

# **Nordic Assistance to Vietnam (NAV)**

## **CLOCA Report**

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July 26 – 27, 2010

## 1. Executive Summary

Nordic Assistance to Vietnam (NAV) has been implementing their NPI award since December 2006 and will be closing their no-cost extension period on November 30, 2010. During this time, the organization has accomplished a great deal programmatically. NAV has also developed organizationally. On July 26 and 27, AED led NAV staff through a close out organizational capacity assessment (CLOCA) at their office in Hue.

In January, 2007, NAV went through a 3-day self assessment facilitated by MSCl. NAV never underwent an organizational capacity assessment (OCA) or technical assessment (TOCA). As such, the CLOCA was the first systematic self-assessment by AED that NAV has been through under the NPI program. A total of 16 NAV staff contributed the CLOCA with AED's Vietnam Field Liaison facilitating and three USAID representatives present as observers. See **Annex 1** for a complete Participant List.

The outcome of the CLOCA included quantitative scores for each category in the CLOCA tool's seven domains (see **Annex 2**). The CLOCA also involved qualitative observations for each section, which are summarized in this report and an indication of where NAV stands four months prior to the project's close. It also includes a "wrap up" action plan that NAV plans to integrate into its country plan that is currently under development. Finally, the report reflects on NAV's achievements, lessons, and the challenges it has overcome associated with its NPI award.

Broadly speaking, NAV has distinguished itself as a learning organization that has taken advantage of its NPI award to develop its systems and staff in addition to its technical programming. Staff are motivated to continue the professionalization of NAV as well as their project partners, which was evident in their ambitious recommendations. The NPI award has allowed NAV to identify promising practices that will be maintained or scaled up, e.g. staff and stakeholder participation in planning and decision-making. Some organizational areas, e.g. NAV's USG-compliant financial systems and policies, may be considered models for other organizations seeking to partner with USAID. Other areas, particularly human resource management and parts of project performance management, require further attention.

Overall feedback on the CLOCA process was positive.

## 2. Findings by Section

### 2.1 Governance<sup>1</sup>

NAV's governance structure flows down from NCA. NAV does not have a **board of directors** in country and it uses NCA's **vision** statement as its own.

The NCA Christian **mission** wording is not appropriate for the Vietnam context given the sensitivity of religious work in Vietnam and the interfaith dimension of NAV's work that includes non-Christian faiths. As such, NAV currently uses only the vision "Together for a Just World" actively and sometimes refers to the values in planning meetings with staff. During the CLOCA, NAV discussed the merits of developing more specific mission language to guide its work in Vietnam. This could also be used for external communication of its work within Vietnam.

The in-country **organizational structure** is very clear, supported by documentation, and regularly reviewed by staff to ensure that it remains relevant. Staff recognize that this is an ongoing process to maintain. While communication and sharing between different program areas exists, this can be further strengthened. A key achievement during the NPI project has been the recruitment of new competent staff and the empowerment of staff such that NAV is not dependent on the three key personnel: the Resident Representative (RR), the National Coordinator and the Financial Manager. NAV is currently in the middle of RR handover, guided by a detailed **succession plan**. In all, there will be almost a full month of handover.

NAV is aware of its **legal** responsibilities and complies with all tax and labor laws. NAV's Project Office permit is currently being renewed, which happens every two years. The NPI project activities have been authorized by provincial/city authorities in most sites, which can be considered an achievement given the sensitivities of the project. Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is the only location that has not received government approval. Efforts are ongoing and NAV has been transparent with government authorities throughout the process. A key lesson learned in getting legal approval is the importance of transparency and building trust, both with community-level partners and with government authorities.

### 2.2 Administration

Overall, NAV gave itself high scores (all 3s and 4s) in terms of the organization's administrative **systems**, supporting documentation and compliance with USG rules and regulations. A key finding, however, is that administrative **policies and procedures** related to **travel**, **procurement**, and **fixed asset management** have not been consolidated into a single manual, which opens NAV to risks should current staff responsible for these practices leave the organization. Beyond consolidation of policies and procedures into a single binder/manual, other recommendations were to:

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<sup>1</sup> Nordic Assistance to Vietnam (NAV) is a country program office of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). NAV does not have a board of directors in Vietnam, so this section will be covered in the CLOCA planned for NCA.

- more fully document NAV's consultant recruitment practices
- explicitly include language related to Fly America in NAV's **procurement** procedures
- identify a person to oversee **branding and marking** compliance, particularly the inclusion of disclosure statements in publications, including partner publications.

There was a discussion on whether NAV needed Agreement Officer (AO) approval for equipment according to its own capitalization threshold of \$500 vs. the USAID threshold of \$5000. AED recommended that they use their own threshold, while the USAID representative and NAV did not believe this to be the case. Further clarification on this was being sought through AED.

## 2.3 Human Resource Management

HRM is one of NAV's self-professed weaker areas. Like the administrative assessment, most of NAV's HRM practices and supporting documentation are fairly strong and USAID compliant, but policies and procedures have not been adequately documented in a centralized location. In particular, NAV needs to document existing **recruitment** and **time management** practices.

NAV has been successful with **staffing** in that current staff members report feeling motivated and committed to their work. **Job descriptions** and supervision lines are clearly defined and regularly reviewed for relevance. The NPI project has three vacancies, with documented strategies on how to deal with each so that implementation is not compromised. NAV struggles to compete with larger organizations that can offer higher **salaries** and are based in Hanoi or HCMC and thus relies on creating a supportive working environment and providing good **benefits**. NAV recently decided to reassign a current staff to become a full-time HR Manager to professionalize the organization in this area.

A key self-assessed weakness in HRM is the lack of a systematic **staff performance management** process. While communication between supervisors and staff is regular, formalized assessments do not take place. Staff involved in the CLOCA believe that performance assessments will increase staff motivation and will reinforce NAV's stated commitments to professional development.

Another area where NAV can improve is the identification of ways to support and promote field collaborators and other **volunteers/interns**. Field collaborators, in particular, are essential to successful project implementation. However, there are no complete written guidelines for the field collaborators except a contract and job description. Once the new HR Manager has fully transitioned, this is an area for her to review.

## 2.4 Financial Management

NAV has a very strong financial management **system** in place, including strong **financial controls**, strong **reporting**, and it is meeting **cost-share** commitments. The one key area for improvement is developing clear guidance on how to manage and store **financial documentation**. Most of the financial challenges faced by NAV during the project have been related to slow or unclear communication with USAID, particularly in the area of **audits**. This has contributed to delays and is an ongoing concern as NAV is nearing the end of the project. A future consideration identified during the CLOCA is accounting for partner contributions to cost-share, which have not been tracked or reported. The challenge with this,

is that FBO partners have very high levels of staff turnover, which would require ongoing financial training on the part of NAV if financial responsibilities are to be shared more moving forward.

## 2.5 Organizational Management

In terms of organizational management, NAV gave itself high scores. As an organization, NAV invests significant time and energy in participatory processes and shared leadership, demonstrated by a strong commitment to internal **communication**. This is evident in their well documented **strategic planning** process as well as the participatory way that NPI **work plans** are developed and documented.

While the people assessing this domain felt that their personal experiences rated scores of four, they scored several sub-domains as three, recognizing that staff based in field offices may have different experiences, notably in **change management** and **decision making**. The score of three for **stakeholder involvement** was better justified, with explanations of differences between project implementation sites. NAV should now focus on scaling up best practices to ensure that all geographic areas where it operates benefit equitably. In terms of **knowledge management**, the sharing of best practice and lessons learned is often limited by NAV's base in Hue, as most sharing forums are based in Hanoi. That said, NAV has learned valuable lessons during the NPI project that are worth sharing with other implementers. Senior management need to be more strategic about deciding and pushing for participation in exchange forums.

One of the biggest challenges NAV currently faces for sustainability is **new opportunity development**. Although NAV has received funding for three out of the four proposals it developed in the past year, future funding for the NPI project remains in question. Staff are too occupied with managing their duties to focus on soliciting further funds and many lack the English language skills to develop competitive proposals. This is an issue that will be raised with NCA in the near future.

## 2.6 Program Management

With regards to program management, NAV gave itself top scores for **donor compliance** and **technical reporting**, despite citing concerns about the quality of some technical data (to be addressed in 2.7). **Sub-grant management** processes are also strong, with lots of written guidance and staff oversight to support sub-grantees in managing their awards. An opportunity moving forward is to build sub-grantee capacity to monitor and report cost-share (see also 2.4).

The biggest area for improvement in program management is in **referrals**. Although NAV and FBO partners have some referral relationships with service providers in Hue, they still have a lot more work to do in terms of mapping out and formalizing relationships with service providers in Hanoi and HCMC. Once mapping exercises are complete, NAV has identified a number of steps that it needs to take to formalize referral relationships and to verify the uptake of referrals and quality of the services provided.

NAV is doing well with **community involvement**, and would like replicate the exciting work it is doing in Hai Phong to involve people living with HIV in program planning and implementation to other geographic areas where it works. Similarly, NAV would like to build on its model work in **gender** to conduct a planned gender assessment of the NPI project. NAV has tools and training materials on

gender that are well beyond what many organizations have in place. Staff would also like to expand on their experience of interfaith sharing between Catholics and Buddhists to learn more about the **cultures** of other faith communities in Vietnam, including Cao Dai, Muslims, and Protestants.

## 2.7 Project Performance Management

The **NPI implementation status** is generally on track, although staff expressed concerns about reaching some of their target indicators due to changes in M&E guidance during the no cost extension period. Key achievements, challenges and lessons raised in this discussion will be covered in Reflections (see 4). Due to the recent departure of NAV's M&E staff, despite a well documented M&E system, there is considerable concern over **monitoring and evaluation** as well as **quality assurance**. NAV adheres to PEPFAR guidance to set service delivery **standards**, which are documented in NAV's training materials.

NAV's decision to provide master training, which is then disseminated to the field staff responsible for data collection has raised some quality concerns. To mitigate this risk, NAV has developed strong **field oversight** and **supervision** systems for early detection of performance issues. These responsibilities are mostly carried out by NAV staff. They would like to see FBO partners carrying more supervision responsibilities in the future, which will require intensified capacity building. Systematic **quality assurance** has been identified as a weak point and NAV has already assigned staff to form a QA team. However, to date that team has not had time to do anything.

## 3. Action Plan

During the CLOCA, NAV brainstormed actions to feed into their strategic planning process. For each sub-domain, NAV staff were asked to recommend actions and identify a key person who would be responsible. These were then summarized in a wrap-up document that was emailed to NAV, with AED and USAID representatives copied.

Despite relatively high scores in most sub-domains, NAV staff were able to identify and recommend a number of clear actions that will contribute to the further development and professionalization of the organization. NAV is now in the process of finalizing the plans to set priority levels, timelines and assign individuals as necessary. The finalized plan will be shared with AED and USAID once complete, which is expected at the end of August.

## 4. Reflections

After scoring each CLOCA sub-domain, NAV staff came together to reflect on the key achievements, challenges, and lessons from the NPI project. Those staff who were with the project since its inception were encouraged to reflect on changes over time. Some of the key reflections from this session as well as from discussions throughout the CLOCA are highlighted below:

### **Professionalization of NAV**

From the time of NAV's pre-award assessment until the CLOCA, NAV has taken great strides to professionalize its operations in Vietnam. Financial and administrative policies have been strengthened

to comply with USAID rules and regulations. Finance staff now feel confident to face external audits. Despite frustrations with the audit process, one staff declared, *“If we can survive a USAID audit, we can survive any audit.”* Another key achievement has been the improved documentation of program work, including technical and organizational capacity building training curricula, which supports both change management and knowledge management. It has not always been easy to keep track of changing PEPFAR indicators and guidelines, but staff expressed pride in the development of their M&E system and their working relationship with the local mission to comply with USAID requirements. Furthermore, the process of managing and building the capacity of sub-grantees, has motivated NAV staff to develop themselves professionally. It was clear during the CLOCA that staff take great pride in their work and generally enjoy the working environment NAV provides.

### **Changed Perceptions**

The idea of FBOs having a role to play in Vietnam was met with skepticism when the NPI project began in 2006. Government authorities were slow to approve project activities and even some FBO leaders were reluctant to assign clergy to participate in HIV-related activities. The role of clergy has been considered to be religious duties such as praying, and not social work. NAV struggled to get its coordination boards running and other INGOs did not believe that NAV would be able to implement the program and comply with USAID regulations.. Some staff even admit that when they began working for the project, they doubted that FBOs would be able to work in the field of HIV. Now, in 2010, NAV and their partners feel that they have witnessed a significant change in attitude. Through transparent programming, there is growing recognition and support for the work of FBOs, with high level Fatherland Front officials participating in project events and other faiths, e.g. Muslim and Protestant, expressing an interest in partnering with NAV to initiate similar programs. A soon-to-be published book on the role of FBOs in Vietnam’s HIV response has garnered attention from high-level authorities in the Communist Party. NAV staff emphasized that this would not have been possible without the long process of developing trust relationships with government on one side and faith based communities on the other.

### **Increased Service Delivery to PLHIV**

NPI has enabled the scaling up of prevention, care and support services to people living with and affected by HIV in six provinces through developing a new cadre of care providers. FBOs, which are well-established in communities and will remain once funding ends, are now sensitized to Vietnam’s HIV epidemic and have improved skills to address prevention, care and support. NAV counts as one of its great achievements the gradual shift of FBO work from charity to social work approaches. While this shift is not complete, they have been encouraged by the growing openness of FBOs to this approach, which is more client-centered. The NPI project has seen the impressive growth in FBO clergy taking part in HIV activities. In HCMC, for example, monk and nun involvement grew from four to 21 individuals over the course of the project. In particular, care and support services are well documented and followed-up.

## Annex 1. NAV CLOCA Participant List and Session Assignment

### NAV Names and Positions – CLOCA participants

- Ingunn Brandvoll, Resident Representative
- Nguyen Thi Hong Cam, National Coordinator for HIV/AIDS
- Dang Dieu Tan Trang, Human Resource and Accountability Manager (former National Coordinator for Gender-Based Violence and Community Development)
- Hoang Thanh Mai, Administrator
- Nguyen Thi Hoai, Financial Manager
- Nguyen Minh Phuc, FBO Program Coordinator
- Tran Quang Minh, Program Coordinator for prisons and Alliance of PLHIV (worked previously for the PEPFAR-funded program)
- Le Chi Phuc, FBO Deputy Program Coordinator
- Nguyen Minh Duc, Capacity Building Officer
- Pham Anh Tuan, Project Manager Hai Phong
- Tran Van Phu, Project Manager Quang Ninh
- Le Thi Thuy, Project Officer Hanoi
- Tran Phu Si, Project Officer Hue and Danang
- Pham Thi Phuong (Buddhist name Bich Chau), Deputy FBO Program Coordinator for Buddhists
- Truong Thi Lan (Sister Lan), Field Collaborator for the Catholics in Hue

### NAV CLOCA Session Assignments

<b>CLOCA Section</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
• Governance (NAV is the country office of Norwegian Church Aid, whose Board of Directors is located in Oslo, Norway).	Cam, Ingunn, Trang, Hoai, Mai	26 July
• Administration	Mai, Hoai, Ingunn	26 July
• Human Resources Management	Cam, Ingunn, Trang, Mai	26 July
• Financial Management	Hoai, Chi Phuc	26 July
• Organizational management	Cam, Ingunn, Minh Phuc, Trang	27 July
• Program management	Cam, Minh Phuc, Chi Phuc, Hoai, Quang Minh, Trang	27 July
• Project Performance Management	Cam, Minh Phuc, Chi Phuc, Minh Duc, Tuan, Phu, Thuy, Quang Minh, Si, Nun Bich Chau and Sister Lan	27 July
• Wrap-up	All	27 July

### AED – CLOCA Facilitation

- Sara Nieuwoudt, Technical Manager & Vietnam Field Liaison

### USAID – Observers

- Kenneth Sklaw, USAID/Washington (Activity Manager for WWO)
- Elizabeth Coleclough, USAID/Washington (Intern)
- Le Thi Thu Hien, USAID/Vietnam (Care & Support)



## Annex 2. Table of Scores

CLOCA Scores			
Governance		Administration	
Vision/Mission	3	Operational Policies, Procedures and Systems	3
Organizational Structure	4	Travel Policies and Procedures	4
Board Composition and Responsibilities	NA	Procurement	4
Legal Status	4	Fixed Asset Control	3
Succession Planning	4	Branding and Marking	3
Human Resources Management		Financial Management	
Job Descriptions	3	Financial Systems	4
Recruitment and Retention	2	Financial Controls	4
Staffing Levels	3	Financial Documentation	2
Personnel Policies	3	Audits	4
Staff Time Management	3	Financial Reporting	4
Staff Professional and Salary History	3	Cost Share	4
Staff Salaries and Benefits	3		
Staff Performance Management	1		
Volunteers and Interns	1		
Organizational Management		Program Management	
Strategic Planning	4	Donor Compliance	4
Workplan Development	4	Sub-Grant Management	3
Change Management	3	Technical Reporting	4
Knowledge Management	3	Referral	2
Stakeholder Involvement	3	Community Involvement	3
New Opportunity Development	3	Culture and Gender	3
Communication	4		
Decision Making	3		
Project Performance Management			
NPI Project Implementation Status			3
Field Oversight			4
Standards			3
Supervision			4
Monitoring and Evaluation			3
Quality Assurance			2