

Democracy building cooperation



benefits Swedish trade with Vietnam

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The Swedish Riksdag (Parliament) has long been cooperating with the Vietnam National Assembly to develop democracy in Vietnam. This has resulted in the assembly gaining a stronger position than previously and increasing its openness to the general public. Indirectly, the project has also strengthened Sweden's good reputation in Vietnam, benefiting areas such as trade between the two countries.



The parties sign the programme for the second part of the cooperation between the Vietnam National Assembly and the Swedish Riksdag in June 2003.

Since 1998, members of the Swedish Riksdag and government employees have met regularly with Vietnamese parliamentarians to exchange knowledge and experiences. For the first nine years, cooperation was financed through aid, but now it is continuing without Sida's support.

The overarching purpose of the cooperation has been to help strengthen democratic development by reinforcing the role of parliamentarians as legislators and by improving the efficiency of the National Assembly's administration. Increasing openness to the general public has been an important part of the process.

As Nguyen Thi Cam Mhu, Head of the Division for International Cooperation Project Management,

Office of the National Assembly of Vietnam explains: "The cooperation has brought many positive changes. The parliamentarians and their staff have developed their working methods and have a greater capacity today than previously. Openness towards the general public has also improved considerably. This provides greater knowledge and insight and contributes strongly to increased democracy building in Vietnam."

"Among other things," she continues, "we have introduced the Swedish model with ombudsmen, a youth parliament and broad dissemination of information to the public. We are serious about this process of change and have the support of the Vietnamese people. An example of this is

when we arranged the very first youth parliament in Hanoi in 2006. The event attracted a great deal of attention among school children, university students and ordinary citizens."

Open-hearted discussions

Vietnam is one of the countries where Swedish aid is changing and Partner Driven Cooperation will play an increasingly important role. Vietnam is a one-party state and the status of the National Assembly in relation to the Communist Party and the government was previously weak.

Says Anders Forsberg, Secretary-General of the Swedish Riksdag: "In our meetings with politicians and government employees, we have held open-hearted discussions on the conditions and demands imposed by a democracy. About how important it is to permit an active opposition and differing views. There are now various groupings within the Communist Party and this could be the embryo of a multi-party system."

He is deeply involved in the cooperation from the Swedish side and explains that gender equality has also been a key topic. Special cooperation has been developed between women parliamentarians in the two countries. Anders Forsberg stresses the fact that both countries have learned a great deal.

"We haven't gone to Vietnam as 'teachers'. The cooperation has also enhanced the knowledge of all of the Swedes who have participated. It has provided in-depth knowledge and insight into the broad differences in the conditions for democracy building around the world. The cooperation also benefits other contacts between Sweden and Vietnam. As many as 70



The public receives information about the work of the National Assembly during a visit to the Assembly building in Hanoi in 2006.

Swedish companies have established a presence in Vietnam and have a lot to earn by Sweden enjoying a favourable reputation among politicians, businessmen and the public,” he says.

Mutual exchange

The cooperation with the Vietnam National Assembly is the most extensive collaboration the Swedish Riksdag has ever had with an individual foreign parliament.

The project has included seminars, study visits, training measures and capacity raising efforts in the area of IT and for libraries.

Vietnamese politicians, government employees and certain strategic groups, such as journalists and teachers, have been involved. From Sweden, numerous members of the Riksdag and government employees have participated.

Several concrete changes have taken place in the wake of the project. There are now more full-time parliamentarians than previously and they meet more frequently. Ministers respond to questions in television broadcasts from the chamber. School groups and members of the public are allowed to visit the assembly.

A frequently visited website has been set up and an information centre is being planned.

“The conclusion of the aid-funded project does not mean an end to cooperation. We will continue our ongoing contacts with our Vietnamese colleagues. It’s an exchange from which both countries benefit,” says Anders Forsberg.

Vietnam is one of the countries where Swedish aid is changing. Cooperation between various Swedish players – authorities, organisations and businesses – and partners in the country is increasingly taking place on equal terms and through mutual interest. The objective is long-term self-sustaining relations, for the partners in the countries and for the people living in poverty.

Sida is stimulating Partner Driven Cooperation by facilitating contacts, arranging meeting, disseminating knowledge regarding possible partners and markets, as well as providing initial financial support.



Vietnamese parliamentarians on a study visit to Sweden and Finland to discuss issues including gender equality, December 2007.