

UNDP's Management Response

End-Term Review of the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) Research and Advocacy Programme for the period from November 2017 – April 2026

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Important Note: The majority of action points under each recommendation are subject to the successful commencement of the next phase of the PAPI Programme (the Inclusive Governance Enhancement Programme - IGEP) designed in collaboration with the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) as the identified national counterpart, and currently undergoing the review and approval process by the Government of Viet Nam.

Recommendation 1. Establish a Data Independence Protocol with built-in fail-safe mechanisms

UNDP and HCMA should jointly **develop and formally adopt a Data Independence Protocol that codifies the principles and procedures governing PAPI's survey methodology, data collection, analysis, and publication**. This protocol should include clear editorial independence provisions guaranteeing that findings are published without any form of interference; defined roles for UNDP and HCMA in the data production chain; transparent publication commitments with pre-announced timelines; explicit safeguards to detect and address any potential attempts to influence data collectors or team members, that would trigger a suspension of publication; and a pre-agreed fail-safe mechanism, endorsed by UNDP, HCMA, and donor partners, providing for the suspension of publication if data integrity is found to be compromised. This mechanism should be designed as a credible deterrent and communicated transparently to all partners. The protocol should be annexed to the project's governing document and shared with donors.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is "Accepted," "Partially Accepted," or "Not Accepted," and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP acknowledges the importance of maintaining the integrity, credibility, and transparency of the citizen-centric governance performance surveys. Pending the approval of the planned partnership, UNDP will work with HCMA to develop and formalize protocols that clearly defines roles, safeguards methodological rigor, and ensures transparency in data production and publication. The protocol will be developed in consultation with relevant partners and aligned with national regulations and institutional arrangements for the next phase.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Codify editorial independence and survey integrity mechanism with formal provisions ensuring that final findings are published as analyzed by the technical team without external interference or vetting of results	July 2027	UNDP and HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Establish a safeguard mechanism , to be endorsed by the relevant Project Steering Committee for any future PAPI-like governance enhancement initiative, that mandates the immediate suspension of publication if data integrity is compromised	July 2027	UNDP and HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 2. Maintain international technical expertise as a credibility anchor

International technical advisory support has played a demonstrated role in buttressing the credibility of PAPI's data findings and reinforcing its methodological integrity. The next phase should **retain dedicated independent technical advisory capacity**, whether through a **standing methodological review panel, periodic external audit, or an embedded international adviser**, to provide ongoing quality assurance and sustain PAPI's credibility with both domestic and international audiences. This third-party independent advisory function should be maintained as a distinct, resourced component of the project and should not be absorbed into general project management.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP recognizes the value of continued access to independent technical expertise in sustaining the methodological rigor and credibility of data collection and analysis processes. Subject to Government approval and in collaboration with HCMA, appropriate mechanisms will be put in place as part of upcoming governance programming to ensure ongoing technical quality assurance, building on existing practices and adapted to the institutional arrangements. International expertise will be embedded, as feasible, in full respect to the existing regulatory frameworks, to ensure PAPI-like future initiatives maintain international standing and methodological rigor.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Institutionalize a Standing Methodological Review Panel that reviews every stage of the survey lifecycle—from sampling design and questionnaire adjustments to data weighting and final analysis	July 2027	UNDP and HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Resource a Dedicated International Technical Advisor with an explicitly primary role of providing independent review and technical validity of the methodology and data	December 2031	UNDP and HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Implement periodic external peer-review/validation of survey findings with the involvement of UNDP and/or third-party experts for spot-checks of fieldwork and ad-hoc review of the performance of data collection	March 2027	UNDP and HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 3. Undertake a comprehensive instrument review and adopt a biennial survey cycle

The project should **initiate a structured, consultative review of the PAPI survey instrument**, taking advantage of the break-point created by the country's administrative restructuring. This review should address the dimensional framework, with a view to potentially consolidating from eight to approximately five core dimensions; questionnaire length, which at 45 to 60 minutes has been identified as undermining data quality and respondent engagement; the incorporation of new governance dimensions reflecting Viet Nam's recent institutional changes; and the feasibility of mixed-mode data collection incorporating digital channels. The review should involve HCMA, international methodological experts, and provincial stakeholders, and should be completed before the 2027 survey cycle. Furthermore, the project should adopt a biennial survey cycle for the full nationwide survey, using intervening years for deeper analysis, thematic research, provincial-level engagement, and lighter rapid assessments or thematic modules to maintain data continuity. A biennial cycle will allow greater investment in analytical depth and policy impact while reducing the operational burden and enabling more rigorous quality assurance.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is "Accepted," "Partially Accepted," or "Not Accepted," and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP agrees on the need to periodically review and update PAPI-like survey instruments to ensure its continued relevance, usability, and methodological robustness in a changing governance context. In collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and pending Government approval, the next phase of governance programming will explicitly consider options for streamlining the instrument and optimizing the survey cycle in a way that balances data continuity, analytical depth, and operational feasibility. UNDP has already launched a governance performance metrics mapping exercise, as well as an initial analysis of the PAPI index, to evaluate PAPI's strengths and weaknesses, existing gaps and opportunities to maximise the policy influence of citizen-centric governance performance assessments.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Review current available indices to consolidate dimensions/sub-dimensions of PAPI to find gaps and complementary for the next phase of PAPI-like survey/index	July 2026	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Initiated
Execute a strategic survey redesign for questionnaire optimization while transitioning to a biennial nationwide survey cycle	May 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Conduct specialized thematic deep-dive research to utilize the intervening years to inform policy discussion	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 4. Redefine the reporting strategy and invest in provincial case studies

The project should develop **a differentiated reporting strategy that complements the full analytical report with more accessible products targeted at specific audiences**. This should include: a concise provincial scorecard format presenting key results and recommendations for each province; thematic policy briefs timed to align with specific policy windows; and further integration of PAPI data with complementary data sources such as PCI and digitalization indicators to provide a richer analytical picture. In parallel, the project should conduct in-depth case studies of provinces that have demonstrated exceptional capacity to translate PAPI findings into concrete governance reforms with measurable, visible outcomes. The Quang Ninh case and similar examples should be documented systematically to identify the institutional, political, and administrative factors that enable effective responsiveness to citizen feedback and to inform the advisory work of the next phase.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP concurs with the recommendation to further diversify analytical and reporting outputs of any potential future PAPI-like initiative to better serve different audiences and enhance policy relevance. Pending Government approval, the next phase of governance programming will build on existing reporting practices to develop more targeted products and continue leveraging opportunities to complement survey findings with in-depth analysis, including provincial experiences, in coordination with HCMA and other stakeholders.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Implement a differentiated reporting approach (i.e., a separate set of a full national overview report and a provincial scorecard report) for launching after each biannual survey cycle	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Synthesize multi-source governance analytics , taking use of other available indices when such complementary indices are ready for cross-index integration	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Conduct in-depth research into high-performing and poor-performing provinces to identify the specific institutional and political "X-factors" that enable change	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 5. Formalize the UNDP–HCMA partnership, invest in HCMA’s survey governance capacity, and address the regulatory environment

UNDP and HCMA should develop a **comprehensive operational agreement that specifies roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and accountability frameworks for all project activities**, clearly delineating who manages procurement, data collection, analysis, quality assurance, report drafting, and publication decisions. The agreement should be informed by a thoughtful review of the comparative strengths and advantages of each partner, with a view to maximising methodological rigour and operational efficiency. This review should consider which functions are best performed by UNDP, given its international procurement systems and quality assurance standards, and which can be progressively assumed by HCMA as its institutional capacity develops, including training on survey methodology, quality assurance protocols, data ethics, and the management of sensitive governance themes. The enumerator management model, using students from one province to survey another, should be considered and piloted carefully. The project should also develop a proactive engagement strategy to address potential continued changes in the regulatory environment, including new ODA regulations requiring closer government supervision and the Personal Data Protection Law.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP agrees on the importance of further clarifying and strengthening the operational framework of the partnership with HCMA in the next phase, pending approval of such programming by the Government of Viet Nam. This will include continued dialogue on roles, responsibilities, and quality assurance processes, as well as support to capacity development, in a manner that reflects the evolving institutional context and ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of the programme.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Include in future partnership agreements for the implementation of PAPI-like governance enhancement initiatives, detailed provision that formally define which partner leads on procurement, data collection, and report drafting to avoid ambiguity and ensure accountability.	October 2026	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Establish a dedicated horizon scanning and review mechanism to navigate the evolving legal landscape in Viet Nam, particularly regarding international cooperation and data.	October 2026	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Design a phased transition plan to progressively transfer technical functions to HCMA as its internal expertise matures	January 2030	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 6: Develop a dedicated inclusion strategy and navigate sensitive governance topics with strategic lenses

The project should **develop a dedicated strategy for sustaining its inclusive governance work that does not rely solely on the main PAPI survey budget**. This strategy should map potential national budget lines and institutional champions for specific inclusion themes, explore co-funding arrangements with HCMA's own research budget, and develop a phased plan for progressively handing over specific research streams to national institutions. For sensitive governance topics, the project should continue its evidence-based approach while exercising strategic patience where the space to transition from evidence to action may be limited. The strategy of generating rigorous evidence, identifying champion government partners, and waiting for conducive policy windows has been effective over the medium term.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP recognizes the importance of sustaining attention to inclusive governance issues and continuing to generate evidence on topics of relevance to policy dialogue. In collaboration with national partners and pending approval by the Government, the next phase will explore options to strengthen the sustainability of this work and ensure that evidence generation and policy engagement are appropriately aligned with the evolving institutional and policy environment.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Explore formal co-funding arrangements that leverage HCMA's internal research budget , ensuring the Academy has a strong stake and ownership in long-term inclusion programming	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Create a structured handover plan to transition specific inclusion-related research and locally led innovation streams to domestic partners at the national and provincial levels	October 2031	UNDP, HCMA & provincial governments	No comments	Not Initiated
Advocate for the continued rigorous collection and analysis of sensitive data through government partners identified as “champions” for inclusive policy making	October 2031	UNDP and HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 7: Consolidate digital innovation initiatives and invest in AI-powered ethnic minority e-service access

Building on the demonstrated replication success of the provincial digital public service delivery initiatives, the project should develop a **systematic scaling strategy with documented models and standardized training materials**. This should include investment in expanding the existing piloted AI model into a fully operational tool providing step-by-step guidance in ethnic minority languages for accessing online administrative services. The project should engage the Ministry of Science and Technology to embed citizen-centred design principles into national e-governance standards and integrate AI-powered tools into the mainstream digital transformation agenda. The emphasis on reaching ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and elderly populations should be maintained as a distinctive value proposition.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
PARTIALLY ACCEPTED

UNDP acknowledges the progress made in piloting digital innovations under the programme and the potential for further scaling. As noted at the beginning of the document, further actions on the recommendations from the Terminal Evaluation of the PAPI Research and Advocacy Programme, are subject to the approval of the continuation of UNDP’s governance enhancement support. Pending said approval from the Government of Viet Nam, the next phase will focus on consolidating lessons learned, supporting the adaptation and replication of viable models, and providing technical advice to national partners, taking into account resource availability, government priorities, and sustainability considerations.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Develop a comprehensive package of documented models and standardized training materials that any province can adopt to replicate successful digital innovations	December 20227	UNDP, HCMA and selected provinces	No comments	Not Initiated
Design the AI-powered assistance tool to help users navigate complex online administrative services, with specific interfaces tailored for persons with disabilities and the elderly	December 2027	UNDP	No comments	Initiated
Expand existing pilot AI models into fully operational tools that provide step-by-step, voice-activated, or text-based guidance in ethnic minority languages depending on their available written/verbatim forms	July 2027	UNDP	No comments	Not Initiated
Leverage project evidence to shape the broader regulatory and technical landscape of digital governance in Viet Nam to ensure the integration of accessible e-services with AI-powered tools into the national digital transformation agenda	December 2027	UNDP, HCMA, MOST, MPS, selected provinces	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 8: Develop a donor engagement strategy that leverages comprehensive donor support and consolidate outcome-monitoring into a harmonized MEL framework

Building on the project’s existing donor engagement practices, **the next phase should formalize and systematise the approach to engaging bilateral donor partners** not only as financial contributors but as strategic allies, including regular briefings on all categories of risks and opportunities with specific suggestions for partner engagement, donor participation in strategic project events, and a joint advocacy framework for key messages on governance accountability and citizen participation.

Building on the reporting instruments the project already maintains, including UNDP's corporate results-based management system, annual project reports, quarterly bulletins, the papi.org.vn record of provincial responses, and donor-specific templates, the next phase should **consolidate these into a single harmonized outcome-monitoring framework**. The framework should be designed jointly with funding partners on the basis of agreed MEL templates, drawing on a single evidentiary base to meet the varied reporting expectations of multiple donors. This would reduce the fragmentation of current reporting, strengthen the project's ability to demonstrate value for money across its full portfolio of partners, and free team capacity for analysis and policy engagement.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP agrees on the importance of further strengthening structured engagement with development partners and enhancing the coherence of monitoring and reporting approaches. The next phase will build on existing practices to promote more systematic dialogue with partners and explore options for streamlining reporting frameworks to improve efficiency, transparency, and alignment with partner requirements.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Convene regular technical briefings that provide donors with insights into project risks (regulatory, political, or technical) and emerging opportunities for impact	October 2031	UNDP, and HCMA where appropriate	No comments	Initiated
Update and share the PAPI website (www.papi.org.vn) and news dispatches with donors and national partners to ensure institutional memory and streamline the flow of information to all partners	October 2031	UNDP	No comments	Initiated
Develop a single harmonized outcome-monitoring framework designed jointly with funding partners on the basis of agreed monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) best practices, to be included in annual progress reports	December 2027	UNDP, funding partners & HCMA	No comments	Initiated

Recommendation 9: Consider strategic rebranding aligned with the new institutional partnership

The project should give consideration to **rebranding PAPI in a way that reflects the new institutional partnership with HCMA and the broader analytical ambition to move beyond a single index toward a comprehensive governance monitoring platform** as soon as the next phase commences (subject to government's approval). Any rebranding should preserve the core substance and longitudinal comparability of the survey data, communicate the transition to the new partnership configuration, and position the instrument as a tool that supports the government's own reform objectives. The development of a digital dashboard for monitoring the two-tier reform could serve as a flagship product for the rebranded project.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
ACCEPTED

UNDP acknowledges the potential value of aligning future programme’s positioning (pending Government approvals) with its evolving institutional arrangements and scope. Any consideration of rebranding of PAPI-like initiatives will be undertaken in consultation with HCMA and relevant authorities, ensuring continuity of the PAPI’s principles and methodological rigour, data comparability, and alignment with national priorities.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Update the visual identity and naming convention to clearly reflect the joint UNDP–HCMA partnership, moving away from a project-based feel toward a permanent institutional platform.	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Broaden the project's brand architecture to encompass an evidence-based citizen-centric governance performance monitoring platform in Viet Nam	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Develop the current PAPI website (www.papi.org.vn) into a digital dashboard that tracks governance reforms at both the national and provincial levels, providing real-time, AI-powered visualizations of research data to serve central and local governments as well as the public	October 2031	UNDP, HCMA, website developers	No comments	Not Initiated

Recommendation 10: Develop a supply-side governance assessment to complement the citizen perspective

In the next phase, the project should **further explore through in-depth research the development of a complementary supply-side component capturing the perspectives of public officials on governance challenges and reform priorities**. A supply-side complement may support reducing the perception that PAPI is biased insofar as it seeks to understand governance performance from the perspective of citizens only, strengthen interpretive power by enabling analysis of the gap between citizen experience and official intent, and reinforce PAPI’s analytical position as a comprehensive governance monitoring platform rather than solely a citizen satisfaction index.

Management response (Please indicate whether the recommendation is “Accepted,” “Partially Accepted,” or “Not Accepted,” and briefly explain):
PARTIALLY ACCEPTED

UNDP recognizes the potential value of complementing citizen-based data with additional perspectives to enrich analysis and policy dialogue. In collaboration with HCMA and relevant stakeholders, future governance programming will explore options for further analytical work in this area, taking into account existing initiatives finances by international partners to offset the likelihood of potential overlaps, methodological feasibility and the broader policy context.

Key action(s)	Due Date	Responsible Unit(s)	Comments	Status
Develop specialized deep-dive research instruments to systematically capture the views, constraints, and priorities of civil servants and local administrators to complement quantitative survey findings	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Formally integrate the supply-side research through thematic in-depth studies into the project's core analytical framework to move beyond the indexing assignment	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated
Use dual-perspective data to facilitate "bridge-building" policy dialogues between central/provincial/commune leaders and citizen representatives, using the evidence of shared challenges and foresighted opportunities to foster collaborative reform.	October 2031	UNDP & HCMA	No comments	Not Initiated

** Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).*