

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION (CSOs) AND THEIR POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENHANCING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK IN VIETNAM

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1. Introduction

For years the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Vietnam which have emerged and developed along the course of national development history have implemented many charity-based activities in caring and supporting people who are facing troubles in their life, including children, disabled people, HIV victims, and etc. Not until current an increasing official and public attention has been paid to the role of the CSOs including social organizations, mass organizations and NGOs in dealing with contemporary development issues emerged from a changing socio-economic context especially when the Vietnamese state has tried to minimize their role in some areas, especially social aspects (Norlund, 2007).

In the face of increasingly critical social issues under a changing socio-economic context of Vietnam especially since Doi Moi Revolution, it requires people who work in social sector to be professionally trained. For this reason, social work has been trained in a number of universities throughout the country since early 2000s; and recognized a profession by the government through the Decision 32/2010/QĐ-TTg dated 25th March 2010. Currently, the drive to professionalizing social work is urgently needed so that social workers are capable of dealing with such growing social issues and to socio-economic development. In fact, the process of professionalizing social work in Vietnam is at very early stage and needs much more supports and encouragement from different socio-economic sectors both national and international. The question ‘whether civil society organizations which played an crucial importance to dealing with social issues in the past, can contribute to enhancing the profession of social work in Vietnam or not?’ is critical. This paper is intended to address this question. In particularly, through reviewing current studies and reports it looks at the traditional and emerging roles of CSOs in current society and examines their possibility to shift from ‘traditional social actors’ to ‘supporters’ of professional social work.

2. Recognition of civil society organizations and their role in Vietnamese society

2.1. CSOs in Vietnam

It is widely defined that civil society is commonly defined as “the area outside the family, market and state”. In reality, how the term ‘civil society’ is also understood largely depends on specific countries and regions with their distinctive socio-economic and political characteristics. In current Vietnam, there is not a clear definition on civil society; therefore classifying social civil organizations is a critical issue. Norlund (2007) takes account of the functions of organizations in society to identify CSOs, which is to say that it