Roles and Contribution of Viet Nam Civil Society and NGO Toward Social Welfare: Challenges and Opportunities for Middle-Income Countries

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Introduction: The paper explores governance and service models addressing Vietnam's social needs, particularly following its 2015 reclassification as a Middle-Income Country. This status shift precipitated a sharp decline in international aid, necessitating new sustainable frameworks. Drawing comparisons to the United States, where a robust culture of philanthropy supports a vast NGO sector, we examine the potential for civil society to fill these service gaps in Vietnam. Specifically, this research investigates the capacity of NGOs to meet population needs and analyzes current professional and public attitudes toward contributing time and resources to charitable causes.

Methodology: This study employs a literature review and qualitative analysis of public reports and interviews to assess the preparedness of civil society and NGOs following the transition to Middle-Income Country status. Data collection included interviews with ten consenting adults—four Americans and six Vietnamese—regarding responsibility for social well-being, citizen contributions, and personal and perceived national attitudes toward donating time or resources to social programs.

Results: Collected data will be proceeded through master thematic analysis. The cultural family system in Viet Nam is more inwardly focused, where the well-being of the family across generations is centered. Unlike the American concept of the nuclear family, care and concern in a larger and wider family kin are the presumed and assumed responsibility of the collective kin. In the Viet sample, the citizens expect the government to provide the necessary resources and policies to ensure social well-being. Nearly all would consider donation money to a specific event but not a universal calling. The data illustrate a sharp contrast with the American attitude toward charity contribution.

Conclusion: This study highlights the evolving yet limited role of civil society and NGOs in Viet Nam as the country transitions to middle-income status. Our findings underscore that while Vietnamese citizens still largely expect the government to lead in ensuring social well-being, there is a lack of a widespread culture of charitable giving—contrasting with contexts like the United States where citizen and private sector contributions play a significant role in social service provision. This suggests that civil society in Viet Nam is at a pivotal moment. As international aid declines, there is both a challenge and an opportunity to build a stronger, more engaged civil sector with diversified sources of support. This study adds to the body of knowledge by offering a culturally grounded lens through which to assess and strengthen the role of non-state actors in advancing universal welfare goals.

Practical Value: The study explores implications for professions dedicated to societal wellbeing, specifically examining universal welfare and social protection frameworks advocated by international bodies like the International Labor Organization. It highlights the global consensus on the benefits of social security and the necessity of prioritizing these protections as key components of national expenditure.

Direction for Future Research: Extensive research into cultural attitudes toward charity and social welfare in middle-income countries is essential to strengthen civil society. Current findings reveal how sociocultural norms, government structures, and donor transitions interact to shape the sustainability of NGOs. Ultimately, ensuring these organizations thrive requires cultivating a national culture of giving, building trust in civic institutions, and establishing supportive policy environments.

Keywords: civil society, charity giving, universal welfare, Vietnam, qualitative research, literature review

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