

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The United Nations in Viet Nam





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Foreword

The average Vietnamese today is significantly better off than they were only ten years ago: more educated, healthier, and more connected with the rest of the world – electronically, economically and socially. Though poverty persists in some parts of the country, particularly in remote and ethnic minority areas, Viet Nam remains an impressive model of pro-poor growth.

Viet Nam's success is due in large part to policy reforms that unleashed a vibrant private sector and attracted significant foreign investment. International assistance has also played an important role, helping Viet Nam integrate into the global economy, adapt to global standards and market demands, and develop plans, policies and programmes aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.

The United Nations has a long history as a key partner in Viet Nam's development, supporting the country's progress and helping to build the nation. Over the years we have developed strong relationships with the Vietnamese people, Government, mass organizations and civil society, and have

worked hand-in-hand with them to improve the lives of all Vietnamese.

This publication highlights some of the UN's recent contributions that have played a part in Viet Nam attaining a comparatively high level of human development and becoming a middle-income country. It also illustrates how the role of the UN in Viet Nam is evolving as the country continues to grow and develop. Already challenges are emerging that threaten Viet Nam's success story: rising inflation, climate change and growing inequalities in society are just some of the big headwinds that Viet Nam faces in its drive to become a modern, industrialized country by 2020.

For the UN Country Team in Viet Nam, this year marks the end of our current One Plan (2006-2011), the consolidated programme of all UN agencies working in Viet Nam under the One UN Initiative. Over the past five years Viet Nam has become a leading pilot country for UN reform, and while much remains to be done, our joint work with the Government, donors and other partners is better coordinated and more effective, and we are better able to leverage the experience and expertise of multiple UN

agencies to help Viet Nam address complex development issues. We are currently finalizing our One Plan for 2012–2016 that will focus our resources on the major challenges facing Viet Nam in the next phase of its development.

In this new era for Viet Nam the UN's role is increasingly to help protect and give voice to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, to provide independent, evidence-based policy advice, and to help Viet Nam attain global standards in economic, environmental and social areas – while living up to its international commitments.

From our first acts of assistance more than 30 years ago to our wide-ranging support to a growing middle-income country today, we are very pleased to be part of the Viet Nam story.

Eamonn Murphy
United Nations Resident Coordinator a.i.
Viet Nam
October 2011



Facts About Viet Nam

Viet Nam is situated in Southeast Asia, bordered by Cambodia and Laos in the west and China in the north. Over 86 million people from 54 different ethnic groups live on its narrow 'S'-shaped land area, including more than 3,000 km of coastline. Three-quarters of the country is hilly and mountainous, and arable land accounts for only 28.4 per cent of the total. Viet Nam has 63 provinces and cities with Ha Noi in the north serving as the capital and Ho Chi Minh City in the south the largest urban area, with a population estimated at 7.16 million.

In 1986, after decades of conflict, and struggling to speed up its economic recovery and reconstruction efforts, Viet Nam instituted the *doi moi* (renovation) reforms, shifting from a centrally-planned economy to a 'socialist market economy'. These reforms resulted in sustained, rapid economic growth. Poverty rates plummeted from 58 per cent in 1993 to 14.5 per cent in 2008. In recent years GDP growth has slowed due to the effects of the global economic crisis and macroeconomic instability – to 5.3 per cent in 2009 and 6.78 per cent in 2010 – but Viet Nam remains one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Selected Indicators

Human Development Index (ranking out of 169 countries, 2010): 113

Population (2010): 86.75 million

Life expectancy at birth (2009): Male= 70.2 Female = 75.6

Sex ratio at birth (2010): 111 boys per 100 girls

GDP growth rate (2010): 6.78 per cent

GDP per capita (2010): USD 1,200

Poverty rate (2008): 14.5 per cent

HIV prevalence rate (2010): 0.44 per cent

Rural households with access to safe water (2009): 83 per cent

Net primary enrolment rate (2009): 94.9

Under five mortality (per 1000, 2009): 25

Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000, 2009): 69

Global climate risk index ranking* (1999-2009): 5th

Main exports (2009): crude oil (11.4%), garments and textiles (15.5%), sea products (6.8%), footwear (7.4%), rice (5.9%), coffee (3.6%), others (49.4%).

Main imports (2009): capital equipment (17.5%), refined petroleum (11.1%), textile and cloth (11.2%), electronic components (5.3%), others (54.9%).

Sources: United Nations Viet Nam 2010; Population Change and Family Planning Survey 2010, General Statistics Office; World Development Indicators database, December 2010; Viet Nam UNGASS 2010; Health Statistics Year Book 2009, Ministry of Health; UNICEF Viet Nam 2008, 2010; Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey 2008; Ministry of Health 2008; Germanwatch 2010.

*The Global Climate Risk Index 2011 analyses to what extent countries have been affected by the impacts of weather-related loss events (storms, floods, heat waves etc.) - both in terms of fatalities as well as economic losses - using the most recent available data. It is produced by the organization Germanwatch.





Poverty Profile of Viet Nam

Viet Nam currently ranks 113 out of 169 countries on the Human Development Index and has already achieved, or is on track to achieve, many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the 2015 deadline. While all the MDGs are achievable, several are currently lagging behind – particularly MDG 6 on HIV and MDG 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability – and there are disparities in MDG progress between provinces and regions.

The map at left highlights the varying household poverty rates among the 63 provinces and cities of Viet Nam. Economic growth in Viet Nam has been associated with an increase in inequality, particularly a widening rural-urban income gap. Three regions account for more than two-thirds of Viet Nam's poor: the Northern Uplands, Mekong Delta and North Central Coast.

Ethnic minorities, which comprise 14 per cent of the population and live mainly in these remote upland areas, are disproportionately affected by poverty, and represent over 50 per cent of the poor. About 90 per cent of the poor live in rural areas.

Household poverty rate by province

0.3-6. 3	19.6-22. 8
6.4-9. 1	22.9-28. 5
9.2-11. 0	28.6-39. 2
11.1-13. 3	39.3-58. 2
13.4-16. 4	Missing Da ta
16.5-19. 5	

Source: Viet Nam General Statistics Office 2008



Viet Nam – A Time of Transition

Last year Viet Nam reached a significant milestone: in just over two decades it went from being a poor, underdeveloped economy to reaching middle-income country (MIC) status. The UN shares Viet Nam's pride in this impressive progress, which owes much to reforms that have opened up the economy and unleashed a dynamic and vibrant population.

But MIC status is not the end of the development road. In recent years rapid economic growth has contributed to a new set of challenges for Viet Nam: a growing gap between rich and poor; migration of millions of people and the explosive growth in cities; pollution and environmental degradation; changes in traditional social norms; and a gap between the country's public institutions and an increasingly sophisticated and demanding reality. To avoid what is known as the 'middle-income trap' Viet Nam will have to innovate and use labour and capital more productively in order to

enhance the quality of economic growth and ultimately improve living standards.

There are also lingering development challenges as well as gains that remain fragile and require continued attention and new approaches. These include persistent poverty, particularly in remote areas and among ethnic minorities (poverty still affects close to 15 per cent of Vietnamese, including around 50 per cent of the ethnic minority population); gender inequality and domestic violence; HIV; and lack of access to water and adequate sanitation, among others.

The average income per capita of Vietnamese reached almost US\$1,200 in 2010 – up from less than US\$400 in 2000.

The fact that Viet Nam is now highly integrated into the global economy means it is more vulnerable to changes and threats from around the world. Many of the emerging challenges that Viet Nam faces are influenced by events and processes beyond its borders, from climate change to inflation to volatility in trade and investment flows.

The United Nations in Viet Nam

Over the period of Viet Nam's recent socio-economic success, many international organizations and partners have helped Viet Nam better understand and access international markets, apply best practices and develop effective and appropriate policies to bolster economic and social development. As an independent, global body the UN has been an important partner, providing resources and technical advice to help Viet Nam improve the living conditions of millions of Vietnamese people.



A Changing Role

As the needs of the Vietnamese people and Government have changed, the UN has changed the way it works. This has meant a shift away from providing services, such as cleaner water in rural areas or vitamin supplements for children, towards providing policy advice, technical expertise and funding research so that the Government is better able to address emerging challenges and provide for the needs of Vietnamese citizens.

Our shift in focus is closely related to the 'One UN' reform that began in late 2006, when Viet Nam requested to be one of eight pilot countries selected for the global 'Delivering as One' initiative that aims to reduce duplication, improve coordination and make UN agencies work more effectively and efficiently at the country level.

As a partnership involving the Government, the UN and donor countries, the One UN Initiative has made significant progress. Viet Nam is seen as a global leader in achieving the goal of One UN and in promoting aid effectiveness. UN agencies in Viet Nam have greatly increased coordination, joint planning and programming – particularly through the eight thematic Programme Coordination Groups. This has led to greater impact in key development areas like social protection for all, gender equality, and responding to HIV.

The UN's core mission and mandate remain the same, however: supporting development in Viet Nam that enables human development, underpinned by an inclusive, human rights-based approach.



List of donors to the One Plan Fund 2006–2011

- Australia
- Canada
- Finland
- France
- Ireland
- Luxembourg
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom



How the UN is Making a Difference

The UN contributes to Viet Nam's development and helps improve the lives of Vietnamese people in a variety of ways, from promoting laws and policies in line with international norms, to improving protection of and support for the poor and most vulnerable, to helping Viet Nam provide decent jobs and basic services to all citizens. Within the framework of our One Plan, we help Viet Nam achieve its international obligations, including the Millennium Declaration and MDGs and various human rights commitments, as well as its national development goals. And increasingly, by providing new ideas, better tools, technical advice and information, the UN is increasing the capacity of Viet Nam to address development challenges itself.

In recent years our policy advice and technical assistance has targeted emerging issues such as providing decent work for millions of new labour market entrants, expanding social protection to all citizens, supporting legal and judicial reforms, piloting public consultations and citizen surveys, and sharing ideas on how Viet Nam can shift towards more environmentally sustainable development. Our support includes funding targeted research, analysis of data and producing policy discussion papers to assist Viet Nam in developing effective, evidence-based policies and programmes. We also have stepped up our advocacy on sensitive issues such as domestic violence and human rights for all.

*The UN has a unique mandate and is uniquely placed to help where others cannot. . . .
The UN has a fundamental role as a peacekeeper, a peace builder, in delivering humanitarian aid, helping countries out of crisis and upholding global standards.*

Alan Duncan, UK Minister of State for
International Development, speaking in
Ha Noi on 14 June 2010

The UN's Comparative Advantages

The effectiveness and impact of our work relates to certain comparative advantages the UN has as a development partner – ways in which the UN's support is particularly effective, relevant, unique, or sustainable due to our reach, mandate, scope and influence. In Viet Nam there are several ways in which the UN plays a special role in responding to the demands of a fast-growing and rapidly changing Viet Nam:



1. Helping Viet Nam develop and implement laws and policies

Drawing on our global networks and experience, the UN is especially effective in providing advice and technical assistance to develop and implement laws and policies that are based on international norms and standards and are informed by quality data and research.



3. Supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged

Due to our unique mandate, the UN advocates for and helps to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged are heard and issues of inequality are addressed in national policy processes.



2. Bringing people together to discuss and solve development challenges

In our unique role as an independent, global organization, the UN is able to bring decision-makers, local and international organizations, citizens and other stakeholders together to discuss challenges and improve coordination of efforts to deal with them.



4. Helping Government agencies work better together

Because the UN works across sectors with many Government partners, we are able to assist the Government to better coordinate its response to complex issues such as climate change, social protection, and sustainable development.

Although in many cases the impact of our work in Viet Nam flows from several of these unique strengths, we highlight in the following pages examples of our work on important development challenges that are particularly linked to each of these four comparative advantages. This is followed by several examples of cross-cutting work in areas such as gender equality, human rights, HIV and climate change.







1. Helping Viet Nam develop and implement better laws and policies

The UN in Viet Nam is putting greater emphasis and devoting more resources to helping Viet Nam develop, implement and monitor laws and policies that are consistent with international norms and standards and with Viet Nam's international commitments. This is a direct response to requests from the Government as it seeks international support and experience to guide a new, more complex phase of development. UN support includes policy advice, technical assistance, advocacy and introducing better policy-making processes. We are also increasingly funding research to provide evidence and informed policy options for decision-makers, as well as innovative pilot interventions that can be scaled up.

The UN has a particular strength in this area due to the extensive multi-lateral UN system and our large global pool of experts. UN agencies have experience in dozens of sectors in hundreds of countries and a long history of cooperation with Vietnamese and international partners active in the country.

The following examples of UN policy support illustrate how our work has contributed to more inclusive policymaking processes, more informed policies and plans, and stronger institutions in several key areas.



Support to the National Assembly

For many years the UN has been building the institutional and policy capacity of Viet Nam's National Assembly, particularly for the law-making process, and for its oversight and representation functions. Increasingly, our work is being conducted directly with key Committees of the National Assembly through projects, policy research or assistance in the revision of draft laws. UN technical advice and capacity building work has contributed to development of the Law on People with Disabilities; the Labour Code; the Law on HIV/AIDS; the draft Law on the Prevention and Control of Tobacco Harm; the draft Law on Trafficking; and the draft Law on Access to Information. In 2010 the Office of the National Assembly and the UN organized, in co-operation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a high-level dialogue to review the XII Legislature's performance and discuss essential reforms needed for the future of the National Assembly.

The UN has also supported the National Assembly to pilot public consultations on matters of citizens' concerns and sensitize elected officials on important population changes such as migration and population aging. UN agencies have also increased the gender-responsiveness of the National Assembly, particularly for the process of revising draft laws including the Law on Criminal Procedure and the Law on Legislation Dissemination and Education.

Recent laws that the UN helped to develop or provided substantial input to:

- Law on Health Insurance
- Labour Code
- Access to Justice Law
- Law on People with Disabilities
- Law on Cultural Heritage
- Law on Child Adoption
- Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control
- Law on HIV/AIDS
- Food Safety Law
- Law on Gender Equality
- Law on Biodiversity
- Law on Enterprise
- Law on High Technology



Public participation for better policymaking

To support more participatory policymaking, the UN has helped introduce additional public consultations with citizens and other stakeholders in Viet Nam. These consultations contribute to improving government relations with citizens and help policymakers tap new sources of ideas, build trust and strengthen civil capacity. For example, the UN organized and supported consultations at the national and provincial level for the development of three recent laws – the Law on the Adoption of Children, the Law on People with Disabilities and the Law on Food Safety – including a number of consultations with relevant (non-state) groups. Partly as a result of UN support, the National Assembly's Committee on Social Affairs and the Ethnic Council have started to pilot public hearings on poverty reduction strategies and on the policy on settlement for ethnic minority groups.

At the local level, the UN has helped develop a process for public consultations for Provincial People's Councils. To date an estimated 10,000 people have been consulted in 16 provinces on a range of topics which directly affect them, such as land use rights and education fees. As a direct result, many provincial proposals and decisions have been changed to better reflect the needs, rights and hopes of ordinary people. The consultations have also helped citizens to better understand their role in assessing provincial policy, their rights to certain services according to a particular policy, and the duty of Deputies to represent them.

Input to the national Socio-Economic Development Plan 2011–2015

Over the past several years the UN has worked with various Government counterparts on development of the 2011–2015 Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) and the 2011–2020 Socio-Economic Development Strategy (SEDS). To support the new SEDP, the UN brought in world-renowned specialists to deepen discussions on key issues for Viet Nam and established a Development Partners Working Group together with bilateral and other multilateral donors, which consolidated various UN agency inputs and engaged with the SEDP drafting team.

Stressing the importance of human, social and sustainable development, the UN advocated for greater balance between economic goals and social development priorities in order for Viet Nam to achieve equitable, inclusive and sustainable growth in the years ahead. The UN advocated for inclusion of issues we feel are critical to Viet Nam's socio-economic development in the medium term. These included acknowledging the roles of the State and the private sector in the economy and stronger policy orientations for cross-cutting issues such as climate change, institutional modernisation, HIV, and gender equality. While not all suggestions were adopted, the final

version of the SEDS and final draft of the SEDP reflect several major areas of UN policy advice and advocacy work such as the importance of social protection in socio-economic development.

Another example of UN influence in policy development is our advocacy and support for a 'basic floor' of social protection for all Vietnamese. The UN advocated for, and provided significant technical inputs to, the process of developing a national social protection strategy. The UN supported the expansion of social assistance by expanding the eligibility under Decree 6 and funding analytical work to support introduction of a child benefit. UN assistance involved several agencies providing advice based on each agency's expertise (e.g. social insurance, poverty reduction, children and corporate social responsibility) and was based on an overall rights-based perspective. This work contributed to the quality of the current strategy and its underlying principles: the strategy is comprehensive and universal, covers different groups and different kinds of social protection, and represents a significant move towards social protection for all citizens.

Selected policy and law-related reports and research papers supported by the UN

- Health Insurance in Viet Nam: The Case of Workers in the Informal Sector
- Vietnam Employment Trends reports
- Viet Nam's Industrial Policy: Designing Policies for Sustainable Development
- Reforming Public Administration in Viet Nam: Current Situation and Recommendations
- Internal Migration: Opportunities and Challenges for Socio-Economic Development in Viet Nam
- A Robust Harvest: Strategic Choices for Agricultural and Rural Development in Viet Nam
- Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Education
- Series of papers on progress and gaps towards achievement of the MDGs
- Taking Advantage of the Demographic Bonus in Viet Nam: Opportunities, Challenges and Policy Options
- Vietnam Industrial Competitiveness Report
- Policy advice to the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy 2011-2020



Social protection for all

As part of our social protection advocacy agenda, the UN has also been promoting recognition of social work as a profession and development of a national social work programme. At both the national and sub-national levels, the UN has put a lot of effort into building institutional and human resource capacity for an evidence-based and participatory social work programme.

Another area of focus is assisting the Government to achieve equity in health through social health insurance. This is a critical instrument for removing financial barriers to accessing health care and preventing impoverishment of families from catastrophic health care costs. UN advocacy and support has focused on improving the benefit package of social health insurance

to better cover vulnerable and unreached groups, and to strengthen health insurance management at the provincial level. The UN has also supported the Ministry of Health to develop decrees and guidance on implementation of the health insurance law and the broader benefit package, with the goal of reaching universal health insurance coverage with equity.

Partly as a result of UN efforts, the Government made a commitment to allocate over US\$ 120 million to a 10-year national social work programme.





2. Bringing people together to discuss and solve development challenges

As an independent organization, the UN is in a unique position to convene diverse groups in dialogue on development issues and improve coordination on complex and sensitive challenges. We encourage discussion and facilitate partnerships among international organizations, Government, the business sector, civil society, community groups and other stakeholders.

In Viet Nam, we play a key role in bringing together Government and non-governmental partners to discuss a range of issues, especially challenges that require action on multiple fronts – such as climate change, natural disaster preparedness and response, public administration reforms and the national response to HIV – as well as sensitive issues like human rights, international labour standards, dioxin remediation and gender equity. The UN also works through personal channels to develop relationships that allow informal discussion on a range of issues.

The UN is a major funder and facilitator of national and international conferences and events that bring together not only national groups and stakeholders, but also international experts and organizations. A few notable examples of recent meetings and events that the UN supported include:

- The first Ethnic Minority Policy Forum in Viet Nam organized in December 2010 by the UN and the Centre for Ethnic Minority Affairs. Participants discussed challenges facing Viet Nam's ethnic minority groups and the future strategies and approaches needed to ensure that ethnic minorities benefit from the country's development.

- A special meeting in November 2010 on Viet Nam's climate change strategy involving donors from the Climate Change Working Group, national leaders and experts, UN experts and former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Yvo de Boer.
- A policy dialogue in March 2011 organized by the UN and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs/National Committee for the Advancement of Women for discussion of the National Strategy on Gender Equality implementation plan, gender and aid effectiveness in policy advocacy, and key findings of recent research on employment trends in Viet Nam and sex disaggregated indicators from the 2009 census.
- A national conference on migration, development and poverty reduction in 2009 jointly organized by Viet Nam Academy of Social Science and the UN to review research findings, interventions, and current policies and identify recommendations for integration of migration issues into the SEDP/SEDS and relevant sector plans and policies.

For many critical development challenges, the UN is contributing to a broader-based, more coordinated and effective national response. In the health sector, for example, the UN provides support to the Joint Annual Health Review process including strengthening its linkage to the five-year health plan for 2011-2015. The examples of our work in disaster risk management and the national response to HIV illustrate how the UN utilizes its convening power to bring diverse groups together to better respond to development challenges.

Policy Dialogue

The UN has been very active in organizing both public and 'closed-door' policy dialogues on priority social and economic development issues. These discussions have included the Vietnamese policy research community and representatives of civil society, the Government, international development partners and the Party. Among other initiatives, policy dialogues have been organized with the participation of respected universities, institutes and think tanks such as Harvard and Maastricht, and have included prominent academics and practitioners such as Professor Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Ha-Joon Chang, Simon Maxwell, Yvo de Boer and James Riedel.

The UN has also helped create, expand and facilitate sector-specific partnership groups that support dialogue on priority issues, such as the SME Partnership Group, Health Partnership Group, Education Sector Group, Reproductive Health Affinity Group, Gender Action Partnership, and the national HIV Technical Working Group. And we have also improved dialogue and coordination with our Government counterparts through the creation in 2008 of the eight joint UN/Government Programme Coordination Groups which cover key areas of cooperation such as health, governance and sustainable development.

The National Response to HIV

In Viet Nam, the UN supports Viet Nam's strategic planning and coordination of the national response to HIV through the Joint UN Team on HIV. The UN works closely with national and international partners to discuss specific needs and promote HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, and facilitates the joint work of stakeholders to develop and implement a national monitoring and evaluation framework.

One example of how the UN has made an impact in this area is related to Viet Nam's national proposal to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Round 9. The UN brought together a group of stakeholders to develop the first dual track HIV proposal to the Global Fund, which required addressing a number of policy issues and taking a major role in facilitating discussion to ensure a proposal and



an approach that involved civil society for the first time. The success of Viet Nam's proposal resulted in funding for civil society directly, within an overall grant with Government of US\$101 million awarded in late 2009. This was a major milestone in joint UN/Government/civil society collaboration on HIV. Under the grant, HIV treatment is being made available in selected prisons for the first time, while issues related to men who have sex with men were also included for the first time. This new programme complements ongoing initiatives of the Government and donors such as the World Bank, U.K. Department for International Development, Australia and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

The UN also coordinates donor support for the national response to HIV and our policy advocacy work via the Ambassador/UN Heads of Agency Informal Coordination Group on HIV, and has worked to expand the national HIV Technical Working Group to become more inclusive of civil society. The UN has supported increased coordination capacity of the National Committee on AIDS, Drugs and Prostitution Prevention and Control, which works across multiple sectors, and UN support has strengthened the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Training in HIV response within the education system. The ministry is now developing an Action Plan on HIV Prevention in the Education Sector for the period 2011-2015, which aims to ensure a comprehensive education sector response to HIV and AIDS.



Viet Nam was hit by an unprecedented severe drought in 2010 which lasted for more than six months. Through regular detailed disaster situation reports, consultative meetings with Government, donors and NGOs and targeted joint advocacy, the UN brought greater attention to the drought, its changing condition and future possible outlooks, as well as institutionalizing early warning and preparedness capacity.



Helping Viet Nam deal with natural disasters

The UN plays a leading role among organizations in Viet Nam in facilitating stronger dialogue and coordination between sectors, localities and agencies in order to ensure an integrated approach to disaster risk management, including disaster preparedness, relief/rescue and early recovery. Through the Natural Disasters and Emergencies Programme Coordination Group (comprised of nine UN agencies and Government counterparts), the UN has improved dialogue and coordination with the ministries of education, health, labour and other agencies.

The UN also promotes coordination and dialogue with local and international NGOs through the Disaster Management Working Group and Climate Change Working Group. And UN staff have regular formal and informal dialogue with officials of the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Natural Resources and Environment, Planning and Investment, Health, Education and others, as well as with counterparts in the World Bank, the European Commission, ADB, JICA, AusAid, USAID and embassies.

As a result, sector-wide coordination and dialogue has improved before, during and after disasters, particularly thanks to regular disaster 'situation reports' and UN technical support to the Disaster Management Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Standing Office of the Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control.






3. Helping the most vulnerable and disadvantaged

The UN has an important role to play in advocating on behalf of vulnerable and/or voiceless groups, such as the chronically poor, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and those at higher risk of, or living with HIV. While Viet Nam has made impressive progress in poverty reduction, not all groups have benefitted equally. Some people face new vulnerabilities due to the rapid pace of change and new threats to health, livelihoods and security such as epidemics and climate change.

Our work includes protecting the rights of these people, supporting provision of needed services, advocacy on their behalf and ensuring they have a voice in policies and decisions that affect them. Specific areas of the UN's work include improving the status of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities; research and advocacy related to national and international migration and creation of decent and productive jobs; expanding and ensuring public services and social protection; preventing and combating gender-based violence; increasing incomes of poor families and farmers; and support to men, women and children living with HIV.



In response to an unprecedented outbreak of measles in 2009 of 8,000 reported cases, over seven million Vietnamese children were vaccinated against measles through a nationwide campaign, the first such campaign since 2002. The UN provided support for procurement as well as technical assistance for monitoring and oversight.



Closing the development gap for ethnic minorities

Access to quality and appropriate education is a gateway to development and poverty eradication for minorities, and it is equally essential for the preservation and promotion of minority cultures, languages and identities.

– Ms. Gay McDougall,
UN Independent Expert on
Minority Issues, in her Viet Nam
mission report, 2010

While Viet Nam has reduced its overall poverty rate in a remarkably short period of time, the poverty rate in ethnic minority and mountainous areas remains high: 2.5 times higher than the national average. The UN has been outspoken on the need to focus on this issue, and contributes to closing this 'development gap' in several ways. One UN-supported approach focuses on empowerment, by building the capacity of ethnic minorities to participate in all stages of developing, managing and monitoring the policies and programmes that affect their lives. Another area of focus is promoting bilingual education in schools. The UN has worked with the Ministry of Education and Training to pilot mother tongue-based bilingual education activities in Lao Cai, Gia Lai and Tra Vinh provinces, in the languages of H'mong, Jrai and Khmer, respectively. This includes bilingual education materials like textbooks and teaching tools produced in ethnic minority languages, and training in mother tongue-based bilingual education techniques. Following her mission to Viet Nam, the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Ms. Gay McDougall's primary recommendation to redress the development gap for ethnic minorities was bilingual education.

Selected research reports and analysis on poor or vulnerable populations

- Social impact of the economic crisis: 'Rapid impact monitoring' studies
- Qualitative research: Children with Disability in An Giang and Dong Nai
- A mid-term review of the National Targeted Programme for Poverty Reduction and Programme 135-II, 2006–2008
- Final report analysis of the Programme 135-II baseline survey
- How External Support for Health and HIV Will Evolve as Viet Nam Becomes a Middle-Income Country
- Action Research on Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education
- An Analysis of the Situation of Children in Viet Nam 2010



Improving living standards in provinces with high numbers of ethnic minorities

Kon Tum is one of the poorest provinces of Viet Nam: approximately half of the population belongs to various ethnic groups and as of 2009 around 24 per cent of its population lived below the poverty line, compared to the national rate of 14.5 per cent. Several UN agencies have been supporting Kon Tum's development for many years, and in 2007 a joint UN programme was launched to provide a more coordinated and strategic response with a focus on strengthening capacities of local authorities to plan and manage their development effectively and to better deliver quality basic social services to local people.

A mid-term review of the initiative found that the quality of the local development planning process has been improved, and knowledge and skills of health and education professionals have increased. Access to higher quality local health services and midwives has expanded, with health facilities now more accessible to people in remote areas. In targeted primary schools and early childhood education centres, knowledge and skills of teachers, school management and parents were found to have increased and there is much more of a focus on child-oriented learning. Overall, the new planning approach introduced takes a bottom up approach, and as a result commune and district plans are better informed by local needs and priorities and are more responsive to local conditions.





Monitoring the impact of the economic crisis on the poor

In response to concerns about the impact of the recent global economic crisis on the poor and on vulnerable groups in Viet Nam, the UN rallied other development partners and non-governmental organizations in 2009 (including the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences/ Centre for Analysis, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Oxfam, Action Aid and the World Bank) to participate in conducting several rounds of 'rapid impact assessments' (RIM) in order to monitor impacts.

These assessments highlighted the impact of the crisis on workers in export industries and craft villages, and on migrants who were forced to return home. They also revealed impacts on families, with many households reporting they cut back on education spending and reduced food expenses. The findings were presented to the National Assembly and high-level Government officials, providing particularly relevant data for a decision-making environment in Viet Nam characterized by scarcity of real-time information.

A second RIM exercise was done in 2010, and currently the UN is developing another RIM exercise for 2011. This will focus on the current high inflation and the effectiveness of Resolution 11 on macroeconomic stability.



The UN Joint Programme on Green Production and Trade has helped 23 companies develop new and more sustainable products, and has provided training for small and medium enterprises and grassroots craft producers on business development, cleaner production and sustainable design.

Creating sustainable livelihoods for the poor

A new joint UN programme is increasing income and employment opportunities for growers and collectors of raw materials and producers of handicrafts in several poor provinces of Viet Nam. The UN Joint Programme on Green Production and Trade has completed baseline surveys on raw materials suppliers and grassroots craft producers, finalised in-depth value chain studies on five craft product sectors, and produced an assessment of production, occupational safety and health conditions of craft producers.

The initiative targets 4,800 households in the north of the country, including 1,400 families from disadvantaged ethnic minorities such as the Thai, Muong and H'mong. About 40 per cent of these households live below the poverty line of 200,000 VND per capita/month (about 0.35 USD/day). The UN's approach is to develop better integrated, pro-poor and environmentally sustainable 'green' value chains including bamboo and rattan, sericulture, sea grass, lacquer and handmade paper.



New ideas and approaches for reducing poverty

To address poverty reduction efforts from a broad human development perspective, the UN has in recent years strongly advocated for a differentiated and multi-dimensional view of poverty, including a more nuanced and diversified approach to targeting poverty; differentiating between chronic (ethnic minority) and emerging forms of transient poverty; the role of social protection in general, and the expansion of social assistance in particular; and a focus on reducing disparities. A recent UN-supported survey of urban poverty in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City, for example, utilized a multi-dimensional approach to show that while the two cities have enjoyed tremendous economic growth, people living in the two cities face inequalities in living standards and in access to services, such as education and health care.

The UN has also supported better coordination and integration of Viet Nam's numerous poverty reduction efforts. The UN provided substantial inputs and coordinated development partners' contributions to the formulation of the Resolution on the ten-year Poverty Reduction Strategy, with a strong focus on links with other policy frameworks,

notably Programme 135, and the role of various Government agencies and line ministries in its implementation. In related work, the UN has helped the Government to mainstream its poverty reduction efforts across line ministries through policy dialogues. The Poverty Reduction Policy Dialogue and the Ethnic Minority Development Forum, both held in 2010, are recent examples.

As a result of UN advocacy work and technical support, the Government is now better able to measure poverty, and to address it in national and local plans and policies. For example, the use of multi-dimensional approaches to poverty measurement was reflected in the Urban Poverty Survey that was released in 2010; and the 2008 Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey Report, published in 2010, includes a comprehensive analysis of multi-dimensional child poverty. The National Assembly approved a new set of national poverty lines in 2010 which are set 30 per cent higher than the normally used official lines. This may increase the number of Vietnamese who qualify for certain services and benefits, such as health insurance cards.



4. Helping Government agencies work better together

Because our agencies work across so many sectors, the UN is able to facilitate a multi-sectoral approach and help various Government agencies and bodies better coordinate their work, particularly on issues that are cross-cutting. UN agencies in Viet Nam work closely with the Government under the umbrella of the One Plan on a broad array of issues including equitable economic and social development, delivery of quality public services, environmental protection, good governance and building strong institutions, and effective emergency preparedness and response.

Two examples of areas where the UN is helping the Government coordinate their work better are the national response to climate change and local provision of social services.

Climate Change

Effective coordination and cooperation are critical if Viet Nam is to respond to climate change and avoid the worst impacts. Yet climate change-related policy development, research, and awareness raising all face coordination challenges because climate change action relates to so many sectors and other strategies, plans and national target programmes.

In recent years the UN has helped the Government coordinate the development of the National Target Programme to Respond to Climate Change, which was approved in late 2008.

The UN has broadly supported national efforts to address climate change under the lead of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, with strong roles for other ministries, including the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry Of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Ministry of Finance.

The UN has also promoted and supported mainstreaming of climate change into the national Socio-Economic Development Plan under the leadership of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and supported the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to work with provinces and sector ministries (including the ministries of agriculture, information and technology, health, education, labour and communication) to provide guidance on their action plans to respond to climate change. The UN has also directly supported sector ministries in this action planning, often bringing expertise from different UN agencies to help a specific ministry.

Viet Nam is also one of a select group of countries piloting the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD), which involves close collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and multiple Government agencies at both national and provincial level and three UN agencies, in partnership with many other international organizations (see pages 42-43 for more details about the UN-REDD Programme in Viet Nam).



Another major challenge is accessing international funds for climate change adaptation and greenhouse gas emissions mitigation, especially new funding opportunities from developed countries. The UN is helping strengthen coordination efforts by donors and national agencies alike, including enhancing the practical roles of Ministry of Planning and Investment and Ministry of Finance in coordinating and managing overseas development assistance (ODA) for climate change. Existing and new ODA modalities are becoming more complex and this is putting new and increasing demands on the Government's management and coordination of ODA.

Selected climate change policy and research papers

- Viet Nam and Climate Change Action: Strategic Priorities
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Options for Mitigation in Viet Nam, and the UN's Responses
- The Challenge of Climate Change and Economic Development in Viet Nam
- Viet Nam and Climate Change: A Discussion Paper on Policies for Sustainable Human Development
- Responding to Climate Change in Viet Nam: Opportunities for Improving Gender Equality



Better government coordination at the provincial level

In Quang Nam Province, UN agencies have joined forces to support the provincial government to develop a Provincial Development Strategy that covers a wide range of sectors such as culture and tourism, employment, environmental protection and agricultural development. The work is expected to result in a model of UN support for socio-economic development that could be duplicated in other provinces across the country. UN support in Quang Nam has led to improved capacity of local government agencies in

planning and strategy development. Coordination among the provincial departments has been strengthened, which contributes significantly to greater impact and sustainability.

In another initiative in Dong Thap, Ninh Thuan, An Giang, Kon Tum and Dien Bien provinces, the UN has supported multi-sectoral and integrated social services, including strengthening of cross-sectoral linkages. This has resulted in 90,000 pre-school, primary and lower secondary school

children (30 per cent from ethnic minorities) benefitting from child-friendly and child safe schools; 19,000 people (40 per cent from ethnic minorities) receiving access to safe water and hygiene education; 2,716 households (90 per cent ethnic minorities) receiving access to adequate sanitation; 27,000 pregnant women receiving ante-natal care services; and 2,000 children in need of special protection benefitting from community-based protection systems.



Cross-cutting areas

Human Rights

The UN plays a significant role in promoting human rights around the world. While Viet Nam has ratified several international human rights conventions – such as the Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and International Labour Organization conventions – and has stated its commitment to ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention Against Torture, the Government and other stakeholders have identified a number of human rights challenges.

To help Viet Nam adhere to its international and national human rights commitments and promote a rights-based approach to development, the UN supports dialogue with the Government and stakeholders on human rights issues, advocates for the universality of human rights standards and values, and assists with harmonizing national law with international norms and conventions. The UN also has a specific project with Ministry of Foreign Affairs to build capacity for effective implementation of international human rights treaties, and supports Viet Nam's involvement in international and regional human rights events and mechanisms.

In 2009, for example, the UN helped Viet Nam prepare for its first Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a mechanism to review a country's human rights record and to report on how well it promotes, respects and protects human rights. The UN conducted an assessment of Viet Nam's human rights situation, with a focus on development issues, and the UN and the Embassy of Switzerland fostered an exchange of experiences between Viet Nam and representatives from the Philippines and Indonesia as input to the wider UN human rights analysis. Viet Nam's UPR report was presented to and discussed by the UN Human Rights Council, and Member States provided recommendations, many of which Viet Nam accepted and is now working to implement.

Selected publications related to human rights

- An assessment of Viet Nam's human rights situation, with a focus on development issues
- A human rights-based approach to development toolkit
- The rights of children with disabilities in Viet Nam: Bringing Viet Nam's laws into compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

After the UPR, the Government extended invitations to six human rights 'independent experts' and 'special rapporteurs' – in the areas of ethnic minorities, extreme poverty, health, education, food and foreign debt. Three of these independent experts have already visited Viet Nam. In July 2010 the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Gay McDougall, completed her mission to Viet Nam, the first visit by a UN Human Rights Special Procedure to Viet Nam in over ten years. This was followed by the visit of Ms. Magdalena Sepulveda, the Independent Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, in August 2010, and the UN Independent Expert on Foreign Debt and Human Rights, Mr. Cephas Lumina, in March 2011.



International Human Rights Treaties: The Hague Convention

One recent example that highlights the UN's work supporting Viet Nam to adopt, ratify and/or implement international human rights treaties is advocacy for substantial reform of the child adoption system to bring it more in line with the principles of the Hague Convention on adoption. UN advocacy efforts started in 2009 with an external assessment of the child adoption system. This and related advocacy work contributed to the development and passing of a national Law on Child Adoption in 2010. The law has substantially reformed the system of inter-country adoption, making it more

transparent and consistent with the principles of the Hague Convention. Currently the UN is helping the Government create regulations meeting international standards on child adoption to support the nation's ratification of the Hague Convention. UN support will include developing a national monitoring system with adoption supervision, a comprehensive assessment of the root causes of child abandonment and relinquishment, and building the capacity of policymakers, welfare and enforcement personnel to better protect children.





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Cross-cutting areas

Gender Equality

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to Viet Nam's continued social and economic development, and the UN leverages several of its comparative strengths to support Viet Nam in this priority area. In recent years the UN has supported the Government to develop and implement two key laws, the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence, to ensure more gender responsive policymaking and to develop a sound evidence base for policymaking on gender issues. The UN has also contributed to improving services and support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including women affected by domestic violence. And it has facilitated stronger partnerships between Government, development partners and civil society while supporting the Government to more effectively engage

civil society in policy formulation. Specifically, the UN has worked in partnership with other stakeholders to advocate for and help the Government develop the historic domestic violence law, which was passed in 2007 and affords protection for the rights of women and their families to live a life free of violence. The UN has also provided technical assistance to the National Assembly through a pioneering project that supports the development of mechanisms to increase gender mainstreaming in the Vietnamese legislative process.

UN agencies have assisted the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs – as the responsible national agency for the Gender Equality Law – to develop the National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2011-2020 and to strengthen its

capacity to coordinate with other line ministries to design and implement the strategy. This has included engaging with different partners such as civil society, academic institutions and development partners to ensure their voices are heard in the process. In related work, the UN has supported increased participation of civil society organizations and other stakeholders, such as the Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in the process of developing gender-specific government policies such as the National Programme on Gender Equality for 2011-2015. The UN has also supported gender mainstreaming in key national strategies and plans, such as in the small and medium enterprises policy, labour code, national Reproductive Health Strategy, the national Family Strategy and the national HIV Strategy.

Over the past several years the UN has supported better coordination and collaboration on gender issues through the Gender Action Partnership, a forum for representatives of the Government, donor, and UN agencies, mass organizations, civil society organizations and academic institutions to share and discuss gender concerns and challenges and plan for and coordinate effective responses.

To redress inequalities and promote gender equality, the UN has worked through the Gender PCG to help generate data for use in policy advocacy and improved programming. This has included support to the General Statistics Office to calculate the Gender-related Development Index, Gender Empowerment Measure and the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. The UN has also conducted research on ethnic minority women's access to legal services, the situation of sex workers in relation to migration in Viet Nam, the rising sex-ratio at birth, the impact of the economic crisis on rural women and information on child rights and gender equality.

As part of efforts to protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged, the UN has supported the Government and the General Statistics Office to develop and field Viet Nam's first ever national survey on domestic violence, providing a baseline for policy-makers and service providers working to protect women who have experienced violence, and those providing services to survivors. The UN has also supported new interventions to improve service side responses by providing capacity building to police and law enforcement officials, as well as to health services to improve their support and referral to victims. These initiatives are an important contribution towards the goal of ensuring all women in Viet Nam can live a life free of violence.



Selected gender-specific research papers and reports

- The Differential Impact of the Vietnamese Economic Stimulus Package on Women and Men
- Gender analysis on the draft Socio-Economic Development Plan 2011–2015
- Results from the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam
- Socio-Economic Impacts of WTO Accession on Rural Women
- Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Viet Nam: Towards a Strong National Programme Designed to Support Both Prevention and Response
- Gender-Based Violence: Issue Paper
- Tourism, Gender, Ethnicity and Challenges to Sustainable Development in Multiethnic Upland of Viet Nam: A Case Study of Sa Pa
- National textbook review and analysis from a gender perspective: report of findings



Case Study

UN-REDD in Viet Nam

In 2009 Viet Nam was selected as one of nine initial pilot countries globally to implement the United Nations Collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (UN-REDD). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has recognized Viet Nam as one of the most-affected countries in the world as a result of climate change, and UN-REDD aims to promote socio-economic development and poverty alleviation in forestry areas.

Phase I of the UN-REDD Viet Nam programme started in August 2009 with the long-term objective of assisting the Government in developing an effective 'REDD+' mechanism, currently being finalized. REDD+ goes beyond deforestation and forest degradation, and includes the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. Phase 1 of the UN-REDD Programme focuses on preparing Viet Nam to be ready for REDD+, including institutional arrangements; preparation of appropriate laws and legislation; and developing a National REDD+ Programme.

The UN-REDD Viet Nam Programme is a joint initiative with the Government led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development with financial and technical support from the UN. The programme closely collaborates with a number of international and local organizations and projects including the World Bank and National REDD Network members such as JICA, GIZ and SNV.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent

As the first country to proceed with formal preparations for field-based REDD+ activities, the UN-REDD Viet Nam Programme is pioneering a process to seek Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of communities that will be affected by REDD+ activities. FPIC is a rights-based principle representing the right to self-determination, related rights to land, territories and natural resources, the right to culture, and the right to be free from racial discrimination. Participation and inclusion are among the human rights principles that guide the UN's work at all levels, and Viet Nam is a signatory to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. FPIC applies to key decision points for actions that have the potential to impact the land, territories and resources upon which rights holders depend for their cultural, spiritual and physical sustenance, well-being and survival.

In 2010, FPIC was piloted in Di Linh and Lam Ha districts in Lam Dong, a province endowed with 618,000 hectares of diverse forests, covering 63 per cent of the land. The FPIC process was conducted in 78 villages because of the prevalence of ethnic people (of the 53 ethnic groups present in Viet Nam, around 30 groups are found there). The process, which involves eight steps and three phases, was completed between April and June 2010.

The FPIC process was a pilot activity, and through this exercise, the programme aimed to draw out lessons for the future implementation of the FPIC process in Viet Nam and other countries. In addition to FPIC, there are several other important components of the UN-REDD programme, including forest monitoring and development of a benefit distribution system.

The Government and the UN are currently formulating a large scale Phase II pilot of the UN-REDD programme that should make substantial finance available to thousands of forest dependent households as payments for forest protection and enhancing carbon stocks. Phase II (2011-2014) will introduce REDD+ in the 40 forested provinces of Viet Nam and it will support full-scale implementation of REDD+ in six provinces.

In the village meetings I have recently seen that most people understand the benefit of forests and trees so people consult with [the UN-REDD programme].

Mr. K'Bren, of Kala TongGu village







Focus areas for 2012–2016

Viet Nam is well-settled in the ranks of countries that have achieved medium human development, and is on track to meet, or has met, a majority of the Millennium Development Goals at a national level – with the exception of MDG 6 on combating HIV and other diseases, and the water and sanitation targets of MDG 7. Viet Nam is increasingly active within international organizations, trade with global markets continues to grow, and in many ways the future looks bright.

At the same time, a set of persistent and emerging challenges threaten Viet Nam's development progress in the near to medium term. These include macroeconomic instability; a rapidly changing demographic profile; environmental degradation; climate change; rising disparities; growing urban, migrant and other forms of poverty; job creation for hundreds of thousands of new labour market entrants; the need to improve labourers' skills and productivity; threats to food security and food safety; lack of access to social services and social security; gender inequality; and the need to modernize institutions and overcome corruption.

The national SEDS for 2011-2020 and a recent independent analysis by the UN¹ both noted the need for a greater balance between economic growth and social, human and sustainable development goals if Viet Nam's future growth is to be of high quality and sustainable – ensuring that all citizens benefit from the development process, including most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

¹ *Joint Country Analysis of Viet Nam*, Brian Van Arkadie et al, 2010.





From the perspective of the UN, in order to achieve Viet Nam's ambitious development goals and the MDGs in an inclusive and sustainable way, greater efforts in several critical areas are needed, including:

- addressing inequalities and disparities and tackling persistent and emerging forms of poverty;
- providing equal access to employment and income-generating opportunities;
- promoting environmentally sustainable growth that minimizes the harmful effects of growth on the environment, society and people's health and welfare, mitigates the negative impact of pollutants, including overuse of agricultural chemicals, minimizes the harmful effects of climate change and reduces the carbon intensity of growth;
- increasing levels of productivity and technological sophistication in production;
- continuing to promote economy-wide competitiveness and global integration in a way that allows the Vietnamese people to reap the full economic and social benefits of globalization;
- accelerating progress towards the unfinished MDGs agenda; and
- ensuring regionally balanced economic development.

The UN's One Plan for 2012-2016 will respond to Viet Nam's needs as a new middle-income country and promote full achievement of the MDGs with equity in all parts of the country by focusing on three broad but critical areas: inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth; access to quality essential services and social protection; and enhancing governance and participation.

As Viet Nam navigates these complex challenges over the coming years, the United Nations will continue to respond, adapt and redefine its role so as to most effectively support continued development and a better life for all Vietnamese people.

The One Plan for 2012-2016

The three focus areas are:

- Inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth
- Access to quality essential services and social protection
- Enhancing governance and participation



The Mission of the United Nations in Viet Nam

The United Nations, in partnership with the Government and people of Viet Nam, works to ensure that all Vietnamese people enjoy an increasingly healthy and prosperous life with greater human dignity and expanded choices. Collectively and through its individual agencies, the United Nations cares and creates opportunities for the poor and most vulnerable, and for youth, to whom the future belongs.

In accordance with the United Nations Charter and Millennium Declaration, the United Nations advances the principles of equality and social justice, while providing impartial advice, technical expertise, access to global knowledge and local experience to meet Viet Nam's development challenges.

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