



Mandate Spotlight: 057 Vietnam HAWA

Enhancing the Impact of the HAWA Online Platform for Exhibition (HOPE) of Vietnamese MSMEs

Location: Vietnam

Beneficiaries: Handicraft and Wood Industry Association of Ho Chi Minh City (HAWA) & select HAWA MSME Members

Consultant: Globally Cool

Start: Mar. 2021

End: Mar. 2022

CTIF Contribution:

CAD \$99,836

Context

Businesses across Vietnam, and MSMEs in particular, have faced serious revenue and cashflow challenges as a result of the drop in trade associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. An April 2020 survey by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimated that 82% of Vietnamese businesses forecast a reduction in revenue in 2020 and that 35,000 businesses would cease operations this year, exceeding the number of new start-ups.

These impacts have been felt in Vietnam's wood, furniture, and handicraft industries. According to HAWA's research among its MSME members, more than 80% of existing international orders were delayed or cancelled, amounting to losses of more than USD 130M. 51% of these companies are now out of business or are downsizing, and these numbers grow larger each day. As a result, HAWA projects that 45% of workers in this industry have lost their jobs. By the end of March 2020, 105 firms had let go of 21,410 employees.

These circumstances led HAWA to think of an innovative solution to help its members find new buyers worldwide to sustain or increase their revenues and retain or grow their workforces. Out of these circumstances, the HAWA Online Platform for Exhibition (HOPE) was created to replace or substitute for the traditional in-person venues, most notably trade fairs and exhibitions, through which buyers and sellers have typically met and struck agreements. HAWA's mission is to strengthen the export capabilities of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Vietnam's wood, furniture, and handicraft sectors. In doing so, HAWA, through HOPE, is enabling its members to grow their businesses, retain and strengthen their workforces, and reduce poverty.

Brief Description of the Mandate

CTIF's consultant, Globally Cool, provided technical assistance aimed at enhancing the HAWA Online Platform for Exhibition (HOPE); assisting HAWA's MSME members in utilising and maximising the benefits of the HOPE platform to access new international markets; and developing communications products to promote and facilitate the use of the HOPE platform by prospective buyers in international markets, particularly in Canada. This technical assistance ensured the prioritization of women-led MSME members (those owned by women and where women comprise the majority of their workforce) in the handicraft and wood industry association.

Selected Key Findings and Recommendations

- **Improved HAWA's Capacity to carry out its role in promoting Vietnamese MSMEs (majority are women-led)** in the handicraft, wood and furniture by helping them enhance the design and contents of the HOPE platform, creating promotional materials for the HOPE platform, and coaching them on digital marketing strategies
- The HOPE Platform now **showcases approximately 100 MSMEs** in its digital showroom and has over 2000 products, which can be searched using smart filters through a user-friendly format.
- HAWA's MSME members understand how the HOPE Platform can help them access new markets and provides digital marketing tools that can be used for their respective businesses.
- **Facilitated access to new markets**, particularly Canada, for HAWA and its MSMEs by carrying out roundtables and virtual sessions with potential Canadian buyers and launching an intensive online promotional campaign.

- Re-launching the **HOPE Platform has resulted in over 50 Vietnamese MSMEs have received requests for quotes**, and approximately half of them have reached the negotiation stage with potential buyers, including in Canada. It is anticipated that some of these transactions will progress towards the sampling and contract signing stages following the conclusion of this technical assistance.
- **Intensive digital marketing campaigns** using Google, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram, among other platforms, and collaborations with influencers in the handicraft and wood sectors targeting potential buyers in Canada as well as other international markets.

Environment & Climate Change

Environmental sustainability, social compliance and other standards required by Canadian buyers are crucial criteria for potential buyers of wood and wood products. Such issues were mainstreamed in the comprehensive review and recommendations to enhance the HOPE website and the promotional activities geared towards Canadian buyers. Strategic communications on environmental sustainability and other applicable standards in the wood and furniture industry were included in the training of HAWA and its MSME members, such as clearly communicating certifications and standards and incorporating such messages in the company's unique selling proposition. It is also noteworthy that many furniture members of HAWA already comply with important legal timber certification requirements required by their international customers and that HAWA requires all members to use legally sourced timber prior to joining.

Follow-up Support

Following the conclusion of the mandate, a number of recommendations for further improvements were suggested, including extensive capacity building on content creation for websites and social media to enhance the HOPE Platform and to enhance the effectiveness of MSMEs using this Platform. Capacity-building sessions could be offered to these MSMEs to help enhance their online presence and capabilities to effectively and efficiently utilize the Platform.

Testimonials



Figure 1: The HAWA Team

Gender and Social Inclusion

The selection criteria and promotion of the training course among MSME members of HAWA specified the need to target having a majority of female participation. In the end, 52% of the participants in the training and coaching activities of this mandate were women. The one-on-one coaching of the women involved strengthening their self-trust to create an action plan toward business sustainability.

The comprehensive review of the HOPE website and the design of the training course took into account the importance of building women's knowledge and capacity in business digitalization. Digitalization allows women to work remotely from home while taking care of their families, but it has also become increasingly important due to the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place at the time of the mandate's implementation.

"The project with CTIF and Globally Cool has made the [Hopefairs.com](https://www.hopefairs.com) platform more professional and effective, creating a good impression and increasing its reach to international buyers. At the same time, the project also provides great support for HAWA members, helping businesses access digital marketing tools more quickly and easily."

- Mr. Nguyen Chanh Phuong Vice Chairman of HAWA
