

INGO Statement for the Consultative Group Meeting Education and Skills | Revision of Land Law

Hanoi, Vietnam, 10 December 2012

More than 700 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) implement projects in Vietnam. They work closely with Vietnamese partners and the Government of Vietnam, significantly contributing to the country's development. INGOs in Vietnam have a strong commitment to information-sharing, partnerships and coordination. This statement is a result of discussions held at the INGO forum in November 2012, a series of consultations with elected INGO representatives for the Consultative Group meeting and consolidation of INGOs' inputs finalised by the VUFO-NGO Resource Centre. The statement brings together the views of INGOs in Vietnam on two vital themes which are being discussed at the Consultative Group meeting today.

Education and Skills: Laying the Foundation for Successful MIC

Education has been one of the main strategies to overcome poverty for many households in Vietnam, as a result of changing livelihoods and investing in children's education. Following rapid urbanization and land expropriation many people without skills and knowledge to adapt have struggled. Those who have invested in their children's education have also increased the opportunities of the next generation to have stable jobs with higher incomes. The employment rate of young people who finish upper secondary school is higher in suburban areas, while it remains low in urban areas. High school students have better access to information on vocational training, but still lack objective and in-depth information. Urban students have a greater range of choice, reflecting more diverse labour markets in cities. Suburban and rural youth have limited access to information. Vocational training schools, colleges and universities provide counselling but the information is usually insufficient. Many parents and their children choose educational institutions based on trends, rather than selecting courses that may better match possible future employment opportunities.

Vietnam has a population of around 85 million and it is estimated that roughly 1.4 million Vietnamese youth enter the job market every year. A large percentage (45%) of Vietnam's unemployed are young people from the age of 18 to 25. At the same time there is a labour shortage of skilled workers which is slowing down the country's economy. Some employers have to invest six months of training for new employees in order to simply introduce them to the workplace and modern standards. A combination of inadequate education, lack of skills, chronic unemployment, poverty, dependency and declining self esteem – all lead to impoverished youth having few economic opportunities. Access to quality schooling has been one of the major areas of concern, particularly in poor and remote regions. Education from the age of 11 upwards has to be paid for, which is an additional difficulty for many families. Other issues related to technical and vocational training opportunities include:

- Young people in urban areas are not interested in working for the public sector. They prefer to work in the private sector because of: (a) more opportunities; (b) performance-based and capacity-based benefits; (c) easier move between companies.
- Young people with vocational and tertiary qualifications have difficulties in applying skills and knowledge to their work. Former students of technical schools complain that their courses have been too theoretical and the equipment used in practical sessions was out of date.
- Employers report that few graduates possess required skills. Graduates from prestigious vocational schools demonstrate good technical skills, while colleges and universities providing similar courses produce graduates with less technical knowledge and higher salary expectations.
- Many young people who graduate from intermediate vocational schools, colleges and universities frequently have to take lower-skilled jobs. They often find employment unrelated to their qualifications. Some students work while studying, mostly in areas related to their field of study, so that they can gain practical experience.

- After finishing high school many young people find jobs at factories or industrial parks through recommendations of relatives and friends working in the same company. Many employers give priority to skilled workers with upper secondary education, which makes it more difficult for unskilled workers to find jobs.
- Women are disproportionately affected by limited access to skills building opportunities, as they have less time for extra study due to their domestic obligations and a perceived traditional role of primary carers.
- Most young urban people, including those from poor households, are not interested in short-term vocational training programmes although they are supported by the State. The most common reasons are: (a) Poor households cannot give up work even for short periods; and (b) People prefer to receive on-the-job training or in workshops while working rather than attending official training courses.

Education is the main building block of effective human resources development, which requires integrated and concerted strategies, policies, plans and programmes. The focus should be on early learning through improvement of kindergarten and primary school programmes. Children exposed to inadequate education at an early age will suffer long-term impact on their schooling and overall development path, which may create inequality and reduce the opportunities for the next generation. Investments in early childhood lead to a more healthy and productive labour force, which will contribute to Vietnam's socio-economic development. A more healthy and productive workforce in turn is a guarantee for continued security, social cohesion and citizenship; providing the State with a guaranteed social and economical return on investment.

Inequality in access to basic education has been reduced in the last five years. However, disparities in access to upper secondary education and above are high, especially in disadvantaged areas. The more affluent have better access to high quality education than the poor; they are able to invest more in their children's education; they can choose *good schools and selected classes* for their children, while poorer households choose local schools. The most expensive educational services – such as international schools, English language classes with foreign teachers and studying abroad – are only for children from wealthy families.

Vietnam has witnessed significant improvements in education for ethnic minorities in recent years. However, according to the World Bank's survey in 2010 around 30 percent of minority households had at least one child dropping out of school before the completion of a grade – compared to 16 percent for the Kinh. In 2006, the net enrolment of ethnic minorities at primary education level was 89 percent, while that of the Kinh was nearly 98 percent. Only 42 percent of ethnic minority children from the age 6 to 18 attended upper secondary school, compared to 57 percent of the Kinh children. Ethnic minority girls experience the lowest enrolment and attendance rates of any group, the highest repetition and dropout rates, the lowest primary school completion and the lowest transition rates from primary to lower secondary schools. The main reasons for this situation are:

- Language barrier – 90 per cent of ethnic minority children speak their own ethnic language at home, while young children have little or no exposure to Vietnamese before primary school. These children are unable to access education in their mother tongue and often fail to develop fluency in Vietnamese. School reading materials are in Vietnamese only and ethnic minority children are unlikely to understand the lesson.
- Teachers do not have comprehensive knowledge or awareness on child development, teaching approaches and understanding of ethnic minority cultures. The curriculum is rarely adapted to ethnic minority context, resulting in poor learning outcomes. Most teachers in minority areas are Kinh, and a few speak local languages.
- Awareness about child rights and the importance of *education for all* among children and parents is low. Communities' participation and access to information in this area is still limited.
- Schools are in short supply of teaching facilities, proper toilets, clean water, books, learning materials and safe playgrounds.

In order to overcome these barriers, INGOs have promoted innovative practices that have demonstrated tangible improvements. Interventions have typically focused on three strategies: (1) capacity building for teachers; (2) increasing child participation; and (3) promotion of engagement by parents. In addition to these strategies – already tested by INGOs in the field – we offer the following specific recommendations:

1. **Further reforms** of technical and vocational training institutions as the key for future socio-economic development; more specialized orientation of mainstream education in line with labour market demands and offers; adjustment of policies to support effective vocational training for the most vulnerable youth within the urban and peri-urban context. This should include supporting enterprises to provide training for workers, and supporting studying and working in parallel with attachment to private households business or urban business associations – not only official vocational training centres.
2. **Child-Centred Methodology (CMM)** – in line with the Active Teaching and Learning approaches set out in the Education Law (2005) and currently implemented by the Ministry of Education and Training. CCM ensures that all educational activities are oriented towards learners: children actively explore new knowledge; teachers act more as facilitators; learning activities are diversified; children go through activities to share their ideas and come up with the experience they need to learn.
3. **Curriculum adaptation to the local context**, cultural traditions and living conditions – a single textbook and curriculum for all children nationwide does not reflect children’s lives and experience in different regions and from different ethnic origins. The Department of Education and Training and schools in targeted provinces have been supported to revise grade 1 and grade 2 curricula to be more relevant to ethnic minority children’s learning competencies and living environment. Related projects also guide and encourage teachers to replace texts, vocabulary and pictures in the textbook that are not familiar to ethnic children with more familiar items. This helps children comprehend the new language.
4. **Second language teaching methodology** – recognizing that the Vietnamese language is the second language for most ethnic children, INGOs have introduced several second language teaching techniques to teachers through a number of training sessions at different levels. By applying these teaching methods, ethnic minority children’s acquisition of Vietnamese language improved significantly.
5. **Bilingual education** – practical models of bilingual education for minority ethnic children have been developed. The models introduce both mother tongue and Vietnamese instruction in pre-school and in the first years of primary school in order to increase the children's learning competencies. Evidence to date shows that ethnic minority children in the pilot areas have gained more confidence and competence in the new language as compared to children in non-bilingual classes.
6. **In-service skill-based training** is critical to improving teachers’ skills and methodologies applicable in the local context with ethnic minority children. Training courses have proved to have the most impact in the area of child rights, active teaching method, making and using learning aids, teaching skills for multi-grade classes, applying IT in teaching and learning, lesson planning, monitoring and evaluation skills, class observation and giving feedback, using local materials for teaching and class decoration, management skills, building child-friendly school library and teaching with new preschool curriculum.

Land Issues: Revision of Land Law for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

Land is a critical asset for poor and marginalized people and communities. It is a source of food security and livelihoods. Effective and equitable use of land can expand and diversify livelihood options. For many people, especially ethnic minority communities, land and forests are part of their identity and culture. Land reform has played a crucial role in contributing to Vietnam’s impressive poverty reduction record. Today, land is coming under increasing pressures, and thus is more contested. Loss of agricultural land without due process, proper compensation and alternative livelihoods pushes people back into poverty, even destitution. Land policies and their implementations have shown deficiencies. The current policies, in some cases, operate at the expense of small-scale farmers. It is poor and marginalized people who are exposed most and most vulnerable to corruption and abuse. How a nation manages access to and equitable use of land

resources in the context of rapid economic development and increasing resource constraints is critical for sustainable growth, poverty reduction and social stability.

INGOs welcome the Government's initiative to address these challenges. The revision of the Land Law (2003) is a critical step the Government is taking to deal with land issues. To effectively respond to the range of challenging land issues, the revision of the law should be informed by the experiences and aspirations of the people. While the revision of the law is crucial, other policies and their implementation will also need to be reviewed. People, communities and people's organizations must play an integral role in this process.

Based on our experiences from communities across Vietnam, INGOs offer the following recommendations:

1. Small-scale farmers face more disadvantages compared to other groups that should be addressed, including granting agricultural land use rights to households for an unlimited term, reviewing tight land use-change restrictions, and supporting substitution of site-matching, higher-value food crops where rice cultivation is not productive. The process of land-use certificates issuance should be affordable, fair, and equitable especially with regards to women's equal rights to men and customary rights of forest users.
2. People, communities and their representative organizations must be given a stronger voice and role in land use and management. The revised law needs to increase transparency, access to information and enhance participation of people and communities in land-use planning. Community participation must be guaranteed in land conversion and land acquisitions on the basis of the principles of free, prior and informed consent. Concrete mechanisms to enable effective community participation should be clearly stated.
3. Customary practices in land and forest management and use are critical for ethnic minorities -- not only for livelihoods but also spiritual and religious practices. Communities have demonstrated that they are good custodians of forests. The provisions for collective and customary land use and management practices of ethnic minorities must be better recognized in the law. The various purposes of forest land, including spiritual and religious, need to be more recognized.
4. Make progress in and disclose the ongoing review of the current use, productivity, employment, social functions and sharing of benefits from agricultural and forest land controlled by state farms and state forest enterprises. Agricultural land and forest land from under-performing state-owned enterprises should be reallocated to support poverty reduction and local rural development, with special considerations for land-poor and landless households.
5. The wide scope for land recovery by the state must be reviewed and tightened, in light of the continued increase in the number of public land disputes. It is important to clearly defined what constitutes *public interest* in land recovery, and *economic development* as the other broad category for land recovery by the state should no longer be applied at this stage in Vietnam's development. Compensation for recovered land must include the provision of alternative livelihoods for farmers impacted by land-use change. Compensation must be fair, adequate and timely. Land compensation should be based on an independent land pricing, which should reflect the future values, and social and opportunity cost of farmers affected by land use change.
6. The National Assembly is providing important oversight of the implementation of the Land Law in Vietnam, but given the challenging nature of land issues in Vietnam and the critical importance of land in the socio-economic life of the country, it is important to have the active participation of other stakeholders in the oversight process to ensure genuine effectiveness. The people's associations, media and other organizations can contribute significantly in this regard, and clear mechanisms for their participation should be specified in the new Law.