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## Environmental Knowledge for Youth Can Help Viet Nam Accelerate its Green Actions for the Economy, People and Environment

In Viet Nam, young persons aged 15–24 currently account for one-quarter of the total population providing Viet Nam with a unique socio-economic development opportunity. But this potential can only be tapped if young people can access quality education, health care and decent employment, and participate in public life.

The findings in this brief highlight the Viet Nam-specific responses and insights, based on the three-country study commissioned by UNICEF and UNESCO, on advancing an inclusive green economy through empowerment and participation of young people in the Greater Mekong region. While some of the analysis is based on secondary research and desk reviews, a limited number of focus group discussions and interviews were also conducted with young people, government and private sector partners.



“ I can feel that young people care about environmental issues, but they don’t have a chance to accumulate knowledge. ”

– Owner of a green business in Viet Nam

### Policy landscape in Viet Nam

Viet Nam committed to unconditionally reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 8 per cent by 2030, with the possibility of surpassing the target to 25 per cent, conditional on international support based on its recent Nationally Determined Contribution submission<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> UNFCCC, 2020. Viet Nam Updated Nationally Determined Contribution



- The priority sectors for climate change mitigation are energy, agriculture, land use, land use change and forestry, waste and industrial processes.
- The Government has ratified many international climate and environmental agreements: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (in 1994), Kyoto Protocol (in 2002) and the Paris Agreement (in 2016).
- The Government adopted a law in accordance with the international agreements (article 68 of its Constitution, the Communist Party's Resolution on Active Response to Climate Change, Improvement of Natural Resource Management and Environmental Protection).<sup>2</sup>

Viet Nam also has a National Strategy for Climate Change, a National Target Programme to reduce climate change impacts and a National Green Growth Strategy (adopted in 2012).

- The Green Growth Strategy promotes 'green thinking' and aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase the use of clean and renewable energy and promote green lifestyles.
- The Government collaborates with various organizations and countries on environmental issues and is implementing several programmes on green growth; demand for green skills is increasing in six high-growth sectors: construction, transportation, energy, tourism, manufacturing and hospitality.<sup>3</sup>

Young people in Viet Nam account for a large share of the labour market, but finding decent jobs remain a challenge.

- The Government developed the Viet Nam Youth Development Strategy, 2011–2020, which is a framework for relevant ministries and sectors to provide a holistic response to young people's needs and rights.

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<sup>2</sup> Grantham Institute on Climate Change, 2019. *Climate Change Legislation in Viet Nam: The 2015 Global Climate Legislation Study. A review of climate change legislation in 99 countries.* London.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, pp. 76–78.

- To facilitate growth and produce human resources, the Government launched the Strategy of Education Development 2011–2020 and the Strategy of Vocational Training Development 2011–2020<sup>4</sup>. Both emphasize the vocational training and responsibilities within the private and public sectors.
- Technical resources and coordination issues between ministries remain lacking, resulting in a mismatch between skills taught and those required for employment. There is also a need for incorporating green skills and green growth in technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

The international commitments and national policies and plans in place for climate change recognize the need for awareness, communication and outreach. Yet, there is no substantive action plan for awareness raising and communication which targets adolescents and youth.

## Stakeholders consulted in Viet Nam

The UNICEF and UNESCO study set out to gauge (i) the level of awareness of environmental and climate change among young people; (ii) their participation in policy-making, movements or training for green jobs; and (iii) their sense of ability or empowerment from that involvement.

The young participants in Viet Nam ranged from high school students aged 15–18 in Hanoi and rural areas near Ho Chi Minh City to working youths aged 18–24 in Hanoi and young people aged 15–24 not working, in education or training, also in Hanoi.

In addition, government and civil society stakeholders who were provided additional information through individual interviews included two policy-makers, two civil society and social enterprise officers, two environmental science or sustainability experts and a green business owner.



<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pp. 74–75.

## Findings

### Awareness and participation

The young people in the study admitted to taking a somewhat passive role in finding information about environmental issues and were not clear on their role in climate change mitigation. There was no significant difference in awareness between the male and female youth participants.

They did not recall green jobs ever being discussed in school as career options, and they presumed such jobs were probably not likely to offer financial security. Some of the young people thought green, or environment-friendly, jobs meant some form of manual labour, such as street sweeping. Some mentioned the bamboo-straw industry as another possible green job area.

Several respondents said they did not have much information on green jobs. They also seemed to have limited understanding of environmental and climate change policies. Most of them did not have adequate information about the Government priorities on climate change issues and thought there should be more policies addressing pollution—as well as stricter implementation of all policies, including punishing non-compliance. They also suggested that the Government should subsidize the cost of production for eco-friendly products and encourage people to work in green industries by providing financial incentives, like an increase in base salary and work insurance.

Some of the young people in the study had participated in Chiến dịch Mùa Hè Xanh (Green Summer Campaign) and Phong trào Ngày Chủ nhật Xanh (Green Sunday Movement) environmental camps, organized by the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. Others professed to lacking interest in environmental issues generally, or never hearing about green events, which is why they have not participated.





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## Empowerment

When it comes to speaking out on issues in Viet Nam, the young people in the study were cautious and hesitant, and were not sure if they had a right to participate in a green movement. Social norms, they explained, do not encourage or allow youth to voice their opinions.

Most of the youth in the study said they use social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to share their concerns of contemporary issues, including environmental degradation and climate change. They agreed, along with the government and non-government individuals who were interviewed, that social media is one place where they can be vocal about their concerns and also start and follow a trend or movement. They also cited government-led channels, such as the Youth Union and Thanh Nien,<sup>5</sup> that work to promote youth participation. Although the youth participants engaged in this study were aware of ways for young people to express their opinions to local government, such as e-mail a particular office or post and share articles on Facebook, they have never done such a thing. They seemed to feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar with expressing their concerns to either local or national government. Some seemed unaware of their right to express their ideas and opinions.

The young people reinforced findings that suggest that there are few government-supported extracurricular initiatives across the country that provide youth with opportunities to build green skills. They, as well the adult interviewees, recommended that the Government provide training opportunities and financial support to learn green skills and start green enterprises.

“  We are afraid that we would be opposed by some people if we tell our opinions. ”

– Young Vietnamese participant

<sup>5</sup> Forums organized by the Government for youth to participate and to share their thoughts on environmental issues.

## Recommendations for government action to partner with youth as agents for change

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Formal educational institutions were characterized as best situated to ensure that youth are aware of green opportunities, green jobs and the skills needed for those jobs, but their potential has not been fully tapped. Participants suggested:

- The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs should incorporate green skills and soft skills into the TVET system and TVET strategies. There should be emphasis on producing a more inclusive TVET programme that appeals to girls. And the Ministry of Education and Training should incorporate the concepts of green schools and green education into the national education system, with transparent budget allocation.

To empower youth through formal education and vocational training, the participants suggested a range of approaches:

- Incorporate green skills, in the curriculum, and discuss green jobs as potential career options with real-world examples of how it can provide financial security.
- Provide counselling sessions on and examples of green jobs and their financial worth.
- Train teachers so they have a better understanding of environmental issues, climate change and green skills.
- Include more fieldwork with theoretical knowledge and provide practical skills training for green jobs.
- Establish partnerships between schools and the private sector to create green job opportunities for youth. Liaise with businesses to create internships and job opportunities for students.
- Establish knowledge sharing platforms with mentors who are already engaging in green jobs where youth can learn, explore their career options and share ideas.
- Promote principles of sustainability in the actions of students, including their working lives.

Outside of the education system:

- Support the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union to empower youth by providing capacity training and financial support. The Youth Union is a powerful organization with extensive reach. It also has networks in many organizations and agencies; the Government could leverage the Youth Union's unique position and network to reach and empower girls and boys.
- The Government could do better in communicating policies to youth and creating feedback loops by providing platforms that are more accessible or using audio-visual mediums, offered the environmental experts in the study.



“Greening the Mekong: Action for a Greener Economy with Children and Youth” is a study to better understand the opportunities and barriers for young people to integrate sustainability into their current and future economic activity. Awareness of sustainability issues has grown over the past decade, but does not always result changes to the way we live and work. This series of policy briefs examines current levels of awareness and support mechanisms in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam, and explores opportunities to empower youth to play more active roles as agents of change for a greener planet.

The full report and policy briefs can be accessed at:



- UNESCO website: <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/report-greening-mekong-action-greener-economy-children-and-youth>
- UNICEF website: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/research-reports>

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