



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs

# Review of Ireland's Mission Strategy for Vietnam and the Mekong Sub- Region 2017-2020

Report

Evaluation and Audit Unit

2021

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

APU	Asia Pacific Unit
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CDC	Certificats de Coutume
CEMA	Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCAD	Development Cooperation and Africa Division
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EAU	Evaluation and Audit Unit
EU	European Union
EUVFTA	European Union Vietnam Free Trade Agreement
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information Communication and Technology
IDA	International Development Association
IDEAS	Irish Development Experience and Sharing
IPSARD	Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development
LDC	Least Development Country
LMIC	Lower Middle-Income Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PMF	Performance Management Framework
SAGM	Standard Approach to Grant Management
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VIBE	Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

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## **Review Team**

The Evaluation and Audit Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland is an independent unit that reports directly to the Secretary General. Their work is overseen by an independent Audit Committee. This review was undertaken by the Evaluation and Audit Unit and the consultancy firm, IOD PARC. The report is the product of the authors, and responsibility for the accuracy of the data included in this report rests with the authors. The findings, interpretations, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or views of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The 2017–2020 Vietnam and Mekong sub-region Mission Strategy sets out Ireland’s approach to its bilateral relationship with Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region. The Embassy implemented key Irish Foreign Policy priorities by serving its citizens (including during a global crisis), contributed to advancing Ireland’s economic, political and diplomatic interests and provided development assistance in Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar. Total estimated programme expenditure was €39.1 million between 2017 and 2020, implemented through a mixture of grants to government, multilaterals, non-government organisations and civil society.

## Purpose

This report is an independent, evidenced-based assessment of the Embassy’s Mission Strategy 2017–2020 under the criteria of effectiveness, coherence and lesson learning across the five outcome areas in their strategy. The review was commissioned to inform the design of the new mission strategy (2022–2027), contribute to organisational learning and serve as a mechanism of accountability.

## Methodology

The hybrid remote review applied a mixed-methods approach, which included a review of documentation, 116 semi-structured discussions with 107 individuals (54.2% female, 45.8% male), five focus groups, and one site visit in January–February 2021. Partner sampling was purposive with a selection across key areas of engagement, representing approximately 74.5% of financial expenditure. Limitations<sup>1</sup> to the review include: restrictions associated with conducting the review remotely; limited community consultation; standard attribution and apportionment challenges; sampling; potential exclusion; and less access to government officials than would be the norm. At the time of writing, access to documentation was primarily 2016–2019 inclusive<sup>2</sup> with 11 partner reports (~20% of total) and two evaluations from 2020 available, limiting the inclusion of all results for 2020.

Figure 1: Summary of programme spend 2017–2020



<sup>1</sup> Further standard limitations include bias, breadth of the review, COVID-19 bias, exclusion, participation limitations and quality and availability of data.

<sup>2</sup> The rapid and unpredictable evolution of the COVID-19 response into a protracted relief and rehabilitation operation will almost certainly have imposed limitations on partner planning, data gathering and analysis. The majority of partner 2020 annual reports were due after the review was complete. 11 partner reports (~20%) and two evaluations from 2020 were available at the time of writing.

## Overall

Overall, the Embassy made important contributions across a breadth of areas, both organisationally and within Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region in a dynamic and at times, challenging operating context. The Embassy was politically astute and innovative, building on foundations laid during 15 years of diplomatic presence in Vietnam. It was an exemplar in integrating and leveraging all aspects of the work of the Embassy to deliver a strategy that was relevant and responsive to Irish Foreign Policy priorities in the sub-region. Importantly, the Embassy had valuable lessons on modernising diplomacy that can help shape corporate policy and approaches. It is leading the way on two critical areas for modern diplomacy – embedding an integrated approach and the provision of development assistance in a lower-middle income country (LMIC). These are critical elements that have relevance across several Irish missions.

The implementation of the mission strategy provided support to a broad range of partners on poverty reduction with a strong focus on ethnic minorities, demining, mine risk education and nutrition. It contributed to capacity-building and strengthening of strategic linkages between Ireland and Vietnam through the IDEAS programme. Nevertheless, the review identified opportunities for streamlining and focusing its efforts. The success of the Embassy's work was hampered by the breadth of its engagement<sup>3</sup>, systems challenges, a crowded bilateral space and more recently, COVID-19. Looking forward, there is potential for streamlining its broad portfolio of activities and bringing focus and depth to its investments in line with Ireland's comparative advantages and opportunities. The Embassy is well positioned to continue being an exemplar of *Global Ireland* (Gol 2015) and the strategies that are designed to enable this.

## Policy vision and framework

Pursuit of the objectives of Ireland's Mission Strategy in Vietnam and Mekong sub-region was clearly underpinned by Ireland's Foreign Policies *The Global Island* (Gol 2015a); Ireland's international development policy, *One World One Future* (Gol 2013) and more recently *A Better World* (Gol 2019) and *Ireland's Asia Pacific Strategy* (Gol 2020). Throughout 2017–2020, the Embassy supported Irish citizens and advanced Ireland's values, political, diplomatic and economic interests. They promoted multilateralism and international normative frameworks, working in a challenging international environment that was disrupted in 2020 by COVID-19. In their political work and development programming, they supported civil society groups, advocated for fundamental human rights, and targeted the furthest behind. While several activities were funded to specifically advance gender equality, delivering on the mission strategy commitments relating to this and strengthening transformative programming may be advanced in line with the ambition of *A Better World* (Gol 2019).

## Relationships and cooperation

The Embassy's diplomatic approach, strong relationships, economic promotion and investments, contributed to people-to-people connections and cooperation in line with Ireland's foreign policy interests. This contributed to the effective delivery of core mission strategy outcome areas. The Embassy played a key role in cooperation with State Agencies to facilitate economic promotion, access commercial opportunities, navigate challenges, and share understanding of political, commercial and economic developments. Nevertheless, there is some scope for closer cooperation to capitalise on this. The Embassy had strong, collaborative political, economic, security and development cooperation relationships with the EU, partner governments and development partners. They used their diplomatic

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<sup>3</sup> For example, number of partners, areas of focus and geographic reach.

leverage to engage effectively in development programming across the region, support multilateralism and help promote international norms, thus furthering Ireland's reputation and global interests. Even though this is an area for further strengthening, it has demonstrated a commitment beyond just a transactional relationship and has provided an entry point for discussion on issues that matter to partner governments.

## **Prosperity**

Building on the success of the EU Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), the Embassy advanced Ireland's economic interests through securing market access for Irish food. They supported Irish State Agencies to establish a local presence and undertake work in Vietnam to promote Irish exports. The Embassy were innovative in linking economic and development agendas that supported people to people connections, technical exchanges and institutional development that supported mutual interests. They promoted Ireland's international education sectors, supported innovative economic engagement, and deepening research linkages in the *Asia Pacific Strategy* (Gol 2020), *A Better World* (Gol 2019), and *Irish Educated, Globally Connected* (DES 2016).

## **People, culture and promotion**

The Embassy engaged effectively with Irish emigrants and the diaspora, as well as promoting Irish culture, arts and creative industries through Embassy events. They improved visa systems and worked closely with EU and others to support the COVID-19 response for joint facilitation of returning EU citizens. A lack of physical presence in the sub-region was challenging in relation to consular assistance, with a strong reliance on the UK Embassies in Cambodia and Lao PDR to liaise locally on behalf of Irish citizens. The Embassy successfully grew their Facebook and Twitter follower numbers having strengthened their approach as a result of a 2017 review and capitalising on the Embassy's success of the pilot commercial attaché scheme.

## **Innovation, research and effectiveness**

The Embassy's approach to research, evidence and learning on a number of initiatives resulted in residual outcomes beyond the lifetime of the mission strategy. Building on results from the previous strategy, the Embassy's IDEAS and VIBE initiatives resulted in technical exchanges, institutional linkages and in one instance, was a catalyst for further funding for a collaborative research project. While curtailed by COVID-19, some of the micro-projects and investments produced mixed results that may not be seen immediately. The Embassy should continue to capitalise on its comparative advantage and seek opportunities for local, innovative solutions. This can be done by funding approaches or by considering funding higher social value linkage products such as shared research initiatives led by Vietnamese or regional academic thought leaders in partnership with Irish HEIs.

## **Development programming**

The Embassy built on the positive legacy of past strategies and in-country presence achieving important outcomes throughout the course of the mission strategy in the areas of civil society support, ethnic minorities, nutrition and UXO. With modest resources, they reinforced good practice and accountability by funding interventions to promote resilience to economic, social and environmental stresses and shocks, supported by inclusive economic growth and accountable institutions. They promoted resilience by working to improve sustainable livelihoods, nutrition and participation in democratic institutions. They demonstrated adaptive management that reached the most vulnerable rapidly during as the COVID-19 pandemic in the sub-region and severe flooding and landslides in

central Vietnam. With the exception of a small number of programmes, the effects of COVID-19 were highly disruptive to the implementation of partners' planned activities. The Embassy adopted a dual approach to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. In Vietnam, the Embassy renegotiated a significant number of its partnerships to ensure that resources were reallocated to respond to urgent needs that arose from the COVID-19 crisis<sup>4</sup>. Overall, the Embassy supported a wide range of partnerships that were largely strategic and delivered through a range of modalities that consistently targeted the furthest behind. Several of the sectors in which the Embassy operated were highly political and the Embassy sensitively navigated challenges as well as possible within the constraints of the environment. While some interventions achieved better success than others, the Embassy made good contributions beyond the financial grant alone.

While the Embassy does the most with its modest resources, it was hampered by a crowded<sup>5</sup> bilateral space, breadth of activities and lack of physical presence in the sub-region. Partners in the sub-region noted there were deeper mutual benefits to be gained from the development programme such as stronger government relationships, advocacy, influence, and policy exchange. Exogenous factors such as the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, level of integrated systems coherence and under-resourcing at HQ impeded effectiveness. Myanmar in particular lacked the synergy of political and development cooperation work, with the two functions separated between Hanoi and Bangkok. Substantial inequalities still remain across the region for which the Embassy can continue to respond.

### Insights from peer foreign ministries

The mission strategy was initially intended to have a 'sunset clause' on its development programme in Vietnam. A key question in this review examined lessons other peer ministries learned in their reduction of ODA and move towards deepened economic partnerships. Insights from peer missions indicated the mutually beneficial relationship ODA brought to their engagement in Vietnam and the sub-region as well as the benefits of working in niche areas that gave them stronger visibility. Essentially, ODA enhanced relationships and catalysed opportunities that would not be there otherwise. Overall, it was highlighted that if the development cooperation programme was withdrawn too early and without careful consideration, it could lead to a loss of opportunity, visibility and valuable relationships. Should a reduction of ODA occur, a strategy and a broader discussion of the role of ODA when moving from traditional aid to a transformation and economic partnership is needed at senior management level ahead of any major change in programming in Vietnam.

### Defining and measuring performance

**Attribution and capturing results:** There was a significant amount of valuable work carried out by the Embassy that added value to the entire strategy, reinforcing its development programming and in particular, capturing results across the breadth of its activities. This was one of Ireland's first such strategies that captured this breadth. There was some potential identified for strengthening the utility of the framework to enable an adaptive management and results based management approach by the Embassy.

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<sup>4</sup> In Cambodia and Lao PDR, the Embassy entered into three new partnerships with UNICEF Lao PDR, UNICEF Cambodia and the Pasteur Institute. Up to 85% of partners requested funding be repurposed or reported delays to planned interventions.

<sup>5</sup> The OECD DAC (2020) Peer Review of Ireland noted the crowded bilateral space Ireland entered in Vietnam from 2005. In 2019, Ireland was the 12<sup>th</sup> of 28 highest ODA donor to Vietnam of OECD DAC donors (OECD Stat). In 2019, Ireland was the 63<sup>rd</sup> highest recipient country of Vietnam exports to the world (IMF 2021). Interviewees during the course of the review noted the "crowded bilateral space that is also highly competitive" Ireland is operating in Vietnam.

## Governance, structures and systems

Effective management, oversight of funding and good decision-making on key strategic issues was evident despite constraints at times in both HQ and at mission level. A combination of good management systems, communication, realistic objective setting and implementation of the Standard Approach to Grants Management helped to mitigate risk. The integrated way in which the Embassy worked enabled them to develop synergies across outcome areas aligned to the strategy, although efficiencies in allocation of tasks was at times not always achieved. Choice of investments in the sub-region (est. 28.5% of total spend) was directed at well-established INGOs and multilateral programmes. However, the combination of high administrative demands and the number of designated partners may have impacted the ability of the Embassy to engage, where relevant, in opportunities for participating in technical, advocacy and policy forums. Challenges around integrated knowledge management systems impacted all aspects of the Embassy's work and as the Department's intranet-based work expands, these inefficiencies (and their associated costs) are increasing. In addition, there were a number of unintended consequences including reduced access to policy and technical support for the development cooperation programme staff.

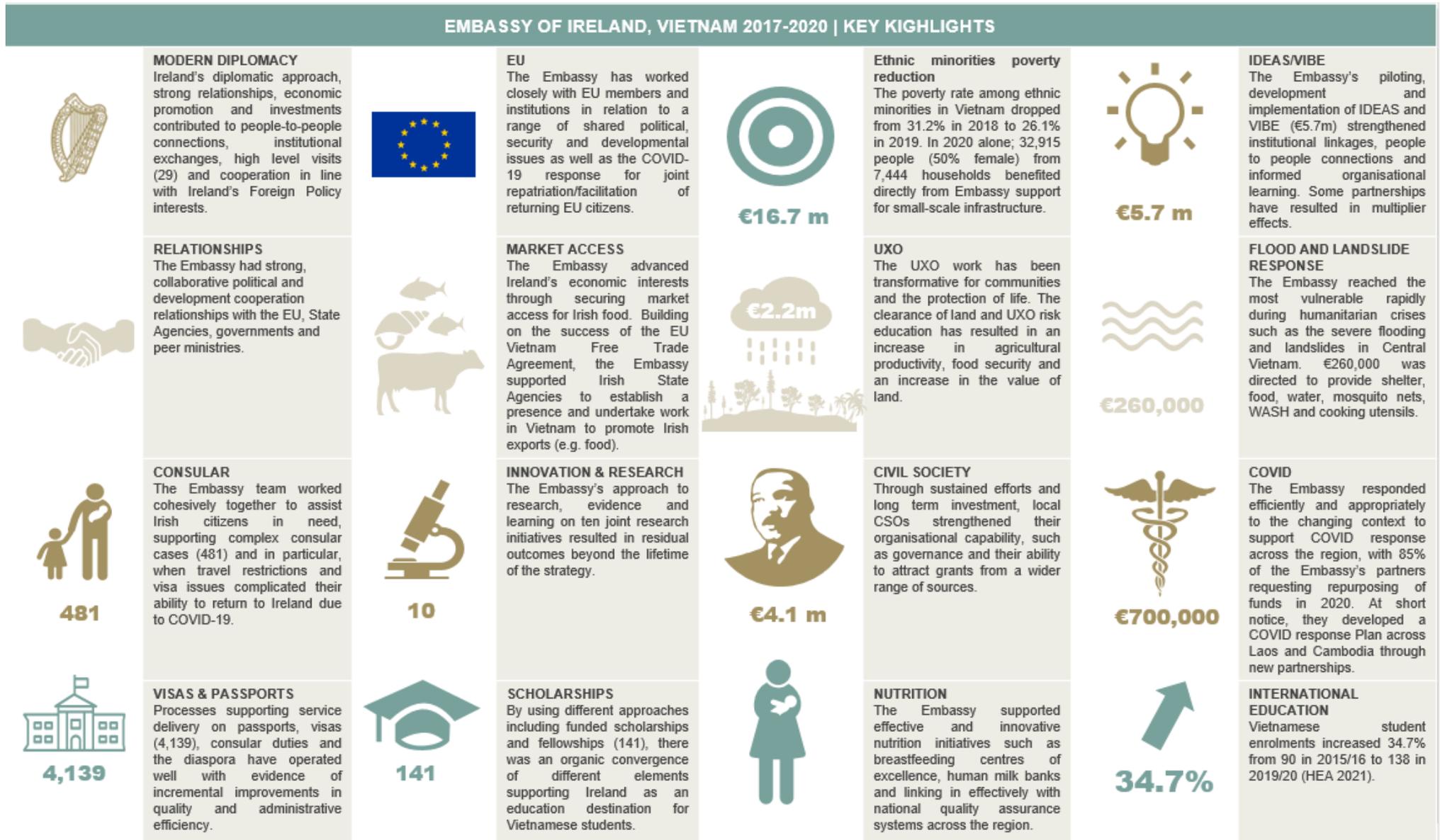
## Resourcing

Implementing the mission strategy calls for operational systems, management resources, and staffing levels that are commensurate with the ambition of the strategy. Currently, these resources are fully committed and at times, over-stretched. It was evident that approaches, activities and resourcing at HQ level influenced the ability of the Embassy to implement their strategy effectively, such as turnover of HQ staff, under-staffing in key support units and transaction costs associated with overlapping requests that might be streamlined. The new mission strategy should therefore be developed jointly with a review of HQ, HR, and knowledge management needs. Access to knowledge management systems that are nimble, useful, effective, and industry tested would vastly assist in efficiency and rapidly inform data driven programming.

## Conclusion

The Embassy is well placed to continue adapting to the context, balancing its resources to outputs and continuing to orient itself towards a politically informed future. Taking on board the recommendations from this report and continuing its astute approach, the Embassy should be in a position to pivot more towards *A Better World* (Gol 2019) and *Ireland's Asia Pacific Strategy* (Gol, 2020) as long as they are sufficiently resourced at all times, supported by HQ and with knowledge management systems supported and strengthened.

Figure 2: Embassy of Ireland, Vietnam 2017— 2020- Key highlights



## Recommendations and issues for consideration

Issues for consideration and recommendations focus on supporting delivery of the new mission strategy and are broadly related to enhancing strategic focus, articulating a regional approach and supporting organisational learning.

1. **Integrated approach, relationships and cooperation:** The Embassy should continue its strong relationships, cooperation and integrated approach that advances its political, technical and public diplomacy strengths and reinforces all aspects of their work. The integrated approach should be maintained and the Embassy should continue to capitalise on synergies between outcome areas while considering a strategic focus. (Owner: Embassy; long term).
2. **Establishing a more focused set of strategic priorities:** The Embassy might consider refining its efforts on a smaller number of specific<sup>6</sup> areas aligned with Ireland's foreign policy interests, capitalising on Ireland's strategic advantages and in-country market demands, where feasible in the next mission strategy. This could include a reduction of the number of partners or consideration of consortia management approaches that reduces administrative burden while strengthening upstream advocacy and policy engagement activities in relevant sectors. (Owner: Embassy; medium-long term).
3. **Development programming, synergies and research:** The Embassy should continue its strategy of mixed modalities across interventions. Their focus on innovation, educational, technical exchange and institutional linkages that promote synergies between its development programme as well as the promotion of Ireland as an education destination is well placed for future facing work. With the high value placed on education, there is ongoing demand for technical exchange and international education. Building on previous linkages, the Embassy could consider funding high social value shared research initiatives led by Vietnamese or regional academic thought leaders in partnership with Irish HEIs. (Owner: Embassy; medium-long term).
4. **Defining and measuring performance:** The Embassy may benefit from strengthening the utility of their PMF and an expanded approach to results measurement that includes the strategic and portfolio levels. Effort put into developing the PMF needs to be proportionate to its use. Going forward, recognising that there will still be requirements for corporate reporting, an adaptive management approach is needed that can help inform allocation of resources and staff time on an ongoing basis. They may consider how success is measured being realistic about what is possible to achieve with the resources the Embassy has, and ensuring the tool enables the Embassy to adapt what they are doing in a timely manner. (Owner: Embassy/DCAD; short term).
5. **A Better World:** Moving forward, the Embassy might reflect on the implementation of its gender commitments and include these approaches as feasible in their next strategy. Internal ways of working and interventions should promote gender responsive programming that directly advances gender equality and transformational change, whilst ensuring institutional capacity and access to such resources. While the Embassy cannot and should not "do everything", in considering coherence and prioritisation with *A Better World*, it could consider mutual interests, windows of opportunities and areas in which it has already built modest successes. It may also consider using

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<sup>6</sup> The OECD DAC (2020) Peer Review noted Ireland could also draw on the experience of other DAC members. One such example is New Zealand which, outside the Pacific, focuses on niche areas rather than trying to work in areas already covered by other donors, thus supporting division of labour. See (OECD, 2015[21]) at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264235588-en>.

the lens of 'furthest behind' in its prioritisation across its development programming. (Owner: Embassy; short-medium term.).

6. **Regional programming:** Working thematically and regionally had multiple benefits, however, effectiveness could be enhanced by a physical presence. A strong case exists from a consular, diplomatic, political and risk perspective for the Embassy to deepen their footprint and strengthen effectiveness in the sub-region beyond Vietnam. However, this would require a shift in resources, (financial, systems, human) and consideration of a physical presence (e.g. locally engaged node) in order to maximise opportunities, ability to monitor and engage in political/advocacy/coordination mechanisms. Deepening the regional footprint would need to be carefully articulated, considered and strategised with a clearly defined purpose and goals, drawing upon the lessons of other donors who have taken similar regional approaches. The question of regional positioning will need to be reflected at senior management level (Owner: Global Programmes [lead]; Embassy/Asia Pacific Unit; SMG; PDG; short-medium term).
7. **The current Myanmar governance arrangement** has constrained effectiveness and is further hampered by the split reporting lines, lack of physical presence and current political destabilisation in Myanmar. The governance arrangement for Myanmar should be reassessed by HQ senior management in consultation with key stakeholders. At the time of writing, this issue was due to be considered, and the decision made should ensure that resources are assigned as appropriate in Bangkok/Myanmar/Hanoi with the ability to manage the level of engagement (political and development) in Myanmar. (Owner: Global Programmes [lead]; PDG; Embassies Bangkok and Hanoi; Asia Pacific Unit; short-medium term).
8. **Managing risk:** The Embassy should maintain a healthy risk appetite, continue to assess and calculate risk in such projects, and take the opportunity to make strategic contributions where appropriate. (Owner: Embassy/DCAD [Leads]; medium term).
9. **Resourcing:** The Embassy might review the relationship between its breadth of activity, and balance its resources, including staffing structure, roles and competencies, operational needs extending to the physical space, office IT systems, and knowledge management systems. The OECD DAC Review of Ireland (2020) emphasised the need to match resourcing with ambition of Ireland's priorities. Matching resources at both HQ and mission level in any future facing work is essential. HQ and the Embassy should continue to ensure staff capacity and skills are supported to deliver on priorities at both HQ and the Embassy. (Owner: Embassy/DCAD; HR, medium term).
10. **Evolution of development cooperation programming considerations:** Insights from peer missions indicated the mutually beneficial relationship ODA brought to their engagement in Vietnam and the sub-region. As ODA spend enhanced relationships and catalysed opportunities that would not be there otherwise, a broader discussion of the role of ODA when moving from traditional aid to transformation and economic promotion is needed at senior management level. This may potentially include a strategy for doing so ahead of any major change in programming in Vietnam in particular. (Owner: PDG/EMG [lead] Embassy/Asia Pacific Unit/Global Programmes; short-medium term).
11. **The Embassy should continue its approach to innovation, evidence and learning, which has broader knowledge exchange potential organisationally.** Greater efforts should be considered

to facilitate systemic organisational learning for colleagues that currently do not have access to the intranet<sup>7</sup>. This could include facilitation by HQ of multiple time zones when delivering training, recording events as well as consideration of shared knowledge management solutions (Owner: Embassy [lead]; DCAD Policy Unit; ICT; short term).

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<sup>7</sup> This includes sharing learning between Vietnam and other missions

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Ireland first established diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1996. In 2005, the Embassy in Hanoi was opened and a programme of bilateral cooperation began. Vietnam was identified as an Irish Aid Key Partner Country and, alongside Palestine, is one of only two key bilateral partner countries receiving Official Development Assistance (ODA) outside of Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>8</sup>. The bilateral relationship between Ireland and Vietnam was built on a development cooperation partnership centered on reducing poverty among ethnic minority communities, sharing the experience of Ireland's development through exchange between Irish and Vietnamese economic and social institutions, providing scholarship opportunities for talented Vietnamese students, and supporting Vietnam's emerging civil society.

In 2017, the Embassy published the first mission strategy<sup>9</sup>, building on successes of previous country strategies. With an indicative annual budget of €10 million over the period 2017–2020, the strategy covered four countries<sup>10</sup> – Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. The mission strategy sets out Ireland's engagement in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region for the period 2017–2020 and outlined an integrated approach across consular services, diaspora outreach, political engagement, development cooperation, cultural engagement, economic and promotion of Ireland. It sought to serve Irish citizens, to advance Ireland's interests and prosperity and to promote Ireland's values in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a one year strategy was approved for 2021 to enable the Embassy to respond to the crisis ahead of preparing for a new mission strategy.

### 1.2 Purpose and scope of the review

This review is an independent, evidence-based assessment of the effectiveness and coherence of Ireland's Mission Strategy for Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region 2017-2020. The purpose of the review was:

- To provide DFA senior management with an independent, evidenced-based assessment of the performance of Embassy of Ireland, Vietnam under the OECD DAC criterion of effectiveness and coherence of Ireland's mission strategy across a selection of approaches/activities in a range of outcome areas;
- To provide the Embassy and relevant DFA business units with a review that can be used to inform the upcoming mission strategy planning;
- To contribute to the pool of evidence for the delivery of results from 2017–2020 by applying a robust review as a mechanism of accountability;
- To examine the effectiveness and coherence of the implementation of the mission strategy and its approach to the sub-region;
- To contribute to the Department's organisational learning.

The review covered the period of the mission strategy from 2017 to 31 December 2020. Guided by the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance and Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, the review examined the performance of the mission strategy applying the overarching questions (below). The DAC evaluation criteria of

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<sup>8</sup> Through regional, multilateral and headquarter programs Irish ODA goes to a total of 130 countries.

<sup>9</sup> Prior to this, mission strategies were referred to as "Country Strategy Programmes".

<sup>10</sup> The development cooperation programme expanded in 2006 to Cambodia and Lao PDR, and again in 2013 to Myanmar. The Embassy is accredited to Cambodia and Lao PDR, with the Embassy in Thailand accredited to Myanmar.

effectiveness and coherence were selected for this review. In addition, the theme of lesson learning was embedded across the review to ensure contribution to overall organisational learning.

### 1.3 Methodology

The review applied a mixed method approach including 116 semi-structured interviews with 107 individuals (54.2% female, 45.8% male), focus group discussions (5), a review of documentation (543) and a site visit. Partner sampling was purposive with a selection across key areas of engagement and representing approximately 74.5% of financial expenditure<sup>11</sup>. The review of documents included DFA policies, Embassy annual planning and reporting documents, thematic and programme evaluation reports, and partner planning and reporting documents. Thematic analysis of interview notes and documents was conducted to identify preliminary and emergent findings. Feedback was sought from stakeholders through an Embassy briefing to validate the emerging findings.

### 1.4 Review team

The review team comprised of representatives from Department of Foreign Affairs' Evaluation and Audit Unit (EAU) and independent consultants from IOD PARC based in Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and the United Kingdom. Four overarching evaluation questions (below) were drawn from the Terms of Reference. The list of stakeholders interviewed by the review team is provided in Appendix 1.

### 1.5 Review questions

#### Effectiveness

1. To what extent is the Embassy effective in the achievement of results towards the mission strategy outcomes in line with relevant key policies<sup>12</sup> (e.g. *A Better World; Global Island*)?
  - a. What were the key achievements, results and challenges<sup>13</sup> of the development assistance portfolio (Outcome Four)?
  - b. What were the key achievements, results and challenges in the Embassy's political, diplomatic and economic engagement?
2. Does the governance structure, systems, capabilities and approaches (at headquarters, mission and regional level), enable the Embassy to manage resources allocated, allow for an adequate assessment and management of risks and facilitate the effective delivery of the integrated mission strategy?

#### Coherence

3. To what extent is the mission strategy and sub-regional approach coherent and effective?

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<sup>11</sup> Partners were selected to encompass financial expenditure across all outcome areas according to representativeness, financial value, strategic value, risk and other criteria determined by the Embassy.

<sup>12</sup> The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World (Gol, 2015a); Statement of Strategy; *One World One Future and A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development* (Gol, 2013); Ireland's Asia Pacific Strategy (Gol, 2020); *Ireland's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (Gol 2019)*; *Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World* (Gol, 2015b). Where policies have been updated, these will be considered in light of forward facing recommendations rather than reviewing the projects against policies that were not in place during the mission strategy.

<sup>13</sup> Including for example, COVID-19 and changes to ways of working.

- a. To what extent are partnerships and approaches (inter-departmental and inter-agency) coherent and effective in the delivery of development assistance<sup>14</sup> and bilateral relations?
- b. How effectively and coherently has the Embassy and its partners incorporated, responded to and advanced normative human rights, gender equality and other equity frameworks in line with key normative frameworks<sup>15</sup> and Irish policies<sup>16</sup> *Global Island, One World One Future* and *A Better World*?

### Lesson learning

4. What are the key insights<sup>17</sup> emerging from the implementation of the integrated mission strategy that can contribute to overall organisational learning?
  - a. Were any unintended consequences (positive or negative) observed?
  - b. What can the Embassy and its partners pragmatically consider in order to improve delivery of the mission strategy outcomes within the sub-regional context (taking into account operational and contextual factors)?
  - c. What insights have other countries learned through their shift towards economic partnerships and political engagement in Vietnam and the sub-region?

### 1.6 Limitations

The review limitations were related primarily to COVID-19 restrictions, access to individuals, and up to date documentation, results and data. At the time of writing, access to documentation primarily was 2016–2019 inclusive<sup>18</sup> with 11 of 54 partner reports (~20% of total) and two evaluations from 2020 were available, limiting the inclusion of all results for 2020. Due to the review being conducted remotely and ongoing travel restrictions in-country, it was only possible to conduct one visit to a partner organisation and interview three government representatives. This impeded the ability to fully triangulate findings. While this led to a consequential loss of formal and informal country level engagement with partners and Embassy representatives, adhering to local regulations and the principle of *prima non male* (do no harm) were paramount to the implementation of the review.

### 1.7 Structure of the report

Section 1 outlines the background, scope and methodology of the review. Section 2 provides an overview of the regional and country contexts. A brief overview of the mission strategy is outlined in Section 3, including a financial breakdown of the programme. Section 4 discusses the effectiveness of the programme against the priorities in Ireland's foreign policy *The Global Island* (Gol 2015a). An analysis of the coherence of the mission strategy is presented in Section 5 and a focus on governance structure, systems, capabilities and approaches presented in Section 6. Lessons from across the

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<sup>14</sup> Including UXO clearance and mine action.

<sup>15</sup> For example, international frameworks on climate action; international humanitarian law, international human rights law, DFA policies, gender analysis in programming, gender sensitive budgeting, disaggregated data by gender, age and disability.

<sup>16</sup> *The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World* (Gol, 2015a); *Statement of Strategy; One World, One Future* (Gol, 2013) and *A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development* (Gol, 2019); *Ireland's Asia Pacific Strategy* (Gol, 2020); *Ireland's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security; Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World* (Gol, 2015b). Where policies have been updated, these will be considered in light of forward-facing recommendations rather than reviewing the projects against policies that were not in place during the mission strategy.

<sup>17</sup> For example: competitive advantage or potential opportunities; insights from the integrated approach, insights gained from the experience of COVID-19; added value of the mission's approach to Ireland's interests and the Vietnamese and sub-regional context (e.g. supporting inclusive development, strengthening relationships and promoting mutual prosperity)

<sup>18</sup> The rapid and unpredictable evolution of the COVID-19 response into a protracted relief and rehabilitation operation will almost certainly have imposed limitations on partner planning, data gathering and analysis. The majority of partner 2020 annual reports were due after the review was complete. 11 partner reports (~20%) and two evaluations from 2020 were available at the time of writing.

programme and other diplomatic missions are outlined in Section 7, with conclusions and recommendations outlined in Section 8.

## 2. Country and Regional Context

### 2.1 Vietnam

Vietnam is a one-party state, led by the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam. Vietnam has undergone a significant development transformation since the end of the war in 1975. Economic and political reforms under Doi Moi launched in 1986 have seen the country experience rapid economic growth. It grew from one of the world's poorest nations to becoming a lower middle-income country (LMIC) in 2010. With poverty rates now at 6%, Vietnam was seen as a success story, but challenges persist, including ethnic minority communities comprising 86% of those who remain in poverty (World Bank, 2021). A geo-strategically significant, culturally diverse country, with over 54 ethnic minority groups and a population of 97 million, Vietnam was among the top eight countries in receipt of bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) from Ireland in 2018 (Gol 2018). In 2017, Vietnam graduated from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) lending body losing access to concessional finance of loans and grants. The transition to a LMIC and graduation from the IDA has been coupled with a change in how development partners are now allocating their ODA and engaging with Vietnam.

Developmental improvements in the past three decades have brought it to middle-development status with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.704 and a ranking of 117/189 countries (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2020). With low inflation, stable currency and strong Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows, Vietnam's economy is steadily moving towards integration with the global economy reflecting robust Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth (EIU 2020a). Vietnam joined the World Trade Organisation in 2007 with subsequent economic liberalisation measures and efforts of reform. Despite politicised anticorruption efforts, corruption and heavy state bureaucracy continue, constraining the ease of doing business (EIU 2020a). Vietnam is characterised by a shrinking civil society space and restrictions on freedom of press and speech (Human Rights Watch 2019).

Other challenges include climate change and inequality. With Vietnam susceptible to regular floods, droughts and landslides, climate change is placing a strain on the low-lying Mekong delta as well as the mountainous highlands where the majority of Vietnam's poorest now live. The UN (2013) estimated that between 2007 and 2050, climate change will cost around US\$6–15 billion to the Vietnamese economy. Vietnam has taken important steps to achieve gender equality with the release of the *National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030* (Government of Vietnam, 2021), but challenges remain. These include the pay gap between men and women, lack of high level representation, wage parity and employment, areas which are reported to be disimproving.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Indicators 2019 for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam

	Population (000)	Life expectancy (years)	Infant Mortality (per 1000 live births)	Access to safe drinking water (%)	Net enrolment secondary education (%)	Human Development Index 2019 (rank of 189 countries)	Gender Development Index 2019 (ratio female to male HDI)	Domestic violence incident 2005-2015 (%)	Share of seats in Parliament held by women (%)
	(a)	(a)	(a)	(a)	(a)	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)
<b>Cambodia</b>	16,289	71	25	65	42	144	0.922	21	19
<b>Lao PDR</b>	7,123	65	49	77	60	137	0.927	15	27
<b>Myanmar</b>	54,100	66	38	88	58	147	0.954	17	12
<b>Vietnam</b>	96,484	74	17	96	92	117	0.997	34	27
<b>Ireland</b>	4,977	82	3	99.9	99	2	0.981	15	24

	GDP per capita at current prices (US \$) (a)	Trade in goods balance (US\$ million) (a)	Share of intra-ASEAN trade in goods (%) (a)	FDI inflows (US \$ million) (a)	Ease of doing business (rank of 190 countries) (c)	Corruption Perceptions Index 2020 (rank of 180 countries) (d)	Human Capital Index 2020 (e)	Internet subscribers per 100 persons (a)
<b>Cambodia</b>	1,663	(4,891)	26	3,706	144	160	0.49	41
<b>Lao PDR</b>	2,645	12	61	557	154	134	0.46	35
<b>Myanmar</b>	1,229	(581)	34	2,509	165	132	0.48	33
<b>Vietnam</b>	2711	11,168	11	16,120	70	104	0.69	69
<b>Ireland</b>	78,806	71,878	N/A	19,845,000	24	20	0.79	91

Data sources: (a) ASEAN Statistical Leaflet 2020 (data 2019), for Ireland from Irish Central Statistics Office and World Bank (b) UNDP: Human Development Report 2020 (data 2019) (c) World Bank: Doing Business. Measuring Business Regulations 2020 (data May 2019) (d) Transparency International: Corruption Perceptions Index 2020 (e) World Bank: Human Capital Index 2020

Vietnam has embraced multilateralism as a way to ensure stability in the region and is aspiring to have middle power influence (Bony-Cisternes 2019). In January 2020, Vietnam became a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, the same year it held the rotating chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Reforms that were constrained, such as freedom of association and labour rights, were agreed to as necessary conditions for joining regional associations and free trade agreements (Bony-Cisternes 2019). It is through economic and trade agendas that donors are able to engage in some previously sensitive areas in Vietnam. Other areas, such as fundamental freedoms, remain a challenge.

## 2.2 Cambodia

Cambodia's political situation has deteriorated sharply with the suspension of the main opposition party, a flawed election and severe restrictions on press freedom and on civil society. This has altered the EU's relationship with Cambodia leading to the partial withdrawal of Cambodia's preferential access to the EU market (EIU 2020b). With a population of 16.5 million, the UNDP (2020) HDI ranks Cambodia at 144/189 countries with a HDI of 0.594 (UNDP 2020). While there have been some gains in economic development, the benefits to the population are unequal. Challenges remain in poverty reduction, nutrition, marginalisation of groups, unexploded ordinance and explosive remnants of war contamination, climate change and environmental protection (Asian Development Bank 2020; EIU 2020b). Much like Vietnam, the cost to Cambodia's economy of impacts of climate change are significant as is China's influence in the country. In 2015, a USAID project estimated that adverse impacts resulted in the loss of USD\$1.5 billion. These are compounded by weak governance and a high corruption perception index (Transparency International 2018).

## 2.3 Lao PDR

Lao PDR has achieved sustained economic growth, health and education reform. However, this has not evenly translated into poverty reduction. Disparities and vulnerabilities persist, and inequalities are widening. Lao PDR has gained footholds towards graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, with a HDI of 0.613 and country ranking of 137/189 (UNDP 2020). The economy is precarious and is dependent on agricultural exports and mineral extraction. In addition, the country has faced an increasing number of natural disasters in recent years (EIU 2020c). As with Cambodia, China has a significant influence and investment in a number of infrastructure projects has translated into a significant long-term debt burden to China.

## 2.4 Myanmar

The context in Myanmar has shifted drastically. In February 2021, a coup led by the military, saw the arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and other key National League for Democracy (NLD) ministers and political leaders. A year-long state of emergency was initially announced and a transitional government was

installed. While there has been international condemnation of the military takeover, neighbours such as China, Cambodia and Thailand have noted it as an internal matter to be resolved nationally. Resistance to the coup has been prolonged and widespread, including an active civil disobedience movement. The coup has also brought renewed uncertainty to the many internal conflicts involving Ethnic Armed Organisations. ASEAN is attempting to find a political solution to the situation, but is finding it challenging to maintain an internal consensus and to get full engagement by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw).

Before the coup, Myanmar was experiencing significant development, economic, political and human rights challenges and its transition to democracy had been fragile (EIU 2020d). Myanmar's HDI ranking has barely increased from 148/188 in 2014 to 147/189 in 2020 (UNDP 2020). The situation in Myanmar was the most complex of the four countries and has been compounded further by recent events. Systematic human rights violations continued, attracting widespread media interest and debate within the international community.

## 2.5 Regional Context

Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam are part of the Greater Mekong sub-region that includes parts of the People's Republic of China (Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region) and Thailand. In recent decades, all four countries have been on an upward path of economic and human development. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) promotes economic, political, security, and educational cooperation among its members of which have included Cambodia, Lao DPR, Myanmar and Vietnam since the mid-1990's. Known as the CLMV sub-group, Cambodia, Lao DPR, Myanmar and Vietnam have been working closely to strengthen regional integration to improve trading links within the wider ASEAN group. All four countries regard membership of ASEAN as critical for trade and their broader economic development.

## 3. Overview of the Mission Strategy

Approved in May 2017, the mission strategy was guided by Ireland's Foreign Policy, *The Global Island* (Gol 2015a) and Ireland's international development policy *One World, One Future* (Gol 2013). It was the first iteration of a mission strategy that explicitly sought to achieve targeted outputs under all aspects of the Embassy's activities. With an overarching mission to serve Irish citizens, advance Ireland's interests, prosperity, and promote Ireland's values, the strategy was framed around three high level objectives:

- i) Ireland's people in the region are well served, better protected and more closely connected;
- ii) Ireland's prosperity is enhanced through trade, investment, people-to-people engagement and institutional exchange and through EU membership;
- iii) Ireland's values and influence contribute to a more stable and secure rules-based international environment, the protection of human rights, reduced inequalities and the empowerment of people to participate in their own development.

Following an evaluation of the 2011-2016 programme, development cooperation remained central to the work of the Embassy which focused on addressing vulnerability and reducing poverty and inequality in line with Ireland's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The mission strategy, linked to the five high-level strategic goals of DFA's Statement of Strategy, sought to achieve five major outcomes (Table 2). This review examined achievements, results, and challenges for each of the five outcome areas.

Table 2: The mission strategy high-level outcomes

The Global Island	Ireland in Vietnam and the Mekong Sub-region Mission Strategy 2017-2020
<b>Our People</b>	<b>Outcome 1:</b> Efficient and effective passport, consular and diaspora services in Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR
<b>Our Influence</b>	<b>Outcome 2:</b> Strengthened bilateral relationships and influence for Ireland in Vietnam and the sub-region
<b>Our Place in Europe</b>	
<b>Our Prosperity</b>	<b>Outcome 3:</b> Increased two-way trade and investment, including strong educational and research linkages in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region.
<b>Our Values</b>	<b>Outcome 4:</b> Marginalised and vulnerable communities in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region are more resilient to economic, social, and environmental stresses and shocks, supported by more inclusive economic growth and accountable institutions.
	<b>Outcome 5:</b> The Embassy is fit for purpose to deliver a coherent approach and ensure the optimum use of resources

### 3.1 Portfolio and financial overview

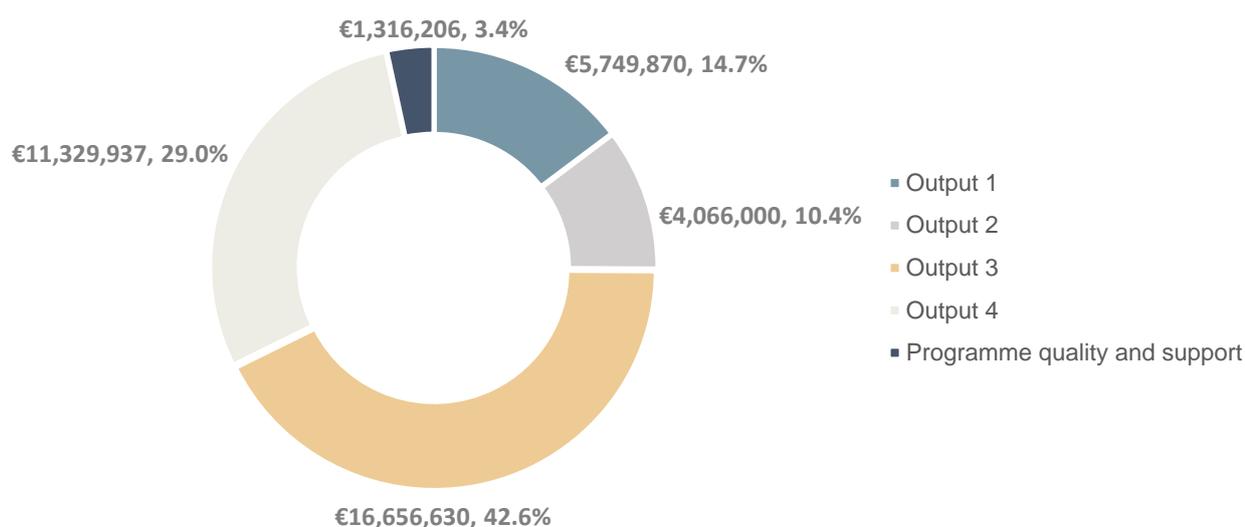
During the period 2017–2020, the Embassy spent an estimated €39,118,643 (€44,798,345 including administration). The breakdown of budget expenditure is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Expenditure by year and outcome area

Output Four Area	2017	2018	2019	2020 IDC	% Change 2017-2020	Total 2017-2020
<b>Output 4.1</b> Economic growth is more inclusive and sustainable and institutions are more accountable and transparent	€1,761,554	€1,543,410	€1,479,906	€965,000	▼ 45.2%	€5,749,870
<b>Output 4.2</b> Civil society and citizens are empowered to realise their rights and participate in their own development	€1,197,694	€1,000,094	€1,163,212	€705,000	▼ 41.1%	€4,066,000
<b>Output 4.3</b> Vietnamese ethnic minority communities are driving their own development and benefitting socio-economically, supported by more enabling and evidence-based policy.	€4,201,345	€4,200,061	€4,285,224	€3,970,000	▼ 5.5%	€16,656,630
<b>Output 4.4</b> Regional Support – Environmental, economic, health and safety risks to vulnerable communities in Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar reduced	€2,510,986	€2,987,447	€2,731,504	€3,100,000	▲ 23.5%	€11,329,937
<b>Programme quality and support</b>	€304,488	€295,503	€306,215	€410,000	▲ 34.7 %	€1,316,206
<b>Programme totals</b>	<b>€9,976,067</b>	<b>€10,026,515</b>	<b>€9,966,061</b>	<b>€9,150,000</b>	▼ 8.3 %	<b>€39,118,643</b>
<b>Administration expenditure</b>	€1,441,043	€1,404,009	€1,434,650	€1,400,000	▼ 2.8 %	€5,679,702
<b>Total (including admin)</b>	<b>€11,417,110</b>	<b>€11,430,524</b>	<b>€11,400,711</b>	<b>€10,550,000</b>	▼ 7.6 %	<b>€44,798,345</b>

Source: Audited accounts 2017-2019, Q&A; 2020 May IDC

Figure 3: Total programme (excluding admin) expenditure 2017- 2020 by %



**Overall programme expenditure** decreased by 8.3% from €9,976,067 in 2017 to €9,150,000 in 2020 due to a reduction in overall budget. A shift in resources from outputs 4.1- 4.3 to output 4.4 occurred in 2020, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic response. The total number of partners across the four outputs was comparatively high, between 43 and 54 a year (see Table 7, pp. 32). Six partners each received funding of more than €1 million over the four-year period covered by the strategy<sup>19</sup>. Another 15 partners each received €400,000 or more over the strategy period. The vast majority of partners received less than €100,000. There were a number of small partners and micro-grants subsumed in the category 'others' under each sub-outcome area. Expenditure under this category of micro-grants was reported as €1,500,667. Total costs for programme quality and support (€1,316,206) constitute 3.4% of the total programme cost (€39,118,643).

**Output 4.1: Economic growth is more inclusive, sustainable and institutions are more accountable and transparent represented 14.7% of total programme expenditure at €5,749,870.** Overall expenditure between 2017 and 2020 decreased by 45.2%. The larger dip occurred in 2020 due to COVID-19 reallocation. This output had a strong link to the bilateral political and trade relationship in Vietnam. The majority of the budget was earmarked to scholarships and institutional partnerships linking universities and state agencies to organisations in Vietnam. This area reflected the greatest transition towards an integrated approach, achieving development outcomes while contributing to strengthening bilateral relationships more broadly.

**Output 4.2: Civil society and citizens are empowered to realise their rights and participate in their development represented 10.4% of total programme expenditure at €4,066,000.** Overall expenditure between 2017 and 2020 decreased by 41.1%. The larger dip occurred in 2020 due to COVID-19 reallocation. Under this output, 28 civil society organisations were supported in the period 2017-2020 plus a number of small micro-grants. It was reported by staff that given the number of partners supported, and with the introduction of the new Standard Approach to Grant Management (SAGM), significant time was spent on managing these relationships.

<sup>19</sup> The Irish Council for Overseas Studies/Targeted scholarships, CEMA Vietnam, Alive and Thrive, The HALO Trust (Cambodia), the UNDP Trust Fund for UXO in Lao PDR, UNOP Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT Myanmar).

**Output 4.3: Vietnamese ethnic minority communities are driving their own development and benefitting socio-economically supported by more enabling and evidence-based policy represented 42.6% of total programme expenditure at €16,656,630.** Overall expenditure between 2017 and 2020 decreased by 5.5%. This output had a clear focus, the biggest expenditure and the smallest number of partners among the four outputs. Ireland is in the process of refining its support of the direct contribution to Programme 135 of the Vietnam State Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA), which amounted to almost €16.7 million over four years.

**Output 4.4: Environmental, economic, health and safety risks to vulnerable communities in Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar represented 29.0% of total programme expenditure at €11,329,937.** Overall expenditure between 2017 and 2020 increased by 23.5% due to reallocations from other budget lines to support the COVID-19 response in 2020. Overall, this component was well focused with about 40% of the expenditure going towards unexploded ordnance clearance and education, and another 20% towards child nutrition.

### 3.2 Implications of COVID-19

In late January 2020, the Government of Vietnam introduced measures to restrict movement of people to try and curb the spread of COVID-19. Restrictions further intensified in mid-March and a lockdown resulted in the closure of international airports. As a result, there were several impacts on the implementation of the mission strategy during its final year. The first was the sudden increase in demand and volume for consular support. As borders started to close in Vietnam, Lao PDR and Cambodia, Irish citizens found themselves stranded in the region. The temporary transfer of two of the five diplomatic officers out of Vietnam in March 2020 to e-work remotely for periods of five to eight months generated additional workload and pressure on the remaining posted staff.

COVID-19 prevented the Embassy team from travelling within Vietnam or to the region to undertake monitoring visits of its development cooperation programme. Since March 2020, the Embassy team have not been able to travel to accredited countries. Up to 85% of partners indicated delays to planned activities or requested that funding be repurposed as a result of COVID-19. The Embassy was able to quickly adjust to be able to respond to the crisis, providing critical and timely inputs to its partners. Lastly, the substantial increase in workload responding to the protracted crisis, the need to sensitively manage multiple complex consular cases, and those separated from families back in Ireland added extra pressures to the team during this period.

## 4. Effectiveness

This section focuses on review question one of the terms of reference. It presents results<sup>20</sup> and effectiveness in relation to the mission strategy's high-level goals and outcomes associated with Our People, Our Influence, Our Prosperity, Our Place in Europe and Our Values.

### 4.1 Our People

#### Summary of Key Findings

- The Embassy team worked cohesively to assist Irish citizens in need, supporting complex consular cases and in particular when travel restrictions and quarantine complicated their ability to return to Ireland due to COVID-19. However, their ability to respond efficiently was compounded by the

<sup>20</sup> Access to documentation was primarily was 2016–2019 inclusive<sup>20</sup> with 11 of 54 partner reports (~20% of total) and two evaluations from 2020 available at the time of writing.

reduced team size in Hanoi and in some instances, lack of physical presence in countries of secondary accreditation.

- Processes supporting service delivery on passports, visas, consular duties and the diaspora have operated well with evidence of incremental improvements in quality and administrative efficiency.
- Public diplomacy and promotion of Irish cultural events were successfully organised which added to the promotional work of the Embassy, as well as engaging the diaspora.

**Key Finding 1: The Embassy team worked cohesively to assist Irish citizens in need, supporting complex consular cases and in particular when travel restrictions and quarantine complicated their ability to return to Ireland due to COVID-19. However, their ability to respond efficiently was compounded by the reduced team size in Hanoi; and in some instances, lack of physical presence in countries of secondary accreditation.**

**The Embassy worked cohesively to assist Irish citizens in need and responded quickly to COVID-19.** The Embassy successfully adapted and deployed a two-team<sup>21</sup> approach to maintain operations during the COVID-19 pandemic as Vietnam quickly and effectively locked down the country. In the first month, there was a significant shift of effort to consular activities with staff working long days to address immediate concerns and matters arising from Irish citizens including those who found themselves quarantined at government facilities in challenging conditions in Vietnam. Consular assistance cases logged in Cabhair<sup>22</sup> increased from an average of 48 per year during 2016-2019 to 289 logged in 2020. At the point of lockdown there were an estimated 1,500 Irish citizens in the Mekong sub-region. Working with the EU and existing networks, the Embassy enabled Irish citizens in the region to quickly access flights. However, managing often complex consular cases in non-English speaking accredited countries without Honorary Consuls or access by local staff to Cabhair impeded the efficiency in the Embassy's response. Responding to often complex consular cases in Cambodia and Lao PDR was a key service area of the Embassy for which the British Embassies in Phnom Penh and Vientiane and to a lesser extent, the EU mission in Phnom Penh provided support. This support was critical given the need to operate in local languages in Cambodia and Lao PDR which the Embassy was unable to do.

**Key Finding 2: Processes supporting service delivery on passports, visas, consular duties and the diaspora have operated well with evidence of incremental improvements in quality and administrative efficiency.**

**There has been an improvement in the processing of visas both in terms of administrative aspects as well as in supporting the quality of applications.** The Embassy engaged in a pilot approach on student visas (one of 17 missions sanctioned to do so), which increased the volume of received applications for visas to study in Ireland to over 150 per year. The work of the Embassy was instrumental in supporting the quality of these applications and in respect to both student and business visas, there has been a faster process of issuing visas. Between 2017 and 2020, a total of 4,139 visa applications were received (Table 4). The Embassy continued to seek ways to improve its services. This included the promotion of the launch of a new online passport system, including for first time applicants. Feedback, both directly and through social media, from visa applicants and Irish citizens on the use of Embassy services remained very positive, reflecting a strong customer orientation.

<sup>21</sup> In order to minimise risk and encourage physical distancing, Embassy staff reduced their physical presence and split into two rostered teams with half working remotely and half in the mission.

<sup>22</sup> Cabhair is the consular management system that is used to record all consular cases and requests.

Table 4: Overview of consular and visa data

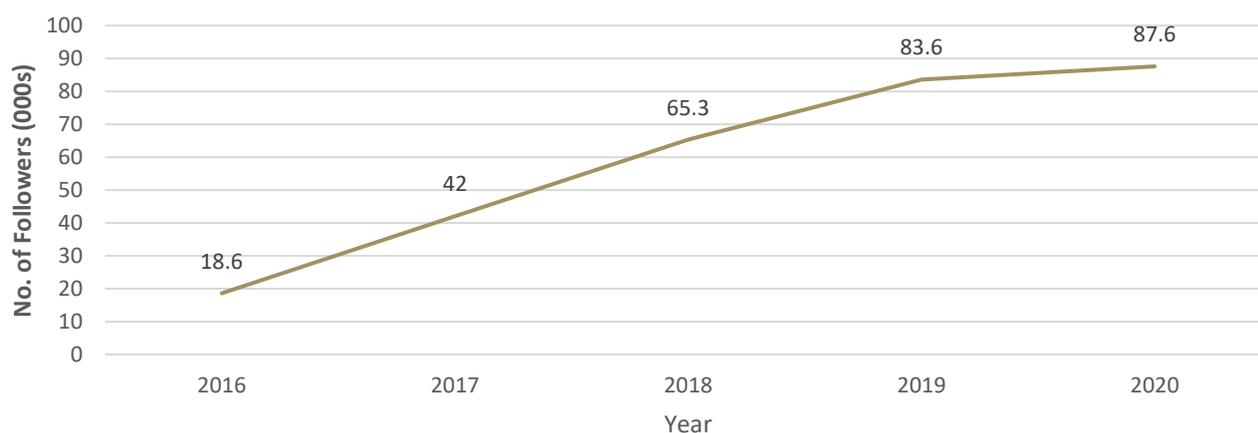
Service	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Irish community (estimate on business plans)	1500	1500	1500	1500	1500	<b>1500</b>
Consular Assistance Cases	37	57	53	45	289	<b>481</b>
Passports issued (excluding online)	129	106	156	191	133	<b>609</b>
Visas processed	1091	914	931	967	236	<b>4139</b>
Temporary passports issued	10	8	7	7	1	<b>33</b>
Foreign Birth Registrations	10	7	8	8	2	<b>35</b>
Affidavits	36	129	132	181	73	<b>551</b>
Certificats de Coutume (CDC)	18	7	9	14	11	<b>59</b>
Adoption applications	15	25	21	10	9	<b>80</b>
Authentication of documents	655	1044	888	923	731	<b>4241</b>

Source: Embassy Annual Reports 2016-2018 & 2020 Business Plan. Embassy communication 2021.

**Key Finding 3: Public diplomacy and promotion of Irish cultural events were successfully organised which added to the promotional work of the Embassy, as well as engaging the diaspora.**

**Cultural events focused on Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, while paused for COVID-19, were a consistent and important feature of the Embassy's external engagement as well as being a link with the Irish community in Vietnam.** Events averaged around 20 per year and included extensive activities around St. Patrick's Day, Bloomsday, Pride and sporting events. The Embassy demonstrated it was well positioned to respond to strategic realignment taking place in Headquarters to deepen the focus on cultural diplomacy, recognising the value of sharing Ireland's expression of culture, values and interests. In Cambodia and Lao PDR, the Embassy supported around eight diaspora events a year over the life of the strategy with sporting events also taking place in Cambodia.

Figure 4: Embassy Hanoi Facebook page followers 2016–2020



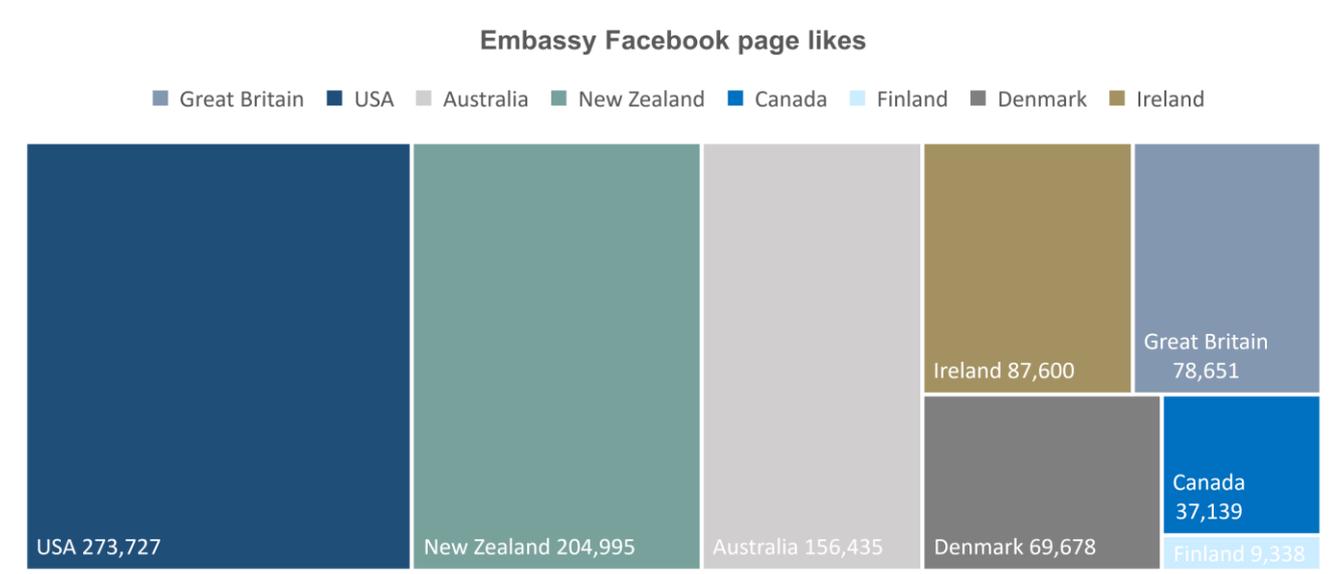
Source: Embassy annual reports 2016–2018, Business Plan 2020 (for 2019 figures)

**Visibility of Ireland steadily increased through the active use of social media and a strong public diplomacy agenda.** This was noted as a contributing factor to strengthening people-to-people connections and promotion of Ireland. An independent assessment on the promotion of Ireland to the Vietnamese public via the Embassy of Ireland's digital platforms was completed in November 2017

and found it to be effective (Son et al. 2018). It was noted by HQ that the Embassy in Vietnam was a strong performer across the Embassy network. Its Facebook account had 87,600 followers (Figure 4) and shows a strong performance compared to peer Embassies. Utilising stories of development support to local communities and posting bilingually, the Embassy was able to create a narrative around Ireland’s values that the Vietnamese have responded positively to. With a dedicated local staff member working on promotion and a breadth of content, the Embassy was acknowledged for effectively utilising its budget. Annual greening events were noted to have raised the visibility of Ireland among the wider public, as had the official St. Patrick’s Day events.

Following the success of the Embassy’s Facebook page, a Twitter page was launched in 2019. Content from across the Embassy’s portfolio of work was disseminated across both platforms. The lack of access by local staff to the intranet however, prevented the Embassy from readily drawing from images, videos, infographics and logos to use in their social media products. Nor can local staff easily access corporate guidelines around social media and campaigns. This has added a significant time burden to diplomatic staff who are required to provide administration support to local staff to enable access to this information.

Figure 5: Number of Facebook page likes of peer embassies<sup>23</sup>



## 4.2 Our Influence

### Summary of Key Findings

- The Embassy was politically astute, technically capable and an exemplar in integrating all aspects of the work of the Embassy to deliver a strategy that was relevant and responsive to the needs and development priorities of Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region.
- Ireland’s diplomatic approach, strong relationships, economic promotion and investments contributed to people-to-people connections, institutional exchanges and cooperation in line with Ireland’s Foreign Policy interests. This has contributed to the effective delivery of core mission strategy outcome areas.

<sup>23</sup> As of 10 May 2021

### **Relationships and Ireland's strategic advantage**

With just over 15 years of a diplomatic presence in Vietnam, the Embassy team were able to build on the successes of previous strategies and continue positive working relationships. It supported Irish citizens in the region, promoted trade and investment, assisted Irish businesses to gain access to a fast-growing market, engaged with Irish diaspora on cultural events, and implemented a development cooperation programme aligned to needs in the region and Ireland's values. While working in a crowded bilateral and competitive economic and political space, the Embassy's flexibility and agility has seen traditional aid projects evolve to support development, diplomatic and trade objectives Irish Development Experience and Sharing (IDEAS) and Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange (VIBE) programmes. The Embassy focused on establishing strong and mutually beneficial relationships with the EU, and it proactively supported State Agencies to gain a presence in Vietnam.

Through the development assistance budget, the Embassy provided development cooperation support to Vietnam as it transitioned to a middle-income country. It has earned Ireland the reputation of being the lead development partner on the issue of ethnic minority poverty and a trusted and authentic partner by the Government of Vietnam. The Embassy invested staff resources to establish the foundations for a growing political relationship and greater State Agency and trade presence ensuring a holistic approach to the relationship. With Vietnam positioning itself towards middle power status, and its increasing engagement and commitment to a multilateral rules-based order, Ireland's balanced engagement of aid, economic promotion and diplomacy was well placed.

With strong foundations laid and growing recognition, Ireland has an emerging strategic advantage in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region. To date, this has included working with the UN and EU to provide catalytic development cooperation support in the region. This advantage includes positioning Irish education institutions to take advantage of the growing demand for higher education in Ireland as the only English-language education destination in the EU market. With Vietnam's focus on integration into global rules-based trading systems, supporting Irish businesses to enter the Vietnamese market to take advantage of a rapidly growing middle class while engaging in policy dialogue with the government on normative values are ongoing opportunities.

**Key Finding 4: The Embassy was politically astute, technically capable and an exemplar in integrating all aspects of the work of the Embassy to deliver a strategy that was relevant and responsive to the needs and development priorities of Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region.**

**The Embassy was able to align and leverage the work of the Embassy to advance foreign policy priorities.** In Lao PDR and Cambodia, the development cooperation programme enabled the development of credible diplomatic relationships with partner governments. In these countries, where there is currently little trade or economic engagement, it demonstrated a commitment beyond just a transactional relationship and has provided an entry point for discussion on issues that matter to partner governments.

**Through a joined-up approach with HQ and Ireland's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York, the Embassy raised Ireland's profile amongst ASEAN members on Ireland's commitment to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.** During its hosting of ASEAN in 2020 a key theme for Vietnam was on WPS. Participation by the Embassy and Headquarter staff during an online event helped raise Ireland's profile amongst ASEAN members on Ireland's commitment to the WPS agenda.

**A focus on strengthening bilateral relationships and influence in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region resulted in political consultations taking place and an increase in high level visits.**

Between 5 and 20% of staff resources were dedicated annually to this area of work. As a result, political consultations with the Government of Vietnam could take place in May 2019. Over the life of the Strategy, 29 high level visits took place. In the accredited countries, with no Irish presence in country and only a limited number of visits by Embassy staff, deepening bilateral relationships and influence was a challenge, but would be necessary to facilitate any deepening of the relationship including significant scaling up of development assistance.

**Key Finding 5: Ireland's diplomatic approach, strong relationships, economic promotion and investments contributed to people-to-people connections, institutional exchanges and cooperation in line with Ireland's Foreign Policy interests. This has contributed to the effective delivery of core mission strategy outcome areas.**

**The Irish Development Experience and Sharing (IDEAS) programme was used effectively to create and deepen institutional relationships.** Whilst IDEAS commenced in the first Vietnam Country Strategy (2007–11) it continued to provide a strong mechanism for strengthening government relationships. A focus on the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development during the current mission strategy supported partnerships between the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development and Teagasc to build an economic model on pork products. The Vietnam National University of Agriculture and the National University of Ireland Galway developed a climate resilient agriculture programme. These initiatives were complemented by targeted high level engagement by Ministers of State with senior officials in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which saw positive outcomes in securing access to new markets. Irish agri-food products gaining access to the Vietnamese markets doubled<sup>24</sup> during the past two years with the addition of pork, live bivalve molluscs and seafood.

**A focus on achieving mission strategy outcomes led to innovative adaptations in IDEAS to ensure increased institution-to-institution linkages.** Recognising that post-graduate scholarships in Ireland did not necessarily create links between academic institutions and that institutional linkages when instigated by the mission were burdensome and did not always lend themselves to scale, led to the creation of the Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange (VIBE<sup>25</sup>). With modest seed funding, it supported joint projects between Irish and Vietnamese higher education institutions, with an emphasis on relationships that have potential for catalytic effects in terms of longer-term linkages. Through IDEAS, and VIBE in particular, a diversity of institutional partnerships was achieved. It enabled a transfer of skills to Vietnamese organisations, while establishing new institutional links with Irish institutions. This has been demonstrated through the number of new partnerships established<sup>26</sup>. VIBE's focus on the education sector coincided with a gradual increase of self-financed Vietnamese students now studying in Ireland. The 2018 evaluation of VIBE noted wider catalytic effects of the programme included opening doors to high level Vietnamese policy makers, reaching wider expertise than traditional development cooperation programmes, bringing in new Irish partners to Vietnam, and increasing awareness of Ireland in Vietnam. Interest in VIBE was high with 36 applications in round one (five were selected) and 22 applications in round two (10 were selected). The evaluation found that the planned project outcomes for completed projects were in most cases achieved.

<sup>24</sup> IDEAS evaluation November 2020

<sup>25</sup> VIBE sits within the IDEAS programme

<sup>26</sup> Between 2017-2019, VIBE supported 13 new partnerships.

### 4.3 Our Prosperity

#### Summary of Key Findings

- The Embassy played a key role in cooperation with State Agencies to facilitate economic promotion, access commercial opportunities, navigate challenges, and shared understanding of political developments. In Vietnam, State Agencies referred to the Embassy as an essential resource for economic promotion and supporting Irish businesses. Nevertheless, there is scope for closer co-ordination.
- The Embassy has contributed to Ireland's formal and informal international education connections through support of a fellowship programme during the mission strategy. By using different approaches, there has been a convergence of support for Ireland as a higher education destination for Vietnamese students. This is reflected by the increase in student enrolments from Vietnam for the duration of the mission strategy.

**Key Finding 6: The Embassy played a key role in cooperation with State Agencies to facilitate economic promotion, access commercial opportunities, navigate challenges, and shared understanding of political developments. In Vietnam, State Agencies referred to the Embassy as an essential resource for economic promotion and supporting Irish businesses. Nevertheless there is scope for closer co-ordination.**

**In Vietnam, State Agencies referred to the Embassy as an essential resource for economic promotion and supporting Irish businesses**<sup>27</sup>. Vietnam has a significant, rapidly growing economy with a large manufacturing sector and an emerging middle class. Facilitated by the new EU Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), this represented a context in which there were opportunities for promoting Ireland. The Embassy played a pivotal role in taking the agenda forward through a joined up Team Ireland approach across State Agencies. At the start of the strategy period, there were no State Agencies with a permanent presence in Vietnam. This changed with the opening in late 2020 of the Enterprise Ireland Office in Ho Chi Minh<sup>28</sup> the commercial capital of Vietnam, and with the cementing of a long-standing local agent role in Hanoi for Education in Ireland. Interviewees reported “excellent engagement” from the Ambassador and the team with requests from State Agencies for Embassy support. The appointment in early 2019 by the Embassy of a Trade and Promotion Officer under DFA's pilot Commercial Attaché scheme marked important progress of Irish interests in Vietnam. The completion of the pilot scheme and associated departure of the staff member in January 2021 left a gap in terms of the capacity of the Embassy to provide a more coordinated and dynamic approach to State Agency engagement.

**Capitalising on the trade and commercial opportunities in Vietnam required an active and dedicated local presence of State Agencies.** Vietnam has a rapidly growing food sector characterised by growing numbers of consumers who have the purchasing power to pay a premium for high, imported goods. During the strategy period, Ireland was successful in securing market access for Irish pork and more recently, Irish seafood (March 2019). This was regarded as a key achievement involving facilitation of access to government and ministers by the Embassy. For Irish seafood, subsequent business activity in the face of considerable competition, has been strong. This progress was supported by a placement in Ho Chi Minh city from Bord Bia's elevated graduate programme (18-month fellowship working with clients) collaborating with Embassy promotional events in Ho Chi Minh,

<sup>27</sup> While attribution is indirect, their joint efforts, deepened engagement and astute commercial decisions by State Agencies contributed to an increase in Irish merchandise exports to Vietnam from €87.25<sup>27</sup> million in 2017 to €108.29 million in 2020

<sup>28</sup> The Embassy actively supported this process readily sharing information and providing advice

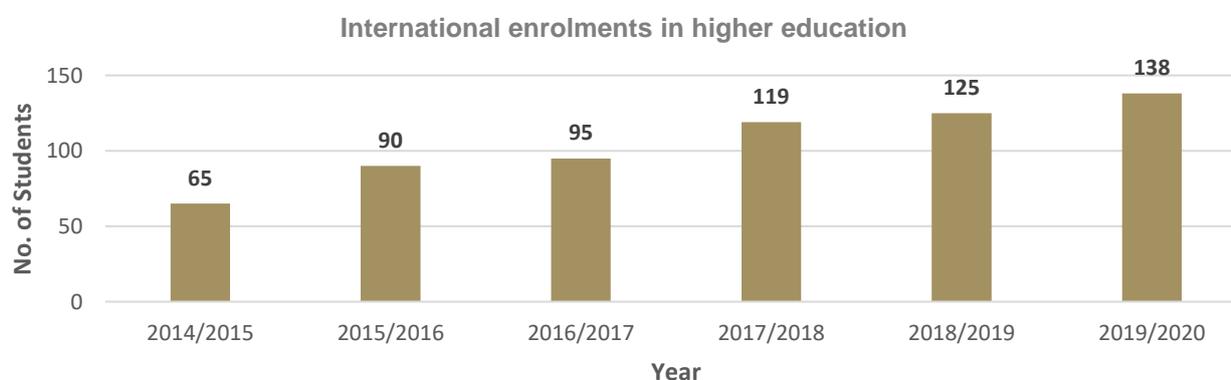
showcasing Irish shellfish and engaging with customers in 2020. Irish pork was part of a joined-up EU campaign led from Singapore for which Ireland secured the promotional contract. Progress was constrained by a lack of local presence and knowledge of customers. Work continues in trying to secure market access for Irish beef in Vietnam.

**Increased visibility of Ireland in Vietnam has been achieved through coordinated approaches of the Embassy and State Agencies on strategy and communication.** The Embassy's Local Market Plan, reflective of a period when State Agencies had no presence in Vietnam, provided a useful consolidated overview of the main initiatives underway in agri-business, education and aviation<sup>29</sup>. However, it did not represent a coordinated (State Agencies plus Embassy) strategic forward looking and resourcing approach. These were all areas where potential for collaboration existed (policy, business, training) and where the IDEAS programme has been instrumental in helping to create several new institutional relationships.

**Key Finding 7: The Embassy has contributed to Ireland's formal and informal international education connections through support of a fellowship programme during the mission strategy. By using different approaches, there has been a convergence of support for Ireland as a higher education destination for Vietnamese students. This was reflected by the increase in student enrolments from Vietnam for the duration of the mission strategy.**

In just a few years, Ireland has taken an important step in promoting itself as a higher education destination for Vietnamese students. This step, moving from 65 enrolments in higher education in 2014/15 to 138 in 2019/20 (Figure 6 and Table 5), has been the result of several different factors. Central was the move of Education in Ireland (set within Enterprise Ireland) to establish a presence in Hanoi. This enabled a more proactive approach including development of a strong social media presence, running live talks with colleges in Ireland in 2020, and sharing interviews with students on their experiences of studying in Ireland. Attending education fairs and facilitating the connections between Vietnamese universities and Irish education institutions was a contributing factor. The Embassy was an important contributor to these developments through the more indirect path of the VIBE component of the IDEAS programme and promotion activities (such as attendance at education fairs) to promote Education in Ireland. The results of the growth of education in Ireland was seen both in terms of its short-term value (students bringing funding into Irish education) and its role in helping to foster longer-term relationships between the two countries.

Figure 6: International enrolments in higher education 2014-2020 (Vietnamese students in Irish HEIs) (HEA 2021)



Source: Higher Education Authority Data <http://bit.ly/3t8Xw4u><sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Other sectors included clean energy, MedTech, ICT and agri-food.

<sup>30</sup> 2019/2020 number is from direct communication between EAU and HEA.

Table 5: Number of scholarships provided to Vietnamese students to study in Ireland

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
<b>IDEAS Scholarships Awarded</b>	28	29	25	29	21	<b>132</b>

Source: Embassy Annual Reports, Embassy communication

**There is an opportunity to bring together and forge a more compelling offer and context for higher education study in Ireland, and to take advantage of the UK exit from the EU.** While Malaysia remains the largest market for education in Ireland in South East Asia, Vietnam in second place has strong potential. Capitalising on this, in a very competitive market, have been constrained by available resources.

A challenge for the Embassy in Vietnam was raising visibility and understanding of Ireland as a country. The alumni group who received scholarships for study in Ireland has reached a level where a structured and engaging approach could have a greater effect on raising Ireland's visibility. The positive experiences of university lecturers who have been involved through the Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange (VIBE) in exchanges/interactions with colleagues from Irish educational institutions also represented a force to be harnessed. Research collaborations that are emerging from VIBE funded initiatives and the embedding of PhD research studies within this were important channels for increasing the visibility of Ireland as an education destination.

#### 4.4 Our place in Europe

##### Summary of Key Findings

- The Embassy worked closely with EU members and institutions in relation to a range of shared political, security and developmental issues as well as the COVID-19 response for joint facilitation of returning Irish citizens.
- Ireland supported the work of the EU delegation through political initiatives such as joint démarches, technical support and training on peacekeeping, joint statements, cultural diplomacy, EU events and technical inputs.
- An important achievement of the EU during the life of the strategy has been the completion of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), contributing to the potential for increased preferential access to markets for Ireland.

**Key Finding 8: The Embassy worked closely with EU members and institutions in relation to a range of shared political, security and developmental issues as well as the COVID-19 response for joint facilitation of returning Irish citizens.**

**The EU commitment to multi-dimensional poverty and a focus on the poorest/furthest behind first aligned well with Ireland's engagement in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region.** The EU Action Plan in Vietnam focuses on intersectionality and categorisations that can make one vulnerable (or not) in different contexts. In reality, any coherence between the EUs development assistance in Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar and Ireland's bilateral assistance in the Mekong sub-region was largely coincidental. As a result of the EU devolution policy on development assistance in-country, delegations were involved directly in programming assistance and the management of field projects. In Vietnam, Ireland's development cooperation work with the EU has been limited due to

differing priorities – the EU is focused on sustainable energy and good governance. In the Mekong sub-region, where Ireland does not have a presence, there was regular and direct relationships with the Delegation on development. This was particularly valuable in Lao PDR as an access point for Ireland in its relationship building and political engagement. In Myanmar, where the diplomatic relationship lies with the Embassy in Bangkok, leveraging from the EU presence was more challenging.

**The COVID-19 response further demonstrated the value of Ireland's close cooperation with the European Union delegation.** Through close cooperation of Member States, they coordinated practical and financial support to citizens from Europe to best manage during the crisis, including options for leaving the country/the sub-region. This coordinated approach positioned Irish citizens to gain access to a limited number of flight options during the early onset of the pandemic.

**Key Finding 9: Ireland supported the work of the EU delegation through political initiatives such as joint démarches, technical support and training on peacekeeping, joint statements, cultural diplomacy, EU events and technical inputs.**

**Ireland was perceived as being among the most reliable and supportive EU member states for the political engagement work of the delegation.** The Embassy supported the EU on drafting language for statements such as condemnation of the death penalty and wording on South China Sea. It has also participated in cultural diplomacy, EU events and peace and security initiatives, such as technical support and training on peacekeeping. The Embassy was regarded as a key collaborator, and strongly supportive of the work and positions taken by the EU.

**There were a number of joint initiatives, such as on climate change and human rights, for example,** joint démarches with the EU. However, it was unclear how Ireland's strong position on human rights shaped the work of this EU group within Vietnam. Ireland was commended by multiple actors for its continued and demonstrable commitment to supporting civil society organisations which continue to be under pressure given the shrinking funding space. As Vietnam steadily moves towards graduating from LMIC status, the concerns over sensitive topics such as freedom of expression and freedom of safe assembly will inevitably grow and require 'safe spaces' for sensitive dialogue with the Vietnamese authorities.

**Ireland's global priority on peacekeeping and WPS aligned with the EU priorities in Vietnam.** The EU established a framework agreement with Vietnam on security that outlines a shared vision on rules-based order and international norms. This reflected the Vietnamese constitution's position on alliances, non-presence in another country, and strong interest in technical assistance such as doctors and trainers. During the course of the strategy, a number of Vietnamese officers received training, both in person and online, at the United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI). There was significant alignment between Ireland's global priorities on peacekeeping and the EU's priorities in Vietnam, which has potential for greater engagement and leverage.

**Key Finding 10: An important achievement of the EU during the life of the strategy has been the completion of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), contributing to the potential for increased preferential access to markets for Ireland.**

**The EVFTA, ratified by the European Parliament, has been a significant milestone during the life of the strategy, placing Vietnam and Singapore on the same level in terms of trade potential.** While attribution is not directly tied to the mission, trade opportunities have grown in Vietnam over the

last decade and the country is seen as an important gateway to Asia. The EVFTA has contributed to the potential for increased preferential access to markets for Ireland and now recognises the EU as an advance partner in Vietnam. With the EVFTA now in place the EU has been able to link its trade agenda with broader policy discussions with Vietnam on its approach to sustainable development, including a greener and more inclusive approach.

**Establishment of the EVFTA has led to a 'Team Europe' approach in Vietnam, validated by Heads of Missions in Hanoi presented to Brussels in March 2021.** Sitting alongside the sustainability chapter of the EVFTA the 'Team Europe' approach is focused on transformational engagement by EU members in Vietnam. The expectation is greater alignment and coherence of EU member initiatives, (and potential competition), alongside stand-alone projects funded by the EU. A number of collaborative projects with member states are also planned focusing on (i) climate resilience, low-carbon circular economy combining climate proofing, energy support, sustainable energy transition and sustainable consumption, and (ii) decent employment and inclusive entrepreneurship, including aspects of factory conditions and women's empowerment.

## 4.5 Our Values

This section outlines key results and effectiveness of Ireland's development assistance and cooperation with Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar with an average budget of €10 million per annum. Overall, the Embassy made important contributions with its development cooperation programme across a breadth of areas within Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region. In Vietnam, implementation of the mission strategy provided support to a broad range of partners on poverty reduction with a strong focus on ethnic minorities, demining, mine risk education and nutrition. It also contributed to capacity-building and strengthening of strategic linkages between Ireland and Vietnam through the IDEAS programme. Working with a variety of partners and modalities, the Embassy engaged in critical work across the sub-region relating to unexploded ordnances (UXO), nutrition, emergency response and resilience building. Nevertheless, some challenges were highlighted, including the impact of a lack of physical presence, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the breadth of programmatic areas and number of partnerships.

### Summary of Key Findings:

- **Ethnic minorities:** Through sustained support, engagement in national policy dialogue and progress achieved through the Ethnic Minority Partnership for Resilience and Development (EMPRO) portfolio of projects, the Embassy developed a reputation in Ireland and Vietnam for ensuring the needs of those that have been left furthest behind.
- **IDEAS:** The Embassy's piloting, development and implementation of the Ireland Development Experience and Sharing (IDEAS) Programme strengthened institutional linkages, people to people connections and informed organisational learning. Some partnerships resulted in multiplier effects with potential significance that could be better monitored. IDEAS was demand-driven and the continued interest from partners reflects its success.
- **Civil society engagement:** In a restrictive operating context, the Embassy supported a range of approaches resulting in increased participation in civil society mechanisms that were appropriate and sensitive to context. Through sustained and long-term investment, local CSOs had the predictability of funding to strengthen organisational capability. The support the Embassy provided at the operational level on securing government approval for projects was notable. However, numerous systemic challenges remain to the CSO space in relation to freedom of speech and human rights.

- **UXO:** The holistic approach the Embassy on UXO has been transformative for communities and the protection of life across all its countries of engagement. The clearance of land coupled with mine risk education, has resulted in an increase in agricultural productivity, food security and value of the land. Ireland's longevity of investment in the UXO sector has allowed partners to plan longer term and achieve outcomes that might not be possible with short term funding arrangements.
- **COVID response:** The Embassy responded efficiently and appropriately to the changing context to support COVID response across the region. Partners reported the key drivers of success were the use of technology, pre-established relationships and coherence with national systems. Working through multilateral partners enabled the visibility of Ireland's contributions to be demonstrated to government partners. With the exception of a small number of programmes, the effects of COVID-19 were highly disruptive to the implementation of partners' planned activities, with up to 85% of partners requesting funding to be repurposed or to support COVID-19 sensitive supports throughout 2020.
- **Nutrition:** The Embassy supported effective regional nutrition initiatives such as breastfeeding centres of excellence, cash transfers, human milk banks and linking in effectively with national quality assurance systems across all four countries of operation.
- **Myanmar** has a range of urgent development, security and humanitarian needs which the Embassy responded through a modest amount of funding. All partners highlighted the flexibility of the Embassy and Irish funding, next to their continuity and reliability as a donor, as a key contributing factor for their success. Nevertheless, effectiveness was hampered by the split between political and development reporting lines, lack of physical presence and reputational and financial risks borne by the Embassy.

**Key Finding 11: Ethnic minorities-** Through sustained support, engagement in national policy dialogue and progress achieved through the Ethnic Minority Partnership for Resilience and Development (EMPRO) portfolio of projects, the Embassy developed a reputation in Ireland and Vietnam for ensuring the needs of those that have been left furthest behind.

**The Ethnic Minority Partnership for Resilience and Opportunity (EMPRO), established by the Embassy, was regarded as an important forum for policy dialogue and sharing lessons.** With members comprising Ireland's partner organisations working on ethnic minority issues, including the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA), the United Nations and civil society, dialogue focused on sharing lessons and cooperation between different projects. CEMA reported that the poverty rate dropped from 31.2% in 2018 to 26.1% in 2019. In 2020, 32,915 people (50% female) from 7,444 households in ethnic minority communities benefitted directly from the Embassy's support to small scale infrastructure development through Programme 135.

**Addressing ethnic minority issues is a Vietnamese government priority<sup>31</sup>.** With 86% of those remaining in poverty being from ethnic minorities, the National Assembly, the highest body in Vietnam, adopted a new National Target Programme (NTP) on socio-economic development of ethnic minorities (2021 – 2030). It was noted by interviewees that a significant diplomatic achievement of the Embassy had been the awareness of National Assembly members of the contributions Ireland has made to this area. Over the last three years, the Embassy supported CEMA to conduct 15 separate policy studies which provided critical inputs and recommendations that were taken up in the development of this new NTP<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Ethnic minority poverty is a priority in the SEDS 2021-2030, as well as its predecessor SEDS 2011-2020.

<sup>32</sup> The EMPRO evaluation found that EMPRO has contributed to shape the new programming for ethnic minority development with support for the development of the Master Plan (MP) and its resultant National Target Programme (NTP) on socio-economic development of the ethnic minorities and mountainous areas (SEDEMA) for 2021-2030 period.

**Ireland consistently provided support to CEMA and Programme 135 (P135) since 2006.** Initiated in 1999, P135 aims to improve living conditions for the rural population, with a particular focus on the 135 poorest ethnic minority communities in five provinces across Vietnam. Though support for P135 was by far the largest single contribution within the Irish programme (€16,656,630 between 2016 and 2020), it amounted to approximately 1.97% of the overall outlay of the national programme<sup>33</sup>. Nevertheless, the 2020 evaluation of the programme noted the 780+ Irish funded community-led development initiatives "represent important supplements to the GoVN-led support to the Programme 135 communes and innovations of the existing implementation arrangements in the GoVN-led programmes".<sup>34</sup> In addition, the established partnerships with civil society organisations working on ethnic minority issues enabled the Embassy to complement its partnership with central government, deepen its own understanding of the issues, and become the leading bilateral partner working in this area. As a result of this approach, Ireland developed a reputation, both in Vietnam and in headquarters, for playing a critical role in maintaining a focus on the issue of ethnic minority poverty, while contributing to progress in reducing overall poverty.

**Key Finding 12: IDEAS- The Embassy's piloting, development and implementation of the Ireland Development Experience and Sharing (IDEAS) Programme strengthened institutional linkages, people to people connections and informed organisational learning. Some partnerships resulted in multiplier effects with potential significance that could be better monitored. IDEAS was demand-driven programme and the continued interest from partners reflects its success.**

**The IDEAS programme in Vietnam broadened beyond a traditional development approach in its use of institutional linkages as a vehicle for achieving multiplier effects in different settings.** During the strategy period, IDEAS was broadened to extend beyond its original economic and financial focus. Demand-led by 24 Vietnamese partner institutions, new areas of interest emerged (e.g. food systems, food safety). These were responded to positively and opportunistically by Irish institutions. One interviewee reported that, "they helped us fill in the gap. Their support really met our demand." It created a platform to multiply the benefits of the programme through business-oriented research and innovation. IDEAS has helped to raise the visibility and profile of the Embassy in Vietnam, albeit from a low base. It strengthened the association with Ireland of a growing group of Vietnamese professionals, including 104 IDEAS scholars. Alumni of the programme are making important contributions to the Vietnamese private and public sectors, as a recent survey among returned scholars indicated.<sup>35</sup>

**The investment of careful thought and time by the Embassy team has been key to this success of IDEAS.** The nature of IDEAS and in particular the VIBE component has brought together a number of institutional partners who lacked the experience of working with donors in a funded partner role. Moreover, Vietnamese partners have at times needed support to help to forge the necessary connections with Irish counterparts. The Embassy invested considerable effort to make this all work, with the quality of this work being appreciated by all sides. One interviewee reported that they "appreciate their support. This high level meeting would not have happened without the support from the Embassy." Through this, a rich network of contacts has emerged and continues to be strengthened. This in turn provided the platform for institutional partners to forge their own self-propelled direction. Opportunities to address the management burden of IDEAS on the Embassy without damaging the innate qualities of the investment need to be explored.

<sup>33</sup> The significance of this grant to the recipient communities was appreciated by central level stakeholders, the local authorities as well as the recipient communes consulted during the field visits of this review.

<sup>34</sup> Review of the Ethnic Minority Partnership for Resilience and Opportunity (EMPRO) by the Embassy of Ireland to Vietnam, January 2021.

<sup>35</sup> 42% work in the private sector; 36% in the public sector; 15% in the non-profit sector and 7% are self-employed. Education is the most significant sector of employment (21%), followed by business (12%), ICT (11%), finance (9%) and banking (8%).

**IDEAS provides a pathway to the potential shape of future collaboration between Ireland and Vietnam.** At its best, IDEAS was seed funding into the scoping of entry points for Vietnamese and Irish institutions to collaborate through technical knowledge exchange on a specific area relating to a systemic change. As expected, not all of the seed sown has fallen on fertile ground but the evidence looking across the IDEAS programme (and within this the strong VIBE component) of results being achieved is strong. An illustration of this success was the VIBE initiative between Vietnam National University and the Innovation Academy of University College Dublin on bringing innovation to teaching methods, with the effects of this engagement now extending beyond the initial cohort, backed by VNU's own resources across the VNU network and also starting to be drawn on by other provincial universities<sup>36</sup>. In addition, Dublin City University are planning a self-funded joint programme in data analytics with the Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City Campus to start in 2022.

**Key Finding 13: Civil society engagement-** In a restrictive operating context, the Embassy supported a range of approaches resulting in increased participation in civil society mechanisms that were appropriate and sensitive to context. Through sustained and long-term investment, local CSOs had the predictability of funding to strengthen organisational capability. The support the Embassy provided at the operational level on securing government approval for projects was notable. However, numerous systemic challenges remain to the CSO space in relation to freedom of speech and human rights.

**The Embassy supported 29 civil society partnerships over the life of the strategy across Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region.** There were many examples in the Embassy's portfolio of the breadth of initiatives at the community level addressing citizen's rights and seeking to empower citizens to participate in their own development. Through sustained, and long-term investment, local CSOs had the predictability of funding to strengthen organisational capability. At this level, close engagement on managing grants by the Embassy was appreciated, but evidence of links to upstream policy dialogue and advocacy remain limited. Support covered a breadth of areas on rights including youth, disability, women's economic empowerment, and ethnic minorities with many good examples at the community level. In 2019, a total of 34,958 children were screened for early childhood disability, and 7,134 youth had accessed a youth social innovation hub supported by the Embassy. Potentially focusing on fewer areas would increase the Embassy's ability to link to upstream advocacy. At the moment, the breadth of partners and thematic areas is limiting the potential for advocacy and/or policy dialogue.

**There was good evidence that all CSO partners are committed to the objectives of the mission strategy and *A Better World*.** There was clear alignment between what partners are doing at the grassroots level and with the country and global values of Ireland. Specific networking opportunities were provided by the Embassy (EMPRO, Hanoi and Hoi An networking events) to create links between CSO organisations to scale up impacts. The Embassy played an important facilitating role in this area. What impact this has had on scaling up of initiatives though is difficult to establish, and cross regional approaches were felt by CSO partners not always to have been optimal.

A challenge in Vietnam was the constrained operating environment for civil society. Decree 93, which governs how CSOs can operate, was noted in the 2019 mid-term review (MTR) as having become more constrained on CSO operations during the life of the strategy. The support the Embassy provided at the operational level on helping to secure government approvals for projects is greatly appreciated.

<sup>36</sup> A Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) team is in the process of establishing the Center for Climate-Resilient and Agrifood Systems (CRAFS) to pursue further climate missions in the future through research and teaching

The Embassy should continue to work with the EU and like-minded partners to monitor closely developments regarding civil society space and to develop joint actions to support this.

Figure 7: Civil society selected highlights

CIVIL SOCIETY: KEY HIGHLIGHTS			
 <b>€4.1 m</b>	<b>INVESTING IN CIVIL SOCIETY</b> €4.1 million was invested in civil society programmes.		<b>AGRI-FOOD VALUE CHAINS, MARKET ACCESS AND CERTIFICATION.</b> During 2020, 63 cooperatives with 2,372 farmers engaged in the VietFarm programme training and standards system on sustainable agricultural production to promote market access, certification and livelihoods.
	<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b> Through sustained efforts and long term investment, local CSOs strengthened their organisational capability, such as governance and their ability to attract grants from a wider range of sources.		<b>WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION</b> APHEDA established the first ever network of elected women deputies and provided training and support at all levels in three provinces of <a href="#">Bắc Kan</a> , <a href="#">Hải Dương</a> and <a href="#">Phú Yên</a> .
	<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD DISABILITY DETECTION</b> In 2019, 34,958 children under 6 years old were screened in all three districts.		<b>DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT</b> Funded activities included prevention and preparedness such as a community-based disaster risk management, disaster risk assessment and disaster risk mapping in <a href="#">Quang Tien</a> region.

**Key Finding 14: UXO: The holistic approach the Embassy on UXO has been transformative for communities and the protection of life across all its countries of engagement. The clearance of land coupled with mine risk education, has resulted in an increase in agricultural productivity, food security and value of the land. Ireland's longevity of investment in the UXO sector has allowed partners to plan longer term and achieve outcomes that might not be possible with short term funding arrangements.**

**There was strong evidence of unexploded ordnance clearance and mine risk education across the four countries, achieving good results in reducing risk for affected communities while increasing access to land for housing, agriculture and infrastructure.** Ireland was noted for its longevity of support in UXO, in particular in Cambodia (see Appendix 2 for an aerial view of the demined areas Irish funding has supported). The work also focused on advocacy for disarmament, non-proliferation and safe management of unexploded ordnance (UXO) with inputs provided by the Embassy to a high-level meeting in Geneva and contribution to the organisation of a side event on Lao PDR at a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) meeting in New York.

Figure 8: Regional UXO and mine risk education – selected highlights

REGIONAL UXO AND MINE RISK EDUCATION: KEY HIGHLIGHTS			
 <b>€2.2m</b>	<b>UXO</b> The UXO work has been transformative for communities and the protection of life. The clearance of land and UXO risk education has resulted in an increase in agricultural productivity, food security and the value of land.		<b>REMNANTS OF WAR DESTROYED</b> In Cambodia in 2020, 775 anti-personnel (AP) mines, 25 anti-tank (AT) mines and 786 other explosive remnants of war (ERW) were destroyed.
	<b>LAND CLEARED IN CAMBODIA</b> In 2020, 685,974m <sup>2</sup> of high-priority land was cleared benefiting 54,035 people.		<b>MYANMAR</b> In 2019, the project delivered 54 sessions of mine risk education, reaching 1,363 people; completed baseline assessments in 359 villages to identify villages with suspected landmines and Explosive Remnant of War (ERW) contamination.
	<b>INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY</b> In 2020, mean household income increased from \$7,621 before clearance to \$13,114 after clearance — equivalent to a \$5,493 or 72% increase in annual income.		<b>LAO PDR</b> 177,871 UXOs were cleared between 2017-2019 from 10,900m <sup>2</sup> land. As a result of mine risk education and land clearance, there was a reduction in accidents from 30 in 2016 to 20 in 2019 and a reduction in casualties from 59 in 2016 to 25 in 2019.

By 2019, unexploded ordnance education reached 74,695 people in Cambodia and 7,500 in Myanmar, with over 250 hectares of land cleared in Cambodia and 1,741 hectares cleared in Lao PDR.<sup>37</sup> The mid-term review found potential for the Embassy to strengthen the regional dimension of the UXO/mine risk education work through identifying synergies and supporting exchanges between countries and engaging more actively in regional discussions. It noted that for the remainder of the strategy, the Embassy could seek to bring more coherence to its work on UXO. Opportunities were noted for increased engagement with the Irish Defence Forces in the area of mine action, drawing on their expertise for technical advice, analysis and evaluation. Due to COVID-19, it was not possible to explore these opportunities. The development of the new mission strategy offers an opportunity to take forward this mid-term review recommendation.

**Key Finding 15: COVID-19 response- The Embassy responded efficiently and appropriately to the changing context to support COVID-19 response across the region. Partners reported the key drivers of success were the use of technology, pre-established relationships and coherence with national systems. Working through multilateral partners enabled the visibility of Ireland's contributions to be demonstrated to government partners. With the exception of a small number of programmes, the effects of COVID-19 were highly disruptive to the implementation of partners' planned activities, with up to 85% of partners requesting funding to be repurposed or to support COVID-19 sensitive supports throughout 2020.**

**The Embassy applied a rapid, multi-tiered and flexible response to COVID-19.** The Embassy has demonstrated a proactive approach to risk management, regularly reviewing the Business Plan risk matrix in senior management meetings and adapting it to the changing context. Their approach focused on the immediate prevention and risk mitigation of the spread of COVID-19, a focus on household and policy levels in healthcare service provision, and a longer-term response to the socio-economic impact. It was a good example of the Embassy's capacity to adapt and adjust quickly and effectively to urgent changes in context and needs. Several new partnerships, repurposing of funds and interventions were agreed to meet immediate needs in responding to the crisis. New partners were selected based on their presence in country, and on their ability to respond quickly through their own existing relationships. They provided additional funds to a very limited number of partners that had the capacity to rapidly scale up initiatives to meet increased demands from affected communities.

The COVID-19 Response Plan for Cambodia and Lao PDR was delivered through three partners. €337,367 was provided to UNICEF Lao PDR to strengthen the capacity of hospitals in management of severe cases of COVID-19 through the procurement, delivery and installation of 15 oxygen set concentrators for hospitals across the country. This resulted in high visibility and longevity in terms of the contribution it makes to hospitals' capacity to deal not just with COVID-19 but with other medical conditions where oxygen concentrators are useful/required. The Pasteur Institute in Cambodia, the national referral laboratory, utilised €100,000 to support the virology department to carry out surveillance and investigation. UNICEF Cambodia utilised €250,000 to reduce life-threatening impact of malnutrition and provide essential hand hygiene supplies to vulnerable families. As government systems had been used to distribute the equipment, partners were able to promote Ireland's contribution directly to government counterparts. In Myanmar, allocation of funding to the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) was increased to incorporate COVID-19 specific response in assisting vulnerable, displaced households' access to basic services.

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<sup>37</sup> 2,670 UXO's cleared in Cambodia and 52,577 UXO's cleared in Lao PDR.

**Key Finding 16: Nutrition-** The Embassy supported effective regional nutrition initiatives such as breastfeeding centres of excellence, cash transfers, human milk banks and linking in effectively with national quality assurance systems across all four countries of operation.

**The Embassy supported exclusive breastfeeding and infant nutrition in the four countries through a targeted partnership with Alive and Thrive.** Through the provision of strategic technical assistance, centres of excellence in breastfeeding were established in Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. They worked directly with 99 healthcare facilities in Vietnam to strengthen early essential new-born care. Project data provided evidence that within a two-month time period, 87.9% of new-born infants in supported hospitals were breastfeeding within one hour of birth, increasing to 95% for vaginal births. Initiatives in Myanmar and through EMPRO in Vietnam were aligned to contribute to nutrition objectives. In Myanmar, their partnership with UNOPS supported smallholder farmers and landless communities, including a targeted intervention to improve nutrition of mothers and their children in the critical first 1,000 days of life. Through the Ethnic Minorities Partnership for Resilience and Opportunity (EMPRO) programme, Vietnamese CSOs reported that they supported 627 ethnic minority community development initiatives. Some of these initiatives focused on gender, access to services, food and nutrition security, water, sanitation and hygiene, education, climate mitigation and adaptation, building community ownership and capacity sustainably.<sup>38</sup> Working through existing programmes in the region enabled the Embassy to support coherence with well-established programmes, and increase its impact in this priority area. With only limited funding, this ensured an efficient use of staff resources in managing this priority. With Ireland's global focus on hunger and malnutrition, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture this issue remains relevant across Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar.

**Key Finding 17: Myanmar has a range of urgent development, security and humanitarian needs which the Embassy responded through a modest amount of funding. All partners highlighted the flexibility of the Embassy and Irish funding, next to their continuity and reliability as a donor as a key contributing factor for their success. Nevertheless, effectiveness was hampered by the split between political and development reporting lines, lack of physical presence and reputational and financial risks borne by the Embassy.**

**Myanmar is a complex country with a range of urgent development, security and humanitarian needs.** The Embassy, through strategic partner selection, was able to provide a modest amount of funding to existing programmes that has enabled their partners to scale up their activities. This included support for the annual business transparency review, mine risk mapping and education across conflict affected states, support to large-scale livelihoods and nutrition programmes, and emergency response and protection to children from Rohingya and other conflict affected ethnic minorities. All partners interviewed highlighted the flexibility of the Embassy and Irish funding, as well as their continuity and reliability as a donor, as key contributing factors for their success. Partners reflected that the limited capacity by Embassy staff to effectively engage and stay on top of the rapidly evolving political economy in country presented risks for the Embassy. This was noted in terms of possible risks to reputation as well as financial risks. The realities faced by implementing partners were not always felt to be well understood, and as a result challenges around responsive and sensitive programme management issues had arisen.

<sup>38</sup> Specifically on nutrition, resilient livelihoods (CARE and Plan), village-scaled infrastructures using community force account (RIC, CARE, Plan)- see EMPRO Evaluation report, 2020. Nutrition or livelihood initiatives supported by the EMPRO partners were supplementary to the production support under the Programme 135 or other existing resources. Village scale infrastructures and O&M of the EMPRO partner projects are supplementary to infrastructure and O&M components of the Programme 135. In this regard, the initiatives facilitated by the NGO partners in the EMPRO were seen to be supplementary to the Programme 135 investments

**A further challenge noted was the split of diplomatic and development functions between Hanoi and Bangkok posts.** Partners in country were broadly unaware of the split noting this was a potential explanation for why advocacy opportunities were not being realized. The missed opportunity from leveraging development cooperation initiatives to deepen political relationships is something that both missions were aware of. The combination of COVID-19, the recent coup, travel restrictions and resourcing issues have exacerbated the constraint. The split was widely accepted as not optimal, with the need for a strategic look at the long-term priorities for engagement and resourcing to effectively support this programme.

## 5. Coherence

This section focuses on review question three of the terms of reference on coherence. It reviews policy coherence and how the Embassy's work and its partners have contributed to international normative frameworks, advancing Ireland's values, and the overall coherence of the regional programme approach.

### Summary of Key Findings

- **Regional coherence and effectiveness:** The Embassy engaged in relevant thematic work across the sub-region relating to UXO, nutrition, emergency response and resilience building. While some areas were programmatic and regional, there is potential to bring more of a regional lens but only where greater resources are present to manage this. Partners reflected a physical presence would bring stronger effectiveness, relationships, advocacy and policy engagement. Nevertheless, opportunities for coherence or cross partner learning may be strengthened.
- **Selection of partnerships:** The Embassy was focused on addressing key ongoing development challenges in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region that directly link to Irish Foreign Policy Priorities. By working through multilaterals and NGOS, partnerships have complemented existing initiatives, contributing to harmonisation of donor activities and added value whilst avoiding duplication of effort. This has supported a coherent approach.
- **Policy:** The Embassy used its diplomatic strengths to engage effectively in key opportunities and shared issues, help promote gender equality, civil society, reaching the furthest behind and promote international norms, thus also furthering Ireland's reputation and global interests.
- **Gender:** The Embassy supported a range of achievements through astute partner selection and ensuring gender considerations were integrated throughout their programming. In some instances, it was central to the partner's work (UNOPS, APHEDA, HALO, UN Women, Care International and CDI). Gender equality was highlighted in the mission strategy. However, gender analysis commitments did not appear to be consistently applied across the programming. Ensuring momentum is a continuous effort and there is room for deepening the work and fulfilling commitments on gender analysis and opportunities for transformative programming.

**Key Finding 18: Regional coherence and effectiveness-** The Embassy engaged in relevant thematic work across the sub-region relating to UXO, nutrition, emergency response and resilience building. While some areas were programmatic and regional, there is potential to bring more of a regional lens but only where greater resources are present to manage this. Partners reflected a physical presence would bring stronger effectiveness, relationships,

advocacy and policy engagement. Nevertheless, opportunities for coherence or cross partner learning may be strengthened.

**The Embassy has strived to achieve a coherent regional approach based on its strategy.** While there was a breadth of possible thematic areas listed under the regional programme including environmental, economic, and health and safety risks to vulnerable communities, the financial analysis demonstrated that there was a focus on three main areas: mine clearance and education, nutrition and resilience building. This enabled staff at the Embassy to develop a greater depth of knowledge in these thematic areas and identify linkages between programmes.

**Current resources mean that the amount of time staff can spend on the sub-regional programme was limited, with on average one visit per year.** Some years there were opportunities for more visits. With COVID-19 and instability in Myanmar, there was no opportunity to travel since March 2020. When a country visit takes place, it covers the full spectrum of the Embassy's work in Cambodia and Lao PDR (where they are accredited), with meetings with government as well as development partners. In Myanmar, a joint visit with the Bangkok mission took place in early 2019 with the intent to increase synergies between the work programmes but COVID-19 prevented more visits from happening. It was noted by partners that while much of their work and meetings were virtual, there were still opportunities for the Embassy to participate further. The majority (75%) of regional partners also reflected a physical presence would bring stronger effectiveness, relationships, advocacy and policy engagement. Some interviewees viewed the sub-regional programme had potential for greater coherence. There were other views that the Embassy could do more with regional organisations, noting Ireland has much to share from its own experience as a member of the EU. With the current lack of presence in the sub-region, limited resources, and a breadth of countries to cover, the current approach taken by the Embassy has been both pragmatic for ensuring financial accountability of Irish funding, and efficient in terms of minimising staff time required to administer and manage the regional programme.

**An explicit shared understanding of the rationale behind the sub-regional approach was absent.** While there was good intent to ensure coherence of the sub-regional program, an underlying approach was not clear. A range of views have emerged on what the Embassy should be doing including those who think a greater focus on transboundary issues is needed, as well as greater focus on regional institutions. From the Embassy's perspective, it has acknowledged the potential exists to focus more. Clarity would be needed on what the Embassy wants to achieve from a more consolidated and focused sub-regional programme.

**Key Finding 19: Selection of partnerships-** The Embassy was focused on addressing key ongoing development challenges in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region that directly linked to Irish Foreign Policy Priorities. By working through multilaterals and INGOS, partnerships have complemented existing initiatives, ensuring harmonisation of donor activities and added value whilst avoiding duplication of effort. This has ensured a coherent approach.

**In working through multilateral and international NGOs in the Mekong sub-region in particular, the Embassy ensured consistency of their interventions with other actors' interventions in the same context.** This included harmonisation and complementarity of interventions as well as avoiding duplication of efforts. Overall, the Embassy supported a wide range of partnerships that were largely strategic and delivered through a range of modalities that consistently targeted the furthest behind. Several of the sectors in which the Embassy operated were highly politicised and the Embassy sensitively navigated challenges as best as possible within the constraints of the environment. While

some interventions achieved better success than others, the Embassy made good contributions beyond the financial grant alone. While it was noted that there were many partnerships, they were seen as a strength that enabled Ireland's visibility and relationships with government counterparts to grow. The number of partnerships resulted in a heavy administration load for the team, with human resource intensive support required by university partners and local civil society organisations to fulfil basic administration requirements of the grants.

**Several partners noted there was not always clarity on what Ireland wanted from a partnership approach.** While appreciative of the predictable funding, the inability of Embassy staff to engage in policy dialogue when opportunities arose, participate in advocacy campaigns or provide technical inputs, was seen as limiting factor to the partnerships. This was exemplified in the sub-region where engagement was further limited. Development needs and poverty rates in the sub-region are now much higher than in Vietnam. Currently most of the development cooperation funding goes to partnerships within Vietnam (Table 6).

**Table 6: Estimated expenditure by country and region**

Objective	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Total
Vietnam	€1,590,000	€3,465,000	€16,656,630	€800,000	<b>€22,511,630</b>
Laos	€635,000	€215,000	€0	€2,910,000	<b>€3,760,000</b>
Cambodia	€0	€20,000	€0	€2,350,000	<b>€2,370,000</b>
Myanmar	€240,000	€100,000	€0	€2,060,000	<b>€2,400,000</b>
Various (individual scholarships, Programme quality and support Regional)	€3,284,870	€266,000	€0	€556,440	<b>€4,107,310</b>
	€304,488	€295,503	€306,215	€410,000	<b>€1,316,206</b>
	€0	€0	€0	€2,653,497	<b>€2,653,497</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>€6,054,358</b>	<b>€4,361,503</b>	<b>€16,962,845</b>	<b>€11,739,937</b>	<b>€39,118,643</b>

Source: IDC 2020

**Key Finding 20: Policy coherence-** The Embassy used its diplomatic strengths to engage effectively in key opportunities and shared issues, help promote gender equality, civil society, reaching the furthest behind and promote international norms, thus also furthering Ireland's reputation and global interests.

Ireland's Mission Strategy in Vietnam and Mekong sub-region was underpinned by Ireland's Foreign Policies *The Global Island* (Gol 2015a); Ireland's international development policy, *One World One Future 2013-2018* (Gol 2013) and more recently *A Better World* (Gol 2019) and *Ireland's Asia Pacific Strategy* (Gol 2020). Throughout 2017-2020, the Embassy supported Irish citizens and advanced Ireland's values, political, diplomatic and economic interests. The Embassy promoted multilateralism and international normative frameworks, working in a challenging international environment that was disrupted in 2020 by COVID-19.

In political work and development programming, the Embassy supported civil society groups, advocated for fundamental human rights, and targeted the furthest behind. The Embassy supported a small number of initiatives relating to climate change and the environment, including innovative linkages in their IDEAS programme. Given Vietnam's priorities and the Mekong sub-region's vulnerability to climate shocks, if Embassy staffing constraints permit, there would be opportunities for advancing climate action in the future. Likewise, while several activities were funded to specifically advance gender equality, delivering on the mission strategy commitments relating to this and

strengthening transformative programming may be advanced in line with the ambition of *A Better World* (Gol 2019).

**Key Finding 21: Gender-** The Embassy supported a range of achievements through astute partner selection and ensuring gender considerations were integrated throughout their programming. In some instances, it was central to the partner's work (UNOPS, APHEDA, HALO, UN Women, Care International and CDI). Gender equality was highlighted in the mission strategy. However, gender analysis commitments did not appear to be consistently applied across the programming. Ensuring momentum is a continuous effort and there is room for deepening the work and fulfilling commitments on gender analysis and opportunities for transformative programming.

**As part of the mid-term review, a gender review was completed with positive findings.** The Embassy was noted for having strong leadership and it was innovative in using existing partnerships to help address this issue within the Embassy. The review looked at the Embassy strategy and action plan in terms of how the Embassy would achieve their gender equality ambitions. Recommendations to address gaps and challenges, while building on existing strengths were made which have since been taken up. This has included gender training for all staff. As a result of this training, an action plan was formulated by the team which is now being implemented internally.

**The mission strategy had a commitment to ensuring that all programmes include a gender analysis, sex disaggregated data and gender indicators incorporated into systems for monitoring and evaluation across the Embassy's work.** Whilst there are many good examples of these commitments having been delivered across the work of the Embassy, particularly in the ethnic minority work and land mine clearance and education, not all partners were able to demonstrate they had undertaken gender analysis or were capturing disaggregated data.

## 6. Governance

This section focuses on review question two of the terms of reference. It outlines findings in relation to how the governance structure, systems, capabilities and approaches have enabled the Embassy to manage resources and risks to ensure the effective delivery of an integrated mission strategy. Findings fall into five main areas: effectiveness of the integrated approach taken by the Embassy, coherence of knowledge management systems, effectiveness of the partnership approach, implications arising from the new standard approach to grant management, and the overall approach to performance management.

### Summary of Key Findings

- At the Embassy level, there was evidence of effective management and oversight of funding and good decision making regarding strategic issues. Management of risk was integral to the way the Embassy team worked and reported to headquarters.
- The integrated way in which the Embassy is working enabled the Embassy to work across all outcome areas aligned to the strategy, although efficiencies in allocation of tasks has not always been achieved.
- Partner selection was spread across a range of sectors, modalities and partner types to maximise effectiveness, build capacity and mitigate risks. The number of projects and/or thematic areas of support was relatively large and diverse in comparison to other Irish missions but is also a reflection

of the Embassy's focus on piloting, testing and maturity. However, taken together, in some parts of the programming there is a need for further prioritisation.

- The introduction of the Standard Approach to Grant Management (SAGM) added to the strength of oversight of partners with regards to proposal appraisal, monitoring and evaluation, and risk management. However, the perceived 'one size fits all approach' to the application of the SAGM has created some inefficiencies.
- The Performance Management Framework (PMF) provided a useful analytical tool and framework for monitoring the strategy and performance of the programme but sat alongside corporate reporting requirements. A tool that can both feed into the corporate reporting, as well as ensure adaptive learning would add greater value to the Embassy.

**Key Finding 22: At the Embassy level, there was evidence of effective management and oversight of funding and good decision making regarding main strategic issues. Management of risk was integral to the way the Embassy team worked and reported to headquarters.**

**The Mid-term Review (MTR) completed in 2019 outlined evidence demonstrating that an integrated approach resulted in effective management and oversight of funding.** Integral to its management approach, the Embassy placed a high priority on risk management. The Embassy completed an annual risk register as part of its business planning process which was comprehensive. The risk register was reviewed at every Senior Management Group meeting and has been updated during the mid-year review process. The Embassy demonstrated a responsive approach to risk management as observed in the 2020 Business Planning process. In this plan, two of 11 risks identified in the 2019 Business Plan were eliminated, two others were reviewed and merged, and two COVID-19 risks were added. The mid-term review noted that annual audits were diligently conducted with recommendations implemented. 100% of performance assessments met a satisfactory grade in 2017 and 2018.

In addition to promoting coherence and recognising the lack of presence on the ground and challenges of remote monitoring, the Embassy worked through trusted international partners in the sub-region. Comprehensive and close management of partnerships, reporting, capacity assessments and financial reviews of CSOs demonstrated due diligence and detailed risk management. By the 2019 MTR, the Embassy had completed 17 capacity assessments and nine organisational and financial reviews. Some partnerships added a significant management burden. The lack of capacity to regularly visit and monitor the programmes has meant Embassy staff have been unable to verify achievements and impacts. This coupled with the heavy reliance on self-reporting, has exposed the vulnerabilities of this remote monitoring approach.

**During the life of the mission strategy, the management arrangements of the Embassy with headquarters have been adjusted.** There was split reporting to the Asia Pacific Unit (APU) and the Development Cooperation and Africa Division (DCAD). Transfer of responsibility within DCAD to the newly created Global Programmes Unit has led to improved engagement with co-location with other non-African locations giving commonality of issues. This has enabled strengthened line of sight of the integrated approach back to headquarters. Furthermore, the establishment of a relatively new business unit within DCAD provided a clear 'home' for Vietnam and was an important development. It was reported by headquarters staff that political and development approaches were well connected and mutually supportive. Yet resourcing constraints in DCAD meant the Embassy has been largely self-managed on the development cooperation side. Benefits from being in the development division, such as technical support, participating in communities of practice and systematic sharing of lessons, were

not yet felt by the Embassy to have fully materialised. All noted that relationships were strong and intent for support was there, but challenges of under-resourcing in DCAD and a seven-hour time difference had resulted in barriers to these benefits being realised.

**Key Finding 23: The integrated way in which the Embassy is working has enabled the Embassy to work across all outcome areas aligned to the strategy, although efficiencies in allocation of tasks has not always been achieved.**

**The Embassy made a formal shift in embedding an integrated approach to the way it works in the mission strategy.** It outlined a transparent framework for addressing global priorities identified in *The Global Island* (Gol 2015a) and *One, World, One Future* (Gol 2013) and summarised clearly what it would do to contribute to these. The mid-term review noted it had made significant progress and that the overall direction of the approach remained valid with strong results having been delivered.

**The mission strategy brought together existing approaches being undertaken by the Embassy and piloted new ways of working under one clear, comprehensive and integrated framework.** Earlier groundwork in moving to an integrated approach was capitalised on, with IDEAS and local market plans being central to the integrated approach. The review team found close alignment between business planning, annual reporting and the mission strategy, thus reinforcing the integrated approach. To ensure a fully integrated approach, several staff roles were redefined to cover multiple areas of the mission strategy. Three new internal working groups were established focused on different parts of the Embassy's portfolio of activities (development, economic and promotion) with staff participating in different groups to ensure cross learning and sharing of ideas between portfolios. Further refinements to internal management are still taking place recognising the ongoing learning approach they have cultivated.

**An increase in compliance reporting was a challenge given the Embassy's dual reporting lines and knowledge management systems coherence.** With local staff unable to access internal systems (such as Cabhair, the SUN accounts system and other intranet based applications and resources), all reporting and record keeping fell to posted diplomatic staff. This has had a negative impact on the efficiencies the integrated approach was trying to achieve. It was also noted by staff that the move to an integrated approach had resulted in increased workloads due to additional tasks being taken on, and new coordination meetings. With the Standard Approach to Grant Management (SAGM) also increasing workloads there was widespread agreement within the Embassy that workloads are no longer sustainable and prioritisation needs to occur. Ensuring the new grants management system that is currently being designed takes into consideration systems coherence will be of importance to ensure efficiency in processing development cooperation grants in a way that is accessible to all staff at the Embassy. The new mission strategy presents an opportunity to ensure these issues are considered to help inform prioritisation.

**With the formalisation of an integrated approach, staff welcomed the opportunity to learn new skills and work in different areas.** While the increased workload was noted, the focus of the Embassy as a learning organisation was appreciated. The mid-term review noted that exchanges with Embassies in Kenya, South Africa and Zambia in 2017 had contributed to strengthening the application of an integrated approach. It highlighted that the approach had involved a significant shift, with colleagues working increasingly across different work streams. While this had resulted in identifying synergies, and additional resources being deployed for certain tasks, it was noted to have been demanding on staff. The learning approach was noted to have extended to partners, with a focus on

creating networking and establishing links between partners to encourage cross organisational learning. This was supported by learning events organised both in Hanoi and Hoi An during the life of the strategy.

**Key Finding 24: Partner selection was spread across a range of sectors, modalities and partner types to maximise effectiveness, build capacity and mitigate risks. The number of projects and/or thematic areas of support was relatively large and diverse in comparison to other Irish missions but is also a reflection of the Embassy’s focus on piloting, testing and maturity. However, taken together, in some parts of the programming there is a need for further prioritisation.**

**During the life of the strategy there were 96 partnerships (Table 7) spread across a range of thematic areas<sup>39</sup>.** The challenge of this diversity has been the added management required. With constraints already highlighted and increased workload because of an integrated approach, the diversity of partnerships was noted to have placed a further strain on staff. There was also a sense that opportunities to deepen policy and strategic engagement with partners are being lost due to the breadth of partners that the Embassy staff were managing. Partner selection was based on multiple criteria, including assessments of likely risk. However, analysis of their contribution to the overall strategic priorities of the strategy was not always clear. Yet there was evidence of clear intent by the Embassy to ensure partner selection contributes to a coherent approach as demonstrated by the focus on mine clearance and education in the regional programme as well as food security and nutrition. All partnerships were able to demonstrate a link to the mission strategy.

**Table 7: Number of partners by outcome area 2017-2020**

Outcome	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Outcome 4.1 Economic growth</b> is more inclusive and sustainable and institutions are more accountable and transparent	15	17	17	26
<b>Outcome 4.2 Civil society</b> and citizens are empowered to realise their rights and participate in their own development	11	8	10	9
<b>Outcome 4.3 Vietnamese ethnic minority communities</b> are driving their own development and benefitting socio-economically, supported by more enabling and evidence-based policy	9	9	9	8
<b>Outcome 4.4 Regional support</b> – environmental, economic, health and safety risks to vulnerable communities in Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar reduced	8	11	11	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>54</b>

Source: Embassy of Ireland, Hanoi. VIBE partners are cumulative and include no cost extensions. While the number in 2020 appears to go up substantially, it is because of no cost extensions rather than new partnerships or new grants. There was a total estimate of 96 unique partners throughout the course of the mission strategy.

**Key Finding 25: The introduction of the Standard Approach to Grant Management (SAGM) added to the strength of oversight of partners with regards to proposal appraisal, monitoring and evaluation, and risk management. However, the perceived ‘one size fits all approach’ to the application of the SAGM has created some inefficiencies.**

**The Embassy was commended by headquarters for its diligent implementation of the new Standard Approach to Grant Management (SAGM).** There was a high value placed by staff on ensuring quality reporting in a timely manner. Senior Advisers and Programme Officers themselves had found they were taking on wider responsibilities due to the integrated approach and had less time available.

<sup>39</sup> These include: inclusive economic growth, transparency and accountability, education institutional linkages, civil society strengthening, ethnic minority issues, gender and climate smart livelihoods, health and nutrition, environment, health and safety risks and mine action.

**All staff reflected that implementation of the SAGM, coupled with integrated knowledge management systems, had been particularly demanding and time consuming.** This was amplified when applied to smaller organisations who generally had less capacity and experience of dealing with donor requirements and was characteristic of a number of small partners across the Embassy. With the diligent approach taken to risk management both in terms of partners selected in the Mekong sub-region, and in the regularity of its reporting and review, the Embassy may not have adopted a streamlined approach to partner management. It was noted by headquarters that the SAGM was designed to be proportionately applied and the Embassy could benefit from reviewing its application of the system.

**Key Finding 26: The Performance Management Framework (PMF) provided a useful analytical tool and framework for monitoring the strategy and performance of the programme but sat alongside corporate reporting requirements. A tool that can both feed into the corporate reporting, as well as ensure adaptive learning would add greater value to the Embassy.**

**The Performance Management Framework (PMF) integrated all the Embassy's outputs and outcomes into one joint framework.** Part A included five High Level Outcomes and four Intermediate Outcomes reflecting the overall goals the mission strategy is expected to contribute to. Part B sets out nine priority outputs with 40 indicators that clearly articulates what needs to be delivered through the implementation of the mission strategy. Part C provides an overview of the systems and structures to be enhanced/introduced for effective delivery of results.

**The PMF, while a comprehensive framework, was drafted in 2019.** It did not appear to be used to guide management decisions of the Embassy (although noting it was not long after that the COVID-19 crisis commenced). It was noted by some stakeholders that it served a greater purpose as a useful and important communication tool on the work of the Embassy. Information contained in the PMF was generally logical and fit for purpose in tracking results in the development cooperation programme, but information collected on political and economic promotion data was less clear and inherently more difficult to measure and link attribution. With separate reporting required in the business plans, annual reports, on consular data, budgets, grant management and social media, efficiencies have not been achieved through having a comprehensive PMF.

## 7. Lessons

This section focuses on review question four of the terms of reference on lesson learning. It outlines key insights in terms of implementing an integrated mission strategy and how it can contribute to overall organisational learning. Lessons from other missions that have shifted their engagement away from traditional bilateral development cooperation towards a greater focus on economic partnerships are outlined.

### 7.1 Overall insights

The delivery of the integrated mission strategy (2017–2020) provided a strong example for DFA of how an Embassy can largely, through strategic planning, innovating and piloting, integrate all aspects of the work of an Embassy. This experience offered two overall insights that may contribute to discussion and exploration within the Department to inform organisational learning.

**Orientation:** *Global Ireland* (GoI 2018) has provided a framework for reimagining development cooperation in Vietnam applying the mutuality of sustainable development and its multi-dimensional relationship-based approach. Previously, the focus was on the poverty dimensions of the country and

sectoral specific, technical solution focused 'aid' interventions. The nature of Ireland's engagement in a particular setting will continue to be attuned to the country context but particularly in a LMIC like Vietnam, this has benefitted from being developed from a standpoint of where and how Ireland can best support Vietnam's path to sustainable development. This perspective has relevance to organisational learning and all embassies irrespective of the nature, source and volume of the funding they directly manage (in-country) and the other sources of finance and engagement that characterise Ireland's relationship with the country. It will also affect longer-term moves around staffing structures and skill sets within Embassy teams and associated processes on human resources.

**Concept of region:** The Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region Strategy was predicated on the premise that there was merit for Ireland in having a sub-regional approach to development programming. Learning from the programme suggests a need to revisit this, given the (above) orientation point and a recognition of the importance of Vietnam within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which also includes Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar, and the symmetry in the geopolitical context between the European Union and ASEAN. Within the Department there appears to be different uses of the terms region and sub-region and how it applies to the geography of Asia. Coming together around clusters of residential missions constituting a region and within which individual countries have their own specific engagement needs, may be a more relevant organising principle for the future. This could also enhance the way in which Ireland seeks to engage, work with and through the European Union and Multilateral organisations, recognising the increasing importance of regional structures in support of country level engagement within the UN Development System.

## 7.2 Insights from peer Ministries on deepening an economic partnership with Vietnam

Many of Vietnam's traditional bilateral development partners, particularly European donors, have transitioned away from bilateral development assistance (Table 8). Officially The Netherlands stopped its bilateral support in 2012, Sweden in 2013, Denmark in 2015, the UK in 2016 and Finland in 2018. Data from the OECD DAC (Table 8) shows that there are still ODA flows from these countries to Vietnam. What has changed is the size of these programmes, how they are managed, and what they focus on. This re-thinking of development co-operation acknowledged the successful path that Vietnam was on, and declining potential for donors to have the transformative impacts experienced early on in Vietnam's development. At the same time, the situation domestically changed for many donors. The global financial crisis in 2008 placed a strain on ODA, with major donors' aid to developing countries falling by nearly 3% in 2011 (OECD), and several countries experiencing a shift to more conservative and market-oriented approaches.

The rationale for exiting<sup>40</sup> and/or transitioning to new relationships in Vietnam was generally given as one of the following three reasons: economic<sup>41</sup> success of Vietnam; unilateral political decision; and reducing operational costs. The first rationale was Vietnam's successful economic development journey which resulted in poverty being reduced from 70% in the 1980's to just under 10% when the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) were reported on in 2015, and its move to a LMIC. This was the main rationale given by the UK (Landel Mills 2015). The second, was often noted as unilateral political decisions. For example, Sweden made a political decision to drop all socialist one-party states from its ODA partner list (ODI 2019). The third rationale given was based on increasing the effectiveness of development partners overall ODA programmes by reducing fragmentation of their aid programmes spread thinly across numerous countries, to more focused programmes. This was one of the rationales

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<sup>40</sup> There is no universally agreed definition of what defines 'exit' or 'transition'. In its 2019 report Exit from Aid, ODI proposed the following definitions – exit is when a recipient country no longer receives support from a bilateral development partner, and s was defined as the period when the financing mix and instruments evolve.

<sup>41</sup> Three aspects that comprise the definition of improvements in economic conditions are: growth, poverty and inequality

given by the Finnish government who following significant reductions to their ODA programme decided to focus on fewer countries.

**Table 8: DAC Countries (OECD 2021) ODA Disbursements to Vietnam 2010–2019 (USD Millions, current prices)**

Donor	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>DAC Countries, Total</b>	1830.71	2084.35	2655.83	2379.94	2427.82	1820.64	1871.56	1540.21	777.98	715.43
<b>Australia</b>	119.83	137.26	144.5	147.17	125.8	103.88	54.18	39.09	48.66	48.71
<b>Austria</b>	2.99	7.31	5.9	4.15	5.08	5.53	2.92	5.03	3.9	4.26
<b>Belgium</b>	22.24	22.98	25.36	29.82	23.51	14.14	15.05	13.08	29.81	15.64
<b>Canada</b>	25	32.65	27.85	22.12	16.25	19.94	19.61	14.77	14.32	13.93
<b>Czech Republic</b>	2.36	1.66	1.45	1.48	0.44	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.06
<b>Denmark</b>	69.04	62.12	61.33	40.82	35.46	13.12	11.7	6.23	8.26	-0.2
<b>Finland</b>	25.19	23.17	12.93	24.72	19.61	12.4	12.93	13.55	9.37	6.08
<b>France</b>	242.42	220.45	135.34	177.27	158.48	84.61	41.3	41.61	7.31	118.91
<b>Germany</b>	96.38	123.86	98.55	144.29	131.91	131.22	181.7	114.27	130.69	122.36
<b>Greece</b>	0.04	0.05	0.08	..	0.04	0.01	0	..	0	0
<b>Hungary</b>	0.32	0.28	0.32	0.74	1.37	3.54	1.76	1.75	2.6	6.28
<b>Iceland</b>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	0.06	0.09
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>18.31</b>	<b>16.47</b>	<b>18.55</b>	<b>17.14</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>12.56</b>	<b>11.43</b>	<b>9.68</b>	<b>10.73</b>	<b>9.32</b>
<b>Italy</b>	5.69	3.98	4.45	2.42	3.13	3.2	1.55	2.4	2.47	4.21
<b>Japan</b>	807.81	1031.01	1646.71	1306.89	1523.09	1074.92	1166.06	927.96	203.75	148.63
<b>Korea</b>	96.04	139.49	200.32	234.56	178.84	217.16	179.83	182.01	142.98	81.33
<b>Luxembourg</b>	12.14	8.77	11.27	12.38	12.5	11.34	7.11	5.44	4.4	3.68
<b>Netherlands</b>	21.16	18.48	7.78	0.62	-0.71	-0.49	0.75	0.18	0.22	0.53
<b>New Zealand</b>	6.47	6.72	8.24	9.89	7.95	4.78	6.44	7.13	7.2	5.1
<b>Norway</b>	20.18	43.12	46.44	18.39	19.8	9.61	10.14	10.61	4.47	5.03
<b>Poland</b>	4.38	4.5	2.34	4.3	-0.15	-0.19	-0.43	0.11	2.84	0.48
<b>Portugal</b>	..	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
<b>Slovak Republic</b>	0.11	..	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.02
<b>Spain</b>	15.99	10.47	3.73	-2.11	-1.53	-23.64	-4.55	-2.88	-4.06	-4.45
<b>Sweden</b>	16.56	15.66	11.19	11.14	-0.3	-0.85	1.39	1.45	1.57	1.69
<b>Switzerland</b>	25.8	30.57	17.29	29.92	31.81	24.79	34.35	21.71	19.09	12.23
<b>United Kingdom</b>	82.2	35	81.88	36.29	25.01	18.83	12.37	8.74	13.95	14.99
<b>United States</b>	92.06	88.29	81.98	105.48	93.56	80.1	103.83	116.16	113.26	96.44
<b>Multilaterals, Total</b>	936.5	1239.46	1446.38	1698.02	1778.76	1331.55	1016.73	835.33	808.42	366.7
<b>Official Donors, Total</b>	<b>2769.86</b>	<b>3332</b>	<b>4113.31</b>	<b>4085.6</b>	<b>4215.62</b>	<b>3167.39</b>	<b>2906.07</b>	<b>2407.49</b>	<b>1647.77</b>	<b>1094.63</b>

Data extracted June 2021 from OECD.Stat. NB: Other ODA channels such as non-OECD countries and multilaterals are not included in the table.

The following lessons were drawn from embassies and delegations interviewed for this review, as being critical elements to ensuring effective relationships with Vietnam.

**Having a clear plan to manage a transition ensured continuity of relationships.** This needed to include a clear, and positive, communication plan focused on both internal and external audiences. The importance of managing the changing relationship in terms of expectations, administrative and legal requirements was noted to take time, required detailed planning and concerted effort to ensure buy in. Internally it was important to ensure clear positive messaging, repositioning of staff wherever possible, and providing training to help with repositioning. If ODA to Vietnam continues at a reasonable level then the need to talk of exit or even transition was ultimately seen as not necessary.

**Establishing new ODA instruments for engaging with the Government of Vietnam enabled government relationships to be maintained while creating entry points for business.** The three countries that had officially ended their bilateral aid programmes in Vietnam had all established new instruments for continuing to engage with Vietnam ahead of their programmes closing. Having these new instruments planned early enabled continuity of engagement. Most of these new instruments were generally administered by headquarters. All interviewees noted these instruments were critical to maintaining good working relationships with government counterparts and that opportunities for their businesses, particularly small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) had been opened as a result. Continuing ODA programmes to leverage opportunities and influence was seen as critical by all.

**Identifying a limited number of stakeholders and government counterparts ensured efficient use of embassy resources while maximising opportunities for business engagement.** In moving to, or focusing on an economic partnership, it was said that priority should be given to identifying what sectors to engage in and which stakeholders to engage with. This was seen as critical for ensuring a meaningful engagement where value can be added, while not spreading too thinly. Priority economic sectors had invariably been driven by headquarters and opportunities for business engagement, as well as the comparative advantage of the country.

**By prioritising engagement, it was possible to develop a reputation that helped to increase visibility.** Prioritising engagement in a limited number of areas enabled countries to develop a reputation for sectoral excellence. For smaller countries, this was seen as an important outcome for ensuring visibility of their engagement while supporting their businesses. Focusing on fewer areas and ensuring resources were allocated to these, was said to help achieve impact and create an identity for the embassy. For example, in Vietnam, Israel was known for its agricultural excellence, Denmark for its focus on energy, Belgium on food, and Finland on water. The benefit of being able to draw from ODA projects to showcase the Embassy on social media was noted by all interviewees as helping to create positive reputations. With an estimated 30 million smart phone users in Vietnam there was a wide audience to tap into. Showcasing work was noted as critical to helping to establish the embassy's identity and reputation.

**Investing in educational linkages created meaningful relationships, while helping to establish reputation as a destination for international students.** All countries placed a focus on deepening educational linkages, focusing on both research and tapping into the international student market. With over 400 universities in Vietnam, it was noted that there were plenty of opportunities for everyone to engage. By establishing links with regional universities, one bilateral partner noted that this had given them good insights and linkages into central government. With over 250,000 Vietnamese studying abroad there was significant potential in the international student market. In post-Brexit EU, this presents a significant opportunity for Ireland as the only English-based offering.

The overriding reflection from interviewees was the importance of their ODA investments to securing new business relationships for SME's and maintaining robust government relationships. There was a strong sense that if the development cooperation programme had been withdrawn too early, it would have been damaging for relationships. Ensuring that years of engagement and investment were not just let go once the bilateral aid programme ceased needed planning. Keeping relationships alive needed thought and regular engagement with ministries. Ultimately the idea of countries exiting their aid programmes in Vietnam was a misnomer. What has changed is the way aid is given, the outcomes expected from that aid and the focus of those relationships. A broader discussion of the role of ODA is needed ahead of any significant change in the extent and nature of support provided. This goes beyond the scope of this review but would be an important consideration before shifting approaches.

### 7.3 Strengthening the delivery of the mission strategy

Based on the findings in this review, suggestions from partners, and lessons from other missions, the following have been identified as areas where greater emphasis could lead to improved delivery of a new mission strategy. These are summarised under the following: enhancing strategic focus; clarifying the regional approach; and supporting systemic/organisational learning.

#### Enhancing strategic focus

The 2017–2020 Strategy was an important first step in framing and articulating a vision for the integrated Embassy. With the implementation of *Global Ireland: Delivering in the Asia Pacific Region to 2025* (Gol 2020) and *A Better World* (Gol 2018) and lessons emerging from implementation of the current strategy, there is an opportunity to refine and narrow down the focus of the Embassy. This would help to ensure greater efficiency in resource allocation, whilst strengthening potential for impact. The rationale for enhancing strategic focus:

- **To help create an identity and reputation.** Ireland has developed a positive reputation for its contribution to the ethnic minority work in Vietnam. The opportunity now is to develop a clear narrative and focus on what Ireland as an economic partner has to offer Vietnam. With the new EVFTA and Vietnam's position as a gateway to ASEAN, there is potential for this to have scale and multiplier effects across the ASEAN region.
- **The need to focus the team's efforts.** The integrated approach enabled staff to identify multiple opportunities for linking the aid and economic agendas. These were being taken forward on top of existing commitments, creating heavy workloads and a fragmented approach. A clearer, narrower focus would help in decision making around priorities, and ensure staff remain focused on a collective set of issues of highest priority to Ireland.
- **To consolidate the administrative workload.** While the breadth of partnerships enabled trialling and piloting of new ideas, the administrative burden it has created, together with the administrative constraints the Embassy was faced with, makes it unsustainable to continue as is. Consolidation of the number of partnerships and introducing innovative management arrangements will be needed going forward to ensure sustainable workloads.
- **Ensure a more strategic use of advisers.** Linked to consolidation of administrative workload was the need to free up critical staff time to step up engagement in more upstream policy work. With a cohort of senior and widely respected advisers, the Embassy is well placed to engage in strategic policy dialogue and advocacy. This would help to improve the visibility of the Embassy with Government and bilateral partners while helping to develop its reputation.
- **To clarify expectations of partners and bilateral relations.** Currently the Embassy is managing a large number of partnerships. It was noted by partners in the Mekong sub-region that they were not always clear on what Ireland wanted out of the partnership over and above a funding relationship. EMPRO was a good model in Vietnam of how a clearly articulated partnership approach can help achieve progress greater than the sum of its parts. It also enabled Ireland to establish a reputation in this area. Drawing lessons from this model and replicating this across the Embassy would help clarify expectations for internal and external stakeholders.
- **Articulate what success looks like.** It was not evident that there was Embassy wide understanding of what success looks like. The PMF presented a good framework for measuring different levels of results, but many of these were outside the direct sphere of influence of the Embassy and it lacked buy-in from across the Embassy and headquarters. Ensuring there is a management framework in

place that tracks progress towards desired outcomes, whilst enabling adaptive management decisions would strengthen the Embassy's approach.

### Clarifying the regional approach

With current bilateral allocations and staffing resources available, the Embassy took a pragmatic and effective approach to managing the regional programme. There were mixed views among partners and at DFA HQ on the intent of the regional programme. Clarifying the approach would help to communicate this with partners and build broader understanding across DFA on the objectives of the regional programme. In considering the new mission strategy, there is potential for increasing bilateral allocations to the Mekong sub-region and developing a more coherent regional approach, but only if additional resources can be secured to ensure on the ground presence. This would be necessary to ensure effective monitoring and management of any increased funding. Without it, the increased risks would likely outweigh the increased benefits. The rationale for clarifying the regional approach:

- **Addressing the management of Myanmar.** It was noted across the organisation that split management of Myanmar between Bangkok and Hanoi is less than ideal, and that it is not a simple issue to resolve. Senior management recognise the need for a high-level discussion on the issue and the recent coup is likely to have heightened this urgency. A critical input will be the need for a clearly outlined evidence base on what the implications of the current arrangements are. Clarifying the Mekong sub-regional approach will enable a better understanding of the issues around management of Myanmar, most notable being the fiduciary and reputational risks Hanoi is exposed to.
- **Determining bilateral resource allocations.** If a determinant of ODA allocation in Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region is based on development need, there is a rationale for scaling up bilateral allocations in the sub-region while scaling down in Vietnam. However, current management arrangements would make this difficult to administer without increasing risk to the Embassy. There is also a need for a broader discussion of the role of ODA in this region and whether it should be focused on traditional aid or other areas of transformative development. There were mixed views on this within DFA. Clarifying a regional approach would help to start to address this issue.
- **Establishing a case for innovative on the ground presence to help manage risk.** Without on the ground presence outside Vietnam, scaling up of bilateral allocations to the region would increase the risk the Embassy is exposed to without sufficiently realising the benefits. Innovative approaches were suggested including a model followed in other missions, locating someone in the EU offices in each country, and recruiting a local staff member. In order to be able to make the case, a clear rationale and evidence base would be needed.
- **To help communicate with stakeholders.** Partners in the region were not always clear on what Ireland wanted to get out of its partnerships, over and above a funding relationship. Clarifying the regional approach and preparing a communication piece would help bridge this gap while ensuring all stakeholders had a level understanding.

### Supporting systemic/organisation learning

The focus on learning in the Embassy was noted by staff as an important element of how it operated. This learning culture has enabled staff to take on new roles and embrace an integrated approach. Staff felt supported throughout the process. Essential now is ensuring the systematic approach the Embassy has adopted feeds into headquarter thinking and approaches. The rationale for supporting systematic organisational learning:

- **The Embassy has important lessons on modernising diplomacy that can inform corporate policy and approaches.** The Embassy is leading the way on two critical areas for modern

diplomacy – embedding an integrated approach and evolution of ODA in a LMIC. These are critical issues that have relevance across several Irish missions. Their approach also contributes directly to the vision of Ireland's Foreign Policies. Communities of practice led by headquarters have not adapted to the constraints the Embassy are working in. This has ultimately led to the exclusion of the Embassy's participation.

- **Ensuring effective management of risk.** Split reporting between APU and DCAD has given the Embassy greater visibility in both the political and development streams in headquarters but conversely has led to the siloing of issues feeding into headquarters. Another challenge was replicating the integrated approach in headquarters that has been achieved at the Embassy level. One of the main constraints was the current lack of understanding of financial, administrative and reputational risks the Embassy is faced with. Ensuring these issues are effectively communicated and discussed in current management arrangements with headquarters is needed.
- **A performance management framework (PMF) that has further utility.** As noted in Section 6, the PMF presented a good framework for capturing results but was not a useful tool for adaptive management. Ensuring that a new PMF systematically draws lessons into its application, will enable a tool more appropriate for management.
- **Maintaining the right skill set.** The Embassy has embraced a learning approach and supported staff to develop new skills. This has resulted in a successful integrated approach that has promoted teamwork, synergies, and greater collaboration on initiatives. To embed this approach, a skills audit would help to establish what skills there are and what gaps might remain, enabling the Embassy to plan ahead on skilling up the workforce.

## 8. Conclusions, recommendations and issues for consideration

Overall, the Embassy made important contributions across a breadth of areas, both organisationally and within Vietnam and the Mekong sub-region in a dynamic and at times, challenging operating context. The Embassy was politically astute and innovative, building on foundations laid since the establishment of a diplomatic presence in Vietnam. It was an exemplar in integrating and leveraging all aspects of the work of the Embassy to deliver a strategy that was relevant and responsive to Irish Foreign Policy priorities in the sub-region. Importantly, the Embassy had important lessons on modernising diplomacy that can help shape corporate policy and approaches. The Embassy is leading the way on two critical areas for modern diplomacy – embedding an integrated approach, and the provision of development assistance in a LMIC. These are critical elements that have relevance across several Irish missions. It also contributed directly to the vision of Ireland's new foreign policy.

The implementation of the mission strategy provided support to a broad range of partners on poverty reduction with a strong focus on ethnic minorities, demining, mine risk education and nutrition. It also contributed to capacity-building and strengthening of strategic linkages between Ireland and Vietnam through the IDEAS programme. Nevertheless, the review identified opportunities for streamlining and focusing its efforts. The success of the Embassy's work was hampered by the breadth of its engagement, systems challenges, a crowded bilateral space and more recently, COVID-19. Looking forward, there is potential for streamlining its broad portfolio of activities and bringing focus and depth to its investments in line with Ireland's comparative advantages and opportunities within the context. The Embassy is well positioned to continue being an exemplar of *Global Ireland* and the strategies that are designed to enable this. Issues for consideration and recommendations focus on supporting delivery of the new mission strategy are broadly related to enhancing strategic focus, articulating a regional approach and supporting organisational learning.

Issues for consideration and recommendations focus on supporting delivery of the new mission strategy and are broadly related to enhancing strategic focus, articulating a regional approach and supporting organisational learning.

- 1. Integrated approach, relationships and cooperation:** The Embassy should continue its strong relationships, cooperation and integrated approach that advances its political, technical and public diplomacy strengths and reinforces all aspects of their work. The integrated approach should be maintained and the Embassy should continue to capitalise on synergies between outcome areas while considering a strategic focus. (Owner: Embassy; long term).
- 2. Establishing a more focused set of strategic priorities:** The Embassy might consider refining its efforts on a smaller number of specific<sup>42</sup> areas aligned with Ireland's foreign policy interests, capitalising on Ireland's strategic advantages and in-country market demands, where feasible in the next mission strategy. This could include a reduction of the number of partners or consideration of consortia management approaches that reduces administrative burden while strengthening upstream advocacy and policy engagement activities in relevant sectors. (Owner: Embassy; medium-long term).
- 3. Development programming, synergies and research:** The Embassy should continue its strategy of mixed modalities across interventions. Their focus on innovation, educational, technical exchange and institutional linkages that promote synergies between its development programme as well as the promotion of Ireland as an education destination is well placed for future facing work. With the high value placed on education, there is ongoing demand for technical exchange and international education. Building on previous linkages, the Embassy could consider funding high social value shared research initiatives led by Vietnamese or regional academic thought leaders in partnership with Irish HEIs. (Owner: Embassy; medium-long term).
- 4. Defining and measuring performance:** The Embassy may benefit from strengthening the utility of their PMF and an expanded approach to results measurement that includes the strategic and portfolio levels. Effort put into developing the PMF needs to be proportionate to its use. Going forward, recognising that there will still be requirements for corporate reporting, an adaptive management approach is needed that can help inform allocation of resources and staff time on an ongoing basis. They may consider how success is measured being realistic about what is possible to achieve with the resources the Embassy has, and ensuring the tool enables the Embassy to adapt what they are doing in a timely manner. (Owner: Embassy/DCAD; short term).
- 5. A Better World:** Moving forward, the Embassy might reflect on the implementation of its gender commitments and include these approaches as feasible in their next strategy. Internal ways of working and interventions should promote gender responsive programming that directly advances gender equality and transformational change, whilst ensuring institutional capacity and access to such resources. While the Embassy cannot and should not "do everything", in considering coherence and prioritisation with *A Better World*, it could consider mutual interests, windows of opportunities and areas in which it has already built modest successes. It may also consider using

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<sup>42</sup> The OECD DAC (2020) Peer Review noted Ireland could also draw on the experience of other DAC members. One such example is New Zealand which, outside the Pacific, focuses on niche areas rather than trying to work in areas already covered by other donors, thus supporting division of labour. See (OECD, 2015[21]) at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264235588-en>.

the lens of 'furthest behind' in its prioritisation across its development programming. (Owner: Embassy; short-medium term.).

- 6. Regional programming:** Working thematically and regionally had multiple benefits, however, effectiveness could be enhanced by a physical presence. A strong case exists from a consular, diplomatic, political and risk perspective for the Embassy to deepen their footprint and strengthen effectiveness in the sub-region beyond Vietnam. However, this would require a shift in resources, (financial, systems, human) and consideration of a physical presence (e.g. locally engaged node) in order to maximise opportunities, ability to monitor and engage in political/advocacy/coordination mechanisms. Deepening the regional footprint would need to be carefully articulated, considered and strategised with a clearly defined purpose and goals, drawing upon the lessons of other donors who have taken similar regional approaches. The question of regional positioning will need to be reflected at senior management level (Owner: Global Programmes [lead]; Embassy/Asia Pacific Unit; SMG; PDG; short-medium term).
- 7. The current Myanmar governance arrangement** has constrained effectiveness and is further hampered by the split reporting lines, lack of physical presence and current political destabilisation in Myanmar. The governance arrangement for Myanmar should be reassessed by HQ senior management in consultation with key stakeholders. At the time of writing, this issue was due to be considered, and the decision made should ensure that resources are assigned as appropriate in Bangkok/Myanmar/Hanoi with the ability to manage the level of engagement (political and development) in Myanmar. (Owner: Global Programmes [lead]; PDG; Embassies Bangkok and Hanoi; Asia Pacific Unit; short-medium term).
- 8. Managing risk:** The Embassy should maintain a healthy risk appetite, continue to assess and calculate risk in such projects, and take the opportunity to make strategic contributions where appropriate. (Owner: Embassy/DCAD [Leads]; medium term).
- 9. Resourcing:** The Embassy might review the relationship between its breadth of activity, and balance its resources, including staffing structure, roles and competencies, operational needs extending to the physical space, office IT systems, and knowledge management systems. The OECD DAC Review of Ireland (2020) emphasised the need to match resourcing with ambition of Ireland's priorities. Matching resources at both HQ and mission level in any future facing work is essential. HQ and the Embassy should continue to ensure staff capacity and skills are supported to deliver on priorities at both HQ and the Embassy. (Owner: Embassy/DCAD; HR, medium term).
- 10. Evolution of development cooperation programming considerations:** Insights from peer missions indicated the mutually beneficial relationship ODA brought to their engagement in Vietnam and the sub-region. As ODA spend enhanced relationships and catalysed opportunities that would not be there otherwise, a broader discussion of the role of ODA when moving from traditional aid to transformation and economic promotion is needed at senior management level. This may potentially include a strategy for doing so ahead of any major change in programming in Vietnam in particular. (Owner: PDG/EMG [lead] Embassy/Asia Pacific Unit/Global Programmes; short-medium term).
- 11. The Embassy should continue its approach to innovation, evidence and learning, which has broader knowledge exchange potential organisationally.** Greater efforts should be considered

to facilitate systemic organisational learning for colleagues that currently do not have access to the intranet<sup>43</sup>. This could include facilitation by HQ of multiple time zones when delivering training, recording events as well as consideration of shared knowledge management solutions (Owner: Embassy [lead]; DCAD Policy Unit; ICT; short term).

In summary, the Embassy is well placed to continue adapting to the context, balance its resources to outputs and continue to orient itself towards a politically informed future. Taking on board the recommendations from this report and continuing its astute approach, the Embassy should be in a position to pivot towards *A Better World* and *Ireland's Asia Pacific Strategy* (GOI, 2020) as long as they are sufficiently resourced at all times, supported by headquarters and knowledge management systems are supported and strengthened.

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<sup>43</sup> This includes sharing learning between Vietnam and other missions

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## Appendix 1: List of interviewees

### Internal stakeholders

Organisation and Department		Number of participants
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Asia Pacific Unit	3
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Embassy of Ireland, Bangkok	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Communications Unit	2
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Conflict Resolution Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Culture Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD SM	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Business Support Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Civil Society and Development Education Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Global Programmes	2
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Nutrition	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Policy Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Policy: Agriculture	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Policy: Gender	2
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Policy: People	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DCAD Research and Learning, Policy Coordination and Economics	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	DSG	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Evaluation and Audit Unit	2
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Economic Promotion Unit	2
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Finance Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Former Ambassador of Ireland, Vietnam	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Former Development Specialist, Vietnam	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Global Ireland Unit	2
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Human Rights Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	ICT-Corporate Service	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Irish Abroad Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Policy Planning Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Strategy, Governance & Change Unit	1
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland	Embassy of Ireland, Vietnam	17

## External stakeholders

Number of participants	
Academic Friends of Ireland Network	2
Agrifood Company	1
Alive and Thrive (FHI Solutions: Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar)	2
APHEDA Vietnam	1
Belgium	1
Bord Bia	1
Canada	1
Care International Vietnam	1
Center for Development and Integration (CDI) Vietnam	1
Center for Sustainable Development Studies (CSDS) Vietnam	1
Clean Energy Company	1
Denmark	1
Education in Ireland	1
Enterprise Ireland	2
EU Delegation	2
Finland	1
Industrial Development Authority, Ireland	1
IDEAS: UCC-MPI-VNUA	1
Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development	1
Institute Pasteur Cambodia	1
Israel	1
Mine Advisory Group (MAG) Myanmar	1
Ministry of Finance/Committee (Ministry) for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA)	2
Ministry of Planning & Investment & DEA – Dept for Economic Agriculture	1
Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business	1
National Agro-Forestry-Fisheries Quality Assurance Department	1
NFSC	1
Plan International Myanmar	1
Plan International Vietnam	1
Teagasc	1
The Association for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (AEPD) Vietnam	1
The HALO Trust (Cambodia)	2
UNDP Trust Fund for UXO in Lao PDR	1
UNICEF Cambodia	1
UNICEF Laos	1

United Nations Women	1
UNOPS: Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) – Myanmar	2
VIBE: Hanoi Technology and Science University	1
VIBE: Hanoi University	1
VIBE: Hue College of Economics – Institute of Technology Tallaght	1
VIBE: National Economic University	1
VIBE: School of Law	1
VIBE: SL_STEAM Group – Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh – University of Science (VNUHCM – US)	1
VIBE: UCC Irish University	1
VIBE: University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH) – University College Cork – Department of Food Business & Development	1
VIBE: Vietnam National University, Hanoi – UCD Innovation Academy	1
Viethealth for Disabilities Vietnam	1
World Bank Lao PDR	1

## Appendix 2: Minefield clearance in Cambodia

Irish funding of The HALO Trust has enabled the clearance of 929 minefields to date, which are denoted by Irish flags below. Due to the scale of minefields cleared, and as minefields are often situated in proximity to other minefields, Irish flags usually denote a cluster of minefields cleared by Irish Aid-funded teams, rather than a single minefield (source: HALO, 2021).

