



VIETNAM

The whole community has changed their view of homosexuals

A few years ago, homosexuality was considered a disease in Vietnam and many people were forced to hide their sexuality for fear of being ostracized or losing their job. Thanks to collaboration between the Vietnamese organization iSEE and the Swedish RFSU, Vietnam has developed a strong LGBT movement and the same-sex marriage law is now being reviewed by the National Assembly.

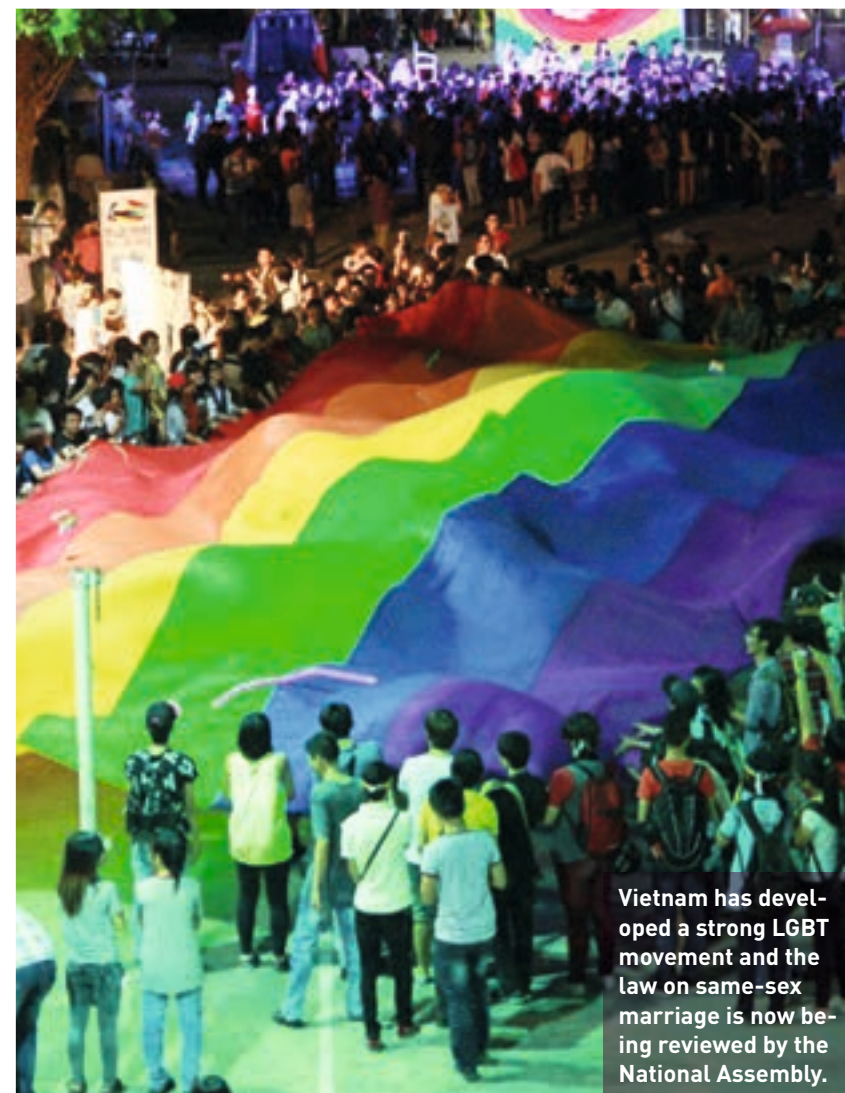
“My life has changed completely. Today, I live openly with my homosexuality and my mother has joined a parent group that supports the LGBT movement,” says student Khoa Teddy, 24, from Ho Chi Minh City.

Four years ago, when a Sida funded collaboration between RFSU and iSEE (Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment) was launched, the situation was different. At that time, Khoa Teddy had to hide his sexuality. When he revealed it to his mother, she was

heartbroken and approached different psychologists to try to cure him.

He was not alone. A study conducted by iSEE in Hanoi in 2009 showed that 86 percent of the respondents who were homosexuals felt compelled to hide their sexuality to avoid losing friends and jobs. 90 percent felt that society had a negative view of homosexuality.

The study inspired iSEE to initiate a partnership with RFSU aiming to strengthen LGBT rights and combat prejudice. During



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PHOTO: iSEE

2010–2012, they worked together to raise awareness about LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) persons through campaigns especially aimed at the media and various women's, student and youth organizations.

The collaboration has led to LGBT information becoming part of many schools' sex education, a campaign has been launched against bullying in schools, sex counsellors have been trained in LGBT issues and a support group for relatives has been initiated.

According to Le Quang Binh, head of iSEE, the project has been very successful.

"A new view of homosexuals is emerging in society. In the past, homosexuality was described as a disease in the media. Today, you read about the right to live with the one you love. LGBT persons feel more empowered and are less afraid to be open about their sexuality. I'm proud of what we have accomplished," he says.

One of the main achievements is the development of ICS (Information Connecting and Sharing), the first LGBT organization in the country.

"Previously there were a few cafés where LGBT people met, but they were so secret that only a few people knew about them. Thanks to ICS we have gained access to a large network and a new community," says Khoa Teddy.

One of the organization's most important issues in 2013 has been to advocate for the legalization of same-sex marriage. Thanks to the campaigns, ICS has provided valuable



Le Quang Binh is head of the iSEE (Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment)

"I'm very proud of our work and what we have accomplished for the LGBT community."

/LE QUANG BINH

input for the Ministry of Justice to consider a law change. They have received inspiration from Sweden which has allowed same-sex marriage since 2009.

"We have made study visits to Sweden and Stockholm Pride. RFSU has in turn been in Vietnam to share their experience of advocacy. It has been very useful," says Le Quang Binh.

One of RFSU's tasks is to combat prejudice and discrimination against LGBT persons globally. However, in order to influence public opinion in other countries, local knowledge is required. The cooperation with iSEE has been very successful.

The funding from Sida ends in October 2013, but the project has led to additional funding from other sources. The parties are now considering a regional partnership with LGBT organizations in other countries in Southeast Asia.

THE FACTS

PARTNERS

The Swedish national organization for sexual advice RFSU and the non profit human rights organization iSEE (Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment).

COST

2,260,000 SEK

SIDA CONTRIBUTION

1,760,000 SEK

PARTNER CONTRIBUTION

640,000 SEK

TIMEFRAME

2010–2013

RESULTS

■ ICS campaigned with iSEE and Sexual Rights Alliance to raise awareness of LGBT students being harassed at school. Thousands of signatures were collected and presented to the Minister of Education with a requirement to address this issue.

■ Following a workshop with 120 counselors, a plan has been designed to educate counselors to provide support for LGBT persons.

■ PFLAG organizes meetings for parents to collect information about LGBT issues. Participants have been interviewed by media to spread information and show that they have gained greater understanding and acceptance of LGBT persons.

■ iSEE have been asked by the Department of Justice to provide information about Vietnamese LGBT groups and to support the revision of the Marriage Act.

■ RFSU and iSEE are cooperating for continuous use of the project concept in order to increase understanding of LGBT persons across East Asia.