

Vietnam



In Vietnam, The Asia Foundation supports programs to advance effective governance, facilitate economic dialogue and private sector development, address environment and climate change challenges, and empower women and vulnerable populations.



Two decades of intense market-oriented development have transformed Vietnam into one of the fastest growing economies in the world with a remarkable poverty reduction record. However, rapid economic growth in a system built on central planning is exacerbating fundamental institutional weaknesses and creating new challenges, from social inequality to inadequate public services and rising pollution. Increasing industrialization is resulting in the loss of agricultural land and high rural unemployment. As the gap between urban and rural areas grows and environment degradation becomes much more visible, public sentiment has shifted from growth at all costs to equitable and sustainable growth.

THE ASIA FOUNDATION IN VIETNAM

The Asia Foundation has been supporting Vietnam's ongoing transformation since 1993 through a network of committed partners in government, the private sector, and civil society and a resident office in Hanoi since 2000. Vietnamese are well aware that the country needs new institutions and practices to support its continued growth and position in the region and the world. That process will take time, and its success requires not only greater openness from the state, but also a higher level of social consensus on what constitutes effective governance. To this end, the Foundation supports Vietnamese efforts to generate constructive debates about governance options and practices, increase public participation in the policy dialogue, support private sector development, and continue the country's regional and international integration. Helping to build the country's human resources and ensuring that the

disadvantaged can access economic and educational opportunities are themes that cut across all Foundation programs in Vietnam.

Our programs are built around four key themes:

1. Advancing effective governance.
2. Supporting economic policy dialogue and private sector development.
3. Addressing environment and climate change challenges.
4. Empowering women and vulnerable populations.

ADVANCING EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Effective governance requires institutions and practices that are responsive to citizen needs and that leverage all the resources available within society to address social concerns. The Asia Foundation's partnerships with the Institute of Legislative Studies and the Office of the National Assembly work to strengthen the capacity of Vietnam's legislature, an increasingly important and active institution. Our activities have helped to enhance the skills of Vietnam's lawmakers and create more opportunities for citizens to participate in the lawmaking process.

Transparency and accountability are critical dimensions of effective governance. The Foundation supports policy research and interventions responding to emerging issues in Vietnam. We identify and conduct research on key issues, using the results to design targeted, evidence-based programs. One example is our sponsorship of research into the rising number of



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citizen petitions on land acquisition and compensation, followed up with support for work by the Government Inspectorate to improve government agencies' handling of citizens' complaints. The Foundation also assisted government agencies and CSOs to conduct public consultations to inform the drafting of laws, from the Law on Environment Tax to the Labor Code and the Law on Access to Information.

The growing gap between urban and rural areas is an increasingly important aspect of governance debates in Vietnam. The Foundation works to improve understanding and develop policy responses including partnering with the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development's Institute of Policy and Strategies for Agricultural and Rural Development in a pioneering study to develop a systematic tool, the Rural Public Services Index, to assess the quality of public services for rural inhabitants based on citizens' feedback and satisfaction.

The Foundation is at the forefront of strengthening civil society organizations in Vietnam. Between 2009 and 2011, our pioneering civil society organization (CSO) capacity building program provided training for hundreds of Vietnamese CSOs in organizational development, nonprofit sector governance, public participation mobilization and policy advocacy skills.

Wherever possible, the Foundation assists efforts to bring civil society voices into policy debates on issues from gender equality to the environment and public access to information. The Foundation builds CSO capacity to carry out rigorous research, conduct public consultations on key policies and laws and engage in policy dialogue with the National Assembly (NA) and government agencies at national and local levels.



SUPPORTING ECONOMIC POLICY DIALOGUE AND PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Policy reform pursued by the Vietnamese government over the past two decades has led to sustained high economic growth and remarkable success in poverty reduction. However, explosive growth has been accompanied by increasingly complex social and economic challenges. Harnessing the resources and expertise within society to generate innovations and informed responses to opportunities and risks in this new phase will be critical to achieving sustainable development and global competitiveness.



The Asia Foundation supports research into key economic issues, transparency initiatives and policy dialogues engaging the business community and policymakers. Our work has gathered

business concerns about the regulatory environment and documented best practices in transparency and access to information in provincial economic governance.

The Foundation's sustained assistance to the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, for example, has established respected tools and databases supportive to economic growth and private sector development, from the well-known Provincial Competitiveness Index to the Vietnam Business Insight Survey.

ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES

Rivers dying from industrial pollution, worsening air quality in cities and industrial zones, untreated solid waste and biodiversity loss and the effects of natural disasters and climate change are all highly visible in Vietnam. They are increasing public anxiety, damaging public health and impacting socio-economic development. International and domestic efforts to address environmental degradation and climate change have increased markedly in recent years, but excessive reliance on centralized, top-down approaches, weak enforcement, and inadequate civil society and community participation remain long-standing challenges.

The Asia Foundation supports capacity building for environment agencies and CSOs, and supporting CSOs to carry out policy research and public consultation on issues related to the environment and climate change. We also sponsor community-based environmental management initiatives, environmental education in schools, and youth environment initiatives. One of the Foundation's most innovative recent programs has been the piloting of a new model of interactive environmental education for 6,000 primary school students in Hanoi for potential future integration into the national curricula.



Vietnam is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and the effects of climate change. Disaster risk management (DRM) has tended to focus on government capacity or vulnerable populations. Little attention is paid to businesses—critical players in community resilience and an important part of the socio-economic life of communities. The Foundation's work in DRM creatively links SMEs with government and community groups to improve disaster preparedness and response.

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Vietnam's transitional political economy and changing social norms present new opportunities, but also generate new risks and deepen existing vulnerabilities. The Foundation works to support vulnerable populations across Vietnam, to ensure greater opportunities for women's participation in the country's social, political



and economic spheres, to develop dynamic rural cooperatives and improve provision of critical services to migrant workers and the urban poor. We cooperate with Vietnamese CSOs and government institutions to develop innovative vocational training, financial literacy, and critical services including legal and employment counseling services for migrants and other vulnerable populations.

As the pace of export-led, market oriented economic growth intensifies, women, in particular, are a significant source for low-wage labor in the cities, in factories, and for labor export, informally to nearby countries such as China and Cambodia or through official channels to other parts of Asia and the world. Demand for employment far outstrips legitimate opportunities putting many at risk of being exploited or trafficked. The Asia Foundation's anti-human trafficking program works with schools and educators in the Mekong Delta to increase awareness of safe migration and labor and sexual exploitation. We work with government and CSOs to improve the quality of support to victims including through the development of National Minimum Standards for Trafficking Victims' Support and Protection.

Ultimately, empowering vulnerable and at-risk women means providing them with educational and employment opportunities. The Foundation's scholarship program for disadvantaged girls provides hundreds of scholarships a year to deserving young women in Nam Dinh, Can Tho, An Giang, and Hau Giang to enable them to complete high school. In 2011, the Foundation established a new university scholarship program, with the goal of providing 200 deserving young women from difficult backgrounds with full support to achieve their university degrees in a chosen technical field, such as engineering, where women are often under-represented.

REGIONAL RELATIONS AND HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY

The Asia Foundation has long supported efforts to improve U.S.-Vietnam relations through educational exchange activities, research fellowships and grants, and bilateral conferences. A network of American Studies scholars has been established through the Foundation's support and meets annually to share teaching innovations and research results. We have a long-term partnership with the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV) and support foreign policy capacity building and regional cooperation initiatives.

As one of the most literate developing countries in the world, there is a great demand for publications in Vietnam — particularly for scarce foreign-language materials. Through a long-term partnership with the National Library of Vietnam (NLV), The Asia Foundation's Books for Asia program has shipped approximately 320,000 volumes of high-quality educational materials to more than 100 institutions throughout Vietnam since 2000. Since 2005, the

Foundation has worked with the NLV to strengthen the capacity of public library institutions creating a more welcoming and accessible library environment and extending partnerships with school and university systems.



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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **National Assembly:** Assisting the National Assembly to train more than 200 deputies in public consultation techniques and strategies.
- **Civil Society:** Training on organizational development, public participation and policy advocacy for more than 960 individuals from more than 350 CSOs across 32 provinces and cities between 2009-11.
- **Environment Education:** Piloting integration of environmental themes into school curricula and activities for 6,000 primary school children in Hanoi.
- **Disaster Risk Management:** Training in disaster risk management techniques for more than 140 SMEs in three disaster prone provinces.
- **Anti-trafficking:** Conducting safe migration education for more than 55,000 vulnerable children and young people.
- **Scholarships:** Annual scholarships for over 400 disadvantaged girls.
- **Books:** 320,000 books distributed to more than 100 institutions throughout Vietnam since 2000.

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