



Capacity Building for Public Health Education in Vietnam

Collaboration between Queensland University of Technology and Faculties of Public Health in Hue, HCMC and Can Tho, Hanoi School of Public Health in 2007 - 2010

Mid-term Review of Project Support 2007 - 2008

Tran Tuan
Tran Thi Thu Ha



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Capacity Building for Public Health Education in Vietnam: A National Collaboration
Mid-term Review of Project Support

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Evaluation Team

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Glossary of terms and acronyms

ACS	Academic Credit Systems
AP	Atlantic Philanthropies
BPH	Bachelor's of Public Health
FPH	Faculty of Public Health
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
HSS	Health Social Sciences
HSPH	Hanoi School of Public Health
MTR	Mid-term Review
MPH	Master's of Public Health
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
MoH	Ministry of Health
PMC	Project Management Committee
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RTCCD	Research and Training Centre for Community Development
SIGs	Special Interest Groups
UMP	University of Medicine and Pharmacy

Executive Summary

In 2006, Atlantic Philanthropies approved a four year capacity-building project for the public health faculties in Hue, HCM city, and Can Tho. The project aim is to enhance the skills of public health graduates in Vietnam so they can better achieve the ultimate goal of improving the health of the Vietnamese population. The project focused on two main areas: (1) improvement of the quality of university training courses and (2) enhancement of academic staff capacity in these faculties.

The total budget was approved at \$4,144,353.80 AUD with a distribution of 21% in 2007, 30% in 2008, 26% in 2009, and 23% in 2010.

To launch the project, each faculty has established a project management office linked with the Queensland University of Technology in the role of international project manager and grantee and with the Hanoi School of Public Health acting as the local technical consultant. Above all, they established a national management committee which includes a senior staff member from each of the five institutions to review and approve annual plans. In addition, they appointed a full-time Vietnamese national program coordinator to assist each faculty in project management.

For the first half of the project life (2007-2008), there have been 15 key activities with approximately 2,000,000 USD spent in three areas: (1) Improving the capacity of existing and newly-recruited staff for teaching; (2) Improving the quality of curricula and teaching resources; and (3) Strengthening the infrastructure for national collaboration. Up to May 2009, there have been 15 teaching staff members participating in teaching fellowships in Brisbane, accounting for 71% (15/21) of the project plan. English language training has been promoted in the three faculties. Ten faculty staff members have been pursuing PhD and Master's degree programs at QUT (with only one scholarship yet to be allocated). Efforts to revise curricula have been launched in all three faculties with technical support from QUT and HSPH. Two SIG groups have been started to create a setting where faculty staff can exchange knowledge and share their teaching experiences. Through these efforts, all three faculties have become pioneers at their universities by renovating the training curriculum so that it meets contemporary national standards. The evaluation team conducted 37 interviews (including project director, former- and current local project coordinators), reviewed project outputs of training curriculums, and held a seminar by the request of the public health students in Hue on "solving public health students' questions on public health education and professions in public health".

In general, the evaluation team found that this is a very impressive capacity building project, from project design to project implementation. The project produced substantial outputs which have significantly improved the quality of public health training in these faculties. One of the most impressive project outcomes is an increase in the faculties' willingness to incorporate health social sciences (such as health education, health psychology, and mental health) into their teaching and research. Another notable outcome was the project's successful creation of a collaborative environment for public health training between faculties. In the long term, the project has a great potential to impact public health and medical education in Vietnam.

Lessons learnt from this project are:

- The project is well designed, from targeting problems in public health education development in Vietnam to identifying project strategies and project management structure. All targeted objectives are very specific and practical, and they address systematic issues for Viet Nam. While Vietnam has a severe shortage of skilled public health professionals, the government has developed no clear plan to remedy this problem, so it is up to each public health training institution to address it. This project is one of the very few projects which go beyond equipment and building construction to focus on developing and improving human capital. The project was built with very clear implementation strategies and feasible outcomes.
- Project management is kept simple but effective in coordinating activities across the faculties, while maintaining a very collaborative environment among project partners.
- All project activities are monitored well.
- Throughout the project so far there has been a high level of contribution from the QUT academic staff. This has included direct work in Vietnam by 12 Lecturers and a further 10 individual academics who have contributed in Brisbane. Their work includes participation in training workshops, as mentors for Teaching Fellows and co-supervision of PhD and Masters students.
- The project has successfully built up the faculties' capacity in health social sciences – an important area in public health training that was underdeveloped in medical and public health education in Vietnam so far.
- The project is building a large alumni group consisting of staff across the three faculties plus the Hanoi School of Public Health and QUT who understand each other very well and have demonstrated they can work effectively. This is a valuable human resource that will help to strengthen the national capacity for public health teaching and research.
- The project is now quite well known in Vietnam. In particular, the innovative work that is being done on development of Academic Credit Systems has engaged with the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Health, all other Universities of Medicine and Pharmacy and several other universities in Vietnam.

However, the project also has some room for improvement.

- The operation and management of SIGS were behind schedule, mainly due to competing demands of staff in Vietnam. There is a need for interventions to address institutional issues (i.e., workload, interfaculty communication and management, etc.) and the absence of a detailed action plan.
- The project would have a much bigger impact on the quality of public health training if they had forced strong PhD and Master's students to take all available chances to provide evidence-based training.
- Master's and PhD candidates would greatly benefit from participating in a training workshop aimed at helping them choose meaningful research topics

that add to their professional development while also fitting into their local context.

- The project annual work plan was not well distributed to all the teaching staff in the last two years. Therefore, some teaching staff members were not aware of and did not fully utilize opportunities to make use of the resource development fund.

For the second phase of this project, the team has the following recommendations:

1. Over the next two years, the project should put more focus specifically on improving the training curriculum at the public health field sites. Workshops on strategies for improving the quality of field sites should be organized within the scope of this project.
2. For the current project, there are nine recommendations that should be considered to help the project achieve further progress in public health education and training in Vietnam:
 - Faculty staff and project beneficiaries should be encouraged to learn how to resolve issues as they arise. The issues they are currently facing include the following: Firstly, although public health training is very much needed in Vietnam, few qualified professionals want to become public health lecturers. Secondly, public health trainers often seem disconnected from many of the pressing public health concerns currently facing society. Additionally, their training outcomes- public health students- do not fully grasp public health philosophy and basic methods. And lastly, Master's and PhD candidates should choose research topics and research questions from their related teaching areas.
 - From the Master's or PhD training programs to SIGs research or curriculum development, there needs to be more focus on solving current hot public health problems in Vietnam. The project should make it a priority to create a public health workforce that confronts public health issues in Vietnam from a critical viewpoint. In order to accomplish this, Master's and PhD students should be taught how to address their research and training interests critically using the tools they have at their disposal. Additionally, case studies for teaching can be employed to further this goal. Such case studies may include epidemiologic research investigating "unsolved" conditions which have gained the attention of journalists and the public (e.g. the Lang Ung Thu cancer outbreaks, Deltoid Sclerosis outbreaks, and cholera outbreaks, as well as demographic issues like an imbalanced sex ratio).
 - There is a need to speed up the curriculum revision process as well as textbook translation and adaptation. The project might need to discuss with PMC solutions such as inviting an editorial board or increasing translation and edition fees.
 - The availability of funds for Academic Resource Development should be promoted to every teacher by launching a call for small grant proposal or innovation ideas. The logo competition has been a nice experience and should be widely applied in teaching resource development. The Director and the National Program Coordinator should manage this more actively.

- Urgent attention must be given to improving the procedures for the expenditure of funds provided by the project for Academic Resource Development activities, especially in HCMC UMP where there has been difficulty obtaining approval for reimbursements and no adequate mechanism for allocating funds for new initiatives.
- SIGs need to assess the teaching quality of five main subjects. This assessment would be a prerequisite for reviewing the current teaching style, identifying concerns of students and identifying skills to equip students with by each subject.
- In order to change the existing traditional curriculum into a competency-based curriculum, the project needs to have a discussion with faculties about clearly identifying their different types of students and the key competencies of these students. Once identified, students can be given the appropriate knowledge and skills required to be successful in their respective areas. In addition, faculties should consider reducing teacher workload by making more use of doctoral candidates during the data collection period.
- English training for staff members who do not plan to undergo academic education overseas seems ineffective because they have no time for learning, no pressing motivation and no environment to practice their English. It is impossible to improve the English skills of all teaching staff. The project should consider different options for remedying this situation. For example, it would be better for the project to select some key persons who might be trainers or potential leaders in the future and send them to QUT for 3 month or 6 month English education. Alternatively, Australian volunteers having expertise in education could come to work long term at each faculty. This might create a practicing environment for the teaching staff. Another option would be to cut funding for English training altogether due to its inefficiency and lack of results.
- Teaching staff need an ongoing learning environment and access to educational documents. We recommend the creation of an e-library for 3 FPH and HSPH and a forum where teachers can post interesting documents, websites or research results to share with colleagues or download teaching references. HCMC seems to be a suitable host as they have a good information technology team. This project is an area that SIGs should focus on. Furthermore, it would be very helpful of QUT to allow the three schools access to the QUT e-library by providing them with usernames.