

Current Situation and Solutions to Increase Social Criticism Participation of Science and Technology Organizations

—Case Study of Affiliated Science and Technology Organizations of the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations

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Abstract

To promote democracy and strengthen social consensus, social criticism has been considered an important tool and information channel in Vietnam nowadays to help State's policy-making agencies to make the right decisions that in line with the people's need. However, the reality of social criticism work in Vietnam in general and of the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA) in particular still has limitations. Regarding the mechanism, although there have been many state documents regulating the role and function of VUSTA's social criticism such as Decision No. 1795/QD-TTg on October 21, 2015 of the Prime Minister, Decision No. 14/2014/QD-TTg on February 14, 2014 of the Prime Minister, Circular No. 11 on January 29, 2015 of the Ministry of Finance, People's Committees of provinces and cities issued Regulations on consultation, criticism and social assessment for local VUSTA, there is still a lack of effective mechanisms to gather, attract and encourage the participation of scientists and member associations of VUSTA, especially science and technology (S&T) organizations under VUSTA. In recent years, many S&T organizations under VUSTA have played an active role in research activities and participating in social criticism, contributing to perfecting policies, laws, programs and projects for socio-economic development. However, the operations of affiliated S&T organizations still face many difficulties because of capacity of S&T organizations is limited and regulations to create an environment for S&T organizations to operate are not yet complete, especially in social criticism activities. There are many aspects in assessing the current status of participating in social criticism of S&T organizations under VUSTA, such as regulations on functions and tasks, on research, consulting and social criticism capacity of S&T organizations; analyz-

ing the causes affecting the participation in social criticism activities of S&T organizations. This article will focus on evaluating and analyzing the current state of social criticism capacity and propose some solutions to increase the participation in social criticism of S&T organizations under VUSTA.

Keywords

Social Criticism, Science and Technology Organizations, Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations

1. Current Status of the Capacity to Participate in Social Criticism of Science and Technology Organizations under VUSTA

1.1. Regarding the Legal Status and Role of S&T Organizations under VUSTA

The S&T organization under VUSTA was established by the VUSTA Presidium, approved its charter of organization and operation in accordance with the law. It is a non-public S&T organization, granted a certificate of registration of S&T activities by the Ministry of S&T, granted a seal by the Ministry of Public Security and granted a tax code by the tax authority to operate.

S&T organizations are governed by the Law on S&T and other relevant legal provisions, operating according to the mechanism of autonomy, self-management and financial self-financing. The human resources include management team and employees who work full-time, part-time and may have collaborators.

The main function of S&T organizations is to gather experts and scientists to carry out the tasks of the organization. This function is specified in the organization and operation charter of each unit. This is also the implementation of part of VUSTA's functions: "1) Gathering and uniting Vietnamese science and technology intellectuals inside and outside the country, coordinating and guiding the operations of member associations. 2) Acting as a bridge between member associations with the bodies of the Party, the State and the Vietnam Fatherland Front and other organizations to tackle common issues for the VUSTA intellectuals. 3) Representing and protecting the legal rights and interests of its members, member associations, and Vietnamese intellectuals in science and technology." (Decision No. 1795/QĐ-TTg, 2015). These S&T organizations are allowed to contribute opinions in the process of building and completing policies, socio-economic development programs and projects according to the provisions of law and the charter of the organization.

Affiliated S&T organizations play an important role in the process of building and developing VUSTA. "These S&T organizations are considered a new factor in Vietnam in participating in the socialization of science and technology activities, education and training, people's health care, community development and environmental protection" (Ngoc Linh, 2023); VUSTA needs to "strengthen ex-

changes and links between affiliated organizations, introduce effective science and technology organization models to learn and share experiences; strengthen cooperation with state management agencies, create conditions for S&T organizations to participate in programs, projects, and topics to provide consultation, criticism, and social assessment” (Van Tan, 2018). Affiliated S&T organizations have contributed to enhancing VUSTA’s role in gathering, uniting, and promoting the creativity of S&T intellectuals to serve the country’s sustainable development.

1.2. Regarding the Functions and Tasks of Participating in Social Criticism of S&T Organizations

According to 2020 survey data on the functions and tasks of S&T organizations under VUSTA (Chien, 2020), there are 150/580 (about 26%) S&T organizations with the task of participating in social criticism and being specifically stipulated in the Charter and operation of the organization, and this task is also specified in the Certificate of registration of science and technology activities. This is an important legal basis for S&T organizations to carry out social criticism tasks.

One of VUSTA’s important tasks is “Proactively consulting, criticizing and assessing society to contribute to building a scientific and practical basis for planning and implementing the Party’s policy orientations and policies and State’s policies and laws, strategies, planning, programs, socio-economic development plans, and important projects” (Decision No. 1795/QD-TTg, 2015). VUSTA’s social criticism activities are “activities of providing comments, assessments, criticisms and recommendations on the suitability of the project content with the goals and conditions prescribed or the current situation” (Decision No. 14/2014/QD-TTg, 2014). However, in Decision No. 14/2014/QD-TTg, it only mentions social advocacy activities of VUSTA and its member associations without specific regulations for affiliated S&T organizations. This also affects the participation of S&T in social criticism activities.

Implementing assigned functions and tasks, a number of S&T organizations under VUSTA have proactively implemented research, consulting, and social criticism activities for policy orientations and policies, programs, socio-economic development projects. However, there are still many S&T organizations that have not been able to implement this task.

Survey data also shows that about 30% of S&T organizations under VUSTA are not interested in social criticism activities because the organization itself does not have the function or task of social criticism and at the same time the organization also does not know how process to implement.

1.3. Forms of Implementing Social Criticism Tasks of S&T Organizations

The 2020 survey results show that S&T organizations under VUSTA have implemented social criticism tasks in 5 main forms, shown in **Table 1** below:

Table 1. Forms of implementing social criticism activities of S&T organizations.

Forms of implementing social criticism activities	Quantity	Percentage (%)
1) Presiding over the implementation of the social criticism project	43	28.6
2) Organize seminars and discussions to collect opinions to serve social criticism	30	20.0
3) Coordinate/participate with other units to implement social criticism topics	78	52.0
4) Write reports and seminars for the purpose of social criticism	61	40.6
5) Appoint experts to participate in social criticism when be invited	60	40.0

Source: Survey data of 150 S&T organizations, 2020.

From **Table 1** above, it can be seen that the form of Coordination/participation with other units implementing the social criticism project accounts for the highest percentage (52%); next is Writing reports and seminars for the purpose of social criticism (40.6%) and Appointing experts to participate in social criticism when be invited (40%). Meanwhile, only 28.6% of units implemented the form of Presiding over the implementation of social criticism topics, and only about 20% of units implemented the form of Organizing seminars and discussions to collect opinions to serve social criticism. Thus, the majority of S&T organizations implement social criticism activities in the form of participating with other units but rarely directly preside over the implementation of social criticism activities.

Each form of social criticism has its own advantages, for example, the form of chairing the implementation of social criticism topics is a form that any S&T organization wishes to implement because it is suitable for the condition that the organization has a rich experience experts team. Besides, the organization can mobilize more reputable scientists to carry out the social criticism project.

The form of organizing seminars and discussions to collect opinions for social criticism helps the organization quickly synthesize opinions of experts and scientists and send recommendations directly to competent authorities for research. Furthermore, through seminars and discussions, experts and representatives of state management agencies have the opportunity to meet, exchange and discuss directly on issues that need social criticism opinions.

In addition, some S&T organizations carry out social criticism through other forms, such as: Social criticism is based on evidence through field research results; Social criticism through writing comments, evaluations, and recommendations on issues that require social criticism opinions and posting them in the media...

1.4. Regarding the Content of Social Criticism of S&T Organizations

“Scientific and technological organizations are participating more and more in stages in the policy development process, contributing opinions and proposing initiatives for the policy orientations and policies of the Party and the State” (Khoi, 2019), thereby contributing to perfecting policy orientations and policies, creating higher social consensus in the implementation process so that policies can truly come to life.

“For the process of developing and perfecting policies, the Institute of Environmental and Social Sciences has actively participated in contributing opinions and proposing initiatives for policies. Specifically, the Institute participated in commenting on the draft document of the 12th Party Congress on “Strengthening publicity, transparency and accountability of State administrative agencies”, participating in commenting on the draft document of 12th Party Congress on “Management of social issues in industrial zones”.

(N. D. B, male, Institute of Environmental and Social Sciences)

Below are the topics and fields that S&T organizations often attend in the process of implementing social criticism:

Table 2. Contents of implementing social criticism tasks.

Content of implementing social criticism tasks	Quantity	Percentage (%)
1) Content related to the Party’s policy orientations and policies	18	12.0
2) Content related to State policies and laws	76	50.6
3) Content related to important policy orientations and policies of provinces and cities	15	10.0
4) Socio-economic development projects and schemes	64	42.6
5) Other	30	20

Source: Survey data of 150 S&T organizations, 2020.

Table 2 shows that S&T organizations under VUSTA carry out tasks with content related to State’s policies and laws, accounting for the highest proportion (50.6%). Next is content related to socio-economic development projects and schemes (42.6%). These are comprehensive policies and projects, have a wide scope of influence nationwide and have a direct impact on people and businesses. As for issues related to policy orientations and policies of the Party and State from central to local levels, these organizations pay less attention (about 10% - 12% of implementation units).

1.5. Human Resources Participate in Social Criticism

Regarding human resources, besides many experienced experts, S&T organizations under VUSTA also have a team of young, well-trained and quite dynamic personnel. Through reported data of 150 S&T organizations, in 2019 there were 1803 workers working at S&T organizations, including 1036 official workers and 1093 part-time workers. In 2020, due to the Covid-19 epidemic, this force was somewhat reduced compared to 2019, specifically there were 1542 official workers, 696 part-time workers, this is shown in **Table 3** below.

Table 3. Human resources of the organization.

Year	Human	Official	part-time	Pay social insurance
2019		1.803	1.093	1.036
2020		1.542	696	783

Source: Survey data of 150 S&T organizations, 2020.

Thus, on average, a S&T organization under VUSTA has about 10 official employees and about 6 - 7 part-time employees, not including the number of collaborators. A few organizations have a larger workforce of 20 - 25 official employees, roughly equivalent to a medium-sized public S&T organization.

The fact that experts from S&T organizations under VUSTA participate in many stages of the policy development process, providing scientific arguments and practical basis for policy makers, has clearly affirmed their role, potential and strengths of S&T intellectuals in S&T organizations.

Number of S&T organizations under VUSTA have in-depth policy research capacity, have systematic research, evaluation and recommendation activities, which have been recognized by both scientists and authorities, for example: “The Center for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development (CIRD) coordinates with the National Assembly’s Science, Technology and Environment Committee and the General Department of Forestry to conduct a series of surveys, assessments and consultation workshops to provide scientific arguments advocate for amending and replacing the Law on Forest Protection and Development and the Law on Forestry to protect the rights and interests of households and communities as well as consulting on the Land amendment Law 2013” (Dat, 2019). Statistics show that there are “63 draft laws, 64 draft decrees and 128 draft circulars and propose many policy initiatives for management agencies to consider...” vusta.vn (2018) has been implemented by S&T organizations under VUSTA.

Although the official staff is not large, S&T organizations are still able to mobilize the participation of experts and scientists in social criticism activities. The widespread and social participation of qualified and experienced experts is the factor that ensures that the issue of social criticism is considered in a systematic, scientific and practical basis.

However, the capacity of human resources to perform social criticism work in S&T organizations is still uneven, many units and officials do not have enough capacity and experience to carry out this activity. Therefore, some S&T organizations have not implemented social criticism activities deeply, have not brought many specific results and have not created the trust and coordination of competent authorities.

In social criticism activities, the leader of a S&T organization plays a very important role, especially in terms of qualifications, vision, acumen, bravery and determination to implement social criticism tasks. In the context of increasingly developing society and deep international integration, there are many economic, social, scientific, educational, health care, environmental issues... arising, even emerging, but how to choose the right issue and be able to conduct social criticism depends on the choice of the organization leader. This is a demonstration of the capacity of the human resources leading the S&T organization in this activity.

1.6. Financial Capacity of S&T Organizations

In order for non-public S&T organizations to participate in social criticism activities, in addition to factors such as the quality of human resources and the ability to organize and perform tasks, financial factors play a very important role for a social criticism activity to be effective. Funding sources for S&T organizations to carry out social criticism tasks are usually from budget sources ordered by state agencies “Presiding organizations are organizations with legal status assigned to preside over the implementation of social consulting, criticism and assessment tasks: Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations, Local Union of Science and Technology Associations, National Science and Technology Industry Associations, Science and Technology Organizations” ([Circular No. 11/2015/TT-BTC, 2015](#)) or from other legally mobilized funding sources. However, the current cost norms for this activity are very low compared to the spending norms for similar scientific activities, so it is not consistent with the practice of implementing social criticism activities of S&T organizations.

According to VUSTA’s report, every year a small number of affiliated S&T organizations register and are funded from the state budget to implement social criticism seminars; a number of S&T organizations receive orders from state agencies at the central and local levels to carry out research serving social criticism activities.

As for other sources, a number of S&T organizations under VUSTA use funds to carry out social criticism tasks through S&T service activities, corporate sponsorships or a very few from research funding of the international organizations in accordance with the provisions of Vietnamese law.

1.7. Satisfaction Level of S&T Organizations in Social Criticism Activities

Survey results show that S&T organizations also have advantages when participating in social criticism activities. This is shown in [Table 4](#) below.

Table 4. Advantages when implementing social criticism activities.

Advantages	Quantity	Percentage (%)
1) Trusted ordering agencies and organizations	45	30.0
2) Invited by VUSTA to participate in social criticism	32	21.3
3) VUSTA is ready to coordinate and sponsor social criticism activities	15	10.0
4) VUSTA acts as a bridge to convey social criticism opinions to competent agencies	8	5.3

Source: Survey data of 150 science and technology organizations, 2020.

Table 4 shows that 30% of units responded that they are trusted by agencies and organizations to carry out social criticism tasks. This is important for non-public S&T organizations because when these organizations gain trust, the proposed social advocacy tasks will be more favorable.

Only 21.3% of units were invited by VUSTA to participate in social criticism, 10% of units were sponsored by VUSTA for this task and 5.3% of units were helped by VUSTA to convey opinions to the competent authorities. This shows that VUSTA's support for affiliated S&T organizations has received attention but needs to continue to receive more attention in the future.

Assessing the level of satisfaction of S&T organizations in carrying out social criticism tasks, the percentage of S&T organizations responding to the level of Satisfaction and Partly Satisfaction is much higher than the level of Dissatisfaction. Specific data are shown in **Table 5** below.

Table 5. S&T organizations' self-assessment on the level of satisfaction in Deploying social criticism tasks for the period 2015-2020.

Satisfied		Somewhat satisfied		Unsatisfied		Total	
45	30%	66	(44%)	39	(26%)	150	(100%)

Source: Survey data of 150 S&T organizations, 2020.

S&T organizations responded Satisfied and Partly satisfied because: Suggestions and recommendations in the organization's social criticism report were received and recorded by the authorities. These organizations have provided competent agencies with a lot of information, grounds, and objective scientific data to serve the review and approval of socio-economic development schemes, plans, and projects. Through the implementation of social criticism activities, S&T organizations have gathered and promoted the role and intelligence of intellectuals, experts, and scientists, contributing to the implementation of the functions and tasks of VUSTA.

Thus, according to the survey and analysis content above, it can be affirmed that S&T organizations are an organic part and play an important role in the process of building and developing the organization of VUSTA, including social

criticism activities. However, besides the results achieved, S&T organizations still encounter many difficulties and limitations, especially related to ensuring the maintenance and development of resources, social criticism capacity as well as legitimacy when the this organization participates in social criticism activities.

2. Propose Solutions for S&T Organizations to Well Implement Social Criticism Activities

To promote the role of S&T organizations in participating in social criticism activities, contributing more strongly to the development of VUSTA the author proposes a number of solutions as follows:

- Competent agencies should continue to review, supplement, and perfect environmental institutions (including guidelines and policies on social criticism; regulations for organizations conducting social criticism; regulations for agencies receiving social criticism and regulations on the relationship between these components) so that S&T organizations can participate in social criticism activities effectively, contributing to perfecting policy orientations, policies, programs and socio-economic development projects.
- The Ministry of Finance needs to soon amend the financial mechanism in the direction of “increasing funding sources for social consulting, criticism and appraisal work: have appropriate funding regimes to encourage VUSTA’s scientists who spend a lot of time and energy on research, social criticism” (L.H, 2024).
- VUSTA needs to regularly evaluate and summarize the participation in social criticism of affiliated S&T organizations in VUSTA’s overall social criticism activities, thereby adjusting and supplementing internal regulations accordingly to promote effective participation of affiliated science and technology organizations.
- VUSTA needs to organize training classes on methods and the process for implementing social criticism activities to improve the capacity to participate in social criticism for affiliated S&T organizations; “Continue to rectify the activities of organizations and conduct reviews of organizations that operate weakly, ineffectively, and not in accordance with the principles and purposes” (Giang, 2022), affecting the reputation of the S&T organization itself and the reputation of VUSTA.
- S&T organizations need to proactively and regularly improve their organizational structure, expand cooperation, and increase resources (human and financial) for social criticism activities to well perform the tasks of social criticism.
- S&T organizations need to proactively propose and improve the quality of implementing social criticism tasks to create more trust in cooperation and assign tasks to VUSTA as well as competent agencies in social criticism activities.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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