

# **Vietnamese-American Diaspora Philanthropy to Vietnam**

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# Vietnamese-American Diaspora Philanthropy to Vietnam

## I. Introduction and Coverage

The objectives of this study, along with other diaspora philanthropy studies in particular countries being prepared under the auspices of The Philanthropy Initiative and supported by the Hewlett Foundation, are “to document and analyze diaspora giving from the United States back to the country of origin,” in this case Vietnam, and “to provide recommendations on how to increase the quantity and impact of diaspora giving” by Vietnamese-Americans back to Vietnam.

In contrast to such Asian countries as China,<sup>1</sup> India,<sup>2</sup> the Philippines,<sup>3</sup> and Pakistan,<sup>4</sup> where there is already a growing body of work on diaspora giving back to those countries, particularly from the United States, this appears to be the first formal research paper on Vietnamese-American diasporic giving back to Vietnam. This is an initial effort, clearly subject to reinterpretation as new data and perspectives emerge, and particularly as the Vietnamese American community and knowledgeable Vietnamese in Vietnam, begin to write their own history of their own work in diaspora giving back to Vietnam.

But other researchers and activists have already made valuable contributions to our initial understanding of Vietnamese-American giving back to Vietnam. Le Xuan Khoa’s valuable commentaries have enlightened the picture,<sup>5</sup> as have discussions by

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the chapters on China in Geithner, Chen and Johnson (eds.), Diaspora Philanthropy and Equitable Development in China and India (Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., the chapters on India in Geithner, Chen and Johnson (eds.), Diaspora Philanthropy and Equitable Development in China and India (Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University, 2005); Priya Viswanath, Diaspora Indians: On The Philanthropy Fast Track (Mumbai: Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy, 2003); R. Gopa Kumar, Indian Diaspora and Giving Patterns of Indian Americans in USA (New Delhi: Charities Aid Foundation, India, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., *Tapping Diaspora Philanthropy to Benefit Civil Society in the Homeland: The Ayala Foundation USA Experience* (Ayala Foundation USA, 2006); the Philippine Diaspora Philanthropy Portal at [www.filipinodiasporagiving.org/](http://www.filipinodiasporagiving.org/), and the diaspora philanthropy issue of the Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium’s APPC Post, October 2004, at [www.asianphilanthropy.org/pdfs/post/appcpostissue18.pdf](http://www.asianphilanthropy.org/pdfs/post/appcpostissue18.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Adil Najam, Portrait of a Giving Community: Philanthropy by the Pakistani-American Diaspora (Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University, 2006); Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy, *Philanthropy by Pakistani Diaspora in the USA* (2005), digested at [www.pabe.org/pcp-summary.pdf](http://www.pabe.org/pcp-summary.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See the very useful work by Le Xuan Khoa, including *Normalization of Relations Between the Overseas Vietnamese and Vietnam* (November 2001), at [www.giaodiem.com/doithoai/lexuankhoa.htm](http://www.giaodiem.com/doithoai/lexuankhoa.htm); *Vietnamese Expatriates and Vietnam: Challenges and Opportunities*, Review of Vietnamese Studies (November 2002); *Statement by Professor Le Xuan Khoa at the Reception of the VA NGO Lifetime Achievement Award* (November 2005); *Vietnamese Americans’ Charity and Social Development Work in Vietnam* (December 2005), at [www.va-ngo.org/vjmla/](http://www.va-ngo.org/vjmla/).

others on Vietnamese-American giving back to Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> Reports issued as part of institution-building efforts to knit together supportive elements of the Vietnamese-American community to give more back to Vietnam and in diverse ways have contributed to the knowledge base as well,<sup>7</sup> and the occasional reference to aspects of Vietnamese diaspora giving in comparative contexts.<sup>8</sup>

I recognize those important contributions with gratitude and have learned much from them, as this paper clearly shows. I have also benefited greatly from interviews with a number of Vietnamese Americans active in diaspora giving back to Vietnam. I am grateful for their time and candor.

## II. The Vietnamese Diaspora

### Migration and Demographic Profile

In numerical terms there was no significant Vietnamese diaspora until the 1960s. In the early and mid twentieth century, small numbers of Vietnamese emigrated for political, economic and family reasons to France, China, Thailand, the United States and other countries. But the émigré life of Vietnamese has long been celebrated in Vietnam, most particularly in the case of Ho Chi Minh, who roamed Europe and Asia (and by rumor and myth in Vietnam, the United States) before returning to Vietnam in the 1940s.

As of 2005, about three million people were living in the Vietnamese diaspora, in the following countries, according to official Vietnamese government statistics:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Nguyen Hoai Duc Tri, MD, *Returning to Vietnam: An Alternate Perspective* (2002); and *Perspectives of the VMA [Vietnamese Medical Association], From a Younger Physician* (2002); ThuQuyen Dinh, *My Viet Nam* (December 2005), available at [www.va-ngo.org/vjmla](http://www.va-ngo.org/vjmla).

<sup>7</sup> The most important of these documents, discussed extensively in Section III, are those issued by the Vietnamese-American Non-Governmental Organizations Network (VANGO) and its affiliates. See Pacific Links Foundation, *Report on the First Vietnamese American Nongovernmental Organization Conference (May 7-9, 2004) and VA NGO Network Activities (September 2003-May 2005); Executive Summary and Post Conference Statement* issued after the first conference of Vietnamese American NGOs in May 2004; Le Xuan Khoa's address, *Vietnamese Americans' Charity and Social Development Work in Vietnam* (delivered at the second conference of Vietnamese American NGOs, November 2005); *VA NGO Collaborations 2004-05* (November 2005); Charles R. Bailey, *Opening Remarks at the Second Conference of Vietnamese American NGOs* (November 2005), all available at [www.va-ngo.org/vjmla](http://www.va-ngo.org/vjmla).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., references in Sidel, *Refocusing on the State: Government Responses to Diaspora Philanthropy*, in Merz, Chen and Geithner (eds.), *Diaspora and Development* (Harvard University Global Equity Initiative, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> Data from the Committee on Overseas Vietnamese (Ban Viet Kieu), Hanoi, cited in Dang Nguyen Anh, *Enhancing the Development Impact of Migrant Remittances and Diaspora: The Case of Vietnam*, *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 20:3 (April 2005), at <http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/journal/2005/No3/DevelopmentImpactOfMigrant.pdf>.

Thus the Vietnamese diaspora in the United States is by far the largest group outside Vietnam. And those numbers have grown very quickly over time. As late as 1945, there were only a couple of hundred Vietnamese in the United States. The numbers began to grow in the 1960s, as students from the south, war brides and others came to the United States, and shot up in the early 1970s and particularly with the refugee flows in the immediate post-war era. Between 1970 and 2000, more than 1.8 million Vietnamese immigrants and refugees arrived in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

<b><u>The worldwide Vietnamese diaspora, 2005</u></b>	
United States:	1, 300,000
Russia and Eastern Europe:	300,000
France:	250,000
Australia:	245,000
Canada:	200,000
Taiwan:	110,000
Thailand:	100,000
Germany:	100,000
United Kingdom:	40,000
Northern Europe:	30,000
Netherlands:	15,000
Belgium:	12,000
Japan:	12,000

In 2000 there were 1.1 million Vietnamese in the United States, and 1.4 million by 2005. The median household income of identified Vietnamese Americans in 1990 was \$33,500, “slightly above the national average,” and it doubled from 1980. By 2000 it was over \$47,000. The proportion of Vietnamese in the United States in poverty fell sharply between 1990 and 2000 – from 24% to 14%. While the proportion in poverty among the Vietnamese population was still higher than in the broader population, the gap was narrowing considerably.<sup>11</sup> Proficiency in English had risen from 27% in 1980 to 40% in 1990 to well over 50% in 2000.<sup>12</sup>

### **Patterns of Association**

Patterns of association in the Vietnamese community in the United States are complex and becoming more so as new generations emerge. In the early years of the post-1975 arrival of many Vietnamese, association was based on multiple and overlapping patterns – communities of origin, communities of arrival, religion, occupation, military status among some male arrivals, and other factors. These remain relevant categories.

But they have been joined by new patterns of association, many now represented in organizational forms: communities of young professionals, in various fields, for example, and even online communities of younger Vietnamese, many of whom grew up or were born in the United States. One broad generalization – if it is possible to make

<sup>10</sup> Scott Gold and Mai Tran, *Vietnam Refugees Finally Find Home*, Los Angeles Times, 24 April 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Nhu-Ngoc T. Ong and David S. Meyer, Protest and Political Incorporation: Vietnamese-American Protects, 1975-2001 (Center for the Study of Democracy, University of California, Irvine, 2004), at <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1038&context=csd>.

<sup>12</sup> Scott Gold and Mai Tran, *Vietnam Refugees Finally Find Home*, Los Angeles Times, 24 April 2000.

any such statements about patterns of association in this or any community – is that politics was perhaps a more important facet of life in the original patterns of association than it is today.

### **Vietnamese American Remittances to Vietnam**

It has been particularly difficult over the years to measure Vietnamese American remittances to Vietnam. As the Vietnamese diaspora began returning quietly in the 1970s – cautious of the triple threats of pressure from the dominant anti-Hanoi groups in the Vietnamese American community, the U.S. government embargo, and continuing hardline policies in Hanoi – they brought goods and money with them, usually undeclared at any border. These practices have persisted to this day, even as the three obstacles to Vietnamese American engagement with Vietnam (U.S. government policy, anti-Hanoi forces in the community, and Vietnamese government policy) have eased significantly.

But there is still mistrust about Vietnamese banks or other transfer arrangements, some caution about divisions in the community, and so much remittance transfer remains quiet or off the books. It is also virtually impossible to separate remittances into categories, and thus almost impossible to provide useful estimates for how much of the remittance total is used for family relief, education, small business development, investments, and charitable work. Nor, in the Vietnamese contexts, are these various “uses” necessarily as bounded and distinct as they might be considered in the United States, in part because Vietnamese families and relatives in Vietnam are often responsible for all measure of uses of remittance funds – from land investment to the education of local relatives to charitable donations.

Vietnamese Americans quietly began returning to Vietnam in the 1970s, long before Vietnam’s *doi moi* (renovation) policies took hold in 1986. In 1986 and 1987, as *doi moi* began, only about 8,000 *Viet Kieu* traveled back to Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> By 1992, 80,000 *Viet Kieu* from around the world visited Vietnam. In 1995, 270,000 visited.<sup>14</sup> By 2000, when Vietnam issued 150,000 visas for people in the United States to visit, 130,000 of them were for *Viet Kieu* in the United States.<sup>15</sup> And worldwide, some 360,000 *Viet Kieu* visited Vietnam in 2003.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *New Resolution Further Supports Viet Kieu: Government Official*, [Vietnam News Service](http://vietnamnews.vn/vnnet.vn/2004-04/02/Stories/18.htm), 3 April 2004, at <http://vietnamnews.vn/vnnet.vn/2004-04/02/Stories/18.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> David Lamb, *Viet Kieu, A Bridge Between Two Worlds*, [Los Angeles Times](#), 4 November 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Hegstrom, *An American Tradition; Exiles Raise Funds for Schools in Vietnam*, [Houston Chronicle](#), 17 January 2003.

<sup>16</sup> *Gray Matter: A Golden Asset (Interview with Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Dinh Bin)*, [Vietnam Economy](#), 13 April 2004.

In the mid to late 1980s, the value of remittances home from the Vietnamese diaspora was estimated at about \$100-200 million each year. Those returns continued to rise throughout the 1990s. In 2001, according to official Vietnamese statistics, remittances from overseas Vietnamese totaled \$1.754 billion in 2001, including \$880 million remitted through Ho Chi Minh City banks. The official remittance figure reached \$2.2 billion in 2002, \$2.6-2.7 billion in 2003,<sup>17</sup> and about \$3.2 billion in remittances through formal systems were reported in 2004, some ninety percent in cash, “equivalent to the total export value” in that year. But these remittance figures were incomplete, since they do “not include the amount of remittances, both in kind and cash, sent directly by migrants to their families.”<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, by 2003 and 2004, remittances from overseas Vietnamese exceeded the revenues (after expenses) generated from oil, garment or seafood exports from Vietnam – Vietnam’s three leading commodity exports.<sup>19</sup> Remittances to Ho Chi Minh City alone totaled \$1.85 billion in 2004.<sup>20</sup> By the end of 2004, remittances since 1991 had totaled \$15.5 billion, an amount “equal to 60% of [foreign direct investment] capital and higher than the total disbursed Official Development Assistance (ODA) capital so far. [The 2004] figure of \$3 billion is equivalent to the ODA volume to Vietnam committed by the donors’ community for the 2005 fiscal year.”<sup>21</sup>

In 2003 remittances constituted 7.4% of GDP, 160% of FDI and 13% of commodity export turnover. And remittances were estimated to reach \$3.8b in 2005 – a twenty percent increase over 2004 – and still calculated only through banks and licensed remittance services. Vietnamese leaders now recognize that overseas remittances were “the most powerful and least costly source of foreign capital for Vietnam,” and one government research specialist has forecast \$100 million growth per year in overseas remittances over the next fifteen to twenty years.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Viet Kieu Turn Up With the Goods*, Vietnam Economy, 29 December 2003; Edward Hegstrom, *An American Tradition; Exiles Raise Funds for Schools in Vietnam*, Houston Chronicle, 17 January 2003 (citing Virginia Foote testimony to Congress); *A Good Return from Overseas Vietnamese Remittance*, Vietnam Economy, 4 February 2003. The 2003 activity included 1,274 registered investment projects with registered capital of \$710 million. For an example of the new Vietnamese-American investments, see *Coming Home to Invest*, Vietnam Economy, 10 February 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Dang Nguyen Anh, *Enhancing the Development Impact of Migrant Remittances and Diaspora: The Case of Vietnam*, Asia-Pacific Population Journal 20:3 (April 2005), at <http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/journal/2005/No3/DevelopmentImpactOfMigrant.pdf>. See also *Experts Tell Banks to Profit from Remittances by Overseas Vietnamese*, Vietnam Economy, 21 January 2005.

<sup>19</sup> *Coming Home to Invest*, Vietnam Economy, 10 February 2004.

<sup>20</sup> *Experts Tell Banks to Profit from Remittances by Overseas Vietnamese*, Vietnam Economy, 21 January 2005; *An Integral Part of Vietnam*, Vietnam Economy, 13 April 2004.

<sup>21</sup> *Overseas Remittance Bolsters Vietnam’s Economy*, Vietnam Economy, 4 January 2005.

<sup>22</sup> *Viet Kieu Sending More Money Home*, Vietnam Economy, 27 October 2005.

## II. The Evolution of Vietnamese-American Diaspora Philanthropy

Vietnamese-American giving back to Vietnam has developed and expanded rapidly since the late 1980s, when there was almost no activity, to 2006, when dozens, perhaps even hundreds of formal and informal Vietnamese-American groups are contributing to Vietnam and tens or hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese in the United States are giving back home.

This section discusses the evolution of that giving in three stages – the first, early years, when individuals led the way, some of them acting bravely in a hostile American atmosphere; years of tentative expansion after the normalization of Vietnam-U.S. relations in 1995, and the rapid expansion and acceleration of Vietnamese-American giving has occurred since the typhoons and floods of 1999 and 2000 and then-President Clinton's 2000 Vietnam visit. In each of these stages the report discusses the scale and scope of diaspora giving, where data is available, and such patterns and mechanisms of giving as are discernable from the available reporting and interviews.

### The Early Years of Cautious Engagement, 1986 – 1995

Vietnamese-Americans began returning to Vietnam in very small numbers – and very quietly – in the mid to late 1980s. They recount a suspicious Party and government, expressed through difficulties with visas, surveillance, controls on family visits, a requirement that they live in hotels, and other restrictions.<sup>23</sup> The funds and goods they brought back (and perhaps more rarely, sent back through inconsistent banking and mail channels) were, by all accounts, used largely for family relief, investment in family businesses, education of relatives, and to smooth the way for emigration to the United States or other countries.<sup>24</sup>

In the United States, Vietnamese government representatives at the United Nations and academics and activists who sought better relations with Hanoi were the subject of protests and occasionally violence, including the killing of Tap Van Pham, a newspaper editor, in 1987 in Little Saigon in Orange County.<sup>25</sup>

For Vietnamese-Americans who sought to reconnect with Vietnam, that was best done quietly. And relatively little support went beyond family relief to charity and philanthropy in Vietnam. In any case, few charitable organizations existed to channel

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<sup>23</sup> David Lamb, *Viet Kieu, A Bridge Between Two Worlds*, Los Angeles Times, 4 November 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Interviews with two senior members of the diaspora involved with exchanges and visits to Vietnam for many years.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel C. Tsang, *Little Saigon Slowly Kicking the Redbaiting Habit*, Los Angeles Times, 31 January 1999, at <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~dtsang/redbait.htm>; Nhu-Ngoc T. Ong and David S. Meyer, Protest and Political Incorporation: Vietnamese-American Protects, 1975-2001 (Center for the Study of Democracy, University of California, Irvine, 2004), footnote 11. For an early and important episode, see *Vietnamese Who Supports Hanoi Angers Refugees*, The New York Times, 6 May 1981.

such funds,<sup>26</sup> most religious congregations in Vietnam were not permitted to receive émigré funds or dared not take them, the government was not considered a reliable recipient of émigré charitable assistance, and the focus was on families.

In the early 1990s, the number of Vietnamese-Americans returning to Vietnam began to grow. In this era returning Vietnamese continued to bring funds and goods, and most of those donations still went to family relief, family education, investment in family businesses, and emigration procedures and necessities. But a few channels began to open for the broader social use of remittance funds.

In Ho Chi Minh City, the social services network gathered about Nguyen Thi Oanh and her social work groups received some overseas Vietnamese assistance. An early and senior Vietnamese-American activist, Dao Spencer, brought young Vietnamese-Americans back to Vietnam through the American NGO PACT to reconnect with the country and offer their skills to schools, hospitals and businesses, supported by the Ford Foundation. Vietnamese religious congregations in the United States – Protestant, Catholic, evangelical, Mennonite prominent among them – began to collect funds for religious and social use by their hometown or other fraternal congregations in Vietnam. There were many other channels, many quite private and unknown even to this day beyond the participants.

Vietnamese-Americans were still careful, for the community was still divided, and while protests and violence gradually subsided there remained enormous anger, particularly in older émigré communities, toward the Hanoi government and, by extension, those who returned. But what was once a largely united front against Hanoi had begun to splinter: “There is a real split in the community,” a Vietnamese-American leader told the Chicago Tribune in 1994. “We accept that many people go back to visit their families and do charity work for refugees. But working with the Communist government, that we cannot accept...”<sup>27</sup>

The Los Angeles Times put it well in 1995, just before Vietnam-U.S. relations were normalized: “Young Vietnamese Americans are torn between their parents’ hatred of Communism and a desire to help strengthen a nation they barely know.” “I cannot take away my father’s pain,” one young Vietnamese American said, “and he knows not to try to take away my quest to do something for the country that holds my birthright.”<sup>28</sup>

Helping “strengthen a nation they barely know” was thus an entry point for Vietnamese Americans to reconnect with Vietnam in the early and mid 1990s. Charitable

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<sup>26</sup> For an early discussion of domestic charitable organizations in Vietnam, see Sidel, *The Emergence of a Nonprofit Sector and Philanthropy in Vietnam*, 8 Voluntas: International Journal of Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action 283-302 (September 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Melita Marie Garza, *A Community Divided; Vietnamese Split Over the Embargo*, Chicago Tribune, 13 February 1994.

<sup>28</sup> Lily Dizon, *Divided Loyalties*, Los Angeles Times, 2 May 1995.



and philanthropic activities remained largely ad hoc, episodic, and particularly difficult to trace. Some returning young people worked with Hope International and other groups in Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>29</sup> The Vietnamese-American community was not then – nor now – exceptionally wealthy, and that limited the amounts returning home. And, of course, some Vietnamese-American giving remained in the United States, in Vietnamese, religious or other communities. But, gradually, diaspora giving – through funds and through services – was beginning to grow in scale and broadening in scope.

Vietnamese government policies began to change as well, further spurring *Viet Kieu* remittances, investment, and charitable giving. In the early 1990s there was a 5% tax on funds sent back through banking channels by overseas Vietnamese. That tax on remittances was abrogated in the 1990s and the government began to actively encourage *Viet Kieu* engagement with the economy in all forms. By the mid-1990s the “*Viet Kieu* economy amounted to \$20 billion a year” and was growing rapidly each year. Remittances were growing as well, though the precise figures were shrouded in cash carried in pockets and bags.<sup>30</sup>

An initial effort was TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals), initially promoted by the United Nations. It has brought several hundred overseas Vietnamese professionals to Vietnam to assist in domestic professional and development activities. While the number of TOKTEN experts is not large, the program has played a role in reintroducing overseas Vietnamese professionals to the nation, including some who had fled in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>31</sup>

### **Expanding Giving after Normalization, 1995 – 2000, and the Beginnings of Collective Action**

Vietnamese American giving back to Vietnam continued to grow in the mid 1990s, as American engagement with Vietnam thickened and, in 1995, the United States and Vietnam re-established diplomatic relations. Many more visits home took place, and a slowly growing number of Vietnamese Americans returned to live and work in Vietnam. Émigrés brought money back for churches and temples and to support social services. A growing number of Vietnamese Americans began to work directly with some of the growing number of local charitable institutions.

There were literally hundreds of such examples of direct charitable action. One young Los Angeles émigré established a small school to teach children English and mathematics.<sup>32</sup> A Colorado-based Vietnamese American named Binh Nguyen met a

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<sup>29</sup> Id.

<sup>30</sup> David Lamb, *Viet Kieu, A Bridge Between Two Worlds*, Los Angeles Times, 4 November 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Dang Nguyen Anh, *Enhancing the Development Impact of Migrant Remittances and Diaspora: The Case of Vietnam*, Asia-Pacific Population Journal 20:3 (April 2005), at <http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/journal/2005/No3/DevelopmentImpactOfMigrant.pdf>, p. 117.

<sup>32</sup> David Lamb, *Viet Kieu, A Bridge Between Two Worlds*, Los Angeles Times, 4 November 1997.

group of Vietnamese nuns caring for orphans in the south during her first trip home in 1994; over the next three years she donated more than \$7,000 and raised at least \$14,000 more for the orphans. She also “founded a free clinic to help the poorest of the poor in Saigon ... and [worked] to reopen the same private high school in Saigon that she attended.” The free clinic was opened with the proceeds from 2,800 eggrolls sold at an annual ethnic food festival. Other funds have been raised at church presentations. The Vietnamese government welcomed her support.<sup>33</sup>

Collective efforts among Vietnamese Americans to provide charity to Vietnam were slow in starting – most efforts from the late 1990s to about 1997 appear to be individual, family-based or – as in the case of Binh Nguyen mentioned above – including a few friends together attracting donations for projects back home.

But individual and family activity began to turn to collective action in the fall of 1997, when Typhoon Linda hit southern Vietnam, killing 3,700 Vietnamese, destroying 100,000 homes and many villages, and leaving thousands without homes, “the deadliest typhoon to hit Southeast Asia in a century.”<sup>34</sup> The change in attitude toward working with Vietnam had been long and gradual in coming, and even the year before, in 1996, some Vietnamese American groups had been criticized by others in the community for raising funds for relief of flood victims.

But the Typhoon Linda effort brought together a considerably wider swath of the community than before. At least \$155,000 was contributed by the Vietnamese American community in Los Angeles through the International Red Cross. Large contributions also flowed in from Vietnamese communities in San Jose and Houston, with plans to raise over half a million dollars. “[W]ith this year’s relief mission, we are changing the community’s course,” a community activist told the Los Angeles Times.<sup>35</sup>

Some of this community activity was related to the scope of the disaster, and some may have been related to the fact that it occurred in the south, the origin of many Vietnamese Americans. But it was sizable nonetheless, and it was aided by U.S.-based community groups delivering aid directly to victims in Vietnam, forestalling concerns

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<sup>33</sup> *Champion for the ‘Dust of Life’; Vietnam Expatriate Adopts Orphanage in Former Homeland*, The Denver Post, 19 March 1996. “...[I]n Vietnam there is a saying that for every beginning there has to be an end, for every up a down, every high a low. My beginning in Saigon didn’t have an end. I never properly said goodbye to anyone or anything. So, for years the thing nagging at me was that I need to go back and properly say goodbye.”

<sup>34</sup> Tini Tran, *Watching Aid Dollars at Work; Charity: County’s Red Cross Chief sees Post-Typhoon Suffering in Vietnam and How Local Donations Have Eased It*, Los Angeles Times, 23 June 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Tini Tran, *Disaster Spurs O.C. Vietnamese Aid Effort; Charity: Immigrant Community, Once Wary of Aiding Communist Government, Responds to Help Typhoon Victims in Their Homeland*, Los Angeles Times, 7 December 1997; Tini Tran, *Watching Aid Dollars at Work; Charity: County’s Red Cross Chief sees Post-Typhoon Suffering in Vietnam and How Local Donations Have Eased It*, Los Angeles Times, 23 June 1998.

about government taxation, corruption and other issues.<sup>36</sup> Of course, political conflict within the community continued as well, spilling over in February 1999 when a Vietnamese American video store owner hung a poster of Ho Chi Minh and the official Vietnamese flag on the wall of his store. And even in 1999, “Vietnamese Americans who work with charities that deliver aid and medical treatment to poor people in Vietnam are reluctant to speak publicly about it for fear they would antagonize some people in the community.”<sup>37</sup>

The community came together once again in 1999, when floods devastated central Vietnam, displacing two million people and destroying half a million homes. Flood relief activities may have raised millions of dollars in Vietnamese-American communities in 1999 and 2000. A relief fundraiser that drew prominent singers from the Vietnamese American community raised over \$63,000 from 1,000 attendees in November 1999.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after, a walkathon raised another \$100,000 for flood relief, as organizers promised to deliver the funds to victims through religious groups in Vietnam to “bypass the government.” The effort was not only sizable but multi-generational, as Vietnamese American families marched and donated together.<sup>39</sup>

By 2000, the year the Vietnam-U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement was signed and five years after normalization, tens of thousands of Vietnamese Americans were eagerly returning to Vietnam each year, among them thousands of second generation *Viet Kieu* interested in helping their homeland.<sup>40</sup> Flood relief activities continued and became more organized, to prevent fraud and leakage of funds in the United States and Vietnam. Some relief activities appear to have become more clustered in churches and the religious community, to prevent funds from being siphoned off by anti-Hanoi groups in the United States or corrupt officials in Vietnam.

“The money goes to the churches without going through Communist officials,” a Westminster Vietnamese community leader told the Los Angeles Times. “That is one of the donors’ biggest concerns.” A concert raised \$100,000, and a single Santa Ana Vietnamese church raised over \$20,000. The pastor then traveled to Vietnam, to

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<sup>36</sup> Id., Los Angeles Times, 23 June 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Carol Morello, *Turmoil in Little Saigon; Conflict over [Ho Chi Minh] Poster Stirs Up Vietnamese Community*, USA Today, 16 February 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Thuy-Doan Le, *Event Pulls in \$63,500 for Vietnam Flood Relief*, Los Angeles Times, 14 November 1999.

<sup>39</sup> H.G. Reza, *Steps to Recovery; In Walkathon, 3,000 Vietnamese Americans Raise Funds for Flood Relief in Their Homeland*, Los Angeles Times, 31 December 1999.

<sup>40</sup> For a good sense of the second generation’s emotional ties to Vietnam in these years, see Hieu Tran Phan, *Connections to Homeland are Intense, Idealistic*, Orange County Register, 31 May 2000. See also Ilene R. Prusher, *Return of the Vietnamese Who Fled*, Christian Science Monitor, 20 November 2000.

distribute the funds through churches in the Mekong Delta. These patterns were repeated in Vietnamese American communities across the country.<sup>41</sup>

Part of the fear was that corrupt anti-Communist activists or corrupt officials in Vietnam would siphon off some of the aid money. But another concern was the continuing tax imposed by Vietnamese authorities on aid funds. Seeking to avoid the tax, siphoning, and any ties to the Vietnamese government (for funds channeled through the Red Cross, for example, were re-channeled through the Vietnamese Red Cross), community leaders in the flood relief movement, pastors, NGO leaders and others found their own channels to get aid.<sup>42</sup>

In response, the Vietnamese government eliminated the tax on remittances and relief and stepped up its contacts with Vietnamese American community leaders doing relief and philanthropic work back home.<sup>43</sup> In 2000, the government began eliminating the “two-tiered pricing system that offer[ed] lower prices to Vietnamese than to foreigners for travel and many other services.”<sup>44</sup>

### **The Acceleration and Organization of Vietnamese-American Diaspora Philanthropy, 1999-2006**

Over the next several years, diaspora giving to Vietnam continued to grow, even after the impetus of the 1999 typhoon and the 2000 floods began to fade. Individuals and families continued to send money for charity, and new organizations formed as the community’s attitude toward contact with Vietnam continued to relax. The newer diaspora giving was more organized, more ambitious, and more institutionally linked in the United States and in Vietnam – to other Vietnamese American NGOs, and to broader domestic and international NGOs eager to help and to work in Vietnam.

These developments were facilitated by a steady reduction in bureaucratic procedures and limitations on Vietnamese-American investment and other activity in Vietnam, and extensive reaching out to the *Viet Kieu* community by the Vietnamese leadership. There were a number of indicators of quickening official interest in the *Viet Kieu* community.

#### *Changing Vietnamese Policies*

Several steps had already been taken – elimination of the tax on remittances and relief, for example, and of differential pricing that at time affected and often angered overseas Vietnamese. In November 2001, restrictions on the buying of homes by

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<sup>41</sup> Mai Tran, *Vietnam Aid Efforts Becoming Tougher Sell*, Los Angeles Times, 29 October 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Id.

<sup>43</sup> Kinh Luan, *San Francisco, HCMC Enhance Ties*, Saigon Times Daily, 27 February 2001.

<sup>44</sup> Migration News March 2002, cited in Dang Nguyen Anh, footnote 18.

Vietnamese-Americans were clarified and relaxed.<sup>45</sup> In 2001 and 2002, taxes and fees on remittances were further reduced or eliminated.<sup>46</sup> In 2002, Decision 78 of the Prime Minister “was issued to expand the types of institutions that could receive and deliver foreign currency remitted by overseas Vietnamese to their relatives in the country.”<sup>47</sup>

In 2003, the Ho Chi Minh City government gave awards to five French, Belgian, German and American *Viet Kieu* who had “made great contributions to the development of the city’s education, healthcare, agriculture and society.” They included Professor Pham Chung, who taught and provided teaching materials to the Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics.<sup>48</sup> And national leaders continued to press for more favorable treatment of *Viet Kieu* investment and philanthropy, and called for greater efforts by the overseas community.<sup>49</sup>

In June 2003, the Deputy Foreign Minister who concurrently heads the national Committee on Overseas Vietnamese (*Ban Viet Kieu*) visited Vietnamese communities in Washington, Virginia, Houston and San Jose to “open the door wider for overseas Vietnamese ... to return home.”<sup>50</sup> Some powerful localities with significant overseas Vietnamese links – led by Ho Chi Minh City – began pressing harder for “timely” instructions from Hanoi, that “relevant agencies and Viet Kieu be given the chance to comment about any draft policies that affect them,” and, most importantly, that “HCM City authorities be given more power to settle Viet Kieu related issues.”<sup>51</sup> Ho Chi Minh City kept up that pressure for more autonomy into 2005 with a call for more power to grant licenses at the local level for overseas Vietnamese investment.<sup>52</sup>

Most importantly in overall policy terms, recognizing the role that overseas Vietnamese could play in investing and contributing to the nation’s development, the Vietnamese Communist Party issued a formal Party Resolution in April 2004 recognizing the important role that overseas Vietnamese could play in contributing to the nation’s development and seeking to move policy in that direction.

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<sup>45</sup> *Four Groups of Overseas Vietnamese (Viet Kieu) Can Buy House[s] in Vietnam to Live*, Vietnam Economy, 18 February 2003.

<sup>46</sup> *Viet Kieu Turn Up With the Goods*, Vietnam Economy, 29 December 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Dang Nguyen Anh, footnote 18, p. 114.

<sup>48</sup> Tuyet An, *City Praises Excellent Viet Kieu*, Saigon Times Daily, 24 December 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Anh Minh, *State President Calls for Viet Kieu’s Further Investment*, Saigon Times Daily, 16 January 2004.

<sup>50</sup> *Viet Kieu Called On to Return Home*, Vietnam Economy, 18 June 2003.

<sup>51</sup> *A Vast Potential Still Remains*, Vietnam Economy, 15 July 2003.

<sup>52</sup> *‘One-door’ Policy to be Applied for Viet Kieu*, Vietnam Economy, 22 July 2005.

*Resolution 36 on Overseas Vietnamese Affairs*, adopted by the Party's Political Bureau on March 26, 2004,<sup>53</sup> called for relaxing travel and immigration issues, streamlining investment rules, encouraging the purchase of land, houses and other assets, broadening discussion of new policies on overseas Vietnamese to include both the public and the émigré community, providing incentives for financial and other re-engagement, seeking to assist overseas Vietnamese in the protection of their rights overseas, among numerous other measures. The Resolution noted that overseas Vietnamese "contributions to ... national construction, especially their brainpower, are not commensurate with their potential" and called for better policies and conditions to enable those contributions.<sup>54</sup>

Resolution 36 was quickly followed with an Action Program intended to implement the Resolution, and which also called for steps to smooth the way for overseas Vietnamese contributions to the country.<sup>55</sup> As one of the many components of that program, the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Science and Technology convened a workshop of overseas Vietnamese intellectuals in August 2005 to discuss ways of expanding *Viet Kieu* intellectual contributions to Vietnam; at the workshop some of the intellectuals criticized continuing limitations on overseas Vietnamese activities, visa problems and other limitations.<sup>56</sup>

Others chafed at remaining bureaucratic and licensing obstacles to working with overseas Vietnamese, including Ho Chi Minh City, which sought greater authority to approve investment projects and more flexible banking procedures.<sup>57</sup> Further visits to the United States followed as part of the renewed emphasis on engagement with the Vietnamese-American community.<sup>58</sup> And, again explicitly as implementation of Party Resolution 36, the Ho Chi Minh City Committee for Overseas Vietnamese opened an Overseas Vietnamese Club for Science and Technology in HCMC at the end of 2005.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The official Vietnamese and English texts of the Resolution (officially Party Resolution 36/NQ-TW) are at [www.cpv.org.vn](http://www.cpv.org.vn); [www.ubvk.hochiminhcity.gov.vn](http://www.ubvk.hochiminhcity.gov.vn); [www.quehuong.org.vn](http://www.quehuong.org.vn), and other sites.

<sup>54</sup> For an introduction to the Resolution's contents, see *Politburo Affirms Overseas VN as Integral to Nation*, *Vietnam Economy*, 1 April 2004; and *An Integral Part of Vietnam*, *Vietnam Economy*, 13 April 2004.

<sup>55</sup> The Action Program is officially Decision No. 110/2004/QĐ-TTg [of the Prime Minister] Promulgating the Government's Action Program for Implementation of Resolution No. 36/NQ-TW of 26 March 2004 on Overseas Vietnamese Affairs, available at [www.cpv.org.vn](http://www.cpv.org.vn); [vbqpl.moj.gov.vn](http://vbqpl.moj.gov.vn), and other sites. The Action Program is described at *Building Bridges with Overseas Vietnamese*, *Vietnam Economy*, 22 July 2004.

<sup>56</sup> *Overseas Vietnamese Respond to the Call*, *Vietnam Economic News*, 7 September 2005.

<sup>57</sup> *County Needs Viet Kieu Funding: Banking Official*, *Vietnam Economy*, 4 August 2005.

<sup>58</sup> See *NA [National Assembly] to Open Dialogue with Viet Kieu*, *Vietnamnet*, 4 January 2006.

<sup>59</sup> *Overseas Vietnamese Sci-tech club Established*, *Vietnam Economy*, 29 December 2005.

## *The Expansion and Diversification of Giving and its Mechanisms*

As these steps unfolded, Vietnamese-Americans and the resurgent Vietnamese American business community working in Vietnam – primarily in the south – also stepped up its charitable activities, bolstered by the more friendly government policies and the availability of local intermediaries to assist.<sup>60</sup> By mid-2003, a Ho Chi Minh City newspaper reported that “[V]iet [K]ieu contribution is beginning to diversify into social programs such as flood relief, scholarships, support for Agent Orange victims, the families of war martyrs and heroic mothers.”<sup>61</sup> The American and Vietnamese press began to report numerous examples, through many channels, of diasporic giving back to Vietnam.

In 2003, for example, several second generation Vietnamese Americans in Houston founded Sunflower Mission to build schools in the Mekong Delta, seeking initially to construct two schools but planning to “raise \$1 million and build 100 schools in the next five years.”<sup>62</sup> One example of these Vietnamese American donors who were now well grounded in Vietnam, rather than visiting or doing charity work for a few months, is Nguyen Thinh, who founded Pyramid Software Development in Saigon in 2001. But Thinh is perhaps just as well known in Saigon for a range of charitable and educational activities – including establishing the Nguyen Truong To Scholarship Fund, a health program, and other activities.<sup>63</sup>

The increase in domestic charitable groups and the availability of local intermediaries to assist in providing educational, health and other services also helped to strengthen overseas giving. Thousands of local and provincial charitable organizations were formed in Vietnam between the mid 1990s and the midpoint of this decade. A number became useful and trusted conduits for *Viet Kieu* aid. The Sponsoring Association for Poor Patients in Ho Chi Minh City, for example, founded in 1994, helped hundreds of patients in its first ten years, raising 216 billion Vietnamese *dong* for its work. About a third of its expenses were donated from a combination of business associations, companies, churches and temples, and overseas Vietnamese.<sup>64</sup>

The change over twenty years was typified by Ca Van Tran, who emigrated from to the United States in the 1970s. In the 1970s and early 1980s, with “whatever money he could spare from his earnings as a janitor,” Tran “would roll into thin sticks, hide in

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<sup>60</sup> Anh Minh, *State President Calls for Viet Kieu’s Further Investment*, Saigon Times Daily, 16 January 2004; Thanh Phuong, *For the Sake of the Poor Patient*, Saigon Times Daily, 20 February 2004.

<sup>61</sup> *A Vast Potential Still Remains*, Vietnam Economy, 15 July 2003.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Hegstrom, *An American Tradition; Exiles Raise Funds for Schools in Vietnam*, Houston Chronicle, 17 January 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Gia Linh, *Skinhead CEO sees IT a Promising Sector*, Saigon Times Daily, 12 February 2004.

<sup>64</sup> Thanh Phuong, *For the Sake of the Poor Patient*, Saigon Times Daily, 20 February 2004.

tubes of toothpaste and mail to his parents in Vietnam. His methods were rudimentary, but they helped him fulfill a duty many immigrants meet: supporting the family they left behind.” After two decades of hard work, and with his Vietnamese family well on its feet, Tran “realized that it was no longer enough to help just his family.”

In the 1990s Tran established Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH), one of the most prominent of the Vietnamese-American groups working in Vietnam. VNAH rapidly became a leading player in work with the handicapped but also in the types of policy work that many Vietnamese-Americans eschewed until recently. Tran and his colleagues became a conduit of information on nonprofit law, supported by U.S. government funding, and a trusted intermediary in Vietnam’s explorations of a Law on Associations (*Luat ve Hoi*).<sup>65</sup>

There were many other examples, large and small, in the very different environment after about 2000:

- Vietnamese American Le Khanh, who assembles packages of food and staples in Ho Chi Minh City for distribution to “poor, old people and underprivileged children at houses, pagodas and charity centers....”<sup>66</sup>
- Former South Vietnamese general Hoang Van Lac, now a Houston resident, who works with a Vietnamese American group called the Child Support Association to provide medical care to poor Vietnamese children in American tertiary hospitals.<sup>67</sup>
- Cleveland Indians pitcher Danny Graves, perhaps the only Vietnamese-American in major league baseball, worked with Major League Baseball and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund to bring a baseball field and training program to Vietnam.<sup>68</sup>
- Students at six Georgia universities banded together to raise funds and awareness to help victims of human trafficking in Vietnam.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Phuong Ly, *Moving Forward, Giving Back; U.S. Immigrants Become Homeland Philanthropists*, The Washington Post, 4 March 2004; discussions in Hanoi.

<sup>66</sup> *An Overseas Vietnamese Helps the Poor*, Saigon Times Magazine, 10 August 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Hegstrom, *Vietnamese Exiles in America Long Shunned Efforts to Help Homeland, Fearing to be Considered Communist Collaborators; Putting People Before Politics*, Houston Chronicle, 26 November 2005.

<sup>68</sup> Simon Montlake, *Baseball Pitches In to Heal US-Vietnamese Wounds*, South China Morning Post, 5 February 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Brian Feagans, *Charity Tackles Human Trafficking; Vietnamese Students Seek to Help Sex Slaves*, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 10 May 2006.



- Two Vietnamese-American groups – Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH), and Hope for Tomorrow – sent doctors, dentists and public health workers to provide medical care in the central highlands, treating 2,700 children in about two weeks in late 2005 with U.S. government support.<sup>70</sup>
- And, when more severe storms struck central Vietnam in the fall of 2006, funds poured in again from overseas Vietnamese.<sup>71</sup>

### *The Community Begins to Organize in Earnest*

By 2005 there were literally hundreds of such groups of Vietnamese Americans – some small, some larger – working in Vietnam. A number of these organizations came together, first in late 2004 and then in December 2005, to meet, strategize, and eventually form the Vietnamese American Non-governmental Organizations Network (VANGO).<sup>72</sup> A delegation from Vietnam attended several sessions, and Vietnam’s consul general in San Francisco told the San Jose Mercury News that “the people and government of Vietnam recognize the contributions and roles of Vietnamese-American” groups.<sup>73</sup>

The Network hopes to expand work and help Vietnamese American groups deal with bureaucracy and “frustrations” in dealing with Vietnamese officials. “The face-to-face dialogue really helps,” noted the head of VNHelp, a San Jose organization. “In the past, there was a lot of distance between the non-profits and Vietnamese officials.” And one of the Networks leaders noted that “[w]hat we’re doing – demanding transparency and accountability from the Vietnamese government – is a very American thing.”<sup>74</sup>

### *Philanthropy in the New American Homeland*

Meanwhile, Vietnamese American philanthropy in the United States has been growing as well. Another watershed came with Hurricane Katrina, which decimated Vietnamese communities in Louisiana and Mississippi. The Vietnamese American community responded with an outpouring of aid. And large-scale individual philanthropy was beginning as well: two wealthy Vietnamese American businessmen donated \$1 million for an academic center at of the Coastline Community College in southern California, and the campus was to be named for them.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Todd Bullock, *Vietnamese Americans Bring Health Care, Hope to Rural Vietnam*, U.S. State Department, Washington File, 21 February 2006, at [usinfo.state.gov](http://usinfo.state.gov).

<sup>71</sup> *Gan 500 Trieu Ung ho Dong bao cac Vung bi Bao lu*, Communist Party of Vietnam website, 24 November 2006, at [www.cpv.org.vn](http://www.cpv.org.vn).

<sup>72</sup> See <http://www.va-ngo.org/vjmla/>.

<sup>73</sup> K. Oanh Ha, *A Quiet Truce to Help Vietnam*, San Jose Mercury News, 4 December 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Id.

<sup>75</sup> Mai Tran, *Vietnamese Immigrants Give \$1 Million to College; Donation by Developer, Restaurateur Bolsters Little Saigon’s Growing Sense of Philanthropy*, Los Angeles Times, 20 December 2005. In an

So the picture was quite different in the fall of 2006, when President Bush visited Vietnam, than it had been when Clinton visited in 2000, or when Vietnam-U.S. relations were normalized in 1995. Tensions remained, to be sure, both within the Vietnamese-American community and when Vietnamese-Americans allegedly sought to oppose the Vietnamese government through violent means.<sup>76</sup> But contacts and remittances had grown dramatically, and expanded well beyond family relief, education and investment to include a rapidly growing array of charitable and philanthropic activities.

On the eve of Bush's visit, even the San Jose Mercury News, in the heart of the Vietnamese community, could announce that "philanthropy work by Vietnamese Americans in Vietnam, once conducted under the radar to avoid the scrutiny of both communist officials and the immigrant community here, now flourishes."<sup>77</sup>

Some of this work was carried out by individuals, some by small, local groups, and some by larger groups that were becoming national in scope and gathering together under the banner of the Vietnamese American NGO Network to expand their reach in the United States and Vietnam. Vietnamese-American intellectuals were returning in greater numbers as well, including the public return of one of the community's most prominent members to live in Vietnam.<sup>78</sup>

Together it added up to a growing presence in Vietnam and in the Vietnamese-American community far more pronounced than in 2000 or 1995. Many issues remained – corruption and difficult government policies key among them in the eyes of Vietnamese diaspora philanthropy activists. But Vietnamese diaspora giving from the United States back to Vietnam had come a long way indeed from the suspicious and closed days of the mid-1980s.

### **III. Summary and Recommendations**

#### **Summary of Key Findings, Issues and Challenges**

1. Vietnamese diaspora giving from the United States started slowly and fitfully in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of a number of factors:

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echo of the past, the gift reportedly included "a statue that honors American and South Vietnamese soldiers."

<sup>76</sup> *Ho Chi Minh City Court Sentences Seven for Acts of Terrorism*, Financial Times Information Wire, 15 November 2006.

<sup>77</sup> K. Oanh Ha, *U.S.-Vietnam Ties Deepen*, San Jose Mercury News, 7 November 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Vanessa Hua, *Good Morning, Vietnam – Decades After He Fled, a Radio Host is Going Home*, San Francisco Chronicle, 15 August 2006.

- The continuing post-war conflict between Vietnam and the United States;
- Often bitter political differences between Vietnamese in the United States and the ruling Party and government in Vietnam;
- The initial, and relative, lack of wealth in the Vietnamese community in the U.S., particularly in the early years of the post-war diaspora (and the lack of “leading” wealth in the community);
- The lack of institutional and organizational mechanisms for the transfer and distribution of diaspora giving;
- The relatively late arrival of a substantial Vietnamese diaspora compared to other Asian immigrant groups;
- Smaller numbers; and
- An initially scattered community (although the community later re-collected in major centers in California, Texas and a few other locations).

2. Over the last ten to fifteen years, Vietnamese diaspora giving from the United States back to Vietnam has begun to grow substantially in the quantity and diversity of that philanthropy, and in the range of options available for transferring and distributing such giving in Vietnam. Vietnamese policy toward the diaspora and diaspora giving has gradually begun to soften and, in some ways, become more knowledgeable and sophisticated.

3. Vietnamese diasporic attitudes toward working in and with Vietnam have also diversified as new generations have emerged, access to Vietnam became easier, and *doi moi* (renovation) policies took hold in Vietnam. Spiritual reasons for giving (“making merit” and building community) have remained, even as new motivations have taken hold, particularly among younger generations. Fulfilling duties to family and homeland remains a key motivator for Vietnamese American philanthropy, even if the forms have changed over the years.<sup>79</sup>

4. In the past five to eight years, diaspora giving to Vietnam from the United States has increased substantially. Measurements are very difficult because of problems in analyzing the goals and flows of remittances; the use of cash for family remittances as well as social giving; the secrecy underlying many of these flows; and because a significant proportion of diaspora giving goes through personal rather than organizational channels both in the United States and in Vietnam. This work has expanded as Vietnamese Americans have become considerably more active in the broader community of non-governmental organizations working in Vietnam; are recognized as able to negotiate more easily in Vietnam than before, serving as a bridge between Vietnam and foreign investors;<sup>80</sup> have begun to work at the policy level; and are rapidly increasing their investment in Vietnam, spurring and legitimizing other activities as well.

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<sup>79</sup> See the comments by Ca Van Tran in Phuong Ly, *Moving Forward, Giving Back; U.S. Immigrants Become Homeland Philanthropists*, *The Washington Post*, 4 March 2004.

<sup>80</sup> Dang Nguyen Anh, footnote 16, p. 116.

5. In the last several years, an organized community of Vietnamese organizations in the United States dedicated to assisting Vietnamese development through diaspora giving has emerged. This community comprises a large number of relatively small organizations raising funds in the United States and disbursing funds for a variety of social and philanthropic programs in Vietnam, as well as a new umbrella organization of Vietnamese American NGOs, the Vietnamese American Non-Governmental Organizations Network (VANGO).

6. The rapid growth of organizations (both in number and in giving to them), and the emergence of an umbrella network organization bodes well for the growth of Vietnamese American diaspora giving back to Vietnam, for understanding of the increasingly complex regulatory environment for diaspora giving in the United States (especially since September 2001), and for continuing dialogue with Vietnam on the constraints to growth and effective use of diaspora contributions in Vietnam. This emerging network has not been accompanied yet by the emergence of either very large individual donors (as in the India case) or high-wattage sponsors and events (also as in the India case, as in former President Clinton and others' highly visible support for the American India Foundation). But that has not stopped the network, nor diaspora philanthropy from increasing rapidly.

### **Recommendations on Increasing Quantity and Impact of Diaspora Giving**

1. The increasing tendency of Vietnamese diaspora giving to be organized through structured mechanisms (such as 501(c)(3) registered organizations) is a welcome development and bodes well for the continuing growth of diaspora giving back to Vietnam and its growing effectiveness there. Such organizational forms and their increased effectiveness should be encouraged, through work with individual organizations (perhaps by local funders) and with the national umbrella group, the Vietnamese American Non-Governmental Organizations Network (VANGO) (by national funders).

2. Useful work with VANGO would perhaps include:

(1) Support for VANGO dialogues with Vietnamese Party and government officials on constraints and obstacles in effective Vietnamese diaspora giving back to Vietnam, including regularly scheduled dialogues and meetings that focus on particular issues of concern (such as corruption; national and local policies; banking issues, and other key problems);

(2) Support for VANGO (in collaboration with other American organizations) to provide capacity building support to both member and non-member groups in the VANGO network on such issues as organizational capacity; fundraising; compliance with U.S. law; effective programming principles; and other needs as defined by VANGO and its members as well as non-member groups;

(3) Perhaps eventually, if VANGO and the Vietnamese authorities consider it useful, support for a VANGO informal or more formal presence in Hanoi that could serve

as a resource for Vietnamese Americans interested in diaspora giving back to Vietnam, for Vietnamese diaspora groups based in the United States, for Vietnamese policymakers interested in contact with and understanding of the diaspora's giving, and for other funders interested in the work that Vietnamese Americans are doing in Vietnam.<sup>81</sup>

3. There is a strong need for deeper and more detailed knowledge of diaspora giving in Vietnam – diaspora giving by the Vietnamese diaspora, but also, particularly among policy makers, deeper and more detailed understanding that the diaspora philanthropy underway in Vietnam is part of a worldwide trend that can provide significant benefits and is manageable by receiving states through recognized and appropriate means.

To this end funders should consider:

(1) Supporting workshops on diaspora giving (with examples and discussions well beyond the Vietnam case) in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City that would be sponsored by government organizations and made available to policymakers, along with support for translation, publication and dissemination of well-edited materials on diaspora giving in Vietnam;

(2) Supporting travel by key Vietnamese policymakers at national and local levels to Vietnamese American diaspora giving groups as well as other institutions active in the diaspora philanthropy field in the United States;

(3) Supporting research on the extensive diaspora giving underway in Vietnam that is not undertaken through existing organizations, but rather through family, personal, religious and other ties; and

(4) Supporting further inquiry into key issues in Vietnamese American diaspora philanthropy:

- What is the impact of Vietnamese diaspora philanthropy on the ground in Vietnam?
- How are diaspora philanthropy impacts differentiated by region, province, and urban and rural areas in Vietnam?
- Is Vietnamese diaspora philanthropy supportive of social justice and equitable development, or does it further strengthen the growth of unhealthy gaps in Vietnam's prosperity?
- Does Vietnamese diaspora philanthropy augment state efforts and resources to serve Vietnam's population with basic and essential health, educational and other services, or is it being used to substitute for state obligations, to relieve the state of its rightful burdens?

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<sup>81</sup> I wish to re-emphasize strongly here that these thoughts are entirely my own and do not reflect nor have they been endorsed in any way by VANGO.

These are among the many unanswered questions about the growing Vietnamese diaspora philanthropy that further inquiry can and should answer. This report has been but an initial interpretation of this rapidly growing phenomenon, a prologue to work in the years ahead and, it is hoped, a spur to funders, researchers and others in strengthening diaspora philanthropy for equity and social development in Vietnam.