

## Viet Nam

### Part 1: Situation update in the country

#### Country context

##### Politics and governance

The year 2018 witnessed significant political developments and major economic and social progress in Viet Nam. At the same time, the country's emerging role increased substantially in terms of its contribution to multilateralism at both regional and global levels.

The merging of the Party Secretary General and the President of State roles into one position has strong implications for Viet Nam's governance structure. 2018 also marked another year of strong anti-corruption effort led by the Party, which aims to address not only corrupt individuals but also gaps in existing governance and legislative systems. While the anti-corruption drive has increased the trust of citizens and businesses in Government, the action caused interruptions and government personnel uncertainty, delaying numerous approval processes and activities. These delays were exacerbated by an ongoing civil servant reform with a freeze on hiring and the aim to reduce the government workforce across all agencies by 10 per cent by 2020.

The Party is also implementing a rapid downsizing policy of the Government executive structure by merging departments at sub-national level and a number of ministries. Many service-providing agencies, including health and social work centres, were merged. While this rationalization has been to some extent effective in big cities, many smaller and poor areas suffered from lack of staff and increased competition for services.

The Government continued to pursue its 'socialisation policies'. The aim of socialization is to improve the quality of services and to increase the autonomy of social service providers. However, quality improvements have not been uniformly observed and out-of-pocket payments have become the norm rather than the exception for service users. The Ministries of Health and Education are designing quality standards, and performance-based budgeting will be applied, as per the intention of the 2015 Budget Law. Health insurance coverage for the general public is 86.9 per cent, however the quality of services must be improved.

In 2018, the Vietnamese public actively engaged with the legislative agenda, in particular in relation to a draft law on special administrative and economic zones and a draft law on cyber security designed to regulate the internet. Although the National Assembly promulgated the Law on Cyber Security to come in to effect on 1 January 2019, it postponed discussion on special and administrative zones until 2019 in response to the public engagement.

Social media, especially Facebook, has experienced fast growth in Viet Nam. Facebook remains the primary social media platform for Vietnamese youth. UNICEF utilized Facebook to reach over 8.6 million people (72 per cent female, 28 per cent male) with 45 per cent of visitors aged 18-24 years), and the local account gained 32,000 followers in 2018. Other social media platforms including Instagram and Twitter, as well as local platforms such as Zalo, are also gaining prominence among youth. The newly-enacted law on cyber-security and potential

consequences on Facebook and other social media platforms in Viet Nam could affect UNICEF's communication and public advocacy efforts, its ability to grow an online base of digital supporters and the advocacy for greater protection measures for children online. Enforcement and implications of the law by local authorities remain unclear.

There was increased public visibility on violence against children in schools, communities and the family, creating space for high-level engagement and advocacy. This was due to UNICEF's advocacy (among others) and more regular media coverage of cases of abuse, sexual abuse and violence. As a result, there was a clear shift in the political acknowledgement of, and commitment to, addressing violence against children in Viet Nam. Several high-profile cases were investigated, addressed seriously and reported publicly. This led to a high-level discussion in the National Assembly and the Prime Minister convening a nationwide conference on the issue, with UNICEF's technical support.

### **Economy**

Despite uncertain external conditions, Viet Nam's economy in 2018 proved resilient with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of around 7 per cent - the highest growth since 2008, making Viet Nam one of the world's fastest growing economies - and real wage gains and job growth. This was accompanied by broad macroeconomic stability with an inflation rate of 3.54 per cent (the Government target was 4 per cent), a trade surplus of US\$7.2 billion which was around 3 per cent of GDP, and a low unemployment rate of 2.0 per cent. The budget deficit narrowed slightly to 4 per cent of GDP in 2018, down from 4.3 per cent in 2017. However, 71 per cent of the budget was spent on recurrent expenditures, given the large wage bill and debt services, leaving little space for public investment.

Foreign direct investment continued to be strong. Despite progress in improving the business climate, Viet Nam's ranking in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business 2019 slipped to 69th out of 190 economies, down from 68th in the previous year. This reflects the need to keep pace with reform progress in other countries to maintain competitiveness.

### **Poverty and inequality**

Poverty measured at the General Statistics Office (GSO)-World Bank national poverty line declined by almost 4 percentage points since 2014, to 9.8 per cent in 2016. Notably, poverty among ethnic minorities declined by 13 percentage points, representing the largest drop in poverty among ethnic minorities in the past decade. Progress was also observed in non-income dimensions, from increases in enrolment in early childhood education and post-secondary education, to access to improved water and sanitation. Overall, progress in all indicators reflected significant improvements for everyone, however, poverty reduction owed more to high average growth than redistribution. Viet Nam's poorest households are concentrated in highland and mountainous areas less known for agriculture dynamism. A sizeable economically secure class with a daily per capita consumption of at least US\$5.50 has emerged and is growing, accounting for 70 per cent of the population.

Inequalities in opportunities further entrench and expand existing gaps between groups. While welfare has improved across the board, inequities between groups have not closed fast enough. Despite the progress noted above, almost 45 per cent of ethnic minorities still live in poverty. Thus, ethnic minorities who made up only 15 per cent of the country's population, constituted 73 per cent of the poor in 2016. Their average per capita consumption was still less than 45 per cent of the majority Kinh and Hoa.

Gaps between the poor and the non-poor in terms of access to upper secondary education and improved water and sanitation widened. Low tertiary education attainment by the poor and ethnic minorities excludes them from the most economically rewarding jobs which require a university degree. Lower rates of educational enrolment are partially explained by household poverty itself, as lower income families are less able to invest in tutoring and study support, as well as the low quality of schools in poor communities. This points towards a reduced intergenerational mobility.

Viet Nam has made considerable progress towards gender equality, including closing gender gaps in education, reducing maternal mortality and expanding economic opportunities for both men and women. However, inequalities are still evident in employment and access to resources, women's lower representation in decision-making, rates of domestic violence and sex-selective abortion. Deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs that favour the male-child and portray women in a subordinate role in society continue to persist. In particular, women and girls from ethnic minority groups suffer greater disadvantage in access to education, health services and resources, being generally confined to reproductive activities, household or family work. The Global Gender Gap Report that benchmarked 149 countries on their progress towards gender parity in 2018 ranked Viet Nam in 77th place.

In summary, efforts to promote shared prosperity in Viet Nam will increasingly focus on enabling households and groups to achieve economic security while addressing persistent disparities in government-supported social assistance across groups and issues of social exclusion. This is especially the case in large cities like Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and Ha Noi. Shared prosperity will require creating more and better jobs that are accessible to all workers, rich and poor. This can be achieved by promoting investment in more productive sectors of the economy to increase labour inflows to them. The development of more sophisticated economic activities will, in turn, require investment in building the requisite skills for youth and adolescents to successfully enter the workforce. Expanding access to high-quality education, especially in poor and underserved regions, will be critical not only for developing skills, but also reducing existing inequalities in access to opportunities between the poor and the non-poor.

Key challenges to ensuring that all people across the country can benefit from Viet Nam's economic development success include:

- Stunting of children aged under 5 years is highest in three regions: the Central Highlands, the Northern Midlands and Mountains, and the North Central and Central Coastal Areas. In mountainous and remote areas, one in three children aged under 5 years is stunted;
- There are still children of secondary school age in rural areas in the Northern Midlands and Mountains, the Central Highlands and the Mekong River Delta who have either never attended school or have attended school but subsequently dropped out. Generally, they are poor children, migrant children, children with disabilities, Khmer and Mong children, children from low-population ethnic minority groups and Mong girls;
- Violence against children and women and trafficking of children and women is severe and well reported in the press. In 2016 and 2017, there were more than 2,000 cases of child violence nationwide, according to Ministry of Public Security reports;
- While data on adolescent pregnancy in Viet Nam are difficult to obtain because of the stigma associated with out-of-wedlock pregnancy, it is possible to estimate the rate of adolescent pregnancy by using data on abortions. This indicated that about 20 per cent of the 300,000 abortions performed annually in the country involve adolescents. Other data show that over 10 per cent of unmarried girls in Viet Nam aged 15-24 who were sexually

- active had an unintended pregnancy;
- Education - the national average net enrolment rate for lower secondary education is 92.6 per cent and for higher secondary education is 74.3 per cent. However, the Government recognises that more investment is needed to improve preschool and higher education standards, as well as expand mother tongue-based education, especially in the mountainous and disadvantaged areas and in industrial and processing zones;
- Social protection – the Government has developed an Action Plan to implement the Master Plan of Social Assistance Reform and Development (Vision to 2030) which expands coverage for children and pregnant woman, the poor and vulnerable and increases the levels of benefits. The challenge is implementing this plan in a sufficient and sustainable manner. The low level of state budget and other required fiscal reforms will cause delays for its progress.

## **Development context**

Resource mobilization and partnerships are increasingly challenging in Viet Nam. Official development assistance flows to Viet Nam have slowed in recent years, partly due to its status as a lower middle-income country since 2010. Many donors have focused their limited resources on lower income countries. In addition, as part of a strategic trend among development partners in Viet Nam, many bilateral donors have shifted their focus towards investment, trade and green growth. While the natural transition in a middle-income country would be to evolve to local private sector fundraising, there is not yet a legal framework in Viet Nam which expressly allows this to occur. However, the Government is showing some interest in piloting innovative partnership with businesses after learning from UNICEF experiences supporting other countries.

## **Sustainable development goals (SDGs)**

Viet Nam was ranked 57 out of 156 countries globally on the SDG Index in 2018, a nine-step increase compared to 2017. The country is among the 10 best performers in Asia and the Pacific; and among the 10 best performers globally on SDG 5 on gender equality. Viet Nam's Human Development Index ranks at the upper end of the Medium Human Development, 116th out of 189 countries. Viet Nam needs to obtain only additional 0.006 points to join the High Human Development group.

In 2018 there were concerted actions by Viet Nam towards SDG achievement, including the development of the first Voluntary National Review with major support by the United Nations (UN) including UNICEF on child-focused SDGs. The National Assembly with support from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the UN (led by UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme/UNDP) hosted a high-level conference on the SDGs. This conference exposed many members of the Government to the SDGs for the first time and drew commitment from the National Assembly to enhance their oversight of SDG implementation and budget allocation. Focus was given to the “leave no one behind” agenda, specifically for women and children.

## **One UN in Viet Nam**

UNICEF continued to be a key leader of One UN in Viet Nam, especially on SDG implementation and United Nations operations. For most of 2018, UNICEF chaired the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) UN Joint-Results Group and the UN Operations Management Team; co-chaired the UN Programme Management Team and the UN SDG Working Group; and was vice-chair of Results Groups on Governance and Justice, and Inclusive Social Services.

## Natural disasters

Viet Nam is coping with visible challenges related to climate change and environmental protection. It is one of the top 10 countries most affected by natural disasters and climate extreme events globally. Natural disasters cost 0.8 per cent of GDP annually. In 2018, according to the Central Steering Committee on Natural Disasters Prevention and Control, natural disasters killed 218 people and caused damage of nearly US\$860 million. Viet Nam suffered from 13 typhoons, 14 flash floods, four extreme cold spells, 11 heat waves and 30 torrential rain storms causing serious destruction to the country during the year. Strengthening the social protection system to be shock-responsive and building the resilience of families and children remains a critical piece of unfinished business for the Government.

## Part 2: Major Results including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

The Country Programme 2017-2021 is structured into three cross-cutting components, covering all UNICEF Strategic Plan goals. UNICEF aims to reduce children's vulnerabilities and ensure that they can reach their full potential in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties. A particular focus is given to leaving no one behind, notably children with disabilities, ethnic minority children and migrant children.

The Country Programme is contributing to results in:

- 1 Accountability and system-building for child rights and protection, by influencing the national legal and policy agenda and strengthening government systems for the realization of child rights;
- 2 Integrated early childhood development (IECD) at national and local levels (in three focus provinces). This focusses on strengthening the coordination and integration of services including nutrition, health, early childhood education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child and social protection, and holistic parenting for expectant mothers, caregivers and children, and;
- 3 Programme partnership, public advocacy and communication for child rights to promote action to address vulnerabilities and inequities affecting children.

IECD is a cross-sectional outcome of the country programme and results are reported across all strategic plan goals. A key achievement in 2018 was the signing of the National IECD Scheme commissioned by the Prime Minister and supported by UNICEF, which paves the way for the implementation of nationwide IECD programmes. Key partnerships for advancing the IECD agenda were established, notably with the National Assembly. This included a workshop on IECD for National Assembly members and a high-level oversight visit to programme sites led by the Vice-Chair of the National Assembly and 10 members. The visit allowed the members to observe the actual situation, challenges and opportunities for young children and their families in marginalised communities. They also engaged with local governments to understand constraints, capacity gaps and the implementation environment of the IECD model. The National Assembly expressed its strong commitment to providing leadership on IECD and continuing oversight of implementation nationwide.

To pilot the approach, the IECD Programme was launched in three provinces, with 1,500 health, education and child protection workers participating. Community platforms such as commune health centres, preschool and primary schools and IECD clubs supported 13,700

parents, caregivers and children aged 0-8 years with knowledge and skills including newborn care, breastfeeding practices, early learning and playing, multiple micro-nutrient supplementation for children and pregnant women, treatment of severe acute malnutrition and case management for children in need.

### **Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives**

To help Viet Nam achieve SDGs 2, 3 and 5, UNICEF supported the Government to improve the enabling environment for children by influencing laws and policies, to strengthen institutional capacity and partnerships for child health and well-being, and to implement the flagship IECD programme.

#### **Health systems strengthening**

More than one million newborns received early essential newborn care following health worker skills improvement and capacity building supported by UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO). The training was implemented at scale, covering more than 88 per cent of provincial and district level health facilities nationwide. With UNICEF support, the Ministry of Health conducted coaching and supportive supervision on the implementation of early essential newborn care in low-performing provinces. Early essential newborn care was also made a criterion in health facility performance in maternal and child health care. The Government's investment of more than US\$250,000 for the supply of medical equipment, printing and distribution of communication materials on newborn care was an additional sign of ownership and commitment.

UNICEF also led the United Nation's joint efforts to support the national action plan to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B, approved in November. The development process resulted in improved knowledge of policy makers and maternal and child health and HIV and AIDS managers, as well as their commitment and buy-in to eliminate the three diseases.

UNICEF continued to support the country in its transition plan as a GAVI-supported country. A high point was the successful introduction of inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) as a routine immunisation. Despite a global shortage of the polio vaccine, with GAVI funding UNICEF procured enough IPV vaccines to reach an estimated 690,000 children aged 5 months in 2018. Communication to support measles, mumps and rubella immunisation led to a significant uptake of this vaccine in target populations. To reach every child, UNICEF assisted partners to identify 22 districts with 319 hard-to-reach and low-immunisation coverage communes, resulting an additional 32,000 children aged under 1 year reached. District and commune level micro-planning sessions were conducted, resulting in 319 commune immunisation action plans.

#### **Enhancing child nutrition partnerships**

In 2018, UNICEF supported the strengthening of partnerships and advocacy on child nutrition. This began with the launch of Scaling Up Nutrition in Viet Nam with UNICEF technical and logistical support. It was attended by the Prime Minister and the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General. This created a high-level advocacy platform for engagement with traditional and new stakeholders from the private sector. Government commitment was realised through two important pro-nutrition policies: the Communist Party Resolution and the Prime Minister's Directive on strengthening nutrition.

UNICEF advocacy achieved a significant outcome in 2018 by persuading the Government to

retain a decree requiring the use of iodised salt in food production. The decree, enacted to prevent iodine deficiency disorders, was seen by the private sector as a business constraint. Together, UNICEF and WHO advocated with the Prime Minister and the media and engaged in evidence-based dialogue on the value of the decree, which led the Ministry of Health to postpone its revision and institute an evaluation.

UNICEF also actively advocated around breastfeeding. In Viet Nam, only 24 per cent of babies aged under six months are exclusively breastfed. The rates are likely lower for working women, especially in the apparel and footwear sector. UNICEF partnered with the private sector to promote a breastfeeding at work campaign. The campaign was piloted in 2018 in the largest footwear manufacturer in the country with 74,000 workers. The objective of the campaign is to clarify misunderstandings among female factory workers relating to breastfeeding in the workplace and to promote the implementation of nursing breaks as outlined in Viet Nam's legal framework. The successful launch led to an action plan by the factory to put in place support mechanisms for workers to continue breastfeeding their babies when they return from maternity leave.

UNICEF supported the institutionalization of quality of care criteria for nutrition as part of the Vietnamese Hospital Quality Assessment Criteria. It is now mandatory that quality of breastfeeding and nutrition services form a part of hospital performance assessments under health systems management. Clients of many hospitals are now benefiting from quality breastfeeding and nutrition services. The Viet Nam experience was used in developing global guidelines and a case study of the approach was published in an international journal in 2018.

### **IECD – health and nutrition**

UNICEF supported improved skills for birth attendants, early essential newborn care, early and exclusive breastfeeding promotion, appropriate complementary feeding and screening and management of severe acute malnutrition in 27 project communes in three provinces. The results were achieved through UNICEF's technical assistance in training and coaching visits for health staff, provision of therapeutic food, micro-nutrient supplements and home fortification services to the poorest households, and organization of community-based communication for pregnant women, mothers and their children.

### **Goal area 2: Every child learns**

UNICEF continued to work to ensure that every child in Viet Nam has the opportunity to learn and reach their full potential, contributing to multiple SDGs, particularly Goals 4 and 5.

### **Building a quality education system**

UNICEF Viet Nam worked closely with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to strengthen the education system in Viet Nam, essential to the sustainable delivery of positive learning outcomes for children and adolescents. The Government is revising the Law on Education and, in 2018, UNICEF submitted a set of 26 recommendations to the drafting committee aimed at ensuring that all children are in school, learning and safe.

UNICEF also provided support for Viet Nam's participation in the Southeast Asia-Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) field trial. This ground-breaking assessment scheme assesses reading, writing, math and global citizenship in Grade 5 students in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. Viet Nam's initial results from the field trial were positive. Sixty-three provincial education managers improved their understanding and capacity to

prepare the SEA-PLM main survey, planned for 2019. The results of the survey will inform the development of equitable education policies focused on learning outcomes.

### **Strengthening the education system to include the most vulnerable children and adolescents**

UNICEF partnered with MOET to finalize a study on out-of-school children. The study used innovative statistical methods to identify comprehensive profiles of excluded children and the barriers that lead to exclusion. This study helped the Ministry to identify and implement policies that address exclusion from a multi-sectoral perspective. All 63 provinces developed action plans based on the recommendations of the study.

### **Ethnic minority children**

To better understand barriers faced by ethnic minority children to access quality inclusive secondary education, UNICEF and MOET conducted the 'Qualitative study on equitable access to lower secondary education'. Education stakeholders, including ethnic minority representatives and 50 educational managers from five provinces with high concentrations of ethnic minorities, were involved. A set of concrete recommendations were developed and shared at national and provincial levels.

UNICEF also supported MOET in the development of a guidance booklet on the implementation of mother tongue-based bilingual education for education managers at sub-national level. The booklet, together with training, benefited 13 provinces with high ethnic minority populations, increasing the knowledge and skills of education managers on mother tongue-based bilingual education.

### **Children with disabilities**

UNICEF partnered with the Ha Noi National University of Education to develop, pilot and finalize a pre-service training curriculum to support staff in public schools to address the specific education needs of children with disabilities. UNICEF supported MOET to develop an in-service teacher-training curriculum, which was rolled out nationwide in the 2018/2019 school year. Both curricula are now included in all regular pre- and in-service training of teachers. Plans are in place for MOET to take over full financing by 2020. UNICEF also supported training for 700 education managers and teachers in four provinces on early identification and early interventions for children with disabilities, with referral mechanisms to commune health centres as needed.

UNICEF utilized its legal and policy analysis on children with disabilities, the qualitative study on ethnic minority children and the out-of-school-children study to advocate for reform of the Law on Education to ensure inclusive education. UNICEF also convened a pre-session policy dialogue with the National Assembly to discuss the reform of this law. The pre-session brought together a team of children and young people to share their views with key parliamentary decision-makers about the gaps in children's rights to education and to reach consensus on areas for reform.

### **Strengthening educational opportunities for adolescents and youth**

UNICEF Viet Nam was a key contributor to UNICEF's global UPSHIFT programme. UPSHIFT aims to empower youth to build skills and opportunities through social innovation and entrepreneurship. In partnership with Saigon Innovation Hub (also UNICEF's partner for the Child Friendly City Initiative in HCMC), UNICEF Viet Nam adapted UPSHIFT content into eight modules piloted in 13 schools, after-school centres, out-of-school and university-based social

innovation clubs, directly impacting almost 300 adolescents and young people aged 12-20 years. The majority of participants were girls (66 per cent).

The aim of the pilot was to test the broader value and adaptability of the UPSHIFT programme, assessing the potential of using social innovation as an approach for integrating 21st century skills into learning and practice for youth and adolescents in Viet Nam. Department of Education staff, teachers, social workers and young people were stakeholders for the pilot programme. The aim is for UPSHIFT's human-centred design approaches to be integrated into formal education and complement the mainstreaming of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (known as STEM) in lower secondary education. Following the positive results of the pilot, 10 public lower secondary schools in HCMC and four schools in remote Dien Bien province will pilot UPSHIFT modules for social innovation in the first quarter of 2019.

### **IECD - education**

A child's social emotional learning and development is an essential component of school readiness. UNICEF, in collaboration with MOET, supported the roll-out of the social emotional learning curriculum in 200 preschools in three focus provinces through teacher training, on the job coaching and classroom environment improvements, benefiting 5,000 children aged 3-5 years. In these preschools, parents and caregivers were empowered to be partners in the development and education of their preschool children and their siblings. The schools served as a hub for parents on topics regarding health, nutrition, psychosocial care, early learning and stimulation, and child protection, reaching 1,678 parents and caregivers.

With UNICEF support, MOET and the National College of Education are working to establish national standards and mechanisms to monitor the coverage, quality and outcomes of Viet Nam's inclusive early childhood education (ECE) systems. In 2018, 80 ECE curriculum writers, researchers and national ECE managers revised and adapted two important international tools: the East Asia Pacific Early Childhood Development Scales and the 'Global Guidelines Assessment Tool, which were approved by the Ministry.

### **Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

UNICEF Viet Nam and its partners improved the prevention of and responses to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children in 2018, towards the achievement of SDGs 5, 8 and 16. UNICEF made significant contributions towards building a functioning child protection system in Viet Nam.

UNICEF used evidence to inform policy development and improve the legal and regulatory framework for child protection. Several major studies were finalized in 2018 with technical support from UNICEF. UNICEF and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) finalized a study on mental health and psychosocial well-being of children and young people in Viet Nam and a discussion paper on early child marriage. UNICEF and partners also finalized a budget and costing analysis of the child protection system within the social welfare sector. These studies were widely disseminated to increase Government and public understanding of and attention to these critical issues.

Many years of high-level advocacy on ending violence against children resulted in decisive Government action on this issue in 2018. UNICEF provided technical expertise to the national online conference on ending violence against children, chaired by the Prime Minister and attended by 18,000 parliamentarians, policy makers and government officials at national and

local levels, in more than 500 locations nationwide. The conference led to concrete policy directions by the Prime Minister, including a decision to assign child protection workers at the commune level. Following the Government's participation in the regional INSPIRE Workshop, UNICEF is advocating for Viet Nam to become a Pathfinding Country under the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

UNICEF also provided support to improve national legislation and to demonstrate innovative alternative care services for children without parental care and children with disabilities. The Ministry of Justice was assisted to develop a new decree to guide the implementation of child adoption.

Through to UNICEF technical support and advocacy, the national project on prevention and combating crimes against children, juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, and human trafficking, led by the Ministry of Public Security, was approved. The project creates an overarching framework for the law enforcement sector to strengthen prevention and promote community-based solutions to combat crimes against children.

With direct UNICEF support, a Family and Juvenile Court was launched in Dong Thap, the second children's specialist court in Viet Nam. The first was launched in HCMC in 2016. Following the Dong Thap launch, the Supreme People's Court committed itself to expanding the model nationwide.

### **Improving capacity of the social welfare and justice sectors**

Since social work is critical to the development of the child protection system, UNICEF provided technical support for the draft Law on Social Work and advocated for its inclusion in the 2020 law-making agenda. In addition, UNICEF provided technical assistance to MOET to develop a circular on social work services in schools that establishes responsibilities and procedures to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children in schools.

UNICEF also worked to institutionalise improved university education on child protection. This included child protection courses in the Bachelor of Social Work offered by Ha Noi University of Education. The objective is to provide future social workers with specialised knowledge and skills to work with vulnerable children. The training materials developed were shared with 50 other universities to improve the quality of social work education programmes in the country. Likewise, UNICEF provided technical support to develop the first-ever undergraduate law subject on justice for children at Ha Noi Law University. This specialist course aims to build professional knowledge and skills on children's rights among future legal practitioners.

Support continued to be provided to MOLISA to improve the capacity of the existing social welfare workforce. One hundred and thirty social welfare managers from provinces across Viet Nam were trained in a five-week social work administration course. To support the introduction of multi-disciplinary case management to address violence against children, UNICEF provided technical support to MOLISA to develop a training manual for the social welfare sector. Two training courses using this manual were delivered to 103 key Government staff from 63 cities/provinces. MOLISA is using its own funds to publish the manual to train child protection staff nationwide.

### **IECD – holistic parenting and local child protection systems**

Key to the IECD approach is an innovative holistic parenting programme, which incorporates positive parenting, nurturing care and social cohesion. UNICEF worked with partners to design

and advocate for this programme, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, WHO, international non-government organizations and private sector partners. In the three pilot provinces, 1,582 parents participated in parenting education sessions to increase their knowledge and skills on health care, early stimulation, positive discipline and protection from violence. The holistic parenting programme and the social emotional learning approach in preschools are being researched as part of a global partnership on social cohesion and peacebuilding with leading institutions in this field including the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Yale University's Early Childhood Peace Consortium and Vietnamese academia.

UNICEF supports the establishment of local child protection systems to provide prevention, case management and response services, especially for young children. UNICEF provided training on basic social work and child protection skills for 800 local child protection staff and collaborators. These workers reached more than 2,900 children, including those who experienced violence or sexual abuse. The support from UNICEF led to increasing local Government leadership on child protection and improved coordination to prevent and respond to violence against children, including through the establishment of networks of village child protection collaborators.

#### **Goal area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

With a focus on urban programming, WASH, and disaster risk reduction within the country programme, UNICEF works closely with the Government, the private sector and other partners to create a safe and clean environment for children, contributing to SDGs 6, 11, 13 and 16.

#### **Evidence-based urban programming and advocacy**

UNICEF's urban programme is anchored in a Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) partnership with HCMC. With technical assistance from UNICEF, aligned with the global minimum criteria, a cross-sectoral CFCI management board was established and endorsed by the Provincial People's Committee. The board manages and coordinates the CFCI, addressing gaps in child rights realization as identified by the city's Situation Analysis of Children (2017). The participation of government officials from HCMC and Da Nang city in UNICEF's urban conference on children in Surabaya, Indonesia, confirmed Da Nang's interest in joining UNICEF's Child Friendly City Initiative. A CFCI multi-stakeholder consultation is planned to take place in early 2019 to agree on ways forward.

Under the umbrella of CFCI, nearly 300 girls and boys from HCMC showcased their 21 innovative three-dimensional models of a smart, inclusive, safe and child-friendly city neighbourhood. Children's innovations demonstrated the value of engaging them in city spatial planning and helped promote child-friendly planning to ensure safe and sustainable urban environments.

Public-private partnerships were supported under the framework of UNICEF's Child Rights and Business Principles strategy to address work place and community concerns for children of poor migrant women workers in HCMC's industrial zones. UNICEF supported a forum entitled 'Better business for children: Promoting actions on children's rights in the footwear and apparel sector' with the participation of representatives from pilot factories, key brands, non-profit organizations, academia and the Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It aimed to gain broad commitment and support for the implementation and potential scale of the factory programme pilot. The forum helped commit UNICEF's 11 partner factories, employing a total of 105,000 workers in and around HCMC, to act to address barriers primarily related to nutrition,

young worker protection and childcare.

With the aim of increasing access to quality early childhood education in industrial zones, UNICEF supported a workshop to identify and discuss key bottlenecks and regulatory inconsistencies in the ECE legal framework and to generate recommendations for the revision of existing legal documents. Fifty high-level participants representing ministries, the Trade Union and universities participated. As a result, the Prime Minister issued a decree which required land to be assigned for pre-school construction and suggested public-private partnerships to mobilise ECE resourcing.

### **IECD - water, sanitation and hygiene**

Universal access to clean, safe drinking water and improved sanitation continued to be a priority for the Government. While 91 per cent and 78 per cent of total population have access to basic drinking water and sanitation services respectively, challenges remain in achieving SDG 6.1 and 6.2 for high quality, sustainably and safely-managed water and sanitation services for all. UNICEF is one of the leading partners supporting WASH-related policies and guidelines at the national level as well as pilot programmes in remote areas in four provinces. This has been through utilising communication for development tools on drinking water safety, household water treatment and storage and community-led total sanitation under the IECD programme. Drinking water safety, sanitation and hygiene were enhanced through provision of supplies and improved infrastructure in the poorest villages in households and in schools. In 2018, approximately 3,000 households in six communes and 60 schools benefited from upgraded WASH facilities, ceramic water filters and handwashing and hygiene promotion activities. Around 18,000 children now practice healthy WASH behaviours and enjoy a cleaner school environment.

UNICEF supported the finalization of a national action plan to be open defecation free and provided technical assistance for 62 provinces to develop their localised action plans. UNICEF also worked to support action plan implementation at the village level for potential nationwide scale-up. One hundred villages, covering a population of 200,000, were certified open defecation free during the reporting period. In an additional 125 villages, community-led sanitation was introduced, benefiting approximately 250,000 people. A 2018 evaluation of UNICEF's WASH programme recommended the need for ending open defecation to become a new social norm, as well as enhanced post-certification monitoring to ensure that communities remain that way.

### **Disaster risk reduction**

Based on findings from the 2016 after-action review of the drought and salt water intrusion response, in 2018 UNICEF provided technical advice to strengthen the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's structures and capacity for disaster mitigation and risk reduction. Capacity building included child-centred risk mapping and analysis training for national and regional disaster management staff in all provinces. In Ninh Thuan province, 546 officials from line departments and the education sector gained enhanced skills due to training on communication to affected populations before, during and after a disaster, risk-informed and child-focused planning, and disaster information management and monitoring. To facilitate learning from other country experiences, UNICEF supported a DRR study visit to Japan. A highlight was visiting a school-based safe community (Bokomi model) which Ninh Thuan province has committed to adapt to its context.

With UNICEF support, the Ministry of Education and Training developed the first disaster risk

reduction learning framework with suggested materials on integrating DRR in all curriculum subjects and training modules for teachers. Learning from the study tour to Japan was incorporated into these lesson plans. To assist the education sector to deliver more systematic situation monitoring in emergencies, an online portal was operationalized for education managers to access prior to, during and after disasters.

In May, the National Day for Prevention and Control of Disasters was celebrated for the first time in all 14,695 primary schools across Viet Nam to raise awareness on natural disaster preparedness. The event was broadcast live on television, with the participation of the Prime Minister in a UNICEF focus-province and was watched by millions of people.

Finally, as chair of the United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience Result Group, UNICEF facilitated Viet Nam's participation in the Asia Ministerial Conference on DRR, including the development of Viet Nam's first report on progress toward implementation of the Sendai Framework.

### **Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life**

Reducing inequities is essential to the realization of children's rights in Viet Nam. UNICEF's work supports Viet Nam to achieve the SDGs, including 1, 5 and 10.

#### **UNICEF supported Viet Nam to reform its social protection policies**

Evidence generation and technical assistance by UNICEF influenced Viet Nam's landmark overhaul of its social assistance system culminating in the development of an operational action plan to implement the Master Plan for Social Assistance Reform (MPSAR).

UNICEF influenced the MPSAR content using findings and recommendations from its research on child budgeting, targeting mechanisms and child-focused social assistance, child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection, and social welfare workforce strengthening. As a result, the MPSAR now includes plans for a benefit for children aged 0-3 years, a benefit for pregnant woman, increases to the levels of benefits, a social security law, and exploring a multi-tiered system for universal social protection. UNICEF partnered with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to support Viet Nam to share its experience in enhancing child-sensitive, shock responsive social protection at an ASEAN technical workshop. In tandem, UNICEF provided technical assistance to several studies on child poverty to influence Viet Nam's mid-term review of its National Targeted Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction.

#### **Strengthening the inclusion of children with disabilities in law, policies and practice**

UNICEF continued to support better quality and accessible community-based services for children with disabilities across child protection, social assistance, health, education and justice. UNICEF deployed its technical expertise to support the General Statistics Office to conduct Viet Nam's National Survey on People with Disabilities. This is one of the first national disability surveys in the world that fully incorporates the Washington Group Extended Set of disability questions for adults and the UNICEF/Washington Group Child Functioning Module. The survey provides the prevalence rate of children with disabilities with full disaggregation, key data on access to basic services and social assistance, and social attitudes toward disability in Viet Nam.

UNICEF contributed significant technical assistance to identify and address gaps in services for

children with disabilities. UNICEF conducted a legal and policy analysis on children with disabilities and a social audit. Both included the views of adults and children with disabilities, disabled people's organizations and government staff on gaps in policy implementation. Alongside these analyses, UNICEF delivered training on legislative reform in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities for selected officials across Government who will likely be engaged in the reform of the Law on Persons with Disabilities. UNICEF continued to advocate for amendment of this law.

UNICEF also contributed to enhanced national monitoring efforts for children with disabilities through continued partnership with the Viet Nam Federation of Disabilities. This included delivering a three-day training workshop on social audit tools and conducting a social audit exercise to obtain citizen feedback on the implementation of key Government policies for children with disabilities. The exercise helped establish a platform for engaging disabled person's organizations and persons with disabilities in monitoring the implementation of disability-related policies and programmes.

### **UNICEF empowered adolescents**

UNICEF leveraged its diverse partnerships to empower adolescents to participate in the policy-making process. Following the establishment of the U-Report in 2018, over 1,400 adolescents gave real-time feedback on the prevalence of violence, which was also shared with the public via social media to raise awareness of children's views on violence. UNICEF and the Youth Union also reviewed the operation of five provincial Children's Councils, the formal child participatory structure in Viet Nam. Capacity building support was provided to Children's Council members to enhance their advocacy and communication skills. Key lessons and findings from both activities were documented and informed the establishment of Children's Councils by two further provincial governments, with Youth Union plans to scale-up to a further 20 provinces within the next two years.

UNICEF engaged with marginalized and vulnerable adolescents and young people in HCMC to identify, design and test human-centred solutions to community problems under the UPSHIFT programme, implemented in partnership with Saigon Innovation Hub. UNICEF implemented two UPSHIFT 'rounds' as part of its social innovation and entrepreneurship programming. One round was part of the Generation Unlimited Global Youth Challenge with a specific focus on skills for girls' employability and empowerment. The other round engaged 10 teams with nearly 1,200 participants, primarily focusing on generating solutions for adolescents and young people with disabilities. Feedback showed that participants were motivated by creating social impact and by gaining and practicing functional skills not yet available for all through formal education, especially for marginalized and vulnerable adolescents and youth, including those with disabilities.

### **UNICEF helped draw high-level attention to SDGs and children**

Throughout the year, UNICEF sought opportunities to advance the SDGs and its children's agenda through organizing and influencing high-level events with the National Assembly, Government, and development partners, in close collaboration with other UN agencies. The National Assembly, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations (led by UNICEF and UNDP) co-hosted a high-level conference on the SDGs, exposing many parliamentarians to the SDGs for the first time. The National Assembly committed to enhance their oversight of SDG implementation and budget allocation. Focus was given to the "leave no one behind" agenda, specifically women and children, which resonated strongly with parliamentarians at national and local levels.

UNICEF delivered a presentation on the importance of investing in early childhood development at the Viet Nam Public Finance Forum. This was acknowledged by the Ministry of Finance as key to high quality human capital and sustainable development. The Ministry of Education and Training, with UNICEF support, also launched an SDG 4 Action Plan, with 160 education managers equipped with an understanding of SDG 4 and the tools to monitor implementation. UNICEF advocated for child-related SDGs and facilitated discussions on gender and child-related issues and the role of businesses at the National Conference on Sustainable Development, which attracted around 600 participants and was attended by the Prime Minister.

### **UNICEF advocacy, communications and partnership**

A strong push on the Early Moments Matter campaign gained momentum on social media. The local campaign built on the global Baby Talk materials, adapted to Viet Nam's context. One of the key objectives of the campaign is to encourage fathers to take a more proactive role in the upbringing of their children, especially in the early years. The local Baby Talk and Mini Parenting Master Class reached over 844,000 people, more than 60 per cent of whom were men.

UNICEF strategically engaged well-known Korean celebrities to raise awareness of violence in school as a part of the End Violence campaign. An October field visit with K-Pop stars contributed to a significant rise in social media engagement, doubling the monthly real engagement. The powerful message calling on young people to act to stop bullying at school had a strong impact on young social media users.

In collaboration with Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Viet Nam Internet Association, UNICEF held a consultation on children in the digital age. It brought together business, Government, non-government organizations and academia to discuss on-line child protection, participation and empowerment. As a result, two animations on internet privacy and cyberbullying were produced and broadcast nationwide through social media.

### **Cross sectional approaches**

#### **Gender**

Gender is mainstreamed across UNICEF Viet Nam's programme, including design, implementation and monitoring, to maximize realization of the rights of both males and females. Examples of UNICEF direct support for gender equality included:

- The social and emotional learning curriculum for preschool age children, which addresses gender norms of boys and girls from a young age, respect for diversity and respect for gender identity. The programme deals directly with gender stereotypes, norms and expectations by training male facilitators, including fathers and other male caregivers as participants and by emphasising the importance of fathers' caregiving on child development. This message is particularly important in Viet Nam where mothers are heavily responsible for raising children.
- UNICEF and UNFPA jointly conducted a literature review on child marriage in Viet Nam resulting in a discussion paper which was widely disseminated to line-ministries, UN agencies, international non-government organizations, organizations and universities. The paper helped increase Government and public understanding of the situation and key drivers of child marriage, as well as cultural norms and practices related to child marriage.
- UNICEF and UN Women collaborated to strengthen the capacity of HCMC authorities in

public finance for women and children. UNICEF and UN Women trained 80 key leaders from city government and district People's Councils on child- and gender-responsive budgeting. The training resulted in a draft guideline on budget oversight for children's rights and gender-responsive budgeting.

- Through its factory programme, UNICEF advocated for issues such as maternity protection, breastfeeding in the workplace and family-friendly workplace policies in 11 factories with a total of 115,000 workers, mainly women. Good practices and lessons learned from this engagement will feed into national policy advocacy on the issue of business and children's and women's rights.

### **Humanitarian action**

In late 2017, Typhoon Damrey caused fatalities and affected the lives of approximately four million people, including one million children and two million women. Total economic damage and loss was estimated at US\$332.8 million. Utilizing Central Emergency Response Funds, UNICEF implemented a WASH project with 99,780 beneficiaries, including 43,231 children and 56,549 adults. Thirty-six schools received water filtration systems, 1,300 households and schools received 2,000-litre water tanks, 3,090 ceramic filters for safe drinking water were provided to households and schools, 18,750 households received child-friendly hygiene kits, and 17,905 households received WASH booklets with life-saving messages.

Following successful UNICEF advocacy, the Government established a WASH in emergency working group which it leads, co-chaired by UNICEF, and which ensures more responsive and coordinated actions whenever emergencies happen. In addition, the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and Global WASH Cluster in coordination with the UNICEF Viet Nam, supported a training course on rapid needs assessment of WASH in emergencies, which improved Government WASH counterparts' capacity to conduct needs assessment in an emergency.

### **Human rights**

An active role was played in UNICEF in the preparation of key reports to human rights bodies. UNICEF facilitated broad consultative processes, including with civil society organizations, to help prepare State Party Reports on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF also supported civil society organizations and disabled person's organizations to prepare Alternative Reports. As a result, important child rights issues such as child abuse and exploitation, child marriage, the legal definition of a child, and gaps relating to children with disabilities were incorporated into the Alternative Reports. UNICEF also provided technical inputs to the preparation of the United Nations submissions to Viet Nam's Universal Periodic Review implementation (third cycle) and other human rights Treaty Bodies.

In collaboration with UNDP and the Central Institute for Economic Management, training was conducted on Business and Human Rights for Government officials. It was the first training where Child Rights and Business Principles and UNICEF's Guide on the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 16 were introduced to Government representatives.

## **Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints**

2018 was a critical year for the 2017-2021 Country Programme, as it became fully operational

after a long period of delays in gaining approval for project plans and documents required under Viet Nam's overseas development assistance management framework. By mid-year, 15 out of 16 projects were approved and being implemented. The year saw some important breakthroughs, such as the Government decision to scale-up a UNICEF-supported model of Family and Juvenile Courts, and a stepped-up partnership with the National Assembly at the highest level. Nevertheless, uncertainty caused by the government reform processes affected the implementation of numerous activities. This was mitigated to the degree possible and resulted in some important lessons learned.

### **Government civil servant and structural reform**

In 2018, the Communist Party of Viet Nam and the Government of Viet Nam acted decisively in setting a 10 per cent reduction target for the civil servant personnel headcount by 2020 across all Government agencies. The Party also directed government organizations to lighten their apparatus by reducing the number of departments and leadership positions. These decisions, while expected to reduce public budget spending and improve Government's efficiency, may also negatively affect social services delivery and lead to interruption in work processes, disproportionately impacting poorer areas. These changes also created some uncertainties and vacancies in certain Government functions, causing delays in decision-making and approval, including of project documents, work plans and project technical papers.

UNICEF took a proactive action to overcome this challenge and in doing so, learned a number of lessons:

1. It is important for UNICEF and partners to have a shared and clear understanding of the Government policy, motivation, process, key stakeholders and drivers behind these major reforms. UNICEF raised concerns related to these reforms with the World Bank in the context of the Public Expenditure Review discussion, including potential implications on poor families. The 2018 United Nations Country Team 2018 end of year report also highlighted these issues, due to inputs from UNICEF.

2. UNICEF, through close partnership with key line ministries, generated evidence, and feedback from the sub-national level and conveyed to the national level the constraints and implications of the reforms. During a UNICEF-facilitated subnational work planning meeting on SDGs, provincial departments raised and discussed the impact of the reforms on their localities. They provided constructive and balanced feedback to the national level, and subsequently, via the Ministry of Education and Training, to the National Assembly. This experience reinforced the importance of listening carefully to local partners and strategically advocating upwards based on local realities.

3. To overcome the delays and uncertainty caused by the reforms, UNICEF maximized long-term partnerships with leading government agencies, for example, the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Office of the Government, to leverage their support for acceleration of approval and decision making for UNICEF-related documents. These partnerships will remain critical going forward, as the reform process continues to deepen.

4. The constrained fiscal environment is also pushing UNICEF to revisit social policy and public financial management priorities across all sectors, in order to be better aligned with the current realities, as well as the needs and interests of the Government. In particular, UNICEF's agenda should consider the potential impacts on children and the most disadvantaged populations.

## **Establishment of Family and Juvenile Courts**

In 2018, Viet Nam launched its second specialist children's court, the Dong Thap Family and Juvenile Court. The court will better protect and serve children through its dedicated children's judges and court staff and its child-and-gender-responsive procedures, allowing children and their families to participate more fully in judicial proceedings. The first Family and Juvenile Court was launched in Ho Chi Minh City in 2016. Late in 2018, the Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court announced that Family and Juvenile Courts would be established in 36 other provinces and subsequently nationwide.

The creation and scale-up of these children's courts represents over 10 years of UNICEF work. UNICEF adopted and pursued a long-term strategy, flexible enough to change to fit the evolving context, which included: high-level legal and policy advocacy with the Communist Party of Viet Nam, Courts, Government and the National Assembly; study visits to leading children's courts; conducting research on justice for children, including a feasibility study; capacity building efforts with justice actors on child-and-gender responsive processes and procedures; evidence-gathering from the Ho Chi Minh City Court, and; and comprehensive legal reform.

This achievement demonstrated the importance of a long-term and multi-pronged approach that incorporates legal and policy advocacy, capacity building, evidence generation, and modelling innovative approaches, both in-country and through inter-country exchanges. Key lessons learnt included:

- 1) Being prepared to seize opportunities that aligned with UNICEF advocacy. The first attempt to include a provision for a specialist children's court into the Law on Protection, Education and Care of Children of 2004 was not successful. Although this law directly affected the provision of child justice, in the Vietnamese context a more appropriate avenue for advocacy for a children's court was via judicial reform. In 2005, such an opportunity arose with the launch of the comprehensive legal and judicial reforms for the period 2005-2020 by the Viet Nam Communist Party, with court reform at the centre of this process. UNICEF seized the opportunity to advocate for the introduction of specialist children's court in the reform of the Law on People's Court Organization.
- 2) UNICEF's best practice modelling with the first two Family and Juvenile Courts created evidence to advocate for national scale-up of the courts. 2018 saw an upswing in national attention to all forms of violence against children spurring the National Assembly to hold a special session calling on Government and state agencies to report on their actions to address violence against children. UNICEF's best practice modelling enabled the Supreme People's Court to highlight the child-friendly and gender-responsive approaches within the children's court as an important response measure and publicly committed to national scale up.
- 3) Locating children's issues within the broader country context, UNICEF Viet Nam linked its work for the creation of a special court for children to the ongoing national legal and judicial reform program and harnessed the opportunity presented by the reform of the Constitution in 2013. The creation of the Family and Juvenile Court become a central part of Viet Nam's legal and judicial reform package, whilst the

reform of the Constitution provided a strong rationale and motivation to Viet Nam to establish a children's court to fulfil the new constitutional provisions on human rights, including children's rights.

- 4) UNICEF 'localised' the evidence used to advocate for the courts based on the main parameters used in official decision-making in Viet Nam. The focus was on the degree of need, values, costs and the availability of resources to create a sufficient basis to successfully bring about the court.
- 5) Ensuring Government ownership and leadership, especially building the capacity of a core group of 'thought leaders', was critical for success.

### **Working with the private sector**

Viet Nam continued to experience strong economic growth and foreign direct investment. In this context UNICEF increased its engagement with the private sector to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the positive impacts of the private sector on children. UNICEF focuses on the footwear and apparel industry, which are in the top 10 export industries of the country. Through collaboration with Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, strategic corporate partners, brands and pilot factories, UNICEF is implementing a Factory Programme to better understand the industry's impacts, identify win-win solutions and encourage the factories to initiate actions aimed at improving the well-being of working parents and their children.

A key lesson learned during the implementation of the factory programme in 2018 was that factories are familiar with one-off engagement with non-government organizations. This is mainly funded by brands, where the factories normally allocate time for their workers or management to undergo training on workplace issues. However, long-term engagement which requires the allocation of resources and the introduction of changes in the workplace, was more challenging. For successful engagement, a case for investment needs to be made and senior management buy-in is crucial. Developing investment cases requires dedicated and disaggregated research and evidence-gathering.

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