

The Development of Culture, Identity and Resources Use Management

A Case Study

Acronyms

CAKE	Centre of Accessible Knowledge and Expertise
CASI	Civil Action and Socio-Economic Inclusion in Sustainable Development for Ethnic Minorities in Northern Vietnam
CEMA	Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs
CIRD	Centre for Indigenous Research and Development
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CIRUM	Culture Identity and Resources Use Management
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CODE	Consultancy on Development
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DONRE	Department of Natural Resources and the Environment
EM	Ethnic Minorities
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FLAP	Forest Land Allocation Programme
HEPA	Human Ecology Practice Area
ICCO	Interchurch Cooperation in Development
IPADE	Instituto de Promocion y Apoyo al Desarrollo
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
LTA	Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability
LISO	Livelihood Sovereignty Alliance
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Products
PC	Peoples Committee
PNet	Personal Friends Network
RDPR	Rural Development and Poverty Reduction Fund
SEARAV	South-East Asia Research Association of Vietnam
SFE	State Forest Enterprises
SPERI	Social Political Economic Research Institute
TEW	Towards Ethnic Minorities
VUSTA	Vietnam Union for Scientific and Technology Association
WAPI	Working Group for Advocacy and Promoting Indigenous Initiatives

Introduction

This study documents the organizational development of Culture Identity and Resources Use Management (CIRUM), its evolving strategies to achieve its mission, its method of working at the grassroots, its lobbying and advocacy style, including the establishment and facilitation of the Forest Peoples Land Rights Network (LandNet), and how it has established its legitimacy and accountability.

The study will also compare the present situation of the organization with an organizational capacity assessment made in 2009 and with a 2012 study of the NGO sector in Vietnam.

Finally the study will ask questions about the impact of CARE's CASI programme, and make recommendations for CIRUM, CARE and INGOs in general about future programming in the area of ethnic minority land rights and gender programming.

Methodology

The study used semi-structured interviews as the primary way of getting the views of relevant stakeholders. Informants were present staff members of CIRUM, staff of LISO alliance partners, members of LandNet, former officials at commune and district level and members of CASI staff. Programme documents, evaluations and studies relating to CIRUM were also reviewed.

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Summary

The development of CIRUM cannot be properly understood if its history is only charted from 2005. Both its present director and vice director were for some time director and vice director of its parent organisation, Towards Ethnic Women (TEW). Just as they now lead CIRUM, they have brought with them the methodologies, field experience and grassroots connections they gained whilst in TEW.

Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that one of the great strengths of CIRUM is its connection to the grassroots - farmers in upland Vietnam project areas, and local government officials at commune and district level. All respondents interviewed in the study mentioned the excellent methods CIRUM uses at the grassroots and the relationships they have established. They have gained trust, and are almost universally admired for their passion, ethics and knowledge of land rights and sustainable livelihoods issues.



CIRUM brings together government and people in practical events. Here the Huu Lung District vice-chairman, members of the Peoples Committee, officials of the Lang Son farmers association and DARD travel to Khe 5 village in Ha Tinh province to visit the LandNet forest management model.

want information processed and spun by an NGO with its own agenda. They want real information from real people who are confident and informed, and that is the service that CIRUM provides, building capacity at local level and facilitating this interaction.

The organisation itself has grown slowly since 2005, for the first five years relying on just one donor for its funds. Its vision and mission has remained strong however, and its strategy for tackling ethnic minority land rights has evolved over time as it has responded to what it has learnt. Initially CIRUM worked with forest land allocation programmes (FLAP), and post-FLAP livelihoods models including the establishment of CBOs such as herbal healers groups. In this way it built up its grassroots base,



But it is CIRUM's particular advocacy style that wins it the most praise. From the beginning CIRUM was crucially aware that NGOs cannot represent the people, they can only bring the people and government together. CIRUM and their LISO alliance partners have senior staff who have worked in government and via certain relationships they have many progressive friends within relevant ministries. They understand government very well. Policy makers often do not have current information about the issues at the grassroots or data they can believe about successful policy adaptation in certain areas. They also do not

CIRUM works closely with LISO alliance partners at the grassroots. Here the alliance has organised an exchange on sustainable livelihood models with Red Dao EM in Phin Ngan, Simacai, Lao Cai province.

gained more experience and knowledge of the real problems facing upland living ethnic minority people, and helped to build evidence for possible solutions.

In 2008 CIRUM attempted to join forces with NGOs working in Lang Son province who were also funded by ICCO. CIRUM initiated and drew up a joint programme, Working Group for Advocacy and Promoting Indigenous Initiatives (WAPI) that was approved and funded by ICCO. The programme quickly ran into trouble over the sensitivity of working in land rights. Essentially their new partners in WAPI did not agree in trying to address land conflicts or with their way of working with ethnic minorities.

Nevertheless, CIRUM still wanted to grow its network and find friends, and from 2010, their emphasis changed, although they have continued with their FLAP work. They joined CARE's CASI programme, and then in 2011 again tried to initiate and facilitate another NGO alliance for a programmatic approach pilot in Vietnam, the Land Coalition, again sponsored by ICCO. The strategy was to spread the message at the same level, to join with other NGOs.



CASI staff and CIRUM staff with baseline study in Dinh Lap district.

Overall, CIRUM's evaluation of these attempts at peer network development is not positive. "We deal with issues, conflicts, land rights. Not many people want to work in these areas, as most find them too political, too sensitive. Other NGOs in Vietnam are afraid of touching." The Land Coalition failure demonstrated again the importance of a common vision and shared understanding of those with

whom you wish to work. In some ways the continuing push by international donors to the programmatic approach is seen as an attempt to force local NGO-NGO cooperation, and by some as showing a lack of respect by INGOs to local partners.

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CIRUM staff researching with Dzaao healer in Dong Thang commune, Dinh Lap, Lang Son. CIRUM's relationship with people at the grassroots is a consequence of careful participatory research, planning and implementation.

CIRUM has very strong relationships with its LISO alliance partners, and works in an integrated way, even to the point of sharing advisors. It also has good relationships with others having their foundation it grassroots participatory work such as the Centre for Indigenous Research and Development (CIRD) and the Rural Development and Poverty Reduction Fund (RDPR). Apart from these, CIRUM has found it difficult to find other partners to work closely with, as it is looking to grow an alliance or network of civil society that is very close to it in approach. This insistence

of CIRUM on the similarity in approach and vision has been criticised by some as meaning it will be hard for the organisation's network to grow. However, it is the belief of the organisation that its legitimacy, the trust it has earned at the grassroots, with some donors and now increasingly at central

government level is a *direct result of the consistency of its approach*, of solving conflicts, of very careful, 'softly' lobbying, and its 'interactive' method of facilitating the meeting of government and farmers. CIRUM leadership worries that careless alliances could damage it, after all, 'associational' legitimacy arises from being linked to other legitimate people and practices (Brown 2008).

It is a conundrum for CIRUM, understanding and desiring the need for greater spread not only geographically but also with more policy makers at more and differing levels, yet unable to find adequate friends at their peer level. Several informants mentioned the possible future role of CARE or INGOs in helping CIRUM in this, mediating relationships between VNGOs, allowing them to benefit from each other, whilst avoiding the possible pitfalls of negative associational legitimacy and a competitive instinct in a situation of dwindling donor resources. As mentioned later, it seems networking between LNGOs is regarded as more successful when INGOs assist.



Founding members of the EM land rights network, LandNet, pictured at HEPA, Ha Tinh Province. Several members of LandNet were informants in this study

In 2013 CIRUM facilitated the formation of the Forest Peoples Land Rights Network (LandNet) whose members and coordinators come from the areas in which it, TEW and LISO alliance partners worked in the past. LandNet members are experienced and committed village and community leaders, former local government officials and farmers, and it is their knowledge of forest land right issues and their models of sustainable livelihoods that fronts the present campaign for ethnic minority land rights.¹

In 2015 CIRUM's strategy continues to evolve, with the intention of spreading their learning and exchange network into the lower Mekong region. At present this development has yet to get fully off the ground. Initial contacts are there, but the funding is not, and neither are the staff.

As discussed below, CIRUM fits into the 'medium' size Vietnam NGO category, its organisational growth and issues not so different from others in this category. Staff turnover, lack of real Board involvement, and the necessity of the founder remaining in close day to day touch with the management of the organisation are all features of these NGOs in Vietnam. CIRUM is presently addressing issues in its organisational development related to the Board, staff and management processes. A big issue it faces is the narrowness of its resource base, reliant on overseas donors. Although the number of its donors is increasing, the organisation is aware of this issue.

Informants have many comments on the past and possible future role of CARE and other INGOs or donors in the area of forest land rights. Suggestions in general are related to the continuing role of overseas aid in supporting the development of civil society, particularly at the grassroots, and joining in the interactive lobbying strategy, whilst providing shelter and more capacity building for NGOs.

¹ For more information see <http://land.net.vn/eng/Overview-121.html>

Background to the establishment of CIRUM

Although registered in 2005, the origins of CIRUM can be traced back to 1994. At the time the founder, Ms Tran Thi Hoa had been working for the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Vietnam for 3 years, and working part time for TEW. TEW had been founded by her sister Tran Thi Lanh, its work heavily influenced by the ideas of participatory development as espoused by Robert Chambers and others like him.

For Hoa, FAO appeared not particularly interested in grassroots development, nor upland living ethnic minorities, the poorest of the poor. She decided to work full time for TEW in their grassroots women's empowerment programmes in Quang Binh and Dak Lak, their forest land allocation programmes (FLAP) in Gia Lai and Son La, and in Ha Tay in cooperation with local authorities and functional officials like forest rangers. The staff of TEW worked at a number of levels:



Mrs Hoa and other members of the Kim Hoa savings and credit group, Quang Binh province in April 2015. The establishment of the group was carefully assisted by CIRUM's mother organisation, TEW, and is still working well after 20 years.



Many founding members of LandNet - 'key farmers' - have been representing their communities for many years, assisted first by TEW and later by CIRUM and LISO alliance partners. Here they listen to a young leader speaking out at the network's official foundation meeting at HEPA, Ha Tinh.

with 'key farmers', that is community selected leaders and activists; with government officials from District Peoples Committees or from commune level, or with mass movement women's and youth unions. Funders at this time were the Australian International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and the Netherlands Embassy, but mostly the staff of TEW worked on a voluntary basis.

A key change in 1997 was the involvement of the Dutch Interchurch Cooperation for Development (ICCO) who started funding TEW, and later CIRUM and SPERI. ICCO remained the only core funder of the organizations until 2010. For Hoa, the culture and personality of the organizations were set at this time. They coined the term 'key farmer' and more than 50 of these grassroots activists and leaders from the 1990s are present day members of the Forest Peoples Land Rights Network (LandNet). At this time also the 'personal friends networks' or 'Pnet' of the Hoa can trace many present

organisation's staff came into being (see Figure 1 networking chart below).

day allies from this time, people who she terms 'progressive individuals', who are 'for ethnic minorities' and willing to help in the lobbying and advocacy work. Professor Kong Dien, a government advisor and now CIRUM board member is an example.

TEW's method of making allies in government was straightforward, and originates in a participatory philosophy, a belief of the ethics of their work, and their understanding of the gaps in the abilities and knowledge of local government.

Hoa cites Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen from two districts as examples. "We didn't know what 'lobby' was at this time. We just needed to enter discussions with those in authority, a dialogue to discuss perceived problems. In both cases we were initially viewed with suspicion, but won over the individuals concerned by staying on message and showing our hard-working ethics. We all knew that ethnic minority people needed help, and only the District could help".



Another key technique originating from this time was to involve officials in community work, invite them on field visits or to workshops and forums for them to understand the practical reality on the ground, and to meet 'key farmers'. An early example of CIRUM lobby style of bringing together grassroots leaders and government came in 1998 when TEW organized their first national level workshop attended by amongst others

Facilitating the interaction of the 'above' with the 'below'. Field research with community members explaining sustainable forest management methods to members of the Economic Department of the Central Committee and commune authorities, Kon Tum province, 2014.

VUSTA and the EM department of the National Assembly.

Many of SPERI LISO staff originate from this time also. TEW was registered under the Ethnic Minority Association as VUSTA was not yet in operation, set up under circular 38. FLAP continued in Lao Cai, Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Son La. TEW went through a difficult period from 2002-4 as it came under intense government scrutiny. Touching the issue of rights and also of control over forest and land resources, as well as a highly critical style led to the organization being investigated by five different ministries. Although finance was gone through minutely, even to the extent of following receipts to village level, nothing was found, and the organization continued for the moment. This experience taught the organization the real meaning of accountability when operating in a hostile environment.

For other NGOs at this time who were involved in service provision or projects not touching on elite or party power and control, the government could be seen to be enabling.

However, the events of 2002-4 convinced the staff to change tactics. They were concerned that the government would intervene to stop the organization working. So CIRUM split from TEW, establishing in 2005 under the South-East Asia Research Association of Vietnam (SEARAV) in May 2005. As a legal requirement CIRUM had a founding board, which also included staff. There were eight (mainly part-time) staff including one agricultural staff, three foresters and one FLAP expert. Hoa was vice-director and she is the only survivor from this time. Others have retired or moved to the private sector. One is now active in LandNet, another in their personal friends network 'Pnet'.

CIRUM's objectives remained largely the same as TEW's, but the style was changed. For CIRUM, 'noisy' public criticism was dropped in favour of a calm public face, hoping to work privately with government

as friends or partners with the objective of helping EM out of poverty. Whilst with donors CIRUM could still talk openly (in English) of land rights, with government in Vietnamese the language was more general – ‘natural resource management’, ‘environmental protection’ or ‘community development’. CIRUM also decided to shift into new areas they perceived to be of great need - in north-east Vietnam, working mainly with Nung, Dzao and Tay minorities.

Fisher sees three main strategies of NGOs toward government relationships, either to isolate themselves almost completely from the state, engage the state through advocacy, which may or may not be confrontational; or cooperate with the state through parallel or collaborative field projects.² CIRUM shifted emphasis away from TEW's at times confrontational engagement of the state through advocacy to a more cooperative stance, working if possible with the officials and officers of the state in collaborative field projects.

² Fischer, J. Non-governments: NGOs and the political development of the third world. Kumarian Press; 1998

CIRUM Development Summary

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total staff including part time (pro-rata) and EM	4	5	8	10	10	10	11	11	13	13	14
Ethnic minority staff								1	1	1	4
Directorate	Hien	Hien	Hoa	Hoa	Hoa	Hoa	Hoa	Hoa & Su	Hoa & Su	Hoa & Su	Hoa & Su
International Volunteers						1	1	1	1	3	3
Total Budget US\$ (rounded)	50,000	160,000	170,000	170,000	160,000	180,000	230,000	240,000	210,000	230,000	250,000 exp.
Major Donors											
ICCO	●-----●										
IPADE						●-----●	(left Vietnam)				
CARE						●-----●					
McKnight Foundation								●-----●			
Bread for the World									●-----●		
CCFD										●-----●	
Network events											
CASI partnerships						CASI partnership					
Local partnerships				WAPI			Land coalition				
LandNet									LandNet		
LISO alliance									LISO alliance		
Insider links									MoU CEMA		
Insider links									MoU MARD		
Insider links											MARD draft committee
Strategy focus											
Step 1	Grassroots network and CBO development through FLAP, conflict resolution and livelihoods models as foundation										
Step 2	Alliance approach to spread message with NGO partners										
Step 3									LandNet - bring together grassroots leaders and government		
Step 4											Mekong learning network
LandNet 2015+ strategy	Grow and support independent CBO sub-LandNets advocating on their own behalf										

CIRUM capacity assessment comparison, 2009 & 2015

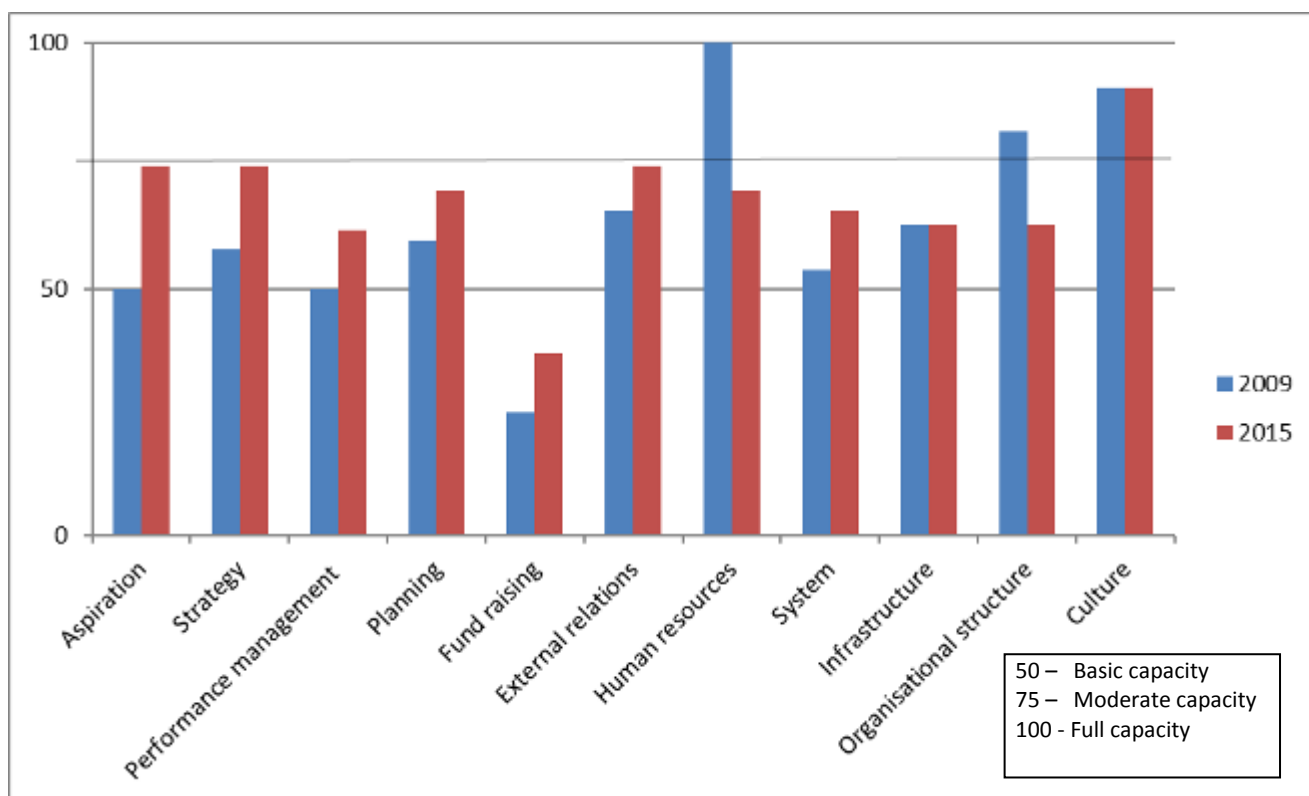


Figure 1 CIRUM organisation capacity

In 2009, a CARE consultant used the McKinsey Capacity Assessment Grid from Venture Philanthropy Partners to assess current capacity. The same areas covered by the grid were examined in this assessment. The assessment is qualitative, based on interviews with CIRUM management, staff and relevant stakeholders, as well as the researcher’s inside knowledge.

In brief

Positive improvements were noted in several areas, especially in aspiration, strategy and planning. Noticeable declines occurred in human resources and organisational structure. This decline is probably due to an over-optimistic assessment in 2009 of the structure, capacity and involvement of the Board in CIRUM’s work.

Although showing an improvement since 2009, the fund raising base of the organisation needs the most work. Issues related to external relations, human resources, performance management and organisational structure also need work and are considered a priority by CIRUM management. Presently CIRUM is in the process of forming a new Board, and approving a Human Resources policy and manual.

Comparing CIRUM with other Vietnamese CSO

In 2012 the Asia Foundation randomly selected 100 Vietnamese CSOs and surveyed them using self-reporting questionnaires. CIRUM is compared with the general findings, trends and issues as reported by the organizations surveyed. As the survey found differences between CSO based in Hanoi to those based in Ho Chi Minh, the comparison is in general with Hanoi based CSO.

Most organizations reported a high **staff turnover** similar to CIRUM. Most CIRUM staff have been working with the organisation for less than 3 years with 9 staff starting during or after 2012. One staff member started in 2007 and the two international volunteers started after 2012. The **Foundation Board** (a regulatory requirement to register an organisation) has been dropped by three quarters of the organisations, including CIRUM. As with 90% of organisations, CIRUM's **founder** was still in charge. All organisations reported a clear mission and clear annual plans. CIRUM has a multi-year strategy, but 30% of organisations do not. Like most NGOs surveyed CIRUM relied on senior staff and leaders for all management, M & E and fundraising. Also similar was CIRUM's use of international volunteers to help with fundraising.

CIRUM's operating budget, at \$200,000-230,000 p.a. over the last three years, would put it towards the higher end compared with many organisations, although its complete **reliance on international donors** compared with many other NGOs makes it vulnerable to changes in INGO funding strategies, a particular cause of concern at present. Other NGOs reported funds coming from other sources, donations from businesses, marketing products, or service fees or even support from government. There may be good reasons for this difference, as CIRUM is rare in openly (but softly) advocating for a change in the sensitive area of land rights, and as a result unlikely to attract the financial support of government or business.

In some instances the direction of funds has been the other way around with CIRUM funds supporting activities or the legitimate work of government personnel – evaluations and field visits to ethnic minority forest areas, or forest land allocation processes. Nevertheless, the area of fundraising and **diversifying the funding base** is an area that CIRUM should consider reviewing.

Most Hanoi based NGOs report, like CIRUM, that they are working in advocacy, with only 24% saying they are working in charitable areas or service provision. The advocacy areas cited were 'social responsibility' or 'environmental protection'. Methods of advocacy were publishing research, holding workshops, or making films or other media products. Very few participate directly in policy making process or submit open letters or petitions to government, relying on friends / connections in government. CIRUM also says that its long-standing connections with progressive individuals in government are important.

So far, many similarities. The **differences** with CIRUM and other CSOs starts to appear when comparing CIRUM's long-standing grassroots work, the building of its EM network, LandNet, and its lobbying and advocacy methodology working together with EM for them (rather than CIRUM) be the advocates for change. Whereas other CSOs' staff are the main actors in problem identification in programme design and planning, LandNet co-ordinators and members are integral to this process when working with CIRUM. The interpretation and effectiveness of **networking** also appears different. CSO in the study were looking horizontally at each other, and the usefulness of networking was rated in terms of getting funds, or information. Vietnamese CSO respondents reported that most network activities focused on information sharing, but many felt that they are not very useful due to a lack of strategy or clear way of working. Over a half of those saying that they were members of a network either never or only sometimes attended meetings. Networks led by **INGOs** were regarded as more effective.

Network development

Three present senior CIRUM staff were asked to note their most important and active contacts (in March 2015) and when these relationships began. The staff were asked to differentiate three levels - national government, peer / NGO level, and grassroots / local government level. An active contact was someone spoken to fairly regularly to share information, join activities or ask for assistance in CIRUM's current area of work, ethnic minority land rights. Network 'traffic' could be, and often is, in both directions.

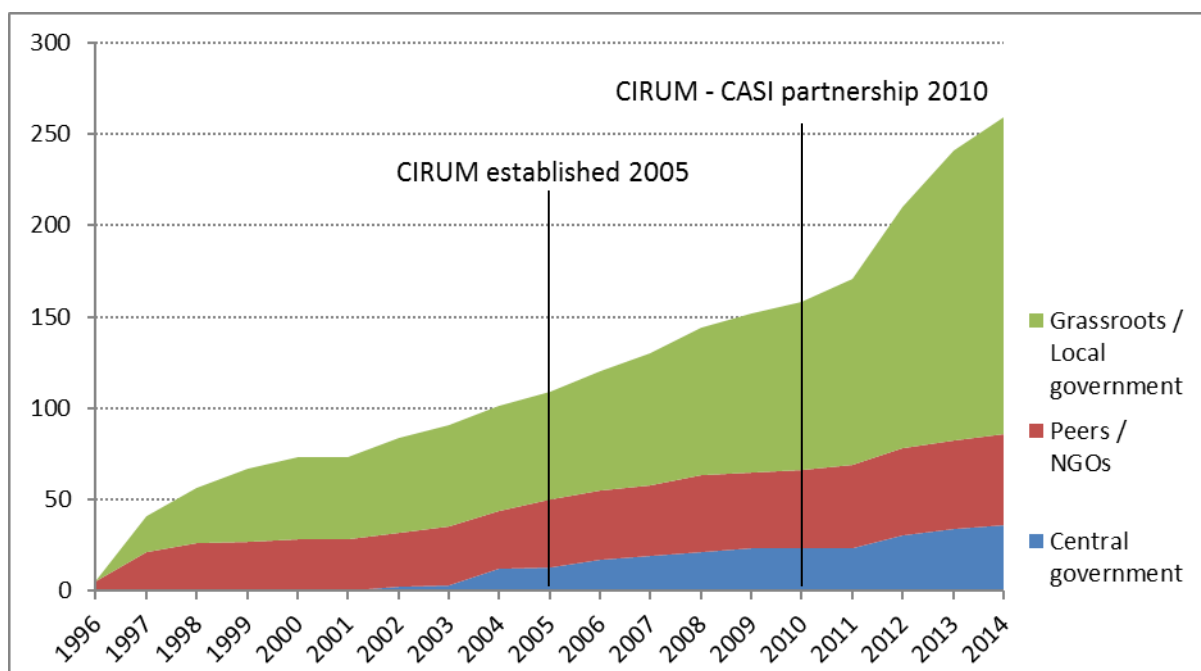


Figure 2 Date network relationships began

All three staff members worked previously for or with Towards Ethnic Women (TEW), and two of them worked before that in relevant government ministries. TEW's focus was very much at the grassroots, and at the formation of civil society in Vietnam, accounting for the quick growth in contacts in NGOs and in local government from the mid-1990s onwards. CIRUM was one of several NGOs born from TEW.



CIRUM and LISO alliance staff together with LandNet representatives report to Kon Tum PC and DARD on forest and land allocation research in Violak, Kon Tum province, 2014.

At national government level top contacts include two vice-ministers, several directors or head of departments at relevant ministries, senior connections at the National Assembly and in the communist party, and senior figures in mass movements.

Peer level includes NGOs, media, retired officials, academics and researchers. Many of the NGO contacts are from LISO Alliance or related TEW NGOs. Retired officials feature as important for the strengths of their own networks, the commitment and availability. This level has shown the slowest growth, and is the level that CIRUM requests help in growing.

The grassroots level network is clearly easily the largest, indicating CIRUM's strengths. Contacts are generally related to the areas in which the staff have worked previously, and it was estimated that at present contacts from 26 different Vietnam provinces could be called upon to assist CIRUM. Positions held by the contacts are mostly at District and commune level, including chairman and vice chairman of Districts. There are many leaders or deputies of relevant departments at provincial ministry level DONRE and DARD, senior or very senior officials at local VUSTA, Fatherland Front and mass movement organizations. Others in the network include village leaders and prominent LandNet members or coordinators. On a positive note for CASI, many recent grassroots contacts have been established during implementation of their funded activities in Lang Son.

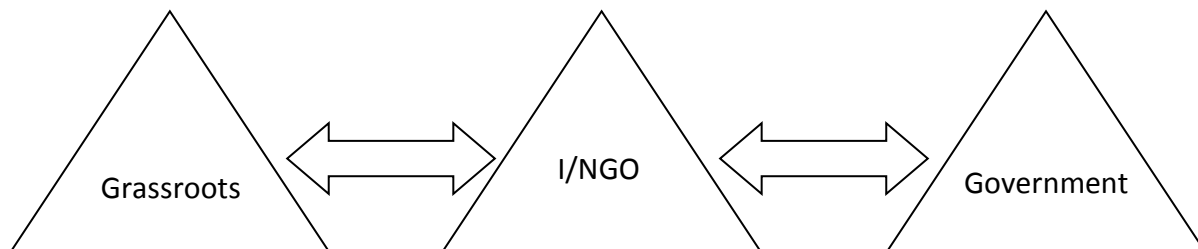
Ethnic minority people account for around a third of grassroots level contacts, fewer peer contacts, and only a small number of national government contacts.

From the very beginning, TEW and later CIRUM pursued two networking strategies. The first was their grassroots network, the members of which they named 'key farmers', many of whom have joined the present day LandNet. Second was their friends network, 'PNet' of progressive individuals in positions of influence. Although some of these progressive officials have retired, they are still important and influential, either for their networks, or because they have become respected advisors.

'Nurturing your networks' was mentioned as a particularly important activity. On a regular basis contact should be made, if only to touch base, discuss some current events or news items, or to wish the contact Happy New Year.

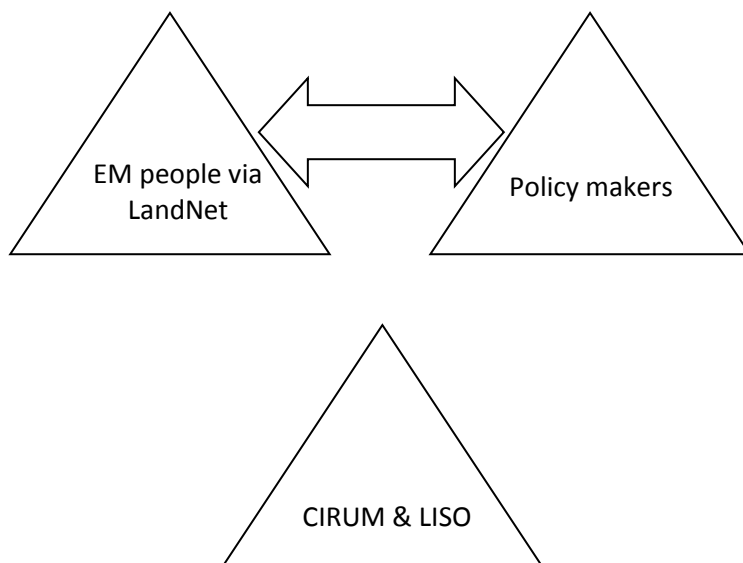
LandNet strategy - Facilitating the interaction of the people with government

Many NGO or INGO see themselves as the connection between policy makers and the community, helping to represent the people and bring their views to government.



CIRUM has a different strategy, pulling back from this role, but facilitating the meeting of government and people to exchange closely. They do this at local level and at national level. As one informant put it - "It is easy for policy makers to understand the real issues as spoken by the community or local authorities. Why? Because at commune level people speak in a detailed, specific way; the people at this level speak with feeling, with knowledge, with legitimacy.

NGO or INGO staff cannot fully represent the community. They will miss important specifics, and they will analyze and generalize and process as they see fit. Policy makers want raw data from the horse's mouth - real, true, authentic. They will do their own analysis of the social implications of what they hear."



Legitimacy, transparency and accountability (LTA)

For CIVICUS, legitimacy refers to perceptions by key stakeholders that the existence, activities and impacts of an NGO are justifiable and appropriate in terms of central social values and institutions. The NGO needs to operate legally, be regarded as having value by differing or even competitive stakeholders, have goals and actions grounded in widely held social values, norms and standards, and seem to be acting in an appropriate and justified way. (CIVICUS 2008). It should have also have 'associational legitimacy' by being linked to other legitimate people and practices, and have 'political legitimacy' by representing key constituencies (Brown 2008).

It is widely assumed that the more legitimate, accountable and transparent an organisation is the more successful it will be. CIVICUS insist that this applies to all political contexts, 'even restrictive or hostile ones'. (Op. Cit p10)

LTA is a primary concern of CIRUM's leadership, and it is important to evaluate the organisation from this perspective. It is also helpful to compare CIRUM's approach to upland living ethnic minorities with the State's using Weber's³ types of legitimacy - traditional legitimacy based on tradition, that things are the way they are, and have always been, and rational or legal legitimacy that relies on rules and law to work in the public interest.

Upland living ethnic minorities' traditions and rules of land use do not fit with state concepts. Neither do EM agree that the previous state seizure of land or allocation to companies is in their or the public interest, as they can see with their own eyes the destruction of the forest or its neglect by those entrusted with its management. Although District power is understood, land grabbing by state and companies is rejected.

On the other hand, as one informant put it, "CIRUM is for us". An ex-commune official explained: "Many authorities are reluctant to work with NGOs, but it relates to the NGO approach. When CIRUM came to my community I was also initially reluctant. But I saw that first they tried to learn our situation in land and livelihoods, and then shared with me and other local authorities about their experiences in how to allocate land and then how to manage it. So I came to understand them, see that they had value, legitimacy, and eventually to trust them."

CIRUM gains its legitimacy from 'below' from its understanding (and support) of the traditional owners of the land and their beliefs. As Borrás (2007:29) explains, "CIRUM's work is framed from a perspective different from the State's: it is one that considers land as having multiple functions: economic: for poor people's livelihoods and household food security; socio-political: partly because having access to and control over land also entails corresponding status, prestige and power in the community; cultural-religious: especially among indigenous peoples because it provides the territory necessary for their cultural reproduction and religious practices; and environmental: because only a sustainable forestry land use can ensure that the forests could continue to provide the commune people their land-based economic, socio-political and cultural-religious necessities."

Local informants all cited the enthusiasm, commitment, and behaviour of CIRUM staff as strong points of the organisation. This, together with respect for local values and norms was considered as key to establishing trust.

How does CIRUM derive its legitimacy from 'above'? Although the researcher had no opportunity to talk with or interview policy makers, CIRUM's growing government network and the increasing cooperation between CIRUM and policy makers at national level⁴ would indicate acceptance of the organization as a useful stakeholder. Certainly, senior CIRUM and LISO alliance staff think so and offer four important reasons.

Firstly, through experience, the organization has side-stepped the trap that many NGOs fall into of 'representing the people', understanding it does not have that authority. It's main push is not to collate,

³ 'Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft' in Preussische Jarhucler 187, 1-2, 1922

⁴ For example, the recent request (April 2015) from Forestry Department of MARD for CIRUM and LISO to draft a chapter on community forest law in the upcoming Forest Law revision

or summarise and process arguments from below for policy makers, but rather to enable their meeting with ethnic minorities who will represent themselves. Its rights-based approach builds the confidence and understanding of leaders of the 'below' and also facilitates and builds the commune to properly represent the people. Policy makers who want first-hand experience and information can contact CIRUM or its LISO alliance partners who will arrange such an interaction of the 'above and below'. CIRUM is also critically aware of the legitimacy of local leaders to represent their own communities, ensuring as much as possible that they are the local people's choice, and fully confident and capable of representing the people.

Secondly, CIRUM has gained recognition from above as a problem and conflict solver who can work with all stakeholders. CIRUM has helped resolve conflicts that have plagued commune and district authorities and offers models of possible land use planning and sustainable livelihoods. CIRUM's work in Bac Lang commune in Dinh Lap District, Lang Son is a good example. Before CIRUM's intervention in 2007, the commune authorities were plagued by a constant stream of complaint letters. After the forest land allocation programme (FLAP), 39 of the 42 conflicts they unearthed had been solved. Although land disputes will never go away entirely, now there is relative peace in the commune. Hoa regards CIRUM's Bac Lang FLAP as 'reputation building' with local authorities, 'inspiring local government'. This is not an accident; CIRUM chose to build its reputation, its legitimacy, by tackling issues that others were not willing to touch. Another example was the choice of resolving the conflict between the people of Huu Lung in Lang Son, and the state forest enterprise (SFE) as well as the conflict in Hoa Son, (also in Huu Lung) with a private company.

Thirdly, the culture of the organization and its approach are seen as essential for its reputation. For senior staff, personal ethics and motivation, as well as a long-term commitment and perspective win friends at the grassroots. Patience is also seen as very important. The Bac Lang FLAP took more than 20 meetings with the community or sections of the community to ensure the eventual participation of everyone and their cooperation and agreement. Hoa describes the methodology like a turtle that constantly sticks his head out of his shell to check the environment before going back inside to consider. Informants at the grassroots also mentioned CIRUM's ethics and enthusiasm and how they appreciated the hard work of the staff and their respectful personal behaviour.

Fourthly, their long-term strategy of post allocation land use planning and sustainable livelihoods, and the support of models of development, their many years of involvement and concentration on land rights issues, their documentation of evidence, their legitimacy from below and extensive network means that they are now recognized as experts in the area of upland forest land rights.

To be legitimate, an NGO has to be **accountable** also. 'Upwardly' to regulators and donors, 'downwardly' to beneficiaries, 'outwardly' to partners, allies and peers who cooperate in programmes and projects, and 'inwardly' to staff, board and volunteers. An organisation is accountable if it has processes and tools of reporting, engagement, management and governance in place and in daily practice. An organisation is **transparent** if it is open, clear and honest about its work, decision making, programmes, information, achievements and failures.

"Tell the truth!" is a common mantra of CIRUM's director, Hoa. One recent consultant described CIRUM attitude as 'refreshingly stropic'. Ethics determines that they stay close to their vision and mission. As one CASI staff put it "CIRUM is quite different from other CSO in that they have a clear identity and area of work. The vision is unchanging and strong: they don't chase funds, and don't change because of what is current fashion. Most middle sized CSO are donor-desire driven and not committed". Honesty and 'lessons learnt' are key to the internal culture of CIRUM, and this works downwards to its beneficiaries as well. It is a common method of CIRUM to inform communities of the complete financial situation and their intentions before any work begins. If there is a budget, the community is informed upfront. This is transparent and also practical – unrealistic expectations help no one. In a way, it can also be seen as a reaction to the 'achievement reporting' of the government system in Vietnam. In a society where there is very little trust, an organization that tells the truth stands out from the crowd. For policy makers who cannot believe their own government statistics or information, CIRUM's approach is refreshing and helpful.

CIRUM is careful to nurture its relations with its donors. It is honest, sometimes painfully so for donors, and it is very cooperative too. As one informant put it, “they have good relationships with donors because they spend time and effort on the relationships”. CIRUM sees donors as partners, and that learning or capacity building can go both ways. Several informants asked that CARE spend more time at the grassroots to learn about CIRUM’s approach and to meet their beneficiaries. In a more formal sense also CIRUM are very accountable, being careful to follow donor criteria and agreed budgets carefully, with independent auditors regularly reporting on the organisation.

‘Downwardly’ CIRUM tries to be accountable as much as it can. A good example of this is the next step in its grassroots networking strategy, LandNet. After two years of hands-on leading the development of the network, building the capacity of sub-LandNet coordinators, the organisation has pulled back, encouraging the coordinators to take a more leading role. CASI is facilitating this movement, with the funding of CBO pilot development projects in Lang Son. Whereas other CSOs’ staff are the main actors in problem identification in programme design and planning, LandNet co-ordinators and members are integral to this process when working with CIRUM.

‘Outward’ accountability is one area where some informants question CIRUM’s commitment. Although it meets regularly with its close alliance partners, it has few regular relations with others. “CIRUM is not open enough to share and align with others. Maybe it is because they have limited staff and are very committed with their field work. But other NGOs ask why they are not sharing or joining? Why be so lonely? I know they have their own identity and don’t want to risk others involvement, but maybe they should be less cautious in advocacy. Maybe they would have a greater impact if they aligned with other stakeholders.”

‘Inwardly’ CIRUM has been making recent attempts to improve accountability. A recent staff review has reported and a staff handbook has been drawn up to solidify processes. Previous capacity assessments have mentioned the kinship ties within the organization as not meeting best systems practice. CIRUM management explains the sensitivity of its work, and previous attempts to recruit staff. Kinship ties or at least family knowledge are considered the most likely way of ensuring both commitment to the organization and ‘safety’ in Vietnam. The Board has only been meeting on an irregular basis, and like many NGOs in Vietnam, it meets only on an informal advisory basis when called upon by the founding director. CIRUM has shown its interest in the Board having a more regulatory and representative basis, and to this end is in the process of establishing a new Board with representation of EM and what it sees as the three levels –central government, peers and beneficiaries.

“We have to be doubly careful about our legitimacy and transparency, about how we manage our resources, how and what we do in the name of third parties.”

CIRUM and Gender

CIRUM’s has its foundation in the work of TEW, an organization dedicated to the improvement of the lives of ethnic minorities in upland areas of Vietnam and ethnic minority women in particular. TEW was instrumental in an important legislative change in the rights of women to own and inherit land, and involved in a number of interventions to promote women as leaders in its project areas.

CARE declared the issue of gender to be at the centre of its programmes in the coming years, and the CASI programme, in which CIRUM is a partner, has a specific gender component. It would seem reasonable to assess to what extent gender has been integrated into CIRUM’s programmes, and the impact of the CASI programme’s specific focus.

As well as those directly involved in the CASI programme and CIRUM’s other projects, the opportunity was taken to interview beneficiaries and those involved in past TEW programmes and present CIRUM programmes in Lang Son, Quang Binh and Ha Tinh on the success of these programmes. Informants were also asked on possible advice to CARE or other INGOs on future programmes.

Gender activities

CASI staff worked together with CIRUM in various gender training activities. In 2013 they met with partners to agree a common understanding on gender equality and mainstreaming, before leaving each

partner to identify areas of gender integration. CASI gender staff Giang met CIRUM staff later in 2013 for a half day to follow up on their commitments made in the training, helping to make a clearer plans and helping staff to go through common activities, what gender issues could be, addressing staff concerns. She reported she worked with CIRUM staff to integrate gender at the organizational level, and discussed gender integration at project level. First at the end of 2013 when CIRUM were planning to establish a community forestry management group in Dinh Lap, and secondly in 2014 she had several meetings with CIRUM staff and the CIRUM gender advisor discussing gaps in cultural research. She admitted she had no idea of the results of either of these interventions. In May 2014 after meeting weekly for two months, CIRUM agreed a gender policy⁵ that noted "CIRUM seeks to affirm and promote the equal rights, opportunities and status of men and women. CIRUM acknowledges that in order to do this, studies to understand the roles, tasks and responsibilities of women and men have to be conducted, with results integrated into their programs." Practical tools were also developed to allow CIRUM staff to evaluate gender inclusion in their activities.

Findings

Staff were asked about CASI's gender training. Most thought it was about inclusion and equal numbers, and about promoting the participation of women. The main difficulty they had was in explaining how they might practically implement gender, and what a successful intervention might look like.



CASI staff assist CIRUM in an organisational development assessment in 2013.

Some felt that the capacity of CASI gender staff was not as high as they expected, and that they didn't come up with concrete programmes, rather asking CIRUM staff for programme suggestions. Matrices as an end product were not hands-on enough for staff, who felt that there was not enough follow up. Some suggested that CASI staff should accompany CIRUM staff out to the field and become involved in actual programme interventions.

Staff were left to wonder if their interventions in project areas were incorporating gender or not, or whether they could. One example was of setting up an indigenous nursery.

" In my experience, I have never seen a CIRUM activity with only men involved, but the question has always been the percentage of women involved. Gender is not only talk about women's involvement but what is a suitable or reasonable involvement and contribution of ideas. If mainly men turn up I remind them to share with their wives and to ask their wives if they agree, when we meet again I will ask the men what their wives think. Why don't women come? When the topic is related to women's role or where women are for some reason more dominant in that family, the women are more likely to come. When the man is more dominant, or decisions are seen to be related to men's roles then men turn up."

Another general comment from a staff member, "Depending on the activities, what is a reasonable percentage of men and women will differ, we or donors should not insist on equal participation. I see this clearly in savings and credit schemes dominated by women or in LandNet, with its higher percentage of men. The people are not interested but you insist that they join in. On the one hand I support the involvement of men and women, and recognize the problem of inequality. On the other hand, local people's decisions need to be respected when designing or implementing a programme".

⁵ <http://cirum.org/documents/149-cirum-gender-policy.html>

It was suggested there needed to be more direction from CASI staff in this area, helping to work on a more hands on way, mentoring CIRUM staff individually, long term.

From the CASI staff side, the view expressed was that the philosophy of waiting for requests from partners means that CARE will rely on partners for movement in this area. If there are no agreed indicators or conditions in the next programme design, then CASI will rely on the personal commitment of LNGO leadership to integrate gender. As the staff and management of small NGOs are often busy and multi-tasking there was concern that gender would be the last issue to be addressed.

Ideally it was suggested that each LNGO should fund a gender position, or at least have a gender point person. Gender guidelines and a gender policy should also exist in each organisation.

CIRUM Gender research

CIRUM carried out gender research in four communities where TEW has been working. The research focussed on uncovering the reasons for the perceived success of the interventions, and discovering any lessons that could inform future CIRUM programme development.



CIRUM/LISO interview and document the story of Mrs Khang, a herbal healer leader from Ba Vi.

For project interventions, informants mentioned that care should be taken in the **initial approach** to a community, as this will not only determine the ability to reach women in programmes, but also the possibility of reaching harder-to-reach members of the community in general.

Common failings in government programme or NGO approaches were that their approach favoured the village elite. Nearly always when a community is approached, the leaders and those most confident will come forward first. General village meetings will also tend to encourage this village elite to come and dominate the proceedings. Field staff and programme researchers and designers have to take this into account and ensure that women, and those most in need have an opportunity to take part. A possible solution was suggested of a random method of researching in villages and communes to discover their true nature. Informants discovered in a random way are much more likely to direct project staff to others in need was recommended.

The TEW approach was regarded as a good example of inclusivity. TEW begins slowly, with no promises of large allowances for attending training course or quick fixes. In this approach the village elite quickly fall away from the programmes, allowing TEW to discover the real needs of the community.



Once TEW had established those with whom to work *Mrs Khang and her husband, village elder Leu Van Trong. His support was vital in her developing her leadership role.* 21

they showed a long-term commitment of many years with interconnected and practical livelihoods programmes to deliver female empowerment and support female leaders. To help women, you need first to discover which activities are already culturally theirs. Animal husbandry, culturally a female role was promoted by TEW to build the confidence and income of women. Men in the community appreciated the extra income and supported their wives involvement. Savings and credit schemes, also seen as appropriate for women, were also supported. Small projects supported by these schemes also benefitted the larger community. Again men could see their worth and thus supported women to continue or grow their involvement.

The researchers agreed that all of the women interviewed were confident and authoritative leaders, and all had the support of the men close to them, whether husbands, fathers or other close family members. A strong enough character to overcome obstacles, an ability to negotiate an often complicated and culturally sensitive path to women's leadership as well as the support of men close to them appeared pre-conditions for women to become leaders. The long term support by TEW has also been vital to the success of these women. We heard from the women themselves that they gained confidence and authority over the years, going on to build the confidence of other women in the community.



Mrs Hoa with a photo of the priest who helped her in the early days of her work. She explained as a Catholic clergyman his support was vital in swaying the community in favour of family planning.

The practical livelihoods benefits of interventions has been appreciated by men in the community leading to husbands and fathers supporting women or even adopting differing roles themselves to support women. Donors and NGOs were urged to change their

minds on funding small projects. Rather than being seen as “service delivery which we don't do anymore”, they should be seen as tools for empowerment.

For future gender programmes



In all communities surveyed, it was the **increasing migration** by both sexes to industrial zones or to Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh to look for work that was of major concern. Young people in particular were most interested in migrating, although not always permanently. Many

CIRUM conduct gender research and training in Hanoi, December 2014

informants were middle aged or older, and this youth migration shift was of particular concern to them, as they saw it is a threat to the long-term sustain-ability of the community and of traditional culture. The reason for migration was clear to all, the lack of livelihoods for the younger generation. Informants felt that programmes were needed to educate and empower young people in communities about the implications of this rural-urban movement. Livelihood programmes, including land rights programmes that assisted in development of a sustainable future in the village were also required.

Some informants felt gender programmes focussed too much on women, or were seeking to blame men. Targeting men to show them the benefits of supporting women was suggested by many informants, men and women. If men understand the benefits, informants felt they would willingly help women to be involved in areas considered outside of their cultural role or to become leaders.

Many informants suggested however not to impose the idea of gender equality in the sense of equal involvement in every activity. Certain activities could be more suitable for women to be involved in as initial way of building their confidence. For example, setting up or managing tree nurseries could be a good start to help women.

It was agreed that a rights based approach was important. Both men and women need to understand their rights and the law, and they need to be able to access government services that are available.

One woman village leader mentioned the lack of remuneration for social leadership roles. She was convinced that women culturally are well suited to community leadership, and has been searching for another woman to take over from her, but is still looking. In particularly poor areas like hers people are too busy looking for money or food anywhere they can find it. Any woman (or person) engaging in community leadership has to have sources of income to support largely unpaid leadership roles.

Comments and conclusions about CASI programme & future assistance

Informants were requested to comment on the CASI programme if they knew of it, and of INGO or foreign donor programmes if they did not. The comments were grouped into categories of CARE, as a donor, as a capacity builder and its role of assisting networking or advocacy.

It is very difficult to attribute changes in an organization to the intervention of a single body, as the environment is much more complex than that. It may be possible however, to plausibly attribute an influence or a contribution. Informants involved in the CASI programme, CARE staff and CIRUM staff were asked to do that.

The CARE CASI objectives focus on strengthening civil society, lobbying and networking. For CIRUM they are very relevant and “close to us.” Several comments from informants mentioned CARE’s understanding and support for CIRUM’s approach and mission, and that they are “helpful”.

CARE as a donor

Comments were very positive. CARE’s flexibility in allowing CIRUM or LandNet to adapt to circumstances and not be too rigid in keeping to strict plans was appreciated; for example in Dong

Thang they enabled CIRUM to pilot their methodology with flexibility, allowing space for them to practice at grassroots level and link with other areas for networking. As one informant put it, “CASI seems to fund objectives, not activities, allowing partners to adapt to changing circumstances. Other donors would do well to follow suit.”

The availability of small grants and the speed of disbursement was mentioned by some informants as particularly helpful, for example in setting up equipment for the Centre of Accessible Knowledge and



Herbal healers exchange visits

Expertise (CAKE) and assisting the development of Huu Lung LandNet.



CIRUM and representatives from local communities meet Dinh Lap PC, and officials from the Forestry division and DoNRE to discuss forest land protection and management. Informants found the CASI programme particularly flexible and helpful in assisting with unforeseen but important projects or events like the seminar here in Dinh Lap.

On the downside there were comments on some administrative matters – for example, “Don’t be too technical with CIRUM and demand complicated financial and administrative procedures. They are a small organization and you will overload staff with more important things on their minds. Of course you need to follow sound principles, but don’t overdo it.”

For the future, CARE were requested to follow the vision as expressed in the latest CASI document “in a real and meaningful way. They need to respond to the strategic development of CIRUM with long term assistance and cooperation.”

It was suggested that CARE in the next phase could look to small grants for LandNet CBO development and allow CBOs to manage their small projects with local NGO support. Examples mentioned were cultivating nurseries of indigenous species, funding a regional exchange network, organizing local sharing seminars and workshops with local authorities on models and ideas, doing co-research to document evidence and to promote NTFP livelihood models as evidence, and for training courses on law and policy updates.



The building of grassroots networks and civil society organisations is most effective when related to practical interventions. Here herbal healers from various CBOs exchange knowledge in Dong Thang commune, Dinh Lap, Lang Son.

There seemed tight agreement between beneficiaries - current LandNet members and representatives - as well as LISO alliance staff about the importance of small grants to building capacity at the

grassroots. Researchers interviewed women leaders and others in their communities in Quang Binh and Ha Tinh as part of gender research and found alliance interventions centered around savings and credit schemes, animal husbandry and indigenous nurseries, when implemented with care and support from a grassroots organization had a large impact on community development, and in this case, women's empowerment.



An important way of building LandNet is to continue FLAP and post-FLAP activities and spread them to new areas. Here CIRUM facilitates San Chi of Na Quan village in land use planning in 2011.

“Exchange programmes are also particularly valuable for those of us at the grassroots – to see possibilities and learn from the experience of others. We need more activities to connect with other groups to be more able to solve our own problems”.

CARE as a capacity builder

As a capacity builder comments were more mixed. To summarize: analysis and planning, although essential, take you only so far. After that, practical, concrete action needs to go further.

On the one hand, the approach of CARE to put the onus onto CIRUM to request assistance and to work with CIRUM staff to help order their ideas and plans was appreciated. “I like their way of working, they really allow us to interact quite well with them, willing to listen to us very carefully and respect our

opinions". Staff mentioned workshops as interesting, or helpful, and a couple staff mentioned that they felt that had a better vision as a result, an understanding of the bigger picture. Their training / planning for lobby was mentioned as helpful.

On the other hand, there seemed to be a sense of incompleteness from those involved in the capacity building. "They spend a lot of time working with us, but it seems we are never finished beyond a matrix". In general informants wanted CARE to adopt a more active role in practical activities, but then suggested that some of the more junior CASI staff were not at the experience or technical level where they were able to advise CIRUM.

Practical 'meaningful' follow up to previous capacity building activities was requested in the area of gender. Any assistance that will lead to more women being involved in LandNet and CIRUM programme activities would be appreciated.



CIRUM is using participatory video (PV) as part of its advocacy strategy. PV produced by villagers themselves will be a very important tool in the future to bring the message from the grassroots to policy makers. Here CIRUM staff helps a Tay healer to edit her story in 2013.

A current and major area of need in CIRUM is for capacity building in the area of documentation and communication. CIRUM need to produce evidence from the field to support their lobby objectives, and to be able to

communicate that evidence in an effective way to policy makers and the wider public. Help in project management was also requested.

CARE should encourage and assist other CASI partners in working at the grassroots, as many find it challenging. CARE should have lessons learnt to share with other partners, continuing in their supportive and non-directional way. How do they share lessons learnt from CIRUM to others? They need to connect more in an open and learning environment.

Several informants suggested that more inexperienced CASI staff should spend more time in the community for monitoring and learning, seeing the reality for themselves and practically supporting finance at a community level. In any way, all NGOs, CARE included, need to spend more time at the grassroots and promote the voice of farmers. An example is the design of the next CASI programme – how much input are the ultimate beneficiaries having in project design? Is it a case of 'same as usual', with NGOs representing the people?

"CARE should not involve themselves but work through CIRUM. We would like more involvement from CARE directly with us, working and following us in land rights and areas of issues a big name like CARE can help us when challenging elites".



CIRUM is re-vitalising Simacai Farmer Field School in Lao Cai province. It will be a platform for lobbying, a one-stop shop demonstrating various sustainable forest management models, and a training and meeting centre for LandNet. In April 2015 CIRUM organised a PV training course for young leaders at Simacai. CIRUM director Tran Thi Hoa also took part. Here she interviews a young H'mong woman selling pesticides in the local market.

Assisting in networking / lobby

Most informants were not really aware of this aspect of CARE's work. At the senior level, CARE's work was much appreciated. For example, the connection with CEMA facilitated by CARE was regarded as very important by CIRUM. Assistance in helping CIRUM to move toward a co-funding and reporting agreement with other donors was also much appreciated.

CARE's status and relationship with CEMA was mentioned as strong, long term and positive, but it was suggested that more could be made of the connection, and that CARE, (or other INGOs or NGOs) should not be directly lobbying, but building the grassroots to help local farmers to speak for themselves.

It was recommended by several informants that CARE use its network and international reputation to help CIRUM by introducing them in a positive way to relevant contacts, to connect with other partners in the region, and to connect CIRUM and LandNet with other CBOs with common or similar interests.

"CARE needs to promote commune leaders or grassroots leaders. CARE needs to find good and experienced people from local authorities or local leaders who know the customs and traditions of the locality and can link between outsiders and locals."

In summary, informants **recommended** CARE to continue their grassroots approach, intensifying it, supporting the growth of CBOs, working in partnership with CIRUM. Most informants who know CARE suggested they could share and exchange more with their partners by working with them in the field and to learn more from grassroots organizations and leaders in order to develop their programme.

Recommendations for INGOs in general

Some similar comments were made about INGOs. They were perceived to have good 'technical' project skills, but not the mandate or ability to represent the voice of the people. If INGOs are partners of policy making ministries like MARD, Education or Health they should use their high status to bring the voice, the real story, from CSO and the grassroots. Policy makers will listen to the people, not to the INGOs themselves. It is easier for policy makers to understand the real issues as spoken by the community or local authorities – because they are specific, they speak with feeling, they have experience. INGO staff will not fully represent the community, will miss important specifics, will analyze and generalize and process as they see fit. Policy makers want raw data from the horse's mouth that is true and authentic. They will do their own analysis of the social implications of what they hear.

Some informants found INGOs in general (not CARE) very directional, obsessed with 'achievement reporting' and administrative procedures rather than practical results, working in a very top down manner. There seemed little appreciation from these INGOs that they existed in a partnership, and actually depended on local partners for programme ideas and implementation. One informant suggested that some INGOs were ethno-centric in their views, swallowing general (and some local NGO) prejudice on ethnic minority land management practice. He suggested that the best and most reliable information is from the grassroots and it is from the grassroots that programmes should be designed.

There was a general view that INGOs need to work more to engage with and promote the grassroots. They should do this by understanding and supporting those NGOs really engaging in the community practically, building CBOs, promoting the voice of local people, not those NGOs claiming to represent the people.

Several informants thought INGOs could be using their technical knowledge and ability for generating knowledge, learning from partners and community first and summarizing this knowledge, for sharing at a wider level. Evidence, and knowledge generation is an area of priority for CIRUM.

Some suggested that INGOs should only work with local NGO networks in a given locality.

“INGOs should keep direct development grants to communities maybe through NGOs to get the community going; second they should strengthen capacity of NGOs in training and networking, so they can achieve both objectives, sharing information between NGOs”.

Finally some respondents were concerned that international donors were swallowing the proud ‘achievement reports’ of the government, as many appeared to be pulling out of Vietnam, unconcerned about the crisis in ethnic minority communities in upland Vietnam. Still largely landless or with tiny insufficient amounts, and facing an attack by companies and elites EM need more help than ever in the area of land rights.



After a successful FLAP process, the next step is sustainable management. Here Tay people draw up community forest regulations in 2012.

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Informants	Organisation / Position
Tran Thi Hoa	Director, CIRUM
Su Nguyen Van	Vice-Director, CIRUM
Dang Van Thang	CIRUM staff
Vu Van Thai	CIRUM staff
Nguyen Ba Tham	CIRUM staff
Bui Tien Dung	CIRUM staff
Pham Van Dung	CIRUM / SPERI staff
Phan Dinh Nha	Vice-Director, CODE
Tuan Trong Dam	Executive Director, SPERI
Chau Quang Duong	Vice-Director, SPERI
Nguyen Duc Thanh	CASI programme
Nong Thi Ha Hanh	CASI programme
Le Thi Hong Giang	CASI programme
NguyenThi Thanh Nhan	CASI programme
Tran Quoc Viet	Former commune leader, now LandNet, Ha Tinh province
Le Kien Cuong	Former commune leader, now LandNet coordinator, Lang Son province
Nguyen Khac Thu	Former District Peoples Committee Chairman and Party Chairman, Ha Tinh
Le Thi Nguyet	LandNet, Lang Son
Pham Thi Lam	Village leader and Lam Hoa Commune Peoples Council Member, Tuyen Hoa, Quang Binh
Chau Van Hue	Vice Director, CIRD, Quang Binh
Nguyen Thi Hoa	Quang Binh LandNet
Tran Thi Binh	Quang Binh LandNet
Tran Thi Dao	Ha Tinh LandNet
Trieu Thi Khang	Herbal Healer, Ba Vi, Ha Noi
Leu Van Trong	Elders Association, Ba Vi, Ha Noi