

A REDUCING POLLUTION CASE STUDY

SUPPORTING COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN VIETNAM

Phase I: Discovery

This case study series aims to inform development practitioners and donors seeking to use a collective impact approach to support local stakeholders to lead efforts to enact their own agendas, leading to lasting change.

Goal: Mobilize cross-sectoral action on environmental issues in Vietnam

Vietnam's rapid social and economic development has led to significant environmental pollution challenges, including poor urban air quality, contamination of surface water and groundwater, and ocean plastic pollution. The people of Vietnam are increasingly concerned about their local air and water quality. In response, the Government of Vietnam (GVN) passed the 2020 Law on Environmental Protection and accompanying National Action Plans related to air quality, water conservation, and plastic waste pollution. Given the complexity of the issues, broad cooperation between the GVN, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scientists, and community groups is needed to address environmental pollution challenges.

Intervention: Engage stakeholders in collective impact initiatives

The USAID Reducing Pollution project, a five-year effort implemented by Winrock International, is supporting locally-driven initiatives to reduce environmental pollution in Vietnam through a collective impact approach. Reducing Pollution is being implemented in three phases: Discovery, Organizing for Action, and Implementation. This case study explores how the project is adapting and implementing collective impact in Vietnam during the Discovery Phase.

What is Collective Impact?

Collective impact is the commitment of a group of actors from across society to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration. Collective impact has five key characteristics:



A **common agenda** that reflects a shared vision for change;



A **shared measurement system** to track progress and ensure accountability;



Mutually reinforcing activities that leverage each organization's strengths;

Continuous communication to build trust; and

Support from a local **Backbone Organization** that leads the process of convening and coordinating participating partners.



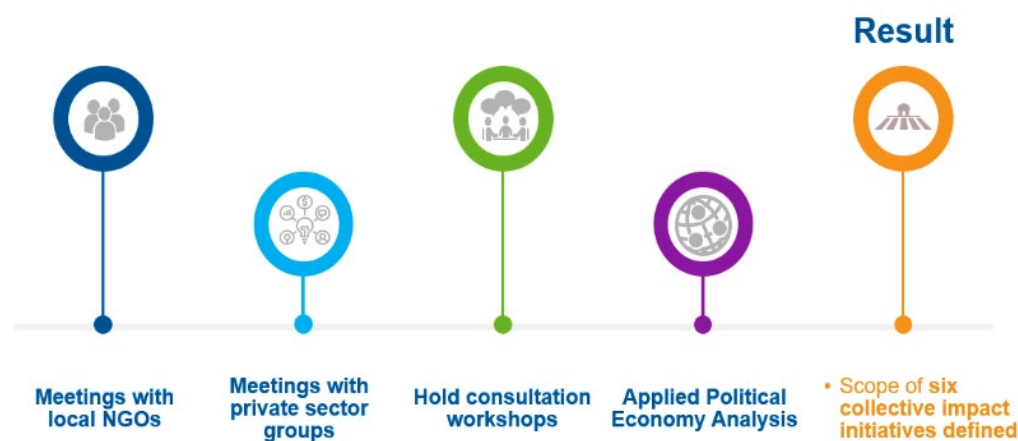
Photo: Project launching event, November 15, 2022

Why did Reducing Pollution use a “Discovery Phase” to create a foundation for collective impact?

The Discovery Phase is used to assess the readiness of an issue for a collective impact approach and determine if there is consensus to move forward with a specific initiative. An issue is ready for collective impact when there is urgency for change related to a complex problem; a history of collaboration among cross-sector partners; resources available to support partner efforts; stakeholder champions with an interest in building a collective impact coalition; and supportive leaders in the government and other key sectors.¹

Most USAID-funded projects start with a specific geographic and/or technical focus areas. For Reducing Pollution, the geographic and technical scope was intentionally left open to allow local stakeholders to provide guidance through a broad consultative process.

What steps did Reducing Pollution take to implement the Discovery Phase?



The project team began with ten critical environmental pollution issues identified through consultation with the Vietnam Environment Administration (VEA), USAID, and other technical experts. The team created a systems map of stakeholders to identify key stakeholders who should be consulted, and held a series of meetings and workshops. During the consultation

meetings, the Reducing Pollution team emphasized that the input collected would help define collective impact initiatives, which the stakeholders would then have the opportunity to implement.

In parallel with the consultation meetings, the team commissioned Vietnam National University’s Central Institute for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies to conduct an Applied Political Economy Analysis (APEA).² The APEA included key informant interviews with 31 representatives of central and provincial governments, NGOs, scientists, and private companies. The APEA provided a deeper understanding of the complex political, economic, social, and cultural influences that have created the context for significant environmental pollution in Vietnam and identified entry points and opportunities to address these pollution issues.

¹ [Collective Action in Programming: A Practical Guide for USAID Missions](#), May 2022

² [Thinking And Working Politically Through Applied Political Economy Analysis: A Guide for Practitioners](#), April 2018

Identification of six collective impact initiatives

Based on the Discovery Phase consultations and the APEA recommendations, the Reducing Pollution team worked closely with USAID and VEA to agree on the final set of priority topics for the project:



1. Plastic waste and Extended Producer Responsibility

The initiative will facilitate the implementation of policy on plastic waste management and pilot models on household waste classification in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.



4. Air pollution from open burning

This initiative applies integrated multi-sectoral and technological solutions to treat domestic solid waste and agricultural by-products to reduce uncontrolled open-burning activities and related negative impacts on community health in Hanoi and Hai Duong province.



2. Developing a circular economy model to reduce plastic waste from hospitals

The initiative supports reducing medical plastic waste and increasing the percentage of recycled and re-used medical plastic waste through a sustainable plastic waste management model in healthcare facilities in the northern and southern provinces of Vietnam, creating a sustainable and efficient circular economy ecosystem.



5. Reducing pollution at metal processing and recycling craft villages

The initiative aims to minimize environmental pollution for metal processing and recycling craft villages by appropriate technological measures and best environmental practices (BEP) and supporting policies on waste management at the craft villages in the north of Vietnam.



3. Air pollution from road transportation

The Project supports efforts addressing air pollution from transportation in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and development of improved national vehicle emissions standards.



6. Creating a nationwide transparent environmental data disclosure platform

This initiative develops a platform for environmental data disclosure and monitoring, thereby enhancing transparency, strengthening capacity and coordination among government agencies, businesses, and communities in controlling and reducing pollution.

Discovery Phase Best Practices

The Reducing Pollution team identified the following as best practices for implementing the Discovery Phase of collective impact:

- Use a collaborative approach with the host government, aligning the project with government priorities to support future phases;
- Use the Discovery Phase to begin to link the three main stakeholder groups of government, private sector, and communities;
- Leverage expertise across sectors by conducting multiple meetings, using repeated interactions to build trust among stakeholders; and
- Conduct an applied political economy analysis to allow the project team and partners to carefully consider opportunities and risks, and to add credibility to the final selection of focus areas/topics.

Discovery Phase Challenges

Understanding collective impact. At project start-up, the Reducing Pollution team found they needed time to absorb the meaning of collective impact internally.

The team had a training session with a US-based facilitator of collective impact. During the training they examined case studies of successful collective impact initiatives and did hands-on exercises to assess the readiness of problems for collective impact and draft guiding principles for using collective impact to address environmental pollution issues.

“We needed to make sure our own team felt confident explaining what collective impact is, so we could help people get enthusiastic about it.”

Brian Bean, Chief of Party

Explaining collective impact to stakeholders.

Another challenge was explaining the collective impact approach to stakeholders, which took time and effort. The team facilitated each meeting carefully to ensure that all stakeholders had the chance to share their input. As with any group, some participants spoke up more than others. This challenge is likely to continue throughout the collective impact process.

“People need to understand what the collective impact means; it requires many meetings to explain to people.”

Ngoc Pham, Collective Impact Director

“The most difficult part is how to allow an equal position and voice for the different stakeholders.”

Nga Doan, Finance and Operations Director

Building local capacity through the APEA.

The Reducing Pollution team designed the APEA process with the intention of adding value in three ways: 1) supporting localization by contracting a local organization; 2) building the capacity of the local organization in the process of carrying out the APEA; and 3) generating a product that could be openly and freely discussed with key GVN partners. Points one and three were successful, with a local university institute completing the APEA, and MONRE/VEA partners involved in key discussions about the resulting report and recommendations. Point two had limited success, and in hindsight there may have been other opportunities for Winrock staff/experts to work side-by-side with the APEA team to facilitate more clear conclusions and other key analysis steps.

Securing project approval from GVN.

The Reducing Pollution team had hoped that the Discovery Phase could run in parallel with the GVN Overseas Development Assistance project approval process. Typically, the approval process takes about one year, and until the project is approved, only planning and consultation activities are permitted.

In general, the Discovery Phase matched well with the project approval timeline, as year one was devoted to stakeholder consultation and the APEA. However, the Reducing Pollution Project Document (the main input for the project approval process) was expected to have a relatively high level of detail about geographic and technical scope so that GVN reviewers could approve it. Since Reducing Pollution was very broadly defined and lacked this detail, there were delays in Project Document development and review. Significant negotiation, communication, and compromise was required to find an acceptable level of detail in the Project Document and secure approval.

