

NGOs and Highland Development: A Case Study in Crafting New Roles*

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Private, non-profit development organizations began to emerge in Vietnam following a 1993 decree on 'science and technology associations'. The government at this time was decreasing the size of the bureaucracy and wanted to see what innovations could emerge in rural development through private initiatives. At the same time, a new agenda was emerging among international donors to support 'civil society organizations' such as development-oriented NGOs. This synergy between domestic and international trends paved the way for an NGO sector to emerge in Vietnam. One organization founded in 1994 was TEW, Towards Ethnic Women, which grew quickly to support a range of projects among some of northern and central Vietnam's poorest minority communities. TEW offers many interesting examples of the types of innovations private development organizations can make in Vietnam today. However, as I initially argued in a 1999 paper on the emergence of NGOs in Vietnam, even TEW's impressive growth does not predict an important role for NGOs in Vietnam for many years to come.

* Published in Kerkvliet, Heng and Koh (eds) *Getting Organized in Vietnam: Moving in and around the Socialist State*. Singapore: ISEAS, 2003.

Introduction

For many years the role of NGOs in sociopolitical development has been described in relation to the importance of a strong civil society in fostering accountability and democratic governance. In Vietnam, until recently, the government through its mass organizations dominated the ‘landscape’ of civil society that in most other nations is dotted with NGOs. This began to change in 1992 when the government issued Decree 35/CP allowing the formation of private, non-profit social organizations (Sidel 1995). In 1996, I interviewed about 15 organizations in Hanoi that were using the term ‘NGO’ to describe their activities (Gray 1999). Most had used Decree 35 to register directly or indirectly under the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA).

One of the organizations was TEW (Towards Ethnic Women), which worked with minority farmers from several highland provinces. TEW had many interesting ideas for working with minorities, including the networking of farmers from different parts of the country. But despite the innovations offered by groups like TEW, it seemed clear that NGOs in Vietnam were emerging in an environment or social space tightly controlled by the state, and their ability to offer meaningful alternatives to the state approach was very limited. I argued that the pace of growth of Vietnamese NGOs would be dictated largely by the amount of donor support, with some danger that foreign donors would expect too much of local NGOs, and try to push them to accomplish too much. I felt this way because in large measure the literature on NGOs and civil society talked in terms of an ‘independence’ or even ‘opposition’ to the state, or state structures –

as if a clear dividing line could be drawn between state and society. A more accurate starting point with which to view the development of NGOs in Vietnam would be to look at civil society as a sphere or 'arena' where competing ideas are debated and acted upon, as described by Ben Kerkvliet in a 2001 article on state-society relations in Vietnam (Kerkvliet 2001, pp. 239-42).

This paper will use a similar approach in looking at how TEW has grown in the past eight years. First I will look at how TEW defines its approach and philosophy, and this will be explored further by looking at their activities in Ba Vi, where they have been trying to help a Dao community gain land-use rights in the buffer zone of the Ba Vi National Park.¹ The rapid growth of TEW indicates many of the options open to NGOs in Vietnam today. However, I stress the point that urban-based NGOs are not the same as people's organizations or social movements, and given this important fact NGOs do not really represent a special area of sociopolitical development in Vietnam, as compared to wider issues such as labour rights, land rights, press freedom, and so forth.

NGOs and Civil Society

NGOs can be defined as private organizations established to meet some social objective, operating on a non-profit basis. Many have trustees or a board of directors that ensure operations are non-profit and follow the goals of the organization. Obviously, this is an incredibly broad definition that covers a wide range of organizations. Nonetheless, this is what NGOs are: a vast spectrum of organizations that are placed together only because they are non-profit and are perceived as being 'non-state' or otherwise independent of formal state structures. In Vietnam it proves very difficult to define organizations as 'non-state,' but in the international arena in

general many NGOs might well say their independent status is the most important element of their existence, which is why the term ‘NGO’ is used in the first place – they define themselves using a negative. Unfortunately, while this makes it clear what they are not, it leaves open the question of what they are. As a result, a whole range of professional, business and religious associations can all justifiably use the term NGO.

In the developing world, however, the term NGO is dominated by a range of private organizations that carry out charitable work to relieve poverty or develop poor communities. Although there are many types of NGOs, the non-profit development organization is so prevalent that in poor nations almost everyone thinks first of non-profit development organizations when they hear the term NGO. Norman Uphoff (1996) writes that this assumption has led some people to think that these development-oriented NGOs represent a ‘third sector’ in the development process, as opposed to the state sector and private business. There is a general belief that these NGOs work closely with the poor and can meet the needs of the poor more directly and efficiently than state offices or the free market. Table 1 shows this basic set of assumptions; which really are like ‘stereotypes’ of development that one can find repeated in a lot of literature.²

Table 1

Public sector	Private sector	NGOs ‘Third sector’
- Bureaucratic - Top-down (inefficient for rural development)	- Free market - Profit-oriented (efficient but misses the poor)	- Bottom-up - Charitable (efficient and reaches the poor)

While it is probably true that small NGOs have advantages in reaching the poor, it remains difficult to argue that NGOs are a ‘third sector’ that can be easily spliced off from the state and private business. Uphoff goes so far as to argue that NGOs are better seen as one half of the private sector, and their ‘clients,’ called beneficiaries or target groups, are similar in most respects to the customers of a private business, in that they can participate in projects if they choose, but they do not have any control over the structure or finances of the NGO. Uphoff argues that if there is any true ‘third sector’ for development, it is a membership sector of people’s organizations or independent cooperatives, which are self-help groups composed of people with common interests, who pool resources to accomplish a goal. In these organizations, the members have a say in the structure of the organization. This is shown in Table 2, which is a simplified version of the charts that appear in Uphoff’s work.

Table 2

Public sector	Private sector		Membership sector
	Business	Charity	
- Still bureaucratic	- Customers	- Beneficiaries or target groups (Both customers and beneficiaries do not manage the organization or control it)	- PO’s and independent cooperatives (Self-help, pooled resources, members have say in management of organization)

(Table 1 and 2 derived from Uphoff 1996, pp. 23-30).

As we will see, in the case of Vietnam, it is hard to lump the emerging NGOs in with private business. But Uphoff does raise an important point in stressing the difference between NGOs and people's organizations. It is important because, despite the difficulties of viewing professional, often urban-based NGOs as the 'voice of the poor,' they remain a focus in many countries for development funding. The rise in importance of NGOs has followed a shift in thinking among Western government and large multilateral organizations. In the post-Cold War world it has become accepted that economic development relies in part on social and political pluralism, called a vibrant or strong civil society. For free markets to operate effectively, the argument goes, you need to foster accountability and democratic governance. Development-oriented NGOs, which at least have close contact with the poor, are seen as important part of civil society. Funding NGOs and civil society has become such a dominant trend that many refer to it as the 'New Policy Agenda' of Western donors. It is important to note that this civil society agenda has two components: economic (to free up markets) and political (to increase pluralism).

In Vietnam, the era of market-based economic development coincided with the emergence of the New Policy Agenda. The 1993 decision to allow the formation of private, nonprofit 'science and technology associations' that could carry out development work was made because the government was scaling back the size of the bureaucracy, and they recognized that there could be important service-delivery or other development innovations that would emerge from private organizations. By the mid-1990s, a range of organizations was emerging. While still few in total number, they could be divided roughly into the following categories, based solely on their origins: 1) government mass organizations or other state bodies; 2) university- or hospital-based groups; and 3) individuals not associated with earlier groups

forming their own organizations, including local staff of international NGOs (Gray 1999, p. 698).

Groups that I met in 1996, which fell into the first category included the Highland Educational Development Organization (HEDO) and the Non-state Economic Development Centre (NEDCEN). In the second category, there were groups like the Centre for Natural Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CRES) and the Institute of Ecological Economy (Eco-eco). Finally, the last group included organizations like the Rural Development Services Centre (RDSC), and Towards Ethnic Women (TEW). These organizations, formed by private individuals, were considered the ‘most promising’ by members of the international NGO community, in terms of their potential to develop new approaches to working with the poor. A closer look at TEW, the subject of the case study discussed in this paper, seems to bear this opinion out.

TEW Background and Approach

Towards Ethnic Women was formed in 1994, one of the first organizations to make use of the 1993 decree on private science and technology associations. TEW registered under the Ethnology Institute, which has played little if any role in the development of the organization.³ The director was a PhD student at Hanoi University, and before that an official at the Forestry Inventory and Planning Institute. Well familiar with the many problems of government programmes in the highlands, the director wanted to find new ways of working with minority people. She formed her own organization because she felt, “an NGO – in the accepted sense of the meaning as an independent body – would be the most effective vehicle for such change

because it would be able to act independently of the bureaucracy of the state and therefore be more effective” (Tran Thi Lanh 1994, p. 4). This comment came soon after TEW was formally registered, when the director spoke at the 1994 Vietnam Update Conference in Canberra. She cautioned people, “If we understand an NGO to be an independent body not linked to Party or State, it is clear that in Vietnam there are difficulties associated with the acceptance of this definition” (ibid, p. 4).

Nonetheless, the director set up her organization to act in a manner patterned after the international NGOs she was familiar with – ie. as an organization that would work with local communities and the state offices that serve them to improve social and economic welfare. This can be verified by looking at TEW’s accomplishments since 1994. Although TEW has published little about its activities, it has released several brochures that spell out its objectives, approach and philosophy, as well as one research article on its land allocation programme in Ba Vi, which will be discussed in the next section. TEW says its long-term objective is to “provide opportunities for ethnic minority communities to improve their quality of life and the ability to solve problems themselves” (TEW brochure, no date). This will be done by supporting a national network of farmers, who train each other in areas like natural resource management; savings and credit; and health care and herbal medicine. The TEW brochure also says the organization will strive to “create opportunities for farmers and (government) authorities to exchange experiences and knowledge,” which, in the Ba Vi case study at least, clearly looks like an incipient effort at advocacy.

TEW’s objectives are evidence of a vision that does not draw very much from the approach taken by the government of Vietnam, which has traditionally described ethnic minorities as ‘backward’ and relied on resettlement and other top-down programmes. The

government's efforts have sometimes made matters worse for ethnic minorities, who already faced enormous problems. In addition to physical isolation, there is a lack of recognition for some cultures (there are more than the 54 recognized ethnic groups, for example), and most importantly there are growing pressures on natural resources. This includes economic pressure from lowland migrants who want access to highland areas to grow coffee and other cash crops. Minorities are often not always prepared for the changes taking place around them, and women in particular have little capacity to understand the cause of many new problems – due in part to the low social status they have in their own cultures and communities.

TEW has responded to this situation by developing a 'vision' or approach to ethnic minority development that is discussed in terms of 1) human ecology, and 2) gender and culture.

As the TEW brochure states:

“(The) human ecology framework strives to understand the position of communities within their natural environment and improve their lives through preserving cultural identity and improving gender relations.... Participation and the human ecology approach will help to strike a balance between the needs of women as individuals, and the goals of the community as a whole.”

To help accomplish these goals, TEW has developed a wide-ranging plan where it was actually at the centre of at least three levels of organizations that stretched from highland villages in Vietnam, to the Southeast Asian region and beyond. At the village and commune level, key farmers are joined in networks that are managed by field offices, which are the main project-implementing bodies. The first of these field offices was the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development (CIRD) that was set up in Quang Binh province in 1997. By 2000, CIRD had registered as a separate NGO under the Quang Binh branch of the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA). TEW also wanted to begin international cooperation programmes, and so in 1999 the Centre for Human Ecology Studies of Highlands

(CHESH) was established. The CHESH brochure states that the impetus for international cooperation began in 1996, when TEW brought several minority farmers on a study tour to Thailand, where they worked with Thai organizations like Ethnet and Impect. (These organizations, given the Thai political environment, are inevitable more ‘activist’ in their approach. Ethnet for example is involved in high-level research and advocacy to support land rights for highland communities.)

The multi-tiered structure therefore calls for CIRD to work directly with ethnic minority farmers in carrying out development work, while TEW will concentrate on research and advocacy at the national level, while also managing a national network of ‘key farmers’ – the village-level coordinators who worked with CIRD and the other field offices. CHESH, meanwhile, will focus on developing regional and international cooperation programmes to promote highland development, including study tours for farmers from different countries in the region.

As of 2001, TEW had field programmes in Ba Vi commune, Son La province, Lao Cai province, and the field office CIRD, carrying out development work in 13 highland communes in Quang Binh. In addition, CHESH had a programme in two villages in Laos, managed in the field by an office of the Lao government. All of these programmes – TEW, CIRD and CHESH – are funded by the Interchurch Organization for Cooperation and Development (the Dutch acronym is ICCO), a Dutch NGO that has supported TEW since 1996. The total number of staff is now about forty, with most being recent graduates from fields such as forestry, economics and law (see TEW, CIRD brochures).

The wide-ranging and rapid growth TEW has seen since 1994 should indicate the options open to NGOs in Vietnam today – given the right financial support, of course. But the question

remains whether this impressive structure can make a difference for minority peoples' lives, and help provide new models and options for highland development. The only evidence to look at here is the case study in Ba Vi, where TEW has been trying to help a Dao minority community for many years.

Ba Vi and Natural Resource Conflicts

TEW's approach to working with ethnic minorities is best illustrated by looking in some detail at how they have responded to resource conflicts in one of the communities where they work. Many would agree that conflicts over land and other natural resources are the greatest threat to highland communities in Vietnam. One of TEW's main goals has been to help highland people's understand land rights and acquire land use certificates.

TEW's first published research concerns their work in Yen Son village of Ba Vi district, in the Ba Vi National Park (Lanh 2000). The Park is only about 60 km from Hanoi, and new roads have made it a popular weekend tourist destination. Yen Son village, with about 170 households, lies at the base of Ba Vi, roughly 100 metres above sea level. The village is populated by ethnic Dao farmers who originally lived on the slopes of the mountain, between 600 and 800 metres above sea level. In 1959 the government moved the Dao down to the 100 metres level and grouped them in two villages, Yen Son and Hop Nhat. Between them, the villages were given 18 hectares of wet rice paddy land. Forest enterprises were created, and they started harvesting trees. During the war, a lot of forest area was cut to increase food production. Forest exploitation was so bad that in 1986 the district issued a decree to stop outsiders from cutting wood on the mountain. In 1987, the Hanoi municipal administration tried to help the Dao

by initiating a major programme that involved land allocation, infrastructure development and credit for animal husbandry. Yen Son was allocated 543 hectares of land between 100 and 400 metres above sea level on the west side of the mountain.

At the same time, a small 'new economic zone' (NEZ) was established at Ao Vua, a short distance from Yen Son village.⁴ Some 27 households were moved to this area, and given 200 hectares for farming and growing trees. Houses were built on two sides of the pond at Ao Vua. The next year, in 1988, the Ao Vua Tourist Company was created. TEW reports that the company was given 20 hectares of the land that was originally allocated to the Dao villagers under the NEZ programme (Lanh 2000, p.49). The company was supposed to give five per cent of all its earnings back to the villagers, to compensate for the land, plus there was an agreement between the villagers and the company to 'co-manage' the land. Sensing problems, some of the villagers who did not want to deal with the company moved back to the main part of Yen Son.

The villagers who stayed were excluded from all activities related to tourism. The company built guesthouses and restaurants all along the road, and to make way for these constructions the villagers were moved again, to the other side of the pond. Then, in 1999, a further 107 hectares of land was allocated to the Ao Vua Tourist Company, with the villagers left on a small strip of about eight hectares. In addition to their substantial loss of land, the villagers have received no earnings from the tourism facilities.

In 1989, a government programme funded by the French *Programme Alimentaire Mondial* (PAM) was initiated to reforest the bare slopes above Yen Son village. The district forest department decided to plant eucalyptus, because it would grow quickly and it was thought that prices would be high because of demand at the Bai Bang paper mill. The villagers agreed with the plan, as they would receive 70 per cent of the income from the sale of the trees. Most of

the 300 hectares of land up to the 400 metres level was planted with eucalyptus. Within three years, the soil around Yen Son started to deteriorate, no other plants would grow under the eucalyptus, and water levels dropped noticeably (ibid, p.50).

The Ba Vi National Park was created in 1991, covering all the land above 100 metres. The Park took almost all the 543 hectares originally allocated to the villagers, who have since come under the administration of Ha Tay province. The villagers living above 100 metres had to move down, and the contracts signed with PAM for the eucalyptus trees were essentially cancelled. The Park argued that the area was ‘forest land’ because it had trees on it (the eucalyptus). Eventually, in 2000, the villagers were given permission to harvest the trees. The villagers earned very little money, and in addition to economic impacts there have been many social problems and threats to the Dao cultural traditions as a result of the creation of the Ba Vi National Park. Dao culture depends a great deal on forest products such as herbal medicines, and as the TEW research puts it, “the Dao feel like thieves and criminals for doing what they have always done traditionally: their very culture has become ‘against the law’” (ibid, p. 50).

Yen Son village was the first area of TEW fieldwork. The organization says its goal “has been to strengthen the Dao community so they can live permanently in the National Park’s buffer zone, and participate fully in the management of the Park,” (ibid, p. 50). With this goal in mind, TEW has set up a series of pilot models with the Dao farmers. This actually dates from before TEW was formally established; the director as part of her PhD research helped form a herbal medicine study group, and a garden model based on the seven households who were resettled at Ao Vua. Then beginning in 1994 TEW tried to help the community obtain formal land rights for hill areas above the 100 metre level. This effort has had some success, as contracts (*khoan dat*) were eventually signed for land up to about 250 metres. This is not full allocation (*giao dat*) so

the land remains under the control of the Park.⁵ TEW feels the Park has stalled because it does not want a strong community role to hinder development plans or earning potential. As the research paper puts it, “There have been many problems with the Park administration, and TEW’s ability to help the villagers has been limited largely because of the Park’s role” (ibid, p. 55).

TEW, as an NGO, cannot participate directly in allocating land. That is, they can support allocation projects, but province, district and commune authorities must carry out the actual work. TEW can fund allocation and provide advice on issues like mapping and conflict resolution, but unless ‘invited’ by the National Park, they cannot become involved. The main approach for TEW has been to lobby on behalf of the farmers and help them to contact officials at the province level and in Hanoi.

For example, TEW brokered a meeting between officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in Hanoi, and four senior villagers from Yen Son. These farmers explained the situation and asked MARD to intervene. MARD did take over the land contracting process, but TEW says this had little positive impact. TEW has also contacted the media in Hanoi, and newspaper journalists have interviewed the village leader and the TEW coordinator. But this type of action has had little impact on the behavior of Park officials. Still, TEW wants to pressure the Park to re-allocate all land taken by the Ao Vua tourist company, as well as all land up to 250 metres. Also, TEW wants the Ao Vua tourist company to respect the agreement to involve the farmers by having their representative on the company board, and of course respecting the agreement to hand over five per cent of earnings. In other words TEW, has moved from implementing small garden pilot models (successfully), to a larger effort at land allocation (unsuccessfully) to a last-ditch attempt to lobby authorities in Hanoi to intervene. The

most noteworthy element of the lobbying effort is that TEW tries to act as a mediator, allowing the farmers to talk for themselves.

Conclusion

As TEW describes in its paper on Ba Vi, its main approach in field work at the village level is to find “key farmers” to train in areas like herbal medicine, animal husbandry, gardening, and so on. These farmers then re-train other members of their community. At the project and programme level, TEW sets up management boards that look similar to the “local development groups” (LDGs) discussed by Fritzen (this volume), meaning a range of officials from the commune, district and province levels.

Whether TEW will be able to influence central level policy-makers in the case of Ba Vi, or other project areas, is not yet clear. Fritzen concludes from his study of a range of LDGs that project/programme size is an important factor in garnering attention at the central level. Small projects can more easily be ignored. However, projects in politically sensitive areas – such as work with ethnic minorities – will receive greater attention (**Fritzen, this volume p??**). That TEW is a small NGO working only on a pilot project level works against them, while the fact that their area of concern is ethnic minorities works for them, in terms of attracting attention to their efforts. As TEW begins to approach central level offices like MARD, and begins to work more closely with VUSTA,⁶ it seems clear that more officials at the province and central levels will become aware of this ‘new voice’ providing them with information and opinions on highland issues. This raises the question of how independent TEW needs to be to remain effective in helping farmers and devising new approaches to highland development. On this

point, it seems clear that there is now more than enough space in Vietnam for organizations like TEW to be considered ‘non-government,’ if by this one means an ability to function autonomously from state agents and a state agenda. Particularly for TEW, financial freedom has given them a lot of room to move and test new ideas – which may not be the case for many NGOs, as the extensive survey done by Wischermann and Vinh found that few organizations in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City had much in the way of foreign funding (Wischermann and Vinh, this volume). But perhaps more important than the financing, the TEW staff have been active in defining their own approach and philosophy, as shown in their brochures (and evidenced by their work in Ba Vi).

Another point to consider is what must be a changing relationship between TEW and the farmers it works with. The TEW director in 1996 said she never told farmers that her organization was an NGO, because she felt this term would have no meaning for them (Gray 1999, p. 702). But by now, the villagers in Ba Vi, such as the TEW coordinator mentioned in the research article, are obviously aware of what an NGO is. This may have importance as TEW’s key farmer network expands, because farmers are meeting and discussing important issues outside the normal channels of the state (which in this case would be the Farmer’s Union or Women’s Union).

Here, it would be good to return again to the views of Uphoff, and the important distinction he sees between small, private NGOs, and larger, mass-based “people’s organizations” or independent cooperatives. The potential social and political significance of mass-based people’s organizations should be obvious – think of Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia, or the National Rifle Association in America. The ability to lobby and advocate, in any political environment, depends to a large extent on numbers, and small NGOs are always at a

disadvantage in this respect, when compared to people's organizations. So Uphoff is correct to stress this fact, and the lack of any independent people's organizations in Vietnam is very noticeable. However, as many of the contributions to this volume demonstrate, it does little good in Vietnam to attempt to define NGOs as one-half of the private sector, as Uphoff attempts. Clearly, many NGOs in Vietnam originated in government bodies, or are staffed by former civil servants. Thaveeporn Vasavakul writes of one such group, the Centre for Rural Communities Research and Development (CCRD), that what makes it nongovernmental is the way it applies alternative models to the locality (Thaveeporn, this volume). In other words, the approach and, presumably, *results*, are more important than legal status or other technicalities. This goes along with Kerkvliet's ideas that, first, one can look within state institutions, "for evidence of struggles regarding issues of autonomy and control," (Kerkvliet 1994, p. 27) and second, and more recently, "individuals, groups, and social forces outside official channels can also affect the political system" (Kerkvliet 2001, p. 269).

This "results-based" view argues that civil society must be understood as an arena where conflicting or contrasting views and approaches come into contact. So NGOs can be lifted out of Uphoff's private sector, and dumped back into a "third sector", in this case relabeled the civil society sector. However, it remains important to look at individual actors, and not draw any sweeping conclusions regarding the democratizing potential of a strong civil society. Recent data suggests the spread of NGOs and other civic organizations across Vietnam, so there are certainly a rising number of actors to look at. (Wischermann and Vinh, this volume). But, importantly, the lack of people's organizations to base their work around means that NGOs are limited to being one part of the "local development groups" that Fritzen discusses – which have numerous

reasons for being successful or unsuccessful, and do not seem to depend much on autonomy or independence from existing state structures.

As for TEW, the evidence from their work in Ba Vi indicates that NGOs can now play an important role in developing new models for work with minority farmers, and their incipient efforts at advocacy – linking farmers directly with officials in Hanoi – are an important indicator of what may lie ahead. Nonetheless, there is no reason to suggest that NGOs like TEW will have any short or medium term impact on sociopolitical developments in Vietnam. TEW is one organization, not a social movement, and there remains little contact between TEW and other Vietnamese NGOs. TEW's significance is that of a 'trailblazer,' offering a number of lessons on how to work with the poor in Vietnam. How long it takes for other organizations to follow and begin to speak out and band together, remains to be seen.

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- TEW brochure (no date).

--- CIRD brochure (no date).

--- CHESH brochure (no date).

Notes

¹ The buffer zone is an area surrounding the Park where farmers are allowed to live, but under the management of strict Park rules regarding land use. The inner areas of the Park are fully protected and no one can use the land.

² For example, in my 1999 paper on Vietnamese NGOs, I quoted an article on Grameen Bank-style microcredit programmes. The article firmly stated: “The leaders of most replications, and of the Grameen Bank itself, are convinced that governments cannot do Grameen Banking. Governments are too political – so they often cannot get the money back. Governments work through entrenched elites – so they seldom reach the poor. Government norms are too rigid and hierarchical to build the kind of village-centred, field-oriented organization required”. (Todd 1996, p. 12) The author of this article later went on to praise the efforts of the Vietnam Women’s Union in its “Tau Yew Mai” (sic) credit programme, funded by the international NGO, CIDSE. It seems the authors forgot the Women’s Union was government, not an NGO (Gibbons and Todd, in Todd 1996, pp. 77-98).

³ Under the rules of Decree 35/CP, a new organization was required to register either directly under a branch of the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations, or under an organization already registered under VUSTA. TEW chose to register under the Institute of Ethnology given the director’s existing relationship with the institute from her days as a PhD student research minority issues. It could be that TEW initially felt the need to be ‘sheltered’ under an existing organization, rather than register directly under VUSTA. The director likely believed the organization would receive ‘less attention’ by doing this. However, during the author’s two years with TEW from 1999 to 2001, there was not one formal meeting between TEW and the Institute of Ethnology, nor any detailed reports exchanged. Thus, it seems clear TEW was left to its own devices.

⁴ ‘New Economic Zone’ is the term used in Vietnam to denote new or resettled communities that are placed in an area where formerly barren land is opened up for cultivation.

⁵ Beginning with the 1993 Land Law, full allocation (*giao dat*) gave farmers de facto ownership of their land, with the ability to rent, mortgage, inherit and ‘sell’ land, through a transfer of the title. A contract (*khoan dat*), however, only allows farmers certain use-rights for a set period. They have to follow a land-use plan developed by the owner and cannot sell, mortgage or inherit the contract.

⁶ CHESH is registered directly under VUSTA, and TEW and VUSTA worked together to organize a conference on ethnic minorities, in Hanoi, in mid-2001.