

CUTS HRC Activity Report

January-December 2013

ONGOING PROJECTS

Competition Policy and Law in ASEAN – Competition Assessment in Lao PDR

The endeavour of the Project is to carry out a competition assessment for Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) during the period October-December 2012 with a budget of US\$17,000 funded by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). This aims to provide an overview of the existing institutional and legal framework as well as the knowledge of how key markets or industries are structured, which can help substantiate efforts to discuss the necessity of a Competition Law in Lao PDR. Currently, the Assessment has been delayed because of administrative problems in Lao PDR. It is now being planned that the assessment would be carried out in April, 2014.

In addition, a mid-term appraisal mission for the Project was held at CUTS HRC's office on November 11, 2013. The results would be the inputs for a possible Phase II of the Project lasting till 2017, which would be discussed in a meeting in November/December 2013. This Phase II is expected to be launched in mid 2014 and will most likely deal with Competition Policy, in general (vis-à-vis Sectoral Regulation, Consumer Protection, etc.) as against Competition Law *per se*. CUTS HRC is to follow with GIZ regarding the Phase II in 2014.

Trade Promotion through Standardisation

The overall objective of the programme is to contribute to economic development in the South Asia and South-east Asian regions (ASEAN) through increased access to markets by local and regional producers by complying with international standards. This Project is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and implemented by the Swedish Standards Institute (SIS). More specifically, the programme aims to build national and regional knowledge, both to participate in International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) standard setting processes and to implement standards. This would be done using two processes as case studies, namely:

- Building capacity on standard setting, using the process of developing the new ISO standard on sustainability criteria for bio-energy, as a case study and
- Building capacity on standard implementation, using the implementation process of the ISO 14067 Carbon footprint of products standard, as a case study.

In this Project, initially eight National Standards Bodies (NSBs) in the South and South-east Asia (SESA) region and the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) were identified to be the main partners; CUTS Hanoi Research Centre (CUTS HRC) and some other private organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) were invited to participate. Starting from 2012 the programme is proposed to last in 2014 with the estimated budget of US\$4.7 million from SIDA with SIS being the leading implementation unit.

The Implementation phase of the programme started in January 2013 and is expected to be completed by December 2014. SIS has invited CUTS HRC to become a partner organisation specifically, for the South East Asia region. The budget for CUTS' activities is tentatively around US\$35,000 per year.

Research & Publications

Periodic Newsletter on Standards and Quality

This is a regular activity funded by the SESA programme till December 2014. The newsletter provides updated standard and quality-related news not only in Vietnam in the region but also in the world. Three issues have been published in electronic format and circulated among CUTS HRC's database of relevant stakeholders in 2013 and four more would be produced in 2014.

A Guidebook on 'Carbon Footprinting of Products for Vietnam', CUTS HRC produced this guidebook based on the ISO/TS 14067:2013 document as well as the results of the 'Case Study in the Rubber Industry of Vietnam' in 2013. The guidebook will be published in early 2014.

Advocacy & Networking

- An ISO Pre-seminar Training and an ISO Plenary on the Standard ISO 13065 were organised from January 17-25, 2013 in Brisbane, Australia within the framework of the SESA programme. Alice Pham took part in both the events.
- A Vietnam National Planning workshop, under the framework of the SESA programme was organised in Hanoi, on March 05, 2013.

Participants included those who have already been involved in previous SESA activities, since July 2012 – both the standard setting and standard implementation components. Alice Pham and Thanh Ha took part in the workshop.

- A training workshop for rubber companies on the standard ISO 14067 Carbon Footprint of Products and its benefits was organised on May 03, 2013 in Binh Duong Province (near Ho Chi Minh City). Alice Pham took part in the event.
- During the seventh meeting of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee on Consumer Protection in Vietnam on May 06-07, 2013, Alice Pham made a presentation on Standards and the Programme.
- A Sub-regional Training Session for South East Asia countries took place on May 13-14, 2013 in Hanoi, Vietnam. The main purpose of this training session was to increase support and knowledge on how to strengthen the cooperation between the national standards organisations and the private/public sectors. Alice Pham and Thanh Ha attended the training.
- On May 22-23, 2013, Alice Pham paid a visit to Bangkok, Thailand to participate in SIDA's Regional Workshop on Anti-corruption on behalf of the SESA Programme.
- A regional training on ISO/13065 was successfully organised in Colombo, Sri Lanka on July 01-02, 2013. Alice Pham took part in the event.
- Thanh Ha participated in one day seminar entitled "Stakeholders Engagement in the Standard Setting Process" organised by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), funded by Swedish Standards Institute at Trade Union Hotel Hanoi on August 15, 2013. More than 60 participants from academic institutions, universities, industrial associations and media took part in the seminar.

- An ISO pre-seminar and ISO meeting on ISO/13065 'Sustainability Criteria for Bio-energy' were organised in Stockholm, Sweden from September 24-October 04, 2013. Alice Pham took part in both the events.
- The meeting of SESA Steering Committee was organised on 30-31 October, 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Alice Pham participated in the meeting.
- On November 08, 2013, the VCCI organised a Workshop on 'Stakeholder Engagement in the Standard Setting Process' in Ho Chi Minh City. The participants consisted of representatives from businesses, research institutions and other stakeholders from the south of Vietnam. Alice Pham made a presentation on the Call for Papers (CFP) guidebook developed by HRC during the event.
- A regional workshop for sharing experiences on Carbon Footprint of Products was organised in Ho Chi Minh City on November 25-26. Alice Pham and Thanh Ha participated in the workshop.
- Alice Pham was invited by SIS to speak in a session during the Bali Trade and Development Symposium (TDS) convened by International Centre on the Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) on the sideline of the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference from December 03-05, 2013 in Bali, Indonesia.
- A Regional Seminar on 'Standards, Standardisation and Trade Promotion' for enterprises and chambers of commerce in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) was organised on December 17-18, in Vientiane, Lao PDR. A major part of funding for the workshop was supported by the SESA Programme and was supported by the Mekong Institute (MI) by providing air fare for the participants. CUTS HRC was the main coordinator of this activity.

OUTREACH

- CUTS HRC has developed and updated a new format of its website with an URL (www.cuts-hrc.org). The website, which stays connected with HO Homepage, was made bilingual (English and Vietnamese) for wider outreach both at national and international levels.
- The website <http://utp.cuts-hrc.org/> has been developed and maintained, with the facilitation of CUTS HRC as a hub of electronic data and information on unfair trade practices in ASEAN member countries with free access for all users. Besides, an E-discussion Forum at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/unfair_trade_practices/ has been also facilitated for cross-group, and cross-country exchange of views and knowledge related to unfair trade practices.
- CUTS HRC has updated its database of relevant stakeholders/experts/donors/ partners for various programmatic areas. The updated database comprises more than 525 experts in different sectors with new subscribers. All publications from HRC would be circulated amongst this database as well as important news items to be shared.

PUBLICATIONS

- The Competition and Consumer Protection Dossier has been published on a quarterly basis to gather facts about Anti-competition Acts and acts that harm consumers' interests in Vietnam. About seven issues of the Dossier were produced and uploaded on the website.
- The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement: Chapter on Competition Policy prepared by Alice Pham was published. This is one of three research papers commissioned by Consumers International (CI) by members and independent experts for release at the 17th Round of the TPP Agreement negotiations in Lima.

REPRESENTATIONS

- From February 25 to March 01, 2013, the Global Meeting on the Review of the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNGCP) was held in New Delhi, India. The meeting aimed to collect comments and inputs into CI's proposed amendments to the UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection, which would be submitted to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for member states' ratification and approval in July 2013. Alice Pham made a presentation on the 'Competition Policy Chapter of the TPP' of which Vietnam has been a negotiating partner during the event.
- Alice Pham and To Tam participated in the Launch Meeting of the Competition Reforms in Key Markets for Enhancing Social and Economic Welfare in Developing Countries (CREW) Project in Jaipur, India on March 13-14, 2013. The main purpose of the meeting was to evolve the Project Methodology and approach, and provide clarity on selection of the Project countries and sectors, based on a 'background paper' prepared, under the Project. The meeting was attended by nearly 45-50 participants from many developing countries in Asia and Africa.
- On May 24-26, Alice Pham visited Jakarta, Indonesia for a meeting with GIZ.
- Alice Pham and To Tam took part in the 25th Anniversary of establishment of Vietnam Standards and Consumer Association (VINASTAS) on May 27. A side meeting on the "Status of the Vietnamese Consumers" Project was organised for CUTS HRC staff to discuss with local consumer associations and individual consultants.
- Alice Pham visited Tagaytay, Philippines to attend an ASEAN Brainstorming Meeting on 'Capacity Building Roadmap for Competition Policy and Law', under the invitation of GIZ from May 29-31, 2013.
- Alice Pham attended two training workshops. One of the Malaysian Competition Commission and other the stakeholders (including the media) organised from June 07-10 in Kuala Lumpur, under the framework of a Project conducted by CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition (CIRC).
- Alice Pham took part in the Mekong Forum 2013 on 'Towards More Inclusive and Equitable Growth in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)', on July 11-12, at the Centara Hotel and Convention Centre in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The Mekong Forum 2013 served as a platform for a range of notable senior policy makers, business and civic leaders, academic experts and development practitioners interested and involved in the GMS Economic Cooperation Programme (GMS ECP) and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to come together in a multi-lateral, multi-level environment to define appropriate measures and plans to support positive gains made by regional development efforts.
- On September 11, 2013, To Tam took part in a video-conferencing seminar entitled "Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Financing for Inclusive Growth: Challenges and Policy Framework" co-sponsored by the Asia-Pacific Finance and Development Centre (AFDC), Korean Development Institute School of Public Policy and Management, the World Bank, and Tokyo Development Learning Centre.
- On September 26, 2013, To Tam attended a meeting between the Committee for Foreign NGO Affairs (COMINGO) and INGOs in the North of Vietnam at The People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM) headquarter.
- On October 08, 2013, a Conference entitled 'Economic Competition Regime: Raising Issues and Lessons from Germany' was organised by the Foreign Trade University (FTU) of Vietnam and the University of Augsburg in Hanoi at the FTU. Alice Pham was invited to participate and make a presentation on 'State-owned enterprises and Competitive Neutrality Principles'.
- Alice Pham took part in an Annual Conference of the Economic Freedom Network Asia was organised during on October 21-22, 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- Alice Pham and Thanh Ha took part in CUTS-CIRC's 3rd International Conference on Competition Reforms: Emerging Challenges in a Globalising World held on 18-19 November 2013 in New Delhi, India.
- To Tam attended the International Workshop on "Effective Implementation of Consumer Protection – Practice of Vietnam and Experience of Korea" organised by Vietnam Competition Authority (VCA) in partnership with Korea Consumer Agency (KCA) and Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) on November 21, 2013 at Grand Plaza Hotel in Hanoi.
- To Tam attended the 3rd International Conference on 'Vietnam-NGO Cooperation' in Hanoi on 28 November 2013. The event was organised by the COMINGO, in an effort to strengthen the cooperation between Vietnam and Foreign Non-government Organisations (NGOs).
- To Tam participated in the 25th Anniversary of establishment of VINASTAS on November 29, 2013 in Hanoi.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- CUTS HRC organised its Pre-retreat on June 18, 2013, at its premise in 112 Kham Thien Street, Hanoi, Vietnam. The purpose of the Pre-retreat was to look into the past and current activities of the office and outline a course of action for the future.
- The Strategy Meeting for Southeast Asia took place on November 21, 2013 in New Delhi, India. It has been decided that a scoping report for CUTS' interventions in South East Asia will be developed with inputs of other offices on different programme areas. This scoping report is meant to be a practical document, which would serve the purpose of planning for strategic interventions of CUTS in the South-east Asia region. The report will cover aspects on the following main areas: Consumer Protection, Competition and Regulation, Governance, Trade and Economics, Climate Change and Sustainable Development, Investment and Corporate Social Responsibility.