



# BUILD-IT PARTNERSHIP SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW

## Background

The BUILD-IT activity (Building University-Industry Learning and Development through Innovation and Technology) is funded by USAID and implemented by Arizona State University. The activity has worked with 13 Vietnamese universities since 2015 to establish university-industry partnerships (UIPs). In 2019, the Government of Vietnam has a new policy to increase university autonomy and reduce financial dependence on the government. Successful UIPs can contribute to this by keeping academic programs relevant, promoting quality education, and helping universities be more responsive to market needs.

## Purpose

This review assessed the sustainability of BUILD-IT's partnerships, provided recommendations to inform future USAID programming, including the BUILD-IT extension period, and explored the challenges and barriers to effective autonomous operations, university needs, and ideas for effective partnering solutions.

## Methods

The research data were gathered and triangulated from various sources, including desk review, key-informant interviews, focus group discussions, reflection sessions from the BUILD-IT Annual Stakeholder Meeting, and data validation workshops.



Students use tools at the USAID-supported Maker Innovation Space at Can Tho University. Photo Credit: USAID

## Findings

### *Valuable aspects of BUILD-IT partnerships:*

- ❖ UIPs provided applied learning opportunities for students, helping them gain skills that prepare them for work.
- ❖ UIPs strengthened industry advisory boards (IABs) and expanded UPs' capacity to foster productive partnerships.
- ❖ BUILD-IT capacity building for university partners' (UPs) leadership and faculty promoted quality education, program accreditation, funding diversification, and autonomy efforts.
- ❖ BUILD-IT pedagogical training improved faculty's teaching methodologies.
- ❖ UIPs supported improved UPs' capabilities in autonomous operation by:
  - Changing the mindset of UPs' leaders regarding autonomy; Enhancing university capacity to exercising autonomy in three areas; academic, personnel, and financial/property;
  - Increasing UPs' institutional brand image and raising their quality profiles;
  - Supporting their international accreditation process;
  - Enhancing UPs ability to sustain and expand meaningful partnerships with Industry Partners (IP).

**Maker Innovation Space (MIS)** sponsored by BUILD-IT - a co-working space for UPs and IPs enhances the quality of Science Technology Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) programs. In Can Tho University's (CTU), MIS has elevated its status as a premier research facility, enhanced facilities for students and staff, and attracted more investment and partnership opportunities.

*"Maker Space has become a spotlight of Can Tho University, a place for students and staff to translate theories in STEM fields into prototypes for technological solutions, fostering their critical thinking and creativity ... It has also been designed to become a Research and Development place for medium and small size enterprises, a training venue for industry partners."* (CTU Leadership).

# Findings

## *Barriers to full support from BUILD-IT partnerships*

- ❖ IPs' limited engagement in implementing activities, mentoring students, and participating in IABs.
- ❖ Limited scope and funding for student activities; lack of adequate measures to promote the engagement of students and faculty in UIP-supported activities.
- ❖ Lack of direct and close connections between BUILD-IT UPs and IPs significantly affected the possibility of continued long-term investment.
- ❖ Barriers to expanding female engagement, including female reluctance to take on leading roles in some Project Based Learning activities, especially those focusing on automation.
- ❖ BUILD-IT focused on training for Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditation; while UPs requested more support for ASEAN University Network–Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) accreditation.
- ❖ Lack trainers who are familiar with or fully understand the local contexts.
- ❖ The English for Engineering Concepts course was poorly matched to student needs and less established due to challenges organizing student schedules for an extra-curricular activity, especially during COVID-19.

## *Barriers for autonomous operation*

- ❖ The autonomy landscape is discouraging with unclear policies: universities are under different layers of management.
- ❖ UPs have limited resources for autonomous operations and some top university leaders are slow to change their mindsets, affecting their ability to pivot to greater autonomy and sustainability
- ❖ BUILD-IT trainers lacked local understanding, resulting in their limited capability to support UPs to develop workable strategies for autonomous operation.

# Recommendations

## **BUILD-IT**



- Continue to expand provision of training sessions to further enhance capacity building of university leaders and faculty, with increased resources and supervision to ensure lessons learned are put into practice.
- Capacity building should include local experts. This will offer more local expertise and support the universities to build relationships with these experts.
- Explore strategies to increase funding for student experiential learning activities, and make these activities more visible to attract female students.



- Provide more focus on AUN-QA accreditation, which is highly demanded by UPs, while continuing to offer ABET support for interested UPs.
- Continue to provide support for UPs' specific needs and in enhancing their capacity for effective autonomous operation. More support should be provided to help UPs implement the lessons learned into their practices.
- Help UPs to approach more IPs directly, rather than managing the relationship for them.

## **USAID**



- Consider signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education and Training to facilitate more engagement of education policy makers in BUILD-IT and similar activities and to further develop and improve autonomy-related policies.

To read the full report, please visit [here](#).

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