

CSO Transparency Initiatives: Being more creative and collaborative signs a way ahead

CSO transparency initiatives

Ninh Binh, 12 – 13 June, 2014 – Vietnam's leading advocates for transparency initiatives, accountability and good governance gathered for the first ever **Civil society organisations' (CSOs) transparency retreat** hosted by **Towards Transparency (TT)**.

They participated to share, learn and seek for collective actions that generate more influential impacts on government and society in Vietnam. The air was heated right at the beginning with open and straight talks on the big picture of **current transparency initiatives** with wide range of existing challenges and opportunities for Vietnam CSOs.

Leaders from 17 organizations including **VNGOs** from diverse sectors, research institutes, and academic experts – most of whom have collaborated with TT on a range of different transparency initiatives – were unanimous about an urge to strengthen the professionally symbiotic **relationship between CSOs and media**. CSOs need media to approach, build trust and engage people better.

“You (CSOs) have ground level evidences and expertise for debating on government's accountability that provide strong background for us (media) in publishing news. The government can refute allegations of media if these are lack of strong evidences. But no law makers can be ignorant of voice of

people who are most influenced by policies.”

Mr. Phan Loi, Journalist and Chairman of the Media and Education for Community – MEC.



Journalist Phan Loi (front) emphasizes on strengthening relationship between CSO and media

Doing research for advocacy

Another topic achieving clear consensus among participants is that **doing research** strongly remains a scientific and practical mechanism to provide **strong evidence for advocacy**, as long as this tool is packed with creative approaches in dealing with decision makers. On the other hand, the “debating culture” is still questioned amongst experts.

“It’s still prevalent in Vietnam that researchers are not yet open to criticism and social debate over their own works. If

we want better research products, this ‘culture’ needs to change.”

Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Anh, the Director of Development and Policies Research Center – DEPOCEN.

In search of **government’s support**, CSOs must show that they are constructive, supportive and transparent as well as being able to provide practical and effective solutions.

Building **alliance with academia, governmental institutions and media** are essences in the success of advocacy work. One voice is hard to be heard but millions voice echoed by media will draw immediate attention.



Experienced researches gather with advocates to share their advocacy experience

Concrete transparency initiatives

When discussing concrete **transparency initiatives** and projects of change, **youth integrity** and **academic integrity** hit people on both emotional and critical sides. The **Youth Integrity Survey 2011** launched by **Transparency International** alarmingly showed that **72 per cent** of young people are willing to pay a bribe for personal gain. This finding was discussed, not to convey negative emotions from people but rather to ask for solutions to this global issue.

Young people are more vulnerable to intangible harassment with tangible consequences. The story of a young graduate who faced boycott preventing him from approaching potential employers because he had taken part in a **youth-led campaign on anti – corruption** before was such a talking case for protecting role that CSOs are tasked in working with youth.

A vivid briefing on the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)** presented by TT's founder, Ms. Nguyen Thi Kieu Vien, received enthusiastic and supporting feedback, and multiple ideas on next steps from all participants. Participants expressed a shared view that OGP is a necessary and highly relevant initiative for Vietnamese CSOs to advocate for improving government transparency.