

Combined INGO Comments on the Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report of Vietnam

Key points

- Vietnam has made admirable progress in achieving sustainable development, and the Voluntary National Review (VNR) report effectively captures and summarises some of these impressive achievements, as well as the ongoing challenges and gaps in data.
- In many places, the VNR report highlights how vulnerable and marginalised groups, particularly ethnic minorities, risk falling behind the majority of the population in achievement of several VSDG targets. However, there are also several cases where these groups are not mentioned in the report and we suggest increasing the coverage of these “left-behind groups”, such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, young women, migrant workers, survivors of violence and vulnerable children.
- Data on several important SDG indicators is missing from the report. Where available, we have contributed NGO data to address these gaps.
- National and international NGOs play an important role in supporting the achievement of the SDGs in Vietnam, including through implementing community-development programs, conducting research and providing policy advice. Continued and stronger collaboration between government and NGOs will strengthen Vietnam’s SDG implementation.
- INGOs are willing and able to contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs in Vietnam, including by contributing data and research to reporting processes such as the VNR. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this report.

Introduction

International Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) play a number of important roles in Vietnam, including implementing development projects at local level across the country that support communities to improve food security, nutrition, child protection, livelihoods, water and sanitation, gender equality, education and social development. INGOs also undertake research and provide policy advice to strengthen the economic and social development of the country. INGOs and civil society organisations are key actors in delivering the SDGs and committed to contributing to this shared vision of inclusive development which “leaves no one behind”. As the instrument of the SDGs, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, states:

"We the Peoples" are the celebrated opening words of the UN Charter. It is "We the Peoples" who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as Parliaments, the UN system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people. Millions have already

engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.”¹

This submission provides comments on Vietnam’s Voluntary National Review report to the UN High-Level Political Forum and provides additional data and input generated by INGOs. It has been prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Planning and Investment in close collaboration and with support of the organisations listed at the end of this document.

Comments on the Draft Voluntary National Review Report

Section 2. Methodology and Development Process of the VNR

The INGO community in Vietnam appreciates the opportunity to be consulted on the draft VNR report. We note that the Agenda 21 Office in MPI has made substantial efforts to engage NGOs throughout the VNR preparation process, including: engaging NGOs in a workshop to review the outline of the VNR report (before the content was developed), sharing the detailed consultants’ inputs with NGOs, and making the draft report available for NGO comments. The Agenda 21 Office has also been available for meetings and responsive to inquiries from various NGOs. This has been very helpful to facilitate NGO engagement in the VNR process. For the preparation of future VNR and SDGR reports, we suggest strengthening engagement of NGOs, CSOs and left-behind groups, for example by: publishing relevant reports and documents online so they can be widely shared and disseminated; engaging NGOs directly in the drafting process (for example, as part of a drafting committee); and sharing drafts with NGOs at the same time as other stakeholders (eg: UN) to facilitate providing targeted feedback early in the process.

Section 3: Awareness of Agenda 2030 – from MDG to SDG

The SDGs are still relatively new and the National Action Plan to implement the SDGs was only promulgated in 2017, so sensitization of communities on the SDGs is still at an early stage. However, there is a need to sensitise local communities more effectively on the SDGs and the part that they can play in their implementation. NGOs can be valuable partners in this enterprise.

Section 5: Institutions and Organisation of Implementation of Agenda 2030 and VSDGs

It would be useful for the report to detail the composition of the National Council on Sustainable Development and provide some brief detail on its contribution to SDG implementation in Vietnam and preparation of the VNR.

For future implementation, we recommend that the Agenda 21 Office takes further steps to involve NGOs, CSOs and representatives of marginalised groups directly in SDG implementation and monitoring. Some initiatives taken by governments overseas to facilitate this could be considered in Vietnam. For example:

¹ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly A/Res/70/1) available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

- Formalising NGO and CSO membership in governance arrangements for the SDGs - a civil society review of the VNR reports delivered in 2018 found that 18 of 42 governments had formalized civil society participation in their SDG governance structures.²
- Using online tools and social media to engage a wide range of stakeholders and seek their input on SDG implementation and monitoring.
- Developing a formal framework for engagement of civil society and representatives of vulnerable and marginalised groups in SDG implementation and monitoring.
- Providing conditional grants to local level governments and social organisations for SDG implementation.

Section 6: Results of Implementation of VSDGs

VSDG 1: Eradicate all forms of poverty in all areas

While this section provides data on overall poverty rates and the poverty rate for ethnic minority populations, there should also be information about the poverty rate among persons with disabilities. The number of persons with disabilities in Vietnam is estimated at 7.8% of the total population so it is important to include this group. Data from 2013 shows that 8% of persons with disabilities in rural areas live in poor households, compared to only 3.5% among persons without disabilities; this rate goes up to 20% for persons with severe disabilities in rural areas.³

It would be good to link the discussion on poverty under Goal 1 to the discussion on inequality under Goal 10, as it is essential to implement these goals together to achieve sustainable and inclusive development in Vietnam. Efforts on poverty reduction should not only emphasize improving economic status, but also on enhancing social mobility (income, employment and skills). In addition, economic growth is as equally important as redistributive policy (progressive tax, spending on public services) to minimize the gaps.

VSDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

The report includes national data on overall hunger, malnutrition and agricultural productivity. We would like to share some additional supplementary data for your consideration.

In relation to the proportion of households with sufficient diet diversity (households that consumed food from four or more food groups in the last 24 hours preceding the survey) World Vision International has found high levels of dietary diversity in most areas in which it works - at 80.25% with some districts achieving as high as 95.32% Hải Lăng, 97.05% Nông Sơn, 98.73% Ngô Quyền. However,

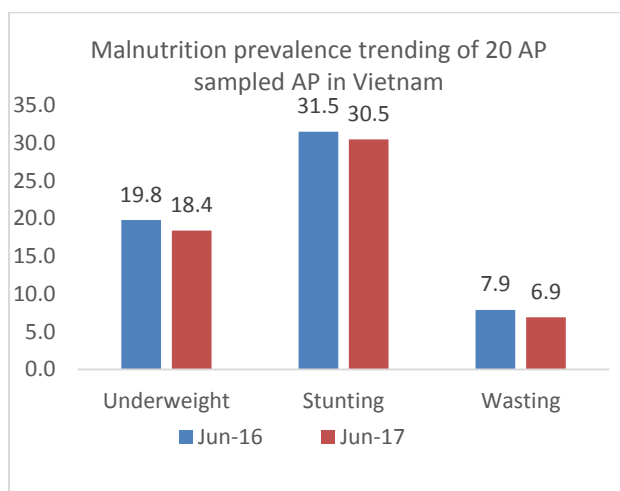
² Progressing National SDGs Implementation: an independent assessment of the VNR reports submitted to the UN HLPF in 2017 (2018) Canadian Council for International Cooperation. Available at: <http://ccic.ca/resources/VNR/English%20VNR%20Report%20FINAL/Full%20report-Eng.pdf>

³ Source: Economic Costs of Living with Disabilities and Stigma in Viet Nam - Institute for Social Development Studies

rates are lower in some other parts of the country – for example, dietary diversity in Hướng Hóa district is 57.44%.⁴

World Vision International research has also found the proportion of households with severe hunger (households with no food to eat of any kind in their household because of lack of resources to get food in the past 4 weeks preceding the survey), to be significantly low, at only 6.12%, including most of the rural locations World Vision International works. This confirms the progress made by the Vietnam government in addressing this goal across Vietnam.⁵

In relation to malnutrition, the English version of the VNR notes that “In 2015, stunting of the children of less than 5 years was 14.1% and this rate reduced to 13.9% in 2016”. We suggest cross-checking the translation to identify whether this is in fact the rate for stunting (low height for age) or under-weight (low weight for age) – it appears to be closer to the proportion of under-weight children under 5. Figures on stunting, wasting and underweight from World Vision International research in 2016 and 2017 are below for reference:



Source: Nutrition measurement conducted in June 2016 and June 2017 across 20 districts with 42,768 under five children in 2015 and 42,627 under 5 children in 2017.⁶

Case study: Integrated approaches to addressing malnutrition in rural remote locations

World Vision International is using integrated approaches to reduce malnutrition for children under 5 across 32 districts in the rural mountainous areas of Vietnam. Behavior change initiatives, integrating

⁴ World Vision International 2018 National Baseline Survey among 11,738 households across 32 districts in Vietnam (Tuần Giáo, Mường Chà, Điện Biên Đông, Tủa Chùa, Mai Châu, Yên Thủy, Lạc Sơn, Trấn Yên, Văn Chấn, Lục Yên, Trạm Tấu, Yên Bình, Na Hang, Thường Xuân, Quan Sơn, Bá Thước, Như Xuân, Như Thanh, Ngô Quyền, Hướng Hóa, ĐaKrong, Hải Lăng, Nam Giang, Phước Sơn, Nông Sơn, Sơn Trà, Sơn Tây, Minh Long, Dac Rlap, Hàm Thuận Bắc, Quận 4, Bình Chánh)

⁵ World Vision International 2018 National baseline survey across 8,304 households in 20 districts in Vietnam

⁶ Yên Thủy, Tiên Lữ, Lạc Sơn, Tủa Chùa, Tuần Giáo, Trạm Tấu, Văn Yên, Trấn Yên, Văn Chấn, Yên Bình, Thường Xuân, Bá Thước, Quan Sơn, Lang Chánh, Hải Lăng, Hướng Hóa, Phước Sơn, Trà Bồng, Sơn Tây, Hàm Thuận Bắc

livelihood and nutrition interventions, has resulted in greater improvement in dietary intake across the target locations. World Vision works with government to establish Nutrition Clubs, where community members are educated on child nutrition issues, improving the nutrition practices among child care-givers, leveraging local resources and linking care givers of under 5 children to opportunities for livelihoods and economic development. In collaboration with government health agencies, World Vision International implemented the first 1000 days of life interventions across 25 project districts and supported 1139 Nutrition Clubs in implementing nutrition interventions. In 2017, 74 villages across 13 districts implemented Positive Deviance Hearth reaching 1352 malnourished children, of which 418 children were successfully rehabilitated at the end of 2017. For 16 districts that integrated livelihood interventions into their Nutrition Clubs, accessibility to the four recommended nutritious food groups (protein, carbohydrate, lipid and vitamins) for mothers and children increased . In addition, 209 villages implemented integrated WASH interventions. Significant improvement in household practices around nutrition, dietary intake and infectious disease prevention have been seen, as well as reductions in the proportion of under-five children who are underweight or experiencing stunting or wasting.

(Source: World Vision Vietnam, Child Well Being report - 2016-2017).

VSDG 3: Ensure healthy life and increase social welfare for all people of all ages

The report is missing some important information about welfare policies for persons with disabilities and persons in special circumstances (orphans, children with HIV, the elderly, etc.). In terms of policies, Decree 28/2012/NĐ-CP indicates monthly allowance for persons with disabilities and supports for services, employment for persons with disabilities; Decree 136/2013/NĐ-CP and Joint circular 29/2014/TTLT-BLĐT BXH-BTC indicates social supports/allowance for other groups in special circumstances. Monthly social allowances are provided to 896,644 persons with severe and very severe disabilities.⁷

VSDG 4. To ensure quality, comprehensive and equal education and promote opportunities for lifetime learning for all people

The report notes the increases in the completion rates for primary and secondary school students. While this is very positive, it is important to mention that the quality of the education for ethnic minority children still needs to be improved. Since 2012, ChildFund Vietnam has regularly conducted quantitative surveys in seven districts in the north of Vietnam to better understand education quality. The data shows that reading comprehension for children aged from 6 to 14 ranges from 12% to 68%, while reading fluency ranges from 42% to 90%.⁸ As reading and comprehension skills strongly affect students' learning, these figures are likely to indicate broader issues with education quality.

World Vision International has also collected data on the proportion of children who are functionally literate (children in Grade 6 or equivalent who could read and comprehend authentic local materials

⁷ Report on review of social welfare activities in 2016 by MOLISA (Báo cáo đánh giá công tác trợ giúp xã hội năm 2016 của Bộ Lao động, Thương binh và Xã hội)

⁸ ChildFund Vietnam, Baseline Surveys.

needed to function in everyday life), finding on average this rate was very high, at 70.7% (Girl: 77.1%, boys: 64.5%) across most of the locations where World Vision works.⁹

This section is missing information about education for children or adults with disabilities. This information may be available from the Steering committee on education for children with disabilities at MOET.¹⁰

We are sharing two potential case studies for your consideration as alternatives to the current Box 4 highlighting Cao Bang's semi-boarding schools, as we suggest alternatives other than boarding schools be considered for a child-rights centered approach.

Case study: Improving the quality of education for children in disadvantaged ethnic minority areas

In recent years, Vietnam has made significant progress in improving education for children from ethnic minority areas. However, according to a survey by Unesco and Unicef in 2013, the proportion of children who have never attended school is high, particularly high for some ethnic minority groups. Nationally, 2.57% of children aged 5-17 years have never attended school. The Mong population has the highest proportion of children aged 5-17 years who never attended primary school, accounting for 23.02%. The main causes of this are:

1. Language barriers - 90% of ethnic minority children use ethnic minority languages at home and there is little or no opportunity to speak Vietnamese before entering elementary school. At school, children are not allowed to learn in their mother tongue and the materials are in Vietnamese – as a result, ethnic minority children have difficulty understanding lessons.
2. Teachers often have limited capacity and awareness about child development, teaching approaches and understanding of ethnic minority cultures. The curriculum is rarely adapted to the local ethnic minority contexts, resulting in poor learning outcomes.
3. Low awareness of children, parents and communities on child rights and the importance of education for all children. Community participation and accountability is limited.
4. Schools lack adequate instructional facilities, adequate toilets, clean water, books, learning materials and playgrounds.

In order to overcome these barriers, international NGOs have assisted the education sector in implementing incentive initiatives and these initiatives have, in part, made clear improvements. Interventions focus on three strategies: (1) capacity building for teachers; (2) promoting the participation of children; (3) promotion of engagement by parents.

Models aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools (verified through experience and implementation) need to be implemented more effectively at the national scale, namely:

- Child-centered approach - This approach ensures that all educational activities are geared

⁹ World Vision International's Functional Literacy Assessment Test survey for 3268 children aged 11 years old in 2017 across 20 districts

¹⁰ Contact: Ms. Quy Suu – 0985631568

towards learners: children actively seek out new knowledge, teachers act as facilitators; there are diversified learning activities; and children share their opinions and identify the experiences they need to learn.

- Adaptable curriculum - There should be specific instruction for teachers on how to adjust the curriculum, especially the first and second grade programs, to better suit academic and life skills. Children in ethnic minority areas support and encourage teachers to use familiar text, words and pictures and to replace words and pictures in textbooks. This makes it easier for children to access to new languages.
- Second language teaching method - Vietnamese is the second language for most ethnic minority children and teachers need to be trained in second language teaching methods and techniques.
- Bilingual education - These models introduce teaching in both Vietnamese and the mother tongue in kindergartens and in the early years of primary school to increase the learning ability of children.
- Focusing on skills training is an important factor in improving the teaching skills and methodologies in the local context of ethnic minority areas. Teacher training courses should provide opportunities for teachers to practice new skills and learn how to handle problems.
- Strengthening school governance and providing on-site professional development to teachers through innovative professional development at the school. Applying new professional activities, each teacher is engaged in learning from their colleagues, learning to solve their own problems. Each school becomes a learning community, helping to develop expertise in a sustainable way.

*Source: INGO experiences in promoting human resource development in ethnic minority areas through education programmes -2013.*¹¹

Case study: Improving literacy for ethnic minority children

In recent years, ChildFund Vietnam has been working in Hoa Binh province to improve writing skills through experiential learning cycles and improve comprehensive reading for ethnic minority children in primary schools. Regular pre- and post-test at schools showed that at least 30% of students improved their learning results from “weak level” to “average level”. The Department of Education and Training of Hoa Binh province has been replicating the Writing Skills through Experiential Learning Cycle project in all districts in the province. Since 2017, ChildFund has been working with Ministry of Education and Training replicating the project in some selected schools in four provinces: Lao Cai, Bac Giang, Ninh Binh, and Nam Dinh.

As at 2017, World Vision International in Vietnam has supported the facilitation of 184 Village Children’s Reading Clubs and 39 ethnic minority mother assistants working in preschool classrooms, contributing significantly to the improvement in reading comprehension of about 5,682 children in 30 districts across 14 provinces in Vietnam. Literacy measurement showed that the percentage of students who could read with comprehension increased 67% in 2015 to 71% in 2017. An external evaluation for The Ethnic

¹¹ A Vietnamese language version of this case study is available at:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jb0J2dcpQzZT6vyVEbOhu_ulgMfkiSxlhePbkiDgFjc/edit?usp=sharing

Mother Assistants model that World Vision was implementing in collaboration with government to facilitate effective learning among ethnic minority students showed significant improvement in the language readiness of ethnic minority children. The Ethnic Mother Assistant practice (called “Language Local Language Collaborators” by the government) was mainstreamed into the national education system of 42 provinces in Vietnam in which ethnic minority children live.

VSSDG 5: Ensure gender equality, empower and create opportunities for women and girls

5.1 Discrimination against women: In this section, it is good to note Vietnam’s strong history of having women holding around 25% of seats in the National Assembly. However, it may be an overstatement to refer to Vietnam as “one of the few countries” with this status – currently there are 68 countries in which women hold more than 25% of seats in the national parliament, and Vietnam has fallen behind several countries in Asia, including Philippines, Laos and Nepal.¹² It may also be misleading to highlight the increase in women in the National Assembly between the 2016-2021 term and the previous term – as this suggests an increasing trend, while in fact the proportion of women in the National Assembly has not changed significantly since the late 1990s.¹³ In addition, low participation of women in provincial and district People’s Councils and in senior leadership positions in government (for example, Vietnam has still never had a woman in the position of President, Prime Minister or Party Secretary) highlights the need to work on the root causes that contribute to women’s lower levels of political leadership. The report should cover these issues, and discuss women’s political participation more deeply, including policies and current status around their election and recruitment for positions, capacity building initiative, women’s participation in government work, and the underlying causes of discrimination (such as discriminatory social norms and women’s unpaid care burden).

It would be useful for the report to include a more well-rounded discussion of discrimination and equality, beyond politics. For example, while women’s labour force participation in Vietnam is high at 72.9%, it is lower than men’s participation at 83.0%,¹⁴ and there is a persistent gender pay gap (with men’s average earnings at least 10.1% more than women’s as at 2015, and men with vocational education or higher earning over 15% more than women with the same qualification level).¹⁵ Moreover, the National Strategy on Gender Equality has not mainstreamed vulnerable people, especially ethnic minorities, children, people with disability and survivors of domestic violence, sexual abuse and human trafficking. It would be good for the Strategy to address discrimination against those vulnerable groups and for the VNR to take a deeper look at the results of the first 10 years of implementation of the Strategy.

¹² Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments*: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (current as at 1 April 2018)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ GSO (2016) Report on Labour Force Survey 2015, available at: https://www.gso.gov.vn/Default_en.aspx?tabid=515, page 12.

¹⁵ GSO (2016) Report on Labour Force Survey 2015, available at: https://www.gso.gov.vn/Default_en.aspx?tabid=515, page 27-28.

5.2: *Violence against women*: The current VNR does not include statistics on the prevalence of violence against women in Vietnam. It could be relevant to include some statistics from 2014 ActionAid and CGFED research which found that 87% of women and girls had encountered sexual harassment in a public place, including whistling, teasing, remarking on appearance, staring at sensitive body parts and intentional touching. On average, 67% of women and girls and 65% of men and bystanders did not take any action when sexual harassment occurred.¹⁶ The VNR does provide helpful statistics on the number of women survivors of domestic violence that have received support, however, some of the presentation of the figures is confusing – for example, it is not clear what the numbers mean in the sentence “In first 6 months of 2017, consolidated report from 56 out of 63 provinces shows that 9,698/7,753 victims receiving support and 3,892/7,088 persons causing violence receiving advisory (55%)”.

5.4: *Unpaid care work*: There is no data on target 5.4 in the current VNR. Women’s unpaid care burden impacts on all other aspects of gender equality – and as such, it is important that this issue is measured and included in the evaluation of SDG 5. Research by ActionAid, AFV and MOLISA have found that on average, women spent 5 hours (314 minutes) per day on unpaid care work, more than 2 hours (125 minutes) more than men. Women therefore do 1.7 times more unpaid care work than men. If women were paid for their unpaid care work, it would contribute more than 20% of total GDP of Vietnam. In areas poorly serviced by public services, women spent up to 9 hours on unpaid care work.¹⁷ Women in the northern mountains area spent nearly two hours (107 minutes) every day collecting fuel and water, compared to three minutes for women in central cities, most likely because of their more limited access to infrastructure and services.¹⁸

5.7: *Women’s access to economic resources*: It could be good to discuss some of the solutions Vietnam is implementing relating to women’s access to vocational education, land tenure (eg: actions taken to increase the number of women with their names on land-use certificates), reducing gender discrimination, assistance in emergency relief/rehabilitation, and empowering women in local governments. The report could also mention some of the Safe Cities initiatives being implemented through the work of MOLISA, local government authorities, UN Women, Plan and ActionAid such as the “Safe Cities and Safe Communities Criteria” and the Safe City project in Ho Chi Minh City.

Case Study: Reducing and redistributing unpaid care work

Since 2015, ActionAid and partners, including MOLISA, AFV and others have been undertaking a long term research and behavior-change program focusing on unpaid care work and the impact that unequal

¹⁶ ActionAid (2014) *Safe cities for women and girls: can dreams come true*

http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/aav-bc_tp_an_toan-vn-trang-24-11-2014_1.pdf

¹⁷ ActionAid, AFV and MOLISA (2016) *Unpaid Care Work: Make a House Become a Home*:

<http://www.actionaid.org/vi/vietnam/publications/cong-viec-cham-soc-khong-luong-de-ngoi-nha-thanh-am>

¹⁸ ActionAid, AFV and MOLISA (2017) *Unpaid Care Work: Sharing is caring?*

<http://www.actionaid.org/vi/vietnam/publications/cong-viec-cham-soc-khong-luong-san-se-la-yeu-thuong>

distribution of care has on women, men society and the economy. The program has several components, including a time-diary survey which has been undertaken in nine project sites around the country, focus group discussions within the community, training sessions on unpaid care work and policy analysis. Between January 2016 and November 2017, ActionAid and partners collected nine time diary surveys from 540 community members. Over this time, women participating in the program reduced the amount of time they spent on unpaid care work by almost an hour (57 minutes) and increased the time spent on paid work by just over an hour (72 minutes). Equality between women and men in unpaid care work also improved over the same time – at the start of the study, women did over two hours (132 minutes) more unpaid care work than men each day. By the end of the study, women were only doing 102 minutes more care work than men each day. Participants in the study commented that men and boys had begun to take on greater roles in housework and child care within the home and that both men and women had a better understanding of the amount of work that women do for their families, and the importance of sharing care.

Source: ActionAid, AFV and MOLISA (2018) *Unpaid care work: redistribution for sustainable development*, available: <http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/publications/unpaid-care-work-redistribution-sustainable-development>

VSDG 6: Ensure sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The report covers policies and the implementation of the national target programs in the areas of water and sanitation. It also highlights Vietnam's strong ambition to achieve this SDG goal on time, and impressive early achievements in this area. The report shows that the proportion of people accessing water and toilets in Vietnam is quite positive. However, the report should be able to show who are still facing the issue of accessibility (6.6% of people do not have access to water, 16.7% have no toilets), and where they are currently living. Ideally, it should tell the audience the causes.

There is an issue of the reliability of the data suggesting that 93.4% of population has access to hygienic water and 83.3% has access to an improved toilet. Several NGOs and other organisations have collected data on water and sanitation which suggests figures may be lower than this, particularly in mountainous areas.

Target 6.1: Safe water:

- According to the results of Plan Vietnam's project on clean water and environmental sanitation in three provinces of Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Kon Tum from 2013 to 2017, just 57% of households manage to store enough water for use around the year.
- ChildFund has been conducting a quantitative survey since 2012 in seven districts in the north, which has found that only 13.7% to 77.8% of households have access to hygienic water all year round.
- A World Vision International survey across 25 project site districts found that the proportion of households with improved drinking water ranged from as high as 80.6% - Trại Ấu, 86% -Lục Yên and 97% (Hòa Vang, Đà Nẵng), to lower results in mountainous areas with ethnic minority populations, eg Hướng Hóa 50.4% and Thường Xuân 54.8%.¹⁹

Target 6.2: Sanitation

¹⁹ WVV 2018 National Baseline survey across 8,331 household in 25 districts

- According to the results of Plan Vietnam’s project on clean water and environmental sanitation in three provinces of Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Kon Tum from 2013 to 2017, the percentage of households having hygienic (improved) toilets is 71%, and just 57% of households manage to store enough water for use around the year.
- Among the World Vision International impact districts, the proportion of households using hygienic latrine was as high as 96% (Hòa Vang, Đà Nẵng) in 2017, Quan Sơn 73.2%, Dac Rlap 64.6% and as low as Tuần Giáo 8.3%.²⁰
- In addition to that, a report on the status of 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam notes that only 27.9% of ethnic minority households have hygienic latrines.²¹ There are only 7 ethnic minority groups in which more than 40% of households can access to hygienic latrines.
- ChildFund’s survey in seven districts found only 19% to 50.5% of households have access to a hygienic latrine.
- According to a 2016 report on rural sanitation in Viet Nam by the Health Environment Management Agency, about 20 million rural people have no access to hygienic latrines; 6 million people are practicing open defecation.²²

The report should also consider the large population of people who are migrating to work in urban areas. Despite having relatively low incomes for their unskilled jobs, they have to pay higher price for water and electricity than the registered residents. The increase of urban population, while the infrastructure and quality of services are still poor, places demands on water and sanitation supplies.

The report also has not taken into account gender issues and the rights of women and girls in accessing quality water and sanitation. The issue of lack of hygiene in public premises, like schools and hospitals, is important to consider in implementing Goal 6.

The report should consider disability inclusion in water and sanitation and future monitoring systems should measure this. According to a study of gender and social inclusion conducted by Plan Vietnam in January 2015, 75.3% of people with disabilities have used water from rivers, streams, ponds or lakes. They should be those who are more vulnerable to inequitable access to water and sanitation.

VSDG 8: Ensure sustainable, comprehensive and continuous economic growth and generate sufficient employment and good productivity and good job for all

SDG Goal 8 calls for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, coupled with full, productive employment and decent work for all citizens. The elements of this goal are interconnected, suggesting that economic growth needs to be inclusive of left-behind groups, and to be combined with initiatives to ensure decent jobs and youth employment. The current chapter of the VNR should draw this link between growth and decent work more explicitly.

Target 8.1: Economic growth: Within the discussion on economic growth, the statement “the public expenditure, effectiveness of investment, leakage, waste and long lasting debt have been gradually

²⁰ WVV 2018 National Baseline survey across 8,331 household in 25 districts: Tuần Giáo, Mường Chà, Điện Biên Đông, Tủa Chùa, Mai Châu, Yên Thủy, Lạc Sơn, Văn Chấn, Lạc Yên, Trạm Tấu, Yên Bình, Na Hang, Thường Xuân, Quan Sơn, Bá Thước, Như Xuân, Như Thanh, Hướng Hóa, DaKrong, Nam Giang, Phước Sơn, Sơn Tây, Minh Long, Dac Rlap, Hàm Thuận Bắc

²¹ MDRI, CEMA, UNDP, Irish Aid (2017) Thông tin tại trang 41 báo cáo thực trạng 53 DTTS

²² http://www.cswashfund.org/sites/default/files/Day1_3%20VIHEMA%20Viet.pdf

better controlled” should be supported by some examples or evidence to strengthen this statement. There should also be analysis on economic shock and vulnerability reduction, especially in urban sector, that contributes to the urban poverty phenomenon.

Target 8.4: Resource efficiency and impact of growth on environment: While the VNR mentions Vietnam’s “Green Growth Strategy” (Decision 1393/QĐ-TTg), it would be good to discuss in more detail how Vietnam is addressing VSDG Target 8.4 under this strategy.

Target 8.5: Full employment and decent work: the analysis of decent work in the report could be strengthened. The international ILO definition of ‘decent work’ is “productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.”²³ Research from multiple organisations has found that while the growth in the manufacturing sector, particularly garments, has helped to fuel Vietnam’s economic success, it has also created jobs that fall below international standards of decent work. Specifically, women in garment factories experience low pay, with an average wage of 3-5 million VND per month, significantly less than the standard set by the Asia Floor Wage; long working hours with frequent overtime; gender segregation and disparate pay in factories; short working lives, with women over 35 discriminated against in employment; and little to no availability of childcare for very young children, limiting women’s workplace participation and opportunities for promotion.²⁴

The report should also include data about employment of people with disabilities. There is currently no data available on unemployment among people with disabilities, an oversight that should be addressed in the development of indicators to measure the SDGs. Data from MOLISA indicates that at the end of 2016, there are about 17,000 persons with disabilities supported for vocational training and job creation, and approximately 15,000 labors with disabilities at 400 enterprises and businesses owned by persons with disabilities and about 16,000 other labors working at family based enterprises or self-employed.²⁵

Target 8.8: Protect labour rights, including for migrant workers: It would be good for the report to highlight migrant workers - according to the 2009 census, approximately 6.6 million people had migrated internally between 2004 and 2009, many for job opportunities. ActionAid research conducted in 2011 found that female migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination - only 2/3

²³ ILO (2007) *Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work*. ILO, Geneva. See: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/publication/wcms_172609.pdf (accessed 3 October 2017).

²⁴ See: Fair Wear Foundation (2015) Vietnam country study 2015. Fair Wear Foundation, p. 20. See: https://www.fairwear.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Country-Study-Vietnam-FINAL_web.pdf; ILO and International Finance Corporation (IFC) World Bank Group (2015) Better Work Vietnam: Garment Industry 8th Compliance Synthesis Report, July 2015. ILO & IFC, Geneva. See: http://betterwork.org/global/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/BWV-8th-synthesis-report_July-2015.pdf; ActionAid (2017) *Stitching a Better Future: is Vietnam’s Boom in Garment Manufacturing Good for Women?* Available at: <http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/publications/stitching-better-future-vietnams-boom-garment-manufacturing-good-women>; Wilshaw, R. et al. (2013) Labour Rights in Unilever’s supply chain, from compliance towards good practice: An Oxfam study of labour issues in Unilever’s Vietnam operations and supply chain. Oxfam, www.oxfam.org/files/rr-unilever-supply-chain-labor-rights-vietnam-310113-en.pdf

²⁵ Annual report 2016 on support activities for persons with disabilities by MOLISA (Theo Báo cáo năm 2016 về hoạt động trợ giúp người khuyết tật Việt Nam)

of formal female migrant workers surveyed had signed employment contracts, 38% of workers reported being forced to work overtime, only 60% of female migrant workers had social insurance and nearly 80% lived in temporary housing with poor infrastructure and sanitation.²⁶

VSDG 9: Develop highly resilient infrastructure and promote sustainable and inclusive industry and strengthen renovation

This section should include information about accessible infrastructure for persons with disabilities. Accessibility for persons with disabilities to public buildings, services, and transportation is already included in many laws and government decisions. For example, Decision 1100/QĐ-TTg dated 21/6/2016 on Plan to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities indicates plan to renovate public buildings and public transportation to be accessible for persons with disabilities. However the implementation is still limited and review and monitoring are missing.

VSDG 10: Reduce social inequality

Goal 10 recognizes growing inequalities in different dimensions (economic, opportunity, voice and participation) and sets specific targets to reduce inequality accordingly till 2030. The VNR recognizes that the government has issued a number of specific policies to acknowledge the importance of reducing inequality, especially enhancing equality of opportunity (i.e gender equality, access to public services, credit, information, transparency, revision of social protection that better support the 40% of low income group, mainstreaming inequality reduction into sustainable poverty reduction programs). The report also highlights important gaps to be address in the coming times (i.e equal opportunity to access quality public services, mutual accountability mechanism and effective participation of citizens). Oxfam's research on people's perceptions of inequality has found that, among three dimensions, inequality in opportunity (employment, access to quality education and healthcare service) is of greatest concern to the public.²⁷

It would be good for the report to specifically highlight in greater depth some of the inequalities currently existing, for example, inequalities in access to decent education, health care and employment for groups like ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, small scale farmers, migrants and informal workers, and women. Factors causing inequality in Vietnam include discrimination including gender disparity, tax system, 'socialization' of public services, spending on health and education, and labour policies.²⁸

To better support the implementation of Goal 10 as a standalone and a mainstream measure of success for other goals, it is necessary to: unpack picture of inequality in Vietnam, with more in-depth analysis on causes of each dimension of inequality and policy implications for the future. There are international methodologies to monitor inequality, and Oxfam globally has piloted a framework for monitoring

²⁶ See ActionAid (2011) *Female and internal migration: an arduous journey for opportunities* Available at: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/aav_baocaopndicu_vn_2_5_2012_2.pdf

²⁷ See Oxfam (2018) *Even it Up: How to tackle inequality in Vietnam* available at:

https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-vietnam-inequality-120117-en.pdf

²⁸ Ibid.

inequality and would like to collaborate to implement it in Vietnam to better support the SDG reporting in the coming period and policy makers. Vietnam has been recognized as active and committed to SDGs in the region. Vietnam Government could play as leading/key role in promoting the collaboration among countries in the region to better address shared questions on inequality (i.e race to bottom on tax and wages that causes inequality).

The Box 10 case study (Development of Long Thanh airport) does not have a very clear link with the theme of Goal 10 (social inequality). Potentially other government social welfare programs could be highlighted in this box instead.

VSDG 11: Develop sustainable and resilient urban and rural areas, ensure safe working and living environments, distribute laborers and population in a suitable manner

Information relating to this goal primarily focuses on housing issues in urban areas and overlooks many other areas and targets related to sustainable cities and communities, such as air pollution, traffic, supporting local economic development in urban settings, green and public space for inclusive accessibility, public services (health care; education; food safety, etc), accessibility for women and girls (for example, women’s access to public toilets) and safety for vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as migrant workers and street vendors. The report should also address the performance of the city governments and public service reform, and targets on urban poverty reduction.

VSDG 14: Protect and use ocean, sea and sea resources sustainably for sustainable development

The report mentions some of the key policies related to VSDG 14, however, we recommend moving the *Biodiversity Law* (2008) and *Forest Protection and Development Law* (2004) to Goal 15 (Life on Land). Other relevant policies that could be listed here include: *Water resource law* No. 17/2013/QH13; *Law on Aquaculture* 2017; and Decree 120/2008/NĐ-CP dated 01/12/2008 on river basin management. Several relevant decrees may also be relevant to list, if there is room: Decree 201/2013/NĐ-CP dated 27/11/2013 on detailed guidance on implementation of Water resource law; Decree 51/2014/NĐ-CP dated 21/5/2014 stipulations on the allocation of certain sea areas to organizations and individuals exploiting and using marine resources; Decree 43/2015/NĐ-CP dated 06/5/2015 Regulations on the establishment and management of water resource protection corridors; and 40/2016/NĐ-CP dated 5/5/2016 detailed guidance on the Law on natural resources, sea environment and islands.

Case study: Community-based tourism - Improving livelihoods for better conservation

Like most families living around the Mui Ca Mau National Park (MCMNP), Mrs. Tran Thi Soi and her family derive most of their income from aquaculture, and until recently saw very few visitors come to her isolated home. That is now starting to change thanks to their new ecotourism business. Her family is one of five that took part in an ecotourism pilot project supported by WWF to create sustainable livelihoods in MCMNP that benefit both people and the park. Before her family began their tourism business visitors to the area came only for a quick trip to see the End Point tower, which marks the southernmost tip of Vietnam. Now those tourists stay to experience life in the mangroves. WWF supported the ecotourism hosts to improve their facilities, provides hospitality training, and connecting the park with tourism agencies to promote the home stays.

Although the complex ecosystem of the park depends on mangrove forests and the Mekong River, financial pressures and lack of environmental awareness drive some people to illegally log and poach fish from the marine protected areas of the park, and upstream hydropower dams also threaten the health of the river. “To support the park, we must support the people,” said Mr. Dang Minh Lam, Deputy Head Park Ranger. “Income from sustainable livelihoods relieves pressure on the park’s resources.”

Source: WWF Greater Mekong

VSDG 15: Protect and develop sustainable forest, preserve biological diversity, develop eco-system services, fight against desertification, stop land degradation and recover land resource

It is recommended not mentioning on Law on Aquaculture (2003) as it is more appropriate for Goal 14 (Life under Water). It is also recommended to bring Decree No. 27/2005 on Guidance on Fishery law Implementation as well as Decree 57/2008/ND-CP on Regulation of Marine Protected Areas to goal 14. Other policies and laws that may be relevant to mention in this section include: Land law 45/2013/QH13; Forestry Law 2017; Decree No. 23/2006 on guidance of Forest protection and development law implementation; Decision No. 1250/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister dated 31st July 2013 on approval of the national biodiversity conservation strategy to 2020, vision toward 2030; Decision No.45/2014/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister dated 08th January 2014 on master-plan for Biodiversity conservation of the whole country to 2020 and orientation toward 2030; and Decision No.218/2014/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister dated 7th February 2014 approving the Strategy for Management of SUF, Marine Protected Areas and Inland Water Protected Areas in Vietnam until 2020 and Vision 2030.

In the section on Vietnam’s progress in implementing VSDG 15, we recommend adding information on special use forest status. To date, Vietnam has established 164 special use forests (SUFs), including 31 national parks, 57 nature reserves, 11 species/habitats conservation areas, 45 landscape protected areas and 20 forests for scientific research and experimental purposes, with a total area of approximately 2.2 million hectares. According to the national master plan for SUF system (Decision 1976/QĐ-TTg), the protected areas system will be expanded up to an area of 2.4 million hectares with 176 protected areas . In addition, 16 marine protected areas and 45 inland water protected areas (of which some area special use forests) have been included by the Government in master plans. Furthermore, a number of Vietnam’s protected areas have been internationally recognized based on international standards as biosphere reserves (09), World Heritage Site (02), Ramsar Sites (08) and Asian Heritage Sites (05).

VSDG 16: Promote a peaceful, equitable and equal society for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all; establish effective, accountable and participatory institutions at all levels

Regarding Target 16.2, the report notes Vietnam’s ratification of international instruments relating to human trafficking, and the Program to prevent human trafficking from 2016 to 2020. However, it would be good to discuss some of the measures Vietnam could implement to address trafficking. For example,

improving livelihood opportunities in ethnic communities would reduce human trafficking and unsafe migration - improving infrastructure (roads, electricity, etc.) is not a sufficient focus. The report should also mention the impact of globalization, for example, social media facilitating trafficking of young women. The report also notes statistics around the serious problem of child sexual abuse. Recent statistics released by the Ministry of Public Security indicate that in the first half of 2017, there were 805 cases of child abuse reported. Of the 805 cases that are known by Vietnamese authorities, 696 cases were reports of sexual abuse.²⁹ The VNR report could also mention Vietnam's child abuse hotline, launched in 2004, and plans for the new upgraded hotline that are currently in development.

The report notes the results of the Justice Index Survey on voice and civic participation, but it would also be good to include the results from the Public Administration and Performance Index relating to control of corruption and civic participation. For example, regarding control of corruption (Target 16.5), PAPI 2017 saw reduced reports of corruption and bribery compared to 2016. For example, while in 2016 5% of respondents said they had paid a bribe in the preceding 12 months, in 2017 this number had dropped to 4.5%. 11.4% of people paid a bribe for construction permits in 2017, compared to 14.3% in 2016, while 17% paid a bribe for LURCs, compared to 23% in 2016.³⁰

The 2017 PAPI found, in relation to Target 16.6 (effective, accountable and transparent institutions) that user satisfaction with public services varies – from 80% of users satisfied with public certification services and only 67.6% satisfied with public service for LURCs. It also found gaps in citizens' participation in decisions that affect them - only 19% of the respondents (10% male, 9% female) said they were informed about local land planning, and 30% (20% male, 10% female) of those who were informed said they had an opportunity to comment on the land plans, among whom 89% (57% male, 32% female) said their comments were taken into account.³¹

Section 10: Difficulties, challenges and next steps

This section highlights some important challenges to be met in the way forward in implementing the SDGs. Another key challenge that should be highlighted in this section is the challenge government programs have to reach the most vulnerable individuals. For example, through work at district and commune level, NGOs have observed that when vulnerable communes receive dedicated programs such as Program 135 and Program 30A, these programs have difficulty reaching the most vulnerable groups (for example, those living in the most remote villages and people with disabilities), leaving these groups without access to services and resources. Local government, NGOs, and others need a stronger commitment to invest dedicated time and resources to reaching these most vulnerable groups, in order to meet Agenda 2030's requirement to "leave no one behind".

²⁹ VietNam News, "Child Sexual Abuse on the Rise in Vietnam", 31 July 2017, <http://vietnamnews.vn/society/381054/child-sexual-abuse-on-the-rise-in-vn.html#eMjzEpedXJxY8xSt.97>

³⁰ Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) (2017), available at: http://papi.org.vn/eng/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2017PAPI_Report_ENG.pdf

³¹ Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) (2017), available at: http://papi.org.vn/eng/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2017PAPI_Report_ENG.pdf

Conclusion

Vietnam has made admirable progress in establishing systems for implementation of the SDGs and mainstreaming the goals into other initiatives. Already, the VNR report highlights some significant areas of progress. However, the VNR also shows that more needs to be done to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised groups with programming and support and to collect data to adequately measure whether these groups are being left behind in the process of national sustainable development. NGOs are important partners in this process and eager to take an active role in implementation and monitoring of the SDGs to ensure no one is left behind.

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- Handicap International
- Heifer Vietnam
- MAG Vietnam
- MCNV Vietnam
- Medecins du Monde
- Mekong Plus
- Oxfam in Vietnam
- Plan International Vietnam
- Room to Read Vietnam
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- World Vision International Vietnam
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