Environment Programs in Vietnam

From one of the five poorest countries in the world in 1985, Vietnam has emerged as one of the world’s fastest growing economies, with an average per capita income of more than $1,000. However, such a rapid economic growth, coupled with a growing population and intense exploitation of natural resources, is straining Vietnam’s environment to the limit.

Dying rivers from industrial pollution, worsening air quality in cities and industrial zones, untreated solid waste and biodiversity loss are all increasingly visible, damaging public health and impacting socio-economic development. Moreover, Vietnam is also one of the countries in the world most impacted by natural disasters and the effects of climate change.

International and domestic efforts to address environmental degradation and climate change have increased markedly in recent years. Much support has been devoted to building the capacity of Vietnam’s environmental agencies, formulating national plans, and reforming environmental policies, laws, and regulations. Yet excessive reliance on centralized, top-down approaches, weak enforcement, and inadequate civil society and community participation remain long-standing challenges. Greater public environmental consciousness is needed to transform the environmental practice of society and the state.

The Asia Foundation has supported Vietnamese efforts to generate constructive debates about governance practices, increase public participation in policy dialogues, and support the country’s sustainable development.

THE ASIA FOUNDATION IN VIETNAM

For the last decade The Asia Foundation has supported Vietnamese partners in government, the private sector, and civil society to research and analyze environment and climate change issues, support development and the implementation of more effective policies, build public-private partnerships to address environmental problems, and engage the public in environmental protection. The Foundation has invested in the younger generation as future environmentalists and agents of change. Given the extraordinary potential impact of climate change on Vietnam, the Foundation highlights and integrates climate change issues as much possible into all of our environment programs.

THE FOUNDATION WORKS IN SIX KEY AREAS:
• Community-based environment management
• Capacity building for environment agencies and NGOs
• Public consultation and advocacy on environment laws and policies
• Environment education
• Youth and the environment
• Disaster risk management

COMMUNITY-BASED ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT

Bringing affected citizens, community groups, national and local governments, and businesses together to jointly establish and implement solutions to environmental problems is challenging but critical. The Foundation’s environmental projects utilize community-based environment management (CBEM) approaches with recent multi-stakeholder programs including partnering...
with committed NGOs in addressing water pollution and waste management around the To Lich River in Hanoi.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR ENVIRONMENT AGENCIES AND NGOs
The Foundation supports sharing of global and regional experiences in environment and climate change policies and best practices for staff of key environment agencies and NGOs. We also work to professionalize environment CSOs through strengthening their organizational development and financial management, and increasing their skills in public participation mobilization and public advocacy through training and networking initiatives.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND ADVOCACY ON ENVIRONMENT LAWS AND POLICIES
We support NGOs to carry out policy research and public consultation on issues related to the environment and climate change. Public consultations take many forms, from expert workshops to web-based campaigns and media roundtables to raise public awareness. These remain very new practices in Vietnam, but Vietnamese NGOs are gaining experience through practice. Results are used to engage government agencies and the National Assembly in policy dialogue.

ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION
Given the rapid pace of environmental degrada tion and serious impacts of climate change, society needs to be conscious of the impact of their own practices and behavior. It is not surprising that many citizens are overwhelmed by the scope of the environmental challenges the country is facing. However, the Foundation and its partners believe that when citizens see themselves as agents of change they are capable of transforming their neighborhoods and workplaces.

The Foundation and its partners seek to transform environment education in Vietnam. We are piloting interactive and experiential learning methodologies in schools and practical steps for environmental protection that will increase the environmental awareness of children and through them, their parents, and their communities.

YOUTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT
The Foundation provides assistance to committed groups of young Vietnamese to develop their own environmental projects, campaigns, and networks. We strengthen the organization, programs, and networks of environmental youth clubs. We help to empower young environmentalists to bring their ideas to fruition, and to learn how to engage effectively with communities, business, and government.

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT
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. Vietnamese small and medium enterprises (SMEs) contribute substantially to employment generation and economic growth. They are also greatly impacted by natural disasters and the consequences of climate change. The Foundation’s work in DRM creatively links SMEs with government and community groups to increase disaster preparedness and improve response. We provide DRM knowledge and expertise to SMEs and business associations and support local DRM innovations.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

• Foundation support has assisted many environmental NGOs to carry out public consultation and policy dialogues on key laws and policies, from the Tourism and Law on Environment Protection in 2005 to the Law on Environmental Protection Tax in 2010.
• The Foundation is supporting the Ministry of Education to pilot integration of the environment into school activities at 10 primary schools in Hanoi, reaching 6,000 students.
• The Foundation is working with the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, relevant government agencies, and NGOs to provide support to SMEs to improve their disaster management and response in three provinces in storm-prone central areas of the country.