

***GLEN Internship 2009***

***The Final Report***

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***INEX-SDA***

***Human Resources Management in a Non-  
governmental Organization***

***Vietnam, Hanoi***

***June – September 2009***

***SJ Vietnam***

## **Summary**

The internship took place in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. The political system of the country could be described as a one party (communist) regime. Nowadays the country is going through a tremendous economic and social transformation when economic development and urbanisation is advancing in very high pace. The ecological and human right aspects seems often not to be seriously considered.

The host organization was Solidarités Jeunesses Vietnam (SJ Vietnam), a Vietnamese NGO (Non-Governmental Organization).

The work of SJ Vietnam concentrates on youth, disabled and disadvantaged children, environment, and cultural exchange. In all of its activities, there are both the local and the international volunteers involved. Thanks to its well established worldwide partnership SJ Vietnam is receiving many international volunteers to various voluntary programs - work camps, training courses, seminars and conferences.

The main task of the internship was to provide for a long term human resources strategy of the organisation and help to increase the staff's overall working capacities. Working duties and activities of the participants were bound primarily to the SJ Vietnam's office in My Dinh, Hanoi.

The main tangible results of the GLEN 2009 internship are: realisation of a one day training for the staff on global issues and social communication, streamlining of the local volunteers recruitment procedure, creation of an intranet application for the staff members, creation of an online database of local volunteers and finally elaboration of the paper "A Groundwork for the Long Term Human Resources Management Plan for SJ Vietnam".

## **Introduction**

Due to my professional, academic and personal interests I have been very interested in functioning of non-governmental organisations in developing countries. This was my main reason for applying to the GLEN program. I chose the internship in Hanoi, cause its content corresponded to my working experience (info-desk officer). The main task of the internship was to provide for a long term human resources strategy of the organisation and help to increase the staff's overall working capacities. Even though there were some small flops and issues I think the internship went very well and my encounter with my receiving organisation was mutually enriching. Moreover, SJ Vietnam helped me to open many doors to local people, customs and culture.

## **The Internship**

Still quite a poor country, Vietnam is now opening itself to the outside world and it's becoming more and more integrated into the global economy. Vietnam is also keeping stable and friendly relations with its neighbours. In the last 20 years, we have seen rapid economical development in this country, accompanied with significant social change and advancing urbanisation. Political system of Vietnam could be described as a one party system, with some degree of democratic procedures introduced at the level of local governance. Even as a low income country, Vietnam is maintaining quite good level of social services for its citizens. Still, there are plenty of those, who are left behind.

A thousand years old city Hanoi, where the internship took place, is the capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It is situated along the banks of the Red River with an estimated population of about 4 million inhabitants. Many colourful districts including the French styled Old Quarter near Hoan Kiem lake, the modern New Quarter, and the more touristy Tay Ho make it a buzzing and exciting city with many interesting places to visit. The cuisine is just amazing, the traffic situation is just terrible. The weather in Hanoi is hot and humid from May till September and comparatively cool and dry from October till April.

The receiving organisation Solidarités Jeunesses Vietnam (SJ Vietnam) is a Vietnamese NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) that promotes values of solidarity, peace and tolerance through active citizenship. It was set up on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2004 by and for national and international young volunteers, with help of SJ France, a full member of CCVIS (UNESCO) and NVDA, a partner of YAP and Alliance. SJ Vietnam is an independent, non-political and non-religious organization open to everybody without any distinction of nationality, race, philosophy, financial resources, education or sex.

The work of SJ Vietnam concentrates on youth, disabled and disadvantaged children, environment, and cultural exchange. In all of its activities, there are both the local and the international volunteers involved. SJ Vietnam hosts international volunteers via its partner around the world and organizes voluntary programs for them. SJ Vietnam organises work camps, training courses, seminars and conferences. It managed to carry out 50 work camps, 12 projects and 4 Group Work camps in 2008. It is also running long-term social projects. Also, SJ Vietnam sends its volunteers and staff to attend training courses and work camps abroad. SJ Vietnam has established worldwide partnership, especially with European networks.

I came to Hanoi on 7 July. My contact person was the SJ Vietnam long term volunteer coordinator Hong Xoan. She provided me with essential information before my arrival. Soon I had learned that there are many solutions to each and every problem popping up.

The introduction to the organisation went well. My tandem partner Jessica, who was at the place for already some time, was very helpful. But the actual content of our internship was blurred and unclear. It took a while until we managed to comprehend the local context, to understand the tasks of the staff members and to realise what is our position within the organisation. By the time, I felt I am getting more and more involved in the processes and proceedings of the organisation.

The cooperation with my tandem partner Jessica wasn't very intensive in the second half of the internship, when compared to the first half. This was caused by her rather long illness and also by her departing three weeks earlier than me.

The problems I have faced could be divided in several sections. The weather and climate in Hanoi was causing me some difficulties. It is very different to the one I am used to – summer is very hot and humid. Sleeping without air conditioning or fan was nearly impossible. On the other hand a raincoat was an essential piece of equipment.

The language barrier was also a challenge. English was a very useful but far from sufficient communication tool. Accompanied by a vast cultural difference, this led to many unavoidable misunderstandings.

Health was also a problem, to certain extend. However, the issues I went through were just minor – food poisoning, rash, tiredness, flu and cold.

Solution to the above mentioned problems was just in coping with the problems or in getting used to them.

Other kind of problems were related to work. At the beginning the biggest problem was that the scope of our tasks in the office was very unclear. The project proposal wasn't concrete at all. According to the proposal, we were supposed to analyse the organisation and provide for a long term human resources strategy. This is a huge task for a three months stay, considering that the way the local staff members understood the notion of human resources was very far from our understanding. Instead the staff members were trying to use our human resources for accomplishing the daily tasks in the office. Since we wanted to keep certain room for the task of analysis, and since we not always had agreed on the particular way certain things were done, we had to say NO to several demands. This had certainly created some tension.

I personally found a solution to this in simply selecting the tasks I found myself competent to deal with. One cannot do everything, however, sometimes it seemed the staff members were expecting it

from us. On the other hand, there was no way in changing anything without being involved in it.

I believe that the internship was fairly successful and brought about several tangible results.

Together with Jessica we set up a one day seminar for the staff members and local volunteers; the reception was quite good. We also tried to evaluate and analyse the processes of the organisation by preparing questionnaires for the staff members.

Even if our task, according to the project proposal, was to observe and analyse the working of the organisation, I felt that in order to bring about some positive change I have to get involved into the actual work of the organisation. I participated in recruiting the local volunteers and I managed to streamline this process to effectively handle an applicant within a single visit to the office, instead making him/her to come two or three times. I also founded an intranet application for keeping of important documents. This was accompanied with an online database of the recruited local volunteers. I was also teaching the staff to use the applications. These applications are used by the staff members until now (I know it, because I can still access the intranet), which is definitely a success. I also created a manual for the whole procedure of the local volunteers recruitment to enhance the sustainability of the innovated procedure.

I, together with Jessica and Hang of the SJ Vietnam staff, created a draft of the GLEN 2010 internship proposal, which I finalised and delivered to the coordinator in Europe.

In the end of my stay I finalised and handed over “A Groundwork for the Long Term Human Resources Management Plan of SJ Vietnam”, which included description of the structure of SJ Vietnam, description of the processes within the organization as well as critical analysis of main problems of SJ Vietnam and suggestions for their solution. I felt that my duties in relation to the project were thus fulfilled.

The most valuable thing I have learned in course of the internship is the importance of thorough communication for mutual understanding and joint work in a wider team. Experience I gained during the internship is invaluable. I can repeat here many “clichés”, which I actually feel being true: I met many friendly, intelligent and hard working people. I have learned to respect approaches to work and life in general very different to my angle of view. Also, I have learned to deal with people from a very different cultural background.

### **Conclusion and perspective**

I appreciate the internship very much for it has considerably widened my perspective. The main benefit I see in getting a real taste of contemporary life in Hanoi. I have worked with Vietnamese, I have lived with Vietnamese, I have “vietnamesed” my life as much as was possible within a three

months stay. I brought home many valuable contacts, many pictures, many artefacts. This is material which could be used any time it will be needed and useful.

I am also very happy I have witnessed the huge social change, which is happening in Vietnam right now. With its many obvious flaws it is fascinating indeed.

Concerning my future GE activities, I expect to give presentations and workshops, I plan on interaction with the Czech Vietnamese community and I want to keep contact with SJ Vietnam.