ROLES OF INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN DEVELOPING SOCIAL WORK SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN VIETNAM

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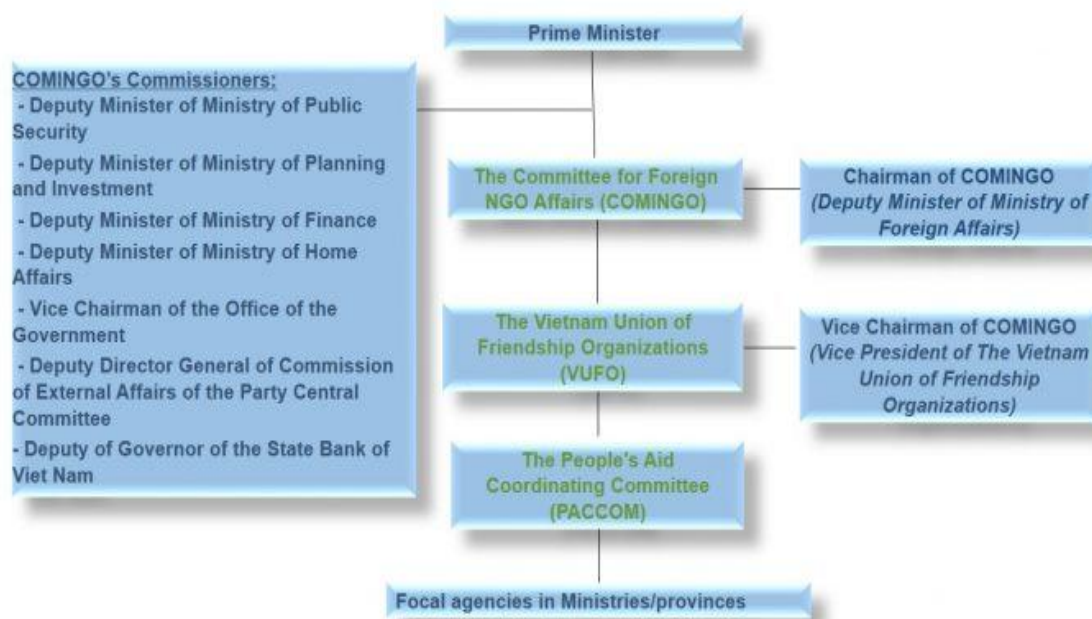Email: lethinhungldxh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Although social work took a dominant position playing in different settings and specialties including children protection and disabilities from the 21st century in the world, it has just been recognized as a profession in Vietnam since 2010. International non- governmental organizations (INGOs) have indelibly imprinted on the process of formation and development of this new practice. The children in special circumstances and persons with disabilities are the top groups with massive demands of holistic social work services. Through case studies and reviews of secondary research, the author sought how INGOs have been contributing in developing social work case management with difficult children and persons with disabilities in Vietnam. It reveals their role models in researching, advocating, capacity building of staff and key stakeholders, piloting the best practices, and enhancing the delivery system of services in a participatory approach from local to central levels.

Key words: International non-governmental organizations, social work services, children, persons with disabilities
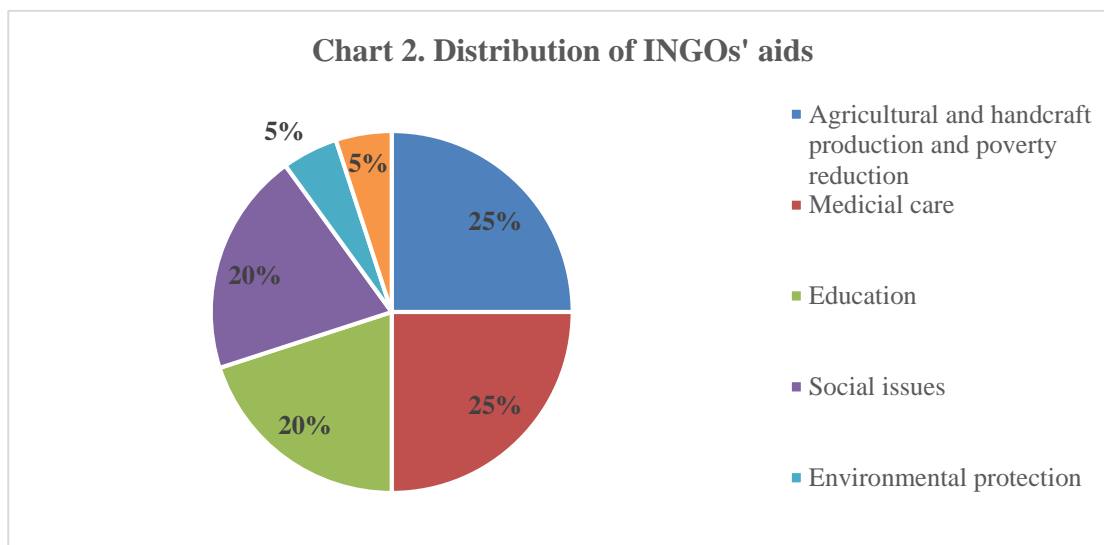
INTRODUCTION

In the context of Vietnam, Foreign Non-governmental Organizations (also known as International Non-governmental Organizations- INGOs) defined as "non-governmental organizations, non-profited organizations, social funds, private foundations, or other forms established under foreign law for development and humanitarian aid, not for profit or other purposes in Vietnam." thanks to the Government's Decree No.12/2012/ND-CP. In this system, the Committee for Foreign Non-Governmental Organization Affairs (COMINGO) works at the highest level of governance followed by the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) as its permanent unit. The People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM) is the specialized and functional body of VUFO (Committee for Foreign Non-Governmental Organization Affairs, n.d.). INGOs have entered Vietnam for decades linked to Vietnam's specific historical periods in international relations.

Chart 1. The structure of the Committee for Foreign Non-governmental Organization Affairs (COMINGO)

It claimed that foreign religious organizations were the first comers to Vietnam for humanitarian aids since the 1950s (Quang Nam Department of Foreign Affairs, 2019). In 1965, aids from Western countries to Vietnamese war victims increased, and several INGOs sent aid shipments to the bombed areas. As estimated up to May 1975, about 63 INGOs were operating in the South and various Friendship Associations from socialist countries supporting the North of Vietnam (Tay T.K., n.d.). Later on, international partnerships had stopped but gradually back to Vietnam several years later. Thanks to Doi Moi in 1986 and after the turning point of 1992 when the cold war broke, the number of INGOs has gone up more significantly. The number of organizations in partnership with Vietnam has tripled from 210 to 650 between 1994 and 2006 and reached 1,000 by 2017 (Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). According to the Report in 2019, Vietnam has relationships with more than 1,000 INGOs, of which about 504 INGOs are regularly operating. Every year INGOs provide around 3,000 programs, projects, and grants with the disbursement value over 20 years, estimated at over 4.3 billion USD (MD, 2018) of which 1.76 billion USD was contributed for the period 2014-2019 (Trong Vu, 2019). Currently, the situation of foreign non-governmental aid to Vietnam tends to slow down; however, there is still a huge contribution through programs and projects in our country (Bich Ngoc, 2020). It is covering all 63 provinces and cities nationwide, particularly the poor, remote, and isolated areas that are in line with the national priorities in developing socio-economic, sustainable development and poverty reduction (Trung Hieu, 2018). Compared to the official developmental aids (ODA), NGOs' aids is a type of grant for humanitarian and developmental goals with quicker and simpler procedures (Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). It falls into six priority fields as following:

Chart 2. Distribution of INGOs' aids

- Agricultural and handcraft production and poverty reduction
- Medicial care
- Education
- Social issues
- Environmental protection

(Committee for Foreign Non-Governmental Organization Affairs, 2016)

There is a common tendency that INGOs' activities have shifted towards reducing humanitarian aid and increasing aid for sustainable development (Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). For the solutions to social issues, INGOs act as innovators, critics, advocates, and policy partners when increasingly demanding the government's attention to those people who have not yet been reached (Inger Ulleberg, 2009, p.9). INGOs have been pushing the best practices and models of how to support people and solve social problems.

Among the priorities, children and persons with disabilities are the targeted groups of the social work profession. In 2010, there were over 1,5 million children in special circumstances, including 1,353,000 children with disabilities, nearly 300,000 children affected by HIV or AIDS, more than 126,200 children without the care of their biological parents, 28,910 children working under hazardous conditions; more than 21,230 children living on the streets, 1,805 abused children and 21,500 children living in institutions (UNICEF, 2018). According to the National Statistics on Persons with Disabilities, Vietnam also has more than 6.2 million persons with disabilities accounted for 7% of the population aged 2 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2018, p.15). The majority are living in the community do not have many opportunities to access welfare policies or professional social work services in the communities. In a research by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (2014) conducted in different provinces and cities, it is indicated that people with disabilities needed a variety of supports and services including monthly allowances (90.8%), health insurance, medical care, information accessibility to policies, legal procedures, services and resources (67.3%), healthcare consultation and assistive devices (40.8- 42.9%), loans and financial support in production and vocational training (37.8-42.9%), general education and life skill training (40.8- 41.8%), participation in social groups and entertainment activities (40.8-42.9%), counseling and psychological counseling (32.7%), legal support (31.6%), part-time care, daily care, full-time care at home (25.5- 33.7%), intensive care (22.4%) (Mai Bui T.X., 2014, p.70). Their needs for support services are at massive demands of up to nearly 100% (Social Protection Department, Institute of Labor Science and Social Affairs, 2012).
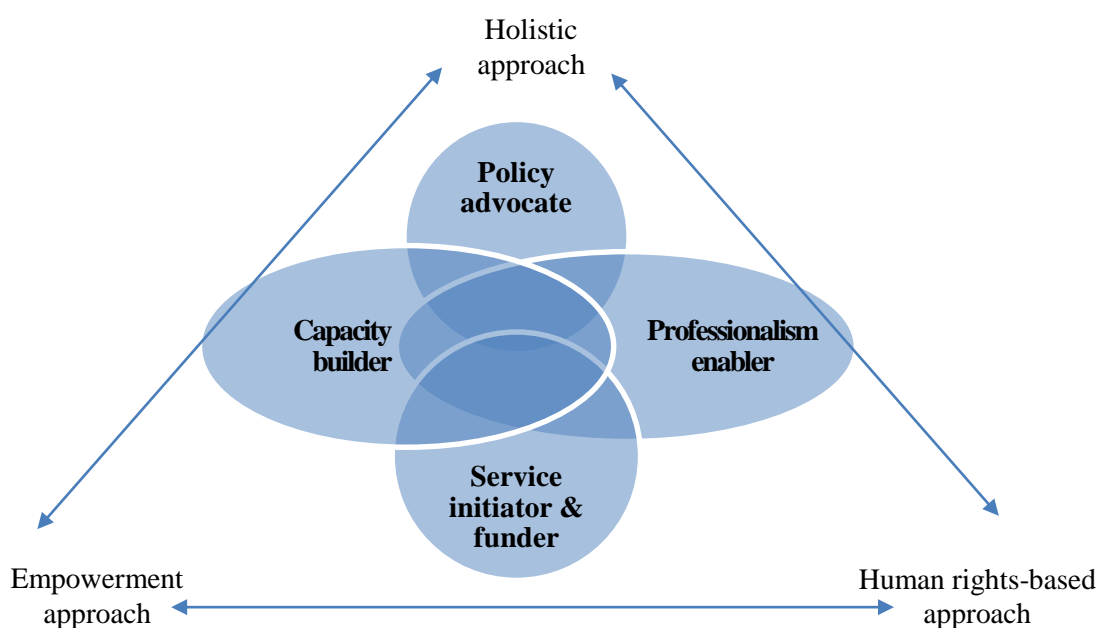
Since the social work profession started in the United States at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, remains integral and dominant to 21st-century social work (National Association of Social Workers-NASW, 2013, p.8-10). Strategically, INGOs significantly contributed to bringing this initiative into Vietnam led to its recognition as an official profession since 2010 as the National Scheme No.32 (Prime Minister, 2010). This paper aims at building up a conceptual framework on the roles of INGOs forming and advocating for social work services as one of the best practices for children and persons with disabilities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

When providing services, NGOs/INGOs play mixed social, economic, and political roles in society as employers and advocates (Boris & Steuerle, 2017, p.2). Empowerment on human rights is one of their functions (PPWG et.al., 2016) to give a voice to the people, eliciting participation, and pressuring the State (World Bank, 1999a). NGOs, including INGOs, offer humanitarian aids, service provision, advocacy research, and capacity building (PPWG et al., 2016; William Taylor et.al., 2012; Inger Ulleberg, 2009). In the implementation of national programs, they are the implementers in clarifying needs/problems, preparation, appraisal, negotiation, implementation, monitoring, and supervision (Warren, 1980). Moreover, their involvement is seen in the process of formulation of public policies and even in the enforcement of social legislation (Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University, n.d.:8) under the scope of international commitments and conventions. In collaboration with the public sector, such as governmental administration, public university, and the quasi-NGOs, their partnerships fall in four common forms, including pilot practice and service delivery, documentation, capacity building of social work staff and advocacy and policy-making (Thuy Bui A., Nhung Le T., 2017).

In this paper, the author proposed the conceptual roles of INGOs in developing social work case management:

Chart 3. Conceptual roles of INGOs in development social work services with children and persons with disabilities

They are underpinning with three major approaches, namely the human right- based approach, empowerment approach, and holistic approach. The ultimate goals of INGOs are to serve for the well-being of people and empower them for sustainable changes with an independent force and partner of the local authority. The government often has to take his concerns to all citizens while their counterparts target disadvantaged groups in the society and advocate for their rights to the government. Respecting human rights is the most cardinal discipline to find the common between INGOs' mission and the state's priorities. INGOs perform two roles: direct service providers and funders to children and persons with disabilities. As funders, INGOs are registered under VUFO and PACCOM either under its central or local jurisdiction. As the social service providers, INGOs collaborate with provincial authority and with local NGOs in implementing pilot projects designed to follow overseas frameworks or models. As the developmental actor, INGOs provide give technical inputs of the best practice to social work staff, enhancing the current human resources, and preparing future professionals. They also help the universities, institutions for research, curriculum, documentation, and high qualify the teachers and supervisors. Together with the government, they work out a favorable legal mechanism, the models, guidelines, and tools for the social work profession.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was designed with two major methods, namely case studies and review of secondary research. For the first, the author on one hand looked at cases of different common forms of INGOs in Vietnam: i) the United Nations Agencies; ii) international NGOs; iii) foreign NGOs or ODA. On the other hand, cases of different key partners of INGOs were studied, including i) Government and local authorities; ii) other INGOs and Vietnamese NGOs; iii) higher education and research institutes. For the latter, a desk review of literature and secondary research was employed for a comprehensive conceptual framework on the role models of INGOs and shreds of evidence for their contribution in developing social work case management with difficult children and persons with disabilities in Vietnam.

KEY FINDINGS

SERVICE INITIATOR & FUNDER

At the beginning of 1990s, Save the Children (now known as Save Children International- SCI) and UNICEF assisted in the introduction of casework with children to Vietnam but limited scope to social protection agencies and intensive care institutions (Lan Nguyen T., Mai Bui T.X, 2011, p.24). Besides, INGOs adapt the best practice somewhere else to pilot in the local context. At the same time, they can innovate and adapt more quickly than national governments; therefore, their actions can undermine government initiatives. But if they scale up their activities and impart their knowledge and techniques at the government level, the country as a whole can benefit (Inger Ulleberg, 2009, p.8). For example, social work case management was first piloted in Districts 1, 4, 8 and Binh Thanh District of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) in 2006 thanks to the financial and technical support of Family Health International 360 (FHI360) and under the implementation of Ho Chi Minh City HIV/AIDS Association. Each district has four full-time caseworkers on average outreaching drug users at their residences as the follow up of rehabilitation at Nhi Xuan Center. Besides, Enfants Et Developpement (E&D- France) in partnership with People's Ward Committees, University of Labour &Social Affairs II (ULSA2) & Ho Chi Minh City Open University. They significantly contribute to pilot and development family development methodology on case management, home visit, and referral services to poor children and their families from 2009 up to now. At the same time (2009-2012), Worldwide Orphans Foundation (WWO) worked with ULSA2 and several other universities as the representatives of different regions of Vietnam in initiating socio-psychological services for over 1,000 children affected by HIV/AIDS in HCMC and nearby provinces (Nguyet Nguyen T.A, 2016, p.541). After that, this model has been currently learned by other NGOs working with children with similar problems or issues.

As development actors, INGOs give funds to NGOs have become key service providers in countries where the government is unable to fulfill its traditional role (Inger Ulleberg, 2009:8). In Vietnam's context, INGOs are greatly involving direct services at the local community. According to the study of Asia Foundation (2012), 62 out of 100 CSOs surveyed in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City choosing service delivery as the forms of operation could be categorized into three different groups: i) Organizations collaborating with government agencies to deliver services according to specific government policies; ii) Organizations providing services that are not part of government programs; and iii) Organizations engaging with authorities by conveying the concerns of their members to them, identifying shortcomings, and suggesting new approaches or improvements to existing programs (William Taylor& et.al., 2012, p.19-20). Another study conducted by the author with the fund of Tuong Lai Centre for Health Education and Community Development (2016) showed that there are 33 out of 43 NGOs involving in delivering services to children and adolescence at local levels. Most of the surveyed social workers participated in casework with individuals in difficult circumstances (Nhung Le T., 2016, p.26).

POLICY ADVOCATE

During service delivery, INGOs interact and identify the needs of vulnerable groups who lack voice towards the authorities. They gather evidence and represent on behalf of their clients to advocate for their rights, which is also one function of caseworkers. INGOs enable Vietnamese NGOs to involve increasingly in advocacy despite challenges in the legal mechanism. INGOs such as USAID, Irish Aids, etc. have made a great contribution to the research to promote the rights of migrant workers while Disability Research & Capacity Development (DRD) make a collective's voice of PWDs to call for their rights in transports, information access and so on. They choose a case study to come up with a landscape overview as strong shreds of evidence.

Regarding of development and improvement of legal policies, the Atlantic Philanthropies, UNICEF, Vietnam's Association of Social Work and Vocational Training (later), together with several NGOs (such as HCMC Club of Social Workers) contribute significantly with their technical support, advice and monitoring in drafting legal documents related to social work profession, namely Decision No.32/2010/QD-TTG of the Prime Minister issued on 25th March 2010 approving *the National Scheme on Developing Social Work Profession between 2010 and 2020*, Circular No.08/2010/TT-BNV of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued on 25th August 2010 about *Position and Job's Code of Social Workers,* Joint Circular No. 30/2015/TTLT-BLDTBXH-BNV of Ministry of Labour, War Invalids & Social Affairs (MOLISA) and Ministry of Home Affairs dated on 19th August 2015 regulating *Job's Code and Job's Description of Social Workers,* Circular No.01/2017/TT-BLDTBXH of MOLISA dated on 02/02/2017 about *Code of Ethics,* and the draft Code of Social Work is on progress.

In the field of disadvantaged children, in 2009 UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs conducted the research and draw out the pilot model of social work case management in assisting disadvantaged children in Quang Ninh province, Dien Bien province, An Giang, Dong Thap and Ho Chi Minh City (MOLISA, UNICEF, 2011). The study shows that cultural factors, conditions of the socio-economic situation, and especially the level of social development in Vietnam affect the effectiveness of assistance to clients. The study is an important basis for the development of Circular No.23/2010/TT-BLDTBXH of MOLISA *regulating the intervention process to support physically and sexually abused children*. This is considered to be the first legal document on social work case management. Particularly, thanks to consultancy, policy advocacy, technical and financial support of UNICEF, on the 6th of January 2017, MOLISA signed the Circular No.01/2015/TT-BLDTBXH providing *the guidelines on case management with persons with disabilities*. Remarkably, after a series of research and service pilots with different groups with financial and technical support of INGOs for years, the Circular No.02/2020/TT-BLDTBXH about *the guidelines on case management for providing social work services*.

As a result, a legal mechanism creates favorable conditions to develop social workers and caseworkers at community levels.

CAPACITY BUILDER

In the manner of a development actor, INGOs not only initiate the model of case management but also involve in competency enhancement of current human resources, which is very critical to Vietnam's newly-developed social work profession. FHI360 and World Bank joined together in improving volunteers and employees working with addicts at all communes and wards of 24 districts of HCMC. Between 2009 and 2010, the program was covered with 38 basic and advanced modules for 1,027 caseworkers. A network of collaborators was able to reach up to 60% of clients who were also referred to appropriate services for social inclusion in residential areas (Hai Nguyen T., 2013:18-19). Another illustration is the achievements in partnership among the Atlantic Philanthropies, Community and Family Services International, Social Work & Community Development Research & Consultancy, and Vietnam's Women Academy- HCMC Branch through the project "Capacity building of local social workers in HCMC". Since 2010, there have been 500 social workers of service agencies getting short-term professional training courses, including case management with specific process guidelines, counseling skills, referral skills, and so on. Besides, the Atlantic Philanthropies also raised awareness and enhanced management skills for executives and managers at middle levels managers in 63 cities and provinces through classroom training and field exposure, even to foreign countries (MOLISA, 2015).

For the future's social workforce, INGOs such as service agencies, institutes, and associations turn themselves into field placement of students. Despite limited supervision capacity, they do make a positive contribution to learner's practical exposure at grassroots. For example, E&D has a six-month internship period (02 days per week) for a certain number of third or fourth- year students in practicing family-oriented- case management, home visit, referral, and counseling. Taiwan Funds for Children and Families (TFCF) also have both domestic and international volunteering programs as well as supervision for students who are interested in working with poor children and their families. Caritas-Germany put their efforts in specializing potential learners in the community- based rehabilitation of PWDs at their project sites in Quang Tri Province, Da Nang City, and later on HCMC and Ben Tre Province. Moreover, WWO had a five- hundred- hour- internship for about 200 students in socio-psychological services for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS\(Nguyet Nguyen T.A., 2016, p.541-542).

Furthermore, INGOs (UNICEF, WWO, etc.) help universities (ULSA2, HCMC Open University, HCMC University of Social Science & Humanities, HCMC College of Economics, Ton Duc Thang University, etc.) improve training quality when their staff get involved as a member of the advisory board, supervisors or visiting teachers. In particular, ULSA2 could develop a large network of supervisors from social work centers and service agencies in 13 Southern provinces and cities thanks to technical support from Caritas-Germany.

PROFESSIONALISM ENABLER

INGOs and Agencies of the United Nations collaborate with universities and research institutes designing the programs, conducting documentation of the practice, developing teaching materials and standardizing processes, tools, and guidelines.

Since the 1990s, UNICEF has assisted higher education institutes in building the curriculum and designing textbooks and other materials for social work vocational training and bachelor's programs, for instance, a set of manuals with 23 modules for social workers (MOLISA, 2012). Later on, UNICEF and some other INGOs advocated the Ministry of Education and Training and gave both technical and financial support to universities for development on the Bachelor Programs in Social Work since 2004. At the same time, UNICEF, USAID, Ford Foundation, etc. also provided scholarships for competent candidates to pursue postgraduate programs overseas who become the high-quality lecturers and specialists in social work at present.

Besides, there are some INGOs taking part in documentation in a short time. Room to Read documented the handbook "Supporting and Counseling for Students" for social workers, which contains key contents on school counseling through case management and essential skills (2011). FHI360 collaborated with the University of Labour & Social Affairs Campus Hanoi and Department of Social Protection developing curricula and the textbook "Case Management with Drug Users" (2012). The Atlantic Philanthropies in partnership with the Center for Social Work and Community Development Research and Consultancy (SDRC) and the Family and Community Services Organization (CFSI) built up the manual "Case Management" for outreaching social workers (2013). Thus, it can be found that various textbooks are used as teaching materials or guidelines at different levels of training programs and for specific groups of clients.

As some significant achievements in international cooperation, ULSA2 could build up a series of textbooks in support of INGOs. In a three- year- partnership project of WWO and ULSA2 from 2009-2012, three heads of textbooks (Case Management, Disclosure Skills, and Stress Management) for social work with vulnerable orphan children affected by HIV/AIDS were developed and published into 1.5 million copies for 18 universities and 25 social centers. Furthermore, in the period 2011-2014, E&D and ULSA2 worked together to develop three manuals including "Counseling at the Center", "Home Visit" and "Referral Services". In 2015, Caritas-Germany gave financial and technical support to ULSA2 to adopt the Guidelines of WHO about "Community-based Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities" with an emphasis on case management on multidisciplinary and multi-dimensional approaches into Vietnam's context as a textbook at bachelor's program which emphasizes. By the year 2016, its practicum manual has been built up and piloted in student's internship and later on in providing services at District 12 and nearby districts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that INGOs have been performing a variety of service and humanitarian functions both as a gap-filler and a development actor. Social work services with children and persons with disabilities are a clear illustration of their contribution in partnership with the public sector in Vietnam. They play significant roles in supporting the government in modeling the services and funding for the delivery systems, designing and improving policies, building competencies of social workers key stakeholders as well as enabling professionalism with documentation, guidelines, and standards. At the same time, they also are advocates, social critics, and monitors for policy formulation. In any position, INGOs affirm its mission of bringing benefits for vulnerable groups and human rights empowerment.

However, the legal framework for NGOs/INGOs, such as the law or acts, has not yet been formed leading to fragmented activities and the challenge against their roles as the development actor. Meanwhile, the development of the social work profession in the future needs more of their involvement.

On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that big INGOs, which have their vision and mission, might affect the mainstream of services and prior beneficiaries. It might come with either overlapped services or left-behind groups of those in need. Therefore, enhancement of leadership, networking, sharing platforms, and databases are essential for their collective strength and cooperation.

Several limitations of this study should be considered with research design. Firstly, INGOs were an unclear term in Vietnam without a legal base. It might be controversial whether the Agencies of the United Nations included. They have been, however, taking the lead roles in developing social work services in particular for children and persons with disabilities with a clear cut. Secondly, research-based on case studies and desk review might not reflect the validity well enough or not reflect the whole picture of all roles of INGOs. Nevertheless, the results of this study contributed to a role framework of INGOs conceptually and evidentially in the context of Vietnam. It is vital to advocate for their clearer status and further development of the social work profession. Meaningfully, future studies with a variety of research methods would help strengthen the ideas on their role in this paper or explore a more holistic framework.

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