

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROVIDING SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES TO YOUNG MIGRANT WORKERS FROM THE JOINT EFFORTS PERSPECTIVE

Nguyen Duc Loc⁽¹⁾

(1) Thu Dau Mot University

ABSTRACT

The main research methodology of the paper is a mixed method approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. Its focus is on the analysis and assessment of the role of social organizations in ensuring social welfare services to young migrant workers from the post-structuralist perspective, centered on the dimension of joint efforts between social organizations. The aim is to identify the present status and assess the role of social organizations, together with state organizations, in developing proper welfare planning for migrant workers.

Key words: social organizations, workers, joint efforts

1. RATIONALE

In an effort to boost the economy, modern Vietnam is undergoing industrialization and modernization, which results in an immense flux of migrants to industrial zones and export-processing zones to seek jobs. They have been quickly integrated into the characteristic environment and become the main labor force (Nguyễn Đức Lộc, 2015). To this specialized environment they have also introduced distinct ways of life, beliefs and manners from different backgrounds, the result of which is a rich mosaic of different lifestyles. Their struggle for survival in urban life is not all a bed of roses. Their risks and hardship of life are a daily matter, leaving them with nothing but an existence destitute of both material and spiritual needs, knowledge and social skills, etc.

Generally speaking, the migrant workers have a very hard life struggling to stay within income despite ever increasing living costs. Added to that are job insecurity, working long hours for unfair pay, and very little chance for promotion (Nguyễn Đức Lộc, 2015). More importantly, many foreign businesses are attracted to Vietnam because it provides cheap labor sources and the burden of social welfare falls on the local governments. However, ongoing socialization of social welfare services in Vietnam is considered an aid to an overloaded welfare system as intended by the national policy, which proves the State's inability to deliver on social welfare, especially for workers in export-processing and industrial zones. The burden of living costs has remained with them since the State began the socialization of welfare subsystems in education, medical care, housing, etc. in the transition to market economy. It has long been an Asian tradition like in Vietnam to have a welfare economy in the family or family's lineage or a familiar social network to seek help in times of need.

It is characteristic of the social institution in Vietnam for political organizations to exist and take an important role in uniting the society to implement socio-political objectives outlined by the Party and the State. Until now, much has been done by the political and social organizations to assemble young workers and take care of their life, especially migrant workers, which serve as an extension of the Party and the State in an effort to provide welfare. However, given current aims and approach of action peculiar to the political and social organizations, this task faces considerable difficulties, sometimes not in keeping with the need for growth. To some extent, it is these organizations that have difficulties assembling young workers in industrial zones. The social structure is diverse and changing, and the organizations are not adequately prepared to assemble the workers, not tuned enough to their life and needs to attract them.

Industrialization and modernization need a young labor force in possession of knowledge, expertise and mastery of science and technology, high moral standards, wholesome lifestyle and a healthy physique. Therefore, the task of uniting and assembling the young, which should have a contributing role towards such a labor force, is becoming more urgent and pressing. The current issue is how to unite and assemble the young more effectively. Recently, such political and social organizations like the Trade Union, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and the Vietnam Youth Association have taken steps to enhance the performance of their activities, thus making a positive impact on the awareness of Youth Union members in industrial zones and export-processing zones. Much interest has been taken and many studies have been conducted, but quantitatively qualitatively not commensurate with social demands.

For this very reason, this paper is centered on analyzing and assessing the role of social organizations in taking care of social welfare, in an effort towards the best policy for migrant workers' welfare. The aim is also to identify the present status and define a policy to improve the workers' welfare, and thereby provide them security to fulfill their role with dignity. Still another aim is to improve and perfect the theoretical foundation for research on the role of social organizations under new conditions, by a research into the social institutions regarding the workers, both official and unofficial.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When examining the theoretical perspectives on social institutions, one of those often referred to as a pioneer in explaining social institutions is the **structuralist perspective**. The principles of structuralist perspective derive from structural linguistics which assumes human thought to be shaped by linguistic structures. Since humans have a predetermined framework of language, post-structuralist perspectives reject a correlation between autonomy in the subject and the determination of meaning in a language and culture. Applying the **structuralist perspective** to explain social institutions, researchers view that social institutions often fall into two groups always standing in opposition, as evidenced by the division into organizational groups: official / unofficial, state / private, traditional / modern, etc (Trần Hữu Quang, 2016). The structuralist perspective may have succeeded in proving the role of a framework of social institutions that impact human awareness, but the structuralists have overlooked such factors as human active agent, cultural relativity, and the

history of development of each society. As a result, in order to repudiate a structuralist model of a stable, universal and ahistorical nature (M. Balkin, 1996) developed by structuralists to provide an explanation of social institutions, some researchers introduced a new perspective named **deconstruction**. According to Derrida, one of the early users of this term, of the two opposite elements in the post-structuralist perspective, there always exists one more dominant than the other because it is considered the universal, standard and central case, whereas the other is put in a peripheral, secondary and derivative position (Derrida, 1976). Accordingly, the structuralist perspective always involves a hidden rank differentiation between two opposite groups. To fuse the separation between social organizations, post-structuralists initiated the model of “joint efforts” among social organizations. They assume that as opposed to official social institutions, unofficial ones are “active structures” (Trần Hữu Quang, 2016), acting more on social reality than invariable structures. Therefore, in place of the traditional perspective which always tends towards a mechanical polarization between social groups, the post-structuralist perspectives favor a more diverse social order for social organizations to work together. As explained by Trần Hữu Quang (2016), the post-structuralist perspective focus on the capacity for action by human agency (humans are not only role players always acting mechanically as determined by the structure), on the randomness highly unpredictable in the social processes (a fact that the community of social sciences began to pay more attention to in late 20th century), placing more importance on the differences rather than similarities in society, on gaps and paradoxes in the operation of the systems. (Stuart Sim, 2005, tr. 291).

The main research methodology of this paper is combining qualitative and quantitative analysis based on data from the project “The role of social organizations in helping young migrant workers in industrial zones and export processing zones in Ho Chi Minh City” written in 2015-2017. The locations chosen for the survey are the four districts with big industrial zones and export-processing zones in Ho Chi Minh City, Thủ Đức District, District 7, District 12 and Tân Bình District. We performed quota sampling and cluster sampling in various stages totaling 800 interview samplings which are quantitative samplings. The sources of qualitative data we collected included comprehensive interviews with workers and representatives of social groups. We also conducted focus group interviews with worker leaders at the companies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The matter under discussion in this paper focuses on the aspects of social networks among the workers in pursuit of livelihood, considering the relationship between participating in social organizations and access to social resources from different social organizations. In addition, an examination of the interconnection between social organizations will provide a clear understanding of the joint efforts among social organizations so as to initiate an approach to joint efforts perspective aimed to deliver welfare to migrant workers.

Workers’ Social Networks and Participation in Social Agencies: In the journey to subsist in urban areas with low work, particularly in industrial and import-export areas, laborers meet with a great many difficulties, particularly access to material and immaterial

assistance in emergency situations. According to a report by UNFPA (2016), Vietnamese migrants are faced with numerous difficulties, including: lodging, health services, occupational searches, security issues, pollution, children's education, administrative procedure, intra-community discrimination, adaptation to new living conditions, etc...

The above challenges raise the question: how can workers use their personal and social resources to cope? As they personally continue to build wide-reaching social networks, their ability to ease their situations will increase, therefore aiding them to react to harmful circumstances adequately and recuperate before too much damage has been done. To describe it differently, stronger resources result in increased ability to react successfully to issues in general, and effects independence and initiative in their recuperation processes. However, in reality, mobilizing workers' resources to prevent issues before they arise presents its own difficulties. The main reason for this is the lack of promotion from sociopolitical organizations regarding the role and position of living assistance for workers, as is the hope of the state. The sources of assistance for laborers are clearly illustrated in the figure below, which further illustrates the previous assertion.

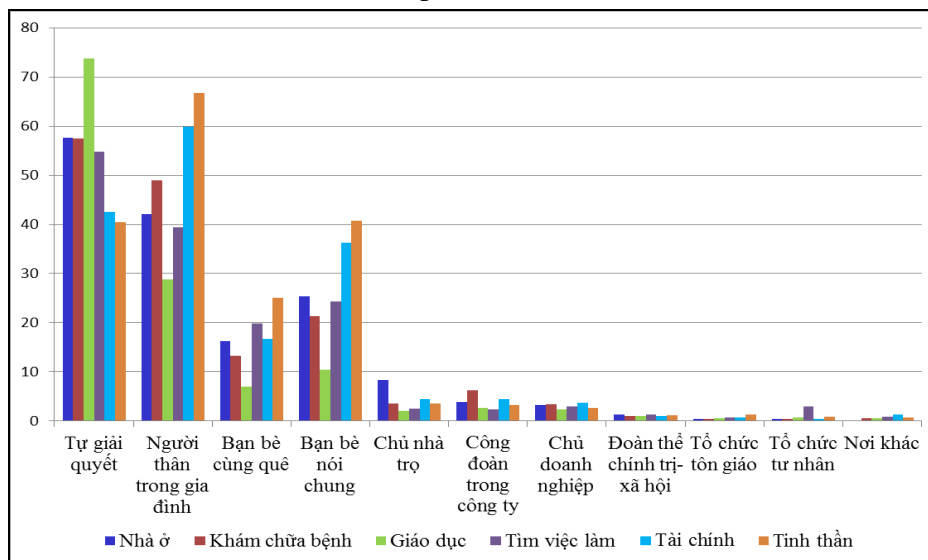


Figure 1: Sources of Assistance for Migrant Workers

The result of examining laborer participation in social programs in industrial and import-export zones, labor unions were the sociopolitical organization with the highest participation rate (58%). The reason for the high participation rate is easily understood: because unions represent the legal rights and interests of the workers. However, further investigation reveals low participation rates in the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and the Vietnamese Youth Union (9% or laborers are members of the Ho Chi Minh CYU and no workers currently participate in the VNYU) although more than 70% of laborers qualify as “youths” in age and are eligible for participation. Ở một dữ liệu khảo sát khác, Although female laborers make up more than half of the composite labor force, only 2% of female laborers are currently members of the Vietnamese Women's Union (VNWU), as can be seen in the following figure:

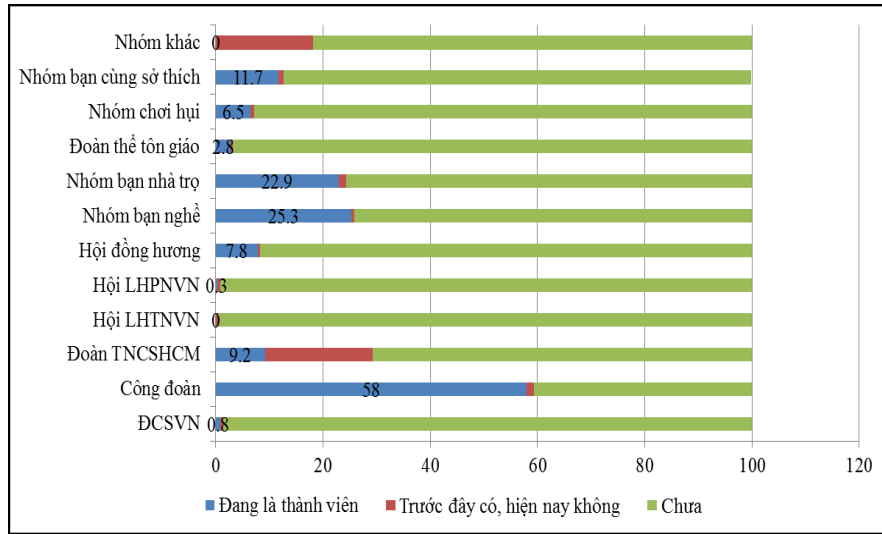


Figure 2: Laborer Participation in Social Organizations

The results above show that sociopolitical organizations still do not present participation attractively enough for laborers. Disregarding unions which were previously representatives of the direct interests of laborers, other sociopolitical organizations such as the Ho Chi Minh CYU, the VNYU or the VNWU, laborers only comprise a small fraction.

Among non-governmental social organizations, the results can be organized as follows: the groups with relatively large participation rates are coworkers (25,3%), neighbors (22,9%), shared-interest groups (11,7%) and groups of common local origin—*hội đồng hương* (7,8%). (See figure 12)

Connection and Cooperation among Social Organizations in Assisting Youth Laborer Welfare: Although it is also responsible for attending to the needs of laborers, unions in production zones and local unions are still independently active, lacking communal connections and support to be both strong and effective. Currently the collective strategies of local unions is still entirely independent from the unions in production/industrial zones, though they should have a close cooperative relationship since they share the goal of creating advantages for workers. They still follow a model of “might makes right” and lack both cooperation and synchrony.

Similarly, the an appraisal of the total difficulties associated with union organizations and laborers indicates the collective difficulty of workers, but the root cause is an issue of livelihood, environment of their enterprise, and the competence of those assigned to the organizations themselves.

With regard to worker welfare, unions can be seen as a bridge between workers and owners of enterprises. Unions have the role of protecting laborers’ interests by advising and interceding on their behalf in the circumstances relevant to the unions’ capability. Unions further protect the interests of the workers when those interests have been violated, as when they have not received unemployment benefits, compensation for labor-related injury, overwork, reduction in the rights of workers to benefit the enterprise, meals without sanitary food, etc... Unions can also aid workers in their daily lives by giving gifts, visiting workers,

and organizing events and activities for workers. Finally, unions aid laborers in communicating and distributing state and company policies related to labor.

Based on the aforementioned activities, unions play a vital role alongside the workers themselves. Unions are a powerful ally when they participate in labor relationships as a bridge between laborers and those who benefit from the labor, which then results in secure welfare for workers. The unions have come to a legal position such that they participate in both the material and immaterial lives of union members, while at the same time protecting laborers according to the law, communicating the will of the laborers and attending to the rights and obligations afforded by labor.

As with the VNYU, unions also organize periodic activities throughout the year, including birthdays for union members, celebrations on 20 October, 8 March, International Children's Day, Lunar New Year, and support events for sickness. Likewise, these programs also are group-oriented, particularly in times of change because small-scale sustainable organization aids connection and consolidation among union members and between union members and the larger organization, but in a few union foundations certain other programs have been implemented, such as moneylending programs aimed at expanding and diversifying workers' livelihoods.

The establishment of a union in any organization is largely dependent on the scale of the enterprise and its goodwill in allowing for unions to perform well in their roles. In addition, union expenditure and assistance programs for union members depend significantly on the leadership of the enterprise. Since union officials are almost always employees of the company, the union protects its workers in labor disputes with those who use the labor, who are also those who pay the salaries of the union officials. At this time, union officials must be shrewd negotiators in order to strike agreements between the two sides, including those related to the power of union officials. However, although there has been significant effort on the part of unions to increase the role of the employers in protecting and assisting their laborers, as above, unions have not yet been able to realize their optimal organizational functionality.

One visit to a youth laborer assistance office, in the time spent waiting to interview one union official, we were given a small volume, entitled *A Union Representative's Handbook – Association with Non-State Enterprises and Non-Public Business Units*. Upon paging through it, we found such titles as “a number of addresses in the city limits to help youth laborers (*một số địa chỉ hỗ trợ thanh niên công nhân trên địa bàn thành phố*)” and in this section it continued to detail the up-to-date activities of all of the locations. However, as we continued to read, we found every location was within the “city center,” in Districts 1, 3, 6, 11, and Phú Nhuận, and too distant from either the residences or the workplaces of the workers. In any case that a worker wishes to come to any of these locations to ask for assistance, seek consultation, or participate in the social activity programs requires them to have available transportation, such as a motorbike. If they use buses, the 3-4 interchanges are required to reach a destination. In one conversation with such a worker, he shared with us that, in cases where the employer mistreated him, he was unable to make contact with an agency because,

MỘT SỐ ĐỊA CHỈ HỖ TRỢ THANH NIÊN CÔNG NHÂN TRÊN ĐỊA BÀN TP. HỒ CHÍ MINH

The map displays the following districts and areas:

- Q. 12, Q. Gò Vấp, Q. Tân Bình, Q. Thủ Đức, Q. 9, Q. 2, Q. 7, Q. 4, Q. 5, Q. 6, Q. 8, Q. 10, Q. 11, Q. Bình Tân, Q. Phú Nhuận, Q. Bình Thạnh, Q. Tân Phú

CHỦ THÍCH

- Điểm hỗ trợ (Support point)
- Đường giao thông (Transportation road)
- Sông ngòi (River)

Điểm hỗ trợ (Support points):

- Cung Văn hóa Lao Động
- Nhà văn hóa Thanh niên
- Nhà văn hóa Phụ Nữ
- Trung tâm sinh hoạt đa ngoại Thanh - Thiếu nhi
- Trung tâm Dinh dưỡng Tp. Hồ Chí Minh
- Trung tâm chăm sóc sức khỏe Sinh sản Tp. Hồ Chí Minh
- Trung tâm truyền thông xã khỏe Tp. Hồ Chí Minh
- Trung tâm hỗ trợ Thanh niên công nhân - Văn phòng 1
- Trung tâm hỗ trợ Thanh niên công nhân - Văn phòng 2
- Trung tâm hỗ trợ Thanh niên công nhân - Văn phòng 3
- Trung tâm hỗ trợ Thanh niên công nhân - Văn phòng 4

Opposite to the activities and assistance offered to workers, we can also evaluate their organizational method and content in cases of activities organized by companies, such as events for artistic activities and physical exercise, gift exchange programs, and public transportation vouchers around Lunar New Year. Moreover, practical education, such as knowledge of trades, English, computer skills, cosmetology, etc... can also be organized according to this model. However, these classes cannot attract a large number of worker-participants because extant reasoning of the organizing officials is that “the better part of

workers are unmotivated to study.” Despite that, those same officials also admit that periodic study or activity for workers cannot be sustainably realized due to economic constraints as well.

In exploring the economic situation of the above official’s organization, we discovered the total budget for one event was only about 400,000 VND, including the budget for purchasing gifts for the gift exchange parties and advertising the event to the workers. With such a paltry amount, the content of an event will not be creative enough to attract a sufficient number of participants, nor will it be possible to improve future events. The sociopolitical organizations continually increase in number in order to better ensure support for workers’ lives, although in recent years the policy of supporting workers by the State of Vietnam. However, with the number of workers rapidly increasing in industrial zones and the demands of the workers themselves doing the same, the need for assistance has led to financial limitations becoming an intractable problem for many groups.

In 2015, the Institute for Economics and Policy Research (VEPR) published a report titled “Economic Costs for Public Mass Organizations in Vietnam,” which enumerated the allocation of funds by the state for sociopolitical organizations, which have not slowed in their growth through the years. The statistical analysis of the report points out that the state budget for the Central Assembly of sociopolitical organizations in 2014 was 14.023 billion VND (VEPR, 2015: 55). The aforementioned figure is a total of both local budgets and the allocation for the central organizations. The state budget for assistance to the Central Assembly increased from 781.3 billion VND in 2006 to 1.899 trillion VND in 2014 (2014 estimate) (VEPR, 2015: 41). In that number, the four sociopolitical organizations, the Vietnam Farmers’ Union, Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and the Vietnam Women’s Union received 1.261 trillion VND in total in 2014, more double the budget in 2006 (532.5 billion VND) (VEPR, 2015: 37). With respect to Ho Chi Minh City, data from the report show that the 2012 budget for the Youth Union accounts for 40% of the total expenditure for socio-political organizations. Apart from funding from the state budget, socio-political organizations also have other sources of income, such as members' fees, preferential loans from social projects, fees from fixed assets, and hidden income from human sources.

Based on data from the VEPR report, the annual budget of socio-political organizations suggests that they are responsible for taking care of the lives of young workers who receive great support from the state. However, in reality significant investment does not guarantee adequate results. The distribution of funds is uneven among socio-political organizations at different levels, in which foundational or grassroots-level organizations are always financially overextended and unable to organize activities that gather and support workers, therefore showing the administrative inadequacy of these organizations. The following is from an article by the State Review on the performance of socio-political organizations: *The function and mission of organizations in the political system has not been clearly defined, nor are their responsibilities entirely clear; the content and methods of their operation are slow to progress and asynchronous; there are many instances of centralized and subsidized bureaucracy. In a few places, organizations in the political system are not closely merged, the results of their*

activity not yet up to standard... Structure and policies for staff are still inadequate, infrastructure and working conditions in many places are still difficult.

Despite facing the difficulties and challenges of supporting the young workers directly, the sociopolitical organizations appear to be alone in their method of solving this problem. There are few indications of cooperation between state and non-state organizations in supporting young workers. We found the reason for the lack of cooperation between the two types of organizations through discursive analysis of youth associations. “Discourse” refers to the act of speaking about and understanding the world, or some aspect of it (Joergensen & Philips, 2002: 1). According to Foucault, discourse arises from a limited number of utterances from which conditions for existence can be defined. Based on this definition, discourse is not an ideal, or a nontemporaneous model, but rather it has historical character, or, more correctly, an element of history which constitutes its limits, divisions, transitions, and temporary patterns. (Foucault, 1972: 117). Discourse is an aggregation of statements derived from historical value-judgments and is exhibited through various social practices.

The emergence of sociopolitical organizations in Vietnam is linked to the historical mission of the Party to mobilize the public in revolutionary struggles. During the times of struggle, these organizations played a role in connecting the masses and were a place of education in revolutionary ideals. It can be said that the success of the people’s liberation revolution could not have done without sociopolitical organizations’ contribution to social-class integration. Thus, since the end of the revolution, the role of bringing together the masses and the values of the revolution has continued to be established through social discourses via statements in official documents of the state. These discourses are further consolidated by power vis-à-vis Capital, which constructs notions of which actions are acceptable or excluded (Stewart & Mark, 2009: 108). So far, these sociopolitical organizations are still considered by the State to be legitimate, in order to communicate the State's undertakings and policies to the masses. This also means that these discourses limit the involvement of other non-government social organizations in the process of gathering and caring for young workers.

In practice, non-governmental social organizations receive very little state assistance in their efforts to assist young workers, and until recently the functionality of non-state social organizations went unnoticed by policymakers. The framework for the functioning of these groups remains on the discussion table, which has caused difficulty for these organizations in carrying out their objectives. That is not to say that they are entirely limited—another of our surveys shows that they working to develop independent strategies to access workers using member networks. Although their efforts only are able to reach members of their own groups, they are sufficiently able to meet the needs of their members through specific and practical support.

4. CONCLUSION

In general, each social organization has individual functions that contribute to worker welfare, especially migrants, and the success of a social security system in Vietnam. It can be said that rural-to-urban migration, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City, contributes to rapid

urbanization and economic growth in the settlement area (GSO, UNFPA, 2016, p. 175-176), and workers in industrial production and export zones are a significant contributor to this migration. Migrant workers incontrovertibly contribute to economic growth in their destination cities, and consequently, supporting them should be an objective of the urban government. Although in recent years the state has instituted macro-level policy to improve the lives of workers, and migrant workers in particular, authorities at all levels in Ho Chi Minh City have also made great efforts to support migrant workers through sociopolitical, civic, and non-governmental organizations. However, the ability of migrant workers to access and take advantage of social welfare programs in shelter, health services, and social sponsorship are still limited. Not only that, but ensuring social security for workers has become a clear human rights issue, as in article 34 of the constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is written “citizens have a right to social security.”

REFERENCES

- [1] Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann (2015), *The Social Construction of Reality*, Editor, introduction and annotation by Tran Huu Quang, Tri Thuc Publishing House.
- [2] Nguyen Duc Loc and Nguyen Van Hiep (2015). *Social Welfare, Status and Access of Migrant Workers in Binh Duong's Industrial Zones*, National Political Publishing House.
- [3] Nguyen Duc Loc (editor) (2015), *Social Life in Contemporary Vietnam, the series*, Vol.1: Workers' fates, realities and strategies, Tri Thuc Publishing House.
- [4] Tran Huu Quang (2013), "Chapter IV, Primary Groups in Society," in Bui Quang Dung (ed.), *Sociology (Postgraduate Curriculum)*, Social Science Publishing House, p. 105-142.
- [5] Tran Huu Quang, *Developing social institutions: One of the social preconditions of the development process in Ho Chi Minh City*, Journal of Social Sciences, 11 (87), 2005, pp. 20-26.
- [6] Tran Huu Quang (2016), *Informal social institution: Theoretical issues and social reality in the Central Highlands*, Journal of Social Sciences, 2 (210), 2016, p. 12-24.
- [7] Dang Ngoc Tung (2014), *Renovation of the activities of the Vietnam's Union to get the requirements of accelerating industrialization, modernization and international integration*, Communist Review, p. 1-8.

Note: This paper is part of the research project “The role of social organizations in helping young migrant workers in industrial zones and export processing zones”, by Ho Chi Minh City Department of Science and Technology.

Article history:

- Received: Nov. 11.2016
- Accepted: Dec. 05.2016
- Email: thanh.loc3@gmail.com