



# Multi-stakeholder initiatives in Vietnam to meet the societal challenges of horizon 2020

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

*Collaboration,  
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This paper aimed at enlightening the emergence of multi-stakeholder initiatives in Vietnam that enable individuals, businesses, and civic societies to undertake the complex sustainability issues in the international business environment. Currently, the philosophy of involving multi-stakeholder initiatives groups in Vietnam for resource management seems overwhelming. Equally, the motive for studying a phenomenon like multi-stakeholder dialogue is a novel outlook that did not catch various researchers' eye earlier. Nowadays, the European multi-stakeholder innovation platform tries to address the European societal challenges and policies due to their roles in the upcoming new program of Horizon 2020. National policy makers using them as building blocks for implementing different strategies such as research and development and regional policies. The approach of multi-stakeholder initiatives in Vietnam is to respond to the limited capacity and resources of individuals, societal sectors, governments, businesses, and civic societies. Thus, this study was conducted to demonstrate the significance of multi-stakeholder initiatives in Vietnam that create a broad multi-stakeholder (science, policy, business, society, including SMEs, public and private investors) and multi-level (local, regional, national, and Europe) innovation platforms to meet a range of societal challenges through Horizon 2020 in order to facilitate the development of committed innovation partnerships and identify how different types of firms, people, and knowledge at national and international levels making civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and individuals and institutions more innovative and competitive. Finally, this paper proposed some recommendations based on assumptions underlying research questions that added value to promote dialogue and collaboration across levels and with key international partners.

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, societal challenges are numerous, multifaceted, and complex, from ageing societies, climate change, to energy security. Concerning this matter, there is a broad consensus in interruption between economic growth and well-being which is increasing rapidly day by day. At the same time, research and innovation have changed into the main engines of social and economic growth both nationally and internationally. Responding to this vibrant condition as well as meeting the societal challenges, this article exposes the prospective awareness of the emergence of multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) in Vietnam that enhancing the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) as a model for scaling up innovations, resources, and actions to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs). MSPs extent a wide range of institutional arrangements for expanding collaboration between government, business both in private and public sectors, civic society, and other multilateral agencies to address economic development challenges. Moreover, innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century differed from the model emerged in the last century, which was considered as a profit-oriented and nationally targeted motive that generating economic value in the society. During this transition period, the concept of MSIs has transpired as a significant building block in every new governance arrangement which respond to the most pressing global sustainability and societal challenges (Zeyen, Beckmann, & Wolters, 2016). Similarly, Matten and Crane (2005) articulated that MSIs provide some collective self-regulation forms where governments do not have capability or willingness to provide adequate regulations or directions at the national or global level. The role of science and technology is critical as they are promoting multidisciplinary approaches which are dynamic and involve multilateral collaborations among different stakeholders. The presence of social entrepreneurs as new actors on the innovation scene is essential to assess the social dimensions. Consequently, the OECD (2011) and Innovation Strategy (2015) set out 5 priorities for policy makers, businesses, and civic societies to improve innovation performance and achieve greater responsibility and growth. These priorities were strengthening investment in innovation and foster business dynamism, invest in and shape an efficient system of knowledge creation and diffusion, seize the benefits of the digital economy, foster talent and skills and optimize their use, and improve the governance and implementation of policies for innovation. Therefore, MSIs which meet the societal challenges in Vietnam become crucial elements in assessing and strengthening the overall sustainable business development, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as individuals and institutions. In this changeover phase, the notion of MSIs and the philosophy of involving multiple stakeholder groups for resource management in Vietnam seem overwhelming for studying the phenomenon such as multi-stakeholder dialogue -a novel perspective that did not attract various researchers' attention. It deals with the consequences of MSIs in Vietnam in order to respond to the limited capacities and resources of individuals, societal sectors in governments, businesses, and civic societies. Thus, this paper aimed at demonstrating the significance of MSIs in Vietnam that create a broad multi-stakeholder (science, policy, business, society, including SMEs, public and private investors) and multi-level (local, regional, national and EU) innovation platform to meet

the societal challenges through Horizon 2020 and facilitate the development of committed innovation partnerships and identify how different types firms, people, and knowledge at national and international level- are one of the ways of making CSOs, NGOs as well as individuals and institutions more innovative and competitive. Hence, this paper has provided a review of the rationale for multi-stakeholders' initiatives, some common distinctive functions and features of MSIs, and governance for successful public or private organizations. It tried to present the concepts and the strategies of MSIs which are beneficial for different businesses, firms, people and knowledge at the national and international levels by setting connection, developing cooperation, extending collaboration, and enhancing competitive approach. Furthermore, this paper stated that how the understanding of MSIs in Vietnam enabled them to achieve distinctive advantages of CSOs and improve and implement SDGs. What are the essential conditions of a country to work for and against the effectiveness of MSIs? What characteristics do interlocutors require and apply to make MSIs successful? How the stakeholders' experiences improving MSI performance?

### **The Literature Review**

Investigating the relevance of the MSIs approach in an organization is obligatory to emphasize that the motivation for starting MSIs can be dialogues or collaborations involving entities with different ideas, competencies, capabilities, authorities, and representatives. Stakeholders were grouped into seven main categories, namely different state organs, civil society groups, businesses, knowledge and research institutions, media, international agencies, and other categories. Whereas government and civil society seem to be present in most cases, business is often absent (Biekart and Fowler, 2016). Currently, organizations and businesses have to face competitive challenges and then turn them into international business opportunities. Then, the function of multi-stakeholder initiatives and governance is to implement some effective and efficient schemes in order to adapt efficient systems for helping companies to deal with the challenges along the whole value chain process that measure both the developed and developing world (Welford, 2015). Precisely, it can be said that it is possible to leverage the power of MSI to include more people in the value chain and increase the benefits of sustainable development goal. More clearly, Davis and Soderborg (2010) stated that a multi-stakeholder approach requires vibrant definitions. Engaging in a multi-stakeholder approach is not an easy accomplishment and the companies usually face with the challenge of classifying and understanding who their stakeholders to create trust and long- term relationships with them. They must adjust and adapt themselves to global versus regional and local needs as well as different communities and cultures, so that they can build and sustain a mutually respectful working partnership and get a clear identification of what makes the partnership a "win-win" venture. Equally, some deferential and strategic multi-stakeholders' initiative approach is vital to make a thoughtful, innovative, competitive, and scalable solution that certainly fulfil the company's responsibilities as an active citizen (Davis & Soderborg, 2010; Zeyen, Beckmann, & Wolters, 2016).

### **The Main Functions and Features of MSIs Group Initiatives**

In this perspective, the functions and features of MSIs provide an effective toolbox to support and involve many stakeholders in a particular industrial sector or regional level. It is necessary to mention that MSIs are mainly considered by the kick off standards, certification systems, joint stakeholder initiatives, roundtable dialogues, common codes of conduct, and joint funding for research and innovation. The most MSIs act for a common cause in society to make production, distribution, and consumption processes more sustainable and ethical. Successful MSIs usually have some essential characteristics which consist of three key important elements. First, the involvement of a broad range of legitimate stakeholders, namely businesses, NGOs, local communities, governments, and those parts which are impacted. Second, a sound multi-stakeholder governance structure ensures that different voices, opinions, and possible solutions can be discussed without one stakeholder or stakeholder group that having excessive influence. Third, well-designed stakeholder engagement mechanisms enable them to gather the views and concerns of a broad range of impacted stakeholders especially those who might be vulnerable or marginalized to ensure of the women's full participation. Also, it is possible to leverage the power of MSIs to include more people in the value chain and increase the benefits of sustainable development goals. The MSIs have emerged as a phenomenon with high practical relevance. At the same time, they are also intriguing from a theoretical perspective because of their inherent double nature. Prakash and Gugerty (2010) referred that MSIs offer voluntary regulation as a means to overcome the current global governance gaps, for example no company is obliged to join the MSIs and adhere to their standards. To avoid any discrepancy and interruption as well as directing sustainability metrics towards ones that are congruent with the existing business administrations and marginalize metrics that have the potential to disrupt regime processes (Konefal, 2015). In addition, several researchers have different opinions towards the functions and activities of MSIs which focus on the following four characteristics. First of all, the MSIs must address the common issues relevant to all or at least most companies in an industry or the broader market (Roloff, 2008). Secondly, MSIs are considered as arenas for collective action (Pattberg, 2005). Touching on this matter, Prakash and Gugerty (2010) stated that MSIs offer voluntary regulations as a way to defeat the current global governance gaps; for instance, none of companies are compelled to join the MSIs and stick to their measures by any formal legal rules. On the contrary, Schouten, Leroy, and Glasbergen (2012) expressed that MSIs do not offer any regulatory aspects. Thirdly, MSIs should focus on the global outreach and ignore MSIs that provide local governance platform (Faysse, 2006). Finally, it is necessary to highlight that MSIs should have at least some degree of formal organization to allow investigating it as an independent entity in order to distinguish between participating and non-participating actors and apply or publicly approve the MSI's principles.

### **The Core Process Model of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives**

In the context of the discussion around the proliferation of multi-stakeholder initiatives, this paper mainly concentrated on how the understanding of MSIs in Vietnam enable them to

achieve distinctive advantages of CSOs development effectiveness and enable environment to improve and implement the SDGs. It is essential to highlight that MSIs bring together diverse actors from the public, private, and civil society sectors in order to solve persistent governance challenges such as enhancing transparency and improving responsibility for better and more sustainable development outcomes (World Bank, 2014). Several researchers and economists who were interested in independent non-profit research and network working systems related to social, ecological, and economic matters for achieving sustainable development emphasized on the aim of multi-stakeholder processes which encouraging to promote better decision making through ensuring the perspectives of the main actors concerned about a particular decision that are incorporated at all stages through consensus building dialogue. I was thought that everyone who involved in the process has a valid vision and relevant knowledge and experience to bring to the decision making (Hemmati, 2002; Huijstee, 2012). Considering the recent trends and developments in internationalization, globalization, and SDGs, Figure 1 depicts the core process model of MSIs. It tries to exhibit how social enterprises (SEs) have been formed from social initiatives in order to fulfil their demands through solving the communities' concrete social problems which led to the entrepreneurial spirit and corporate social responsibility through business ethics. This core process model of MSIs is based on the amalgamation of 5 E's including effectiveness, explanation, efficiency, entrepreneurial, and ethics and the 5 C's including collaboration, connection, cooperation, competitiveness, and continuity which bring steadiness among the different levels, sectors, and types of groups. On the other hand, the concept of MSI also covers the different phases in multi-stakeholder processes from multi-stakeholder dialogues in an initial norm-setting up phase to long-established strategic planning, implementing and managing, learning through reflective practice and monitoring, and learning through adaptive planning that enhance institutionalized initiatives.

Therefore, multi-stakeholder initiatives can be determined as a global institutions including the main corporations and civil society organizations (CSOs) are considered as one type of regulatory private mechanisms that tries to fill the governance gap by involving corporations, civil society organizations, and sometimes other actors such as governments and academia or unions to cope with social and environmental challenges across industries on a global scale (Mena & Palazzo, 2012). As a new form of global governance with the potential to elevate multilateral norms and local actions, multi-stakeholders partnership networks have been branded by drawing on a number of different actors in civil society, government, and business (Bäckstrand, 2006). In a nutshell, MSIs can be raised through negotiation processes through involving representatives of different businesses, civil societies, other possible stakeholder groups, and individuals to address certain sustainable problems. Generally, the focus of interest is on the role stakeholders especially in the early phase of dialogue or negotiation. During the implementation phase, the focus of attention may shift towards capacity building or training the certificate of individual, group, and organizational competencies within the organizations to facilitate organizational learning. To better comprehend the approach of MSIs, this paper was

conducted to introduce some common elements and topographies in the patterns and practices of multi-stakeholders' partnership and platform for sustainable development. It proposed some distinguishing factors for successful practices of multi-stakeholders in Vietnam and their competencies to meet a range of the societal challenges in public and private sectors to connect business performance and sustainability as well as enriching institutional capabilities which enable them to further develop the political, economic, and cultural ties and increase the visibility, understanding, and presence of the Europe in the country.

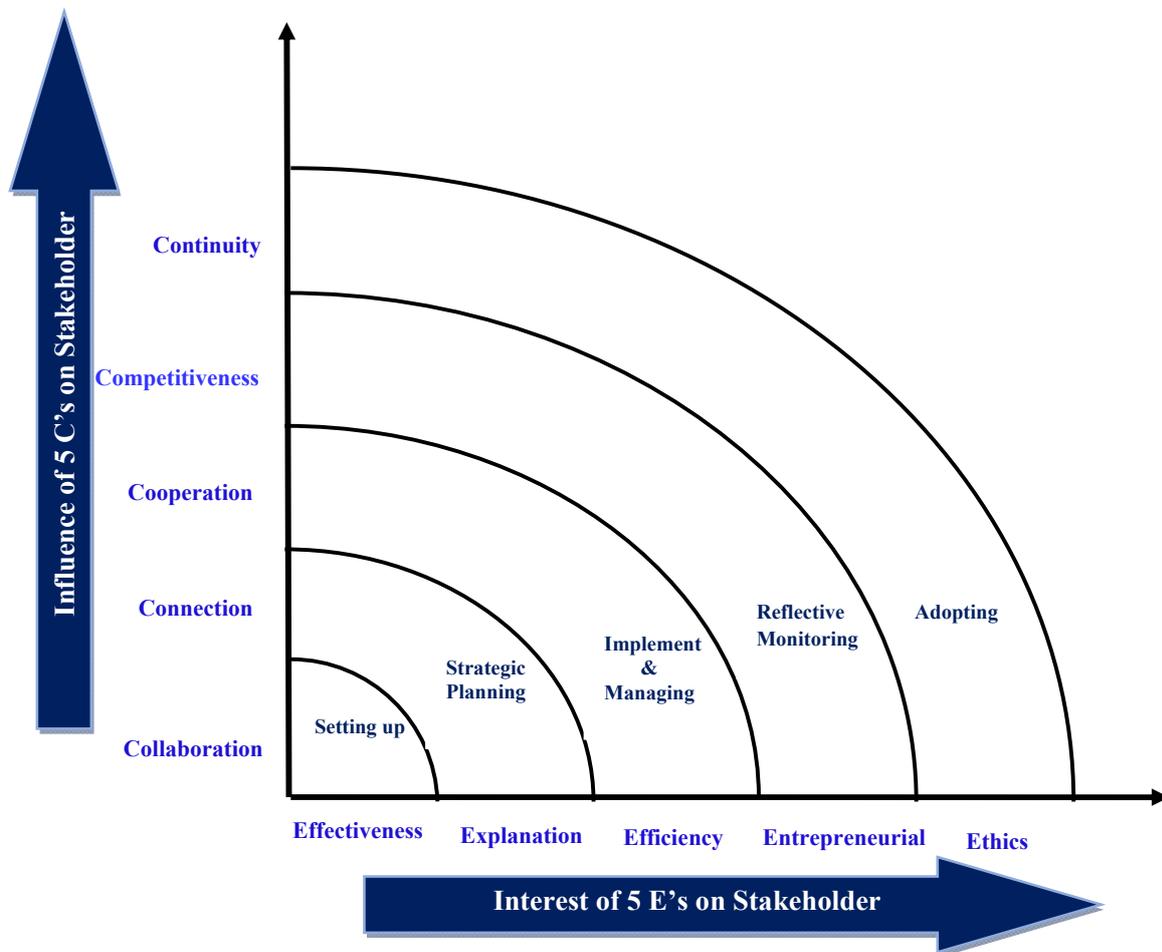


Figure 1. The core process model of multi-stakeholder initiatives (Huijstee, 2012)

### Research Hypotheses

Applying rational approach to the issue of multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) and multi-stakeholders' platform as well as partnership (MSP) leads to the formation of following four important research hypotheses:

**H<sub>01</sub>.** MSIs and MSP are the key factors in dialogue and collaboration across scientific disciplines.

**H<sub>02</sub>.** People, firms' individuals, and government's proficiency linking and networking develop through the amalgamation of different groups which enhance their knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs), and initiatives to upgrade the institutional functionality and improve learning capability.

**H<sub>03</sub>.** The stakeholders' initiatives and their governance encourage entrepreneurial learning and strengthen entrepreneurial spirit of specialized technical and administrative skills, i.e., influencing institutional factors.

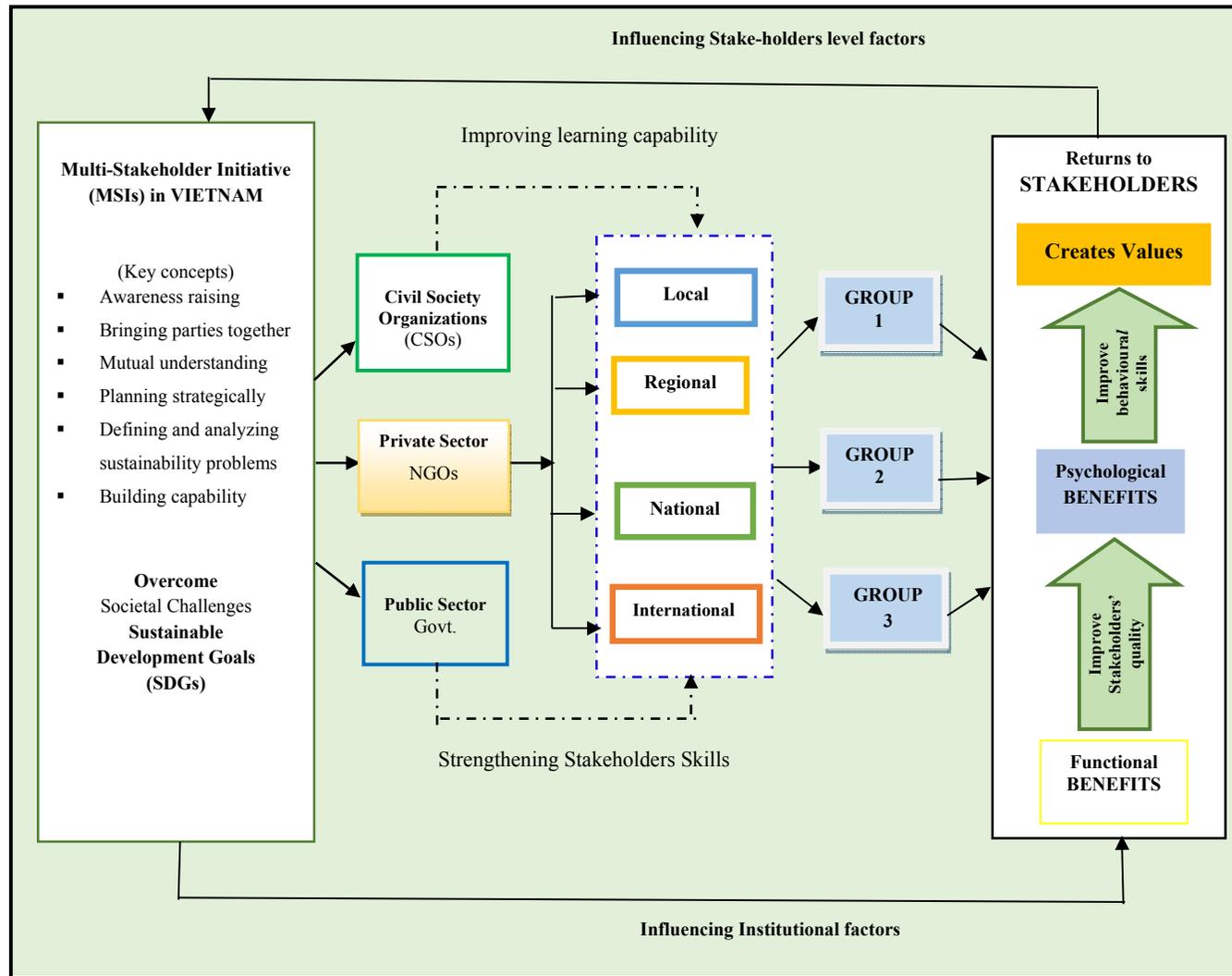
**H<sub>04</sub>.** Multi-stakeholders' initiatives including CSOs, NGOs, and government initiatives have significant impacts on the improvement and the quality of stakeholder's behavioral skills which facilitate and stimulate functional and psychological benefits and create values for the stakeholders.

### **Method**

This research primarily addressed the combination of both empirical evidence and inductive reasoning. Empirical argument usually included the methods of obtaining information (facts & evidence) and data (documents, cases, and NGOs). Normally, the inductive reasoning displayed the probabilistic degree of support of reasoning and the foundation of most scientific theories founded on the contemporary approaches of multi-stakeholder initiatives and multi-stakeholder partnerships of their programs that combine the capacities and resources of several stakeholder groups to respond to any social and technological challenges. In short, MSIs can be considered as a form of community regulation in the absence of government regulation. The objective of this research was to determine the long-term collaboration or the stable arrangement between one company and one CSOs or NGOs. This paper was not going to discuss about the distinction between dialogue and negotiation, because dialogue was associated with open communication and dilemma-sharing between partners. These characteristics will not be manifested in all multi-stakeholder processes. Therefore, a relative study has been done on the basis of preliminary research undertaken by societal challenges' plans of European Commission and European Horizon 2020. This study aimed at exploring the potential contribution of stakeholders' strategies and its distinguishing features that could be considered as the advantages for the organizations such as CSOs, NGOs, and government. Capacity enhancement program and business development usually happen through several stages, phases, or processes such as setting up a dialogue through collaboration to increase effectiveness; strategic planning through mutual cooperation to provide valid explanations; implementing and monitoring through utilizing network and international resources efficiently; enhancing organizational learning through thoughtful monitoring to develop competitiveness and entrepreneurial spirit; building and developing capability through adopting an effective business continuity and growing corporate social responsibility, i.e., business ethics.

### **Results and Discussion**

The findings related to the evolving social, ecological, and economic issues in the realm of sustainable development, i.e., multi-stakeholder's approach literature, have generally given a comparative overview about the conceptual aspects of MSIs. Research shows that the key priorities of multi-stakeholder have great impacts on local, regional, national, and global success as mentioned below in Figure 2. Figure 2 tries to demonstrate that MSIs approach could be a powerful instrument or key to foster the goal of sustainable development that empower the improvement of different sectors, levels, and types of collaboration, due to the presence of organizational learning attributes and priorities that complement the community participation within the organization. Alternatively, advantages of MSIs reinforce the quality of internal and external stakeholders' behavioral outcomes, i.e., individual competence, group competence, and institutional competence of the businesses by improving learning capability, i.e., individual learning, group learning, and community learning which leads to promote innovative capability and business growth due to their inherent competency. To explain the strategic role of MSIs, Woodhill (2004) referred to the facilitation process of multi-stakeholder and social learning initiatives. It is essential to appreciate the new perspectives and challenges with the intention of having the capability of questioning, stimulating, and taking initiative for changing the old conventions, patterns, and values. So, moving forward in this complex situation needs a creative, responsive, and adaptive outlook. Multi-stakeholder approach has been preferred to a traditional top-down approach in order to promote policy changes and managing accountability (Adam, James, & Wanjira, 2007). As a result, the country partnership strategy of Asian Development Bank's (ADB's) for Vietnam tries to meet the most important societal challenges through three pillars including inclusive growth, enhancing economic efficiency, and environmental sustainability. The strategy report shows that Vietnam's economic growth has been increasing since 2011, while the growth of their inflation rate was not so remarkable. Accordingly, Vietnam's macroeconomic policies have remained stable and the investors build confidence to develop a more dynamic market economy to compete globally and deliver an equitable growth over the long term. Regardless of remarkable achievements in reducing poverty, it is indispensable to indicate that some serious development challenges encounter with some income and socioeconomic gaps in some sections of national subgroups or other vulnerable groups (ADB-factsheet, 2016). Central Institute for Economic Management (CIEM) in association with the British Council (BC) in Hanoi and Centre for Social Initiatives Promotion (CSIP) pointed out that Vietnam's societal development strategy is aiming to achieve two main objectives including the promotion of social awareness about social enterprise and development of a foundation for policy discussion in order to develop the social enterprises in Vietnam. To sum up, it is necessary to highlight that MSIs are at least hypothetically intriguing because of their inherent double nature. On the one hand, MSIs influence on corporate social responsibility standards (CSRs) that define or set some norms for corporate behavior and on the other hand, they are also the result of corporate and stakeholder behavior.



GROUP 1: Different Sectors, GROUP 2: Different Levels, GROUP 3: Different type of Collaborations

Figure 2. Thematic model of multi-stakeholder initiatives influencing Vietnam on societal challenges

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of this study manifested that MSI initiatives and their strategies could simplify the sustainable local, regional, national, and international growth in Vietnam which enhanced the continuity of entrepreneurial competitiveness. Nowadays, it is essential to put too much emphasis on the appearance of multi-stakeholders' inventiveness conception as well as the significance of the social, economic environment which increasingly spread everywhere especially in the developing countries like Vietnam. In today's dynamic and ever changing world, there is a self-motivated action that has a great influence on the government, the economic sphere, and the civil society organizations in order to tackle the enormous consequences of changes wherein social, political and economic changes can be brought about. Actually, everyone has the power to partially challenge the actions to which they are opposed. In short, what we call progress particularly in relation to sustainable development usually supports our social capacities to provide constructive ways to engage with each other. To understand the new perspectives and challenges, it is necessary to have the capability of questioning, stimulating, and taking the initiatives for changing the old conventions, patterns, and values. Thus, the aptitude for organizational learning and innovation strategy becomes dominant in recent times. Consequently, the MSIs and MSP recognize that the greatest as well as multifaceted problems will never be solved by one group or entity. Hence, the significance of MSI's approach tries to put the scientific, communicational, agricultural, environmental, economic, political, and governmental perspectives altogether. MSI's tactic gives different perspectives to different communities such as CSOs, NGOs, individuals, and institutions to be involved and stimulates them to work with all the complexities of humans' social, cultural, political, and economical interactions. Furthermore, this paper mainly tried to highlight the ways through which the complex multi-stakeholders' initiating processes and social learning could be facilitated that enable Vietnam to face with the societal challenges under the Europe framework programme of Horizon 2020. It emphasized on the developments and practices which could be employed in order to improve the stakeholder's superiority which accomplished by individuals, organizations, communities, and societies. To address a certain sustainability problem, it was necessary to point out that the phenomenon of MISs and its importance needed some negotiating processes involving representatives of business, civil society, and possibly other stakeholder groups.

Therefore, this research suggested that multi-stakeholder approach could be a very challenging and sophisticated approach of societal challenges under Horizon 2020. MSIs as an instrument played a vital role to set the least standards of responsibility. Multi-stakeholder could create new business opportunities with worldwide competency. MSIs were considered as the only representative way to stimulate some changes in different sectors and levels when they encountered some gaps in the multiple global governance. MSIs could be considered as one of the possible ways to represent one of many possible instruments to influence corporate practices in a more sustainable direction to meet the societal challenges; for instance, Vietnam can be said that makes a difference through transforming its teaching centres to a qualified ones, supporting

international collaboration in its higher educations, researching and making innovations in international educational institutions, improving employment prospects, developing international standards in its vocational and technical education programmes, developing trust and understanding between young people as global citizens by creating international partnerships that provide a global dimension, increasing social awareness, creativity, and innovation; raising awareness of its needs to reduce the impact of climate change. It required to indicate that there are also some other more vital things for dialogue and negotiation process involving representatives of business, civil society for enhancing local, regional national and international, raising awareness and bringing different parties together, crafting common understanding and showing respect, sharing problems that significantly analysing sustainability problems, preparing suitable common ground which enhances organizational learning, and evaluating capacity building. Moreover, the added value of this sustainable development process led the CSOs, NGOs Government, and public/ private organizations to achieve their competitive advantages through improving stakeholders' qualities, behavioural knowledge skills, and abilities to achieve the collective knowledge.

Addressing the key positive aspects of MSIs, it revealed some noteworthy restrictions that create some boundaries from the ethical as well as functional viewpoints; for example, the method of study is a very important factor for doing a collaborative research. Furthermore, the local, national, and international biased point of views might lead to wrong perceptions. Similarly, media might sometimes provide some vague and irrelevant ideas which were not applicable in reality. Sometimes, the language also becomes a barrier for getting the adequate information and communicating whenever necessary. From practical implications standpoint, the high cost also was considered as a vital factor to conduct a dialogue which met with the CSOs, NGOs, individuals, and institutions. Equally, cultural barrier prevented the organizations and the individuals to export information to the outside world in order to help maintain their confidentiality. Time was another crucial factor which gave opportunity to understand MSIs approach and put them into practice. Although, it was presumed that collaborative efforts could achieve significant progress in mobilizing leadership and supporting environmental initiatives.

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