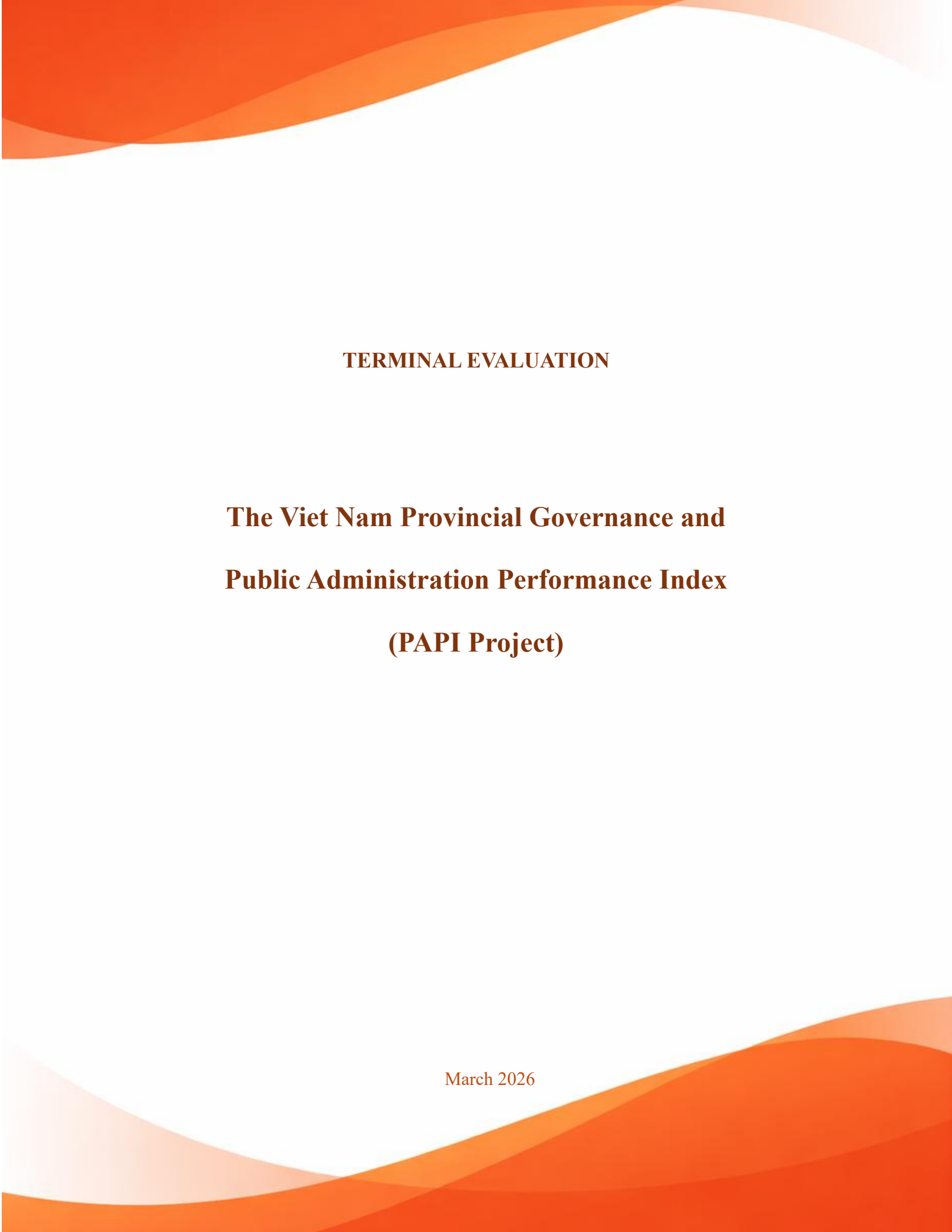


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TERMINAL EVALUATION

The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI Project)

March 2026

Project/Outcome Information	
Project/Outcome Title	The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)
Quantum ID	00100002
Corporate Outcome and Output	- CPD Output 3.2: Improved mechanisms for promoting transparency, public participation, integrity, adaptability and accountability - CPD Output 3.4: Capacities strengthened for institutional reforms addressing gender equality and disability inclusion
Country	Viet Nam
Region	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP)
Project Dates	November 2017 - December 2026 (extended to June 2027) (current phase; programme operational since 2009)
Total Budget	USD 12,868,765
Funding Source	Australian DFAT, Government of Ireland
Implementing Party	UNDP Viet Nam
Key Partners	VFF Centre for Research and Training, HCMA, CECODES, MDRI
Evaluation Type	Terminal Evaluation
Period Under Evaluation	November 2017 - June 2027

Evaluation information		
Evaluation type (project/ outcome/thematic/country programme, etc.)	Project Evaluation	
Final/midterm review/ other	Terminal Evaluation	
Period under evaluation	Start	End
	2020	June 2027
Evaluation Team	Elinor Bajraktari and Pham Quang Nam	
Evaluation dates	Start	Completion
	November 2025	April 2026

Note from the Evaluation Team: *This report exceeds the indicative length of a UNDP evaluation report due to the 16-year duration of the intervention, the convergence of major institutional developments in 2025, and the deliberate intention to make the analysis directly usable for the design of the successor phase.*

Acronyms

CECODES	Centre for Community Support Development Studies
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIM	Direct Implementation Modality
GIS	Geographic Information System
HCMA	Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MDRI	Mekong Development Research Institute
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
PAPI	Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index
PCI	Provincial Competitiveness Index
PPWG	People Participation Working Group
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VCCI	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
VFD	Vietnam Federation on Disability
VFF	Vietnam Fatherland Front
VESS	Vietnam Center for Economic and Strategic Studies

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Executive Summary

Project Description

The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) project, operational since 2009 and in its current phase since November 2017, represents UNDP's flagship governance monitoring initiative in Viet Nam. Over sixteen years, PAPI has evolved from a pilot study in three provinces into a nationally recognized, citizen-centric governance monitoring system covering all of Viet Nam's provinces. The survey measures governance performance across eight dimensions: participation at local levels, transparency in decision-making, vertical accountability, control of corruption, public administrative procedures, public service delivery, environmental governance, and e-governance. By 2024, it had collected governance feedback from 216,673 randomly selected citizens, establishing the most comprehensive longitudinal governance dataset in the country.

This evaluation took place at a moment of exceptional significance for the project. In 2025, PAPI simultaneously experienced its most severe operational disruption and its highest-level institutional recognition. The absence of a national institutional host following the Viet Nam Fatherland Front's (VFF) exit from the project, combined with changes in the operational environment following Decree No. 26/2024/ND-CP, meant that for the first time in the project's history the annual nationwide survey could not be conducted. Simultaneously, Politburo Regulation No. 365 designated PAPI, alongside the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) and the Public Administration Reform Index, as one of the indicators for evaluating the performance of Provincial People's Committee chairpersons. Viet Nam's administrative restructuring from sixty-three to thirty-four provinces, the abolition of the district tier of government, and the reduction of communes from 10,035 to 3,321 further reshaped the entire operational environment. These converging developments define the context within which this evaluation assesses PAPI's achievements and considers the strategic choices that will shape its next phase.

Evaluation Methodology

This terminal evaluation assesses the project's performance against the six OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, supplemented by analysis of cross-cutting issues. The evaluation draws on a comprehensive review of project documentation spanning the full implementation period, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders across five categories, field visits to two provinces, an online survey, and analysis of project monitoring data. The evaluation was commissioned by UNDP Viet Nam in December 2025 and completed in April 2026. Beyond assessing project performance, the evaluation serves to inform UNDP's future programming in governance and public administration in Viet Nam, including the design of inter-linked programme interventions and the formulation of the new Country Programme Document currently under development. The evaluation is intended for use by UNDP Viet Nam, UNDP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, the Government of Viet Nam, HCMA as the incoming national project owner, development partners including DFAT and the Government of Ireland, and the broader governance and accountability community.

Key Findings

1. Relevance

PAPI occupies a distinctive and irreplaceable position in Viet Nam's governance landscape as the only large-scale, independent, citizen-centric assessment of provincial governance performance. Its relevance rests on two mutually reinforcing foundations: methodological credibility and operational independence. The quality assurance architecture, built around GIS-connected tablets, timestamp analysis, random audio recording, and cross-provincial enumerator deployment, provides a level of data integrity that evaluation participants considered exceptional for a survey of this scale. Independence, the separation between the entities whose performance is assessed and those managing data collection and analysis, is what gives the data its value. Evaluation participants from international organizations stated with particular force that if independence is compromised, the value-added of the survey comes into serious question.

PAPI's relevance has been sustained through its capacity to adapt, expanding from six to eight dimensions in 2018 and evolving from a survey instrument into a broader platform encompassing thematic research, policy advocacy, disability inclusion, gender analysis, and citizen-powered innovation. However, the current moment requires a transformation, rather than incremental adjustment. The administrative restructuring has made the existing sampling framework obsolete. Key partners interviewed for this evaluation argued that PAPI needs to go beyond presenting data to interpreting why governance performs as it does, and to integrate with complementary data sources. Making PAPI more sensitive to measuring change within a political term of five years is essential if its inclusion in the performance assessment of provincial chairpersons is to be meaningful.

2. Coherence

PAPI demonstrates strong internal coherence through a multi-partner delivery model that assigns clear responsibilities across UNDP, the international Technical Adviser, HCMA, the fieldwork partner, and the National Advisory Board. This partnership structure was deliberately designed so that no single entity both produced governance performance and assessed it, and it functioned effectively for most of the project's lifespan. Changes in the operating environment affected partnership configurations, with both VFF and CECODES exiting the original partnership configuration.

External coherence is more uneven. PAPI and PCI, which together provide citizen and firm perspectives, have benefited from a shared index constructor and collaborative engagement at the provincial level, with provinces frequently inviting both teams to provide diagnostic analysis for provincial leaders. However, deeper analytical integration of citizen-centric and economic governance findings at the provincial level remains an area for further development; evaluation participants noted that provinces would benefit from systematically reviewing both indices to strike a balance between social and economic governance improvement. PAPI's exclusive focus on the demand side of governance is identified as a gap that limits both analytical depth and political sustainability; a complementary supply-side component capturing the perspectives of public officials would reduce political sensitivity and strengthen interpretive power. HCMA has

formally expressed interest in this expansion. PAPI data and findings are already used in HCMA's teaching curricula, and the Academy's research departments co-author policy papers using PAPI data, creating a coherent feedback loop from citizen evidence to leadership training. Donor coordination between DFAT and the Government of Ireland through the embassies of Australia and Ireland to Viet Nam has functioned effectively, though communication gaps have introduced temporary challenges that both partners acknowledged.

3. Effectiveness

PAPI's effectiveness is characterized by a notable pattern. While thematic research, policy advocacy, and citizen-powered innovation functions have operated continuously throughout the project's lifespan, the project's most visible achievements in these areas occurred in 2025, the year it was unable to conduct its core survey. Of eighteen results framework indicators, eleven were met or exceeded, five fell short due exclusively to the 2025 survey cancellation, one is on track, and one cumulative target is no longer achievable. The survey-independent functions operated at their highest capacity in 2025, producing eleven thematic studies, fifteen case studies, six policy briefs to the National Assembly, sixteen advocacy events, and approximately 250 media items without new survey data.

The disability inclusion pathway from survey data through dedicated research, capacity building, and sustained advocacy to Conclusion Notice No. 444 provides a key example of the project's Theory of Change working as intended. By 2024, all sixty-three provinces had developed governance improvement plans in response to PAPI findings, though sustained reform occurred in only a subset of provinces with committed leadership. The Citizen-Powered Innovation Initiative (CPPI), which has consumed approximately one-sixth to one-eighth of PAPI's annual resources since 2018, has supported local governments in digital transformation and improved access to e-public administrative services in remote and ethnic minority areas, representing an important dimension of the project's effectiveness beyond the core survey function. The principal effectiveness limitation is not in delivery but in measurement: the results framework operates at the output level and the absence of systematic outcome monitoring means the project cannot demonstrate the full extent of its policy influence.

4. Efficiency

PAPI operates on a total budget of approximately USD 12.87 million over the project period (2018–2027), roughly USD 2 million annually. Budget execution has been consistently strong, with an aggregate execution rate of 93 per cent over 2018–2025 and 97 per cent in 2024. When the 2025 survey was cancelled, the project reprogrammed approximately USD 890,000 toward alternative activities, demonstrating operational agility. The multi-partner delivery model generates efficiencies through specialization, and provincial self-funding of workshops and action plans creates a multiplier effect well beyond the project's direct budget. The competitive ranking format functions as an efficient mechanism by which a single investment spurs provinces to invest their own resources in governance improvements.

The evaluation identifies five areas where efficiency could be improved. First, the annual survey cycle consumes resources at a rate that would exceed funding currently allocated to its continuation

beyond the end of the present project, and the timing of the annual cycle leaves no time for reforms to take effect between consecutive survey rounds; a biennial cycle would produce a more sustainable and balanced use of resources. Second, the questionnaire has grown beyond what is needed for the core governance index. Third, the transition from a Responsible Party agreement to a contract-based modality for the citizen surveys will increase unit costs. Fourth, outcome-level monitoring remains underdeveloped. Fifth, the shift to national ownership has introduced temporary transaction costs.

5. Impact

PAPI's impact is substantial and multi-layered. At the national level, its inclusion in Politburo Regulation No. 365, alongside other indices, as one of the indicators for evaluating the performance of Provincial People's Committee chairpersons represents an important form of institutional recognition, although as one component within a broader set of evaluation criteria. The relative significance of PAPI within this regulation should not be overstated. The regulation would continue to function if PAPI were removed. Nevertheless, it creates structural incentives for provincial officials to take citizen feedback seriously. PAPI's disability inclusion work produced the clearest documented policy influence chain. Survey data identified barriers, dedicated research deepened understanding, capacity building empowered potential candidates, sustained advocacy built political will, and Conclusion Notice No. 444 institutionalized the results. While a Conclusion Notice is just a step, albeit important, in the process of policy development, not a policy itself, it nonetheless represents a significant Party-level directive that has facilitated continued advocacy to institutionalize its guidance into future legislation or Party's directive. PAPI data on informal payments was adopted as Viet Nam's metric for SDG 16.5 monitoring, and line ministries now use PAPI data for their own assessment frameworks.

At the provincial level, PAPI created a dynamic of competitive accountability that drove all sixty-three provinces to develop governance improvement plans. Of approximately thirty provinces that received advisory support over a decade, about ten engaged in sustained follow-up and approximately three developed multi-year improvement plans. The gaming problem, where provinces seek to optimize rankings rather than improve governance substance, constitutes a significant negative unintended effect that may intensify as PAPI's stakes increase. PAPI's most significant systemic impact may be its contribution to normalizing evidence-based, citizen-centric governance assessment in a political system that had no tradition of independent governance monitoring when PAPI began in 2009.

6. Sustainability

The sustainability outlook is cautiously favourable. PAPI's integration into Politburo Regulation 365, its adoption by line ministries, provincial self-funding of workshops, and the planned consolidation of HCMA's role as national institutional owner under the successor project provide institutional foundations for continuation. HCMA has been a partner in the PAPI project since 2012, serving as both a responsible party and a collaborator for thematic research and dissemination. The transition to HCMA as national project owner represents a consolidation of this longstanding partnership rather than an entirely new arrangement. The VFF was effective in

facilitating local connection for survey implementation, but as institutional priorities evolved over time in response to new mandates, the organization's support to the implementation of survey results decreased. HCMA does not have the same breadth of presence at the subnational level, but its academic orientation gives it strong capacity for using results, and it remains one of the leading institutions in Viet Nam for translating governance evidence into policy and training. HCMA recognizes the importance of maintaining high standards of data quality and integrity. For data collection, HCMA will need to engage VFF at the local levels for access to villages, a risk that the project has planned to manage and mitigate.

However, the sustainability of PAPI's most distinctive characteristic, its independence, is not assured. Transfer to national ownership creates structural risks to data integrity that can only be mitigated through technical safeguards and contractual arrangements. Four concrete mechanisms have been proposed to maintain or further develop: GIS location verification, timestamp monitoring, authority to eliminate failed surveys, and random audio recording. Financial sustainability for the next phase of PAPI remains a concern: the Government of Ireland has committed funding through 2027, with two additional agreements signed for 2026 and 2027 for PAPI/IGEP as part of Ireland's Strategic Partnership with Viet Nam; DFAT's current phase extends to mid-2027; and EU funding has been committed for 2026-2029, in addition to UNDP's financial and in-kind contribution. The data protection and privacy law requires explicit consent from respondents and imposes stringent conditions on cross-border data transfer, adding operational complexity. The decisions made in 2026 regarding the new partnership agreement, the technical safeguards embedded in it, the scope of the reformed questionnaire, and the retention of international technical expertise will collectively determine whether PAPI emerges from the current transition as a more resilient, nationally owned tool or whether its independence might be affected.

7. Cross-Cutting Issues

PAPI has substantively integrated cross-cutting issues, evolving from a governance index with basic gender disaggregation to a multi-component project addressing disability, ethnicity, migration, gender, LGBTQI+ inclusion, digital governance, and environmental governance. The disability inclusion work represents the strongest cross-cutting achievement. The gender work contributed to the raised target for women in Party Committee leadership from 15 to 25 per cent, though women still account for only about 10 per cent of the Central Committee for 2026–2030. The ethnic minority e-service work produced concrete policy responses through HCMA's Report No. 46 and the related government instruction. The environmental governance dimension has been adopted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for its own assessment framework. PAPI's operation embodies core human rights principles, giving practical effect to the right to participate in public affairs and creating a public accountability mechanism that did not previously exist. The transition to national ownership creates both opportunities and constraints: HCMA's institutional mandate for cadre training provides a foundation for continuing inclusion work, but more contentious topics, particularly LGBTQI+ issues, will need to be pursued through targeted studies rather than the nationwide survey.

8. Overall Assessment and the Perspective

PAPI is one of the most significant governance initiatives in Viet Nam's development landscape. It created something that did not exist before: a structured mechanism through which the governance experiences of ordinary citizens are made visible to national policymakers and used to hold provincial authorities accountable. The evaluation strongly supports the continuation of PAPI under HCMA's national ownership with UNDP providing technical support, quality assurance, and donor coordination. The current juncture represents both the greatest risk and the greatest opportunity in PAPI's sixteen-year history. The programme's track record, the quality and commitment of its team, the genuine demand for its products across multiple levels of the Vietnamese state, and HCMA's institutional interest in the programme's success provide a strong foundation for renewal. Whether that foundation proves sufficient depends on decisions that will be made in 2026.

Key Recommendations

The evaluation makes 10 recommendations organized across six priority areas:

- **Safeguarding Data Independence and Methodological Integrity:** (1) Establish a formal Data Independence Protocol codifying principles governing methodology, data collection, analysis, and publication, including editorial independence provisions, red lines triggering suspension, and a pre-agreed fail-safe mechanism for suspending publication if data integrity is compromised. (2) Maintain international technical expertise as a credibility anchor for independent quality assurance.
- **Seizing the Opportunity for Methodological Reform:** (3) Undertake a comprehensive instrument review addressing the dimensional framework, questionnaire length, new governance dimensions, and mixed-mode and gender-disaggregated data collection feasibility, and adopt a biennial survey cycle using intervening years for deeper analysis, thematic research, and lighter rapid assessments. (4) Redefine the reporting and communication strategy with differentiated products including provincial scorecards and thematic policy briefs, and conduct in-depth case studies of provinces that have demonstrated exceptional capacity to translate PAPI findings into concrete governance reforms.
- **Managing the Institutional Transition:** (5) Formalize the UNDP–HCMA partnership through a detailed operational agreement specifying roles, decision-making authority, and implementation modality; invest in HCMA's institutional capacity for survey governance, quality assurance, data ethics, and management of politically sensitive findings; and address the regulatory environment proactively, including new ODA regulations and the Data Protection Law.
- **Sustaining and Deepening the Inclusive Governance Agenda:** (6) Develop a dedicated funding and institutional strategy for inclusion work and navigate politically sensitive inclusion topics with strategic patience. (7) Consolidate and scale digital innovation initiatives and invest in expanding the piloted AI model into a fully operational tool providing step-by-step guidance in ethnic minority languages for accessing online administrative services.

- Strengthening Strategic Communication and Donor Engagement: (8) Develop a structured donor engagement strategy that leverages political support as well as financial resources, and consolidate outcome-monitoring into a harmonized MEL framework.
- Branding and Positioning for the Next Phase: (9) Consider strategic rebranding aligned with the new institutional partnership, reflecting the broader governance monitoring ambition while preserving longitudinal comparability. (10) Develop a supply-side governance assessment complementing the citizen perspective, capturing the views of public officials on governance challenges and reform priorities to strengthen PAPI's analytical depth and political sustainability.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the terminal evaluation of the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) Research and Advocacy Programme, covering the implementation period from November 2017 to December 2025. The evaluation was commissioned by UNDP Viet Nam in accordance with UNDP evaluation policy and the requirements of the project's donor partners, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Irish Aid/the Government of Ireland. PAPI is a citizen-centric governance monitoring initiative that has operated continuously since 2009, generating evidence through large-scale annual surveys capturing the experiences and perceptions of randomly selected citizens across Viet Nam's provinces. Over its 16-year lifespan, the project has surveyed over 230,000 citizens (inclusive of PAPI respondents and specialized surveys on persons with disabilities), and established itself as one of the most comprehensive longitudinal governance monitoring instruments in the region. The evaluation assesses the project's performance against the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, supplemented by an examination of cross-cutting issues including gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental governance. Its purpose is threefold: to provide accountability to donors and national partners regarding the use of approximately \$12.9 million in project resources; to identify lessons and good practices from PAPI's distinctive approach to citizen-driven governance monitoring; and to generate forward-looking guidance for the successor, temporarily entitled “Inclusive Governance Enhancement Project (IGEP)”, planned for 2026 to 2031 under the institutional ownership of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA).

The evaluation takes place at a moment of exceptional significance for the PAPI project. In 2025, Viet Nam embarked on a far-reaching administrative restructuring that consolidated the country's 63 provinces into 34, abolished the district tier of government, and reduced the number of communes by two-thirds. This transformation necessitated a fundamental reconfiguration of PAPI's sampling framework and operational design, and for the first time in the project's history the annual nationwide survey could not be conducted. Simultaneously, however, the project achieved what may prove to be its most consequential policy outcome: the inclusion of the PAPI index in Politburo Regulation No. 365 as a core indicator for evaluating provincial Party leadership, conferring a level of formal political authority that few development-funded monitoring instruments have attained anywhere. These twin developments, one representing the project's most significant operational disruption and the other its highest-level institutional recognition, define the context within which this evaluation assesses PAPI's achievements, examines its sustainability prospects, and considers the strategic choices that will shape its next phase.

2. Project Description and Context

2.1 National Context

Viet Nam’s transition from a low-income to a lower-middle-income and, as of late 2025 upper-middle-income, country has generated rising citizen expectations for governance quality, public service delivery, and institutional accountability. The country’s constitution mandates that state agencies show respect for the people, devotedly serve the people, maintain close contact with the people, listen to their opinions, and submit to their supervision. Translating this constitutional principle into measurable, actionable practice requires systematic mechanisms for capturing how governance is experienced by ordinary citizens and for holding provincial authorities accountable for performance outcomes.

The governance landscape within which PAPI has operated has changed substantially over the project’s sixteen-year lifespan. Viet Nam’s public administration reform agenda has evolved through successive national strategies, most recently the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2021–2030 and the Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021–2025, which prioritize e-government, transparency, and anti-corruption. The 13th National Party Congress Resolution directed the country toward “modern and effective national governance reforms” while leaving no one behind. The Law on Grassroots Democracy, approved by the National Assembly in November 2022, upgraded the legal basis for citizen participation at the commune level.

In July 2025, Viet Nam undertook a historic administrative restructuring, shifting from sixty-three provinces to thirty-four and abolishing the district tier to establish a two-tier local government system. This restructuring, the most significant institutional reform since reunification, aims to bring government closer to citizens, streamline operations, and improve public services. It creates a heightened need for strengthened vertical accountability towards citizens while simultaneously introducing risks of disruption to service delivery. The restructuring has reshaped the administrative geography within which PAPI operates, rendered the existing sampling framework obsolete, interrupted the sixteen-year time series, and generated new demand for evidence on how the transition is affecting service delivery from the citizen’s perspective.

2.2 Project Background

PAPI was conceived in 2009 to fill a critical gap in Viet Nam’s governance information landscape. The Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI), operating since 2005, assessed provincial governance from the perspective of businesses and the private sector. No equivalent instrument captured how citizens experienced governance, public administration, and service delivery. PAPI was designed to provide this complementary citizen perspective, enabling provincial and national authorities to understand the relationship between what businesses want and what citizens need. As evaluation participants described, PAPI serves as an evidence-based mirror for the state apparatus to view its performance through the eyes of citizens.

The survey was piloted in three provinces in 2009–2010 with funding from the Government of Spain, expanded to thirty provinces in 2010, and scaled to all sixty-three provinces in 2011 with funding from the Government of Switzerland (2011–2017). Since 2018, the project has been

funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Government of Ireland, with additional contributions from UNDP.

Over sixteen years, PAPI has evolved from a provincial governance index into an integrated project encompassing the annual survey, thematic research, policy advocacy, provincial diagnostic support, citizen-powered innovation initiatives, and dedicated components on disability inclusion, gender equality, LGBTQI+ inclusion, and provincial initiatives to increase access of ethnic minorities to online administrative procedures. This expansion, described as the shift from “PAPI” to “PAPI Plus,” was enabled by increased donor funding and reflected a strategic decision to leverage the survey platform for broader governance and inclusion objectives. By 2024, PAPI had collected governance feedback from 216,673 randomly selected citizens across all provinces. In 2025 alone, the project produced over 50 knowledge products, including thematic research reports, policy briefs, and advocacy materials.

2.3 The PAPI Survey Instrument

PAPI measures provincial governance performance across eight dimensions, as assessed by randomly selected citizens based on their direct interactions with local government. The first six dimensions have been tracked since 2009; two additional dimensions were added in 2018 to reflect Viet Nam’s digitalization agenda and growing environmental concerns:

1. **Participation at local levels:** citizen engagement in elections and commune-level policymaking
2. **Transparency in local decision-making:** public disclosure of budgets, land use plans, and local expenditure
3. **Vertical accountability:** responsiveness of local authorities to citizen complaints and contact with elected representatives
4. **Control of corruption in the public sector:** prevalence of bribery in public services, land administration, and government employment
5. **Public administrative procedures:** quality and efficiency of commune-level administrative services and one-stop shops
6. **Public service delivery:** quality of public healthcare, primary education, and basic infrastructure
7. **Environmental governance (added 2018):** citizen perceptions of water quality, forestry management, pollution, and provincial responsiveness to environmental concerns
8. **E-governance (added 2018):** availability, use, and accessibility of provincial e-service portals and online administrative procedures

The eight-dimensional framework provides comprehensive coverage of the citizen–government interface but has contributed to questionnaire length that now requires 45 to 60 minutes to administer. Some evaluation participants proposed that five dimensions could be optimal to enable more focused analysis and facilitate the transition to digital data collection methods. The administrative restructuring provides a natural opportunity to reconsider the dimensional framework alongside the sampling redesign.

2.4 Survey Methodology and Quality Assurance

The PAPI survey employs a multi-stage probability sampling design that uses probability proportional to size (PPS) to first select districts within each province, then communes within selected districts, then villages within communes, and finally households within villages. Prior to the 2025 restructuring, the survey sampled approximately 240 respondents per province, with double sampling and migrant oversampling in twelve larger provinces, yielding a total sample of approximately 19,000 respondents annually. A portion of sampled villages are designated as panel villages, enabling longitudinal tracking.

Data collection is conducted through tablet-based, face-to-face interviews with multiple layers of quality assurance that evaluation participants identified as among the most rigorous of any household survey in Viet Nam. The quality assurance architecture operates on four levels: GIS-connected tablets enabling real-time verification that enumerators have physically visited their assigned villages; individual question timestamps allowing detection of implausibly rapid completion; random audio recording of survey administration; and statistical analysis of incoming data to identify patterns consistent with manipulation or coaching.

The project has also developed specific countermeasures to address gaming by provincial authorities, which intensified as PAPI scores began affecting career progression. These include not disclosing the full questionnaire in advance, question randomization, variant question formulations to detect pre-briefing of respondents, rotation of a proportion of panel villages, and enhanced field monitoring. Survey data is validated by a National Advisory Board comprising government officials, academics, national and international experts, and published annually in bilingual reports. Province-level datasets are made freely available to researchers upon request.

2.5 Partnership Model

PAPI is delivered through a multi-partner consortium that has evolved significantly over the project's lifespan. UNDP Viet Nam provides overall project management, quality control, donor coordination, and technical expertise under Direct Implementation Modality (DIM). A senior international expert ensures methodological consistency, oversees index construction, constructs sampling structure, conducts data analysis, and provides independent quality assurance. This role has been continuous since PAPI's inception and is widely regarded as critical to maintaining the survey's credibility.

Until 2024, the VFF's Training Centre served as the formal national host of PAPI. HCMA has served as a key research and policy partner, with a role that has expanded over time to encompass policy advisory capacity, provincial diagnostic support, cadre training, and thematic research on women's political participation and inclusive governance. HCMA leverages its unique institutional reach - almost every leader in Viet Nam has gone through training at the Academy, providing a network that the project uses to promote findings and conduct advocacy. PAPI data and findings are used in some teaching curricula of the HCMA.

A third-party fieldwork organization manages data collection logistics, enumerator recruitment and training, and database management. This role was held by CECODES from 2009 to 2024. The VFF facilitated local-level access for enumerators from 2009 until its withdrawal from October

2023. While the VFF provided important institutional backing in the project's early years, the formal partnership was through the VFF's Training Centre rather than the VFF itself, and the relationship with PAPI's findings remained ambivalent.

2.6 Output Structure and Annual Cycle

The project is organized around five outputs as it evolved over time: Output 1 covers methodology, fieldwork, and report production; Output 2 covers international expertise for statistical analysis and quality control; Output 3 covers policy dialogues with provinces, including diagnostic workshops in approximately thirty provinces over the project's lifespan; Output 4 covers dissemination and outreach through media, stakeholder bulletins, and the public data website; and Output 5 covers citizen-powered innovation initiatives, thematic research on inclusive governance, capacity building, and policy advocacy. Output 5 expanded substantially after 2018 and now represents a significant share of project activity.

PAPI as the Index operates on a structured nine-step annual cycle refined over fifteen years, spanning methodology refinement, sampling design, enumerator recruitment and deployment, fieldwork (typically from July to October to December), data cleaning and verification, analysis and index construction, report writing, validation by the National Advisory Board, and dissemination through national launch, provincial workshops, media engagement, and the PAPI website. Each cycle spans approximately twelve months. For substantive research and advocacy activities under Outputs 4–5, the programme has run throughout the year each year. The project has maintained dedicated staff working on thematic research, policy advocacy, and citizen-powered innovation (Outputs 3–5) on a continuous basis throughout its sixteen-year lifespan, producing an increasing body of research and policy papers that draw on PAPI data for evidence-based advocacy across a wide range of governance and inclusion topics. The annual survey cycle has been both a source of project discipline and a potential constraint: the intensive pace of annual survey production has at times limited the time available for deeper analytical work and provincial engagement between survey rounds.

2.7 Theory of Change

The PAPI project has operated through an interconnected three-pillar approach encompassing Research, Experiment, and Development. The Theory of Change (ToC), shown in detail in Annex VI of this report, posits that by generating credible, independent citizen feedback on governance performance and engaging multiple stakeholders in evidence-based dialogue, the project will foster constructive competition among provinces, motivate local governments to improve service delivery, and ultimately contribute to enhanced quality of public administration and citizen satisfaction.

Core activities include refinement of methodology and questionnaires, execution of field surveys, data analysis and validation, report publication, dissemination through provincial workshops and media, policy dialogues with government stakeholders, action research on governance gaps identified through PAPI data, technical support to provinces for citizen-centric innovation, and communication and advocacy for inclusive governance targeting ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, migrants, women in political leadership, LGBTQI+ communities, and youth.

The project's intended intermediate outcomes include raised awareness and understanding of administrative performance among policymakers, increased capacity of local governments to act upon PAPI findings, inclusion of PAPI metrics in high-level training and policy dialogues, and the generation of citizen-centric, data-driven public policy. Long-term outcomes encompass enhanced quality of public administration, increased citizen satisfaction and engagement, more equitable and transparent public service delivery, and more inclusive institutions. The intended impact is sustainable improvements in governance resulting in an empowered citizenry and a more responsive public sector.

The project's ToC rests on several critical assumptions - sustained multi-stakeholder engagement, continued financial and logistical support, and political will for implementing data-driven reforms. Key risks include the potential for data manipulation or political pressure on findings, mitigated through the quality assurance architecture and the National Advisory Board, and the broader risk that competitive ranking generates engagement with PAPI data without necessarily motivating genuine governance reform.

2.8 Key Institutional Developments During the Evaluation Period

Exit from the partnership by the Viet Nam Fatherland Front. In September 2023, the President of the VFF informed UNDP of the end of the VFF's involvement in PAPI. The VFF had provided institutional backing and facilitated local-level access for enumerators since 2009 but had never formally owned the project and maintained an ambivalent relationship with PAPI's findings. The change in the partnership configuration responded to an evolution in institutional roles and changes in the operating environment that impacted institutional mandates. Despite this impactful change, UNDP and CECODES completed the 2024 survey in 61 of 63 provinces by drawing on long-standing relationships with provincial VFF committees. As a result, for the first time in sixteen years, the full PAPI survey was not conducted in 2025. In September 2025, the project reprogrammed approximately USD 890,000 from survey operations to alternative activities, including a rapid assessment of citizens' experience with the provision of public services in the two-tier government system covering 5,000 respondents across all thirty-four new provinces using telephone-based interviews.

Transition to HCMA. From October 2024, UNDP began formal discussions with HCMA to serve as the new national institutional owner. HCMA's institutional position, separate from the executive branch whose performance PAPI assesses, provides a structural basis for maintaining the survey's independence. HCMA has been a long-term UNDP's national partner in thematic research and dissemination of PAPI findings since 2012. The partnership is being formalized through a new agreement, planned for 2026–2031. As of the evaluation period, HCMA had not yet issued a final decision, as consultations with three government ministries remained ongoing.

Administrative restructuring. The July 2025 restructuring from sixty-three to thirty-four provinces requires a complete redesign of PAPI's sampling framework, a new baseline for provincial comparison, and adaptation of the questionnaire to the two-tier system. Longitudinal comparability with the previous sixteen-year data series is not being maintained; PAPI is starting a new baseline. Evaluation participants expressed a preference for maintaining the same sampled

communes where possible, which would allow tracking of how the mergers affect governance quality at the community level.

Politburo Regulation 365. Issued in August 2025, this regulation designates PAPI as a key performance indicator for assessing provincial People’s Committee chairpersons. This represents the highest level of institutional recognition that a citizen-centred governance monitoring instrument has achieved in Viet Nam’s political system. It creates built-in demand for PAPI data at the apex of the Communist Party apparatus and elevates the project from a donor-funded research initiative to an internal management tool. Notably, this recognition was not the product of direct UNDP advocacy. The regulation simultaneously increases demand for PAPI and intensifies pressure on provincial leaderships to demonstrate favourable results, creating new risks of gaming and manipulation that the project’s next phase will need to manage.

3. Evaluation Approach and Methodology

3.1 Evaluation Purpose and Scope

This terminal evaluation of the PAPI project was commissioned by UNDP Viet Nam in December 2025 and completed in March 2026. The evaluation serves a dual purpose: to provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of the project’s performance over its full implementation period, and to inform the design and strategic direction of the next phase planned for 2026–2031.

While the evaluation covers the full arc of PAPI’s sixteen-year evolution from its 2009 pilot to the present, it focuses primarily on the current phase (2018–2026), which corresponds to the period of DFAT and Government of Ireland funding and the expansion from the core PAPI survey to the broader “PAPI Plus” agenda. The evaluation period encompasses several transformative institutional developments, including the VFF’s exit from the partnership configuration, the transition to HCMA, the cancellation of the 2025 survey, the administrative restructuring from sixty-three to thirty-four provinces, and the issuance of Politburo Regulation 365.

3.2 Evaluation Criteria and Questions

The evaluation is structured around the six standard OECD-DAC evaluation criteria:

1. **Relevance:** the extent to which PAPI’s objectives and design respond to the governance needs and priorities of Viet Nam’s government, citizens, and development partners, and whether they remain pertinent in the current institutional context.
2. **Coherence:** the compatibility of the project with other interventions in the governance sector, including alignment with UNDP’s country programme, national reform strategies, and complementary governance instruments.
3. **Effectiveness:** the extent to which the project achieved its intended outputs and outcomes, including the quality of its research products, its influence on policy, and its contribution to governance reform.
4. **Efficiency:** how economically resources and inputs were converted into results, including the cost-effectiveness of the multi-partner delivery model and the project’s adaptive response to institutional disruptions.

5. **Impact:** the broader, longer-term changes in governance quality, citizen engagement, and institutional behaviour to which the project has contributed, including both intended and unintended effects.
6. **Sustainability:** the likelihood that the project's benefits will continue after the current funding period, including the institutional, financial, methodological, and political dimensions of sustainability.

In addition to the six OECD-DAC criteria, the evaluation addresses cross-cutting issues including gender equality, disability inclusion, the rights of ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ communities, and the project's contribution to the Leaving No One Behind agenda.

3.3 Evaluation Approach

The evaluation adopted a theory-based, mixed-methods approach combining document review, semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and analysis of project data.¹ The approach was designed to assess the project against its own ToC (which is presented and reconstructed in Annex VI of this report), while also examining the assumptions and external factors that have shaped project performance. The evaluation was guided by the principles of independence, transparency, and utility. All findings are grounded in evidence from multiple sources and triangulated across data collection methods. Within this overall approach, the evaluation drew on two complementary analytical methods particularly suited to a long-running governance intervention operating in a complex policy environment: contribution analysis and outcome harvesting. Contribution analysis was used to assess the plausibility of PAPI's contribution to observed outcomes rather than to claim direct causal attribution, recognising that governance change in Viet Nam is shaped by multiple factors operating simultaneously.²

The evaluation integrated a gender equality and human rights perspective throughout the analysis, consistent with UNDP's evaluation policy and UNEG norms and standards. This is reflected in the inclusion of gender, disability, ethnic minority rights, and LGBTQI+ rights as explicit cross-cutting

¹ The choice of a theory-based, mixed-methods approach was deliberate and responds to three distinguishing features of the PAPI intervention. First, PAPI operates as a complex, multi-component governance programme that has run for 16 years, with multiple intended and emergent pathways of influence that cannot be evaluated through a single methodological lens. A theory-based approach allows the evaluation to test the project's underlying logic and the assumptions on which it rests, while also reconstructing the actual pathways through which outputs became outcomes (Annex VI). Second, PAPI generates both quantitative evidence (survey results, indicator achievement, budget execution data) and qualitative evidence (stakeholder perspectives, observed practice, documentary trails). A mixed-methods design enables the evaluation to draw on each evidence type for the questions it is best suited to answer, and to triangulate across them where possible. Third, PAPI operates in a complex governance ecosystem in which multiple factors shape provincial behaviour and policy outcomes simultaneously, making direct causal attribution implausible.

² This method is further discussed under Limitations in Section 3.7. Outcome harvesting was used to identify and trace specific institutional and policy changes back to their PAPI-related origins, working from observed outcomes (such as Politburo Regulation No. 365, Conclusion Notice No. 444 on disability rights, Office of the Government Letter 278/VPCP-KSTT on ethnic minority e-service access, and the directive raising the target for women in Party Committee leadership from 15 to 25 per cent) backwards through the evidence chain to establish the plausibility and depth of PAPI's contribution. This method is particularly well suited to a 16-year intervention with multiple intended and emergent pathways of influence. Its application is visible throughout the analysis of impact in Section 4.5 (Findings 43 to 46), the cross-cutting findings in Section 4.7 (Findings 63 and 64 on disability and ethnic minority inclusion in particular), and the reconstruction of the Theory of Change in Annex VI, which identifies three pathways and four uptake mechanisms through which PAPI outputs became institutional and policy outcomes. This reconstructed Theory of Change is the product of an outcome harvesting analysis conducted across the evaluation's evidence base. It identifies the actual pathways through which PAPI's outputs became outcomes, derived inductively from observed institutional and policy changes rather than from a pre-defined logical model.

evaluation themes; the deliberate inclusion of stakeholders representing marginalized groups in the interview sample; attention to the Leaving No One Behind agenda in the analysis of effectiveness and impact; and assessment of whether the project's ToC and results framework adequately address gender and inclusion dimensions.

In line with Section 6.11 of the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) Evaluation Performance Indicator (EPI) framework, the evaluation explicitly integrates gender equality and women's empowerment across the three EPI criteria applicable to individual evaluation reports. The table below maps each EPI criterion to the specific elements of this evaluation that address it.

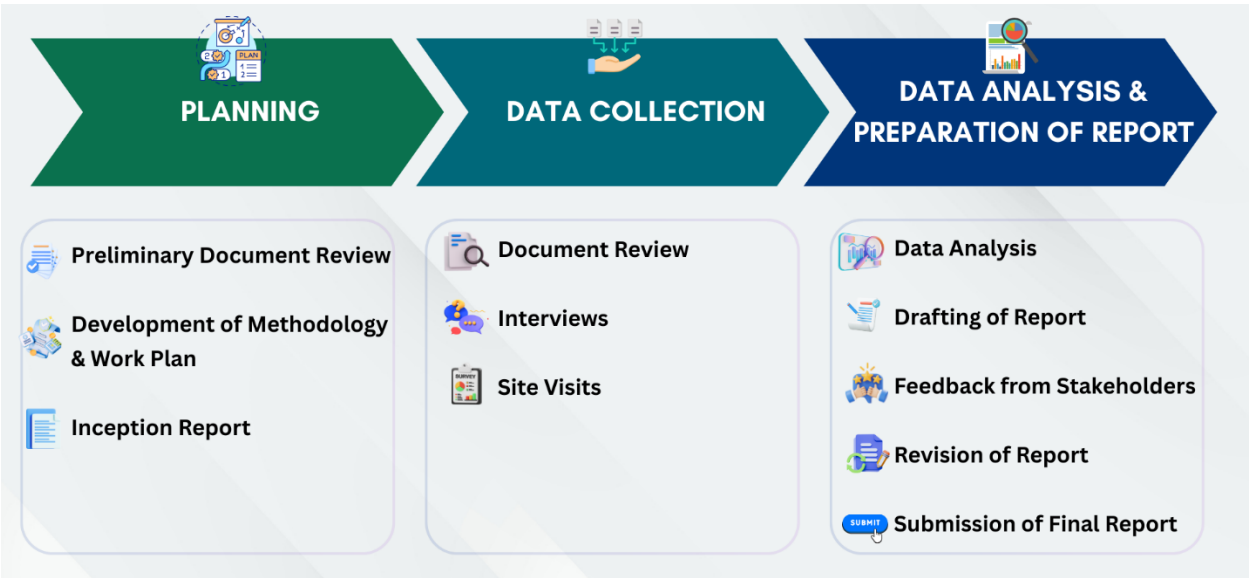
Table 1: Mapping of UN-SWAP EPI Criteria to the PAPI Terminal Evaluation

EPI Criterion	Assessment in the Report
Criterion 1. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are integrated in the evaluation scope of analysis, and evaluation criteria and questions are designed in a way that ensures that relevant data will be collected.	The evaluation scope explicitly includes gender equality as a cross-cutting theme (Sections 3.1, 3.2). Section 3.3 states that the evaluation "integrated a gender equality and human rights perspective throughout the analysis, consistent with UNDP's evaluation policy and UNEG norms and standards." The TOR (Annex I, Section 13) contains three dedicated gender questions, all of which are answered in the findings. The evaluation framework includes Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment as a standalone rated criterion in the Summary Assessment Table (Table 3, Section 6.7), alongside the six OECD-DAC criteria.
Criterion 2. Gender-responsive methodology, methods, tools and data analysis techniques are selected.	The evaluation applies a theory-based, mixed-methods approach (Section 3.3) that incorporates sex-disaggregated quantitative analysis of PAPI survey data (52 per cent female respondents in 2024; documented gender gaps in budget awareness, land use plan awareness, online portal use, and "don't know" response rates). The purposive sampling frame (Section 3.4) deliberately includes gender-relevant stakeholders: HCMA on women's political participation research; the Vietnam Federation on Disability (VFD) on disability with gender intersections; ECUE on inclusion. Triangulation across at least two independent sources is detailed in Section 3.5. Finding 61 documents a methodologically significant randomized experiment on enumerator behaviour and the gender gap in "don't know" responses, exemplifying the evaluation's use of gender-responsive analytical techniques.
Criterion 3. The evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations reflect a gender analysis.	Findings 61 and 62 present substantive gender analysis with sex-disaggregated quantitative data and a documented policy outcome chain (HCMA Report No. 100 to the Politburo contributing to the directive raising the women in Party Committee leadership target from 15 to 25 per cent). Unanticipated gender-related effects are documented in Finding 61 (the gender gap in "don't know" responses partly explained by enumerator behaviour, with implications for the inclusiveness of governance data collection). Conclusion 6.5 explicitly references women's political participation as a distinctive PAPI contribution. The Summary Assessment Table (Table 3) provides a standalone Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment rating with substantive justification. Recommendation 6 (Section 7.4) addresses gender as a named dimension of the dedicated inclusion strategy. Recommendation 7 addresses the gender digital divide through the AI-powered

	ethnic minority e-service tool, with explicit attention to reaching women alongside other marginalised groups.
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Evaluation activities were organized according to the following phases: i) planning; ii) data collection; and iii) data analysis and reporting. The figure below shows the three phases and the main activities under each of them.

Figure 1: Evaluation Phases



Project documentation had been shared with the evaluation team at the outset, and a preliminary desk review was conducted. An evaluability analysis confirmed that the project’s outputs, indicators, baselines, and available monitoring data allowed for an effective assessment.

The evaluation was conducted by a team of two consultants: an international evaluator serving as team leader and a national evaluator based in Viet Nam serving as team member. This composition was deliberate and shaped three aspects of the evaluation. On access, the national evaluator's Vietnamese language fluency and familiarity with the institutional context enabled direct engagement with national-level interviewees and field-level stakeholders, and facilitated the two field visits to remote ethnic minority communes that would have been impractical for an international evaluator alone.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The evaluation conducted a comprehensive review of project documentation spanning the full implementation period, with particular attention to the current phase. Documents reviewed included the project document and results framework, annual progress reports and work plans, PAPI survey reports (2009–2024), thematic research reports and policy briefs, the 2025 rapid assessment, the midterm review, financial reports and budget data, the 16-year trend analysis, donor reporting and correspondence, and relevant government policies and regulations including Politburo Regulation No. 365 and Conclusion Notice No. 444. A complete list of the documents reviewed for this evaluation is provided in Annex III of this report. The evaluation matrix that underpinned the data collection work is presented in Annex VII of this report.

The evaluation conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected sample of stakeholders across five categories: national-level government agencies, provincial-level agencies, think tanks and civil society organizations, donors and international organizations, and UNDP project staff and experts. The five stakeholder categories were identified to ensure analytical coverage across the institutional ecosystem in which PAPI operates.³ Within each category, organisations were selected on three criteria: relevance to PAPI's work, indicated by the depth and length of engagement with the project; diversity within category, ensuring that selected organisations represented distinct perspectives or sub-mandates rather than reproducing the same view; and feasibility of engagement within the evaluation period. The sample size in each category was determined by a saturation principle. Interviews continued in each category until additional interviews produced no substantially new themes, perspectives, or evidence. The final sample of 17 organisations across the five categories met this saturation standard, complemented by direct observation during field visits to two provinces and by analysis of secondary data from PAPI's survey datasets and project monitoring instruments. Interviews were conducted between January and February 2026, either in person in Hà Nội or remotely. The list of interviewees is shown in the table below and in Annex III of this report. The interview guide is presented in Annex VIII of this report.

The national evaluator undertook two field visits to observe PAPI's Citizen Powered Innovation Initiatives in action. In Tuyen Quang province (formerly Ha Giang, following the 2025 administrative merger) in December 2025, the evaluator attended the closing workshop of the Phase II project on improving access to public administrative services for remote and ethnic minority communities, hearing from provincial officials and commune leaders from poor, predominantly ethnic minority communes. The visit also included direct observation of commune officials and village digital teams assisting residents with completing administrative procedures online, with interviews of commune-level staff in Yen Minh. A second visit to Quang Tri province in January 2026 focused on observing training delivered by the Provincial Public Administrative Service Centre to commune officials and village teams in two remote ethnic minority communes, Khe Sanh and Dakrong, followed by interviews with the centre's leadership and implementing staff. Together, the two visits provided first-hand evidence of the project's sub-national digital inclusion work and its reach into some of Viet Nam's most underserved communities. More details on the field visit are provided in Annex III of this report.

³ Each category represents a distinct vantage point on the project's performance and impact: national-level agencies generate and use PAPI evidence in policy and oversight functions; provincial-level agencies are the principal duty-bearers responsible for the governance outcomes that PAPI measures; think tanks and civil society organisations include both PAPI partners (CECODES, ECUE/PPWG, MDRI, VFD) and independent analytical voices (VESS, the Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development, VCCI) that bring external perspectives on PAPI's positioning and influence; donors and international organisations include both PAPI's funders (DFAT, Government of Ireland) and external users of PAPI data (the World Bank, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office); and UNDP project staff and experts include the implementing team responsible for operational delivery and the long-standing international Technical Adviser.

Table 2: Participating Stakeholders

Stakeholder Category	Organization / Entity	Method
National-Level Agencies	Department of Social Affairs, Office of the National Assembly	Semi-structured interview
	Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA)	Semi-structured interviews
Provincial-Level Agencies	Department of Home Affairs / Centre for Public Administrative Services, Tuyen Quang Centre for Public Administrative Services at the commune level	Semi-structured interview Observation
	Department of Home Affairs / Centre for Public Administrative Services, Quang Tri Centre for Public Administrative Services at the commune level	Semi-structured interview Observation
Think Tanks and Civil Society	People Participation Working Group (PPWG) / ECUE	Semi-structured interview
	Centre for Community Support Development Studies (CECODES)	Semi-structured interview
	Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development	Semi-structured interview
	Viet Nam Center for Economic and Strategic Studies (VESS)	Semi-structured interview
	Vietnam Federation on Disability (VFD)	Semi-structured interview
	Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI)	Semi-structured interview
	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)	Semi-structured interview
Donors and International Organizations	Australian Embassy (DFAT)	Semi-structured interview
	Embassy of Ireland (Irish Aid)	Semi-structured interview
	UN Resident Coordinator's Office	Semi-structured interview
	World Bank	Semi-structured interview
UNDP	PAPI Project Team	Semi-structured interviews
	PAPI Project Experts	Semi-structured interviews
	UNDP Country Office Senior Management	Semi-structured interview

3.5 Data Analysis and Triangulation

The evaluation employed a structured approach to data analysis combining content analysis of interview transcripts, thematic coding of qualitative data, and cross-referencing of findings across multiple sources. All evaluation findings are based on evidence triangulated across at least two independent sources. The method of triangulation is presented in Figure 2 below. The analysis was organized around the six OECD-DAC criteria and cross-cutting themes, with each finding assessed for its evidentiary basis, the degree of stakeholder consensus, and its implications for the project's

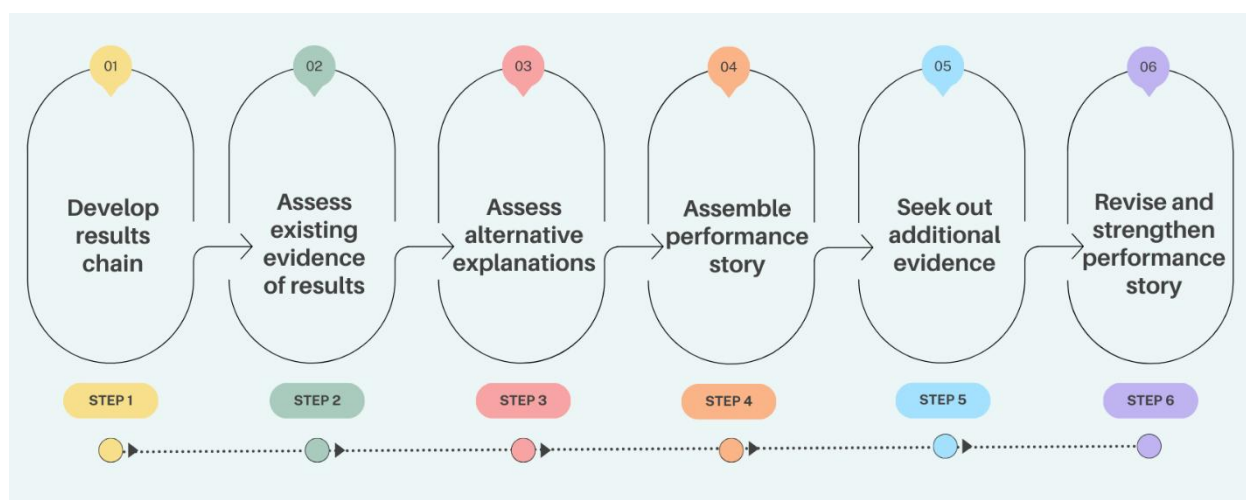
next phase. Where evaluation participants expressed divergent views, the evaluation presents the range of perspectives and identifies the underlying considerations.

Figure 2: Method of Triangulation



The analytical process followed a structured sequence to ensure systematic assessment of the evaluation evidence against the OECD-DAC criteria. The main steps undertaken during the analysis are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Steps in Analysis Process



3.6 Ethical Considerations

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with UNEG ethical guidelines and UNDP's evaluation policy. All interview participants were informed of the evaluation's purpose and provided consent prior to recording. All references to specific individuals have been anonymized; participants are identified by generic descriptors to protect their identity while preserving the evidentiary value of their contributions. The evaluation team was sensitive to the political context within which PAPI operates and took care to present findings constructively. The evaluation team maintained analytical independence from the UNDP project management team throughout the process.

3.7 Limitations

Absence of 2025 survey data. The cancellation of the 2025 PAPI survey means that the evaluation cannot assess project performance for the most recent year using the project's primary output, the Index. The 2024 survey data represents the most recent available dataset. This gap is particularly significant because 2025 was the year of the administrative restructuring, and the absence of PAPI data during this critical transition represents a lost opportunity for evidence-based monitoring.

Attribution challenges. PAPI operates within a complex governance ecosystem where multiple factors influence provincial performance, citizen perceptions, and policy outcomes. The evaluation addresses this through contribution analysis, assessing the plausibility of PAPI's contribution to observed outcomes, rather than claiming direct causal attribution.

Political sensitivities. Some stakeholders may have been reluctant to express critical views in recorded interviews despite assurances of anonymity. The evaluation team mitigated this by triangulating interview data with documentary evidence and probing for critical perspectives through indirect questioning techniques.

Stakeholder coverage. The evaluation was unable to interview representatives of the Ministry of Public Security. Likewise, some PAPI partners declined participation in the interview, perhaps due to the sensitivity of engaging with an international organization. The citizen perspective is captured

indirectly through PAPI survey data and the rapid assessment, but the evaluation did not conduct independent citizen consultations.

Evolving institutional context. Several key institutional arrangements, including the HCMA partnership, and the implications of administrative restructuring, were still evolving at the time of the evaluation. The assessment is based on information available as of February 2026 and may need to be revisited as these arrangements are finalized.

Reviewing the above mitigations measures that were applied, the evaluation team found that some were highly effective, while others only partially closed the underlying gap. Triangulation across documentary and interview evidence was particularly effective in addressing political sensitivities and stakeholder reluctance to express critical views: where individual interview accounts were guarded, documentary evidence and cross-stakeholder convergence allowed the evaluation to identify and report substantive critical findings, including the limited conversion of provincial advisory support into sustained governance reform and the gaming risk associated with the integration of PAPI metrics into the Party's cadre management framework. Contribution analysis was effective in addressing attribution challenges, enabling the evaluation to characterise PAPI's plausible contribution to documented policy outcomes (such as Conclusion Notice No. 444 and Office of the Government Letter 278/VPCP-KSTT) without overclaiming direct causation. The mitigation for stakeholder coverage gaps was the least successful: the inability to interview representatives of the Ministry of Public Security and the declined participation of some PAPI partners constituted gaps that no mitigation could fully close, particularly on questions concerning the regulatory environment for non-state implementation of citizen surveys. The explicit February 2026 cut-off for the evolving institutional context was effective in setting an appropriate boundary for the assessment, but it inherently limits the durability of the report's specific institutional findings, which may need to be revisited as the partnership configuration with HCMA is finalized.

4. Evaluation Findings

4.1 Relevance

4.1.1 A Unique Citizen-Centric Mirror on Provincial Governance

Finding 1: PAPI occupies a unique and distinctive position in Viet Nam’s governance landscape as the only large-scale, independent, citizen-centric assessment of provincial governance performance.

Over sixteen years, PAPI has collected governance feedback from nearly 220,000 randomly selected citizens, generating demand-side evidence base that no other Vietnamese data source provides. Evaluation participants across all stakeholder categories consistently described PAPI’s core function as a “mirror” that reflects provincial governance performance back to the authorities responsible for it, enabling them to take corrective action based on evidence rather than assumption.

The original rationale for PAPI’s creation was to address a critical gap in Viet Nam’s governance information ecosystem. The Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI), established earlier, captured only the business community’s perspective on provincial governance. After several years of working with PCI, it became clear that provinces were interpreting good governance exclusively as what was favourable to businesses, creating an incomplete and potentially distorting picture of governance quality. Citizens’ priorities differ. They want food safety, land tenure security, and quality public services. PAPI was designed to fill this gap by providing citizens’ assessments alongside firms’ assessments, enabling provincial authorities to understand the trade-offs between business interests and citizen needs.

Evaluation participants from international organizations confirmed PAPI’s instrumental value, noting that Viet Nam is distinctive internationally in having both PAPI and PCI, which together provide a complementary picture of governance from both citizen and firm perspectives. This combination is rare globally and provides a significant analytical advantage for drawing evidence-based governance conclusions. Participants emphasized that if PAPI were to cease, it would leave a significant analytical gap that could not be easily filled by any international index, particularly for time-series analysis on sensitive topics such as informal payments and corruption trends.

International Analytical Utility

The evaluation confirmed that PAPI serves as a significant international data source. Evaluation participants from the World Bank described using PAPI data extensively for governance analysis, with particular emphasis on informal payments and corruption trends, where PAPI provides time-series data at the province level that no international index can match. Recent major studies on Viet Nam’s development trajectory used PAPI data for governance mapping and generated significant international interest because comparable data of this quality is extremely difficult to obtain in most countries. The availability of province-level data to any user further enhances its utility for academic research, comparative governance studies, and the monitoring of development programmes.

4.1.2 Methodological Credibility and Independence

PAPI's relevance is inseparable from its credibility, which rests on two mutually reinforcing pillars: methodological rigour and operational independence. Without these, the data would lose its utility for all user groups.

Finding 2: PAPI employs a multi-layered data collection and quality assurance system that has evolved progressively over sixteen years, giving it a level of quality control considered exceptional for a survey of this scale.

Technical safeguards include GIS-connected tablets for real-time verification of enumerator location, timestamp analysis at the survey and question level to detect fraudulent or rushed interviews, and random audio recording capabilities. These safeguards, combined with a progressively refined sampling methodology, give PAPI a level of quality control that evaluation participants considered exceptional for a survey of this scale in a developing country context.

Gaming countermeasures have evolved in response to provincial interference, including randomization of question order, use of differently formulated verification questions, a graduated reduction in panel villages (from 100 percent to 40 percent) to prevent provinces from predicting survey locations, and the deployment of a separate survey instrument for government officials who appeared at data collection sites. When manipulation was detected, statistical tests identified improbable patterns, and data for individual units or entire provinces was dropped from the results.

Finding 3: Three significant methodological limitations were not fully resolved during the project period, though PAPI's transparency in acknowledging and addressing these limitations is itself a mark of methodological integrity.

A major issue has been the challenge of accounting for large-scale internal migration. Because sampling relied on village-level residency lists, PAPI systematically under-represented migrants in both their origin and destination areas. This was corrected approximately three years ago by expanding the sampling frame to include all four categories of residency, but earlier years of data carry an inherent bias toward older, non-migrant populations.

A second unresolved issue is that some governance indicators may capture party organizational capacity, rather than governance quality. Northern provinces with higher party membership density tend to score better on grassroots democracy indicators, and the project has acknowledged difficulty distinguishing between governance quality and party organizational capacity, which may be closely intertwined in many areas, in interpreting those results.

A third pattern is that female respondents disproportionately answer "don't know" to questions about governance topics on which they have direct experience. A randomized experiment showed this to be partly a function of interview administration quality: when interviewers knew they were being observed, they provided more guidance and assurance, and the gender gap in "don't know" responses disappeared entirely.

Finding 4: Independence emerged as the single most important factor sustaining PAPI's relevance, and with the transition from the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) to a new

national partner, such independence will remain essential for the credibility and usability of the PAPI findings.

Evaluation participants from international organizations stated this with particular force. Independence is the most strategic asset the survey has, and if that independence is compromised, the value-added of the survey comes into question. This assessment was shared, in varying formulations, by every stakeholder group interviewed.

The survey's institutional arrangements were deliberately structured to create multiple layers of separation between the entities whose performance was being assessed (provincial governments) and the entities managing the data collection and analysis. The VFF provided institutional backing and local access but did not control the sampling as well as the data. CECODES managed fieldwork independently. UNDP provided oversight, quality control, and technical expertise. This multi-layered separation of functions was central to PAPI's design logic and is widely regarded as fundamental to the survey's credibility.

The exit from the partnership configuration of the VFF in late 2023 and the emerging transition to HCMA raises important questions. Evaluation participants identified several reasons supporting the transition. HCMA's position as a Party institution, rather than a government agency, places it at a different point in the accountability chain, reducing potential tensions between being both the subject of assessment and the entity responsible for judging it. Participants also noted that the Academy has a clear institutional interest in safeguarding data independence, as this strengthens the credibility of its training and policy advisory functions. In addition, its national-level mandate means it is structurally less exposed to the implications of provincial-level assessments, which may further support its ability to engage with the data objectively. The project team highlighted the imperative to maintain genuine independence once the survey becomes nationally owned as a key priority and focus area moving forward. Evaluation participants highlighted several areas they viewed as essential safeguards. For instance, they noted that efforts to alter sampling, influence data collectors, or place undue pressure on team members should be considered serious concerns. They also suggested that if data integrity were compromised, withholding the publication of results would be an appropriate protective measure.

4.1.3 Comprehensiveness and Adaptability

Finding 5: PAPI has evolved from a provincial governance index into an integrated governance ecosystem, though a structural imbalance exists between the survey function and the policy advisory function.

Over sixteen years, the PAPI project has transformed into an integrated ecosystem encompassing the core index, research, innovation, advocacy, civic engagement, disability inclusion, LGBTQI inclusion, public sector innovation, and capacity-building activities. This ecosystem means the project serves multiple functions simultaneously - measurement and benchmarking, analytical and advisory, governance improvement, and social inclusion. Each function addresses a distinct set of stakeholder needs, which helps explain why PAPI has maintained relevance across such a diverse range of users.

However, evaluation participants identified a structural imbalance. The balance is currently leaning towards the survey, with resources for the policy advisory function being limited. Each year, HCMA could only select one to three provinces for in-depth policy advice, when ideally all provinces would be covered. This imbalance was highlighted as one possible reason to question the validity of PAPI's sample sizes. In particular, provinces highlighted an unmet need for supplementary analytical support needed to make full use of survey results. The PAPI report itself was described as too technical for its primary audience, with too much emphasis being placed on the numerical results and insufficient actionable guidance for non-technical audience. When provincial leaders attend the annual PAPI launch, their first concern is the relative ranking of their province. This suggests the report's current format does not effectively translate data into the practical guidance that its most important users need.

Finding 6: PAPI's relevance has been sustained partly through its capacity to adapt, but the current moment requires transformation rather than incremental adjustment.

The most significant adaptation was the addition of two new dimensions in 2018, environmental governance and e-government, in response to Viet Nam's digitalization drive and growing environmental challenges. The e-governance dimension was added specifically to capture the shift of administrative procedures to online platforms without disrupting the existing time series.

However, evaluation participants across all stakeholder groups identified the current moment as requiring more than incremental adaptation. A senior national partner argued that PAPI needs "transformation," citing three interconnected reasons: the profound administrative restructuring of 2025 (the move from sixty-three to thirty-four provinces and the abolition of the district tier), the accelerating impact of digitalization on service delivery, and the need to move beyond collecting citizen perceptions to interpreting why governance performs as it does. The proposed transformation would involve PAPI evolving from a standalone data report into a broader analytical resource on public governance that incorporates other data sources, including PCI data and digitalization data, into dialogue with PAPI findings.

Evaluation participants from international organizations reinforced this view, suggesting this is a good time to revisit what PAPI covers, including potentially adding questions on how citizens experience the impact of reforms on service delivery, expanding coverage of digital interfaces, and dropping topics that have generated little analytical interest. Several participants also raised the question of whether politically infeasible dimensions, particularly elections and some aspects of political participation, should be reconsidered given the shrinking political space for these topics.

Finding 7: Score stagnation on core dimensions over sixteen years creates a credibility challenge: provinces that invest heavily in reform see no improvement in their scores, raising questions about the survey's measurement sensitivity.

Over sixteen years, progress on the first four PAPI dimensions, participation, transparency, vertical accountability, and control of corruption, has been incremental rather than rapid, with scores showing stability over time despite what many stakeholders describe as significant governance reforms at the local level. This pattern points to the potential for deeper institutional strengthening and suggests that PAPI's measurement framework may need to become more sensitive to capturing the types of changes that reforms are producing. Scores on these dimensions have remained around

4.5 over the past decade, a pattern that evaluation participants described as discouraging for provincial officials committed to reform. This underscores the need for enhancing PAPI's sensitivity to measuring change, so that the results of governance reforms can be captured within a political term of five years. Strengthening this measurement sensitivity would enhance the value of PAPI's inclusion in the performance assessment of provincial chairpersons under Politburo Regulation No. 365. Serious discussions over what to measure under the six original dimensions are needed.

The project team provided a nuanced technical explanation. The survey demonstrably detects change where real change is occurring, particularly in corruption control following the anti-corruption campaign launched in 2016, and in administrative procedures during the government's Project 30 streamlining initiative. The limited progress on other dimensions may partly reflect that the survey faithfully measures its original constructs, but some real changes are happening in areas those constructs do not fully capture. The PCI, by comparison, recalibrates every five years, prioritizing maintaining sensitivity to evolving realities over longitudinal comparability. An additional problem was the accumulation of add-on questions from stakeholders and funders unrelated to the core index, significantly increasing the questionnaire's duration and degrading the respondent experience. This tension between consistency and sensitivity is a recurring challenge in long-running survey instruments worldwide, and PAPI's next phase will need to navigate it deliberately.

4.1.4 Alignment with National and International Frameworks

Finding 8: PAPI is well aligned with Viet Nam's key national strategies, the priorities of the current political leadership, and the United Nations' strategic frameworks. It directly contributes to the achievement of SDGs in the country.

At the national level, the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2021–2030 and the Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021–2025 both prioritize public administration reform, e-government, transparency, and anti-corruption, all areas PAPI directly measures. The Law on Grassroots Democracy provides a legislative foundation for the citizen participation that PAPI assesses, and the 13th National Party Congress Resolution's directive toward “modern and effective national governance reforms” while leaving no one behind mirrors PAPI's focus on inclusive, citizen-assessed governance. Most significantly, General Secretary Tô Lâm's emphasis on a “digital dashboard” to track core indicators about the implementation of important Party resolutions, and the inclusion of PAPI in Politburo Regulation No. 365, demonstrate the highest level of institutional demand for systematic, indicator-based monitoring. Within the United Nations system, PAPI directly supports UNDP's Country Programme Document 2022–2026, particularly Outcome 3 on governance and access to justice and Output 3.2 on transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of provincial authorities. It is fully aligned with the UN's One Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development Cooperation 2022–2026.

PAPI occupies a specific and documented role in Viet Nam's implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Its contribution operates along three complementary tracks: as a recognised data source for official SDG reporting, as evidence that informs governance reforms aligned with SDG targets, and as a platform whose thematic work advances SDGs beyond Goal 16.

- SDG 16 — Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (the primary and formal contribution). Under Prime Minister's Decision No. 841/QĐ-TTg, which sets out Viet Nam's roadmap for implementing the SDGs to 2030, PAPI is designated as the national data source for monitoring SDG indicator 16.5.1 (the proportion of people who paid a bribe to a public official or were asked for a bribe in the preceding twelve months). PAPI data was submitted to the Ministry of Planning and Investment for the 2025 Mid-Term Review of Viet Nam's National Action Plan for the 2030 Agenda. Beyond this formal role, PAPI's eight dimensions map directly onto four SDG 16 targets: participation at local levels and vertical accountability speak to SDG 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making); transparency in local decision-making speaks to SDG 16.6 (effective, accountable and transparent institutions); control of corruption speaks to SDG 16.5; and public administrative procedures and public service delivery speak to SDG 16.6.
- SDG 5 — Gender Equality and SDG 10 — Reduced Inequalities (the inclusion agenda). PAPI's thematic work has generated evidence and advocacy in direct support of SDG 5 (women's leadership targets) and SDG 10 (leaving no one behind). The research on women's political participation contributed to the raising of the target for women in Party committees from 15 to 25 per cent in Regulation No. 377 (October 2025). The disability survey covering over 28,000 persons with disabilities, together with the three-year training of ninety-two potential candidates with disabilities, produced the evidence base that informed Conclusion Notice No. 444 on disability inclusion. PAPI has also extended analytical coverage to internal migrants, ethnic minorities, and transgender persons, supporting the inclusion principle that runs across the SDG framework.
- SDG 13, 11 and 3 — Climate action, sustainable cities, and health (the environmental governance track). PAPI's environmental governance dimension has been formally adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (formerly MoNRE) as a source for the Provincial Environmental Protection Performance Index (PEPI), which draws on PAPI's citizen-based measures of satisfaction with environmental quality. Supplementary research, including the 2025 study on the impact of extreme weather on outdoor workers in Ha Noi and the action research on socially inclusive and climate-resilient urban governance, has generated evidence that speaks to SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 3 (health).

4.1.5 Relevance Under Pressure: Current Challenges

Despite its sustained relevance, PAPI faces a set of interconnected challenges that test whether its design and delivery remain fit for purpose in Viet Nam's current context. These challenges do not diminish the project's historical relevance but raise important questions about the conditions under which that relevance can be maintained.

Finding 9: The cancellation of the 2025 survey, the first time in fourteen years the full PAPI survey was not conducted, represents the most visible manifestation of converging operational and political pressures.

The cancellation resulted from a convergence of factors: the exit from the partnership configuration of the VFF, regulatory concerns raised by the Ministry of Public Security about the

survey's institutional anchoring, the refusal of two provinces to grant access in 2024, and the significant administrative restructuring that rendered the existing sampling framework obsolete. The project team redirected resources to a rapid assessment of citizens' experience with the two-tier government system, conducted by telephone with a subset of the 2024 sample. This rapid assessment, while not a substitute for the full PAPI survey, demonstrates the flexibility of the development partners and the team's commitment to adaptive management to ensure that PAPI's core functions of generating citizen feedback on governance performance.

Finding 10: Recent changes in the operational environment require that questions on political participation, elections, and transparency be approached with careful methodological consideration. This situation highlights the challenge of maintaining PAPI's broad governance framework while adapting to current constraints on data collection and analysis. Certain governance dimensions now require careful methodological calibration. For this reason the rapid assessment was limited to public service delivery dimensions only. Some evaluation participants suggested that some dimensions, particularly elections, may not be useful or necessary at this point in time.

Finding 11: The VFF's exit from the partnership configuration will have an impact on effective access to communities, and no consensus exists among stakeholders on the optimal data collection methodology going forward.

Without an organization with equivalent grassroots reach, in-person data collection becomes significantly more difficult. Evaluation participants provided detailed technical assessments warning that phone-based surveys face high non-response rates and self-selection bias, particularly given the current environment where citizens are inundated with spam calls. The data would be either very noisy or potentially biased, making representativeness very difficult to achieve, especially in rural and undereducated areas. A hybrid model using phone surveys in urban areas and face-to-face interviews in rural areas would create a methodological confound, making it impossible to distinguish whether differences in governance responses reflect demographic characteristics or survey administration mode. Any move away from in-person interviews would require fundamental questionnaire simplification.

Against these concerns, several evaluation participants noted that phone-based collection would reduce costs significantly (current data collection costs between \$600,000 and \$800,000 annually), simplify logistics, and contribute to maintaining data integrity. The rapid assessment currently underway provides an initial test of whether phone-based methods can work at scale, though the results will need careful evaluation before drawing firm conclusions.

4.1.6 Concluding Assessment

PAPI's relevance over sixteen years is well established and confirmed with notable consistency by evaluation participants across all stakeholder categories. It fills a gap that no other instrument in Viet Nam addresses: the systematic, independent, citizen-level assessment of provincial governance performance. Its data has been used by provincial governments for self-improvement, by the Communist Party and central government for performance monitoring, by the National Assembly for legislative deliberation, by the World Bank and other international organizations for analytical work, and by researchers for academic inquiry. Its inclusion in Politburo Regulation No.

365 as a key performance indicator for provincial leadership represents the highest level of institutional recognition that a governance monitoring instrument could achieve in Viet Nam's political system.

At the same time, PAPI's relevance is not automatic or self-sustaining. The administrative restructuring, the shrinking political space for some governance dimensions, the incremental pace of progress on core governance dimensions, the loss of the VFF as a local-level facilitator, and the regulatory constraints on foreign-managed surveys all require the project to adapt in ways that go beyond incremental adjustment. Several evaluation participants explicitly called for a "transformation" rather than mere adjustment. The transition to HCMA as the national institutional partner, the planned questionnaire reform, and the exploration of new data collection modalities represent necessary responses to the evolving operational environment. Whether they prove sufficient will depend on PAPI's ability to maintain the independence and methodological rigour that have been the foundation of its relevance, while simultaneously making the instrument more accessible, more interpretive, and better integrated with other data sources in Viet Nam's evolving governance ecosystem.

4.2 Coherence

4.2.1 Internal Coherence: Partnership Structure and Division of Labour

Finding 12: PAPI's multi-partner delivery model was deliberately designed so that no single entity produced governance performance and assessed it, and this division of labour functioned effectively throughout most of the project's sixteen-year lifespan.

The partnership structure assigned distinct and complementary functions to each entity. UNDP provided strategic oversight, quality control, international technical expertise, and donor coordination. CECODES, as an independent non-governmental research organization, managed fieldwork logistics, enumerator recruitment, and grassroots-level data collection. HCMA contributed policy advisory work, provincial diagnostic workshops, and training of provincial officials. An international technical adviser maintained methodological consistency, designed and updated the sampling framework, and conducted data analysis. Real-Time Analytics (RTA) provided IT systems for tablet-based data acquisition and real-time quality monitoring. The National Advisory Board ensured methodological robustness and stakeholder accountability.

The structural logic was multilayered: the entity whose performance was being measured (provincial governments) had no role in data collection or analysis; the entity providing community access (the Vietnam Fatherland Front, or VFF) did not control the sampling and data; the entity managing fieldwork (CECODES) did not design the methodology; and the entity analysing the data operated independently of both the government and the implementing partners. Each function was necessary, and each depended on the others to produce a credible output.

Finding 13: Two developments have fundamentally changed this partnership configuration: the exit from the partnership configuration of the VFF in late 2023 and the anticipated departure of CECODES, requiring a complete reconfiguration of PAPI's institutional arrangements.

The VFF's exit was not abrupt; it was the outcome of changes in institutional roles and ongoing structural challenges. Evaluation participants shared historical context, noting that the VFF operated as a two-way channel for information in Vietnamese society – communicating directives from Party and State leadership to local levels and reporting local concerns upward, consistent with its mandate. However, the VFF's capacity to fulfil this role was constrained by inherent structural factors. Leadership transitions within the VFF posed risks of political instability for the project, and ultimately, these factors contributed to the VFF's departure. CECODES's departure resulted from a combination of factors: evolving regulatory dynamics affecting non-governmental organizations in Viet Nam, a legal incident involving an individual associated with CECODES that negatively affected the organization's stability, and new ODA regulations impacting on the absorption of international development cooperation funds. These departures required the project to reconfigure its partnership moving forward with HCMA replacing the VFF as the national institutional owner.

Finding 14: The transition to HCMA as the national institutional partner presents both potential benefits and a structural consideration regarding the balance between national ownership and the preservation of independent assessment. The transition to HCMA as national institution partners will require a thorough evaluation of the roles and responsibilities of HCMA within the logic of the project. Under the previous arrangement, the separation of functions was clear and well established. Under the emerging arrangement, HCMA serves simultaneously as the national institutional owner, a contributor to policy analysis, and a training institution that uses PAPI data in its courses. This concentration of roles could strengthen coherence by aligning data production and policy application within a single institution, provided that safeguards are in place to ensure methodological clarity and rigour during the transition.

4.2.2 Coherence Between the Core Index and Expanded Project Components

Finding 15: The logical chain connecting PAPI's core index to its expanded components is analytically sound and demonstrably produces concrete outcomes, as illustrated most clearly by the disability inclusion work.

Since 2018, PAPI expanded from being solely a governance index into a broader project encompassing thematic research, policy advocacy, disability inclusion, LGBTQI inclusion, gender and women's political participation, public sector innovation, and citizen-powered digital governance initiatives. The internal logic is that the annual survey identifies governance gaps; thematic research deepens understanding of those gaps; policy briefs translate findings into actionable recommendations; diagnostic workshops help provinces develop improvement plans; and the inclusion initiatives address the specific governance experiences of marginalized groups. Evaluation participants emphasized that the expanded research topics are not created out of thin air but emerge directly from findings in the PAPI surveys.

The disability component illustrates this logic at its most concrete. PAPI data revealed that persons with disabilities face distinct barriers in accessing public services. This finding led to a dedicated disability survey, a three-year training programme for potential candidates with disabilities wishing to stand for election, sustained policy advocacy with the National Assembly, and ultimately Conclusion Notice No. 444 issued by the General Secretary in December 2025. This

Conclusion incorporated the disability rights issues that UNDP advocated for, including a call for research into a disability quota for the National Assembly. Subsequently, an individual with a disability was put forward as a National Assembly candidate by a representative organization for people with disabilities and was subsequently elected. The logical chain from survey data to dedicated research to capacity building to policy advocacy to institutional outcome demonstrates genuine programmatic coherence.

Finding 16: Programmatic coherence is affected by an imbalance between data production and policy application, and by the absence of systematic outcome monitoring for PAPI's expanded activities.

Evaluation participants were particularly direct about the first weakness. The balance is currently leaning towards the survey, with resources for the policy advisory function being limited. Each year, HCMA could only select one to three provinces for in-depth policy advice, when ideally all provinces would be covered. Evaluation participants argued that PAPI reports tend to stop at the launch of general indicators and are not immediately conducive to concrete policy recommendations: the report is too technical and does not provide the kind of actionable guidance that provincial leaders need.

On the second weakness, a senior project team member acknowledged that while extensive policy advocacy work has been produced across gender, e-governance, environmental governance, and other topics, the outcomes and impact are not systematically tracked. Development partners have identified this as an area requiring strengthening. Formal attribution of policy influence is inherently challenging in Viet Nam's institutional context, where government entities do not typically reference externally supported initiatives as direct inputs to policy decisions. The evaluation accepts this as a genuine constraint. Nevertheless, the absence of even plausible outcome-level monitoring, as distinct from definitive attribution, means the coherence between PAPI's data production and its policy influence functions remains difficult to demonstrate empirically. Evaluation participants suggested that following policy processes more closely and investing more in monitoring outcomes rather than just outputs could yield plausible, though not definitive, linkages. The transition to HCMA may create new space for this, since a national institution with a mandate for cadre training and policy research may be better positioned to trace and document the connections between governance evidence and policy outcomes.

4.2.3 Longitudinal Coherence

Finding 17: PAPI's sixteen-year longitudinal dataset is one of its most distinctive analytical assets, but the commitment to methodological consistency has come at the cost of sensitivity to change.

Covering nearly 220,000 respondents across all sixty-three provinces (prior to the 2025 merger), the dataset provides an unparalleled basis for tracking governance trends over time. Maintaining this time-series capability required deliberate methodological discipline: core questions were kept consistent across years to allow year-on-year comparison, while new dimensions were added as separate modules. Evaluation participants from international organizations confirmed its value, noting that PAPI provides time-series data on informal payments and corruption trends that no

international index can match, precisely because the same questions have been asked consistently over many years.

However, the evaluation identified a fundamental tension. The survey demonstrably detects change where real change is occurring, particularly in corruption control following the anti-corruption campaign launched in 2016 and in administrative procedures during the government's Project 30 streamlining initiative. But where original constructs no longer capture the full reality of how governance is experienced, for example through digital channels that did not exist when the survey was designed, the scores remain flat. The slow pace of change of scores on the first four dimensions over a decade or more has become not too incentivizing for provincial officials who believe they are making genuine improvements. The PCI takes a different approach, recalibrating every five years, which prioritizes maintaining sensitivity to evolving realities over strict longitudinal comparability. Both approaches have merit, and the choice involves a genuine analytical trade-off.

Finding 18: The 2025 administrative restructuring introduces a hard break in longitudinal comparability but also creates a necessary and legitimate moment for comprehensive recalibration of the survey instrument.

The reduction from sixty-three to thirty-four provinces and the abolition of the district tier means that a new baseline will be established, and data from the new structure will not be directly comparable to the previous series. Multiple evaluation participants viewed this as both a loss and an opportunity. It interrupts the time series that has been PAPI's most valuable analytical asset, but it also provides legitimate grounds for comprehensive reform of the questionnaire, methodology, mode of execution, and potentially even the name of the survey, without the constraint of backward comparability.

Evaluation participants proposed a specific approach to managing this transition: retaining the same sampled communes from the previous cycle. However, this approach is not feasible, as commune-level units were extensively merged and reduced from 10,035 to 3,321 under the restructuring. The same PPS sampling methodology should be applied to the new administrative geography. The National Assembly and People's Council elections scheduled for March 2026 will produce updated voter lists in every location, providing a reliable basis for new sample selection. Careful geographic and administrative remapping will be required to establish any longitudinal linkages with prior data.

4.2.4 External Coherence: PAPI in Viet Nam's Governance Survey Ecosystem

Finding 19: PAPI operates within an increasingly dense ecosystem of governance surveys in Viet Nam, creating risks of fragmentation, respondent fatigue, and measurement overlap, though some provinces are pragmatically integrating multiple instruments into common action plans.

Since 2014, multiple assessment tools have emerged alongside PAPI and PCI, including the Public Administration Reform Index (PAR Index), the Satisfaction Index of Public Administrative Services (SIPAS), the Provincial Open Budget Index (POBI), the E-Government Index, the Vietnam Digital Transformation Index, the Provincial Environmental Protection Index (PEPI), and

the Patient Satisfaction Index. PAPI has served as a model for a growing number of these sectoral indices, and the VFF has drawn on PAPI's methodology for a new Provincial Social Trust Index.

Several of these instruments measure constructs that directly overlap with PAPI's core dimensions. SIPAS and the PAR Index overlap with PAPI's public administration dimension; the E-Government and Digital Transformation indices overlap with PAPI's e-government dimension; and the POBI overlaps with PAPI's transparency dimension. Evaluation participants noted that, in contrast to PAPI, most of these other indices are not considered politically sensitive because they assess offices and institutions rather than capturing citizens' perceptions of governance gaps between provinces. Several provinces have responded pragmatically by developing common action plans addressing PAPI, PAR Index, and SIPAS simultaneously, suggesting that at the local level these instruments are already treated as parts of a single governance improvement agenda, even without formal coordination at the national level.

Finding 20: PAPI has achieved a degree of national institutional integration that few externally supported governance initiatives attain in any country, including its inclusion in Politburo Regulation No. 365 as a core index for evaluating provincial leadership.

The most significant development is the inclusion of PAPI in Politburo Regulation No. 365/QĐ-BCHTW (August 2025), which designates PAPI, alongside PCI and the Public Administration Reform Index, as a core index for evaluating the performance of Provincial People's Committee Chairpersons. This elevates PAPI from an externally-funded research project to an internal management tool of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, directly linking citizen satisfaction to the career evaluation of provincial leaders.

Additionally, HCMA has submitted at least two reports to the Politburo drawing on PAPI data. In 2025, nine policy briefs were submitted to the National Assembly on topics including public sector innovation, political participation of persons with disabilities, budget transparency, and inclusive e-governance. The Ministry of Agriculture and Environment formally requested PAPI data for its Provincial Environmental Protection Index. PAPI has also served as a model for the development of other Vietnamese indices, including the Public Administration Reform Index, the Provincial Environmental Protection Index, and the Vietnam Digital Transformation Index.

The disability inclusion work associated with PAPI contributed to a tangible policy outcome: Conclusion Notice No. 444, issued by the General Secretary on International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December 2025. This incorporated provisions in line with UNDP's sustained advocacy, including digital transformation and accessibility measures and a call for research into establishing a quota for representatives with disabilities in the National Assembly. Following this Conclusion, one person with a disability was introduced as a candidate for the National Assembly.

Finding 21: The PAPI-PCI relationship represents a case of complementarity in design but fragmentation in practice. Although both instruments are supported by the same expert, provinces develop separate action plans for each and rarely reconcile the different messages they convey.

The two instruments were conceived as complementary: PAPI captures citizen perceptions, PCI captures firm-level assessments. Evaluation participants from international organizations

confirmed this complementarity, noting that Viet Nam is distinctive internationally in having both instruments and that the two complement each other very well. The original motivation for creating PAPI was rooted in the recognition that PCI alone provided an incomplete picture, with provinces interpreting good governance exclusively as what was favourable to businesses.

However, evaluation participants acknowledged that in practice this complementarity has not been fully realized at the provincial level. The two instruments are operationally siloed: provinces develop separate action plans and rarely sit down to reconcile the different messages they convey. This matters because the indices can tell contradictory stories, as illustrated most extremely by the case of Quang Ninh in 2016 (second on PCI but sixty-second on PAPI). Evaluation participants identified HCMA as the right institution to bridge this gap, precisely because the Academy already uses both PAPI and PCI data in its training of provincial officials. The transition to HCMA creates a concrete opportunity to pursue an integrated analysis that helps officials understand trade-offs between citizen and business perspectives rather than treating them as separate performance scorecards.

Finding 22: PAPI's exclusive focus on the demand side of governance (citizen perceptions and experiences) is identified as a gap that limits both analytical depth and political sustainability. A complementary supply-side component would address multiple weaknesses simultaneously.

Some evaluation participants argued that alongside PAPI, there should be an indicator or perspective that explains why local people evaluated the quality of local staff and services as they did. In a survey relying only on citizens' opinions, the information may not be sufficient to translate satisfaction data into policy. This one-sidedness was also identified as a source of vulnerability, because provincial authorities can criticize PAPI for presenting only the citizens' viewpoint without considering the constraints under which officials deliver services. PCI faces less political friction precisely because it complements its survey data with provincial visits and policy analysis.

Evaluation participants supported a complementary supply-side survey, noting it would be enormously valuable for triangulating citizen perceptions against objective institutional data. For example, if citizens in one area report good governance and the supply-side data shows that the local office has more staff and longer opening hours, the combined analysis would begin to explain why some provinces perform well and others do not. Information on staffing levels, working conditions, salaries, training, and institutional constraints would greatly enhance the interpretive power of PAPI's citizen data. HCMA has formally expressed interest in expanding the survey to include the voices of public officials and civil servants. Adding a supply-side component would reduce PAPI's political sensitivity by presenting a more balanced assessment framework, strengthen the analytical depth of findings, and respond directly to provincial governments' demand for explanation rather than merely measurement.

4.2.5 Programmatic Coherence Within UNDP's Country Programme

Finding 23: PAPI's standalone status gave it independence and flexibility, but an opportunity to use PAPI more deliberately as an integrating platform for UNDP's subnational programming has not been fully realized.

Within UNDP Viet Nam, PAPI is embedded in the Governance and Participation Team and contributes directly to the Country Programme Document 2022–2026, particularly Outcome 3 on governance and access to justice. PAPI data is referenced in UNDP programming documents, but the evaluation did not find evidence of a structured process through which PAPI findings routinely inform the design or targeting of other UNDP projects. The logic for integration is clear: PAPI identifies governance issues and challenges at the provincial level, and UNDP has projects addressing many of the same weaknesses in digital governance, climate resilience, gender equality, and access to justice.

The local innovation and digital transformation component illustrates both the potential and the limitations of this integration. Citizen-powered digital governance initiatives piloted in Hà Giang (now Tuyên Quang) and Quảng Trị provinces demonstrated that ethnic minority communities could be supported to access e-services if procedures were simplified and digital support teams properly trained. This model has been replicated in five to seven other provinces including Bắc Ninh, Cao Bằng, Cần Thơ, Điện Biên, and Hà Nội. However, evaluation participants observed that the prospect of local governments allocating their own budgets to continue these activities is limited. These are under-resourced provinces under pressure to maintain high GDP growth rates, and there is no clear connection between helping ethnic minorities use online services and achieving their economic targets. Sustainability therefore depends on linkage to national policy frameworks, such as the requirement under Resolution 57 that at least 3% of the total annual state budget expenditure be allocated to the development of science and technology, innovation, and national digital transformation, and funding streams under the National Targeted Programme on Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas.

The planned transition to a successor phase presents an opportunity to strengthen programmatic coherence by integrating PAPI's data production with capacity building, inclusion, and policy advisory work under a single project framework with HCMA as the national institutional partner. Whether greater coherence is achieved will depend on the quality of coordination between HCMA and UNDP, the extent to which PAPI data informs the design of non-survey components, and the willingness of both partners to treat PAPI as a diagnostic foundation for a broader governance improvement agenda rather than as an end in itself.

4.2.6 Coherence with Donor Priorities

Finding 24: Donor priorities are well aligned with PAPI's expanded inclusion components, but operational coordination weaknesses risk undermining donor confidence during a complex institutional transition.

PAPI is funded by DFAT (Australia) and the Government of Ireland, each bringing distinct thematic priorities: Australia focuses on gender and disability, while Ireland prioritizes ethnic minorities and LGBTQI inclusion. Both donors' priorities align with PAPI's expanded inclusion components, and both are deeply committed to continuing their support and offered political support to help maintain PAPI's integrity and usability during the transition to HCMA.

On the substantive side, evaluation participants offered an assessment of alignment with the priorities of the Government of Viet Nam - ethnic minorities are a top priority for Viet Nam, gender issues receive strong attention, and disability rights are increasingly recognized, but, according to

evaluation respondents, LGBTQI issues are not highly prioritized. Evaluation participants advised that some especially sensitive themes could be best addressed through smaller-scale, targeted studies that could provide society with deeper, more focused data.

On the operational side, communication gaps weaken the partnership's coherence. While regular bulletins are produced to highlight specific achievements and update on progress made through the PAPI, development partners, who rotate every two to three years, may not be aware of, or make an effective use of this communication products. In one instance, a donor staff member only became aware of PAPI's inclusion in Politburo Regulation No. 365 through an internal government dispatch, four months after the regular bulletin had reported this achievement. Donors, for their part, expressed a desire for more strategic engagement and noted that the steering committee is not functioning as an effective strategic tool for steering PAPI's work. The transition to the next phase provides a natural moment to restructure donor engagement through a more effective steering committee and strategic communication.

4.2.7 Coherence with HCMA's Institutional Mandate

As PAPI's transition to HCMA as national institutional owner, the evaluation found strong substantive coherence between PAPI and the Academy's own institutional mandate and activities. HCMA is the primary training institution for cadres at all levels of the Vietnamese political system, with over sixty thousand students passing through its programmes. PAPI data and findings are already used in some of the Academy's teaching curricula, and four core textbooks for cadre training now incorporate PAPI's citizen-centric approach. The Academy's research departments have co-authored policy papers using PAPI data, and HCMA has submitted at least two reports to the Politburo drawing on PAPI findings. This institutional integration means that PAPI's evidence base is reaching the officials whose governance decisions PAPI seeks to inform, creating a coherent feedback loop from citizen data to leadership training to governance improvement. HCMA's formal interest in expanding the survey to include the voices of public officials and civil servants further reinforces this coherence, as it would connect the Academy's training mandate with a more comprehensive evidence base on governance from both the demand and supply sides.

4.2.8 Concluding Assessment

PAPI demonstrates strong internal coherence in its partnership structure, its logical connection between the core index and expanded project components, and the analytical chain from citizen data to policy influence. Its sixteen-year longitudinal dataset provides a form of temporal coherence that is rare among governance surveys globally and constitutes one of the project's most valuable assets. The separation of functions across specialized partners was deliberately designed to ensure independence and data integrity, and this design functioned effectively for the project's lifespan.

At the same time, the evaluation identified five areas where coherence requires focused attention and deliberate action. First, the reconfiguration of the partnership structure is still underway, and the concentration of roles within HCMA will require setting up clear institutional boundaries. Second, the relationship between PAPI's data production and its policy influence is not systematically monitored, making it difficult to demonstrate whether the project's components are producing mutually reinforcing outcomes. Third, the longitudinal coherence that has been PAPI's

strength is now in tension with the need to adapt the instrument to a fundamentally altered governance landscape, and the 2025 administrative restructuring creates both a break in the time series and a necessary moment for comprehensive recalibration. Fourth, external coherence with Viet Nam’s wider ecosystem of governance surveys remains underdeveloped: the integration of PAPI and PCI findings at the provincial level has not yet been realized, and the absence of a supply-side perspective on governance is widely identified as a gap that limits both analytical depth and political sustainability. Fifth, operational coherence with donors’ priorities requires enhancements in the coordination mechanisms than currently exist, including an empowered steering committee and communication tools that are strategic rather than exclusively technical. The transition to the new project, with HCMA as the national institutional partner, provides a concrete opportunity to address each of these gaps if the partnership is deliberately designed to do so.

4.3 Effectiveness

Effectiveness in this section is examined in terms of the project’s success in achieving its stated outputs and outcomes. The section begins with an assessment of the quality of the results framework, then examines the achievement of objectives, and concludes with an analysis of the project’s most significant outcomes, including those that the results framework does not adequately capture.

4.3.1 Quality of the Results Framework

Finding 25: The results framework has served its purpose as a project management tool for tracking annual production cycles, but has four structural weaknesses that limit its utility as a tool for assessing effectiveness and impact. These weaknesses were identified by the Mid-Term Review but were not addressed.

First, the results framework operates largely at the output level, tracking what the project produced, rather than what changed as a result. Of the eighteen indicators, eight function as binary checklists confirming that annual production steps were completed on schedule. Only one indicator (on central-level policy use) attempts to measure policy uptake, and it is the weakest in the framework: a simple binary measure (“used/not used”) that cannot capture the qualitative significance of different forms of policy integration. No indicator tracks whether PAPI data contributed to measurable governance improvements, provincial score changes, shifts in citizen satisfaction, or policy reforms.

Second, the framework lacks an adaptive mechanism. When operating conditions changed drastically in 2024 and 2025, the framework offered no protocol for adjusting targets, revising baselines, or substituting alternative indicators. Several indicators now reference conditions that no longer exist (sixty-three provinces, annual survey cycles). The framework was not updated at the 2023 midterm review, despite clear evidence that the operating environment was changing.

Third, several targets were set too conservatively at the design stage and were never recalibrated. Six indicators exceeded their cumulative targets by margins ranging from 19 percent to 400 percent. When most indicators show overachievement by wide margins, the targets cease to function as meaningful performance benchmarks and make it difficult to distinguish between expected and exceptional delivery.

Fourth, the ToC linking PAPI outputs to intended outcomes (described in the Project Description section of this report and elaborated in Annex VI) did not include a results chain identifying key outcome indicators tied to the governance improvements PAPI was designed to enable. Additionally, no indicator included a quality metric for any deliverable, and two indicators (tracking initial and full data analysis) are near-duplicates with no strong analytical distinction. The programme's original design envisioned a relatively linear progression from citizen survey data to improved governance. What emerged in practice was way more complex - a multi-pathway model in which three distinct, but mutually reinforcing streams of activity converged over time to produce institutional effects far beyond what a survey instrument alone could have achieved. The evaluation reconstructed the Theory of Change on the basis of what materialized in practice. This new Theory of Change is presented in Annex VI of this report, and provides the basis for the analysis of this evaluation.

4.3.2 Achievement of Objectives

Finding 26: PAPI achieved or exceeded its targets across the large majority of its results framework. Where targets were not met, the shortfalls are directly and exclusively attributable to the cancellation of the 2025 survey, driven by external factors beyond the project's control.

For the first time since PAPI's inception in 2009, the nationwide PAPI survey was not conducted in 2025. This resulted from three converging constraints: (1) the changes in the regulatory environment related to the management of international cooperation on law and judicial reforms under Decree No. 26/2024/ND-CP; (2) the exit from the partnership configuration of the VFF Central Committee from survey coordination with CECODES; and (3) the significant administrative reorganization that reduced Viet Nam's provinces from sixty-three to thirty-four, abolished the district tier from 1 July 2025 and consolidated the commune level administrative units from 10,035 to 3,321. In consultation with external partners and in line with the principles of adaptive management, the project team redirected resources toward a rapid assessment of citizens' experience with public service delivery under the two-tier government system, conducted by telephone with a subset of the 2024 sample.

Table 1 below presents the indicator-level achievement. Of the eighteen indicators, eleven met or exceeded their end-of-project targets, five were partially achieved (all directly attributable to the 2025 survey cancellation), one is on track for completion by June 2026, and one cumulative target (total respondents) is no longer achievable.

Table 3: Achievement of Targets in PAPI's Results Framework⁴

#	Indicator	Target (Jun 2026)	Cumulative Result	2025	% of Target	Status	Analysis
<i>Output Area 1: The PAPI Survey and Report Production Cycle</i>							
1	Methodology refined by end of May	9 cycles	8	0	89%	Partially achieved	Completed for 8 of 9 expected annual cycles. Gap entirely attributable to the cancellation of the 2025 survey.
2	Fieldwork completed in all 63 provinces by December	8 cycles	7	0	88%	Partially achieved	Completed in 7 of 8 cycles. In 2024, the survey reached 61 of 63 provinces. The 63-province target is now obsolete following the reduction to 34 provinces.
3	Total respondents interviewed face-to-face	125,000	113,614	0	91%	Partially achieved	Cumulative shortfall of 11,386 respondents cannot be closed by June 2026 project end.
4	Dataset finalised for analysis by mid-December	8 cycles	7	0	88%	Partially achieved	Met in all years when a survey was conducted (2018–2024).
5	Initial analysis of PAPI data in second half of December	8 cycles	7	0	88%	Partially achieved	Completed in every year that a dataset was available.
6	PAPI data analysed by research team by February	9 cycles	7	0	78%	Partially achieved	Completed in all years when data was available. The 2024 analysis pipeline continued to function.
<i>Output Area 1: Dissemination, Policy Use, and Peer Learning</i>							
7	Final PAPI Report validated with Advisory Board by February	9 cycles	8	1	89%	Largely achieved	The 2024 Report was validated in early 2025 and launched in April 2025 with over 600 delegates.
8	National launching event by March/April	9 events	9	1	100%	Achieved	The 2024 Report was launched on 15 April 2025 with broad participation. 300 copies distributed to National Assembly delegates.
9	Regional/provincial dissemination workshops	80	125	8	156%	Exceeded	125 workshops surpassed target by 56%. In 2025, 8 workshops convened despite the disrupted environment.
10	Total participants in diagnostic workshops	25,000	56,550	2,200	226%	Exceeded	Participation more than doubled target. Even in 2025, 2,200 officials participated.

⁴ The table below presents each indicator with its target, cumulative result, 2025 delivery, percentage achieved against the end-of-project target, achievement status, and an analytical assessment.

11	PAPI findings used at central level for policy monitoring	9 years	9	2	100%	Achieved – landmark	PAPI included in Politburo Regulation No. 365 as a core performance index for provincial leaders. A qualitative leap from prior years.
12	Case studies on good/poor performers for peer learning	27	63	15	233%	Exceeded	63 case studies more than doubled the target. In 2025, 15 publications produced without new survey data.
<i>Output Area 2: PAPI-Based Inclusive Governance Research and Local Initiatives</i>							
13	Thematic research studies on inclusive governance	27	32	11	119%	Exceeded	2025 delivered the highest single-year output of 11 studies covering digital transformation, budget transparency, women in politics, disability, and climate.
14	Policy briefs submitted to National Assembly	24	30	6	125%	Exceeded	30 briefs against a target of 24. In 2025, 6 briefs covering public sector innovation, disability, budget transparency, and climate.
15	Central and provincial initiatives on citizen engagement	10	9	2	90%	On track	Nine of 10 planned initiatives supported. Target of 10 by June 2026 remains achievable.
<i>Output Area 3: Effective Communication of PAPI-Related Outputs</i>							
16	PAPI findings widely communicated (media coverage)	700	3,500	250	500%	Exceeded	Media coverage surpassed target by a factor of five. Original target was set far below actual reach.
17	Thematic research advocacy events	21	52	16	248%	Exceeded	52 events against target of 21. High-tempo policy engagement maintained despite survey cancellation.
18	papi.org.vn website updated and maintained	10 updates	10	10	100%	Achieved	Website maintained throughout as primary public platform for PAPI data and reports.

Analysis of Achievement

Finding 27: Survey-dependent indicators (1–6) were met without exception in every prior year (2018–2024); non-achievement in 2025 reflects external disruption, not implementation failure. Survey-independent indicators (7–18) were all met or exceeded, demonstrating that PAPI’s value extends well beyond the annual survey.

The six survey-dependent indicators all recorded zero delivery in 2025 and cumulative achievement rates between 78 and 91 percent. The project demonstrated appropriate adaptive behaviour by pivoting toward the rapid assessment of citizen experience with HCMA, to be published in April 2026.

The remaining twelve indicators, covering dissemination, policy uptake, research, advocacy, and communication, were all met or exceeded. Several showed substantial overachievement: workshop participants at 226 percent of target, case studies at 233 percent, advocacy events at 248 percent, and media coverage at 500 percent. In 2025, the research and advocacy functions operated at high capacity, producing 11 thematic studies, 15 case studies, 6 policy briefs to the National Assembly, 16 advocacy events, and approximately 250 media items without new survey data. This confirms that PAPI has evolved from a survey into a broader governance ecosystem in which analytical and advocacy functions can operate independently of the annual data collection cycle.

4.3.3 Outcomes Beyond the Results Framework

The most consequential results of the PAPI project during the evaluation period are not adequately captured by the results framework. The evaluation identified three categories of outcome-level achievement that merit separate analysis.

Institutional Integration: Politburo Regulation No. 365

Finding 28: PAPI’s inclusion in Politburo Regulation No. 365 is the most significant result in the project’s sixteen-year history, transforming it from an external-funded research tool into an internal management instrument of the Communist Party of Viet Nam.

Politburo Regulation No. 365/QĐ-BCĐTW (August 2025) designates PAPI as one of the core indices for evaluating the performance of Provincial People’s Committee Chairpersons, directly linking citizen satisfaction to the career evaluation of provincial leaders. The binary indicator in the results framework (“used/not used” at the central level) does not capture the magnitude of this shift.

Several aspects are noteworthy. First, the independent inclusion of PAPI in the regulation, suggests that PAPI had achieved sufficient institutional credibility that its incorporation occurred through organic demand rather than external lobbying. Second, PAPI’s inclusion alongside PCI and the PAR Index creates a multi-dimensional performance framework in which citizen perspectives carry equal weight to business perspectives and administrative process assessments. Third, the regulation applies to the executive arm of provincial governance, while PAPI’s new institutional home, HCMA, is a Party institution, creating a necessary structural separation between assessor and assessed. PAPI has also served as a model for the VFF’s development of a new Provincial



Social Trust Index and has inspired an increasing number of sectoral governance indices including SIPAS, PEPI, and the Vietnam Digital Transformation Index.

Policy Influence Through Knowledge Production

Finding 29: PAPI's produced knowledge has been effective in providing evidence to inform policymaking, with the disability inclusion pathway providing strong indications of the project's theory of change working as intended.

The most easily traceable political influence is Conclusion Notice No. 444, issued by the General Secretary in December 2025, which incorporated provisions on disability rights including a call for research into establishing a disability quota for the National Assembly. The logical chain ran from PAPI data revealing governance barriers, to a dedicated disability survey, to a three-year training programme for potential candidates with disabilities, to sustained policy advocacy, to the General Secretary's Conclusion. Following this, a person with a disability was nominated as a candidate for the National Assembly.

In 2025, PAPI submitted nine knowledge products and policy briefs to the National Assembly, timed to inform deliberations on budget transparency, women in politics, disability inclusion, and digital transformation. The National Assembly's Library actively contacts the project team with requests before legislative sessions. HCMA submitted a report to the Politburo on enhancing the participation of women cadres in Communist Party committees, which contributed to raising the target for women in Party committees from 15 percent to 25 percent in Regulation No. 377 in October 2025.

Provincial Governance Improvement

Finding 30: PAPI has contributed to governance improvement at the provincial level, but with significant variation in depth and sustainability, and a persistent question about whether the survey instrument is sufficiently sensitive to detect the improvements it is designed to promote.

Over approximately ten years, HCMA has worked with about thirty provinces on PAPI-based advisory activities, and in every case some form of resolution or decision was issued on how to improve public governance. Of these, approximately ten engaged in sustained follow-up and three developed multi-year improvement programmes. By 2025, twenty-one provincial governments updated their action plans based on 2024 PAPI findings. However, evaluation participants offered a sobering assessment: in some cases, even when provincial officials genuinely wanted to improve and invested in training, equipment, and one-stop shops, PAPI scores did not improve significantly in subsequent survey rounds. This raises a fundamental question of how comprehensively and quickly genuine governance investments translate into measurable PAPI score improvements.

There is also evidence that PAPI's competitive ranking format has generated some negative incentives, alongside productive ones. Evaluation participants reported that some provinces engaged in initiatives that placed more emphasis on moving up the ranking, rather than improving governance substance. In a limited number of instances, attempts to coach respondents were detected through the quality assurance system, leading to the exclusion of affected survey data. Evaluation participants described a suboptimal dynamic by which the identification of measurable



goals that is attached to consequences, may create an incentive to distorting the results. The inclusion of PAPI in Politburo Regulation No. 365, while a landmark institutional achievement, may increase these incentives, unless countermeasures are put in place.

4.3.4 The Attribution Challenge

Finding 31: It is naturally challenging to attribute governance outcomes to any single project, given the many factors that influence such processes. However, distinguishing between strict attribution and reasonable outcome monitoring remains important and should be reflected in future results frameworks.

The evaluation accepts the attribution constraints as genuine. At the same time, evaluation participants from the donor side demand that tools are put in place for better systematic tracking of whether and how PAPI's knowledge products may enter the policy process. Following policy processes more closely and investing in outcome monitoring rather than just output tracking could yield plausible linkages without holding the project to the impossible standard of definitive attribution.

4.3.5 Concluding Assessment

PAPI's effectiveness over the evaluation period is characterized by a paradox: the project's most significant achievements occurred in the year it was unable to conduct its core survey. Of the eighteen results framework indicators, eleven were met or exceeded, five fell short due exclusively to the 2025 survey cancellation, one is on track, and one cumulative target is no longer achievable. The survey-independent functions operated at their highest capacity in 2025, producing 11 thematic studies, 15 case studies, 6 policy briefs to the National Assembly, 16 advocacy events, and approximately 250 media items without new survey data.

One of the most important results in the project's sixteen-year history is its inclusion in Politburo Regulation No. 365 as a core performance index for provincial leaders. The disability inclusion pathway from data to Conclusion No. 444 provides another example of PAPI's theory of change working as intended - survey evidence identified a governance gap, dedicated research deepened understanding, capacity building, sustained advocacy translated findings into policy.

The principal effectiveness limitation is not in delivery, but in measurement and feedback. The results framework operates at the output level and does not fully capture the institutional and policy outcomes that constitute PAPI's most significant contributions. The lack of variability in some scores on core governance dimensions raises a legitimate question about whether the survey instrument is sufficiently sensitive to detect the governance improvements it is designed to promote. And the absence of systematic outcome monitoring means that the project cannot demonstrate, even at the level of plausible inference, the full extent of its policy influence. These are not failures of implementation; they are gaps in the project's capacity to account for its own effectiveness.

4.4 Efficiency

This section assesses the efficiency of the PAPI project, examining whether its operational structures, resource allocation, and management practices have enabled cost-effective delivery of results.

4.4.1 Project Management and Organizational Structure

Finding 32: PAPI's specialization-based multi-partner delivery model has produced clear efficiency gains, but the expansion from a governance index into a multi-component project since 2018 has stretched a six-person core team beyond sustainable capacity.

The delivery model assigns each organization a specialized function aligned with its comparative advantage. UNDP provides strategic oversight and quality control; CECODES (until 2024) managed fieldwork logistics and enumerator recruitment; an international technical adviser maintains methodological consistency and conducts data analysis; rtAnalytics (RTA) manages tablet-based IT infrastructure; HCMA contributes policy advisory and training functions; and the National Advisory Board provides external validation. This structure ensures that no entity performs functions outside its area of expertise. Engaging senior international experts on short-term contracts ensured technical rigour without the cost of maintaining large full-time specialist staff, while thematic research was carried out through collaborations with academics and research institutes.

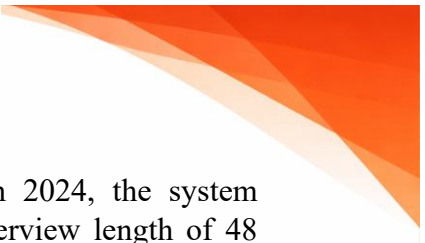
The nine-step annual implementation cycle, refined over fifteen years, organizes these contributions into a predictable sequence from preparation (May) through continued policy dialogue (the following May onward). This cycle was executed with consistent regularity from 2009 to 2024, producing an annual report and dataset in every year except 2025.

Evaluation participants consistently testified to the operational intensity of the core UNDP team, describing extended working hours during critical periods. While this reflects team quality, it also raises efficiency questions. Since 2018, the project expanded to encompass disability inclusion, LGBTQI advocacy, gender research, public sector innovation, and citizen-powered digital governance, without a proportionate increase in staffing, creating a structural tension between the breadth of the project's mandate and the depth of attention any single component can receive.

Finding 33: The fieldwork operation employs a three-tier workforce structure and technology-enabled quality assurance that has eliminated paper-based inefficiencies and enabled real-time remote monitoring of data integrity.

The first tier comprises UNDP as quality controller, the survey convener (CECODES), RTA as technology provider, and the VFF's commune-level committees as field facilitators. The second tier consists of approximately thirty experienced research collaborators serving as field controllers. The third tier comprises 300 to 400 final-year students or recent graduates trained in sociological research methods who serve as enumerators, recruited to work outside their home provinces to protect data integrity.

The rtSurvey mobile application, deployed on GIS-connected tablets, enables real-time tracking of interviews and immediate data upload. This eliminated costs associated with paper surveys,



minimized transcription errors, and allowed daily quality monitoring. In 2024, the system supported nearly 19,000 interviews over five months, with an average interview length of 48 minutes. Multiple quality mechanisms are layered into the digital platform: GIS location verification, timestamp analysis at the survey and question level, and random audio recording capability.

4.4.2 Budget Execution and Financial Management

Finding 34: Budget execution demonstrates strong absorptive capacity under normal conditions and significant operational agility in reprogramming resources when the 2025 survey could not be conducted.

As can be seen from Annex V of this report, over the full project period (2018–2025), the PAPI project executed \$11.26 million of a \$12.04 million budget, with an aggregate execution rate of 93 per cent, which is a strong result for a multi-year, donor-funded governance initiative. Output 1 (the PAPI survey and index) consistently dominated the budget, accounting for nearly half of all expenditure, and achieved the highest execution rate of any output area at 98 per cent. This reflects the centrality of the annual survey cycle to the project's identity and the relatively predictable, recurrent nature of its costs. Outputs 2 through 5, which covered research, policy advocacy, capacity development, and knowledge dissemination, showed more variable execution rates (84–92 per cent across all years), suggesting that these complementary activities were more susceptible to shifting priorities, partner availability, or absorption constraints. The totals for each year were notably stable from 2020 to 2024, between 94 and 97 per cent execution, indicating mature financial management during the project's peak operational years.

The most significant departure from this pattern occurred in 2025, where the overall execution rate dropped to 80 per cent, the lowest of any year. This is directly attributable to the cancellation of the 2025 PAPI survey and the broader operational disruptions arising from Vietnam's administrative restructuring, which constrained activity under Output 1 (budgeted at roughly half its usual level) and sharply reduced spending under Output 3 (70 per cent) and Output 5 (70 per cent). Management costs also fell to 74 per cent execution, consistent with a wind-down period in which planned activities could not proceed as designed. On the other hand, evaluation costs exceeded budget in both years they were incurred (102 per cent in 2023, 115 per cent in 2025), reflecting the additional complexity of assessing a project whose final year was marked by significant contextual upheaval. Taken together, the data confirm that PAPI maintained disciplined budget management throughout most of its lifecycle, with the 2025 shortfall representing an externally driven exception rather than a systemic efficiency concern.

Finding 35: The project has achieved notable efficiency gains through cost-sharing mechanisms, with provinces self-funding diagnostic workshops and action plans, creating a multiplier effect well beyond PAPI's direct budget.

Provinces hosting PAPI diagnostic workshops frequently bore the organizational costs themselves and issued their own budgets for implementing PAPI-related action plans. The 2025 annual progress report confirms that provincial activities were largely funded by provinces that took the initiative to cover expenses. The case of Quang Ninh Province illustrates this dynamic: after its low PAPI ranking, the province invested its own resources in human resources at the grassroots



level and organized training across all fifteen districts, with each signing formal charters of action. An Giang and Soc Trang provinces similarly self-funded their improvement efforts.

The competitive dynamic induced by the provincial ranking is itself an efficient mechanism: rather than funding separate reform projects in each province, donors invested in one index that spurred provinces to invest their own resources in addressing identified weaknesses. Additional efficiencies were achieved through co-funding of thematic studies with research institutes, leveraging other UNDP projects for technical expertise, and a two-donor structure under a single project that avoided duplicated management costs.

4.4.3 Survey Frequency: Annual Versus Biennial Cycle

Finding 36: The annual survey cycle consumes resources at a rate that exceeds available funding, and a biennial cycle alternating data collection with deeper analytical and advocacy work would produce a more sustainable and balanced use of resources.

Evaluation participants stated directly that the project does not have sufficient funding to run PAPI every year. Data collection, reporting, and support alone consume between USD 600,000 and 800,000, with the total including the launch reaching close to USD 1 million. The annual cycle leaves the team in a state of perpetual operational motion with limited capacity to conduct the deeper analytical and advocacy work that makes the data effective as evidence for policymaking.

The current annual cycle also suffers from a timing disadvantage. With the report published in May, provincial diagnostic workshops organized from that point onward, and decisions and plans issued from July, a new round of data collection already commences in August, leaving no time for reforms to take effect between two consecutive survey rounds. A biennial cycle would provide capacity to pause, conduct deeper research, and potentially achieve greater policy impact. This logic is reinforced by HCMA's interest in the research component. A biennial survey cycle, alternating with a year focused on thematic research, provincial diagnostics, and policy advocacy, would produce a more balanced allocation of resources between data production and data utilization. Evaluation participants confirmed that the balance currently leans towards the survey, with resources for the policy advisory function being limited.

The provisional 2026 budget reflects this evolving balance: Output 1 is budgeted at USD 642,000, while Output 5 remains substantial at USD 427,851. Output 3 (provincial dialogues on latest provincial PAPI findings) does not have a dedicated budget allocation for 2026 because the 2025 PAPI surveys could not be convened at the provincial level. Given that the provincial diagnostic workshops have been among the project's most effective and cost-efficient activities, ensuring their continuity in the next phase will be important for maintaining engagement at the subnational level.

4.4.4 Data Collection Efficiency and Methodology

Finding 37: The questionnaire has grown beyond what is needed to measure the core governance index, and a rigorous distinction between core and supplementary questions would reduce survey length, lower costs, and open the door to alternative data collection modalities.



PAPI's in-person survey methodology is its most resource-intensive component: 300 to 400 enumerators annually, coordination with local facilitators in every province, and a questionnaire averaging 48 minutes. Much of the survey's length comes not from the core governance dimensions but from additional questions added at the request of stakeholders and funders. This accretion of questions has significantly increased the survey's length and moved it away from the efficient measurement of its core index.

A more efficient approach, supported by multiple evaluation participants, would distinguish between core index questions (asked consistently and at scale) and supplementary questions (administered to smaller samples, rotated across years, or conducted through separate instruments). Some evaluation participants recommended reducing to five core dimensions as optimal. The 2025 restructuring break creates a natural opportunity to implement this reform.

Finding 38: Phone-based data collection would be substantially cheaper but raises significant quality concerns; the efficiency calculation is not straightforward because apparent cost savings may come at the expense of data credibility.

Phone-based collection would eliminate enumerator travel, reduce dependence on local facilitators, and make it harder for provinces to anticipate and manipulate the survey. The rapid assessment conducted in early 2026, using a twenty-minute telephone questionnaire with approximately 5,000 respondents, represents a practical test of this modality.

However, evaluation participants identified significant quality concerns. Non-response rates on phone interviews are substantially higher than on face-to-face interviews, particularly in Viet Nam where citizens are inundated with spam calls. Higher non-response produces self-selection bias, making the sample less representative. A hybrid model (phone surveys in urban areas, face-to-face in rural areas) would confound survey mode with demographic characteristics, making it analytically impossible to separate the effect of how the survey was administered from the effect of who was being surveyed. If the resulting data is too noisy or biased, the apparent cost savings would come at the expense of the product's credibility. The Viet Nam electronic identity system could eventually enable phone-based sampling, but would still exclude those without smartphones, disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities, the elderly, and women in remote areas.

4.4.5 Quality Assurance Under Institutional Transition

Finding 39: Concrete quality assurance mechanisms have been proposed that could operate regardless of institutional ownership, but their effectiveness depends on formal acceptance by HCMA and UNDP maintaining contractual authority to act on the findings.

Under the current arrangement, UNDP maintains direct oversight over data quality through its access to the GIS portal, timestamp data, and remote monitoring capabilities. Four concrete quality assurance mechanisms have been proposed for the transition: UNDP access to the GIS portal for real-time tablet location verification; embedded timestamps at the survey and question level that UNDP and/or HCMA could oversee; authority to eliminate surveys that fail timestamp checks; and randomly activated audio recording as a quality spot-check. All can be implemented remotely and would provide a robust second layer of quality control without requiring direct operational command.



Evaluation participants confirmed their openness to this model. However, the efficiency of the arrangement depends on whether these will be effectively embedded in the governance arrangements for future iterations of the PAPI data collection. The predictability of survey locations was identified as the biggest quality vulnerability. The administrative restructuring creates an opportunity to redesign the sampling approach. Under the new administrative geography, the central commune where the provincial administration is located will likely always be selected, with the remaining communes rotating from year to year. The new sampling framework should incorporate anti-gaming safeguards from the outset, including measures to prevent local authorities from identifying and pre-briefing selected respondents.

4.4.6 Risk Management

Finding 40: PAPI's risk management has shown notable operational resilience under highly adverse conditions but has historically relied on responsive rather than anticipatory mechanisms. The design-stage risk register correctly identified the principal categories of risk and implementation monitoring captured emerging risks as they materialised, but the contingency planning attached to identified high-impact risks lacked the operational specificity needed to trigger pre-planned mitigation actions when the 2025 survey was cancelled. Looking forward, the Personal Data Protection Law passed by the National Assembly in 2025 introduces a structurally new category of risk that the existing risk management framework does not yet address, with material implications for consent procedures, cross-border data sharing, and the quality assurance arrangements that currently depend on UNDP's direct access to raw data.

Risk management at design. The project document includes a risk register that identified the principal categories of risk PAPI would face during the implementation period: political risks (the political space for citizen feedback on governance, the sensitivities around publishing provincial rankings, the regulatory environment for non-state implementation of citizen surveys); operational risks (the geographic complexity of nationwide data collection, the management of a large enumerator network, the security of data transmission and storage); institutional risks (the dependence on partner relationships with HCMA, VFF, and provincial governments); and financial risks (the dependence on donor funding cycles and exchange rate exposure). The risk register correctly identified that the most material risks for PAPI were structural rather than incidental, arising from the operating environment and the institutional partnerships rather than from internal project management failures.

The design-stage risk framework, however, attached generic mitigation strategies to most identified risks rather than operationally specific contingency plans. Mitigation entries such as "maintain close dialogue with partners," "monitor the regulatory environment," or "engage donors proactively" describe the appropriate posture but do not specify the actions to be triggered, the decision authority, the timeline, or the resources to be mobilized when a specific risk materializes. This is a common feature of UNDP project risk registers and is not unique to PAPI, but it limits the value of the risk register as an operational tool during periods of acute disruption.

Risk management during implementation. During the implementation period, the project monitored risks through the standard UNDP cycle of annual project board meetings, annual



progress reports with dedicated risk updates, and frequent operational consultations between the project team, UNDP Viet Nam senior management, and partner institutions. The project demonstrated operational resilience in responding to four major risk crystallizations during the evaluation period. The COVID-19 pandemic disruption to in-person enumeration was managed through hybrid data collection methods and methodological adjustments that preserved longitudinal comparability. The 2020 sampling correction to include internal migrants previously excluded from local residency lists, prompted by the recognition of a systematic methodological risk, was implemented while maintaining data quality. The progressive narrowing of the VFF partnership, culminating in VFF's exit from the partnership configuration, was managed through the transition to HCMA as the principal national institutional host. The administrative restructuring of 2025 from 63 to 34 provinces was responded to through the 2025 rapid assessment of 5,000 respondents and the substantive analysis of citizen experience during the restructuring period.

In each of these cases, the project's adaptive capacity, the depth of its partner relationships, and the quality of its operational team enabled effective response. The 2025 survey cancellation, however, represented a different kind of test. The cancellation was not the result of an unforeseen risk: the convergence of administrative restructuring, regulatory transition, and partnership reconfiguration was visible to all stakeholders by mid-2025. The cancellation was nonetheless not pre-planned, and the project's response, while ultimately successful in delivering the rapid assessment and maintaining methodological credibility, was developed in real time rather than triggered from a pre-existing contingency plan. The risk register had identified each of the contributing risks separately but had not anticipated their convergence, and the mitigation strategies attached to them did not specify the cascading response sequence that the convergence required.

The Personal Data Protection Law as a forward-looking systemic risk. The Personal Data Protection Law (PDPL) passed by the National Assembly in 2025 introduces a structurally new category of risk that did not exist at the time of project design and is not addressed in the existing risk register. The law's principal provisions with material implications for PAPI are as follows. UNDP can own, process, and use personal data of Vietnamese citizens provided that respondents grant explicit, voluntary, and informed consent regarding the purpose and scope of processing. Citizens retain the right to request withdrawal, deletion, or destruction of their data at any time. Cross-border data transfer is not prohibited but is subject to stringent conditions that make it operationally difficult. The sale of personal data is prohibited.

These provisions require the project to multiply efforts to ensure careful compliance with consent procedures and may constrain cross-border data sharing arrangements that have historically supported PAPI's quality assurance and methodological credibility. The most material operational consequence is that the quality assurance mechanisms that currently depend on UNDP's direct access to raw data would need to be restructured. Options for restructuring include moving quality assurance functions to a domestic legal entity with direct access rights under the PDPL; developing privileged access protocols for international technical advisers under specific consent regimes; or developing anonymized analytical datasets that can be shared internationally for quality assurance without triggering cross-border transfer restrictions. Each option carries operational and credibility implications that require deliberate analysis and stakeholder consultation. None of these options is

currently included in the project's risk mitigation framework, and the design of an appropriate response is one of the immediate operational tasks for the next phase.

4.4.7 M&E System and Value for Money

Finding 41: PAPI's M&E system has demonstrated different levels of effectiveness at the design and implementation stages. At design, the M&E framework was well-structured at the activity and output levels but did not contain a robust outcome-level monitoring architecture matched to the project's policy influence ambitions. At implementation, the project has rigorously tracked the production of outputs and documented selected outcome signals, but has not systematically converted the available information on policy uptake and institutional change into structured outcome monitoring data. The combined effect is that PAPI consistently understates the policy impact it has demonstrably achieved in practice.

M&E at design. The project's M&E framework, as set out in the project document and detailed in its results framework (analyzed in Annex IV of this report against SMART criteria), was developed around four outputs and 18 indicators. At the design stage, the framework reflects sound monitoring principles for activity- and output-level tracking: indicators are clearly assigned to outputs, baselines and targets are specified for most indicators, means of verification are identified, and the data sources are connected to instruments the project would routinely generate (survey reports, training records, partner outputs).

The design-stage architecture, however, exhibits four structural weaknesses at the outcome and impact levels. First, several indicators conflate outputs with outcomes, treating production metrics (such as the number of policy briefs disseminated) as proxies for influence metrics (the extent to which policy briefs are reflected in subsequent policy instruments). Second, the SMART analysis in Annex IV identifies indicators that lack specificity (such as "improved engagement of citizens"), measurability (such as "demonstrated influence on policy"), or time-bound character. Third, the framework did not include indicators capturing the documented uptake mechanisms PAPI has actually used over the implementation period.⁵ Fourth, the framework did not include indicators for the cross-cutting agenda (gender, disability, ethnic minorities, internal migrants, LGBTIQI+ communities) that has subsequently become a distinctive feature of the project's contribution and that is now tracked across three traceable policy chains documented in Section 4.7.

These design-stage gaps are partly explained by the analytical challenge of designing outcome indicators for an evidence-to-policy intervention, in which the link between outputs and institutional change is mediated by multiple actors and operates with significant time lags. They are also explained by the structural conventions of UNDP results-based management at the time of project design, which emphasized output-level accountability over outcome-level traceability. The reconstruction of the ToC in Annex VI of this report identifies the three causal pathways and four uptake mechanisms that should inform the indicator architecture of the next phase.

M&E at implementation. At implementation, the project has executed the design-stage M&E framework with rigour at the output level. Annual progress reports document indicator

⁵ E.g., integration into the Party's cadre evaluation framework; citation in legislation; citation in National Assembly reports; provincial action plans referencing PAPI findings; or co-publication with national institutional partners such as HCMA, MONRE, and the National Assembly's Committee on Social Affairs.



achievement against targets, with quantitative reporting on survey production, training delivery, policy brief publication, and partner engagement. Quarterly bulletins maintain reporting continuity for funders. The papi.org.vn website maintains a publicly accessible record of provincial responses and feedback. Donor-specific reporting templates are completed against agreed milestones. Internal monitoring tools document official government documents that refer to PAPI and list the project's policy research products. The project has also responded adaptively to design-stage gaps: the 2025 rapid assessment was developed as a methodological response to the cancellation of the full survey; sex-disaggregated reporting has been introduced into annual analytical products; and dedicated thematic research has been used to capture cross-cutting agenda outcomes that the original results framework did not anticipate.

Two implementation-stage gaps persist nonetheless. First, the rich body of information the project actually possesses on outcome-level uptake⁶ has been documented narratively in annual reports and policy briefs but has not been systematized into structured outcome monitoring data. Internal monitoring tools list these citations but do not convert them into longitudinal indicators that would allow the project to demonstrate trend lines in policy uptake over the implementation period. Second, the systematic tracking of downstream implementation, such as whether policy briefs are reflected in subsequent legislation, whether provincial action plans referencing PAPI are implemented, or whether the institutional integration under Politburo Regulation No. 365 translates into measurable change in cadre behaviour, has not been operationalized. Evaluation participants suggested that with greater investment in monitoring, plausible though not definitive linkages could be established, such as tracking whether policy briefs appear in subsequent legislation, whether provincial action plans are implemented, and whether PAPI data is cited in official government documents.

Implications for next-phase M&E design. The combined effect of the design-stage gaps and the implementation-stage gaps is that PAPI consistently understates the policy impact it has demonstrably achieved in practice. The multiple traceable policy outcomes documented in Section 4.5 of this report, the embedded use of PAPI data in the Party's cadre evaluation framework, and the replication of provincial models at national scale are not captured in the project's own outcome-level results reporting. The investment required to close this gap is modest relative to the analytical and reputational return. The documentary evidence base for such tracking already exists in the project's records, and the methodology can be drawn from the outcome harvesting practice set out in Section 3.3 of this report.

Finding 42: PAPI demonstrates strong value for money across key dimensions (economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity), with a competitive ranking mechanism that functions as an additional multiplier by spurring provinces to invest their own resources. At approximately USD 2 million per year, the project has created and sustained a nationwide governance monitoring system that generates outputs and outcomes whose value substantially exceeds direct expenditure.

⁶ These include citations of PAPI data in National Assembly reports, Politburo Regulation No. 365, Conclusion Notice No. 444 on disability rights, Office of the Government Letter 278/VPCP-KSTT on ethnic minority e-service access, ministerial directives, the directive raising women's Party Committee leadership targets from 15 to 25 per cent, and MONRE's Provincial Environmental Protection Index.



Over the evaluation period, PAPI has operated at approximately USD 2 million per year, with total expenditure of USD 12.87 million. At this cost level, PAPI has operated at a modest input cost relative to the scope and continuity of the output portfolio it sustains, including a nationwide annual survey of approximately 15,000 citizens, peer-reviewed analytical reports, thematic research, policy briefs, capacity-building programmes, and provincial diagnostic engagement. The project has achieved economy through several deliberate input choices: extensive use of national consultants and partner institution staff rather than international expertise where comparable quality is available; deployment of a student enumerator network through institutional partnerships; UNDP procurement systems that pool fixed costs across multiple projects; in-kind contributions from partner institutions (office space, partner staff time, government counterpart engagement); and the progressive integration of digital tools to reduce printing, transmission, and analytical costs. The 47 per cent of the budget allocated to Output 1 (survey production) reflects the labour-intensive nature of nationwide data collection rather than operational inefficiency.

Within its budget envelope, PAPI has consistently delivered a substantial output portfolio every year since 2009 - a nationwide survey of approximately 15,000 randomly selected citizens (reaching nearly 220,000 cumulatively over the project's lifetime); a peer-reviewed annual analytical report; thematic policy briefs; quarterly bulletins; the papi.org.vn analytical platform; provincial diagnostic workshops; and capacity-building programmes for civil society organizations, persons with disabilities, journalists, and partner researchers. Operational efficiency has been sustained through the continuity of the implementing team, the depth of partner relationships built over 16 years, and the methodological infrastructure refined over consistent annual practice.

PAPI's value-for-money assessment is strengthened by its deliberate equity orientation, mapped to the Leave No One Behind framework in Section 4.7.3. The survey's random sampling gives equal analytical weight to every citizen regardless of socio-economic status. The sampling correction of 2020 to include internal migrants closed a systematic exclusion that had previously biased the dataset toward older, non-migrant populations. The dedicated thematic research and capacity-building work on persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, women, internal migrants, and LGBTQI+ communities ensures that the project's benefits reach constituencies commonly excluded from mainstream governance research. The citizen-powered innovation initiatives have extended digital service access to remote ethnic minority communes in Hà Giang (now Tuyên Quang) and Quảng Trị, with replication to additional provinces. These equity outcomes carry a value that is not reflected in per-respondent cost calculations but is central to the project's overall value proposition.

Beyond the direct value generated by PAPI's outputs and outcomes, the project has produced a substantial multiplier effect through the competitive dynamic of provincial rankings. The fact that provinces now self-fund related activities (provincial diagnostic workshops, internal PAPI-derived analytical exercises, and follow-up actions on poorly-performing dimensions) indicates that the model has been cost-effective and value-adding enough for local governments to adopt and sustain without continued external funding for every follow-up activity. Donors invested in one nationwide index that has, in effect, spurred 63 provinces (now 34, following the 2025 administrative restructuring) to invest their own resources in governance improvement, creating a



multiplier that extends PAPI's impact significantly beyond its direct expenditure. The integration of PAPI data into the Party's cadre evaluation framework under Politburo Regulation No. 365 institutionalizes this multiplier effect by linking provincial performance on PAPI metrics to cadre advancement decisions, while at the same time introducing the gaming risk discussed in Section 4.5.2 of this report.

4.4.8 Concluding Assessment

PAPI has demonstrated good operational efficiency over sixteen years, sustained by a well-designed multi-partner delivery model, a disciplined annual implementation cycle, technology-enabled quality assurance mechanisms, and cost-sharing arrangements that leveraged provincial self-funding to extend the project's reach beyond its direct budget. Budget execution rates have consistently been high and the project demonstrated operational agility in reprogramming resources when the 2025 survey could not be conducted. At the same time, the evaluation identified five areas where efficiency could be improved. First, the annual survey cycle consumes resources at a rate that exceeds available funding, and a biennial cycle would produce a more sustainable and balanced use of resources. Second, the questionnaire has grown beyond what is needed for the core governance index, and distinguishing between core and supplementary questions would reduce costs and enable alternative data collection modalities. Third, outcome-level monitoring remains underdeveloped, limiting the project's ability to demonstrate impact. Fourth, the shift from grant-based to service-contract modalities and the ongoing transition to national ownership have introduced temporary transaction costs that, while necessary, have reduced operational efficiency in the short term.

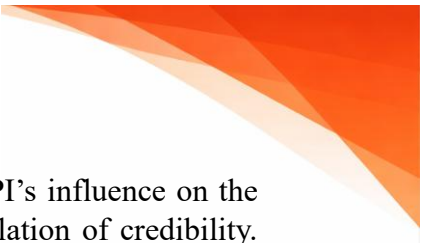
4.5 Impact

This section assesses the broader and longer-term effects of the PAPI project on Viet Nam's governance landscape, examining evidence of impact at the national policy level, provincial governance behaviour, citizen empowerment and inclusion, and the wider governance ecosystem. The analysis draws on sixteen years of project documentation, interview evidence from evaluation participants across all stakeholder groups, and the triangulation of multiple independent lines of evidence.

4.5.1 Impact on National Policy and Institutional Frameworks

Finding 43: PAPI's inclusion in Politburo Regulation No. 365 represents the formal institutionalization of citizen feedback within the Communist Party's cadre management system, achieved not through direct advocacy but through the gradual accumulation of credibility and institutional familiarity over sixteen years.

Politburo Regulation No. 365/QD-BCHTW (August 2025) designates PAPI, alongside a small number of other indices, as a key performance indicator for assessing provincial People's Committee chairpersons. This means that the highest organ of the Communist Party has formally recognized citizen satisfaction and governance quality, as measured by an independently produced survey, as a criterion for evaluating the performance of provincial leaders. The effect is to create structural incentives for provincial officials to take PAPI results seriously and respond to identified weaknesses.



The independent inclusion of PAPI in Regulation No.365 suggests that PAPI's influence on the highest levels of Vietnamese governance operated through gradual accumulation of credibility. HCMA had submitted at least two reports to the Politburo drawing on PAPI data, and the regular citation of PAPI findings by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Ministers in their dialogues with provincial governments collectively created a policy environment in which PAPI's integration was a natural, if unplanned, development.

Evaluation participants noted that the General Secretary himself has stated that people's satisfaction is a metric for governance quality and a measure of leadership effectiveness⁷.

This framing is precisely the principle that PAPI has operationalized over sixteen years, and its incorporation into Regulation 365 represents the formal institutionalization of that principle.

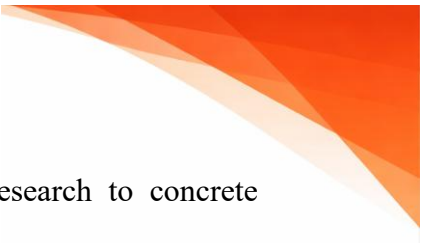
Finding 44: PAPI's impact on disability inclusion policy represents the clearest documented case of the project contributing to a specific policy outcome, with a traceable chain from survey data to Conclusion Notice No. 444 and the nomination of a candidate with a disability for the National Assembly.

Following the mid-term review, the project developed a three-year capacity building programme for persons with disabilities interested in civic and political participation, covering the legal framework, governance processes, and practical skills for engagement in public life. Over three years, ninety-two trainees participated in the programme, and by the end of 2024, fifty-eight had graduated from the advanced course and received certification. In parallel, the team conducted annual nationwide disability assessments, reaching 2,310 informants with disabilities in the 2024 cycle, representing a progressive mainstreaming of disability inclusion within the PAPI survey rather than solely a standalone thematic research exercise. The team also trained journalists, who published articles, radio programmes, and television documentaries on the rights and civic participation of persons with disabilities.

In December 2025, the General Secretary issued Conclusion 444, which seeks to advance further the rights of persons with disabilities and assigns tasks to ensure their full participation, including digital transformation of services and a call for research into establishing a disability quota for the National Assembly. Project stakeholders reported that all advocacy positions informed by PAPI-generated evidence were reflected in this Conclusion. Following its issuance, one person with a disability was introduced as a potential candidate for the National Assembly, and the Viet Nam Federation on Disability expressed interest in continued collaboration with PAPI on capacity building for disability inclusion in governance.

The impact on gender equality policy has been less clearly attributable, but still tangible. The Party issued Directive 45 and related regulations raising the target for women's representation in leadership to 25 percent, up from 15 percent. HCMA's research on women's political participation, conducted with UNDP technical support, contributed specific recommendations that have materialized in some provinces, including lowered age requirements for women's advanced training and promotion planning requirements. These are incremental policy changes rather than

⁷ <https://news.laodong.vn/thoi-su/tong-bi-thu-to-lam-lay-su-hai-long-cua-nhan-dan-lam-thuoc-do-hieu-qua-lanh-dao-1653786.lido>



systemic shifts, but they demonstrate a pathway from PAPI-supported research to concrete provincial-level action.

Finding 45: PAPI data on informal payments has been adopted as the metric for monitoring SDG 16.5 in Viet Nam, and has been adopted by line ministries as a trusted source of governance data, signalling that PAPI has become part of the official data ecosystem.

The sixteen-year trend analysis shows that citizen perception of overall control of corruption has strengthened, with reforms proving most effective at reducing informal payments in everyday service delivery at the local level. Evaluation participants described PAPI's corruption data as filling a significant gap, providing time-series analysis that no international index can match.

PAPI data has been used in monitoring major legislation, including providing baseline evidence for the 2013 Land Law's enforcement and informing discussions on the 2022 Grassroots Democracy Law. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment officially requested PAPI data for its Provincial Environmental Protection Index. The Ministry of Planning and Investment (now Ministry of Finance) uses PAPI data in national SDG reports. These institutional adoptions signal that PAPI has become part of the official data ecosystem, used by line ministries and central planning agencies as a source of information they trust more than their own internal data in some domains.

Finding 46: PAPI submitted nine policy briefs to the National Assembly in 2025, its highest output, but the PAPI report's impact is mediated more by the competitive ranking format than by its analytical content, pointing to a gap between PAPI's potential for policy influence and the actual mechanism through which impact operates.

The 2025 briefs, covering public sector innovation, disability inclusion, budget transparency, and comparative international examples, were closely aligned with the National Assembly's legislative agenda and demonstrate the analytical depth of PAPI's policy products. At the same time, evaluation evidence suggests that the pathway through which the annual PAPI report enters provincial policy conversations is mediated more by the comparative ranking format than by the analytical chapters it contains. Participants from multiple stakeholder groups observed that provincial engagement with PAPI tends to concentrate on relative standing first, and on the underlying analysis only where provincial leaders actively seek to act on the findings. This pattern points to the gap identified in the finding: the analytical potential of PAPI's outputs exceeds the channels through which that analysis currently translates into provincial action.

4.5.2 Impact on Provincial Governance Behaviour

Finding 47: By 2025, PAPI had become embedded in provincial governance practice as a standard reference for self-assessment and planning, with a growing number of provinces translating PAPI findings into formal action plans and directives, including under the post-merger administrative architecture.

The mechanism through which PAPI findings translate into provincial action, including the advisory role of HCMA with approximately thirty provinces over a decade and the Quang Ninh case as the clearest illustration, is examined in Findings 30 and 49. The data presented here updates that narrative with the most recent figures. By 2025, the annual progress report confirms that



twenty-one provincial governments updated their local action plans and directives based on 2024 PAPI findings, issuing twenty-five official documents aimed at improving governance, with seven issued after the provincial mergers. At least eight provinces convened diagnostic workshops, three of which involved UNDP experts.

Finding 48: Some provinces focused on improving their ranking rather than improving governance substance, creating a persistent tension between score optimization and genuine reform.

Evaluation participants described how some provincial authorities engaged in initiatives that placed more emphasis on moving up in rankings rather than addressing the underlying quality of public services. When it was made clear that the objective was to improve public organizations and the ability of public servants, not to improve scores, evaluation participants observed that engagement from some provinces declined. In a limited number of instances, attempts to coach respondents were detected through the quality assurance system, leading to the exclusion of affected survey data. Evaluation participants noted that as the stakes associated with PAPI performance increased, so did the incentive for some provinces to focus on score optimization rather than substantive governance improvement. This suggests that PAPI's relevance to provincial governments is partly distorted by the competitive ranking format, which can incentivize score optimization over genuine reform.

Finding 49: PAPI has created a dynamic of competitive accountability in which all provinces developed governance improvement plans, though sustained reform occurred in only a subset of provinces with committed leadership, while others focused on score optimization rather than genuine governance improvement.

By 2024, all sixty-three provinces had developed some form of PAPI response plan, directive, or resolution. The Quang Ninh case illustrates the mechanism at its most effective: ranked second on PCI but sixty-second on PAPI in 2016, provincial leaders invited HCMA experts to conduct diagnostic workshops. Together, they developed an action plan covering all fifteen districts. The province invested in grassroots-level human resources, organized training, and required each district to sign formal charters of action. After two years, and continuing to the present, Quang Ninh has been consistently strong on both PCI and PAPI. An Giang and Soc Trang provinces followed similar patterns.

However, of the approximately thirty provinces that received PAPI-related advisory support over a decade, about ten engaged in sustained follow-up and approximately three developed multi-year improvement plans. As noted in the preceding finding, PAPI's competitive format generates high initial engagement but converts to sustained governance reform in only a fraction of cases, with some provinces prioritizing score optimization over substantive improvement.

Finding 50: The PAPI model has been replicated by provincial governments at the sub-provincial level and through citizen-powered digital governance initiatives, though the sustainability of local innovations depends on embedding them within government funding frameworks.



Hung Yen Province created its own local PAPI indicators to measure departmental and commune performance. Can Tho City launched a 2025–2030 plan embedding PAPI indicators in its administrative reform agenda. Ho Chi Minh City announced solutions to strengthen data integration to improve its PAPI scores. Several provinces developed common action plans addressing PAPI, PAR Index, and SIPAS simultaneously, treating these instruments as components of a single governance improvement agenda.

The citizen-powered digital governance initiatives piloted in Hà Giang (now Tuyên Quang) and Quảng Trị provinces demonstrated concrete service improvements in remote ethnic minority communities, and the digital literacy model has been replicated in five to seven other provinces. The simplification of administrative procedures that began as a pilot has been replicated at the national level. However, evaluation participants observed that the prospect of local governments allocating their own budgets to continue these activities is essentially zero, suggesting that sustainability depends on linkage to national funding streams such as the requirement under Resolution 57 for provincial digital transformation spending.

4.5.3 Impact on Citizen Empowerment and Inclusion

Finding 51: PAPI has empowered citizens and civil society by making governance experiences visible at the national level and creating an unprecedented evidence base for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and women in governance.

By surveying nearly 220,000 citizens over sixteen years, including in remote and ethnic minority areas, PAPI has given collective voice to populations whose governance experiences would otherwise remain invisible to national policymakers. Evaluation participants from the World Bank noted that at the provincial level, “everyone knows PAPI,” and that the data is used not just as a data source but as a tool for engagement. Civil society organizations focused on budget transparency, disability rights, and inclusive governance have used PAPI data for advocacy.

The disability survey covering over 28,000 persons with disabilities created an evidence base that did not previously exist. The training of ninety-two potential candidates with disabilities over three years, of whom fifty-eight graduated from the advanced course by the end of 2024, for elected office produced practical capacity building that continued to generate effects after the training concluded. PAPI’s data revealed that female respondents show higher rates of “don’t know” responses on governance questions, a finding that stimulated research into the underlying causes of women’s lower political engagement and led to specific policy recommendations. A randomized experiment embedded within the survey showed that when interviewers knew they were being observed, they provided more guidance and the gender gap disappeared entirely, suggesting the problem is partly about how the survey is administered, not just respondent behaviour.

4.5.4 Impact on the Governance Ecosystem

Finding 52: PAPI’s most significant systemic impact may be its contribution to a shift in institutional culture - the normalization of evidence-based, citizen-centric governance assessment.

Together with PCI, PAPI pioneered sociological and governance surveying in Viet Nam and can be credited with having paved the way for a proliferation of other governance assessment tools.



The PAR Index, SIPAS, PACA, the Open Budget Index, the E-Government Index, the Digital Transformation Index, the Patient Satisfaction Index, and the Social Trust Index all emerged after PAPI and PCI demonstrated that evidence-based, comparative governance assessment was feasible and politically viable. This diffusion represents a systemic impact extending well beyond any individual policy change.

HCMA's integration of PAPI content into its training curriculum amplifies this effect. Four core textbooks for cadre training now include PAPI's citizen-centric approach and data. With over sixty thousand students, the Academy's incorporation of PAPI into its curriculum means that tens of thousands of current and future civil servants are being exposed to the principle that governance quality should be assessed from the citizen's perspective. This creates a generational shift in how public officials approach accountability, a form of impact that compounds over time as graduates assume positions of authority throughout the public administration system.

PAPI's experience has been shared through South-South cooperation events, drawing interest from Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Laos. The World Bank's continued use of PAPI data in major analytical works and the growing number of international academic publications confirm the project's impact beyond Viet Nam's borders.

4.5.5 Unintended Effects

Finding 53: PAPI has produced positive unintended effects, but significant negative unintended effects may have been generated by the effective use of PAPI score for performance measurements. The inclusion of PAPI in Regulation 365, and the project's growing significance will require more proactive efforts by the project to mitigate such unintended effects.

Positive unintended effects include the proliferation of governance surveys, the adoption of the competitive ranking model by provinces for sub-provincial units, and international interest in PAPI as a model for subnational governance monitoring. None of these were explicit project objectives.

The primary negative unintended effect has been the creation of negative incentives to influence data integrity. Evaluation participants noted cases where provinces were excluded from results for attempting to manipulate data, and identified the panel design, where some partners know which villages the survey returns to each year, as a potential weak point that enables such attempts to infringe on data integrity.

A second observation is that PAPI's growing institutional significance has coincided with an evolving regulatory environment that shaped the conditions for the 2025 survey cancellation and the transition to national ownership. Managing the balance between institutional recognition and operational independence will be an important consideration as PAPI enters its next phase under HCMA.

4.5.6 Concluding Assessment

PAPI's impact has been substantial and multi-layered. At the national level, it has contributed to the institutionalization of citizen feedback in the Party's cadre evaluation system through Regulation 365, influenced disability inclusion policy through Conclusion 444, provided the



primary metric for SDG 16.5 monitoring, and been adopted by line ministries as a trusted source of governance data. At the provincial level, it has created a dynamic of competitive accountability that drove all sixty-three provinces to develop governance improvement plans, catalyzed sustained reform in a subset of provinces, and been replicated by local governments as a model for sub-provincial performance assessment. At the societal level, it has empowered citizens and civil society organizations with evidence and built an unprecedented evidence base for disability and gender inclusion in governance.

The project's most significant systemic impact may be its contribution to paving the way for evidence-based, citizen-centric governance assessment. This shift is visible in the proliferation of governance surveys, the integration of PAPI into HCMA's training curriculum reaching over sixty thousand students, the adoption of PAPI data by state institutions for their own purposes, and the expectation among provincial officials and citizens that governance performance will be publicly measured and compared.

The challenge going forward will be to maintain the conditions that make this impact possible. The competitive ranking format, the independence of the data, the public availability of the results, and the analytical depth of the findings are the mechanisms through which PAPI generates its effects. If any of these is compromised, the project's impact will diminish regardless of whether the survey itself continues. The evidence suggests that PAPI's impact has been impactful in supporting the evolution of Viet Nam's governance landscape in ways that will partly persist through their own momentum. Moving forward, continued impact on the frontier issues of transparency, participation, accountability, and inclusion will require maintaining the independence and breadth of analysis that have characterized PAPI to date.

4.6 Sustainability

This section assesses the likelihood that the results and benefits of the PAPI project will be sustained after the current phase concludes, examining the institutional, political, financial, technical, and operational factors that will determine whether PAPI's value will continue being recognised as a credible and influential governance monitoring instrument.

4.6.1 Institutional Sustainability and National Ownership

Finding 54: The strategic choice of HCMA as PAPI's institutional home is strong. As a Party institution, separate from the provincial executive whose performance is being assessed, HCMA avoids the fundamental conflict of interest that would arise if a provincial executive body were assessing its own performance. It is worth noting that the VFF was also outside the executive branch and its arrangement did not pose an inherent conflict of interest in this respect. The evaluation notes that future PAPI surveys will likely need to involve VFF structures at the local level for community access.

The transition to HCMA as national institutional owner responds to the ODA management legal requirement that future PAPI surveys be implemented with the involvement of a state agency.

Evaluation participants described HCMA as an appropriate institutional home for PAPI, with advantages compared to the VFF. HCMA already uses PAPI data extensively, trains cadres on how to use it, and has researchers who know how to work with it. HCMA, as an academic institution,



recognizes the importance of maintaining high standards of data quality and integrity. Evaluation participants from international organizations confirmed that HCMA's institutional association provides a kind of legitimacy that reinforces the project's legitimacy, and that a national-level institution is less likely to be impacted about provincial-level assessments and may even welcome the opportunity to support provinces to perform better.

Evaluation participants confirmed strong commitment to the partnership's continuation, reporting that everyone at HCMA wants to work with UNDP to restart PAPI, and expressing strong confidence that the programme can move forward in 2026. The envisioned division of labour is clear: UNDP provide technical advisory and support, as well as quality assurance for the PAPI survey and local innovation initiatives, while HCMA would lead the management of the survey, in-depth studies, research on women's participation, work on ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities, and inclusive governance activities.

Finding 55: Politburo Regulation No. 365 creates a built-in structural demand for citizen-centred governance performance data at the highest level of the Vietnamese political system, and PAPI's adoption by multiple line ministries means it has become part of the official data ecosystem.

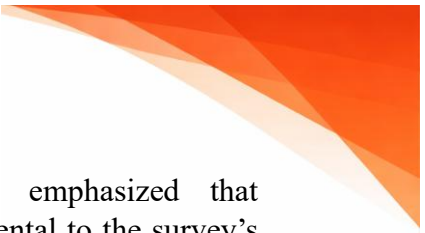
By designating PAPI as a key performance indicator for provincial leadership evaluation, Regulation 365 creates a structural incentive for the government to continue conducting citizen-centred governance performance surveys and publishing results. Without them, the government would lack a tool it has formally committed to using for cadre assessment. HCMA has submitted at least two reports to the Politburo drawing on PAPI data, enabling data to flow directly into the Party's decision-making apparatus.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment officially requested PAPI data for its Provincial Environmental Protection Index. The Ministry of Planning and Investment uses PAPI data in national SDG reports. PAPI's adoption for SDG 16.5 monitoring and its use by line ministries means it has become part of the official data ecosystem. This multi-institutional demand base creates a form of structural sustainability that does not depend on any single donor or institutional champion.

At the subnational level, provinces have self-funded diagnostic workshops since 2015, issued their own budgets for PAPI-related action plans, and in some cases assigned focal points to track PAPI indicators annually. Even after the 2025 administrative restructuring, at least eight provinces convened diagnostic workshops and seven of twenty-one provincial action plans came from post-merger provinces. This resilience through a period of profound institutional disruption is a strong indicator of sustained local demand.

4.6.2 Independence: The Central Sustainability Trade-Off

Finding 56: Independence is PAPI's most strategic asset and a central consideration in the transition to a new institutional partnership. Concrete technical safeguards have been proposed to help maintain data integrity under any partnership model, though their effectiveness depends on how these are formalized in the new partnership agreement.



Evaluation participants from international organizations consistently emphasized that independence is the most strategic asset the survey has, noting it is fundamental to the survey's credibility and added value. Three clear areas were highlighted as requiring special attention: avoiding any influence over sampling, ensuring data collectors can operate without interference, and preventing undue pressure on team members. A practical safeguard was proposed - if data integrity cannot be assured, results should not be published.

PCI offers a relevant comparison. VCCI has maintained full autonomy in conducting PCI, with USAID serving as the funding party rather than the implementing manager. When a Vietnamese company recently replaced USAID as the financial partner, all quality safeguards were maintained, including data embargoes, firewalls, and the retention of the international data analyst. What proved decisive was institutional commitment to methodological rigour. VCCI valued the integrity of the exercise and therefore preserved the mechanisms that protected it. Whether HCMA will adopt a similar approach will be an important factor moving forward.

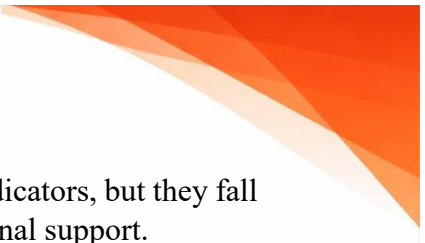
Four concrete technical safeguards have been proposed for the current survey implementation model: real-time GIS verification of enumerator locations; embedded timestamps at the survey and question level; authority to exclude surveys that fail timestamp checks; and randomly activated audio recording. All can be operated remotely and would provide a second layer of quality assurance without requiring direct operational control by UNDP. Evaluation participants expressed openness to this model. However, the division of responsibility on sensitive aspects, such as defining survey topics, decisions on publication of data, and data access control, will need to be clearly articulated in the new partnership agreement. The data protection and privacy law also requires explicit, voluntary, and informed consent from respondents, and compliance with stringent conditions on cross-border data transfer, introducing operational complexity to the forthcoming arrangements.

4.6.3 Financial Sustainability

Finding 57: PAPI remains reliant on international funding for the current project phase. Donors are strongly committed to continuation and have offered support to advocate for and ensure for PAPI's methodological integrity and independence. Provincial self-funding of workshops and action plans represents a form of decentralized domestic investment, but does not approach the scale needed to sustain the core survey function.

During 2018–2025, the project was co-funded by DFAT, the Government of Ireland, and UNDP. The Government of Ireland has committed funding through 2027. DFAT's current financial commitment extends to mid-2027. Provincial self-funding of workshops and action plans represents a form of decentralized domestic investment, demonstrating that provinces value PAPI sufficiently to allocate their own resources to act on its findings.

Evaluation participants among development partners expressed strong commitment to continuation and, significantly, offered support beyond funding, indicating willingness to provide strategic direction and advocacy to maintain PAPI's independence and methodological integrity. This willingness by donors to leverage their role within the project governance structure is a significant sustainability asset. HCMA's dedication of staff time and institutional capacity



constitutes a form of in-kind contribution to the project. These are positive indicators, but they fall well short of sustaining a full PAPI survey cycle without continued international support.

The financial sustainability calculation is directly affected by decisions on survey frequency and methodology. A biennial cycle covering thirty-four provinces, potentially incorporating phone-based data collection for some segments and alternating with a year of thematic research, would substantially reduce the annual cost for the PAPI surveys. An important consideration will be ensuring continuity of funding between the end of current donor commitments and the launch of a successor project.

4.6.4 Human and Technical Capacity

Finding 58: PAPI has built a substantial base of nationally owned technical capacity, including HCMA researchers, integration into training curricula reaching over sixty thousand students, and a planned enumerator recruitment model using HCMA's institutional network, though the potential departure of key international expertise represents a significant continuity risk.

The UNDP team working on PAPI is comprised of Vietnamese national staff with substantive experience in the implementation of the survey. HCMA researchers have been co-authoring policy papers using PAPI data since 2012. A network of seven original team members has remained involved since the pilot study in 2010, several of whom now continue to work within the Academy. PAPI data has been integrated into HCMA's training curricula for mid-level and senior cadres, and four core textbooks now incorporate PAPI's citizen-centric approach. HCMA plans to recruit enumerators from its member institutions (the Academy of Journalism and Communication and the National Academy of Public Administration), deploying them cross-provincially to replicate the quality control measures of the previous partnership configuration.

However, several capacity risks merit attention. The replacement of CECODES, which accumulated fifteen years of fieldwork management experience with a contractor yet to be selected will need to be approached carefully to ensure minimal loss of institutional knowledge. Ensuring continuity of international technical expertise for methodological consistency and data analysis quality will be important for the transition, whether through the retention of the current adviser or the recruitment of equivalent expertise; the PCI precedent suggests that retaining the same data analyst through an institutional transition is one of the most important continuity measures. The expansion of PAPI's scope into multiple inclusion domains has distributed technical knowledge across a team that may not transfer intact to the new streamlined partnership configuration.

A sustainability factor that is difficult to institutionalize is the motivation and commitment of the core team. Evaluation participants from international organizations observed that a significant part of PAPI's sustained quality has been the team's absolute dedication, and that sustaining the energy for a national survey over sixteen years was remarkable. How this commitment will carry forward under a new institutional arrangement, with its distinct incentives, will need to be observed over time.

4.6.5 Sustainability of Governance Outcomes

Finding 59: The sustainability of PAPI's governance outcomes is mixed: many provinces have formalized improvements in institutional routines, but sustained reform occurred in only a fraction of provinces that received advisory support, and the low time-variability of scores on core dimensions raises questions about the connection between advisory support and measurable outcomes.

A strength and demonstration of PAPI's value is that provinces have employed PAPI diagnostic findings as evidence base to inform the adoption of formal resolutions, decisions, and action plans that carry institutional authority beyond the project. Provinces have established one-stop service centres, published budgets, and assigned departmental responsibilities for tracking governance indicators. The digital literacy model has been replicated in multiple provinces. Conclusion 444 on disability rights has its own institutional momentum.

However, of approximately thirty provinces that received PAPI-related advisory support over a decade, only about ten engaged in sustained follow-up and approximately three developed longer-term plans. The low variability over time of scores on the first four dimensions, hovering around 4.5 with limited progress over ten years, raises questions about whether the connection between advisory support and measurable governance outcomes is as strong as the project's theory of change assumed.

The sustainability of citizen expectations is a more positive factor. PAPI has supported the creation of a culture of transparency and accountability among citizens, non-state actors, and the media. If the survey were discontinued or results perceived as compromised, the absence would be noticeable.

4.6.6 Risks to Sustainability

Finding 60: Four principal risks threaten PAPI's sustainability moving forward – any perceived loss of methodological integrity and survey independence, disruption of the sixteen-year time series, a potential funding gap between current commitments and the operationalization of a successor project, and changes in the operational environment impacting international organizations.

A key consideration in the transition will be ensuring that PAPI's independence is fully maintained. Any real or perceived influence over survey design, data collection, or the presentation of results, could affect the credibility and usefulness of the data. Discussions on survey scope have already shown the need for careful calibration, and the 2025 rapid assessment was exclusively focused on public service delivery in light of the additional time needed for such calibration to take place. As the initiative evolves, it will be important to ensure that the scope remains sufficiently comprehensive to fulfil its role as a governance monitoring tool, without transforming PAPI into a public service satisfaction survey.

The administrative restructuring from sixty-three to thirty-four provinces has broken the sixteen-year time series. A new baseline is planned for 2026, but historical comparisons will become more complex. If stakeholders perceive that past data no longer applies, interest in the longitudinal dimension could wane.



The Government of Ireland has committed funding through 2027, and DFAT's current financial commitment extends to mid-2027. A funding gap between the end of current donor commitments and the commencement of a successor project could cause a lapse in activities that would compound the disruption to the survey cycle experienced in 2025.

Changes in operational context have also generated a significant impact on the project. While the new partnership configuration is aligned to the evolving institutional mandates and roles, the effectiveness will need to be tested over time. Evaluation participants observed that UNDP is navigating expectations from multiple stakeholders, including government partners, donors with distinct priorities, and internal corporate mandate, and that thoughtful and fundamental choices will need to support PAPI's continuity and future direction.

4.6.7 Concluding Assessment

The sustainability outlook for PAPI is cautiously favourable. The project's integration into Politburo Regulation 365, its adoption by line ministries, the provincial self-funding of workshops and action plans, the potential transition to HCMA under a successor project, and the substantial base of nationally owned technical capacity provide strong institutional foundations for continuation. The demand for citizen-centric governance data is organic and not externally-driven: it comes from the Party apparatus, provincial governments, international organizations, researchers, and citizen constituencies.

At the same time, the sustainability of PAPI's most distinctive characteristic, its independence, will need to be carefully maintained. The transition to a new partnership configuration introduces considerations for maintaining methodological and data integrity which technical safeguards and clear partnership agreements can help to address. The evolving discussions around some governance dimensions perceived to be increasingly sensitive, the break in the time series due to administrative changes, the continued reliance on international funding, and the changing operating environment all require ongoing attention as the initiative moves into its next phase.

The choices made in 2026 will be pivotal. The terms of the new partnership agreement between UNDP and HCMA, the technical safeguards embedded in the survey moving forward, the scope of the updated questionnaire, the choice of data collection methodology, the retention of key international technical expertise, and the resolution of the data ownership question under the new privacy law will collectively determine PAPI's transition into a more resilient, nationally owned, and influential tool, known for its independence and breadth of scope regardless of the national ownership/partnership model adopted.

The project's sixteen-year track record, the quality and commitment of its team, and the genuine demand for its products across multiple levels of the Vietnamese state provide a strong foundation. The donors' willingness to provide not only funding but strategic and advocacy support for PAPI's independence is an asset whose potential could be more fully leveraged. Sustaining the clarity of PAPI's "mirror" on governance performance is the fundamental sustainability concern.

4.7. Cross-Cutting Issues

In line with international best practices and UNDP priorities, the PAPI project has mainstreamed several cross-cutting issues throughout its implementation. This section assesses how each theme has been addressed, the results achieved, and the challenges and opportunities for the next phase.

4.7.1 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Finding 61: PAPI has consistently ensured gender parity in its survey sample and revealed persistent gender gaps in governance awareness and digital access, with a methodologically significant experiment showing that the gender gap in “don’t know” responses is partly dependent on survey administration modalities.

In 2024, 52 percent of respondents were female, matching women’s share of the adult population. The survey disaggregates many indicators by gender, revealing that women tend to have lower awareness of local budgets and land use plans, lower rates of using online public service portals, and higher rates of “don’t know” responses on governance questions. A randomized experiment showed that when interviewers knew they were being observed, they provided more guidance, and the gender gap in “don’t know” responses disappeared entirely. This finding reveals that the gap is partly a function of interview administration quality, not exclusively a reflection of women’s actual knowledge, with direct implications for improving the inclusiveness of governance data collection.

Finding 62: PAPI’s research on women’s political participation contributed to a new directive raising the aspirational target for women in Party Committee leadership from 15 to 25 percent, though the gap between policy commitment and actual representation remains wide.

Through a multi-year partnership between HCMA and the Viet Nam Sociology Association, the project conducted research on women’s roles in Party agencies and elected bodies, gender bias in training, and challenges women face during the administrative restructuring. In August 2025, HCMA submitted Report No. 100 on enhancing women’s participation in Party Committees to the Politburo, contributing to inform a directive raising the target for women in leadership to 25 percent. Specific recommendations have materialized in some provinces, including lowered age requirements for women’s advanced training and mentoring systems. During the administrative restructuring, the research team’s initial recommendations helped local leaders develop measures to support women in maintaining their participation.

However, evaluation participants acknowledged that challenges still exist in translating the existing directives into concrete results, and that women participation in decision-making positions remains very low. This signals that the evidence generated through the project may not have yet translated into lasting impact in this sphere. PAPI’s gender work has focused primarily on women representation in elected bodies and has not systematically addressed gender in service delivery. The gender digital divide, while identified through PAPI data, has not yet been translated into concrete programmatic responses. Additional sensitive governance dimensions, including LGBTQI inclusion, require continued calibration, with evaluation participants advising that such topics are best pursued through smaller-scale targeted studies rather than the nationwide survey.

4.7.2 Disability Inclusion

Finding 63: PAPI's disability inclusion work represents the project's clearest cross-cutting success, following a twin-track approach of evidence generation and capacity building that produced a complete policy influence chain culminating in Conclusion Notice No. 444.

On the evidence side, the project developed annual disability assessments that progressively mainstreamed persons with disabilities within the PAPI survey framework. Beginning with an initial survey across eighteen provinces, the disability component expanded over successive years, reaching 2,310 informants with disabilities in the 2024 cycle. These assessments generated data of unprecedented scope on how persons with disabilities perceive and experience local governance in Viet Nam.

On the capacity-building side, a three-year training programme for persons with disabilities interested in civic and political participation covered the legal framework, governance processes, and practical skills for engagement in public life, with ninety-two trainees participating over three years and fifty-eight graduating from the advanced course by the end of 2024. The team also trained journalists who published articles, radio programmes, and television documentaries on the rights and civic participation of persons with disabilities, and submitted policy briefs and scientific articles to the National Assembly.

The culmination was Conclusion Notice 444/TB-VPTW, issued by the General Secretary in December 2025, which seeks to advance further the rights of persons with disabilities, mandates improvements to public infrastructure accessibility and digital services, and calls for research into establishing a disability quota for the National Assembly. Project stakeholders reported that all advocacy positions informed by project-generated evidence were reflected in this Conclusion. Following its issuance, one person with a disability was introduced as a potential candidate for the National Assembly, and the Viet Nam Federation on Disability requested PAPI's support in preparing candidates for the 2026 election. This sequence from evidence generation through advocacy to high-level policy commitment and the identification of concrete candidates represents a complete and rare expression of a credible policy influence chain. The rapid assessment in 2025 maintained its focus on disability inclusion by including 300 respondents from the disability survey sample, reflecting the progressive mainstreaming of disability as a genuine cross-cutting dimension of the PAPI survey rather than solely a standalone thematic research exercise.

4.7.3 Leaving No One Behind and Ethnic Minority Inclusion

Finding 64: The project's ethnic minority data collection, analysis, and advocacy produced concrete policy results through action research on e-service access and citizen-powered digital governance pilots in remote communities, though sustainability depends on embedding these initiatives within national funding frameworks.

PAPI's cross-cutting work has been consistent with the UN and UNDP Leave No One Behind (LNOB) framework, which identifies five interconnected drivers of exclusion that prevent individuals and groups from sharing in development progress: discrimination, geography, governance, socio-economic status, and vulnerability to shocks and fragility. The vulnerable groups addressed through PAPI map onto these drivers as set out in the table below. The mapping

makes visible the systemic basis on which PAPI's inclusion work is targeted and the analytical logic that links the survey design, thematic research, capacity building, and advocacy components to each constituency.

Table 4: Mapping PAPI's inclusion LNOB Framework

Vulnerable group	Discrimination	Geography	Governance	Socio-economic status	Shocks and fragility
Ethnic minorities	Linguistic, cultural, and systemic barriers in accessing public services	Concentration in remote, mountainous, and border regions	Lower digital service access, under-representation in subnational leadership	Higher poverty rates, lower educational attainment	Disproportionate exposure to climate and environmental shocks in mountainous regions
Persons with disabilities	Direct barriers to civic and political participation, accessibility constraints	Service availability disparities by location	Limited voice in public affairs, near-zero representation in elected bodies	Higher poverty risk, employment exclusion	Greater vulnerability to crises and reduced resilience
Women	Persistent gender bias in political and leadership spaces; documented gender gap in "don't know" responses to governance questions	Rural-urban variation in voice and access	Continued under-representation in Party Committee leadership (approximately 10 per cent of the Central Committee for 2026 to 2030)	Lower property and land ownership; care responsibilities limiting public participation	Disproportionately affected by economic and climate shocks
Internal migrants	Household registration system structurally excludes migrants from local political processes	Origin-destination disparities; sampling exclusion based on residency lists (corrected in 2020)	Excluded from local voting and participation in destination provinces	Often economically vulnerable, working in informal sectors	Particularly vulnerable to displacement and economic disruption
LGBTQI+ communities	Direct discrimination across multiple dimensions; limited legal recognition	Urban-rural variation in social acceptance	Limited voice in policy and political processes	Employment and access discrimination	Less institutional support during crises



PAPI's contribution to addressing these drivers operates through three mutually reinforcing modes: the survey makes the lived experiences of these groups visible in governance data; the dedicated thematic research generates evidence on their specific exclusion pathways; and the advocacy and policy briefing work translates that evidence into duty-bearer action. The most fully documented of these pathways is the disability pathway traced in Section 4.7.2; the gender pathway is traced in Section 4.7.1. The ethnic minority pathway is set out below as the second of the major documented chains in the cross-cutting agenda. Internal migrants are addressed through the methodological sampling correction discussed below. LGBTQI+ inclusion, which faces the most constrained political space, is addressed through targeted thematic research that the next phase will need to navigate through complementary channels, as discussed in Section 6.5 and Recommendation 6.

The PAPI methodology has included ethnic minority respondents through its nationwide sampling, with enumerators who speak ethnic minority languages or translators recruited for relevant areas. Since 2020, the survey has been expanded to include internal migrants, previously excluded in the data sampling because they did not appear on local residency lists. Evaluation participants described this as one of the most significant methodological corrections, addressing a systematic bias toward older, non-migrant populations.

Between 2021 and 2023, the project and HCMA undertook action research in nine provinces with large ethnic minority communities, compiled in HCMA's Report No. 46 on e-service access for ethnic minority areas. This was submitted to the Politburo and prompted the Office of Government to issue Letter 278/VPCP-KSTT in January 2024, instructing three ministries to simplify online procedures, improve digital identification for ethnic minority users, and upgrade ICT infrastructure. The citizen-powered innovation pilots in Hà Giang (now Tuyên Quang) and Quảng Trị achieved near-universal adoption of online applications in pilot communes, and the model has been replicated in five to seven other provinces. The simplification of administrative procedures that began as a pilot has been replicated at the national level.

However, evaluation participants also offered an assessment of sustainability. The prospect of local governments allocating their own budgets to continue these activities is limited. The sustainability pathway lies in linking initiatives to existing national funding streams, particularly Resolution 57's digital transformation spending requirement and the national targeted programmes for ethnic minority development. The broader Leave No One Behind agenda, including work on LGBTQI inclusion, youth engagement, and internal migrants, may require adapted approaches under the new partnership configuration, with evaluation participants advising that more sensitive dimensions may need be addressed through complementary channels.

4.7.4 Human Rights-Based Approach

Finding 65: PAPI is not designed as a human rights programme, but its operation gives practical effect to internationally recognised civil and political rights, applies key principles of the UNDP Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) in its design and implementation, and creates a public accountability mechanism that is itself a contribution to the realisation of those rights.



By collecting governance feedback from nearly 220,000 citizens and ensuring that this feedback informs government decision-making, PAPI operationalizes Viet Nam's own constitutional principle that state agencies must "show respect for the people, devotedly serve the people, maintain close contact with the people, listen to their opinions, and submit to their supervision" (as set out in Section 2.1 of this report). PAPI data has served as a baseline for monitoring the 2013 Land Law's enforcement and informed the implementation of the 2022 Grassroots Democracy Law. The annual publication of rankings created an accountability mechanism in which provincial officials know that their constituents' aggregate opinions will be published and available for scrutiny by the Party, line ministries, the National Assembly, the media, and the public.

Rights-holders and duty-bearers. Within the HRBA framework, PAPI's two principal constituencies map clearly onto the rights-holder and duty-bearer schema. Rights-holders are the citizens whose lived experiences of governance the survey captures, with deliberate attention to those most often excluded: ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, women, internal migrants, and LGBTQI+ communities. Duty-bearers are the provincial People's Committees, line ministries, the National Assembly, and Party organs whose performance the data assesses and whose institutional capacities the project's training, advocacy, and capacity-building components seek to strengthen. PAPI's annual cycle of survey, publication, provincial diagnostic workshops, and policy briefs operationalizes the relationship between these two constituencies, creating a structured channel through which rights-holders' experiences shape duty-bearers' decisions.

Specific rights given practical effect. PAPI supports the realization of several civil and political rights recognized in international instruments to which Viet Nam is a State Party. The right to participate in the conduct of public affairs (Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ICCPR) is operationalized through the systematic capture of citizen voice and its conversion into evidence used by government. The right to seek and receive information (Article 19 of the ICCPR and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) is supported by PAPI's transparency dimension, which measures whether citizens can access local budgets, land-use plans, and provincial expenditure. The principle of non-discrimination (Article 2 of the ICCPR) is reflected in the random sampling methodology that gives equal weight to every citizen regardless of socio-economic characteristics, and in the dedicated research and advocacy work on women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, internal migrants, and LGBTQI+ communities. The progressive realization of access to public services without discrimination is reflected in the survey's measurement of public administrative procedures and public service delivery, and in the citizen-powered innovation work that extends e-services into remote ethnic minority communes.

Application of the PANEL principles. Examined against the principles that frame UNDP's application of the HRBA in development programming, PAPI's design demonstrates substantive alignment:

- ***Participation.*** PAPI structurally embeds the participation of citizens in governance assessment, including the participation of those most at risk of exclusion through the sampling design, the methodological correction in 2020 to include internal migrants previously absent from local residency lists, and dedicated thematic research on under-represented constituencies.

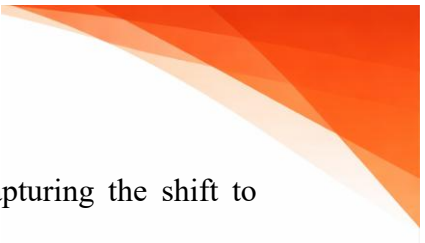
- **Accountability.** The annual public ranking creates a horizontal accountability mechanism that previously did not exist in Viet Nam's governance landscape, complemented by the integration of PAPI metrics into the Party's own cadre evaluation framework under Politburo Regulation No. 365.
- **Non-discrimination.** Random sampling gives equal weight to each citizen, sex disaggregation is maintained throughout, and dedicated work addresses persons with disabilities (Conclusion Notice No. 444), ethnic minorities (HCMA Report No. 46 and Letter 278/VPCP-KSTT), women in political leadership (HCMA Report No. 100), internal migrants, and LGBTQI+ communities, subject to the political space constraints discussed elsewhere in this report.
- **Empowerment.** PAPI strengthens the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights through the three-year capacity-building programme for persons with disabilities (92 trainees, 58 graduates of the advanced course), the citizen-powered innovation initiatives that equip ethnic minority communities to access online administrative services, the training of journalists on the civic participation of persons with disabilities, and the strengthening of civil society and research-partner capacities.
- **Linkage to rights standards.** PAPI's analytical reports and policy briefs explicitly invoke Viet Nam's constitutional principles on the relationship between the state and the people, and engage with relevant national legal frameworks including the Law on Grassroots Democracy and successive Socio-Economic Development Strategies and Plans.

The HRBA dimensions of the institutional transition. HCMA's positioning under the new partnership configuration carries important HRBA implications. As the lead institution training cadres at all levels of the political system, with more than 60,000 students passing through its programmes, HCMA reaches the very duty-bearers whose performance PAPI assesses, creating an institutional pathway through which the evidence base directly supports duty-bearer capacity. At the same time, the transition to a national institutional host requires deliberate attention to the principles of independence, transparency, and protection of those who provide critical perspectives, particularly on the more sensitive dimensions of the HRBA agenda, including LGBTQI+ inclusion, the handling of findings that may not align with official narratives, and the safeguarding of respondent confidentiality. The technical and contractual safeguards discussed in Section 4.6.2 and the data protection considerations in Section 4.4.6 are central to maintaining the HRBA character of the project's next phase.

4.7.5 Digital Governance

Finding 66: PAPI's e-governance dimension, added in 2018, revealed a stark digital divide across provinces and has generated concrete policy results, but the digital divide intersects with every other inclusion dimension and far exceeds the project's capacity to address directly.

The data revealed significant disparities in digital access and use of digital tools: in 2024, only 1.8 percent of citizens in Gia Lai Province had used online public service portals, compared to 18.5 percent in Binh Duong. Urban, wealthier provinces consistently showed higher rates of internet access and e-service usage. The e-governance dimension was added as a separate measurement to



preserve longitudinal comparability on administrative procedures while capturing the shift to digital service delivery.

The e-governance research in remote and provinces with significant ethnic minority populations produced concrete results through HCMA Report No. 46 and the related government instruction. The citizen-powered innovation pilots demonstrated that communities with no prior e-service experience could achieve near-universal adoption when procedures were simplified and support was provided. The project also delivered a review of provincial and national e-service portals to the National Assembly in 2025.

The digital divide is a cross-cutting challenge intersecting with gender, disability, ethnicity, and age. Women from rural or ethnic minority backgrounds have significantly lower rates of e-service use. Persons with disabilities face accessibility barriers on government websites. Ethnic minority communities lack both infrastructure and language support. The sustainability of pilot solutions depends on national policy frameworks, particularly digital transformation spending requirements under Resolution 57, rather than continued project funding. Evaluation participants suggested that digital service delivery should be a priority area for questionnaire reform in the next phase.

4.7.6 Environmental Governance and Climate Resilience

Finding 67: PAPI's environmental governance dimension has been adopted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for its own assessment framework, giving PAPI's environmental data institutional permanence independent of the project.

Added in 2018, the environmental governance dimension measures citizen perceptions of water quality, forestry management, pollution, and provincial authorities' responsiveness to environmental concerns. The data consistently showed regional disparities, with Central Highlands provinces lagging behind. The most concrete policy impact was MONRE's formal request for PAPI data for its Provincial Environmental Protection Index.

Climate resilience intersects with environmental governance and public service delivery. In 2025, the project produced a thematic study on the impact of extreme weather on outdoor workers in Hà Nội, submitted to the National Assembly, which bridged citizen experiences of climate impacts with policy responses on labour and social protection. Evaluation participants noted that environmental governance questions could be strengthened in the questionnaire reform, particularly by adding citizen perceptions of local government preparedness for natural disasters.

4.7.7 Concluding Assessment

PAPI has substantively integrated cross-cutting issues, evolving from a governance index with basic gender disaggregation to a multi-component project addressing disability, ethnicity, migration, gender, LGBTQI inclusion, digital governance, and environmental governance. The disability inclusion work represents the strongest cross-cutting achievement, producing a documented policy influence chain from evidence generation through Conclusion 444 to the identification of National Assembly candidates. The gender work has generated important evidence and contributed to the raised target for women's leadership representation, though the gap between commitment and reality remains wide. The e-service support tailored to the needs of



ethnic minorities produced concrete policy responses, and the environmental governance dimension has been adopted by MONRE for its own framework.

The transition to national ownership under HCMA creates both opportunities and constraints. Evaluation participants advised that some especially sensitive governance dimensions, should be tackled through targeted smaller-scale studies rather than the nationwide survey. At the same time, HCMA's interest in gender research, its institutional mandate for cadre training reaching tens of thousands of officials, and the Party's commitments on disability and ethnic minorities suggest that the core inclusion work is likely to remain a distinctive and core portion of PAPI's work.

Though the next phase it will be essential to reconfirm the project's vocation to address governance from the perspective of those most at risk of being left behind. As evaluation participants observed, partners who understand PAPI as something broader than a survey particularly appreciate the social inclusion aspect, which might otherwise be underestimated in policy research and debate in Viet Nam. This dimension is what distinguishes PAPI from existing satisfaction surveys and constitutes one of its most important contributions.

Separately from PAPI's environmental governance theme, the evaluation confirms that the project's own social and environmental effects are not material under the UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (SES). As a research, data generation, and policy advocacy intervention with no civil works, land acquisition, resettlement, or direct physical interventions at the national or local level, the project does not trigger the SES standards concerning environmental and social safeguards, and the social dimensions material to a nationwide citizen survey, namely informed consent, respondent confidentiality, data protection, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups, are addressed through the project's research ethics protocols (Section 3.6) and the data protection compliance measures discussed in Finding 40.

5. Lessons Learned

This evaluation identified five key lessons from the PAPI experience that are relevant not only to the project's next phase, but to the broader community of governance monitoring and evidence-based advocacy projects.

Lesson 1: Operational Independence Underpins Credibility, but Must Be Actively Protected

PAPI's methodology, data collection, analysis, and reporting must remain free from interference to sustain the legitimacy and trustworthiness of its findings. Evaluation participants across all stakeholder groups affirmed this principle, with participants from international organizations stating that independence is the most strategic asset the survey has, essential to the survey's usefulness and credibility. Experience demonstrates that methodological and data integrity and independence are not lost during transitions to new partnership and ownership model, so long as safeguards for methodological autonomy are deliberately put in place. Methodological integrity and independence are not a one-time design choice, and requires continuous institutional investment to maintain.

Lesson 2: Political Sensitivities Require Strategic Navigation, Not Avoidance

Governance assessments may produce findings that are not aligned with official narratives, and PAPI's sixteen-year record contains concrete instances of this: published findings on informal payments in public service delivery, variable provincial rankings that have at times placed high-profile provinces near the bottom of national tables, survey evidence on land dispute handling and ethnic minority access to public services, and sensitivity around the interpretation of low citizen-participation scores. Where such frictions have arisen, they have been navigated through transparent and independently-reviewed methodologies and extensive stakeholder consultation at both the design and validation stages, which have together built the institutional trust needed to sustain the project's operating space. The Advisory Board has been in place since the project's inception in 2009 and serving as the principal governance mechanism for PAPI in the absence of a formal project board, reviews sensitive findings before public launch and provides methodological and thematic guidance across the annual cycle, and research reports frame conclusions as recommendations for improvement. The Advisory Board could not convene in 2026, reflecting the combined effect of the 2025 survey suspension and the transition to a more controlled ODA environment; re-establishing its convening rhythm is a priority for the next phase. Evaluation participants suggested that especially sensitive governance dimensions may be more effectively tackled through smaller-scale focused and in-depth studies rather than the nationwide survey. The lesson is that proactive action to identify and anticipate emerging challenges, including those that may have a political component, as well as early strategic decisions about the most conducive pathway to pursue distinct governance topics, is most likely to lead to effective results.

Lesson 3: Rigorous Quality Assurance Sustains Policy Influence Over Time

PAPI's credibility and policy impact rest on rigorous, transparent research protocols applied from conceptualization through to analysis and dissemination. All 63 provinces issued action plans and directives based on PAPI findings, the Prime Minister and Deputies have cited PAPI data in annual dialogues with provincial leaders, and PAPI was ultimately incorporated into Politburo Regulation



No. 365. The quality assurance architecture developed over the project's lifespan, including GIS location verification, timestamp analysis, random audio recording, and the exclusion of surveys that fail integrity checks, created a standard that evaluation participants described as exceptional for a survey of this scale. Governance data gains authority through demonstrated reliability over time, not through any single publication cycle. The fact that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment formally requested PAPI data to integrate in own data frameworks, illustrates how sustained quality creates institutional demand that reinforces the project's relevance.

Lesson 4: Policy Integration Does Not Guarantee Operational Sustainability

PAPI achieved a landmark milestone when Politburo Regulation No. 365 designated it as a core performance index for evaluating provincial leaders, elevating the index from an externally-funded research tool to an internal management instrument of the Party. Yet this institutional recognition alone cannot be a guarantee for preserving the project's citizen-centric character. Embedding results in formal policy frameworks is necessary but insufficient for the project's long-term sustainability. It must also secure the operational, financial, and institutional conditions that allow them to continue generating the evidence that may be used to inform policymaking. Regulation 365 creates demand for PAPI data, but it does not provide financial assurances for the continuation of the survey, does not impact the safeguards put in place to maintain its methodological integrity, nor codifies the breadth of governance dimensions to be tackled by the data collection and ancillary advocacy processes. Moreover, PAPI's relative significance within the Regulation should not be overstated: if PAPI were removed, it would not materially affect the validity or effectiveness of the Regulation itself. While the regulation creates a favourable environment for PAPI's continuation, it does not make PAPI indispensable to its implementation. Achieving sustainability requires coordinated progress across institutional, financial, technical, and political dimensions.

Lesson 5: Competitive Ranking Generates Engagement but Not Necessarily Reform

PAPI's provincial ranking format has been extraordinarily effective at generating engagement: by 2024, all 63 provinces had developed response plans or directives. However, the competitive dynamic does not uniformly translate into substantive governance reform. Evaluation participants described the pattern in which some provinces prioritised initiatives that would improve their relative ranking over long-term transformative change. Of approximately thirty provinces that received advisory support, only about ten showed engagement and approximately three developed multi-year improvement plans. The PAPI report's current format may not maximize its policy influence. Evaluation participants observed that it is quite technical and not sufficiently useful for provincial leaders who need actionable guidance rather than academic analysis. The lesson is that governance monitoring instruments need to invest not only in data quality but in converting data into actionable guidance like provincial diagnostic workshops that led to provinces' action plans that enables decision-makers to act effectively. In essence, the PAPI reports to date have helped indicate gaps where central and local governments should work on to narrow them down. This is where PAPI's locally-led innovation initiatives have come in since 2021. The competitive format generates attention; the analytical content must generate action.

6. Conclusions

This section presents the overarching conclusions of the terminal evaluation, synthesizing findings across the six OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and the analysis of cross-cutting issues

6.1 Overall Project Assessment

PAPI represents one of the most successful and sustained governance accountability initiatives in Viet Nam's development landscape. Over sixteen years, the project has built a robust, methodologically rigorous citizen survey that has collected governance feedback from over 230,000 randomly selected citizens across all provinces. It has evolved from a pilot initiative in three provinces in 2009 into a nationally recognized instrument now formally embedded in the Party's own performance evaluation framework.

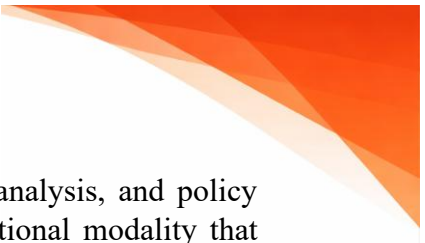
The project's achievements extend well beyond data collection. PAPI has demonstrably created the evidence to inform provincial governance reform, with multiple provinces issuing formal resolutions and decisions in direct response to PAPI findings. It has built significant institutional capacity within national partner organizations, produced an extensive body of policy-relevant research encompassing over 50 knowledge products in 2025 alone, and pioneered innovative approaches to inclusive governance, from AI-powered tools for disadvantaged e-service users to ground-breaking research on the political rights of persons with disabilities. The project's influence on high-level policy is evidenced by the Politburo's Conclusion Notice on disability rights, which aligns with recommendations long advanced by PAPI, and by the National Assembly's request for PAPI's women-in-politics research products.

Evaluation participants consistently described PAPI in terms that underscore its unique value, noting that its interruption would leave a significant gap in Viet Nam's governance data ecosystem. This evaluation concurs that PAPI has established itself as a significant component of the country's governance monitoring architecture.

6.2 Strategic Re-Positioning at a Critical Juncture

The PAPI project is reaching its end point at a moment of significant institutional transformation. The country's July 2025 administrative restructuring, which merged 63 provinces into 34 under a two-tier local government system, represents the most significant reconfiguration of subnational governance since the Doi Moi reforms. This restructuring simultaneously creates both heightened demand for citizen-centred governance data and a legitimate opportunity to reform the PAPI instrument itself.

The transition in the project's national institutional partnership configuration is a strategic development that this evaluation considers positive. HCMA provides a conducive institutional environment and is positioned as a strong institution in Viet Nam for translating governance evidence into policy and training. Since 2012, HCMA has been using PAPI data and research findings extensively in cadre training, has researchers with analytical capacity to work with the data, and is assessed by evaluation participants as an institution that respects the independence of the data because that is what gives it value. The planned division of responsibilities (with UNDP providing technical advice, quality assurance and monitoring of both the core survey and thematic research, in-depth studies, and inclusive governance activities, while HCMA providing



institutional anchoring, leading on the implementation of data collection, analysis, and policy informing activities and owning the outputs) represents a pragmatic operational modality that leverages each institution's comparative advantage.

6.3 Independence as a Strategic Asset and an Ongoing Risk

The single most important finding of this evaluation is that PAPI's independence is simultaneously its most valuable strategic asset and its most fragile one. The transition to a new national partnership configuration is strategically sound in institutional terms, at the same time will require thoughtful discussion to ensure the core characteristics of PAPI are maintained in a way that ensure its continued reliability and credibility. In particular methodological independence and data integrity will be essential areas of focus during the stipulation of the new partnership arrangements.

Over its lifespan, the project has developed and refined robust quality assurance mechanisms, including GPS-tracked tablets, timestamped interviews, audio recording, and third-party verification, that provide important technical safeguards and are proposed to be carried forward into the next phase. However, technical measures alone will not be sufficient. The transition will also require clear protocols on editorial independence, transparent publication commitments, and *the continued involvement of international technical expertise as a credibility anchor.*

6.4 The Imperative for Methodological Evolution

The evaluation finds that PAPI faces a legitimate methodological challenge that extends beyond the immediate disruption of provincial restructuring. Evaluation participants identified a pattern of low time variability of the scores related to key governance indicators that has persisted for nearly a decade. The administrative restructuring from 63 to 34 provinces provides a natural breakpoint that can accommodate a more fundamental review of the survey instrument without sacrificing the principle of longitudinal comparability, since comparability will necessarily be interrupted by the creation of new administrative units.

Several specific areas for reform emerged consistently from evaluation evidence: the questionnaire has accumulated questions over sixteen years and now takes 45 to 60 minutes to administer; the eight-dimensional framework may benefit from consolidation to approximately five core dimensions; and the annual report format could be complemented by more accessible formats that speak directly to provincial leadership priorities.

6.5 Inclusion and Innovation as Distinctive Contributions

The project's work on inclusive governance represents one of its most distinctive and underappreciated contributions. The concrete policy results achieved in 2025 are notable. Notable examples are Conclusion Notice No. 444 on disability rights, HCMA's submission of a high-level report on women's political participation to the Politburo, and the nomination of the first person with a disability as a potential National Assembly candidate. These outcomes validate the project's strategy of combining rigorous evidence generation with sustained, relationship-based advocacy. However, sustainability remains a concern, as local government self-funding for these activities is unrealistic in the near term.

The provincial innovation initiatives on digital public service delivery have shown genuine replication potential. The development of AI-powered tools for disadvantaged users aligns with Viet Nam’s digital transformation priorities. Yet e-governance scores remain low nationally, averaging just over 3 on a 10-point scale in 2024, indicating that the broader enabling environment has not yet caught up with the project’s innovations.

6.6 Project Efficiency and the Funding Landscape

The project has operated with a lean management structure and demonstrated strong cost-effectiveness through its multi-partner delivery model. However, the 2025 survey cancellation exposed the vulnerability of the operating model to shifts in the political and regulatory environment. The donor landscape for the next phase appears cautiously positive. Donors offer not only financial resources but also strategic support that the project has not yet fully leveraged. The project needs to develop a more systematic strategy for engaging donor advocacy support as a complement to financial resources.

6.7 Summary Conclusion and Ratings

The PAPI project has achieved a remarkable trajectory from a small pilot to a nationally institutionalized governance monitoring tool. Its inclusion in Politburo Regulation 365 represents a transformation from a donor-funded initiative into an internal management instrument of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, an outcome that few development projects achieve. The project’s research output, policy influence, and pioneering work on inclusive governance further distinguish it as a high-performing development intervention.

The principal issue ahead is managing the transition to national ownership in a way that preserves the independence that gives PAPI its value, while seizing the opportunity presented by administrative restructuring to modernize the survey instrument. The project enters its next phase with strong institutional partnerships, continued donor interest, and a proven track record, but also with significant risks that will require sustained vigilance, strategic communication, and adaptive management to navigate successfully.

The table below presents the evaluation’s summary ratings for each OECD-DAC criterion, cross-cutting issues, and the overall project assessment. Each rating is accompanied by a brief justification grounded in the evaluation findings.

Table 5: Evaluation Summary Ratings

Criterion	Rating ⁸	Progress towards Goals
Relevance	Satisfactory	PAPI fills a unique and significant gap in Viet Nam’s governance data ecosystem as the only large-scale, non-government led, citizen-centric assessment of provincial governance. Its relevance is confirmed with notable

⁸ Rating Scale: Performance criteria: Highly Satisfactory (HS) – Satisfactory (S) – Moderately Satisfactory (MS) – Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU) – Unsatisfactory (U) – Highly Unsatisfactory (HU); Sustainability: Likely (L) – Moderately Likely (ML) – Moderately Unlikely (MU) – Unlikely (U)

Criterion	Rating ⁸	Progress towards Goals
		consistency across all stakeholder categories. Methodological credibility and operational independence are well established. Alignment with national strategies, the UN strategic framework, and the priorities of the current political leadership is strong. Relevance faces pressure from administrative restructuring, low variability of scores over time on core dimensions, and evolutions in the operational space, but these are challenges to be addressed through adaptation, not evidence of diminished relevance.
Coherence	Satisfactory	Internal coherence is strong: the multi-partner delivery model assigns clear responsibilities and the logical chain from the core index to expanded project components is analytically sound, as demonstrated most clearly by the disability inclusion pathway. The sixteen-year longitudinal dataset provides exceptional temporal coherence. However, external coherence shows weaknesses: the PAPI-PCI relationship remains fragmented at the provincial level, the absence of a supply-side perspective limits analytical depth, and the partnership reconfiguration as the project transitions to a potential new phase is still being finalized. Outcome monitoring linking data production to policy influence is underdeveloped.
Effectiveness	Satisfactory	Of eighteen results framework indicators, eleven were met or exceeded and five fell short due exclusively to the 2025 survey cancellation caused by external factors. Survey-independent functions operated at their highest capacity in 2025, producing eleven thematic studies, fifteen case studies, six policy briefs, and approximately 250 media items. The most consequential result, inclusion in Politburo Regulation No. 365, and the disability inclusion policy chain through Conclusion No. 444 demonstrate significant outcome-level achievement beyond the results framework. Effectiveness is moderated by the results framework's structural weaknesses, the absence of outcome-level monitoring, and the limited evidence of conversion of provincial advisory support into sustained governance reform.
Efficiency	Satisfactory	Budget execution has been consistently strong (93 per cent aggregate over 2018–2025, 97 per cent in 2024). The multi-partner delivery model, technology-enabled quality assurance, and cost-sharing mechanisms through provincial self-funding generate clear efficiencies. The project demonstrated operational agility in reprogramming resources when the 2025 survey could not be conducted. Efficiency is moderated by the

Criterion	Rating ⁸	Progress towards Goals
		annual cycle consuming resources at a rate that requires careful budget management, questionnaire length that has grown beyond core measurement needs, a team that has seen increasing workload connected to the expansion of the questionnaire in a way that is not sustainable over long periods of time, and underdeveloped outcome monitoring.
Impact	Satisfactory	Impact is substantial and multi-layered. At the national level, PAPI contributed to the institutionalization of citizen feedback in the Party's cadre evaluation system, provided the evidence and advocacy that informed disability policy through Conclusion No. 444, provided the primary metric for SDG 16.5 monitoring, and was adopted by line ministries as a trusted data source. At the provincial level, all sixty-three provinces developed governance improvement plans and a subset achieved sustained reform. PAPI's most significant systemic impact is its contribution to normalizing evidence-based, citizen-centric governance assessment. The issues created by the competitive dynamics triggered by the use of PAPI scores for civil servants performance evaluation and the challenge of maintaining operational continuity in an evolving regulatory environment are notable negative unintended effects.
Sustainability	Moderately Likely	The sustainability outlook is cautiously favourable. Politburo Regulation 365 creates built-in structural demand; adoption by line ministries means PAPI is part of the official data ecosystem; provincial self-funding indicates organic local demand; and HCMA is a strategically sound institutional home. However, strong safeguards will need to remain in place to ensure methodological independence and data integrity as the project transitions to a new partnership configuration; the sixteen-year time series has been broken; PAPI remains dependent on international funding with a potential gap between current commitments and operationalization of the next phase; and the changing regulatory environment remains a matter requiring proactive and anticipatory analysis. The decisions made in 2026 regarding the partnership agreement, technical safeguards, and data ownership will be determinative.
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	Satisfactory	Gender parity in the survey sample is consistently maintained. The research on women's political participation contributed to raising the target for women in Party Committee leadership from 15 to 25 per cent. The randomized experiment on the gender gap in "don't know" responses produced a

Criterion	Rating ⁸	Progress towards Goals
		methodologically significant finding with practical implications. The gender digital divide identified through PAPI data has not yet been translated into systematic programmatic responses.
Human Rights and Disability Inclusion	Satisfactory	PAPI's disability inclusion work represents the project's clearest cross-cutting success, producing a complete and rare policy influence chain: evidence generation through surveys covering over 28,000 persons with disabilities, a three-year training programme for 92 persons with disabilities on civic and political participation, sustained advocacy, and Conclusion Notice No. 444 issued by the General Secretary. One person with a disability was nominated as a National Assembly candidate for the 16 th National Assembly. PAPI's operation embodies core human rights principles by giving practical effect to the right to participate in public affairs.
Overall Project Rating	Satisfactory	PAPI is one of the most significant and sustained governance accountability initiatives in Viet Nam's development landscape. It created a structured mechanism through which the governance experiences of ordinary citizens are made visible to national policymakers and can be used to hold provincial authorities accountable. The project's sixteen-year track record, its influence on national policy, its pioneering work on inclusive governance, and its integration into the Party's own performance evaluation framework distinguish it as a high-performing development intervention. The overall rating reflects strong performance across most criteria, moderated by challenges in outcome monitoring, the conversion of advisory support into sustained provincial reform, and by the imperative of maintaining its methodological integrity and independence under any and all partnership configurations.

7. Recommendations

The following ten recommendations are organized by priority area and addressed to the principal stakeholders responsible for PAPI's next phase. Each recommendation is grounded in the evaluation findings and linked to the evidence base established in sections 4 through 6 of this report. Recommendations are classified by priority (high, medium) and timeframe (immediate: within 6 months; short-term: 6–18 months; medium-term: 18–36 months).

7.1 Safeguarding Data Independence and Methodological Integrity

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA, donor partners **Priority:** High **Timeframe:** Immediate

Based on: Findings 2, 3, 39, 49; Sections 4.1.2, 4.4.5, 4.6.2; Conclusion 6.3

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.

Recommendation 2: Maintain international technical expertise as a credibility anchor

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam **Priority:** High **Timeframe:** Immediate

Based on: Findings 2, 3, 39; Sections 4.1.2, 4.6.2, 4.6.4; Conclusion 6.3

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.

7.2 Seizing the Opportunity for Methodological Reform

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA, Technical Advisory Team **Priority:** High
Timeframe: Immediate to short-term

Based on: Findings 25, 28, 36, 37, 38; Sections 4.3.1, 4.4.3, 4.4.4; Conclusion 6.4;

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 instrument review should also assess whether the current questionnaire content and enumerator approach adequately capture women's governance experiences. 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.

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA **Priority:** High **Timeframe:** Short-term

Based on: Findings 24, 46, 47, 48; Sections 4.2.4, 4.5.1, 4.5.2; Conclusion 6.4

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.

7.3 Managing the Institutional Transition

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA **Priority:** High **Timeframe:** Short-term

Based on: Findings 18, 35, 39, 40, 52, 56; Sections 4.2.1, 4.2.7, 4.4.1, 4.4.5, 4.4.6, 4.6.1; Conclusion 6.2

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 Data Protection Law.

7.4 Sustaining and Deepening the Inclusive Governance Agenda

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA, donor partners **Priority:** Medium **Timeframe:** Short to medium-term

Based on: Findings 61, 62, 63, 64; Sections 4.7.1, 4.7.2, 4.7.3, 4.7.4; Conclusion 6.5

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. The strategy should give particular emphasis to women's political participation, building on the demonstrated policy chain from sex-disaggregated PAPI data. 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.

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA **Priority:** Medium **Timeframe:** Short to medium-term

Based on: Findings 23, 50, 64, 66; Sections 4.2.5, 4.5.3, 4.7.3, 4.7.5; Conclusion 6.5;

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, with specific attention to ethnic minority women who face compounded barriers of language, digital literacy, and limited time for online navigation due to care responsibilities, persons with disabilities including women with disabilities, elderly populations, and women in rural and remote areas, should be maintained as a distinctive value proposition.

7.5 Strengthening Strategic Communication and Donor Engagement

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, project management team **Priority:** Medium
Timeframe: Immediate to short-term

Based on: Findings 24, 41, 42; Sections 4.2.6, 4.4.7; Conclusion 6.6

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. The harmonised MEL framework should include gender-responsive outcome indicators capturing the project's contribution to women's political participation, and women's experience of public services.

7.6 Branding and Positioning for the Next Phase

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA **Priority:** Medium **Timeframe:** Short-term
Based on: Findings 17, 19, 35, 52; Sections 4.1.3, 4.6.1, 4.6.5; Conclusions 6.2 and 6.7

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.

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

Addressed to: UNDP Viet Nam, HCMA **Priority:** Medium **Timeframe:** Medium-term

Based on: Findings 17, 20, 21; Sections 4.2.4, 4.2.7; Conclusion 6.7

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.

Each of the above recommendations is grounded in the evaluation findings (Section 4), the conclusions (Section 6), and the evidence base established throughout this report. The following table maps the recommendations to the conclusions of this evaluation.

Table 6: Mapping of conclusions to recommendations

Conclusion	Conclusion section	Corresponding recommendations
Strategic Re-Positioning at a Critical Juncture	6.2	Recommendation 5
Independence as a Strategic Asset and an Ongoing Risk	6.3	Recommendations 1 and 2
The Imperative for Methodological Evolution	6.4	Recommendations 3 and 4
Inclusion and Innovation as Distinctive Contributions	6.5	Recommendations 6 and 7
Project Efficiency and the Funding Landscape	6.6	Recommendation 8
Summary Conclusion and Ratings	6.7	Recommendations 9 and 10

Annex I: Terms of Reference

Terminal Evaluation of the PAPI Research and Advocacy Programme

Service	A Senior National Expert on Monitoring and Evaluation to conduct the Terminal Evaluation of the Research and Advocacy Project “The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)”
Duty station	Home-based with travels to Ha Noi and three provinces (one in the North, one in the Central and one in the South) in Viet Nam
Expected Duration	From November 2025 to March 2026
Supervision	The expert will work together and closely with Programme and Policy Analysts in UNDP’s Governance and Participation Team. The expert will report directly to the Head of Governance and Participation in UNDP in Vietnam.

1. Background and context

During the past two decades, as it has thrived to grow into a middle-income country, Viet Nam has been facing social, economic and institutional structural transformation challenges. Policymakers need better data and evidence-based systems to make informed decisions; voice and agency of citizens and of the most vulnerable needs to be enabled; and transparency and access to information are fundamental to maintain public trust in its institutions and improve an open and fair business environment. Citizens, who are both beneficiaries of public policy and end-users of public services, increasingly demand that these public systems are effective, more transparent, and accountable, more responsive to tax-payers’ expectations, more open to critical voices for reforms and improvements, and be able to catch up with societal changes. They also demand the public sector to promote development and equity public participation in decision-making processes, and citizens’ roles in oversight and monitoring. As a result, central and local governments are expected to respond timely and effectively in order to engage and service citizens better.

To assist Viet Nam in tracking those challenges and suggesting where the country should focus their energy and resources, since 2009, the research and advocacy project “Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)” has been commissioned by UNDP in Viet Nam together with different national government and non-government partners, including the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, local governments and research institutions/think-tanks in conducting the PAPI research and advocacy activities through PAPI surveys, action-based research and policy advice, and locally-led innovation initiatives.

The PAPI research and advocacy project aims to generate data and information, to facilitate policy and action-oriented dialogues, and to support locally-led initiatives that improve the performance of local governments in delivering on public policy promises and in meeting their citizens’ needs. PAPI has been doing so by: (i) enabling citizens to benchmark their local government’s

performance and advocate for improvement; (ii) creating constructive competition and promoting learning among local authorities; and (iii) initiating citizen-centric experiments by and with local governments as well as citizen-led performance tracking tools.

PAPI has puts citizens at the heart of Viet Nam’s development. As ‘end users’ of public administration and public services they are fully capable of assessing the performance of the State and local authorities and supporting the State in establishing a State that is “of the people, by the people and for the people. It aims to benefit citizens, central and local governments, elected bodies, mass organisations, the media, and the international community in Viet Nam and abroad. To pursue that mandate, from 2009 to 2017, PAPI has evolved from a survey, dissemination and dialogue project to a development programme that encompasses three important pillars of a policy cycle: research, experiment and development (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: PAPI Programme’s Approach

Over the past 16 years, PAPI has contributed to improving local governance and promoting inclusive governance. After funding from the Government of Spain (2009-2010) and the Government of Switzerland (2011-2017), the PAPI project has been further funded by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Embassy of Ireland since 2018. With the support from Australia and Ireland, the programme has now expanded its work, leveraging data generated from the PAPI index to address different governance challenges through several initiatives such as the Citizen Powered Innovation Initiative, Gender Equity in Politics, and Person with Disability Inclusive Governance. Appendix 3 below summarizes the PAPI Programme’s Theory of Change, which illustrates how UNDP in Viet Nam works to convert inputs into activities and outputs, which in turn generate outcomes and impact at the national and local levels.

This Terms of Reference is designed to recruit one senior international expert on monitoring and evaluation to conduct the terminal evaluation together with one national expert in the same field. Among other tasks mentioned below, the Terminal Evaluation will assess the project’s alignment with the UNDP Viet Nam Country Programme Document 2022-2026, UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2026, and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (CF) 2022-2026 in Viet Nam. The evaluation is also in line with Viet Nam Country Office’s Evaluation Plan and UNDP’s evaluation policy.

PROJECT/OUTCOME INFORMATION

Project/outcome title	The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)
Quantum ID	00100002
Corporate outcome and output	CPD Output 3.2 [primary]: Improved mechanisms for promoting transparency, public participation, integrity, adaptability and accountability, including participation of women and other vulnerable groups CPD Output 3.4 [secondary]: Capacities strengthened to undertake legal, policy and institutional reforms to address

	structural barriers to gender equality and inclusion of persons with disability
Country	Viet Nam
Region	RBAP
Date project document signed	November 2017
Project dates	Start: November 2017 Planned end: December 2026
Project budget	USD 11,463,033
Funding source (2017-2026)	DFAT, Irish Aid
Implementing party	UNDP

The Programme during the period from 2017 and 2026 has been reviewed twice: in 2019 and 2023. Since the 2023 mid-term review, the programme has been in good progress despite important reprogramming made in the second half of 2025 due to Viet Nam's historic government restructuring and the withdrawal of the Central Vietnam Fatherland Front's facilitation role for PAPI surveys.

This terminal evaluation is planned to assess the results of the PAPI research and advocacy programme for the period from 2017-2026 against its Theory of Change, expected results and outputs and initial impact, and the extent to which UNDP in Viet Nam has followed up on the 2023 mid-term review recommendations. This evaluation also plays an important role in informing the expected next phase of the programme titled "Inclusive Governance Enhancement Programme" and currently under formulation with UNDP's core national partner, the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. Findings from the evaluation can support enhanced designed of the next phase in terms of how to level up PAPI's impact in Viet Nam's new ambitious middle-income development agenda towards 2030. More details on the programme can be found in Appendix 1 of this TOR.

2. Evaluation objectives and scope of work

As part of the CO's evaluation plan for 2025-2026, this terminal evaluation (TE) is being conducted to provide an assessment of the achievement of the PAPI programme's results, including gender responsiveness, and to draw lessons that can improve the sustainability of benefits from the PAPI Programme, contributing to Viet Nam's inclusive and citizen-centric governance and public services. Findings will also inform UNDP's review of its programmes for the period from 2022-2026 and UNDP's planning of its programmes for the period from 2027-2031.

2.1 Objectives

As required by UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and in agreement with the international donors for PAPI, the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Embassy of Ireland, this TE is being carried out in order to:

1. assess whether or not the PAPI Research and Advocacy Programme has delivered its outputs, results and outcomes in line with its Theory of Change; and,
2. provide recommendations to inform the next phase of the programme to leverage what the current PAPI Programme has delivered and what the next “Inclusive Governance Enhancement Programme” should cover substantively to enhance inclusive governance in Viet Nam’s 2026-2030 development and reform agendas, with a special focus on the effective implementation of the administrative reforms at subnational level.

2.2 Scope of work

The TE will review the PAPI research and advocacy programme from 2020-2025, with a focus on achievements and areas for improvement following the second mid-term review in 2023. The review will cover the programme’s contributions to the achievement of the expected project outputs and outcomes, using the four OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability. In addition, the TE will assess how the PAPI programme has addressed cross-cutting themes, including human rights, gender equality, and disability inclusion.

The recommendations in the TE report should be practical and action-oriented and inform the next phase of the programme from 2026 to 2031.

3. Evaluation criteria and key guiding questions

The TE should be rated in accordance with the following aspects:

- **Relevance:** Evaluate the logic and unity of the process in planning and designing the activities.
- **Efficiency:** Evaluate the efficiency of the project implementation, the quality of the results achieved and the time/political/other constraints.
- **Effectiveness:** Evaluate to which extent the project outputs are on track to be effectively achieved.
- **Impact:** Evaluate the impact of the project, as well as its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Sustainability and national ownership:** Assess the likelihood of results becoming sustainable with specific focus on national capacity and ownership over the process.
- **Agenda 2030, Anti-corruption, Human rights, Gender equality, Disability and Social Inclusion:** Assess relevant cross-cutting issues addressed through the intervention, i.e., gender equality, human rights, vulnerable/marginalized groups, leaving no one behind.

A preliminary list of guiding questions is listed below, which should be further refined by the consultant and agreed with UNDP.

Relevance/Coherence

- To what extent was the PAPI Research and Advocacy Programme in line with national development priorities, country programme outputs and outcomes, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and the SDGs?
- To what extent did the Programme contribute to the theory of change for the relevant country programme outcome?

- To what extent did the Programme contribute to gender equality (inclusive of men, women and LGBTIQ+ people), the empowerment of women, the inclusion of ethnic minorities, migrants and persons with disabilities, and the human rights-based approach in general?
- To what extent has the Programme been appropriately responsive to political, legal, economic, institutional, etc., changes in the country?
- To what extent were the objectives of the Programme design (inputs, activities, outputs and their indicators) and its theory of change logical and coherent?
- To what extent was the method of delivery under the Programme appropriate to the context?
- To what extent was the Programme able to address the needs identified by stakeholders?

Effectiveness

- To what extent did the Programme contribute to the country programme outcomes and outputs, the SDGs, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and national development priorities?
- To what extent were the Programme's outputs achieved, considering men, women, LGBTIQ+, ethnicity, persons with disabilities and migrants as the Programme's identified vulnerable groups?
- What factors have contributed to achieving, or not, intended country programme outputs and outcomes?
- What factors contributed to effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the Programme?
- In which areas does the Programme have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?
- In which areas does the Programme have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?
- What, if any, alternative strategies would have been more effective in achieving the project objectives?
- Are the Programme's objectives and outputs clear, practical and feasible within its frame? Do they clearly address all its identified vulnerable groups?
- To what extent have different stakeholders been involved in programme implementation?
- To what extent are programme management and implementation participatory, and is this participation of all vulnerable groups contributing towards achievement of the Programme's objectives?
- To what extent has the Programme contributed to gender equality (inclusive of men, women and LGBTIQ+ people), the empowerment of women, the inclusion of ethnic minorities, migrants and persons with disabilities, and the human rights-based approach in general?

Efficiency

- To what extent was the Programme's management structure as outlined in the Programme's document efficient in generating the expected results?

- To what extent have UNDP's programme/project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
- To what extent has there been an economical use of financial and human resources? Have resources (funds, male and female staff, time, expertise, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve outcomes?
- To what extent have resources been used efficiently? Have activities supporting the strategy been cost-effective?
- To what extent have the Programme's funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?
- To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by UNDP ensure effective and efficient project management?

Sustainability

- Are there any financial risks that may jeopardize the sustainability of the Programme's outputs affecting citizens and vulnerable groups?
- To what extent will financial and economic resources be available to sustain the benefits achieved by the Programme?
- Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize the sustainability of the Programme's outputs and the project contributions to country programme outputs and outcomes for the period from 2026-2030?
- Do the legal frameworks, policies and governance structures and processes within which the project operated pose risks that may jeopardize sustainability of the Programme's benefits?
- To what extent did UNDP actions pose an environmental threat to the sustainability of the Programme's outputs, possibly affecting project beneficiaries (especially vulnerable groups) in a negative way? What is the chance that the level of stakeholder ownership will be sufficient to allow for the Programme's benefits to be sustained?
- To what extent are lessons learned documented by UNDP's Programme team on a continual basis and shared with appropriate parties who could learn from the Programme?
- To what extent did UNDP interventions have well-designed and well-planned exit strategies which include a gender dimension?
- What could be potential new areas of work and innovative measures for sustaining the results?
- To what extent are policy and regulatory frameworks in place that will support the continuation of similar interventions in the future?
- To what extent do partnerships exist with other national institutions, NGOs, United Nations agencies, the private sector and other development partners to sustain the attained results?



Cross-Cutting Evaluation Issues – Agenda 2030, Human Rights, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

Overarching question:

- To what extent has the project contributed to advancing the Leave No One Behind agenda by improving the inclusion, participation, and well-being of populations considered vulnerable—such as people living below the poverty line, ethnic minorities, women, LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, and other marginalized or disadvantaged groups?

Human rights and social inclusion:

- How effectively has the project promoted equitable access to rights, services, and opportunities across different population groups?
- To what extent have project interventions addressed structural barriers and discrimination affecting vulnerable or marginalized populations?
- Were rights-holders (including women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ communities) meaningfully consulted and involved in project planning, implementation, and monitoring?

Gender equality:

- To what extent have gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls been integrated throughout project design, implementation, monitoring, and results?
- Has the gender marker assigned to the project accurately reflected its actual contribution to gender equality?
- What positive or unintended effects—by gender or social group—have emerged as a result of project interventions?

Disability inclusion:

- To what extent has the project adopted a twin-track approach to disability inclusion (mainstreaming disability considerations across activities while also supporting targeted actions)?
- What barriers did persons with disabilities face in accessing or benefiting from project activities, and how were these addressed?
- What proportion of beneficiaries were persons with disabilities, and how were their perspectives incorporated into decision-making processes?

Cross-sectoral integration:

- In what ways has the project applied an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to ensure coherence across Agenda 2030 priorities—particularly gender equality, human rights, disability inclusion, and social inclusion?
- What lessons can be drawn for improving intersectional approaches that jointly address these cross-cutting themes in future programming?

4. Methodology

This TE will adhere to the United Nations Evaluation Group's Norms & Standards, UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and UNDP Evaluation Policy.

It is proposed that the TE will be a participatory exercise considering the views and suggestions of a wide range of stakeholders within and outside the context of the PAPI Programme. Stakeholders' ownership of the findings, recommendations and follow up actions is seen as one of the key factors for ensuring commitment to project implementation in the later stage. A gender and human rights lens should be applied thoroughly during all stages of evaluation to duly address gender, disability, and human right issues.

The TE should employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and instruments. The evaluators are expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach that ensures close engagement with the evaluation managers, implementing partners and male and female direct beneficiaries. As part of the Inception report (1st deliverable), the evaluators should propose a work plan with detailed evaluation methodology. Suggested methodological tools and approaches include:

Document review:

- Project document (contribution agreement)
- Theory of change and results framework
- Programme and project quality assurance reports
- Annual workplans
- Activity designs
- Consolidated annual reports
- Results-oriented monitoring reports
- Minutes of advisory board meetings
- Technical/financial monitoring reports

Interviews and meetings with key stakeholders:

- Semi-structured interviews, based on questions designed for different stakeholders based on evaluation questions around relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.
- Key informant and focus group discussions with men and women, beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- All interviews with informants should be undertaken in full confidence and anonymity. The final evaluation report should not assign specific comments to individuals.
- Surveys and questionnaires including male and female participants in development programmes, UNCT members and/or surveys and questionnaires to other stakeholders at strategic and programmatic levels.
- Field visits and on-site validation of key tangible outputs and interventions.
- Other methods such as outcome mapping, observational visits, group discussions, etc.

- Data review and analysis of monitoring and other data sources and methods. To ensure maximum validity, reliability of data (quality) and promote use, the evaluation team will ensure triangulation of the various data sources.
- Gender and human rights lens. All evaluation products need to address gender, disability, and human right issues.

The final methodological approach including interview schedule, field visits and data to be used in the evaluation should be clearly outlined in the inception report and fully discussed and agreed between UNDP, key stakeholders and the evaluators.

5. Evaluation products (deliverables)

Expected deliverables of the TE evaluation team include:

Deliverables	Requirements	Timeline
1. TE inception report (10-15 pages)	TE inception report should be carried out following and based on preliminary discussions with UNDP after the desk review and should be produced before the evaluation starts (before any formal evaluation interviews, survey distribution or field visits) and prior to the country visit in the case of international evaluators.	15 December 2025
2. TE inception report debriefing	Key findings and recommendations from the TE inception report presented to the key stakeholders (half-day seminar to be convened by UNDP in Viet Nam)	By 30 December 2025
3. Draft TE report	The draft Report should be in English, maximum 60 pages (excluding annexes), including 2-3 pages of Executive Summary. The draft TE report should be concise, self-explanatory, evidence-based, and the recommendations therein should be clear, constructive and forward-looking.	By 15 February 2026
4. TE Audit Trail	The programme unit and key stakeholders shall review the draft evaluation report and provide an amalgamated set of comments. Comments and changes by the evaluator in response should be retained and documented in the Audit Trail.	By 10 March 2026
5. Final TE Report	The final TE Report should be in English, maximum 60 pages and include 3-4 pages of Executive Summary. The final TE report should be concise, self-explanatory and evidence-based, and the recommendations therein should be clear, constructive and forward-looking.	By 25 March 2026

6. Evaluation team composition and required competencies

The TE will be conducted by an independent consultant team consisting of one international consultant (team leader) and one national consultant (team member).

National consultant responsibilities:

- Assist the team leader in understanding the Vietnamese situation and context
- Fulfil evaluation tasks defined by and work under the supervision of the team leader
- Conduct field interviews in selected provinces
- Interpret for the team leader in stakeholder meetings with the Vietnamese informants when and where required
- Co-author the TE inception, draft and final report

International consultant responsibilities:

- Be responsible for overall implementation of the TE
- Develop an evidence-based review methodology and fine-tune key review questions
- Allocate tasks to the national consultant (team member). Supervise and guide the national consultant in implementation of specific tasks
- Analyze collected data and information
- Write and finalize the evaluation report (including the TE Audit Trail)
- Present report findings at a stakeholder consultation meeting online/in person, and the final presentation workshop in person

During the evaluation process the consultant team will work independently and self-sufficiently in organization, logistics and arrangements of meetings with stakeholders and counterparts.

7. Tentative time frame for the evaluation process

The TE will take place from November 2025 to March 2026 with a total number of person-days of 45 for each consultant.

Activity	Est. Days	Expected Outputs	Responsible
Desk Review	5 person-days (max)	Initial briefing with UNDP; Notes with elaborated questions and interview schedules; Inception Report	Evaluation Team
Interviews with relevant stakeholders	15 person-days	Suggested and expanded sample of informants; Informants met for data and information inputs	Evaluation Team
TE Report Drafting and Validation	15 person-days	Drafting initial TE report; Briefing of initial TE findings and	Evaluation Team

		recommendations to key stakeholders (half-day seminar)	
Finalizing the TE Report	10 person-days	Final report in English (max. 60 pages, excluding annexes) including executive summary (max 4 pages)	Evaluation Team
Total	45 person-days per consultant		

UNDP will provide the independent consultants team with an initial list of stakeholders to meet. It will be the responsibility of the independent consultant to arrange meetings.

8. Duty Station and Expected Places of Travel

- Duty station: Ha Noi, Viet Nam
- Expected places of travels: One (01) province in the North (Tuyen Quang), one (01) province in the Center (Quang Tri) and one (01) province in the South (Ho Chi Minh City) with 04 days to be spent in each province including travel days.
- For the International Consultant: one (01) five-day mission to Ha Noi is expected for field study with the Viet Nam-based National Consultant.

9. Contract Payment

UNDP Viet Nam shall reimburse the Individual Contractors upon UNDP's satisfaction with expected deliverables. The payment shall be made in three instalments:

Sequence	Description	Indicative Dates	% of Payment
1st payment	Upon receipt and acceptance of Deliverables 1 & 2 (TE Inception Report)	30 December 2025	20% of total contract
2nd payment	Upon receipt and acceptance of Deliverables 3 & 4	10 March 2026	40% of total contract
Final payment	Upon receipt and acceptance of Deliverable 5	25 March 2026	40% of total contract

10. Support from UNDP and reference documents

UNDP Viet Nam will provide the evaluation team with the following materials:

- Background information about the PAPI (available at <http://papi.org.vn/eng/faq>)
- 2011-2024 PAPI reports (available at <http://papi.org.vn/eng/documents-and-data-download>)

- 2011-2024 PAPI thematic reports (available at <https://papi.org.vn/eng/thematic-research-reports/>)
- PAPI initiatives (available at <https://papi.org.vn/eng/sang-kien-papi/>)
- An initial list of stakeholders for the team to arrange meetings and interviews (see Appendix 2)
- 2023 Mid-Term Review Report
- Substantive inputs in and quality control of deliverables
- Office space for meetings and working sessions when needed
- When requested, arrangement of introduction letters and/or requests for meetings/interviews
- Any other substantive support where deemed appropriate

11. Provision of monitoring and progress controls

- UNDP Viet Nam shall be responsible for quality control of the deliverables.
- The TE team members will report to the Evaluation Manager, who is the Planning, M&E Analyst, UNDP Viet Nam.
- The TE team members will work in close collaboration with the UNDP Viet Nam Policy and Programme Analyst, who is the PAPI research project manager and team leader.

12. Criteria for selection

#	Evaluation Criteria for the National Evaluator	Max Points
1	Postgraduate degree in political science, economics, development studies, or a related discipline. [Master's degree: 140; PhD degree: 200]	200
2	At least 10 years of experience in conducting applied research, project monitoring and evaluation in areas of governance and public administration reforms [105 points for 10 years, 5 points for each additional year, up to 45 points]	150
	Strong experience in qualitative and/or quantitative analysis as shown in previous similar review assignments (with bibliography in CV)	100
	Experience working/conducting project evaluation in Viet Nam is an advantage	50
3	Demonstrated experience in project management and implementation, especially in project monitoring and evaluation	300
4	A strong record of past authored/co-authored review reports/publications, with two examples included in the submission dossier	200



	Total	1,000
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13. Evaluation ethics

This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG ‘Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation’. The consultant must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The consultant must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses with the express authorization of UNDP and partners.

Annex II: PAPI's Results Framework

Output Statement	Output Indicator	Data Source	Baseline (2017)		Target	Cumulative Result	Annual Results	Status at the Time of Evaluation	Means of Verification
			Value	Year	June 2026	2025	2025		
THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- Standardized robust and objective methodology set forth for PAPI further refined and followed upon for PAPI by end of May	Minutes on refined methodology	1	Every year	9	8	0	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Annual PAPI Reports
	- Fieldwork for PAPI completed in all 63 provinces by December	PAPI Dataset	1	Every year	8	7	0	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Annual PAPI Datasets
	- Total number of randomly selected respondents from various demographic backgrounds across Viet Nam interviewed face-to-face	PAPI Dataset	14,063	Every year	125,000	113,614	0	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Annual PAPI Datasets
	- Dataset for PAPI finalized for analysis by mid-December	Verified PAPI Dataset	1	Every year	8	7	0	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Cleaned PAPI datasets for analysis
	- Initial analysis of PAPI data carried out in the second half of December for further writing up of PAPI report in following year January and February of the following year	PAPI Data	1	Every year	8	7	0	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Presentations at National Advisory Board Meetings
	- PAPI data analyzed by PAPI research team members by February of the following year	PAPI Data and other references	1	Every year	9	7	0	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Drafting Reports
	- Final PAPI Report completed, validated with the National Advisory Board by February of the following year	PAPI Data and other references	1	Every year	9	7	1	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Minutes of Advisory Board Meetings
	- National launching event to disseminate latest PAPI findings by March/April of the following year	PAPI Data and Reports	1	Every year	9	8	1	Completed for 2024-2025 cycle; not initiated for 2025	Launching Events
	- Regional/provincial dissemination workshops to disseminate PAPI findings	PAPI Data and Reports	10	Every year	80	125	8	Below the target of 10 due to local	Media news & Mission Account

Output Statement	Output Indicator	Data Source	Baseline (2017)	Target	Cumulative Result	Annual Results	Status at the Time of Evaluation	Means of Verification	
	convened for further policy dialogues with provinces after PAPI findings are launched each year						administrative reorganisation		
	- Total number of participants who are public officials and civil servants in hybrid diagnostic workshops to disseminate PAPI findings each year (estimated average)	Activity Reports/Provincial reports	1,000	Every year	25,000	56,550	2,200	Exceeding target	Media news & Mission Account
	- PAPI findings and data used at the central level for policy monitoring purposes (e.g., in Government's indexes) throughout the year	Media coverage and Government reports	1	Every year	9	9	2	Exceeding target	Regulation 365 on KPIs, MAE's PEPI
	- A series of case studies on good and poor performers for peer learning throughout the year using time-series data	Case study reports	3	Every year	27	63	15	Exceeding target	Published at https://papi.org.vn/eng/thematic-research-reports/
PAPI-BASED INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE PROMOTED THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH & LOCAL INITIATIVES (under Outputs 3 and 5)	- Thematic research studies on inclusive governance, citizen participation, persons with disabilities, gender equity based on PAPI findings	Published reports	3	Every year	27	32	11	Exceeding target	Published at https://papi.org.vn/eng/thematic-research-reports/
	- Policy Briefs submitted to the National Assembly for delegates' reference and discussion		3	Every Year	24	30	6	Exceeding target	
	- Central and provincial initiatives on citizen engagement and public services	Number of local initiatives supported	2	Every year from 2021	10	9	2	On track	Shared for upscaling at https://papi.org.vn/eng/sang-kien-papi/
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF PAPI-RELATED	- PAPI and thematic research findings on inclusive governance, citizen participation, persons with disabilities, gender equity	Media coverage of research findings	100	Every year	700	3,500	250	Exceeding target	Rounded, reflected through media clipping documents for

Output Statement	Output Indicator	Data Source	Baseline (2017)	Target	Cumulative Result	Annual Results	Status at the Time of Evaluation	Means of Verification	
OUTPUTS (under Outputs 1-5)	using PAPI widely communicated							each event posted on www.papi.org.vn/eng	
	- Thematic research advocacy events on inclusive governance, citizen participation, persons with disabilities, gender equity using PAPI	Dissemination and advocacy events	3	Every year from 2019	21	52	16	Exceeding target	Published at https://papi.org.vn/eng/thematic-research-reports/
	- www.papi.org.vn website updated and maintained regularly throughout PAPI iterations	The website	Once	Every year	10 Times	9 Times	10 Times	Meeting target	www.papi.org.vn

Annex III: List of Evaluation Participants and Consulted Documents

Consulted Documents

1. Lessons for Viet Nam's Two-Tier Government System: Trends and Implications from 16 Years of PAPI (2010–2025)
2. Terms of Reference: National Consultant for PAPI Terminal Evaluation
3. Project Document – The Viet Nam Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)
4. PAPI Annual Progress Report – 2024 Progress Report
5. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #40 – June 2024
6. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #39 – April 2024
7. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #41 – September 2024
8. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #42 – December 2024
9. UNDP Viet Nam – 2024 Annual Work Plan: The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI), Revision 01
10. UNDP – Project Annual Work Plan and Budget 2025: The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)
11. UNDP – Project Annual Work Plan and Budget 2025: The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI), Revision 02
12. PAPI Annual Progress Report – 2025 Progress Report (Final Draft)
13. UNDP's Reprogrammed Activities for the Period from September 2025 to June 2026 Using Planned Budget of 890,000 USD for 2025 PAPI Survey Cycle
14. 16 Years of Viet Nam's Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI): Listening to Vietnamese Citizens' Voices from 2009–2025
15. List of Official Documents Referring to PAPI in 2024 & 2025
16. List of Policy Research Papers and Advocacy One Pagers – PAR & AC (PAT, 2008–2017) & GPT (2018–2020)
17. 16 Years of Listening to the Voices of Vietnamese Citizens: Considerations for a Modern State
18. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #43 – April 2025
19. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #44 – June 2025
20. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #45 – September 2025
21. PAPI Bulletin, Issue #46 – December 2025
22. Engaging Youth to Future-Proof Viet Nam's Public Sector
23. Policy Brief: Lessons for Viet Nam's Two-Tier Government System: Trends and Anticipation from 16 Years of PAPI (2010–2025)
24. Equal Political Participation: Ensuring the Rights to Vote and Stand for Election of Persons with Disabilities in Viet Nam
25. Promoting Women's Participation in Leadership and Management Positions in Viet Nam's Political System and Public Administration at All Levels
26. Summary Report: Local Budget Disclosure in the Context of Administrative Boundary Rearrangement in 2025
27. Executive Summary: Impact of Extreme Weather on Outdoor Workers in Hanoi & Suggested Responses
28. Developing a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) System in the Public Sector: International Experience and Recommendations for Viet Nam

29. Local Budget Disclosure in the Context of Administrative Boundary Rearrangement in 2025
30. Supporting Evidence-based Public Sector Innovation and Digital Transformation in Viet Nam
31. Promoting Women's Participation in Leadership and Management Positions in Viet Nam's Political System and Public Administration at All Levels (VLLF Article)
32. Citizen Perspectives: Experiences and Responses to Climate Resilience in Viet Nam's Major Cities
33. The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index: Official Launch – Measuring Citizens' Experiences, 2024
34. Citizens' Expectations of Government Responses to Climate-Linked Disasters
35. 2024 PAPI Provincial Indicators – 34 Provinces
36. Inclusive Governance Enhancement Programme (PAPI Phase II – PAPI 2.0) – Project Document

List of Evaluation Participants

The following are the organizations and entities engaged in the evaluation process. The names of the individuals representing each institution have been omitted due to sensitivity issues and also due to a requirement of the evaluation ToR for anonymity.

Stakeholder Category	Organization / Entity	Method
National-Level Agencies	Department of Social Affairs, Office of the National Assembly	Semi-structured interview
	Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA)	Semi-structured interviews
Provincial-Level Agencies	Department of Home Affairs / Centre for Public Administrative Services, Tuyen Quang	Semi-structured interview
	Department of Home Affairs / Centre for Public Administrative Services, Quang Tri	Semi-structured interview
Think Tanks and Civil Society	People Participation Working Group (PPWG) / ECUE	Semi-structured interview
	Centre for Community Support Development Studies (CECODES)	Semi-structured interview
	Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development	Semi-structured interview
	Viet Nam Center for Economic and Strategic Studies (VESS)	Semi-structured interview
	Vietnam Federation on Disability (VFD)	Semi-structured interview
	Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI)	Semi-structured interview
	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)	Semi-structured interview
Donors and International Organizations	Australian Embassy (DFAT)	Semi-structured interview
	Embassy of Ireland (Irish Aid)	Semi-structured interview
	UN Resident Coordinator's Office	Semi-structured interview

	World Bank	Semi-structured interview
UNDP	PAPI National Advisory Board members	Online survey
	PAPI Project Team	Semi-structured interviews
	PAPI Project Experts	Semi-structured interviews
	UNDP Country Office Senior Management	Semi-structured interview

Field Visit Itinerary

As part of the data collection phase, the national evaluator undertook two field visits to observe PAPI's Citizen-Powered Innovation Initiatives (CPII) in remote and ethnic minority communes. The visits were designed to generate first-hand evidence of the project's sub-national digital inclusion work and its reach into some of Viet Nam's most underserved communities. Both visits combined workshop attendance and direct observation with semi-structured interviews of commune-level and provincial-level stakeholders. The table below summarizes the dates, locations, purpose, methods, and stakeholder categories consulted during each visit.

Date	Province	Commune(s) visited	Purpose	Methods	Stakeholders consulted
December 2025	Tuyen Quang (formerly Ha Giang, following the 2025 administrative merger)	Yen Minh	Observe implementation of CPII Phase II on improving access to public administrative services for remote and ethnic minority communities	Attendance at the closing workshop of CPII Phase II; direct observation of commune officials and village digital teams assisting residents with online administrative procedures; semi-structured interviews at the commune level	Provincial officials; commune leaders from poor, predominantly ethnic minority communes; commune-level staff in Yen Minh
January 2026	Quang Tri	Khe Sanh; Dakrong	Observe CPII training delivery to commune officials and village teams in remote ethnic minority communes	Direct observation of training delivered by the Provincial Public Administrative Service Centre to commune officials and	Leadership of the Provincial Public Administrative Service Centre; centre implementing staff; commune officials and

				village teams; semi-structured interviews with centre leadership and implementing staff	village teams from Khe Sanh and Dakrong
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The two field visits together generated direct evidence on three aspects of PAPI's sub-national work - the operational feasibility of citizen-centered digital service delivery in resource-constrained ethnic minority communes; the institutional arrangements through which provincial centers support commune-level implementation; and the perspectives of frontline officials on the sustainability of the CPII model under the new administrative architecture.

Annex IV: SMART Analysis of Results Framework

Output Area 1: The PAPI Survey and Report Production Cycle

#	Indicator	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound	Overall	Key Issues
1	Standardised methodology refined and followed by end of May	Strong. Defines a specific deliverable (refined methodology) with a clear deadline (May).	Weak. Measured as a binary count (baseline=1, target=every year). No measure of the scope or significance of refinements made.	Met in 2018–2024. Not initiated for 2025 due to survey cancellation, making the annual target unachievable.	High. Methodology refinement is foundational to the entire PAPI production cycle.	Strong. “By end of May” is a clear annual deadline tied to the fieldwork calendar.	Adequate	Binary counting (yes/no) does not capture quality or depth of refinement. No contingency for years when survey is not conducted.
2	Fieldwork completed in all 63 provinces by December	Strong. Defines geographic scope (63 provinces) and deadline (December).	Strong. Province count is verifiable against field mission records.	Achieved 61/63 in 2024. Unachievable in 2025 (survey cancelled). The 63-province target is now obsolete following the reduction to 34 provinces.	High. National coverage is central to PAPI’s mandate.	Strong. December deadline is clear.	Outdated	Not updated to reflect the shift from 63 to 34 provinces. No threshold defined for acceptable partial coverage (e.g., 61 counted as achieved?).
3	Total number of randomly selected respondents interviewed face-to-face	Strong. Specifies the method (face-to-face), sampling (random), and demographic diversity.	Strong. Respondent count is precisely verifiable from datasets. Baseline of 14,063 and cumulative target of 125,000 are quantified.	Cumulative 113,614 against a target of 125,000 by June 2026. The 11,386 shortfall cannot be closed without a 2025 or early 2026 survey of comparable scale. Target is now unachievable.	High. Sample size directly determines the statistical power and representativeness of PAPI data.	Annual periodicity is clear, but the cumulative target assumed uninterrupted annual surveys.	Strong design, unachievable target	Cumulative target did not account for potential survey interruptions. No provision for adjusting the target when one cycle is missed.

#	Indicator	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound	Overall	Key Issues
4	Dataset for PAPI finalised for analysis by mid-December	Moderate. “Finalised” is not defined—does it mean cleaned, weighted, or simply compiled?	Weak. Binary (done/not done). No quality metric for the dataset.	Met annually 2018–2024. Not applicable in 2025.	High. A finalised dataset is a prerequisite for analysis and reporting.	Strong. Mid-December is a clear milestone.	Adequate but underspecified	No quality dimension. “Finalised” could mean different things depending on interpretation.
5	Initial analysis of PAPI data carried out in the second half of December	Weak. “Initial analysis” is vague—no specification of what this analysis entails or its expected outputs.	Weak. Binary completion check. No standard for what constitutes adequate initial analysis.	Met annually when surveys were conducted. Not applicable in 2025.	Moderate. This is a process step rather than a substantive output.	Moderate. “Second half of December” is approximate rather than a fixed date.	Weak	Process indicator with no quality or content specification. Adds little evaluative value beyond confirming the team followed the production schedule.
6	PAPI data analysed by research team by February of following year	Weak. Overlaps with indicator 5. Does not specify how “analysed” differs from “initial analysis.”	Weak. Binary completion check.	Met annually when surveys were conducted.	Low as a standalone indicator. Duplicates indicator 5 without adding distinct information.	Strong. February deadline is clear.	Redundant	Near-duplicate of indicator 5. The distinction between “initial analysis” (Dec) and “analysis” (Feb) is not operationally meaningful in monitoring terms.

Output Area 1 (continued): The PAPI Survey and Report Production Cycle

#	Indicator	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound	Overall	Key Issues
7	Final PAPI Report completed, validated with Advisory Board by February	Strong. Specifies both the product (final report) and the validation mechanism (Advisory Board).	Moderate. Report completion is binary, but Advisory Board minutes provide verifiable evidence.	Met in most years. In 2025, the 2024 report was validated despite delays.	High. The validated report is the Programme's flagship annual output.	Strong. February deadline is clear, though actual launches have sometimes slipped to March/April.	Strong	No quality dimension for the report itself. Occasional slippage from February to April is not reflected in the target.
8	National launching event to disseminate latest PAPI findings by March/April	Strong. A discrete, observable event with a defined purpose.	Moderate. Binary (held/not held). No metric for attendance, media coverage, or stakeholder engagement at the event.	Met in 8 of 9 cycles. The 2024 report launch occurred in April 2025.	High. The launch is the primary dissemination mechanism.	Strong. March/April window is clear.	Adequate	No quality or reach dimension. A poorly attended launch and a high-impact launch both count equally.
9	Regional/provincial dissemination workshops convened after PAPI launch each year	Moderate. "Regional/provincial" is broad. Target of 10 per year does not specify geographic distribution.	Strong. Workshop count is verifiable. Cumulative result of 125 against target of 80 is clearly tracked.	Exceeded in all years except 2025 (8 against a target of 10, attributed to administrative reorganisation).	High. Workshops are the primary mechanism for provincial-level engagement with PAPI findings.	Moderate. "After PAPI launch each year" is clear but open-ended on completion deadline.	Strong	Target of 10/year was conservative; actual delivery averaged ~18/year. Target was never recalibrated upward.
10	Total participants (public officials/civil servants) in diagnostic workshops each year	Moderate. Specifies the target audience (public officials and civil servants) but uses "estimated average" qualifier.	Moderate. Participant counts are reported but the "estimated" qualifier reduces precision. Verification depends on provincial reporting.	Massively exceeded: 56,550 cumulative against a target of 25,000. The 2025 figure of 2,200 still shows engagement despite reduced workshops.	High. Participation by public officials is a direct measure of PAPI's reach into the civil service.	Weak. No annual sub-target beyond the implied 1,000/year baseline.	Adequate but poorly calibrated	Target exceeded by 126%. Either the target was unrealistically low or the counting methodology is loose. The "estimated average" qualifier undermines precision.
11	PAPI findings and data used at the central level for policy monitoring purposes	Weak. "Used" is undefined. No threshold distinguishes incidental reference from substantive integration.	Weak. Counted as a binary annual occurrence (baseline=1). Cumulative 9/9	Met every year, including 2 instances in 2025 (Regulation 365, MAE's PEPI).	High in principle—central-level policy uptake is the strongest evidence of PAPI's	Weak. "Throughout the year" has no deadline.	Poorly designed	The most important indicator in the framework is also the least well-specified. Formal inclusion in Politburo Regulation 365

#	Indicator	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound	Overall	Key Issues
			suggests it is counted whenever any central-level use is identified, regardless of depth.		influence. But the indicator does not capture the significance of that uptake.			is a transformative achievement, but it scores the same as a passing citation in a ministry report.
12	Case studies on good and poor performers for peer learning using time-series data	Moderate. Specifies the purpose (peer learning) and the data basis (time-series), but does not define scope, length, or quality standards.	Strong. Case study count is verifiable from publications on papi.org.vn. Cumulative 63 against target of 27.	Exceeded by 133%. In 2025, 15 case studies were produced despite the disrupted operating environment.	High. Case studies translate PAPI data into actionable provincial learning.	Moderate. “Throughout the year” is open-ended.	Adequate but poorly calibrated	Target of 3/year was far too low given actual production capacity. The 63 vs. 27 gap suggests the target was not informed by a realistic assessment of the Programme’s research output.

Output Area 2: PAPI-Based Inclusive Governance Research and Local Initiatives

#	Indicator	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound	Overall	Key Issues
13	Thematic research studies on inclusive governance, citizen participation, PWDs, gender equity	Moderate. Specifies thematic scope but does not define minimum standards for what constitutes a “study.”	Strong. Published report count is verifiable. Cumulative 32 against target of 27.	Exceeded. In 2025, 11 studies were produced—the highest annual figure—despite the challenging environment.	High. Thematic research extends PAPI’s value beyond the annual index into policy-relevant analysis.	Moderate. Annual target of 3 is clear but “every year” does not specify within-year deadlines.	Strong	No quality dimension. A brief scoping paper and a comprehensive multi-method study count equally.
14	Policy Briefs submitted to the National Assembly for delegates’ reference	Strong. Specifies the product (policy briefs), the recipient (National Assembly), and the purpose (delegates’ reference).	Strong. Submission count is verifiable. Cumulative 30 against target of 24.	Exceeded. In 2025, 6 briefs were submitted.	High. Direct engagement with the National Assembly is a primary advocacy channel.	Moderate. “Every year” but no deadline within the year.	Strong	No measure of whether briefs were read, discussed, or acted upon. The indicator tracks supply to the Assembly, not uptake by delegates.
15	Central and provincial initiatives on citizen engagement and public services	Weak. “Initiatives” is broad and undefined. Does not specify what type of initiative counts, or the expected scale.	Moderate. Initiative count is tracked (cumulative 9 against target of 10). But “supported” is not defined.	Slightly below target: 9 of 10, with 2 in 2025. On track for June 2026.	High. Local initiatives translate PAPI evidence into practical service improvements.	Moderate. “Every year from 2021” is clear on start date but not on annual delivery schedule.	Adequate but vague	The indicator covers a diverse portfolio (Ha Giang e-services, Quang Tri digitisation, budget transparency monitoring) under a single count. No quality or impact dimension.

Output Area 3: Effective Communication of PAPI-Related Outputs

#	Indicator	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound	Overall	Key Issues
16	PAPI and thematic research findings widely communicated (media coverage)	Weak. “Widely communicated” is subjective. The quantified proxy (media items) conflates volume with reach and quality.	Moderate. Media item count is tracked (cumulative 3,500 against target of 700). But counting methodology may vary across years.	Massively exceeded: 3,500 vs. 700 (400% overachievement).	Moderate. Media coverage is one proxy for visibility, but volume alone does not indicate whether target audiences were reached or messages absorbed.	Weak. “Every year” with no within-year milestone.	Poorly calibrated	Target of 100/year (700 cumulative) was set far below actual media engagement. At 3,500 cumulative items, the target has no diagnostic value. No distinction between national media, provincial media, online, and print.

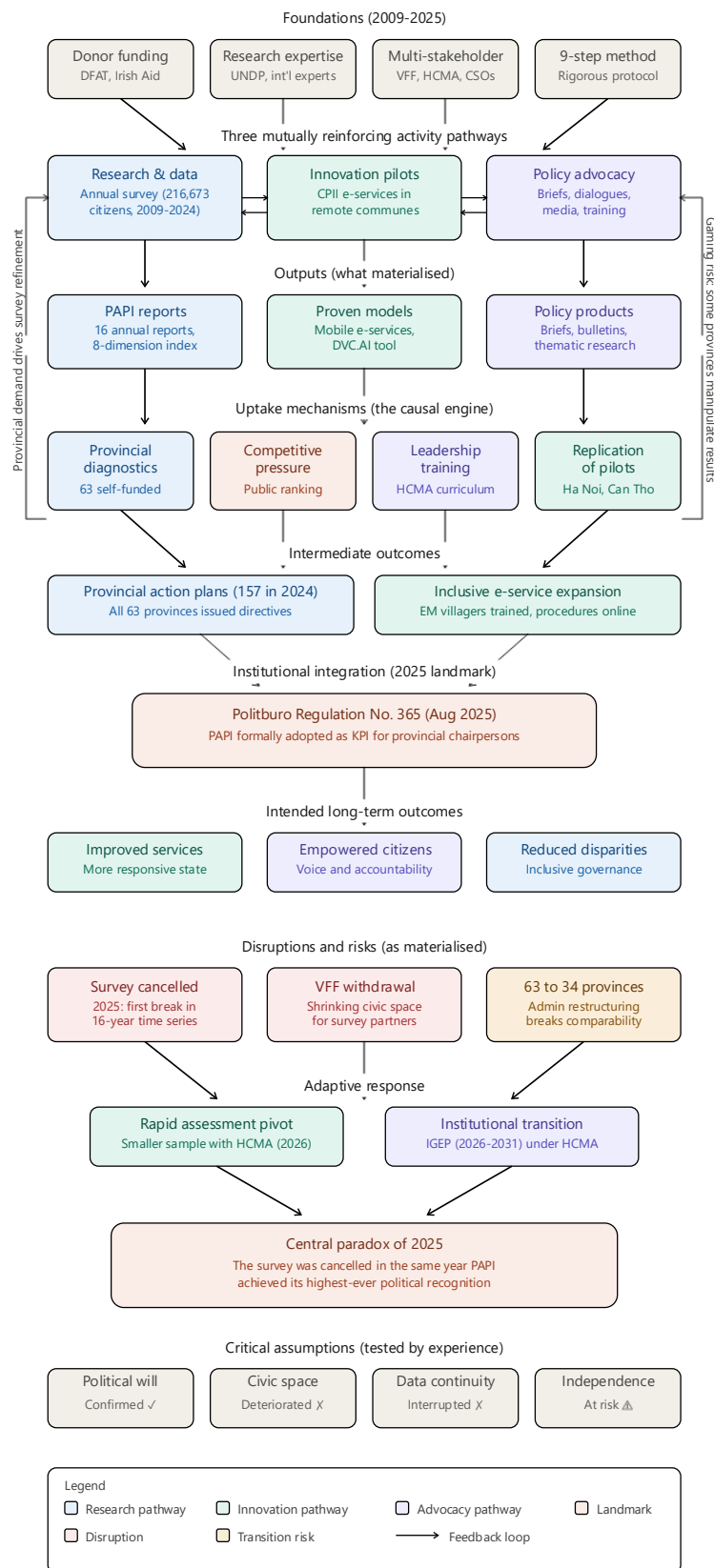
#	Indicator	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound	Overall	Key Issues
17	Thematic research advocacy events on inclusive governance	Moderate. Specifies the type of activity (dissemination and advocacy events) and thematic focus.	Strong. Event count is verifiable. Cumulative 52 against target of 21.	Exceeded by 148%. In 2025, 16 events were held.	High. Advocacy events are a direct channel for translating research into policy engagement.	Moderate. “Every year from 2019” but no within-year schedule.	Adequate but poorly calibrated	Target of 3/year was far too low. The Programme consistently delivered 5–16 events per year. The target provides no performance management function at this level of overachievement.
18	www.papi.org.vn website updated and maintained regularly	Weak. “Updated and maintained regularly” is subjective. No specification of update frequency or content standards.	Weak. Counted as a binary annual occurrence (“1 time/year”). Cumulative “10 times” in “9 times” simply confirms the site was maintained each year.	Met every year.	Moderate. The website is an important dissemination platform, but this indicator captures existence rather than utility.	Weak. “Regularly throughout PAPI iterations” is imprecise.	Weak	No traffic, user engagement, or content quality metric. Confirms the website existed and was updated, without indicating whether it served its intended audience effectively.

Annex V: Budget Execution

No.	Output Area	Budgeted (as per ProDoc)	Spent	Execution Rate
Year 2018				
1	Output 1	\$644,592	\$693,510	108%
2	Output 2	\$58,000	\$19,446	34%
3	Output 3	\$12,000	\$13,336	111%
4	Output 4	\$28,000	\$28,169	101%
5	Output 5	\$54,000	\$39,265	73%
6	Management & Auditing	\$166,563	\$119,858	72%
7	Total	\$963,155	\$913,583	95%
Year 2019				
1	Output 1	\$750,000	\$721,217	96%
2	Output 2	\$42,000	\$23,247	55%
3	Output 3	\$50,000	\$42,489	85%
4	Output 4	\$60,000	\$32,645	54%
5	Output 5	\$72,350	\$44,389	61%
6	Management	\$76,960	\$71,960	94%
7	Total	\$1,051,310	\$935,947	89%
Year 2020				
1	Output 1	\$719,628	\$691,225	96%
2	Output 2	\$31,250	\$25,107	80%
3	Output 3	\$32,500	\$23,498	72%
4	Output 4	\$40,875	\$43,793	107%
5	Output 5	\$160,875	\$156,627	97%
6	Management & Auditing	\$91,521	\$87,359	95%
7	Total	\$1,076,649	\$1,027,609	95%
Year 2021				
1	Output 1	\$650,758	\$658,592	101%
2	Output 2	\$235,250	\$219,808	93%
3	Output 3	\$50,520	\$43,468	86%
4	Output 4	\$47,340	\$45,475	96%
5	Output 5	\$170,760	\$166,134	97%
6	Management & Auditing	\$107,373	\$92,326	86%
7	Total	\$1,262,001	\$1,225,803	97%
Year 2022				
1	Output 1	\$900,000	\$878,765	98%
2	Output 2	\$237,828	\$201,190	85%
3	Output 3	\$96,721	\$76,502	79%
4	Output 4	\$45,000	\$42,590	95%
5	Output 5	\$522,609	\$561,618	107%
6	Management & Auditing	\$144,173	\$132,074	92%
7	Total	\$1,946,331	\$1,892,739	97%

No.	Output Area	Budgeted (as per ProDoc)	Spent	Execution Rate
Year 2023				
1	Output 1	\$850,000	\$826,127	97%
2	Output 2	\$227,000	\$191,312	84%
3	Output 3	\$104,367	\$100,834	97%
4	Output 4	\$56,320	\$53,678	95%
5	Output 5	\$774,350	\$738,767	95%
6	Evaluation (Mid-term)	\$25,000	\$25,389	102%
7	Management & Auditing	\$162,963	\$137,664	84%
8	Total	\$2,200,000	\$2,073,771	94%
Year 2024				
1	Output 1	\$870,000	\$789,484	91%
2	Output 2	\$231,832	\$225,884	97%
3	Output 3	\$116,700	\$112,853	97%
4	Output 4	\$51,100	\$49,551	97%
5	Output 5	\$661,000	\$682,911	103%
6	Management & Auditing	\$154,451	\$154,808	100%
7	Total	\$2,085,083	\$2,015,491	97%
Year 2025				
1	Output 1	\$327,737	\$324,808	99%
2	Output 2	\$88,943	\$85,343	96%
3	Output 3	\$166,500	\$117,339	70%
4	Output 4	\$25,440	\$24,710	97%
5	Output 5	\$699,280	\$491,444	70%
6	Evaluation (Final)	\$40,000	\$46,109	115%
7	Management & Auditing	\$108,117	\$80,522	74%
8	Total	\$1,456,017	\$1,170,275	80%
ALL YEARS				
1	Output 1	\$5,712,715	\$5,583,728	98%
2	Output 2	\$1,152,103	\$991,337	86%
3	Output 3	\$629,308	\$530,319	84%
4	Output 4	\$354,075	\$320,611	91%
5	Output 5	\$3,115,224	\$2,881,155	92%
6	Evaluation (Mid-term and Final)	\$65,000	\$71,498	110%
7	Management	\$1,012,121	\$876,570	87%
8	Total	\$12,040,546	\$11,255,218	93%

Annex VI: Reconstructed Theory of Change



Main Logic

PAPI began with a straightforward proposition: if you systematically measure citizen experiences with local governance across all provinces, make the results public, and rank provinces comparatively, this will generate both a diagnostic function (telling provinces where they are underperforming) and a competitive incentive (motivating provincial leaders to improve their standing). The necessary conditions were donor financing from DFAT and Irish Aid, international methodological expertise through UNDP, a multi-stakeholder partnership anchored by the VFF as the civil society bridge to citizens, and a rigorous 9-step research protocol that ensured credibility.

Three Mutually Reinforcing Pathways

In practice, PAPI evolved from a single-output survey project into a programme operating through three interconnected activity streams:

- The first pathway, research and data generation, was the original backbone. Over 16 annual survey rounds, 216,673 randomly selected citizens were interviewed face-to-face across all 63 provinces. The index expanded from six to eight governance dimensions as the national policy landscape evolved to encompass e-governance and environmental governance. This pathway produced the annual PAPI reports, the 16-year time series, and the comparative rankings that made the index consequential.
- The second pathway, innovation and experimentation, emerged organically from the diagnostic findings. When PAPI data revealed that citizens in ethnic minority and remote areas were being left behind by digital transformation, the programme did not merely report this; it initiated the Citizen-Powered Innovation Initiative (CPII) in Ha Giang (now Tuyen Quang) and Quang Tri provinces. These locally led pilots streamlined administrative procedures for the online environment, established village-level digitalization support teams, and brought mobile e-services directly to remote communities. The AI-powered DVC.AI tool was developed to assist disadvantaged users in navigating public service portals.
- The third pathway, policy advocacy and communication, amplified research findings into actionable policy influence. This stream operated through annual report launches attracting hundreds of senior officials, provincial diagnostic workshops, thematic policy briefs on land transparency, women's political representation, public sector innovation, and budget disclosure, journal articles, quarterly bulletins, and sustained media engagement. The advocacy function proved capable of operating independently of the survey cycle itself.

Causal Pathway: How Outputs Became Outcomes

The critical link between outputs and outcomes was not automatic. Four uptake mechanisms drove the causal chain in practice:

Provincial diagnostic workshops, which all 63 provinces eventually convened and self-funded, created the primary space where PAPI data was translated into administrative action. These workshops engaged tens of thousands of public officials and directly generated the 157 official action plans, directives, and resolutions issued in 2024 alone. The fact that provinces paid for these workshops themselves is an important indicator of perceived value and ownership.

Competitive pressure from public ranking, while sometimes generating incentive to invest in short term initiatives aiming to quickly improve relative ranking rather than substantive governance enhancement, on balance functioned as a powerful motivator. Provincial leaders were attentive to their comparative standing, and top leadership cited PAPI findings when engaging with provincial authorities.

Leadership training through the HCMA curriculum embedded PAPI methodology and findings into high-level professional development for the pool of 2021–2026 government executives, creating a cadre of senior officials socialized in evidence-based governance monitoring.

Replication of proven innovation models saw PAPI-piloted approaches in Tuyen Quang and Quang Tri inspire adoption in major urban centres (Ha Noi's 45-day digital transformation campaign across 126 communes) and other provinces (Can Tho, Cao Bang, Son La), demonstrating that locally led innovations could become national trends.

2025 Landmark: Institutional Integration

The key institutional outcome was the inclusion of PAPI in Politburo Regulation No. 365 in August 2025, formally designating it as one of the core indexes for evaluating the performance of Provincial People's Committee Chairpersons. This elevated PAPI from an externally-funded monitoring tool into an internal management instrument of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, creating a direct, formally mandated link between citizen satisfaction data and leadership evaluation. Alongside this, the General Secretary's directive toward a "digital dashboard" for tracking Party resolution implementation positioned PAPI as a foundational data source for the new governance architecture.

Disruptions That Tested the Theory

Three concurrent disruptions in 2025 tested the theory of change's resilience. The cancellation of the 2025 PAPI survey, the first break in 14 years, resulted from the VFF's exit as a survey partner combined with changes in the regulatory environment on international cooperation and non-state actors. The significant administrative restructuring, reducing 63 provinces to 34 and abolishing the district tier entirely, disrupted the longitudinal comparability of the 16-year data series and created enormous pressures on subnational governments. And the changes in the project's operating environment limited the operational modalities available to non-government partners.

Central Paradox

The most significant finding for the theory of change is that PAPI's highest-ever political achievement, Politburo Regulation No. 365, occurred in the same year its core operational instrument, the citizen survey, could not be conducted. This suggests that the programme's research and advocacy functions had become sufficiently embedded in institutional practice to generate transformative outcomes independently of the annual survey cycle. The 16 years of cumulative credibility-building, relationship development, and capacity investment had created an institutional momentum that survived the interruption of its foundational activity.

Assumptions Tested by Experience

The reconstructed theory of change identifies four critical assumptions, each tested differently over time. Sustained political will at the highest levels was confirmed, culminating in Regulation No. 365. The space for independent data collection evolved over time quite significantly, leading to the transition from a non-state to a state agency implementation framework. Data continuity, upon which the entire competitive ranking model depends, was interrupted by both the survey cancellation in 2025 and the administrative restructuring that renders pre-2025 provincial boundaries non-comparable. And methodological independence, a cornerstone of PAPI's credibility, must remain the cornerstone of the survey as it transition to the new partnership configuration and ownership, where the very institution training provincial leaders also administers the tool that evaluates them.

Implications for Design of New Programme

The reconstructed theory of change suggests that a future iteration of the PAPI project must preserve the three-pathway model rather than reverting to a survey-only design. The innovation and advocacy functions have proven their ability to generate autonomous impact, and the institutional integration achieved through Regulation No. 365 creates a new accountability architecture that the next phase must service. At the same time, the independence and integrity of the methodology and data collection processes will require careful institutional design, including external quality assurance mechanisms, to maintain and enhance the citizen-centric credibility that made PAPI consequential in the first place.

Annex VII: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators / Success Standards	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods / Tools
Relevance and Coherence	To what extent is the project aligned with national priorities, UNDP strategies, and the SDGs?	• Is the project consistent with national governance and development priorities? • Does it contribute to CPD outcomes and SDGs?	• Alignment explicitly reflected in design and workplans. • Stakeholders confirm relevance.	Project Document; AWP; APRs; national policies; CPD.	Desk Review; KII.
	To what extent is the project design coherent and logically articulated?	• Is the results chain clear and realistic? • Are the underlying assumptions valid?	• Clear logic between inputs, outputs, and outcomes. • Stakeholder agreement on coherence.	Project Document; design notes; APRs.	Desk Review; KII.
	To what extent has the project adapted to contextual changes?	• Has the project adjusted to institutional, political, or administrative changes?	• Evidence of documented adaptations or revisions.	AWP; APRs; internal memos.	Desk Review; KII.
	To what extent has the project integrated inclusion and human rights?	• Were vulnerable groups considered in design and implementation?	• Measures addressing gender, disability, ethnicity, migrants, LGBTIQ+ persons.	Project Document; thematic papers; APRs.	Desk Review; KII; Survey.
Effectiveness	To what extent has the project achieved its intended outputs and contributed to outcomes?	• Which outputs were achieved? • How were vulnerable groups affected?	• Achievement against output indicators. • Evidence of use of PAPI findings.	APRs; analytical papers; dissemination data.	Desk Review; KII; Survey; Field Visit.
	What factors supported or hindered achievement?	• Were there operational, contextual, or partnership constraints?	• Stakeholder identification of enabling and limiting factors.	APRs; stakeholder accounts.	KII; Field Visit.
	How effective were implementation strategies and partnerships?	• Did partnerships contribute to results?	• Quality, frequency, and effectiveness of collaboration.	APRs; meeting records; partner notes.	KII; Survey.
	How well did the project engage vulnerable groups?	• Were groups consulted or reached meaningfully?	• Evidence of targeted or mainstreamed approaches.	Reports; thematic studies.	Desk Review; KII; Survey.

Efficiency	To what extent was project delivery timely and cost-effective?	• Were activities delivered as planned? • Were resources used economically?	• Budget execution rates. • Timeliness of outputs.	Financial reports; APRs; AWP.	Desk Review; KII.
	Were management arrangements efficient?	• Were roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms functional?	• Stakeholder feedback on management effectiveness.	Project Document; meeting records.	KII; Desk Review.
	To what extent did M&E support efficient management?	• Was monitoring data timely, reliable, and used for decision-making?	• Availability and quality of monitoring information.	APRs; monitoring records.	Desk Review; KII.
Sustainability	What is the likelihood that results will be sustained?	• Are financial, institutional, and political conditions in place?	• Evidence of counterpart commitment. • Institutional integration of PAPI use.	National policies; APRs; stakeholder feedback.	Desk Review; KII; Field Visit.
	What risks may affect sustainability?	• Are there financial, political, or institutional risks that could undermine benefits?	• Risks identified in documentation and consultations.	APRs; risk logs.	Desk Review; KII.
	How strong is stakeholder ownership?	• Are key actors willing and able to maintain project benefits?	• Expressions of commitment from national and provincial actors.	Government consultations; APRs.	KII; Survey; Field Visit.
Cross-cutting Issues	To what extent has the project promoted inclusion and equitable access?	• Were barriers faced by vulnerable groups addressed?	• Evidence of inclusive measures in outputs and activities.	Project Document; thematic studies; APRs.	Desk Review; KII; Survey.
	Were rights-holders meaningfully engaged?	• Did women, minorities, persons with disabilities, migrants, and LGBTIQ+ persons participate?	• Stakeholder accounts of engagement processes.	Interviews; reports.	KII; Survey; Field Visit.
	What unintended effects emerged?	• Were there positive or adverse unintended results?	• Stakeholder identification of unexpected effects.	APRs; consultations.	KII; Survey.

Annex VIII: Interview Guide

SECTION 1: RELEVANCE

1.1 Alignment with National Priorities

1. PAPI was included in Politburo Regulation No. 365/QD-BCHTW as a KPI for evaluating provincial leadership. What specific advocacy efforts or strategic engagements led to this achievement?
 - a) How long did this process take and what were the critical turning points?
 - b) Which stakeholders were most influential in securing this recognition?
 - c) What role did the Advisory Board play in navigating political sensitivities?
2. How has PAPI's relevance evolved since the massive administrative reorganization of July 2025 (63 to 34 provinces, abolition of district tier)?
 - d) What adjustments to the methodology are being considered for the two-tier government structure?
 - e) How will longitudinal comparability be maintained with the new provincial boundaries?
3. The project documents mention PAPI data being used for SDG 16 monitoring. Can you provide specific examples of how PAPI indicators have been integrated into national SDG reporting frameworks?

1.2 Responsiveness to Emerging Needs

4. How did PAPI adapt its thematic research agenda to respond to emerging governance challenges (e.g., COVID-19 response, digital transformation, climate adaptation)?
 - f) What processes were used to identify new research priorities?
5. The PAPI data consistently shows governance stagnation and rising inequality across provinces since 2018. How has the project used these findings to advocate for policy changes, and what responses have you observed from government counterparts?

SECTION 2: COHERENCE

2.1 Internal Coherence

6. How do the five project outputs (Survey, International Expertise, Provincial Dialogues, Dissemination, Thematic Research) reinforce each other in practice?
 - g) Are there any tensions or trade-offs between outputs that required management?
 - h) How is the sequencing of activities across outputs coordinated?
7. The budget allocation shifted significantly in 2025 (from USD 2.09M to USD 1.46M). How did this affect the coherence of the programme's intervention logic?

2.2 External Coherence

8. How does PAPI complement or differentiate from other governance indices used in Vietnam (PAR Index, PCI, SIPAS, PEPI)?
 - i) Have there been instances of overlap or competition with these indices?
 - j) How does PAPI's citizen-centric approach add unique value compared to government-administered surveys?
9. MONRE officially requested PAPI data for its Provincial Environmental Protection Index (PEPI) because ministry-administered data was considered less credible. What does this tell us about PAPI's comparative advantage, and have other ministries made similar requests?

SECTION 3: EFFECTIVENESS

3.1 Achievement of Outputs

10. The 2025 PAPI survey was cancelled for the first time in 14 years. Can you walk us through the sequence of events that led to this decision?
 - k) When did you first recognize that the survey might not be feasible?
 - l) What alternatives were explored before the decision to cancel?
 - m) How was the pivot to the rapid assessment designed to mitigate the data gap?
11. The VFF Central Committee withdrew from survey coordination in September 2023, yet the 2024 survey was completed in 61 of 63 provinces. How was this achieved?
 - n) What strategies were used to maintain provincial VFF partnerships?
 - o) Why did Tien Giang and Vinh Phuc opt out, and what implications does this have?
12. Over 16 years, approximately 216,673 citizens have been surveyed. How confident are you in the representativeness and quality of this data, given reports of local government interference attempts?

3.2 Policy Influence and Uptake

13. The project reports that 157 provincial documents responding to PAPI were issued in 2024. How do you track and verify the quality and substance of these responses?
 - p) Are there examples where provincial responses led to genuine administrative improvements versus reactive/superficial measures?
 - q) How do you distinguish between provinces that use PAPI constructively versus those attempting to game the system?
14. Nine policy briefs were submitted to the National Assembly in 2025. Can you describe the pathway from PAPI data to these policy recommendations?
 - r) How were the topics selected?
 - s) What feedback have you received from National Assembly members on these briefs?

15. PAPI data contributed to Conclusion Notice No. 444-TB/VPTW on disability rights. Can you elaborate on how PAPI evidence was used in this process and what specific policy changes resulted?

SECTION 4: EFFICIENCY

4.1 Resource Utilization

16. The 2024 budget execution rate was 97% (USD 2.015M of USD 2.085M planned). What factors contributed to this high execution rate?
- t) Were there any activities that were underspent or overspent, and why?
17. The provincial diagnostic workshops are described as predominantly self-funded by provinces. How did this cost-sharing model develop, and what percentage of workshop costs are now covered by provinces?
- u) Are there variations in provincial willingness to self-fund, and what explains these differences?
18. The 2025 budget was reduced by approximately 31% (from USD 2.09M to USD 1.46M). How was prioritization conducted to determine which activities would continue?

4.2 Partnership and Coordination Efficiency

19. Decree No. 26/2024/ND-CP significantly increased the complexity of managing international development cooperation. How has this affected project administration and what adaptations have been made?
- v) How has the shift from NGO grantees to contractors affected relationships and delivery quality?
20. What is the typical timeline for PAPI data to move from collection to publication to policy influence? Are there opportunities to accelerate this cycle?

SECTION 5: SUSTAINABILITY

5.1 Institutional Sustainability

21. HCMA has agreed to become the national project owner for IGEP (2026-2031). What are the key terms of this partnership arrangement?
- w) How will PAPI's independence as a citizen-centric monitoring tool be preserved under HCMA ownership?
- x) What safeguards are being built into the IGEP framework to prevent political interference in survey methodology or findings?
- y) What specific inter-ministerial coordination challenges have delayed the IGEP transition?
22. PAPI methodology has been integrated into four HCMA core textbooks for training senior officials. How does this contribute to long-term institutionalization?

- z) Are there plans to expand PAPI-related training to other educational institutions?

5.2 Financial Sustainability

- 23. The project has relied primarily on DFAT and Irish Aid funding since 2017. What progress has been made in diversifying funding sources?
 - aa) Are there potential Vietnamese government budget contributions being explored?
 - bb) What is the realistic prospect for South-South cooperation funding or additional bilateral donors?
- 24. If international funding were to significantly decrease, which PAPI activities would be most at risk, and which could potentially continue through domestic resources?

SECTION 6: CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

6.1 Gender Equality

- 25. PAPI data is disaggregated by gender and shows persistent disparities in governance experiences. How have these findings been translated into gender-specific policy recommendations?
 - cc) What feedback have you received from women's organizations on PAPI's gender analysis?
- 26. The policy brief on women's political participation was submitted to the Ho Chi Minh Academy (HCMA Report No. 100 to Politburo). What impact has this had on policies for women's representation in the upcoming 2026-2031 electoral cycle?

6.2 Disability Inclusion

- 27. The 2024 survey of 2,310 persons with disabilities across 18 provinces represents a significant dedicated effort. What were the main methodological challenges in reaching and surveying this population?
 - dd) How were organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) engaged as partners rather than just beneficiaries?
- 28. The training for candidates with disabilities for elected bodies is mentioned. What was the scale of this initiative and what outcomes have been observed in terms of actual representation?

6.3 Digital Transformation and E-Governance

- 29. PAPI data shows that e-governance scores remain low (around 3 points on a 10-point scale) despite significant government investment. What are the main barriers identified through PAPI research?
 - ee) How have the Citizen-Powered Innovation Initiatives (CPII) in Ha Giang and Quang Tri addressed these barriers for ethnic minorities?

30. The AI-powered e-services tool (dichvucong.me) was developed under the project. What has been the uptake of this tool and what lessons have been learned about digital service accessibility?

SECTION 7: LESSONS LEARNED AND FORWARD-LOOKING

7.1 Key Lessons

31. What do you consider the three most important lessons from 16 years of PAPI implementation that should inform similar governance initiatives in other contexts?
- ff) What would you do differently if you were starting PAPI today?
32. The project has navigated significant political sensitivities, including findings that sometimes contradict official narratives. What strategies have been most effective in maintaining credibility while ensuring findings are heard?
- gg) Have there been cases where findings were not published or were significantly modified due to political pressure?
33. Looking back at the VFF partnership withdrawal and its aftermath, what lessons does this hold for partnership diversification and risk management in governance programming?

7.2 Future Priorities

34. The IGEP (2026-2031) is described as 'PAPI 2.0'. What are the key innovations or changes planned compared to the current PAPI model?
- hh) How will the methodology be adapted for the two-tier government structure?
35. What are the critical success factors for the 2026 baseline survey with the new 34-province structure?
- ii) What are the biggest risks to successful implementation?
36. If you could make one recommendation to the incoming government leadership regarding the use of PAPI data for governance reform, what would it be?

SECTION 8: CLARIFICATION QUESTIONS ON SPECIFIC GAPS

37. The project documents mention that some provinces attempted to manipulate data and were excluded from annual reports. Can you provide specific examples (without naming provinces) of the types of interference encountered and how these were detected?
38. The 2025 Annual Progress Report mentions 'reactive strategies' adopted by some localities instead of genuine improvements. How prevalent is this behavior, and what distinguishes provinces that engage constructively versus reactively?
39. The thematic research on LGBTIQA+ inclusive governance mentions studies on same-sex couple legal protections. Given Vietnam's political context, how was this sensitive research navigated, and what reception has it received from policymakers?

40. The project documents reference collaboration with the Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs on monitoring the National Targeted Programme for ethnic minority areas. What is the status of this collaboration and how is PAPI data being used?
41. There appear to be delays in the launch of the 2024 PAPI Report mentioned in the 2025 progress report. What caused these delays and how were they resolved?
42. The Advisory Board is mentioned as playing a key role in political sensitization. How frequently does the Board meet, what is its composition, and how have its recommendations shaped project decisions?

Annex IX: UNEG Code of Conduct

1. The conduct of evaluators in the UN system should be beyond reproach at all times. Any deficiency in their professional conduct may undermine the integrity of the evaluation, and more broadly evaluation in the UN or the UN itself, and raise doubts about the quality and validity of their evaluation work.
2. The UNEG⁹ Code of Conduct applies to all evaluation staff and consultants in the UN system. The principles behind the Code of Conduct are fully consistent with the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service by which all UN staff are bound. UN staff are also subject to any UNEG member specific staff rules and procedures for the procurement of services.
3. The provisions of the UNEG Code of Conduct apply to all stages of the evaluation process from the conception to the completion of an evaluation and the release and use of the evaluation results.
4. To promote trust and confidence in evaluation in the UN, all UN staff engaged in evaluation and evaluation consultants working for the United Nations system are required to commit themselves in writing to the Code of Conduct for Evaluation¹⁰, specifically to the following obligations:

Independence

5. Evaluators shall ensure that independence of judgement is maintained and that evaluation findings and recommendations are independently presented.

Impartiality

6. Evaluators shall operate in an impartial and unbiased manner and give a balanced presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the policy, program, project or organizational unit being evaluated.

Conflict of Interest

7. Evaluators are required to disclose in writing any past experience, of themselves or their immediate family, which may give rise to a potential conflict of interest, and to deal honestly in resolving any conflict of interest which may arise. Before undertaking evaluation work within the UN system, each evaluator will complete a declaration of interest form (see Annex 3).

Honesty and Integrity

8. Evaluators shall show honesty and integrity in their own behaviour, negotiating honestly the evaluation costs, tasks, limitations, scope of results likely to be obtained, while accurately

⁹ UNEG is the United Nations Evaluation Group, a professional network that brings together the units responsible for evaluation in the UN system including the specialized agencies, funds, programmes and affiliated organisations. UNEG currently has 43 such members.

¹⁰ While the provisions of the Code of Conduct apply to all UN staff involved in evaluation, only UN staff who spend a substantial proportion of their time working on evaluation are expected to sign the Code of Conduct, including staff of evaluation, oversight or performance management units directly involved in the management or conduct of evaluations. All evaluation consultants are required to sign when first engaged by a UNEG member.

presenting their procedures, data and findings and highlighting any limitations or uncertainties of interpretation within the evaluation.

Competence

9. Evaluators shall accurately represent their level of skills and knowledge and work only within the limits of their professional training and abilities in evaluation, declining assignments for which they do not have the skills and experience to complete successfully.

Accountability

10. Evaluators are accountable for the completion of the agreed evaluation deliverables within the timeframe and budget agreed, while operating in a cost effective manner.

Obligations to participants

11. Evaluators shall respect and protect the rights and welfare of human subjects and communities, in accordance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights conventions. Evaluators shall respect differences in culture, local customs, religious beliefs and practices, personal interaction, gender roles, disability, age and ethnicity, while using evaluation instruments appropriate to the cultural setting. Evaluators shall ensure prospective participants are treated as autonomous agents, free to choose whether to participate in the evaluation, while ensuring that the relatively powerless are represented. Evaluators shall make themselves aware of and comply with legal codes (whether international or national) governing, for example, interviewing children and young people.

Confidentiality

12. Evaluators shall respect people's right to provide information in confidence and make participants aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality, while ensuring that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source.

Avoidance of Harm

13. Evaluators shall act to minimise risks and harms to, and burdens on, those participating in the evaluation, without compromising the integrity of the evaluation findings.

Accuracy, Completeness and Reliability

14. Evaluators have an obligation to ensure that evaluation reports and presentations are accurate, complete and reliable. Evaluators shall explicitly justify judgements, findings and conclusions and show their underlying rationale, so that stakeholders are in a position to assess them.

Transparency

15. Evaluators shall clearly communicate to stakeholders the purpose of the evaluation, the criteria applied and the intended use of findings. Evaluators shall ensure that stakeholders have a say in shaping the evaluation and shall ensure that all documentation is readily available to and understood by stakeholders.

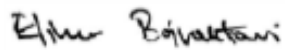
Omissions and wrongdoing

16. Where evaluators find evidence of wrong-doing or unethical conduct, they are obliged to report it to the proper oversight authority.

Signature

Elinor Bajraktari

25/05/2026



Pham Quang Nam

25/05/2026



