



The art of balancing

A study of Vietnam Red Cross Society and its partnerships

About us

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network, reaching 150 million people each year through our 188 members National Societies. Together, we act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by Strategy 2020 – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to 'saving lives and changing minds'.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development and in response to disasters. We persuade decision makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

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Cover Photo: Tran Quan Tuan/Vietnam Red Cross. *Mr Du Hai Duong, a VRCS national disaster response team member assessing some of the flood damage in Long An Province in the South of Vietnam.*

P.O. Box 372
CH-1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Telephone: +41 22 730 4222
Telefax: +41 22 733 0395
E-mail: secretariat@ifrc.org
Web site: <http://www.ifrc.org>

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Acronyms

IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ICRC	International Committee of Red Cross
IHL	International humanitarian law
JSC	ICRC/Federation Joint Commission on National Society Statutes
HR	Human Resources
HQ	Headquarters
HOD	Head of Delegation
NGO	Non-government organisation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NS	National Society
NSKD	National Society and Knowledge Development
OD	Organisational development
PNS	Participating/partner National Societies
RC Law	Law on Red Cross activities
VNRC	Vietnamese Red Cross Society

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Bayarmaa Luntan,

December 2011

Introduction

The Federation secretariat is commissioning a series of studies to improve our hands-on understanding of how National Societies (NS) function in various political, economic and cultural contexts; how external support can and cannot be useful for them; and what needs to be modernised in terms of the Federation's approach to building strong NS. The initiative is in line with the secretariat's commitment to contextualise support and increase its country level focus. The studies, based on real life situations, are expected to contribute to Federation-wide learning and knowledge development.

This paper is the first in such studies and focuses on the Vietnam Red Cross Society (VNRC). Since the introduction of the reform, known as *Doi Moi* (economic renovation or renewal) in Vietnam in 1986, the country has been going through rapid socio-economic changes. These changes have accelerated since the normalisation of Vietnam-United States relations in 1995 and changes in the economic structure of the country since the 6th five year plan (1996-2000). The aim of this study is to learn how VNRC has transitioned itself in this changing country environment; how that process has been internally managed and externally supported by the partner NS and the Federation secretariat; and what are the key issues to be considered for ongoing external support.

The analysis is based on a desk study, a visit to the VNRC including short trips to its Ho Chi Minh and Haiphong chapters, interaction with the country, regional, zone and Geneva based staff of the secretariat as well as meetings with representatives from partner NS present in Vietnam. Annex 1 contains a list of interviewees.

The materials used for the study are limited to mostly what was available in English and this may have limited the analysis. A list of documents consulted is at annex 2. Information collection within the secretariat required a lot more effort than expected. The way we keep institutional memory needs attention. For example, the end of mission reports of the Federation Representatives of 1990s are not available from the Federation archive. It is not possible to see even the list of all Representatives in a particular country as the data were lost when the secretariat's human resources (HR) system changed in early 2000. Therefore, the recent mission reports are also not easily available unless one knows exact names and tracks them in HR files. However, despite these challenges, we hope that the study adequately tackles some key questions.

The paper is structured into four main parts. Parts one and two focus on the VNRC. It first provides a brief description of the organisation and its operating context and then looks at the functioning and services of the NS. To see the major developments and growth covering more than 25 years, the post *Doi Moi* period is divided into three phases. The strengths as well as the issues and dilemmas faced by the NS are also examined

in these sections. Part three is about partnership. It provides an overview of the external support to the VNRC during 1988-2010 and outlines the main patterns, challenges as well as opportunities. The aim is not to look at any individual programmes or thematic areas. The final section (Part 4) explores several themes on what to consider in current and future assistance to the VNRC. The intention is also to contribute to wider thinking and debate on modernisation of the Federation's support on NS development.

1 The Vietnam Red Cross Society

The VNRC was founded on 23 November 1946 by President Ho Chi Minh. It signed the Geneva Convention (Protocol 1) in April 1957 and became a member of IFRC on 4 November 1957.

1.1. Organisation

The VNRC is a large organisation with 4,553,582 members, 3,943,994 youth members and 298,725 active volunteers. They belong to 19,725 grassroots units throughout the country.¹

The NS is organised at four levels following the country's administrative division. It has nearly 12,000 offices with the following breakdown:

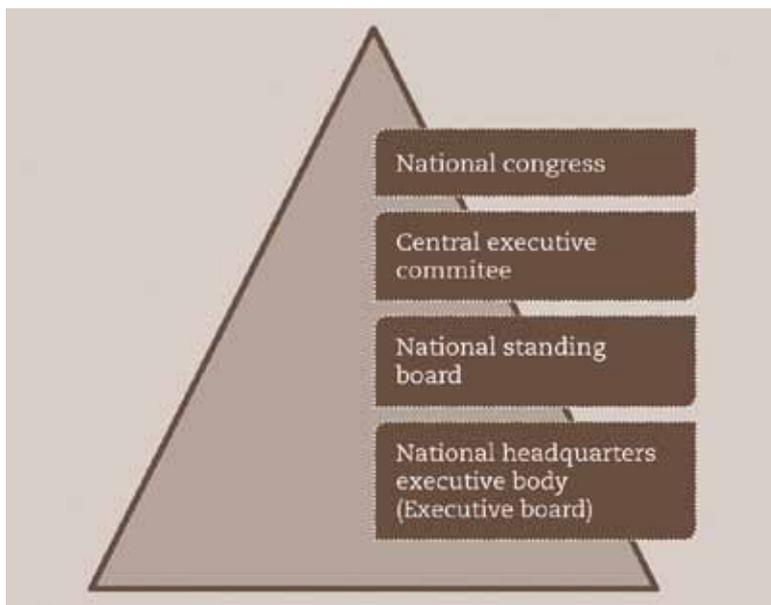
- National Headquarters in Hanoi
- 63 Provincial chapters (at provincial and municipal cities)
- 689 District branches
- 11,000 Commune branches² including sub-branches/units at wards and towns

The highest authority of the VNRC is the *National Congress* which is convened every 5 years with the participation of 350-500 delegates. The National Congress elects a *Central Executive Committee* (Art 12.4 of the VNRC Statutes) which serves as the top leading body in between Congress sessions (Art 13.1). The structure and the number of the Central Executive Committee are decided by the Congress. There are 130 members. It convenes at least once a year. The Central Executive Committee designates the *National Standing Board*, President, Vice-Presidents, Secretary General³ and Deputy-Secretaries General as well as director and deputy directors of the inspection department of the VNRC (Art 17.4). The National Standing Board, on behalf of the Central Executive Committee, guides the work of the NS between the sessions of its Congress (Art 18.1) and convenes at least every 6 months. It discusses provincial issues, disasters and violation of rules etc. There are 39 members. *The National Headquarters Executive Body* (also referred as "Executive Board"), on behalf of the Central Executive Committee and National Standing Board, guides, manages and deals with all affairs between two sessions of the National Standing Board (Art 19). It consists of the VNRC President, Vice-Presidents, Secretary General and Deputy-Secretaries General who are the executive members of the National Standing Board. They meet as often as once a week.

1 Strategy on the development of the VNRC by 2020 adopted in January 2011

2 Source: IFRC office in Hanoi, presentation, 2011

3 At the same time a Vice-President



The terms of office of these bodies are for five years. The same structure is replicated at provincial, district and communal levels. The frequency of their meetings is different. According to the Statutes of the VNRC, the Standing Committee meets once in three months and the Executive Committee once a month.

The President of the country is the honorary president of the VNRC. The President and Vice-Presidents are elected by the national congress.

The NS has 21, 009 staff with the following distribution across four levels⁴:

- HQ 154
- Provinces 849
- Districts 2,034
- Communes 18,216

The number of staff are decided by the People’s Committee⁵ within the following range per office:

- 13-14 staff at provincial level
- 1-2 staff at district level
- 0-1 staff at commune level⁶

The chapters have two reporting lines. They report to the HQ of the VNRC as well as to the People’s Committee of the province or city. Branches report to their corresponding chapters and also to their local People’s Committee.

The financial resources of the NS include:

- Membership fees
- Sources from income generation and services of the Society raised according to the regulations and laws

4 Strategy 2020 of the VNRC, p.3; The data include part-time staff.

5 The People’s Committee, elected by the People’s Council, is the latter’s executive organ, the organ of local State administration. Its responsibility is to implement the Constitution, the law, the formal written orders of superior State organs and the resolutions of the People’s Council, Article 123 of Vietnam’s Constitution.

6 Strategy 2020 of the VNRC, p.3

- Voluntary contribution made by Red Cross members, money and materials contributed by foreign and domestic organisations and individuals
- Sources from humanitarian relief and programs/projects supported by foreign and domestic organisations and individuals
- State budget support according to regulations and laws
- Sources from the State programs/projects funded by external donors⁷.

The VNRC Strategy 2020, adopted in 2011⁸, identifies the following four core areas as operational priorities:

Disaster preparedness, response and recovery: Strengthen the capacity of vulnerable communities to carry out activities to reduce risks and increase resilience in the context of climate change impacts; reduce the loss of life, injuries, economic costs, livelihood impacts and other consequences of disasters; and enhance capacity for disaster response and post-disaster recovery.

Community based healthcare: Improve people's capacity to take care of their own health through promoting, mobilising and supporting community-based health care, environmental protection and improving basic living conditions.

Donation of blood, tissues and organs: Enhance the supply of safe blood, tissues and organs by promoting voluntary blood donation, tissues and organs and advocate for the supply of safe blood and blood products.

Social work: Provide psychological and material (cash and kind) support to the most vulnerable groups and help them improve their lives, livelihood and healthcare by strengthening relationships with other organisations and individuals in social and humanitarian activities.

The VNRC Strategy 2020 also outlines three priorities towards the organisational strengthening of the Society itself. They are:

Promoting humanitarian values: To promote the spirit of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross & Red Crescent and the traditional humanitarian values of the country among the youth and the general public and contribute to the peace and stability of the country.

Mobilising funds for Red Cross activities: Expand financial and in-kind donations to meet the increased vulnerability and humanitarian challenges in communes.

Strengthening organisational structure: Strengthen its internal capacity and become a well-functioning National Society with its rightful position in society, and the capability to play an auxiliary role to the government in Red Cross activities.

1.2. The operating context: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam

During the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s with socialism falling into serious crisis marked by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe socialist block, the Vietnam socio-economic situation became more difficult. In 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam changed its economic

⁷ Art 25 of the Statutes of the VNRC

⁸ A committee of 12 people representing departments at the HQ, led by the Vice-President, worked on the drafting of the strategy. The process was consultative involving all 63 provincial chapters and taking into account existing documents such as the findings from a recent survey on personnel. The Federation office provided financial and technical support.

policy and began reforming the private sector. The reform (*Doi Moi*) intended to bring about a mixed economy, involving a combination of state, collective and private ownership. The development of a multi-sector socialist-oriented market economy regulated by the State implied major changes such as the dismantling of collective farms and encouraging foreign investment. The policy of diversified, open and widened external affairs was implemented. In 1991, Vietnam signed a peace agreement in Paris. It made serious attempts to improve relations with the United States which ended its economic embargo in 1994. Full diplomatic relations were established in 1995. The same year Vietnam joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Today Vietnam has a population of 90.5 million. The country is divided into 58 provinces. There are also 5 centrally administered municipalities existing at the same level as provinces. The provinces are further subdivided into provincial municipalities, townships and counties, and then, subdivided into towns or communes. The centrally administered municipalities are subdivided into districts and counties, and then, subdivided into wards.

Poverty has reduced significantly from 58% in 1992 to less than 15% in 2008. The results of the ten-year socio-economic development strategy during 2001-2010 period, with a goal to achieve middle income country status by 2010, were reviewed at the 11th National Party Congress held in January 2011. The Congress confirmed the continuation of perfecting the socialism-oriented market economy, boosting the renewal process and creating the fundamentals for Vietnam to become a modern industrial country by 2020. The platform for national construction in the transitional period to socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011) and a ten-year socio-economic development strategy in the 2011-2020 period were adopted⁹.

Vietnam achieved the first Millennium Goal – to halve hunger – five years ahead of schedule¹⁰. Other MDGs, particularly in health and education, are within reach. But some significant development challenges remain. 18 million people live on less than \$1.25 a day and seven million ethnic minority people are poor. The MDG target for HIV/AIDS is off-track and the target for sanitation could be missed. More effort is needed to make real progress in tackling corruption. As many girls as boys go to primary school, and the share of women in Parliament is among the highest in the world, but issues such as domestic violence still require much attention¹¹.

Climate change is a real threat. Vietnam is one of the top five countries likely to be most affected by the rise in sea level. Vietnam's projections are that a one meter rise in mean sea levels by 2100 is likely, and this is used in the National Target Programme to Respond to Climate Change. Without major action such as dyke reinforcements and improved drainage, this would cause an estimated threat of inundation to 17,423 sq. km or 5.3 % of Vietnam's total land area. Of that total, nearly 82 % is in the Mekong Delta, 9 % in the Red River Delta and over 4 % each in the North Central Coast and South East regions. The latter includes Ho Chi Minh City.

Urbanization is another issue. The 2009 census in Vietnam recorded that the country's urban population is approximately 26 million, accounting for 29.6 % of the national population. The Vietnam Master Plan Orientation For Urban

The conquest of Vietnam by France began in 1858 and was completed by 1884. It became part of French Indochina in 1887. Vietnam declared independence after World War II, but France continued to rule until 1954 when communists, led by Ho Chi Minh, took over in the North. Under the Geneva Accords of 1954, Vietnam was divided into North and South. The partition led to the Vietnam war. A cease-fire agreement was made in 1973 and two years later the country was united. After reunification in 1975, Vietnam suffered further due to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Vietnamese troops were withdrawn from Cambodia by the end of the 1980s.

⁹ These plans were not available in English by the time of writing this paper

¹⁰ *Growing a better Future: Food justice in a resource-constrained world*, Summary report, Oxfam International, June 2011

¹¹ Summary of DFID's work in Vietnam 2011-2015, May 2011 (www.dfid.gov.uk/Vietnam)

Development Towards 2025 estimates a significant increase in the urban population to 45 % by 2025 and 50 % by 2050. According to the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs, between 2001 and 2005, Vietnam was losing 73,300 ha of cultivated land annually due to urbanization, affecting the lives of 2.5 million farmers¹².

Vietnam represents a “strong government-dominant model of government/non-profit relations” although the “new and slowly reduced role of the state has encouraged a nascent and growing non-profit and voluntary sector”¹³. Philanthropy has begun to grow as well, albeit more slowly. The non-profit and voluntary sector and the state, each face important challenges as development of the sector accelerates. The state has “sought both to encourage growth of non-profit, voluntary and philanthropic institutions, but also to control the pace and directions of that growth. Those dual aims are reflected in the state’s regulation of the sector since mid-1980s”¹⁴.

Considerably closer to the party and government are the traditional, party-led mass organisations, which include the Women’s Union, Youth Union, Peasants Union, Union of Science and Technology Associations and other umbrella groups. The mass organisations had key mobilisation and control functions for much of the 1954-1986 period, including during the war. They are seeking a more representational role under *Doi Moi* and, in many cases, taking more direct responsibility for social service and development activities both in cities and in the countryside.¹⁵

There are some 800 international NGOs registered in Vietnam and they account for a significant portion of overseas development assistance grants. The World Bank was the biggest multilateral donor in 2010, doubling its previous year’s commitment of 2.5 billion USD. It was followed by the Asian Development Bank with nearly 1.5 billion USD. Among bilateral donors, Japan stands out with the biggest pledge of 1.64 billion USD¹⁶.

1.3. National Society development: post *Doi Moi* period

For the purpose of looking at development and service growth of the NS, the post *Doi Moi* period is divided into three parts.

1987 – 1995: Structural independence and capacity strengthening at local levels

This period in the history of the NS is characterised by local capacity strengthening. Until the end of 1988, the Red Cross were established in 40 provinces, 427 districts and towns (accounting for 80% districts) and in 3,814 communes (38%). There were:

Grass-root Red Cross (in communes, offices, schools, enterprises)	7,700
Members	2,700,000
Red Cross Youth and Red Cross pioneers	290,000
Red Cross vanguards	45,000

¹² *Cities and climate change*, fact sheet, United Nations, Vietnam, 2011

¹³ Sidel Mark, *The emergence of a voluntary sector and philanthropy in Vietnam: Functions, legal regulations and prospects for the future*, VOLUNTAS: international Journal of Voluntary Nonprofit Organisations, Volume 8, Number 3, 283-302, DOI: 10.1007/BF02354201

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵ *Ibid* p.289

¹⁶ Source: Market information and Business opportunity - used by the Federation office in Hanoi, July 2010

Out of 40 provincial chapters, 4 operated under the umbrella of the Department of Health. At that time there were several local plans to integrate the local Red Cross into the Fatherland Front¹⁷, Provincial Department of Health or the provincial Association of Traditional Medicine.

This uncertainty was clarified by the beginning of the 1990s. Implementing the Central Communist Party Secretariat Directive No. 14/CT-TW of 1988, the Standing Committee of the Council of Ministries confirmed that the Council of Ministries had no policy to merge the VNRC with State agencies¹⁸.

In 1990 “*Knowledge on Viet Nam Red Cross in response to the Party’s renovation in mass mobilisation*” was published. It was a comprehensive document on the roles and responsibilities, characteristics and functions of VNRC and served as a practical reference for local chapters’ organisation and operations.

A few years later, at the end of 1994 when Vietnamese provinces were re-divided into 53 provinces and centrally administered municipalities, the Red Cross was present in all 53 provinces and most districts. At the grassroots level, the NS sub-branches/units expanded at communes as well as at schools, enterprises, offices and state management farms¹⁹.

It appears that international support was also streamlined to help the NS strengthen its local capacity. For example, in 1990, the VNRC with support from the Federation implemented a “Development Fund” project by which 32 provincial chapters were lent 2,000 USD each as the initial investment for the chapter to operate, strengthen management skills and improve the living and working conditions for staff. Thanks to the investment project, chapters raised shrimps, sugar cane, traded in pharmaceuticals, processed traditional herbal medicines and invested in joint ventures. At the district level, some branches started fund raising despite more difficulties. Sixty percent of sub-branches had their own fund. In 1994 more than 8,000 commune units had funds for operations, more than 2,500 communes had more than 1 million dong each and some communes even had more than 50 million dong (equivalent to approximately 4 500 USD)²⁰.

1996 – 2006: Service expansion and profile growth

The NS further strengthened its grassroots network. 87% of communes had communal Red Cross units.

The main highlights of this period are the expansion of service delivery. The VNRC responded to drought in 1998, and to floods and typhoons in 1998- 1999 (in central Vietnam) and 2000- 2001 (in Mekong river delta). Following historic floods in 9 central provinces in November and December 1999, the provincial chapters, with the support of the International Federation, carried out rescue activities and provided emergency shelter, food and other relief items to the most vulnerable. Houses were reconstructed for the poorest and the most vulnerable among those who lost their homes. This was the most extensive relief operation ever undertaken by the VNRC.²¹ These relief operations proved to

17 Fatherland Front is a political coalition organization, a voluntary union of political organizations, socio-political organizations, social organizations and individuals representing all classes, social strata, ethnic groups, religions and overseas Vietnamese, Art 1, Law on Vietnam Fatherland Front, 1999

18 History of the VNRC, 2010

19 By 1994, there were 14,900 sub-branches consisting 6,555 communes Red Cross and 6,835 sub-branches at schools, enterprises, offices and state management farms (Source: History of the VNRC, 2010)

20 History of the VNRC, 2010

21 Partnership in Profile, 2002-2003, p.319

be a major success in terms of raising the profile and image of the VNRC and improving its government and public relations. The relief programmes also made a tremendous contribution to the institutional confidence and capacity of the VNRC nationwide.²²

By 2003 a National Agent Orange Victim Fund (established in 1998) provided assistance worth some CHF 4.5 million to the victims of dioxin intoxication during the war. The NS ran 16 vocational centres for orphans, street children and the handicapped; 70 centres for the care of orphans and the elderly; 363 charity classes for poor people, orphans and street children; 10 rehabilitation centres for handicapped children; and 185 hospital food services for poor patients (free of charge)²³.

The VNRC ran 633 charity clinics which provided free treatment for poor people. It continued participating in expanded vaccination campaigns, raised awareness and encouraged hygiene and environment protection and family planning. Raising public awareness and motivation for blood donations which was commenced in the previous decade has continued. During this period, a concept of *community-based programmes* was introduced with international support. Different approaches to primary health care were developed. Community health and first-aid programmes were expanded to an increased number of provinces. In 2003 there were over 7000 community-based first aid brigades²⁴.

2007 to present: Positioning of the organisation

A *law on Red Cross activities* (RC Law) was approved by the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in June 2008. In January 2011 the government issued a decree detailing and providing measures for the implementation of the RC Law²⁵.

The main services, as identified in the RC Law, are:

- Emergency assistance, humanitarian relief
- Healthcare
- First aid
- Blood, tissue and organ donation
- Reuniting families separated by wars and natural disasters
- Dissemination of humanitarian values
- Disaster preparedness and response

The law strengthened the position of the NS and provided guarantees of government support. The law was also complimented by other legal provisions and some concerned not only the NS but also other mass organisations. According to Decision 67 of July 2007 issued by the communist party on decentralisation of staff management, the HQ of the VNRC is considered equal to a ministry in the government system. This means that the NS did not report anymore or was influenced by a particular ministry but came to be treated as equal to ministries.

There are some 7-8 other decrees that are directly relevant to the NS adopted during 2007-2011 on a range of issues such as the provision of more qualified staff to the NS and ensuring social benefits to them that were equal to government officers; provision of vehicles and equipment (decree 43 of 2010) or

²² End of mission report (5) p.5,6

²³ Partnership in Profile, 2002-2003

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Decree No.03/2011/ND-CP of January 7, 2011

launching of national appeals (decree 64 of May 2008). The NS is one of three bodies, in addition to the government and the Fatherlands Front that can launch national appeals; if a disaster is outside the country then the VNRC President or the state Prime Minister can launch an appeal.

In short, enormous efforts were made by the leadership of the NS over the last few years to position and profile the VNRC. The Strategy on the Development of the VNRC by 2020 reflects this. Even its motto is “Changing minds - Creating position - Protecting lives”. Creating positions means “to be confirmed by the social and political system the position and role of the Vietnam Red Cross for humanitarian operations”²⁶.

In sum, the VNRC has been playing a vital role in the country in addressing vulnerability and responding to natural disasters. Over the last 25 years of the post *Doi Moi* period, it has made significant progress in terms of strengthening itself. Its strategies have continuously evolved. The NS status at local levels has improved; simultaneously its services and programmes have expanded. In turn, this has contributed to changes in the NS image; government support has increased and partnerships with the Federation and other NS have expanded.

Behind this are dedicated and hard working people.

1.4. Strengths of the National Society

Grass rooted

The VNRC is one of the strongest NS of the Federation in terms of territorial coverage and outreach. If, at the end of 1988, 38% of communes had RC units, today more than 99% of all communes and wards in the country have RC units.

There are 18,216 staff working in grassroot units. Decree 92 of September 2009 on salary for the chairmen at communal level issued by the government has further confirmed its support. It established minimum salary levels for RC employees. Earlier staff were entitled only to a monthly allowance (626,000 dong, equivalent to 24 CHF).²⁷

Mobilisation capacity

The VNRC has enormous mobilisation capabilities. Many examples can illustrate this. Just during 1993-1994, local branches mobilised resources to repair 10,000- 20,000 houses and build 20,000 new houses for disaster victims worth 5.5-6.0 billion dongs (equivalent to approximately 498 000-543 000 USD at that time). In Mekong Delta River, local branches constructed 6,000 bridges worth approximately 6 billion dongs. Southern provincial chapters organised 2,115 burial service teams. In some localities, branches mobilised resources to buy funeral cars and provided free of charge 4,306 coffins (worth more than 2 billion dongs) to people in extremely hard circumstances²⁸.

The RC units at schools, universities and other educational institutions are particularly active in terms of social mobilisation. The leadership is creative on people motivation. For example, in 2010, Haiphong youth units (in 500 schools) raised 1.5 billion dongs (60 000 USD) to support poor students. A regulation was set up that a certain percentage of the assistance goes to needy students of the same school and to Agent Orange victims and the rest is allocated as

²⁶ Strategy on the Development of the Vietnam Red Cross Society by 2020, January 2011, p.2

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ History of the Vietnamese RC, 2010

Haiphong Chapter: “100 plus 5” campaign

1. 100% population is covered by RC units
2. 100% members pay their fees
3. 100% units must buy publications issued by HQ/Chapter
4. Every three households must have at least one RC member (now average 0.8 households has one member, so exceeded the expectation)
5. Every year at least 5 million dong (USD 250) balance is to be carried over by branches and commune units

The initiative was launched in 2003 and 9 out of 14 branches (105 communes) have now achieved these targets.

incentives for organisers (Steering Committee with RC members, representatives from education authority, youth union and school) and the RC unit itself.

Other organisations are supposed to participate in Red Cross activities. Article 5 of the RC Law provides that other organisations including the Vietnam Fatherland Front shall propagate and mobilise their members and people to participate in Red Cross activities.

Campaigning is a well-known method of work and is extremely effective. A recent nation-wide mobilisation campaign to assist victims of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami is an example. A large number of organisations and individuals raised 161 billion dong (7.8 million USD) from March 16 to May 30, 2011, the highest amount of funds mobilised domestically by VNRC. Cash donations and relief goods were delivered on time to support affected people; Cash was transferred within the first two weeks and relief goods were delivered at Japanese counterparts' request. The support was highly appreciated by the Japanese Red Cross and government.

The mobilisation was directly guided by the Secretariat of the Communist Party Central Committee and the government and was actively supported by ministries, agencies, organisations, localities and individuals. The VNRC at all levels consulted on campaign implementation. Media agencies actively communicated on the disaster situation and relief and recovery efforts and regularly updated on the mobilisation campaign²⁹. Only a few organisations in Vietnam are allowed to do such types of activities and the VNRC is justifiably very proud of the results.

Self-reliance attitude

Historically, the Vietnamese people went through several wars and always won them with pride. The Vietnamese are known as strong and resilient people. To be self-sustainable and not to depend on international aid is the spirit in the country and in the NS.

²⁹ Report on Response to the Appeal for resources to assist the recovery of Japanese people affected by the earthquake and the tsunami dated March 11, 2011

Over the last ten years, the VNRC managed to keep the proportion of external support within limits. It is in a range of 20-25% as shown in the table below.³⁰

	2001	Average of 2006-2010
Budget	21 million USD (450 billion VND)	46 million USD
Government support	7.7%	20-25% (9-12 million USD)
In-country fundraising & private donations	69.9%	50-60% (24-28 million USD)
International support	22.4%	20-25% (9-12 million USD)

As seen above, the government support increased significantly while the NS's in-country fundraising & private donations have decreased. However if we compare the volume of foreign aid with the resources mobilised domestically, the proportion is not more than 1:4.

³⁰ Source: VNRC Governing Board Records, January 2011 and Movement Coordination Data, IFRC Vietnam Delegation. This data should be read with extreme caution as it is not based on audited financial statements. VNRC NHQ collects self reported financial data from its chapters to produce consolidated statements for its governing meetings, which has been the primary source for this above analysis. However the details of these reports show potential for double counting.

2 Transition: Challenges and dilemmas

This section outlines a few observations – from the point of view of organisational development – on several issues which require more attention. The purpose is not to draw any conclusions or learning points but rather to question and provoke further thinking and analysis.

2.1. Legal base: Auxiliary role and independence

The activities of the VNRC are supported by the communist party, government and People's Committee at all levels. The government and People's Committees provide salary support to staff³¹, offices, vehicles and other favourable conditions. They help the NS to mobilise other organisations and enable Red Cross activities. For example, as per decision 2602 of October 2009 of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration, a module on Red Cross is included in the training curriculum for government and party officials. Potential leaders at commune level must attend the training. In general, the party and government officials are aware of Red Cross activities.

The government's support comes with influence. Tasks are given to the VNRC together with rules and money, and the NS in turn reports to the government. Chapters have dual reporting i.e. they report to the People's Committees and to the VNRC HQ. They also report to the People's Committees when receiving a major direction from the HQ itself or when getting support from international donors. The People's Committees at all levels participate in the selection of the candidates to be proposed for congress election. Most of the VNRC staff are proposed by the government.

The advantage of this arrangement is that the NS gets official support. However, the close proximity of the NS to the government is seen by RC/RC Movement partners as bringing too much dependency on the government.

In practice, there is a certain level of independence especially in service delivery. The restrictions seem to be more around the functioning of the NS. Also the restriction on the functioning is being openly raised i.e. it is no longer a sensitive theme. The RC Law and following decree on its implementation further define the boundaries. Below are some examples on what the NS can and cannot do.

³¹ For example, about 40 out of some 120 staff at the HQ were supported by the government in 2009

	What is allowed	What is not allowed
Functioning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Selection of leaders: A proposal on personnel with focus on the chairman is one of the key issues on the agenda of each congress at all four levels. The chapter nominates candidates and sits together with People’s Committee representatives to review the proposal/candidates. Once agreed with the HQ, the proposal goes to congress for voting. Then an official letter of the chapter is sent to the HQ for final approval. ■ HQ cannot influence in staff recruitment in chapters and branches (resolution 16 of 2008) ■ Restriction on the use of voluntary donations for humanitarian activities to cover administration/transport costs or salaries. Under the government decree No.64, the state covers all such expenditures.³²
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Propose activities and areas/location to work; ■ Have the right to allocate money for relief i.e. decide to whom to give assistance (The list of beneficiaries sometimes comes from government; RC can change if it can justify; It is thus a negotiated process); ■ Mobilise donors locally and internationally. 	

The VNRC needs to follow the laws and regulations in the country as any other NS. As said by Pictet, National Societies are subject to the law of the land and that “it could not be otherwise”.³³

To be close to the government is a given in the Vietnamese national context. In such a case, an alternative would have been perhaps to be small, poor, not known and not being able to deliver much needed services to the vulnerable. The ultimate success of any NS is measured by what it delivers.

32 Government Decree (No 64/2008/ND-CP) on mobilisation, receipt, distribution and use of sources of voluntary donations for people to overcome difficulties caused by natural disasters, fires or serious incidents and for terminally ill patients, May 14, 2008

33 Pictet Jean, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross*, commentary, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva 1979, p.63

2.2. Foundation: “Bottom-up” and “top-down”

In theory, the VNRC is a *bottom-up* (commonly referred as a “member-based”³⁴) organisation.

The main characteristics of such organisations are:

- Members own and govern the organisation; resources mainly come from them.
- Local units organise the members and services.
- Provincial chapters represent the local level upwards and the central level downwards.
- The national HQ leads the whole organisation.

As we described earlier, the VNRC has four levels each having their own congresses and electing their chairs and taking decisions.

The next national congress will be in 2012. Before it, the provinces, districts and communes conduct their congresses. Their schedules are:

- Commune: January to May 2011
- District: June to September 2011
- Provinces and cities: October to December 2011

The number of members has decreased over the last 2-3 years while volunteers have increased.

	2001	2002 ³⁵	2008	2010
Members	4,700,000	4,700,000	6,153,038	4,553,582
Youth members	2,500,000	2,500,000	4,027,674	3,943,994
Active volunteers			240,294	298,725

According to the NS, the increasing challenge is how to attract and engage members in a meaningful way. The members are questioning why they should belong to the Red Cross.

As for the volunteers, the number is not as high as the members. The concept of “volunteers” is not historically well known. Some chapters do not have volunteers. During recent years, the NS has adopted a policy decision to increase their number. A policy was adopted in 2001 in relation to volunteering, as well as a plan on volunteering development.³⁶ In 2009, a “Volunteering Regulation” was approved. A database on volunteering is a recent initiative (it did not exist in 2001) and in 2010 the HQ has launched a review of existing data on volunteers to verify their accuracy. As part of this initiative, a meeting was organised (funded by the American RC) and a template was set up for data entry. Currently the NS is considering to establish a target (quota) for chapters and branches on volunteer mobilisation and exploring the feasibility of establishing regional volunteer centres with the aim to improve volunteers’ skills.

Overall it is perceived that the main challenge is that the chapters are still not strong enough in managing volunteers and that this is partly due to the definition of a volunteer not being fully clear.

³⁴ IFRC Capacity Building Framework, 2003; Leopold C calls this type of organisation as “member-owned” in his book *Professionell ideell – Om att verka med ideell logik*, 2006

³⁵ Partnership in Profile, 2002-2003, p.317

³⁶ National Society Self-Assessment 2002/2003

According to the Status (Art 10) of the VNRC:

Red Cross volunteers are the ones who take part in humanitarian activities and build long-term Red Cross organisation or specific tasks at every Red Cross level in a voluntary manner, are recognized as Red Cross volunteers.

In the meantime, the members are defined (Art 4.1) as:

Vietnamese people who are 16 years old and above, approve Society's Statutes, voluntarily join the Society and pay the fee, implement all the regulations in the Society's Statutes, participate in activities of the Society will be recognized as a member of Vietnam Red Cross Society.

The basic distinctions made between members and volunteers are that the members pay fees and they, except for supporting members and honourable members, elect and vote³⁷. However some tasks could still be relevant to both members and volunteers. Therefore it is true that the distinctions between members and volunteers are not fully clear and this is confusing some chapters.

Besides there is another and a more fundamental question. Is the NS moving to a different way of being organised?

The VNRC functions under a system of grassroots representation. In such organisations the members are not only the owners of the organisation but also do the voluntary work. This is different from a top-down model which is used in other types of organisations. Of these top-down organisations, the non-profit organisations in Anglo-Saxon countries are most interesting for us. They are called "mission-based" in the Federation's Capacity Building Framework³⁸ or "self-owned"³⁹. Such organisations are not governed by members. They normally get resources (or fundraise themselves) and hire staff to run programmes. When needed, the staff recruit and manage volunteers. If the VNRC is moving to this direction then it is not about automatically turning the most active operative members⁴⁰ into service volunteers. It is about moving to a different organisational logic and thus implies a **planned change process**.

If this shift is not about the deliberate change in model but a way to respond to the challenge of attracting members including youth members, then the problem may not be solved just by "creating" more volunteers. The same challenge of attracting and keeping people (whether they are called members or volunteers) will remain. The issue therefore will be about **creating more services**. The NS cannot have more volunteers than its services.

Thus the subject requires greater conceptual clarity. It is important to avoid a hybrid model that is not proven to have been successful.

37 Art 5 of the Statutes of the VNRC

38 IFRC Capacity Building Framework, 2003 refers to it as "mission-based" organisation; Leopold C calls it as a "self-owned" organisation in his book *Professionell ideell – Om att verka med ideell logik*, 2006

39 Leopold C calls it as a "self-owned" organisation in his book *Professionell ideell – Om att verka med ideell logik*, 2006

40 Operative members are those directly and regularly in Society's operations and activities in a Red Cross unit

2.3. Organisation: Centralised and decentralised

The VNRC is a highly decentralised organisation. The chapters are independent from the national HQ in terms of key decisions such as deciding on the budget, staff numbers and recruitment as well as office structures. These are decided by the chapters themselves or by the People's Committee and negotiated at local level as needed. For example, Ho Chi Minh City's Municipal Red Cross has some 14 government paid staff as per the decision of the Municipal People's Committee on the quantity and the personnel structures of Municipal Red Cross. Recently it has submitted a proposal on strengthening and improving the Red Cross Society's organisational structure to request more staff and to improve the chapter structure⁴¹.

In other words, every level finances itself i.e. "money moves horizontally". From a theoretical point of view, for member-based organisations like the VNRC, ideally the money should go from bottom upwards. If this is not possible then the movement should be from top downwards. Every level financing itself undermines united leadership of an organisation. In the case of the VNRC, the situation is unavoidable as it reflects the political system in the country. Being outside this system means no influence and no budget. The strong lateral relationship between chapters and local authorities make the chapters and their corresponding branches and communes powerful.

A typical picture of a provincial chapter, district branch and commune sub-branch/unit can be seen from the example taken here from Haiphong chapter (as of 2011).

- **Haiphong provincial chapter**
 - **Structure: general office and three professional departments:**
 - Social work department
 - Community based health care department
 - Youth and communication department
 - **The number of staff is 15 including 3 members of the Executive Committee.**
- **Haiphong district branches**
 - **Number of branches: 15 (urban districts 7 and rural districts 8)**
 - **Staff: 29 officers including 14 Presidents and 11 Vice-Presidents and 4 contractual employees.**
 - **Out of 18 full time officers 15 are State funded personnel**
 - **Executive Committee: 315 members**
- **Haiphong commune sub-branches/units (including ward and town)**
 - **Number of branches in communes, wards and towns: 223**
 - **Number of sub-branches/units: 2,503**
 - **Members: 108,654**
 - **Youth members: 102,499**
 - **Volunteers: 5,455**

As written in the Statutes of the NS, the central management is stronger than it appears in practice. However the role of the HQ is not undermined. The general staffing policies are uniform in the entire organisation. After a major decision has been taken locally, the HQ still has to approve it, though this is often symbolic. Among other things such as the policy direction, statutory matters

⁴¹ Proposal on strengthening and improvement of Red Cross Society's organizational structure, HCM city Red Cross

and national level activities, the HQ is in charge of contacts with the central public authorities, international relations (within the RCRC Movement) and accountability for funds from external sources. The funds with internationally supported programmes and projects are re-distributed by the HQ to chapters and then to their branches as needed. Thus money also “moves vertically”.

It appears that **this mixed system functions smoothly under unique circumstances.**

2.4. Services: Facility-based and community-based

VNRC has been running a number of training, research and humanitarian centres. They include:⁴²

- Hong Duc humanitarian center
- Merci center for the performing arts
- Research center for support of the elderly
- Population and family planning center
- Hoa Binh humanitarian center
- Think Phuc humanitarian center
- Lang Tre humanitarian centre (in Dong Nai province)
- Country humanitarian centre (in Binh Duong province)

These centres are run mostly independent of the NS and some even have their own logo. They are not in the NS budget.

In addition, it has RC clinics and blood centres. The RC clinics provide free services to the most vulnerable individuals who are registered based on a list of beneficiaries agreed with the government. These people (poor and children under 6 years) are also given a “help card” and can go to certain hospitals for free services.

It appears that the government encourages the NS to run such humanitarian health care centres/clinics for two main reasons. First, the government wants to encourage doctors to practice outside their official working hours and earn additional income. The RC clinic staff mainly consists of retired or hospital staff working part time. The second reason is that through the RC clinics the government increases its health service outreach and assists the poor who cannot afford proper health insurance.

As for the NS, the issue is on how to manage this service in a systematic way. The humanitarian clinic services are subject to funding availability. No fundraising is done directly by the clinics. Also it appears that there is a big range among chapters in terms of engaging in this work. In Ho Chi Minh city, for example, there are 48 clinics (with volunteer doctors) while the VNRC HQ target given to chapters is much lower at 2-3 clinics. Each chapter sets its own objectives on the number of people to be served. For example, in Haiphong, the target for clinics is set every year. Currently each clinic must provide free services to at least 1500 vulnerable people per year. As for the blood centres, the level of engagement varies across the chapters. The Humanitarian Voluntary Blood Donation Center in Ho Chi Minh, for example, has 59 staff and 2 of them are paid by the government. The chapter collected, in 2010, one third of the whole target of the country i.e. 150 000 units.

42 “Each Organisation, Each Individual Helps One Humanitarian Need”, brochure of the VNRC, 2008

The policy of the VNRC is to expand such facilities. Strategy 2020 of the VNRC, in response to the emerging urbanisation in Vietnam, has an ambitious agenda for health service provision. There are plans to open hospitals, more blood centres and various other speciality health clinics to provide health services for the emerging urban population.

The facility-based health services (hospital, clinics and blood centres) require professional personnel. This is the reason why the NS did not encourage such centres in the past. Now a new direction is being taken. The thinking is probably influenced by experiences from other NS such as Japan, Thailand and Republic of Korea which run similar centres. The reasons for this interest and policy shift seem twofold. First, the centre creation can be an investment in sustainability of the NS. The government support might drop at any time and in the absence of a solid income source to pay staff salaries and cover running costs, the NS will have a challenge to survive. But the centres may remain. Secondly, the centres are visible and appreciated by the government.

In the meantime, the NS has also explicitly stated, in its Strategy 2020, to expand its community-based health care. Community-based programmes were introduced as the VNRC started to get international support in the early 90s. This was seen by partners as “a major breakthrough and started to shift a traditional top-down charity approach to a more participatory, community-based approach aiming for sustainable development at commune level”.⁴³ The process was viewed to be slow. A shared frustration of the PNS on their relations with the VNRC and “a bleak view of the interest of the National Society leadership in carrying out community-based programmes”⁴⁴ can be found in old reports of Federation delegates.

Over the last 20 years, community-based programmes expanded with the assistance of international partners. Currently health is the area where there is a high number of internationally supported projects involving five PNS (French, American, Australian, German, Italian)⁴⁵. The interest in community-based health care could thus be linked to available international project assistance which provides much needed services to the population.

Thus, community-based health programmes co-exist with the expanding numbers of health clinics, blood centres and hospitals. The juggling between community-based vs facility based/curative health services should take into account several issues. First, these services require different sets of skills, leadership and management. The learning from other NS such as the American and Spanish RC which went through the similar experiences and had to make a choice to one or another direction in 1980s could be helpful.

Secondly, one has to also consider the fact that facility-based services are mostly run by staff. If the NS is committed to increase the number of volunteers, it should create more services to be run by volunteers, such as social services in communities. The commitment to expand social work is very much in line with this thinking. Otherwise the facility-based services may not need or create many more volunteers.

Thirdly, the meaning of *community-based* must be made clear. One can serve communities from outside, occasionally visiting and providing assistance. Or

43 End of mission report (7) p.5

44 End of mission report (8) p.8

45 In addition Norwegian RC supports a First Aid and Swiss RC - a water sanitation project in 2 provinces.

communities can be served from within by members and volunteers belonging to grassroots units. There is a risk of creating service volunteers who do not belong to these units but are directly associated with externally funded programmes and projects.

Related to the above, the location of these grassroots units is another interesting issue to be reflected upon. Historically VNRC grassroots units were strong at work-places and educational institutions rather than in communities. Today, of the total 19,725 grassroots units, there are 11,124 communal level units with 55,257 direct sub-units; the rest are based in education institutions and work places including hospitals⁴⁶. It appears that these units might be shifting from offices, enterprise, factories, construction sites, farms, afforestation yards, hospitals to residential areas if we compare the wording of the VNRC Statutes of 2001 and 2008 as shown below.

Statutes (Art 17.1) of 1995	Revised Statutes (Art 21.1) of 2001	Latest amended Statutes (Art 21.1) of 2008
Red Cross bases are foundation of VNRC which are set up at communes, districts, schools, factories, farming, hospitals... Local Red Cross have a lot of members which will be divided into Red Cross Branches, Red Cross Branches have a lot of members which will be divided in Red Cross teams.	Red Cross at grass root level is the foundation of the Vietnam Red Cross, which is founded in accordance with the residential areas: villages, precincts, towns, schools, offices, enterprises, factories, construction sites, farms, afforestation yards, hospital etc... Communal Red Cross with numerous members might be divided into various units and units with numerous members could be separated in to various groups. According to requirements, it is possible to establish their own specific Red Cross unit.	Red Cross at communal level is the foundation of the Vietnam Red Cross, which is founded in accordance with the residential areas. Communal Red Cross is divided into various Red Cross units; Red Cross unit with numerous members are divided into Red Cross groups.

In the meantime the provisions on RC units at schools are being maintained.

2001 Statutes

Article 9: Red Cross pioneers:

Vietnamese pioneers from 9 years old to under 15 years old who voluntarily taking part in the humanitarian activities will be organised into Red Cross pioneer teams.

Red Cross pioneer activities are specifically guided by the Red Cross in collaboration with concerned sectors and organisations.

2008 Statutes

Article 9: Red Cross juniors:

1. Red Cross juniors are the one who are over the age of 9 years old to 16 years old and juniors who are volunteering to participate in the Red Cross activities, as a force of the Society.

2. Red Cross juniors' activities are organised by Red Cross or co-organised with the schools and agencies.

46 Strategy on the Development of the Vietnam Red Cross Society by 2020, January 2011

To be organised fully in residential areas may require a different approach to people mobilisation. It is relatively easier to organise people (members and volunteers) belonging to the same educational institutions and workplaces especially with the current influence by the party and government. The grassroots units can be organised residentially and also institutionally. However each requires a different way to lead and manage and this aspect has to be considered.

In sum, **from a conceptual point of view, the VNRC is juggling between community-based and facility-based services.** The juggling is not only about the facility-based vs community based. It is also about meeting the expectations of both the government and international partners. Both generate money for the NS and its services. The ultimate choice to be made should consider other commitments such as the increase of service volunteers or trends such as grassroots units' shift to residential areas so that **all goes to one direction.**

2.5. Growth versus quality and sustainability

	2001 ⁴⁷	2002 ⁴⁸	2008	2010
Staff	1,500	1,738	13,720	21,009

It appears that the number of staff has been growing steadily over the last ten years although the structure itself remained stable. The HQ was reorganised in 1993 and consisted of four specialised sections formed by 13 departments and units as shown below⁴⁹.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social work • Healthcare • Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel – Inspection • Communication • Red Cross Youth • Red Cross magazine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External affairs • Family link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General affairs • Emulation and reward • Administration • Accounting and economic management • Printing workshop
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The structure is still there. The National HQ is organised into 14 departments. It hosts 4 press agencies: *Humanity and life* newspaper, magazine, television and VNRC website as well as the office of the national committee on voluntary blood donation.

Disaster management	Healthcare	Blood centre	Agent orange victims fund	Communications, volunteering and youth	International relations	Training centre
Fundraising	Finance	Personnel	Social care	Inspection	General office	Representative office in South

The number of staff allocated to chapters and branches often depends on relationships and negotiation with local authorities. It is common that each

47 Partnership in Profile, 2002-2003, p.317

48 Well functioning NS self-assessment 2002: Preliminary Findings, 29 July 2002

49 History of the VNRC, 2010

chapter/branch wants to get more staff due to the work demand on them. Some chapters consider that there are no real guidelines on how to define the number of staff (e.g. in proportion to population or Red Cross members).

In the meantime, staff turnover is increasing and experienced staff are leaving. Overall it is not easy to attract competent people due to low salaries. With the assistance of the Swedish RC, a three-year programme of salary support and capacity building was introduced at the national level in 1999, with positive initial results. The programme was suspended in 2000 due to state inspections⁵⁰.

The leadership is well aware that staff growth must be matched by an extraordinary effort to improve quality. However there are several complications. The NS does not have full control over the quality of staff. They are proposed by the government. In theory, civil service appointments in Vietnam are merit-based and include examinations (interviews). However a study (UNDP) found that “the majority of senior appointments are political appointments, and for lower-level appointments nepotism and the buying of positions is common”.⁵¹ Thus the challenge is how to improve the quality of staff in such a situation where it has very limited control over the leaders and staff joining the NS. It takes time to develop skills and competence as well as basic knowledge/understanding of the NS and Red Cross work.

The equally important question is on how to sustain an expanding structure in the long run.

With strong recognition by the government, the signal given in 2003 (by a decree) was that the government might decrease its budget for the NS. Consequently the government support to some chapters decreased in 2004. For example, due to the increase in inflation the government requested Haiphong chapter to make a 10% saving⁵². To respond to this, the NS undertook several initiatives to improve its domestic fund-raising and created a special department at HQ⁵³. However, as we have seen earlier, while government support increased significantly (despite the earlier signal), NS's in-country fundraising and private donations have decreased (from 69.9% to 50-60%) over the last ten years.

Currently, a significant number of staff still get salary support from internationally supported programmes and projects which will be described in the next section. In general, there is a real danger of becoming dependent on international projects' money. The chapters seem to request skills training on project proposal preparation and are keen to implement projects with international funding. For example, a pilot training on programme logic for ten provinces was finalised recently as part of a PNS support on capacity building on program logic, monitoring and evaluation and needs assessment⁵⁴. The VNRC appreciates these projects as they not only respond to needs in the country but also help in improving staff skills in project management and in profiling the NS vis-à-vis the government.

The critical question is on how to balance the short-term need for international programme support with the long-term investment in domestic fundraising and local resource mobilisation and avoid becoming dependent on international assistance.

50 Partnership in Profile, 2002-2003, p. 318

51 End of mission report (7) p.5

52 This policy also applies for all government agencies.

53 The department was created in 2003. It was closed in 2006 and re-established in 2008 after the VNRC Congress in 2007.

54 Monthly update for RCRC Movement Coordination meeting, June 2011, p.3

3 Partnerships of the National Society

3.1. Overview: 1988-2010

Eleven PNS have been active in Vietnam over the last 17 years. The total funds of the IFRC and PNS spent in Vietnam are estimated as 118 million USD; the average annual support has been approximately 7 million USD.

Earlier days

In late 1980s, the VNRC had partnerships with several PNS such as the Swiss, French, Swedish and Japanese RC. It also had a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union RC/RC. In 1988-1990 VNRC received Movement aid worth approximately 5,260 million dong (approx 475 000 USD)⁵⁵. The VNRC also provided support to other NS. For example, in 1988 VNRC mobilised donation for the people affected by an earthquake in Armenia and collected approximately 100 million dong (equivalent to 250,000 USD).

In November 1990 IFRC received permission to open a Representative Office in Hanoi and Mr. M. Xitman was the first Head of Delegation. A Framework Agreement on development cooperation for the period 1991-1994 was signed in March 1991. In early 1993, a liaison delegate of the IFRC was placed in Ho Chi Minh city.

At that time institutional development and resource mobilisation support were the strategic priorities of the secretariat. About 7 million USD were mobilised from partner NS to help VNRC in these areas. Examples include the earlier mentioned 2,000 USD initial investment in fundraising, lent to each chapter. Besides disaster relief assistance, IFRC built natural disaster preparedness stations in the central coastal area and sponsored training courses for staff. In 1993, as a response to an appeal, 2,568 million dong (approx 232 000 USD) was mobilised for malaria prevention in 19 provinces.

A first meeting of donor NS was organised in July 1992. In March 1993, the ICRC closed its office in Vietnam, its war mission being completed, and started to cover VNRC from the ICRC Regional Office in Bangkok. In the meantime, the number of PNS increased steadily in Vietnam. There was only Danish RC in 1994. The Japanese RC started a disaster preparedness project together with Danish RC and till today it is supporting VNRC in planting mangrove forests along the coastline⁵⁶.

Vietnamese government policy towards international assistance has changed. Until 1995 Vietnamese people were not free to talk to foreigners⁵⁷. That time many Western donors looked to the USA for guidance on how to work with

⁵⁵ History of the Vietnam Red Cross, 2010

⁵⁶ Mangroves and education reduce disaster risk in Viet Nam, case study, IFRC, 2007

⁵⁷ End of mission report (5), p.3

Vietnam or they were rather cautious of how the USA will react to partnerships. President Clinton's meeting with the leadership of VNRC after the floods in 1998 helped the Red Cross profile to grow significantly, and the VNRC and Federation as a whole gained much credibility with other donors.⁵⁸ The Vietnam floods were publicised on international media for three consecutive years and the international appeals were well funded.

Volume

The policy of the VNRC has been to increase the number of PNS as it was stated in its previous ten years strategy. The NS has successfully reached this goal by having **nine partners**. This is the highest number of partners in Asia & Pacific in any host NS besides the Tsunami operations in 2005.

International RCRC aid received by VNRC during 1994-2010 amounted to **118 million USD** and is summarised in the table below. At the top is the Federation (68 million) which has been present in Vietnam since 1990. The next is the American RC (17.5 million) active since 2000 till today followed by French RC (6.4 million) and Danish (6 million)⁵⁹.

Support to the Vietnam Red Cross, 1994-2010

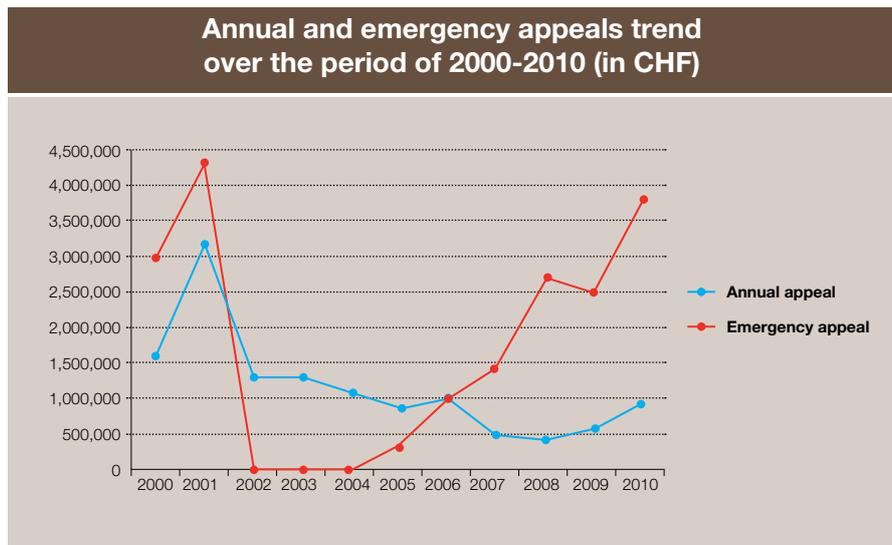
No.	Partners	Period	Total(USD)
1	American Red Cross	2001-2010	17,558,202
2	Australian Red Cross	1995-2010	2,766,073
3	Belgium Red Cross	2003-2004	310,095
4	Danish Red Cross	1994-2005	6,031,814
5	French Red Cross	2002-2005	6,450,468
6	German Red Cross	2007-2010	2,768,904
7	Italian Red Cross	2009-2010	119,508
8	Netherlands Red Cross	2003-2010	3,434,239
9	Norwegian Red Cross	2002-2010	2,188,000
10	Spanish Red Cross	2003-2010	4,695,310
11	Swiss Red Cross	2000-2010	3,896,309
12	IFRC	1994-2010	68,074,025
	Total		118,292,946

Content

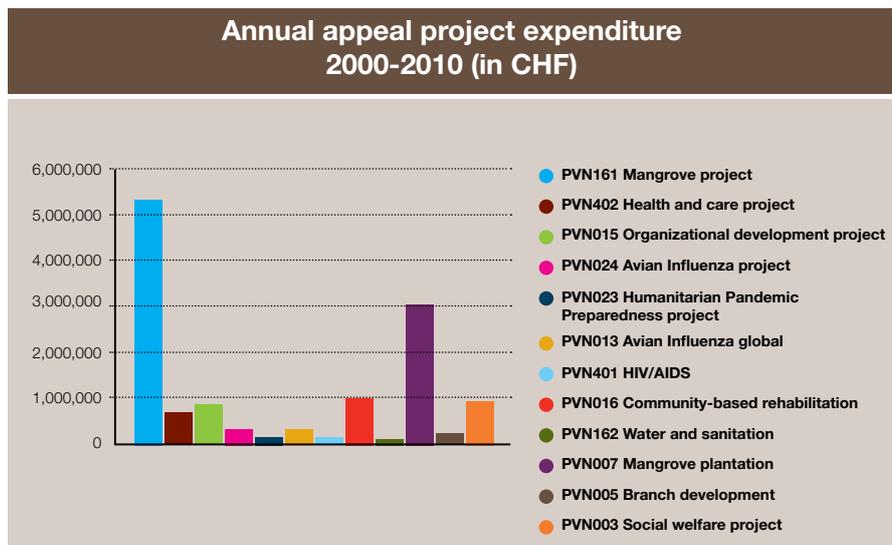
If we look at the support provided through the Federation's appeals during the period of 2000-2010 the general trend is that with increased relief assistance (i.e. emergency appeals) the support through annual appeals (i.e. non-emergency) also increased. With the decrease in funding for emergency appeals, support through annual appeals also went down.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.4

⁵⁹ The paper uses USD and also CHF depending on the origin to ensure consistency with the source document.



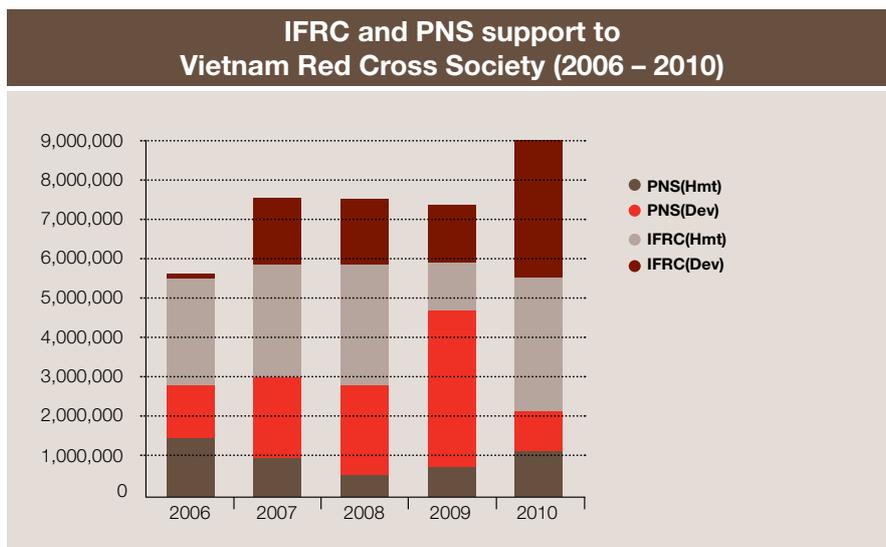
The graphic below provides details on the type of support through annual appeals during these ten years. The top two expenditures are on disaster preparedness/mangrove related projects. They are followed by community-based rehabilitation (CHF 927 000), social welfare (CHF 906 000) and OD support (CHF 835 000).



If we look at bilateral support, during 2006-2010, nine PNS provided development support with 13.1 million USD. Six PNS contributed to various emergency response operations during this period and spent 8.3 million USD.

The American RC is at the top of the development support list with 5.1 million USD while the French RC leads in the relief area with 3.9 million USD. These partners have the biggest influence over successes or failures in these areas.

If we compare the PNS with the Federation, the latter has been more relief oriented in terms of the proportion of development and humanitarian assistance as shown in the following graphic.



If we look at the year 2010 only, there were more than thirty projects supported by PNS, IFRC and ICRC with a total budget of 11.5 million USD. They range from emergency relief to capacity building on humanitarian values, including a project to raise the awareness of communities about unexploded landmines.

Coordination

Coordination has been a challenge with the increase in partners and this was highlighted in almost every single mission report of Federation Representatives over the past 15 years.

The VNRC, before 2006, was represented in the coordination meetings of the partners by a single person often just to “report” to partners. The meetings had always been led by the Federation Representative and took place in Federation premises. This has changed over the years. VNRC leaders, the Secretary General or the President co-chair the meetings with the Federation Representative and the venue moved to the HQ of the VNRC. On these occasions, the leadership of the VNRC use the opportunity to raise issues of their concern including their own priorities.⁶⁰ Now the monthly coordination meeting is prepared by the VNRC itself. Partners send their monthly updates to the NS for final compilation and distribution prior to the meeting. At the request of the ICRC the meeting is called “movement coordination” and a representative of the ICRC (based in Bangkok) sometimes attends.

In addition there is a set of thematic working groups established by PNS and IFRC to ensure substantive coordination. The meetings are chaired in rotation. The VNRC is invited.

The partners have been making efforts to use a common approach to projects or issues. Some work in consortium. Below is an example by the Netherlands RC (NLRC).

⁶⁰ End of mission report (10), p. 2

CBDRM project (in 4 provinces)	NLRC (<i>lead</i>) with Spanish Red Cross	Jan 2007- April 2008
Emergency recovery (in 3 provinces)	NLRC with German RC (<i>lead</i>)	Jan - June 2010
Emergency recovery (in 2 provinces)	NLRC with German (<i>lead</i>) and French Red Cross	Jan - June 2011

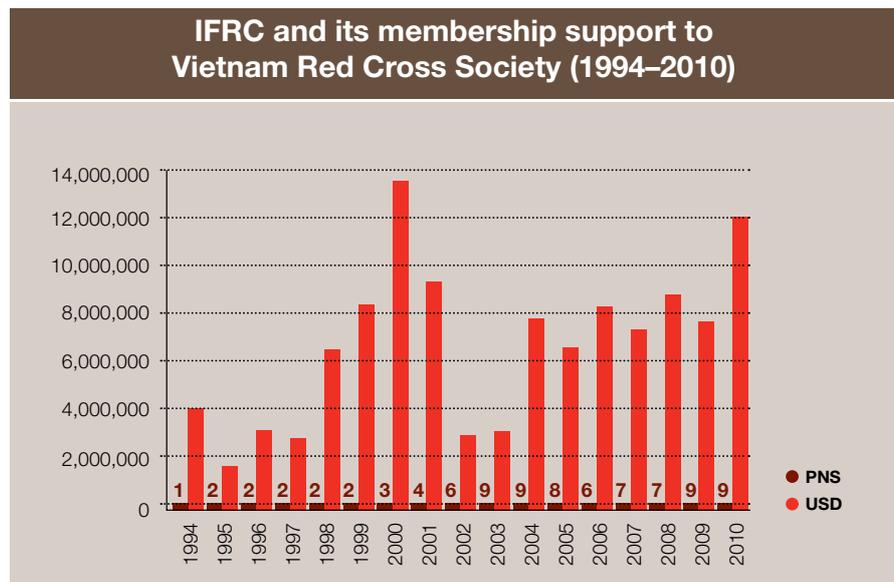
Some partner NS do not seem to see the need for the Federation’s coordination in thematic programme areas. They see the Federation as focusing more on HR, finance and general support to NS management. Partners expect the Federation to take the lead on OD issues.

3.2. General patterns and trends

More PNS and less funds

As shown in the graphic below, with the increase in the number of partners, the actual volume of support funds decreased. In other words more PNS came but with less funds. For example, if we exclude the years of major relief operation (1998-2001), the support in 2002-2003 by 6-9 PNS is comparable with the support of only 2 PNS during 1996-1997.

2010 was the year of significant increase in funds. However this was mainly due to floods.



Less funds and more cost

As the number of PNS increased and funds decreased, the number of staff working for the partners gradually increased. As of 2010 there were 74 people in IFRC and PNS structures. The number ranges from 17 staff employed by the French RC to 2 staff by Norwegian RC.

The total support structure cost in Vietnam is close to 2 million USD.⁶¹ This means that the average annual 8 million USD support including emergencies

⁶¹ Bhupinder Tomar, *Understanding the cooperation model in Vietnam*, discussion paper, 2010

is managed by 2 million USD infrastructure i.e. 25 % of the total volume. This is a big contrast to the VNRC HQs which is less than half a million USD to manage the entire NS.

Consequently, the large number of international support staff (almost half of the overall number of VNRC HQ staffing) put demands on the VNRC staff, in effect, turning them into a “service provider” for international programme management needs. This constant conflict between meeting the donor needs on fulfilling contractual requirements and performing its own role of HQ leads to perpetual underperformance. In turn this shows up in a perception of the weakness of the NS and often leads the partners to recruit even more staff – creating a vicious downward cycle⁶². How can we ensure that the very support aimed at assisting the NS does not trigger a structural problem for it?

Another concern is the duplication of staff roles performed by the existing international support. According to the estimation made by the Federation office in Hanoi, about 56% of staff costs is largely related to representational and administrative roles. In other words, of the 1.7 million USD spent on international support costs in Vietnam, VNRC gets only about half of that money in any form of technical assistance (even that is lower as most of the programme staff are not providing technical support but instead manage programmes)⁶³. The problem is not of having many partners in country. The way in which the international support is organised requires further reflection and modernisation. The partners are aware of the problem and seem to be open for change.

As for the international staff, most PNS have preferred to fund their own candidates sometimes resulting in less experienced delegates being put in charge of their projects. The VNRC tends to accept any delegate⁶⁴.

Lastly, with the increase in the numbers of partners and staff, different rates were introduced by different PNS regarding salary and other costs they covered. Back in 2001, an outgoing Head of Delegation was referring to the need to “streamline the levels of allowance, per diem and payments made by PNS and ourselves to VNRC staff for training courses and workdays” and this has been the consistent concern of all subsequent Heads of Delegations and Representatives of the Federation. Finally, after ten years, one standard *Cost Norms for financing of local costs for VNRC programs/projects* was finalised in May 2011. Now the costs are the same for all partners.

In summary, **the cooperation model in Vietnam has been costly. It has encouraged many parallel structures each placing its own demands on the VNRC.** The issue is beyond Movement coordination remit. The host NS has been needing “protection” not to be overwhelmed by these demands and to keep control over its own priorities while strengthening its ability to streamline the much needed international support. This, in theory, is the support role of the Federation secretariat.

62 ibid

63 Bhupinder Tomar, *Understanding the cooperation model in Vietnam*, discussion paper, 2010

64 End of mission report (7), p.2

3.3. Position of the Federation secretariat

Historical overview: More PNS and “lighter” Federation presence

In early 90s, the strategic priority of the Federation was to focus on institutional strengthening of the NS.

The Federation office then became more operational during very extensive disaster relief operations in 1999-2001 with a huge emergency appeal and overwhelming responses by the donors. As the operations were well funded, the delegation itself grew big with a main office in Hanoi, and sub-delegation in Ho Chi Minh, Hue and Danang. Eight international delegates plus national staff and locally recruited international staff/consultants were actively involved in disaster response, rehabilitation, disaster preparedness, social welfare, health, branch development and organisational development programmes.⁶⁵

This set-up changed over the years. Since 2001, the delegation has decreased. By July 2001 there were 2 delegates (HOD and a finance delegate) and a limited number of national programme/administration support staff.⁶⁶

Since May 2002, the day-to-day work of the delegation was taken care of by a programme manager (Dang van Tao)⁶⁷ and, in fact, a possible exit had been set earlier (for 2000). For various reasons, such as the big relief operations, programme commitments and capacity of VNRC, exit was not possible. Then the gradual withdrawal of the Federation from a strong operational role and even a complete withdrawal of the delegation in 2004 or 2005 (at the latest) were envisaged.⁶⁸

In the meantime during 2000-2003 the number of PNS present in Vietnam has doubled from 3 to 6. The need to pay more attention to relationship management issues, as part of capacity building support, was confirmed.⁶⁹ Why did the secretariat want to withdraw when its presence had become more important than ever with such a high number of PNS?

It appears that the image of the Federation at the time was “just another PNS player” managing its own programmes. The thinking in Geneva was that since there were already many PNS present in Vietnam to address vulnerabilities in a country with a rapidly developing economy, the Federation’s presence was not required. Instead it focused on developing a Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) as the base for facilitating cooperation and pulling together joint resources.

In 2003 it was recommended that “...a written MoU or Agreement to be concluded between the Federation secretariat and the VNRC to outline expectations, roles and responsibilities”. The last MoU expired in 1994.⁷⁰ Accordingly a “new role” was defined in 2004/5 in assisting the VNRC in capacity building; strategic planning; coordinating PNS input to the National Society and a withdrawal by the Federation from its programme management responsibilities⁷¹.

Shortly after this new role was identified, it was recommended that no replacement was needed for the Federation Representative, but to maintain the local

65 End of mission report (4), p. 2

66 Ibid (7), p. 2

67 End of mission report (9), p.1

68 End of mission report (7), p.2

69 End of mission report (6), p.4

70 Ibid (7), p.7

71 End of mission report (8), p.3

office in Hanoi. The reasons given were that the present environment is not conducive to organisational development within the VNRC; there is no longer a co-ordination imperative; and the delegation no longer manages large programmes⁷². This was the very moment when there were 9 PNS each “applying its own approach and building its own funding and programme base”. Since this was happening without a coherent framework, it “led to confusion and frustration for all players, not least the VNRC, which suddenly had to deal with a multitude of partners and mounting demands on its limited capacity”⁷³.

Finally in 2006 the Federation secretariat, led by the Bangkok regional delegation held talks with the VNRC (with President Prof. Nguyen Van Thuong) to define whether the secretariat’s presence was requested and needed. The VNRC clearly stated its wish to have the delegation and thus it was decided to establish “a new cooperation model” and a new Federation Representative was recruited. A concept paper was prepared (later was renamed cooperation document) and signed in June 2006. That time, in addition to the Federation Representative, there were national staff working on disaster management, health and organisational development/financial development in addition to five administrative officers.⁷⁴ The number of PNS was still high though decreased from 9 to 6.

Again in 2008 the outgoing Federation Representative did not recommend a full-time Federation Representative in Hanoi. Till the arrival of the current Federation Representative in March 2010 practically there was a gap of two years. This means that the VNRC was “left alone” to coordinate its 9 partner NS present in the country. The capacity of the VNRC to coordinate its overwhelming big number of partners has been growing but still needed more strengthening.

In sum, with the steady increase in numbers of PNS, followed by the need for stronger in-country coordination, the size of the IFRC office has been reducing. i.e. the more PNS, the smaller and lighter the Federation.

Permanent “exit”

The role of the Federation has been evolving. At the beginning, it focused on institutional strengthening of the VNRC. Later, it was dominated by relief, then programme management and then relationship management and then coordination and capacity building again. However it appears that the mood was always to exit.

What is also somewhat controversial is that the exit plans or recommendations for the reduced presence have paralleled efforts to gain a status agreement with the Vietnamese government. On one hand, we were giving a signal that we were closing the delegation and at the same time asking for legal status to stay. The status agreement is a long story spanning more than 17 years. The Federation has a current MOU with the Government but it is only a license to operate as an international non-governmental organisation (decree of 1996) and does not grant immunities.

⁷² Ibid (8), p.8

⁷³ Ibid (8), p.3

⁷⁴ End of mission report (9), p.3

Practical dilemmas

The continued withdrawal from direct programme involvement was supposed to be replaced by “a stronger role in providing management support to the leadership of the VNRC and the onward organisational development process, as well as strengthening the coordination mechanism in terms of cooperation and partnerships”.⁷⁵ The Federation secretariat was thus well aware of the need and solutions. However, it was always “closing” or “reducing” its presence, as described above, and was not able to state its position. The priorities were defined very much by each individual Federation Representatives⁷⁶ though they were all similar in their general orientation. Furthermore, the durations of stay of Federation Representatives were short; often with some months’ gaps in between outgoing and incoming heads as can be seen from a list of the Federation heads of delegations/representatives in annex 3. Why? One big reason known to everyone and discussed *ad nauseum* was the lack of funding.

It was possible to have the office thanks to the generous support and dedication of the Swedish RC for many years until this discontinued. The secretariat’s presence and duration of individual heads/representatives have been largely decided by available funds and the institutional politics of the PNS. The delegation had to constantly look for funding for itself at times when there was no relief operation. This issue has been consistently stated in several end-of-mission reports of Federation representatives over past years.

Paradoxically, from one side, the coordination of partners and management support to NS leadership were the key roles identified for the Federation. And it was the stated intention of the secretariat. However, in reality, the Federation was spending more in direct humanitarian relief assistance (rather than development) compared to PNS. The budget architecture did not back up the intention.

3.4. Partnership growth and opportunities

Towards more transparency and accountability

In the early stage of the partnership, there were concerns among donors about the integrity and operational effectiveness of the VNRC. An “old communist idea that everyone needs to get something, not just the most vulnerable” was seen as a problem by some external donors⁷⁷. The disaster relief operations in 1998-2001 were big tests and identified several challenges to be addressed. Learning from the operations, procurement procedures changed and adequate disaster response management was put in place.

Currently there is the issue of direct and indirect costs. The VNRC staff are paid by PNS/Federation funded programmes and projects in addition to their government salaries. One staff is in charge of many programmes/tasks and paid accordingly. Money given to a particular staff as his/her salary by a partner does not directly go to that staff; it is redistributed by the NS. The same is the case with per diem and benefits. Why?

The NS budget is decided by the government every year. But the approval comes with some months delay and the NS faces cash flow problem during that period. To cope with the situation and manage its cash flow, it uses international project funds. A complex system of three-tiers of payments (100, 50%

⁷⁵ End of mission report (7), p.7

⁷⁶ End of mission report (6), p.3

⁷⁷ End of mission report (5), p. 5

25%) was created and involves extra expenses requiring additional financial entries. The consequences involve “artificial” invoices/bills. The VNRC reports on separate projects to various PNS and not on the totality.

In addition, the revenue accounts i.e. income and expenditure accounts start with balances carried forward from the previous financial year. Since the books of accounts are not closed at the year-end, all balances including the balances of the revenue accounts are rolled onto the next year which is a complete departure from the general accounting principles applied globally. The procedure followed in VNRC is mandatory for compliance by the mass organisations in Vietnam that receive grants from the government.⁷⁸ These have been creating a question of transparency and accountability, although partners have full understanding and sympathy.

It was said that the VNRC wants to create a common “pot” for all indirect costs in order to make reallocations easier. However this would create problems for PNS in terms of their own reporting requirements. The situation is complex despite the best intentions of all parties. Basically, the NS is caught between the government and PNS. This is a structural problem. An institutional incentive has been created to behave in a certain manner. Now there is more openness from the VNRC to discuss and solve this issue. The Federation representative was able to create this dialogue. A financial audit covering 2009 and 2010 is being planned and the Federation regional office in Bangkok is assisting in the process.

Towards “one Federation”

The PNS staff work well together. The context is also perhaps obliging individuals to share information, discuss common problems and figure out how to deal together with the challenges created by the environment. For example, the PNS staff cannot travel to provinces to monitor their programmes without prior clearance, and staff from the VNRC HQ will always accompany their trips to provinces.

While individuals enjoy solidarity, institutionally the PNS are quite “separate”. Each PNS has its own policy and infrastructure (e.g. each keeping its own staff) and are interested to run their own programmes and projects. Some are more operational than others. A metaphor used by a Federation staff five years ago about “driving a chariot with a team of seven horses, all intent on running in different directions” is still relevant. However opportunities are also opening up. According to a recent stakeholder analysis, IFRC-PNS staffing could shrink if quality reporting is available; Possibilities exist for efficiency and shared resources⁷⁹. Thus, there is a collective will to change.

The overall trend in Vietnam is that international organisations operate under a common frame. For example, the United Nations have “one UN” policy. Similarly Oxfam now works as one; before there were four Oxfams in Vietnam. Others such as the Save the Children, Action Aid and Care have the same policy. The government seems to encourage such a common approach.

Like these organisations in Vietnam, we need to explore the possibilities for a “one Federation” approach. This is beyond the coordination of individual programmes and projects in thematic areas. It is about one strategy towards the NS

⁷⁸ Rakesh Kumar, Mission report: Vietnam, 15-20 May 2011 and 14-17 June 2011, p.2

⁷⁹ IFRC Vietnam Strategy, 2012-2015: *Improving collaboration, Strengthening resilience*, Stakeholder Analysis – PNS, 2010

as a whole. The important steps being made towards that direction now require political backing to get leaders to agree if that success - the example of Vietnam - could be replicated elsewhere as a good practice in movement cooperation.

On the funding side, our share seems marginal compared to the above mentioned organisations which have the same or comparable capacity in terms of staffing in Vietnam. Some PNS confirmed their support over the next 3-4 years; however the projection is 8-9 million USD maximum annually despite the stable high number of PNS present in the country.

Building a stronger National Society

4

A strong NS can be built only by the NS itself. Foreign money, concepts, advice or delegates can be useful if the NS itself knows where it is going and why. For the Federation (secretariat and PNS) a question is on how to help the NS as “one Federation” so that it supports the VNRC as a whole in its chosen direction rather than with separate projects in mind.

This section outlines several learning points for external support under three broad headings.

4.1. Understand the organisational logic

In the past, the VNRC on one hand was seen by some colleagues as an “organisation locked into a system” or “a Gulliver, a giant tied down by bureaucracy, lack of independence and an uneven application of RC principles”⁸⁰. Some believed that the transaction costs of dealing with the VNRC were too high. By transaction costs, they meant “the costs associated with the expenditure of time, energy and resources in order to find information, negotiate contracts and cost norms, maintain and police those contracts etc”. At the same time the very same colleagues all unanimously appreciated the efficiency of the VNRC in programme delivery. This is paradoxical.

It could mean that the NS is not typical i.e. not belonging to any of the known models. It is therefore difficult for foreigners to understand how the system functions. In fact, it is a successful organisation in terms of delivering services which is the ultimate aim of any NS. **The distinction between the “model/functioning” and “product/delivery” has to be made.** In general, we tend to focus too much on the model side without fully understanding the internal organisational logic and operating context of a NS.

In the past, the separation of governance and management of the VNRC has been one of the important issues for partners. For example, in early 2000, it was highlighted by a Federation Representative that “the distinction between governance and management is yet another issue that deserves special attention and that requires cooperation and collaboration with the ICRC”⁸¹.

The secretariat advice and the comments by the ICRC and Federation Joint Statutes Commission (JSC), on the draft revised Statutes of the NS, insisted upon the separation of the two functions. A letter of the JSC in 2007 states that “a clear separation between governance and management functions is required to avoid conflict of interest and ensure a well-functioning National Society”. The JSC even suggested that “the Secretary General should be mentioned, as head of management, as the person responsible before the governance for the

⁸⁰ End of mission report (8), p. 2

⁸¹ End of mission report (6), p.7

performing of the tasks...” . With regard to the President, the comment noted that “He/she is not an executive member of the Executive Committee and the Standing Board if ‘executive’ refers to management activities”⁸².

How effective were these comments? The VNRC National Assembly in June 2007 indicated a separation of governance and management and followed that track for some time before returning to “presidential power”⁸³. Historically the Presidents of the VNRC were also government officials (mostly the Health or Labour/Social welfare Ministers). The position of the President is not combined with other government positions anymore since the election in 2007. However this is seen as more of an individual case rather than being a deliberate decision.

Now the positions of the President and Vice-Presidents are executive. One of the Vice-Presidents is also called “Secretary General”. It is almost as if the title is created for Federation and external partners to satisfy their needs. At the chapter and branch levels there is no such equivalent as Secretary General i.e. the change was introduced only at the central/HQ level. Conceptually this is confusing.

In practice, the division of labour between the President and Vice-President/Secretary General seems clear. The Vice-President/Secretary General is more a deputy to the President and deals with tasks agreed with the President such as the daily oversight of the internationally supported programmes and projects. The management decisions are still made collectively by the National HQ Executive Body of 5 members: President, Vice-Presidents (including the Secretary General) which meets weekly. These five members of the Executive Body, together with selected staff (from departmental directors at HQ and from chapters) form the 39-member National Standing Board which takes major decisions. The main principle that organises the leading bodies of the VNRC at all levels is **collective as the leader, individual as the supervisor**⁸⁴.

On paper, the VNRC belongs to the bottom-up (i.e. “member-based”) model as it is described in section 2.2. This model, in its pure form, expects the members - without external interference – to nominate, elect, review and dismiss leaders at all levels. The leaders, operating under the mandate given by the members, make decisions fully on their own. In this situation, the elected President plays the most important leadership role. Thus, the separation of governance and management (which is vital for “mission-based” or “self-owned” organisations) becomes less important. We often fail to make this distinction.

In reality, it is neither the members nor the elected board but the party and government that influence the organisation indirectly by selecting and paying the salary of leaders. In addition, the chapters have dual reporting: to the HQ of the VNRC and to the provincial People’s Committees. Thus this model is close to another category which is referred in the IFRC Capacity Building Framework as “state-structure based”⁸⁵ or “third party-owned” organisation⁸⁶. The NS moved even closer to this “third-party owned” model with the new legislation and government decrees. These provide the NS with a higher status (i.e. equivalent to a Ministry) and more financial support from the government.

82 Letter of the Joint Statutes Commission dated on 22 June 2007

83 End of mission report (10), p.4

84 Article 12.2 of the Statutes of the VNRC

85 IFRC Capacity Building Framework, 2003

86 Leopold Christer further developed this way of categorising voluntary organizations in his book *Professionell ideell – Om att verka med ideell logik*, published in 2006 in Swedish

At the same time, the VNRC is also decreasing its reliance on members and developing a non-member-based volunteering system.

The point here is not to put the VNRC into any category but to say that the situation is complex and that the Movement partners should be aware of this in order to be more effective in supporting the NS in its chosen direction. The oversimplification in approach to the NS and putting pressure on it to go towards one or the other direction (in this case to separate governance and management) has not been effective. In general, **the mechanical application of a theory based on a model coming from different background may lead to a cosmetic change (e.g. just a name change) and this can be confusing and even counterproductive.**

In fact, a Federation Representative who worked in Vietnam for several years and who was aware of the reality and strength of the VNRC had a realistic and mature view. Her end of mission report in 2008 said that “VNRC looks upon themselves as a mature (mass) organisation, functioning well within the Vietnamese culture and context. There is little need for immediate change as this would anyway dispute authorities and most of its own staff, at all levels. The present system is beneficial to the NS and the President seems to give priority to preserve and strengthen it”⁸⁷. Her predecessor three years earlier also said that “movement on a broad front was neither realistic nor likely to produce much change in near future”⁸⁸.

Lastly, some of our concepts themselves are not precise. An example is the concept of volunteering. It can be about members, active members or service volunteers. Now, as per Strategy 2020 of the Federation, all NS are supposed to report the number of volunteers as a proxy indicator to measure “the degree of success achieved in developing our capacities, and demonstrating the quality and magnitude of work that attracts enhanced resources”⁸⁹. However **there is no indicator explicitly dedicated to the numbers of members.** This may lead NS to value volunteers over their members. What you measure is what you get. The partners of the VNRC have to be aware of these issues and concerns.

Learning in brief:

- National Societies belong to different models (i.e. organisational logic) and this should be recognised and respected.
- The distinction between the NS “model/functioning” and its “product/delivery” should be made.
- The formula to separate governance and management is not always vital. It could even lead to conceptual confusion through a mixed compromise model.

4.2. Help in maintaining and building on existing strengths

Some senior managers of VNRC believe that the HQ focus too much on project implementation funded by international partners at the cost of stronger oversight on NS’s own development issues. They also lack the budget to visit chapters and branches for much needed guidance and advice while project

⁸⁷ End of mission report (10), p. 4

⁸⁸ End of mission report (8), p.7

⁸⁹ Strategy 2020 of the IFRC, Geneva, 2010, p.32

staff are able to travel and work in the provinces which implement partners' projects in specific areas such as health, social work or disaster management. The linkage between these projects and the NS development goals is considered very weak.

Furthermore, equally weak is the linkage between the above projects and OD or capacity building support given by partners.

The main findings of a recent evaluation on the impact of a "Capacity Building, Organisational Development and Disaster Preparedness Project" supported by the Norwegian RC identifies that:

currently most of the RC activities are focusing on charity and short-term humanitarian support. This support is indeed highly valued by beneficiaries, but considering the maturity and proficiency of some of the participating branches/chapters it is suggested to increasingly supplement this type of assistance with more long-term development models.

The report highlights the importance of seeing capacity building support as a "less stand-alone process" and recommends that the approach should "increasingly be driven by a focus on branch output/service delivery, and thus ultimately guided by the needs of communities"⁹⁰.

It is true that generally our OD and capacity building support given to NS tend to target individual problems or development areas (e.g. volunteer development; capacity building in fundraising or leadership development etc) and is not linked to service delivery. Often, although intended project goals have been reached, the NS as such has not grown stronger and more sustainable in the long run. Furthermore, it has been difficult to sustain such isolated improvements.

Another evaluation of a "Community-based Health Care and Branch Development project", supported by the German and Australian RC, points towards the same direction. It identifies that "while chapters have generated income from fundraising and have thereby been able to increase activities, this has not yet led to a development of resources" and, therefore, there is a need to "transform fundraising to resource development" so that it leads "to greater independence and capacity in the long run"⁹¹.

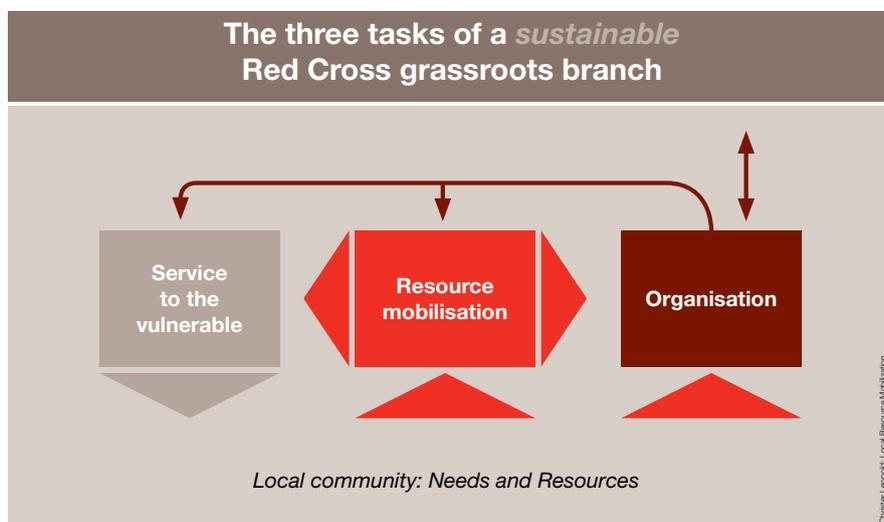
It is true that fundraising alone will not lead to greater financial independence, especially if government regulations make it impossible to take out even a small overhead for operational costs without the donor's explicit consent. However, fundraising perhaps should be complimented by something rather than being "transformed" into something. Besides, if the resource development here is about developing entrepreneurial and business skills then one has also to consider the differing views that exist for and against it. Some believe that it would take a lot of energy, and success is not guaranteed. Others may give some good examples from other NS such as Kenya RC. It all depends on perceived opportunities and conditions.

More importantly, what does the VNRC want? If it wants to be stronger in terms of having money then the entrepreneurial and business approach is relevant. If it wants to be stronger in terms of relevant and expanded service

90 Hoybye A, *Impact evaluation: Capacity Building, Organisational Development and Disaster Preparedness Project*, September 2010

91 Bolte P, *Viet Nam Community-Based Health Care and Branch Development On track, steep hills ahead*, evaluation report prepared for German, Australian RC and VNRC, August 2010. p.14

delivery, then other models should be preferred. For example, a model proposed by C. Leopold on local resource mobilisation (see graphic below) can be an option⁹².



The idea of this model is to turn local resources (e.g. active members/volunteers) into services for the local population. The organisation (unit/branch), its services and resource mobilisation – are all interlinked and interdependent and thus strengthened all together. This is in line with the recommendation mentioned above to focus on branch output/service delivery.

In short, the Federation, including partner NS and the secretariat, are still searching for the most effective way of providing organisational development and capacity building support to the VNRC. Any advice or international support must make sure that the existing systems and structures are protected and not abolished before a sustainable alternative is designed.

As described in section 1.4, the grassroots presence, mobilisation capacity and self-reliance attitude are the main strengths of the VNRC. The combination of all these strengths presents a unique opportunity for the NS to develop a new approach for self-sustainability and stay strong even if government support and/or international assistance are reduced eventually.

Learning in brief:

- There is no such thing as “we do programmes and you handle the NS or focus on organisational development”; they must go together.
- The “fundraising”, “resource mobilisation” or “resource development” – could each mean different thing for different NS or individuals. The concepts and terms must be fully understood when used.

⁹² Leopold C, *Local resource mobilisation*, presentation, 13 September 2007

4.3. Do not put unrealistic demands

The conditions in the country have to be acknowledged for any external advice, assistance or pressure to be effective. This has not always been the case in Vietnam. The drafting of the RC Law is an interesting example.

The NS created a drafting committee comprised of five lawyers. The draft law went to the JSC in 2007 for review. The JSC made several recommendations and the drafting committee in turn made modifications upon receipt of these comments and shared the revised draft with the JSC in 2008.

As we see from the example in the table below, the comments and advice in the first round in 2007 were just repeated in 2008. The final result was disappointment for the commission as these suggested amendments were not fully incorporated in the final version of the law which was passed on 3 June 2008 by the 12th National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Draft text (Article 27)	VNRC is “a social-humanitarian organisation of the public, gathering all Vietnamese people regardless of gender, social classes, religion, faith, educational levels and occupations”
JSC observation in 2007	...given the specific status granted to NS under the Statutes of the International RC/RC Movement, the definition given under article 27 is not complete. The JSC recommends that, under Article 27.1, the NS be recognised as a “voluntary aid society, auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, in accordance with the 1949 Geneva Conventions” ⁹² . Further it was recommended that the law should include, under the same article, that “the public authorities shall at all times respect the adherence by the Viet Nam Red Cross Society to the Fundamental principles of the international red cross and red crescent movement”.
JSC comment in 2008	The revised draft did not integrate the recommendations in 2007 in “an appropriate manner”. In particular the specific status of auxiliary to the public authority in the humanitarian field granted to NS under 1949 Geneva Conventions and under the Statutes of the International RC/RC Movement is not included in the draft law and the JSC again recommended that NS is recognised as a “voluntary aid society, auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, in accordance with the 1949 Geneva Conventions” and that the law should include, under the same article that “the public authorities shall at all times respect the adherence by the Red Cross of Vietnam to the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement” ⁹³ .
Final text	VNRC is “a social organisation conducting humanitarian activities in accordance with Vietnamese law and international law, fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, other treaties to which the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a contracting party, and the Society’s Charter” ⁹⁴ .

The process was thoroughly managed over two years. However, the approach to the review was far from reality. **Being less legalistic and mechanistic and more strategic with organisational development thinking, the law drafting could have helped the NS gain a bit more than what came out of the process.**

93 Letter of the Joint Statutes Commission to the President of the VNRC, dated on 1 October 2007

94 Letter of the Joint Statutes Commission dated on 8 April 2008

95 Article 27.1

With regard to the independence of the NS, the JSC believed that “certain articles are positive in terms of its relationship between the State and the Vietnam Red Cross Society”. However, the commission considered that several articles in the draft law “may be problematic in terms of independence” of the NS and recommended to either clarify or remove them. In particular Article 5 was viewed as problematic “since it must not be the role of State authorities to ‘manage’ Red Cross activities”⁹⁶.

The specific comments made include the following:

- State authorities should not be in a position to promulgate and implement normative documents and policies on Red Cross activities. It should be the task of the governing bodies of the Vietnam Red Cross Society to set up and ensure the implementation of the policies on Red Cross activities.
- State authorities should not be given the power to inspect and examine the implementation of the legislation on Red Cross activities. This could lead to the functioning of the NS being controlled by the State.
- The government, the ministries and ministerial level agencies, and the People’s Committees cannot exercise uniform management over Red Cross activities. This would jeopardise the independence of the NS. It was suggested to limit the functions of the Government at all levels and explained that this does not prevent the National Society from having to report on its activities in one way or another, but it must be allowed to define and develop such activities according to the priorities it has itself identified.

The same comments applied to other articles of the draft law. The recommendations, for example, stated that:

The government as well as the peoples committees must not be in a position to create policies or supervise and inspect the Red Cross activities; otherwise the government would be intervening in the functioning of the National Society.

It recommended “limiting the responsibility of the government and the People’s Committee to “creating favourable conditions for the activities of the Viet Nam Red Cross Society”.

With regard to a particular article, the JSC also suggested that “the people elected agencies should not have the power to supervise the activities of the Red Cross” and recommended removing the provision in the draft version dated on 20 Feb 2008.

Again the drafting committee considered these comments, but not to the level that the JSC wished. Its letter in 2008 says that:

Although some provisions indicate the role of the public authorities to encourage and facilitate the work of the Red Cross of Vietnam, the JSC still thinks that several articles in the draft law may be problematic in terms of independence of the Red Cross of Vietnam. The draft articles may be different from the ones identified in our letter dated 1 October 2007, but the issue of concern remain the same.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Letter of the Joint Statutes Commission to the President of the VNRC, 2007

⁹⁷ Letter of the ICRC and IFRC Joint Statutes Commission, dated on 8 April 2008

Further discussion and follow-up was done by Federation and ICRC staff. The NS and the drafting committee articulated their perspectives. For example, with regard to articles which establish the management responsibilities of the government towards the VNRC it was explained that the government is to be considered as a major “donor” of the VNRC and therefore they have a right to see that resources are well managed⁹⁸.

Thus a lot of efforts were put into making the RC Law compliant with the minimum elements defined in the *Model law on the recognition of National Societies*. The question faced by the NS was complex. **Should the NS have a RC Law accepted and adapted to the Vietnamese political environment or should not have a law at all which may be incompatible with the model law.** This was a dilemma.

On the NS auxiliary role and independence, we should be more creative in interpretation. The notion of “creating favourable conditions for the activities of the NS”, for example, is broad and has to be flexibly understood.

Some argue that normal and conflict situations have to be distinguished. Only during a war or conflict the independence issue is critical as it is linked to access to victims. Some do not agree with this. Others compare the situation with PNS being dependent on their own governments. A PNS representative was explicit in saying that the situation is comparable with PNS getting government funds and that they should not expect different standards from others. A couple of years ago, a Federation Representative in Vietnam referred to this phenomena as “PNS seem to only be paying lip-service when they indicate that they ‘wish for the IFRC secretariat to coordinate’, mainly because either they already have their own agenda or, more frequently, they are bound by their respective Government’s political agenda for the particular country and/or region”⁹⁹ This is a subject, perhaps, for another study.

The point to be made here is on **how to ensure the best possible match of an organisation and conditions in the country.**

On the NS statutes revision itself, we have to **distinguish what can be judged at the global level and what cannot.** NS statutes development contains several elements such as:

- organisational design and systems (i.e. OD aspects)
- legal aspects: general legal aspects and domestic legal context
- culture and organisational tradition in the country, especially voluntary sector traditions
- RC/RC Movement standards

In reviewing the NS Statutes at the global level one can make judgements on the organisational design and systems, the general legal aspects and the alignment with Movement standards. The rest cannot be evaluated properly at the global level.

Therefore the approach to NS Statutes revision in Geneva should be to make judgements on whether it (i) might work and (ii) meets agreed minimum requirements.

Finally, what are the consequences of providing radical comments and advice and then keeping “quiet” when these recommendations are not accepted?

98 OD mission report, Malcolm McKinley, IFRC and Bernhard Julier, ICRC, Oct 2007

99 End of mission report (6), p.5

Learning in brief:

- Revision of NS Statutes and support to the drafting of RC/RC Law or NS policies should be based on in-depth OD knowledge.
- Understanding of the NS's operating environment is essential. When reviewing NS statutes we need to distinguish what can be judged at the global level and what cannot.
- Legalistic solutions or mechanical application of global tools will weaken our advice and recommendations, including those released by respected authorities such as the ICRC and Federation's Joint Statutes Commission.

Conclusions

Over the last 25 years of the post *Doi Moi* period, the VNRC has continued to play a vital role in the country in addressing vulnerability and responding to natural disasters. It has also made significant progress in terms of strengthening itself. The status of the NS has increased.

With the new and more open policy of the government on international assistance, the VNRC has expanded its international cooperation. The RC/RC movement partners came in high numbers. Their support has been greatly appreciated by the Vietnamese people, NS and government. The international profile of the VNRC and its service expansion would not have happened without presence of the IFRC and partner NS.

The general policy of the government towards the VNRC has been to control but also to support. Thanks to the party and government support, the NS was able to maintain independence from international aid especially at the chapter, branch and grassroots level.

However the journeys of the NS have not always been smooth. The government and international partners, both provided resources. The resources were followed by tasks, rules and expectations to be met. The main challenge for the NS has been on how to manage demands from both sides and to minimise dependency on each. It has been a balancing act. Sometimes it was necessary to take a firm position. At other times it was possible to reach compromise solutions. The balancing act and accommodating everything sometimes led to a mixed approach, in practical terms.

If we look closely at the functioning and delivery of the NS, most of the changes are associated with the arrival of international partners rather than the changes in the country. Ironically, the restrictions in the country sometimes helped the NS to maintain its strengths and avoid being pulled in many different directions. The approach has been to get the basics right and to avoid the mistakes and failures of other NS with a similar background. This is due to the firm position of the VNRC leadership and the maturity and confidence of the organisation. It did not rush to borrow ideas from elsewhere and destroy what was in place before developing a new alternative.

The NS is now really reaching a cross roads. There are several dilemmas and challenges being faced. The leadership is well aware of it and is trying to select the most appropriate direction within the given limitations.

Several observations are made in this paper on partnership issues, and they can be summarised as:

- Propositions, advice and pressure coming from a different organisational model, if not adapted to the existing logic of the NS and its

operating environment may not lead to success (i.e. development), on the contrary it may hinder development and growth.

- Uncoordinated actions by partners towards the NS, coupled with earmarked funds, brought only for programme implementation, may lead to capacity stretching and consequently to organisational weaknesses and even to a perceived lack of transparency.
- The gap between intention and reality (coupled with the lack of agreed and consistent strategies to deal with the situation) weakens the position of the Federation secretariat to fulfil its role.

The momentum is now being created with open dialogue and expressed best intentions from all parties. The “one Federation” approach, if deemed necessary, should go beyond the aim of pulling together more resources, but also to serve as a mechanism to ensure conceptual coherence towards strong NS development.

On NS development, the study identified a number of specific learning points for the international partners of the VNRC. These are around three broad themes:

- Understand the NS’s organisational logic
- Help in maintaining and building on existing strengths
- Do not put unrealistic pressure

Several of these learning points are of direct relevance for the Federation secretariat, especially for the NSKD business group which commissioned this study. The issues requiring immediate attention include the following:

1. Standard application of global tools such as the *National Society Governance Guidelines* and *Guidance for National Societies Statutes* without defining their relevance to a particular NS and its operating context has to stop. The NS are diverse and cannot or should not fit in one model. We need to define if some key global tools and standards themselves require amendment.
2. The quality control on OD support given to NS by the secretariat including zone/regional/country offices must improve. The OD advice to a NS is the work of experts and not experienced generalists.
3. The quality of OD input to the revision of NS Statutes and drafting of RC/RC Law must improve. The general approach should be on how to ensure the best possible match of an organisation and conditions in the country.

These are not new discoveries. They are also not OD issues as such but management issues. With the renewed commitment and energy to invest much more in NS development than in the past, there is now an opportunity to break through some of these well-known problems.

Annexes

Annex 1 List of people consulted

Vietnam Red Cross Society

Mr. Tran Ngoc Tang, President

Mr. Doan van Thai, Vice-president, Secretary General

Mr. Dang Minh Chau, Director of International Relations & Development Dept
(member of the Central Standing Committee)

Ms. Luong Hong Thuy (Quynh), Vice Director of International Relations &
Development Dept (Member of the Central Committee)

Mr. Tran Viet Hung Director of Personnel dept, HQ

Ms. Khuong Thi Thanh Huyen, Vice Director of Personnel dept

Ms. Tran Thu Hang Director of Communication, Volunteering and Youth Dept

Mrs. Dang Minh Nguyet Director of fundraising dept

Ms. Dam Thi Nhi Staff of fundraising dept

Mr. Nguyen Thanh Quang Staff of fundraising dept

Ms. Nguyen Thu Phuong Staff of fundraising dept

Mr. Nguyen Huu Thang Vice Director of DM and social work department

Mrs. Nguyen Thu Ha Vice Director of DM and social work department

Mr. Dinh Duy Thenh Vice director of Health and Care dept

Mr. Nguyen Quoc Dan Vice director of RC staff training centre (Member of the
Central Committee)

Ms. Nguyen Thi Minh Staff of training centre

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hue Chairwoman, Ho Chi Minh RC province

Mr. Nguyen Binh Tru Vice Chairman, HCM RC province

Mr. Diep Ba Kiet Head of Administration dept, HCM RC province

Mr. Le Vu Son Vice Chairman, Can Gio Red Cross district

Mr. Nguyen Van Dang Vice Chairman, Can Gio Red Cross district

Mr. Nguyen Kim Hoa- Member of Can Gio Red Cross standing committee

Mr. Nguyen Ngac Chairman of Hai Phong RC province

Mrs. Tran Thi Hong Vice Chairwoman of Hai Phong RC province

Mr. Bui Manh Phuc Member of executive committee Hai Phong

Ms. Pham Thi Hoa Head of Communication and Youth dept, Hai Phong

Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Lan, Deputy Head of Administrative Dept, Hai Phong

Mr. Hoang Cong Nhien, Chairman of Kien An RC district cum Vice Chairman of District People's committee

Mr. Do Trong Khoat, Member of Red Cross district standing committee Kien An

Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Phan, Vice Chairman of Kien An RC district

Mrs. Tam, Vice Chairwoman of Kien An RC district

Mrs. Thien, Member of standing committee, Kien An district

Mr. Hoang Van Khoi, Member of standing committee, Kien An district

Partner NS

D.Kendall Repass, Country Representative, American RC

Nguyen Xuan Duy, Program Coordinator for Vietnam, Norwegian RC

Frank Küppers, Country Representative, German RC

Marta Alejano, Representative, Spanish RC

Tanya Cugura, Programme coordinator, Australian RC

Paul, Van Der Laan, Netherlands RC

Federation secretariat

Anna Leclerc, Head of regional delegation, Bangkok

Bhupinder Tomar, Country Representative in Vietnam

Ewa Eriksson, Former country representative in Vietnam

Ibrahim Osman, Former Deputy Secretary General

Jagan Chapagain, Director of Asia & Pacific zone, Kuala Lumpur

Johan Schaar, Former head of delegation in Vietnam

John Gwynn, Organisational development coordinator, Kuala Lumpur

Nguyen Hung Ha, Programme manager disaster risk reduction, Regional Delegation Bangkok

Nguyen Thuan, Health care project officer

Nguyen Thy Lan, Organisational development manager, Delegation in Vietnam

Nguyen Van, Assistant to Country Representative in Vietnam

Rakesh Kumar, Regional finance development delegate, Bangkok

Simon Missiri, Former head of Asia & Pacific Department in Geneva

Other organisations

Trishit Biswas, Cooperation Delegate, ICRC Regional Delegation, Bangkok

Pham Thi Thanh Hang, UN ISDR, Bangkok

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Vietnam Red Cross Society

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Annex 3 List of the Federation heads of delegation/representatives in Vietnam

	Duration	HOD/Representative	Acting HOD/Representative
1	1991	Michel Xitman	
2	January 1992-June 1993	Johan Schaar	
3	1994-1995	Mohamed Chande	
4	April 1995-June 1998	Carl-Michael Coyet	
5	May 1998 - June 2001	John Geoghegan	
6	August 2001 - October 2002	Bo Backstrom	
7	November 2002 - June 2003		Ingela Holmerz in Hanoi
8	May 2004 - May 2005	Richard May	
9	August 2005 - June 2006	Leopoldo Principe	
10	August 2006 - February 2008	Irja Sandberg	
11	February 2008 - Sept 2009		Stefan Kuhne-Hellmessen from Bangkok
12	September - November 2009	Ewa Eriksson	
13	December 2009 - February 2010		Igor Dmitryuk from Kuala Lumpur
14	March 2010 - present	Bhupinder Tomar	

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity / The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality / It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality / In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence / The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service / It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity / There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality / The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



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