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SYNTHESIS REPORT

Mainstreaming Child-Friendly and Climate Resilient Approaches in Socio-Economic Development Plans and Climate-Related Frameworks in the Former Provinces of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang, Viet Nam



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The report is based on key findings and recommendations from the six background papers reviewing provincial socio-economic development plans (SEDPs) and sectoral plans on climate action, environmental protection, and green growth in the former provinces of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau and Soc Trang (now Ca Mau province and Can Tho city). This report and its findings are intended to inform and support the development of future provincial SEDPs and sectoral plans that strive to be more child-friendly and climate-resilient.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DoET	Department of Education and Training
DoF	Department of Finance
DoH	Department of Health
DoLISA	Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
DoNRE	Department of Natural Resources and Environment
DPI	Department of Planning and Investment
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EP	Environmental Protection
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoVN	Government of Viet Nam
GRDP	Gross Regional Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LNOB	Leaving no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MERIT	Mekong Delta Climate Resilience and Integrated Transformation Project
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MTBP	Medium-Term Budgetary Plan
MTIP	Medium-Term Investment Plan
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSO	National Statistics Office

NTP	National Target Programme
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
QH	Quoc hoi – National Assembly
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
SEDS	Socio-Economic Development Strategy
STI	Science, Technology, and Innovation
UN	United Nations
UNBD	United Nations Biodiversity (Framework/Convention context)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VND	Viet Nam Dong
VSDGs	Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goals
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Objectives of the synthesis: This synthesis assesses the degree to which environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and social inclusion—especially for children, women, and vulnerable groups—are mainstreamed into the five-year Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs) and related climate frameworks of the former provinces of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang located in Viet Nam's Mekong Delta. It highlights achievements, gaps, and innovations in provincial planning and implementation. By consolidating findings from multiple provincial reviews, the report provides an evidence base to support and inform policy dialogue towards strengthening equity and optimizing child-friendly and climate-resilient development planning regionally and nationally.

Sources of evidence: The synthesis draws on six provincial reviews—three on SEDPs and three on climate change adaptation (CCA) and related frameworks—prepared by independent research teams. These vary in depth and coverage, but together offer detailed insights into provincial strategies, priorities, and implementation. Supplementary references to national frameworks, strategies, and statistical sources were also used for context. The synthesis balances these inputs by identifying stylized facts, highlighting innovations, and noting where evidence is limited.

Method and scope: The analysis combines a qualitative review of provincial planning documents with cross-comparisons across the three provinces. It covers both strategic mainstreaming in SEDPs and climate change-related plans, and operationalization through budgets, indicators, and programmes. Special attention is given to commitments towards children, women, and vulnerable groups. The method is not a province-by-province evaluation, but identifies shared patterns, distinct practices, and lessons for integration.

Limitations of the synthesis: Constraints include the uneven quality and coverage of provincial review papers. While the three SEDP reviews followed a broadly similar structure, sections on results for children, women, and vulnerable groups were presented differently, making cross-province comparisons more challenging. The CCA reviews also varied in analytical depth and sometimes lacked quantitative evidence. Findings should, therefore, be seen as indicative rather than exhaustive, with the original reports consulted for further details.

PROVINCIAL BACKGROUND

Provincial socio-economic context: Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang were coastal provinces in the Mekong Delta, located in the south of Viet Nam, with distinct profiles and shared vulnerabilities. Bac Lieu diversified its economy through aquaculture, agriculture, and renewable energy, achieving notable progress in clean water and education. Ca Mau's economy was heavily marine-based, with fisheries and aquaculture contributing more than half of its Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), but erosion and saline intrusion remain major challenges. Soc Trang had a more diversified economy, combining agriculture, aquaculture, industry, and logistics, with poverty reduction among Khmer communities standing out. Together, the three provinces reflected the delta's challenge of balancing growth with environmental sustainability and inclusion.

Environmental degradation and climate change status: All three provinces have faced

and, following the mergers, will continue to encounter severe degradation from intensive aquaculture, agrochemical use, and weak waste management without action. Waterways are polluted by untreated effluent, soils suffer salinization and nutrient overload, and localized air pollution persists from shrimp ponds, craft villages, and open burning. Climate change compounds these stresses with droughts, saline intrusion, flooding, erosion, and subsidence now chronic. Extreme weather, rising temperatures, and shifting disease patterns further threaten livelihoods and health. Collectively, these trends have turned environmental and climate pressures into systemic development risks for the delta, with children and vulnerable members of communities particularly at risk.

Impacts of environmental degradation and climate change: The consequences are clear across health, livelihoods, infrastructure, and equity. Pollution and unsafe water drive diarrheal disease, respiratory illness and dengue, hitting children hardest. Soil degradation and salinity reduce crop and aquaculture yields, deepening debt and food insecurity. Dikes, schools, and clinics face repeated damage from erosion, flooding, and storms that disrupt services. Vulnerable groups—women, ethnic minorities, and the elderly—are most affected, with fewer resources to adapt and a limited voice in planning. These impacts show that environmental degradation and climate change are ecological crises and drivers of inequality.

KEY FINDINGS FROM SEDP REVIEWS

National SEDP 2021–2025: This embeds environmental protection and climate change adaptation as central pillars of sustainable development. It affirms the principle of "leaving no one behind," ensuring that growth is linked with social welfare and resilience. Strategic tasks include promoting green growth, circular economy, and improved water and resource management, while strengthening disaster resilience and ecosystem protection. However, while the SEDP stresses inclusion, it lacks child- and gender-specific indicators, relying on broad, universal targets. As a result, equity commitments remain more aspirational than operational, leaving vulnerable groups insufficiently addressed in practice.

Provincial SEDPs 2021–2025: The SEDPs of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang consistently identifed environmental protection and climate adaptation as guiding principles for socio-economic development. Common priorities included clean water, sanitation, waste treatment, afforestation, and disaster risk reduction. Indicators largely mirrored national benchmarks, which ensures comparability but can limit responsiveness to local realities, such as aquaculture salinity in Bac Lieu or riverbank erosion in Soc Trang. Children, women, and vulnerable groups are generally included under universal service targets rather than through specific indicators. Ca Mau stands out slightly, with child-focused disaster preparedness indicators, but provinces overall relied on the assumption that universal improvements benefit all.

Mainstreaming in provincial CCA and related frameworks: Provinces have also developed climate change, green growth, and environmental protection plans that complement SEDPs. These frameworks reinforced national priorities, focused on adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development. Some equity dimensions are reflected, such as child-friendly awareness campaigns in Bac Lieu or inclusive relocation schemes in Ca Mau. However, integration is uneven: Ca Mau demonstrated the most systematic linkages of environment and inclusion, while Soc Trang's plans remained largely technical and compliance-driven. Overall, provincial frameworks mirror national policy, but add limited locally tailored or equity-sensitive commitments.

Results from implementation: Measurable results were achieved across provinces, with progress in safe water and sanitation, resilient schools and health services, and child-focused safety and health initiatives. Provinces reached near-universal clean water coverage and ensured schools and health facilities had hygienic water and sanitation services, reducing risks for women and children. Investments in climate-resilient classrooms, health stations, and disaster-preparedness curricula improved safety and continuity, while safe housing and school nutrition programmes delivered visible benefits. Ecosystem-based approaches, including mangrove restoration and aquaculture-under-forest models, combined environmental protection with livelihood gains for ethnic minority households.

Waste management also expanded, supported by women's and youth groups, creating safer communities. Results were strongest where provinces used explicit, group-sensitive indicators, showing that tailored measures for children, women, and vulnerable groups led to more inclusive outcomes.

Key gaps: Despite progress, significant gaps persist in mainstreaming inclusion into provincial SEDPs and frameworks. Indicators remain highly aggregated and rarely disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity, or vulnerability status. Budgets are not clearly aligned with inclusive commitments, with most funding drawn from annual allocations or national target programmes rather than dedicated budget lines. Participation of children and vulnerable groups is mostly symbolic, with limited influence over decision-making. Provinces also differ in their weaknesses—Bac Lieu lacked social targeting, Ca Mau underfunded child-sensitive pilots, and Soc Trang relied heavily on external aid—but all share a systemic gap between commitments and equitable outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS FROM REVIEWING CLIMATE-RELATED STRATEGIES

Integration in national frameworks: Environmental protection and climate change adaptation are firmly established as priorities in national frameworks, including the SEDP 2021–2025, the Green Growth Strategy, and the Climate Change Strategy to 2050. These documents affirm principles of resilience, sustainability, and "leaving no one behind." However, while they set ambitious targets, they lack explicit indicators for children, women, or vulnerable groups. Implementation depends on how effectively provinces mainstream these priorities into their own SEDPs and budgetary processes. This creates a strong policy foundation, but leaves a gap between national vision and operationalization at local levels.

Integration in provincial SEDPs: The SEDPs of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang all identified environment and climate resilience as cross-cutting priorities. Common indicators covered water supply, sanitation, waste management, forest cover, and disaster risk reduction, broadly aligned with national benchmarks. Yet, reliance on standardized indicators limits responsiveness to local realities, such as saline intrusion in Bac Lieu or Khmer ethnic group poverty in Soc Trang. Children and women are usually covered through universal service targets rather than tailored commitments. Ca Mau stood out for including some child-sensitive disaster preparedness indicators, but overall provincial mainstreaming remained compliance-oriented.

Distinctive provincial approaches: Each province emphasized different aspects of mainstreaming and implementation. Bac Lieu focused on regulatory frameworks and infrastructure, particularly in waste management, but with limited child-sensitive content. Ca Mau embedded adaptation across multiple sectors, linking environment to education, health, and disaster preparedness, making its approach the most comprehensive. Soc Trang emphasized ecosystem-based solutions, combining mangrove restoration with aquaculture and donor-supported child-friendly initiatives. These distinctions show that provinces can adopt diverse pathways, but the integration of social inclusion varies significantly. The strongest results emerged where social priorities were explicitly embedded alongside environmental actions.

Results of implementation: Provincial climate-related action plans reinforced outcomes already achieved under SEDPs, with progress in climate education, resettlement of high-risk households, monitoring systems, and partnerships evident. Schools institutionalized climate awareness through campaigns and contests, while mechanisms such as Soc Trang's Children's Council brought children's perspectives into planning. Resettlement in Bac Lieu, Ca Mau and Soc Trang provided safer housing and maintained services for vulnerable families. Monitoring improved with adaptation indicators, early-warning systems and agricultural pilots to trengthen accountability. Partnerships with UNICEF, mass organizations, and youth networks expanded child-sensitive initiatives—such as drowning-prevention, safe homes, and environmental clubs—showing how external collaboration complements provincial actions and embeds inclusion in climate resilience.

Key gaps: Despite progress, provincial implementation lacked depth, consistency, and

sustainability in addressing inclusion. Monitoring systems remained fragmented and heavily aggregated, with little disaggregation by age, gender, ethnicity, or vulnerability status, limiting the ability to track who benefits. Budgets for vulnerable groups were not earmarked nor systematically linked to MTBP/MTIP, leaving financing for inclusion dependent on short-term allocations or national target programmes. Participation mechanisms for children, women, and ethnic minorities expanded in form, but remain largely symbolic without structured influence over decisions or resources. These systemic weaknesses mean that high-level commitments have not yet consistently translated into equitable, measurable outcomes for the most at-risk groups.

LESSONS LEARNED

Alignment with SEDPs is decisive: Climate-related frameworks on green growth, adaptation, and environmental protection only gain traction when embedded in SEDPs, which provide the legal and budgetary bridge to Medium-Term Budgetary Plans (MTBPs) and Medium-Term Investment Plans (MTIPs).

Principles need operationalization: Broad commitments to resilience, sustainability, and inclusion must be translated into sectoral guidelines, funded projects, and measurable outcomes. Otherwise, they remain rhetorical.

Financing and mandates must go together: Inclusive initiatives are sustainable only when they are backed by clear budget lines and departmental responsibility, not *ad hoc* or donor-funded projects.

Indicators and participation display weak linkages: Lack of disaggregated data and reliance on symbolic forums for children and women make it hard to track equity outcomes or ensure accountability.

Local innovation shows potential: Pilots such as Ca Mau's drowning-prevention programmes, Soc Trang's child-friendly partnerships, and Bac Lieu's resilient aquaculture models demonstrated that innovation is possible and replicable when supported by resources and institutional mandates.

CENTRAL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

#1. Clarify linkages between national frameworks and SEDPs: Ensure that climate-related strategies (green growth, adaptation, environment) are systematically embedded in SEDPs to avoid duplication and strengthen enforceability.

#2. Move from principles to operational measures: Translate high-level commitments on inclusion, resilience, and sustainability into sectoral guidelines, funded programmes, and actionable policies.

#3. Strengthen budgetary linkages and introduce fiscal incentives: Align national frameworks with MTBPs and MTIPs, and introduce incentives such as preferential scoring, matching funds, or fast-track approval for inclusive, child- and gender-sensitive projects.

#4. Establish a core M&E framework: Mandate NSO to define a disaggregated indicator set (age, gender, ethnicity, disability, vulnerability) covering environmental and social outcomes, harmonized with Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goals (VSDGs) and provincial yearbooks.

#5. Support capacity building and structured knowledge exchange: Institutionalize periodic training for provincial planners and create an annual "Inclusive Green Growth and Climate Planning Forum" for peer learning and replication of innovative models.

#6. Align financing with institutional mandates: Ensure ministries and agencies responsible for climate and social inclusion are allocated corresponding resources, reducing reliance on fragmented donor-funded projects.

PROVINCIAL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

#1. Translate national priorities into locally-tailored action plans and pilots: Adapt national frameworks to local risks (such as salinity, erosion and Khmer poverty that were evident in Bac Lieu, Ca Mau and Soc Trang, respectively) and pioneer inclusive pilots such as safe schools, livelihood-linked mangrove restoration, and climate-resilient resettlement.

#2. Strengthen participatory and consultative processes: Make consultations with children, women, and vulnerable groups a binding requirement in SEDP and climate plan preparation, moving from symbolic engagement to structured participation with feedback loops.

#3. Link SEDPs to concrete budget proposals: Convert inclusive commitments into costed, bankable projects within MTBPs and MTIPs, supported by Department of Finance (DoF) guidance on costing, budget coding, and integration of equity-sensitive interventions.

#4. Strengthen monitoring at the local level: Develop localized M&E frameworks aligned with national standards and provincial yearbooks, assigning line departments to collect disaggregated data by age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and vulnerability status.

#5. Mobilize diverse resources through partnerships: Establish frameworks or memorandums of understanding with development partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector to co-finance inclusive climate initiatives, ensuring alignment with SEDPs and MTIP projects.

#6. Invest in local capacity and coordination: Set up inter-departmental taskforces chaired by Provincial People's Committees (PPC) with the DoF a focal point to oversee integration of climate, environment, and inclusion into SEDPs, meet annually to review progress, and receive technical support from development partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

#1. Provide targeted technical assistance to central agencies: Support the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, and other ministries in operationalizing mainstreaming commitments for the 2026–2030 SEDP cycle, including toolkits, indicator frameworks, and budget-linkage templates, with UNICEF and United Nations agencies leading on child- and gender-sensitive integration.

#2. Support provincial pilots and scale-up pathways: Finance and co-design inclusive pilot models (e.g., child-friendly green schools, gender-responsive mangrove restoration, climate-resilient housing), rigorously evaluate them, and facilitate peer exchanges to embed lessons into provincial SEDPs, MTIP, and MTEF submissions.

#3. Introduce innovative financing approaches: Pilot blended finance, climate bonds, and budget tagging. Help provinces access international climate funds and ensure development bank loans include inclusive safeguards, such as child-sensitive design standards and gender impact assessments.

#4. Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and learning: Establish platforms like an "Inclusive Climate and Development Forum" linking central agencies, provinces, and communities, with development partners funding evidence-sharing, thematic sessions, and structured annual policy dialogues.

#5. Strengthen monitoring, data, and accountability systems: Assist NSO and provincial statistics offices in developing disaggregated data systems, GIS-based mapping, and digital dashboards, with UNICEF and UN Women contributing to child- and gender-sensitive indicators and training provincial staff.

#6. Strengthen policy leverage in loan negotiations: Ensure climate-resilient infrastructure financing systematically embeds social inclusion safeguards, requiring environmental and social impact assessments that assess risks to children, women, and vulnerable groups, and linking loan disbursements to demonstrable inclusion outcomes.



1. INTRODUCTION

01

1.1 Purpose and Objectives of this Synthesis Report

(1). **Purpose and scope of this synthesis report:** The synthesis report consolidates findings from six provincial review reports on socio-economic development and climate-related plans in the former provinces of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang (please see paragraph 6). Its main purpose is to provide a comprehensive and comparative analysis to inform the 2026–2030 planning cycle. This report assesses the extent to which child-sensitive, gender-responsive, and climate-resilient approaches have been integrated into provincial socio-economic development plans (SEDPs) and climate-related strategies. It identifies achievements, gaps, and cross-cutting challenges, in step with highlighting differences in planning quality and implementation as well as proposes actionable recommendations for provincial governments, national ministries, and development partners to enhance inclusive and sustainable development planning in Viet Nam's climate change-exposed Mekong Delta region.

1.2 Sources of the Synthesis

(2). **Two complementary sets of provincial assessments:** The synthesis draws on two sets of assessments, each producing three provincial review reports. The first set, namely provincial SEDP reviews, focused on implementation of the five-year SEDP (2021–2025) in Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang. These provincial SEDP reviews had two core objectives: (i) assess the integration and implementation of environmental protection and climate change adaptation (CCA) in the SEDPs, with specific attention to children, women, and vulnerable groups and (ii) develop forward-looking recommendations for strengthening the integration of environmental and climate priorities in the 2026–2030 SEDP cycle.

(3). **Focus and contribution of the second set of reviews:** The second set of assessments, namely provincial CCA reviews, examined provincial climate-related plans, including green growth, environmental protection, climate change response, and sustainable development, during 2021–2025 or longer-term strategies where available. Similar to the first set of reviews, this set was commissioned by UNICEF within the project "Child-Friendly Policies and Plans for the Period 2023-2026" with the (former) Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), now the Ministry of Finance (MoF). These provincial CCA reviews assessed the extent to which child and social issues were mainstreamed into climate planning and proposed strategic, practical, and specific recommendations for the 2026–2030 planning cycle.

(4). **Methodology applied across both assessment sets:** Both sets of assessments used a combination of document analysis and qualitative methods. The document review covered a broad range of sources, including provincial planning documents, implementation reports, national and provincial guidelines, legal frameworks, sectoral strategies, and relevant statistical data. Additional materials reviewed included legal and policy documents related to child protection, child health and nutrition, hygiene and safety, and public financing for social issues. A complete list of reviewed documents is available in the original reports housed by the UNICEF Country Office and not reproduced here for brevity.

(5). **Stakeholder consultations and field visits as part of qualitative methods:** For

the qualitative component, assessment teams conducted meetings and working sessions with key provincial departments across all three provinces, including the former Department of Planning and Investment (DPI) (now the Department of Finance), former Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) (now the Department of Agriculture and Environment), former Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (DoLISA), Department of Education and Training (DoET), and the former Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DoNRE) (now the Department of Agriculture and Environment). Site visits were also carried out to one model project integrating CCA and green growth with a focus on gender and children, and to two schools delivering climate education through both curricula and extracurricular activities. On average, approximately 45 stakeholders were consulted in each province, including 20–25 government staff and 15–20 individuals from school management and student groups. Two groups of students were consulted during field visits to the provinces. One group was aged 6-11 years from a primary school and one was aged 16-18 years from a high school.

1.3 Contextual Background of this Synthesis

(6). **Provincial mergers as part of administrative reform:** While these assessments were conducted, the Government of Viet Nam (GoVN) implemented major administrative restructuring to address institutional bottlenecks seen as key barriers to accelerating sustainable development. In June 2025, through Resolution No.202/2025/QH15[1], Viet Nam approved a plan to reduce the number of provinces and centrally-governed cities from 63 to 34. As part of this reform, Soc Trang was merged with Hau Giang and Can Tho provinces to form the expanded Can Tho municipality, while Bac Lieu was integrated into Ca Mau province. These mergers are intended to streamline governance, enhance regional planning, reduce administrative fragmentation, and improve resource allocation, particularly in areas vulnerable to climate change and facing demographic and fiscal constraints.

(7). **Two-tier local administration reform and commune consolidation:** In parallel with provincial mergers, Viet Nam is experiencing a transition to a two-tier local governance system that removes the district level, retaining only provincial and commune-level administrations. Under this reform, provinces have begun merging small or under-resourced communes into larger administrative units. As a result, the number of commune-level administrative units nationwide has significantly reduced from more than 10,000 (including communes, wards, and special zones) to just 3,321, comprising 2,636 communes, 672 wards, and 13 special zones.[2] The reform aims to simplify governance structures, streamline administrative functions, and optimize public service delivery. By reducing overlaps and consolidating functions, it is expected to strengthen decentralization, coordination, lower administrative costs, and support more effective implementation of development policies at grassroots level.

(8). **Applicability of synthesis findings in the context of recent provincial mergers:** This synthesis draws on reviews conducted in the former provinces of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang. As the first two have been merged into one province, the findings can be directly applied by stakeholders in the new Ca Mau province. In contrast, findings from Soc Trang, now part of the expanded Can Tho Municipality, do not fully capture the broader context of the new administrative unit. Additional analysis covering the former Hau Giang province and Can Tho city may be needed to paint a more complete picture. Nevertheless, the synthesis results remain a valuable reference for the new Can Tho Municipality in the upcoming 2026–2030 planning cycle. Looking beyond these provinces, this synthesis report also provides valuable lessons for other provinces with similar socio-economic conditions, especially on integrating children and other vulnerable groups into SEDPs and climate-related strategies. The findings also highlight the importance of UNICEF's

1 National Assembly of Viet Nam. (2025, June 12). *Resolution No. 202/2025/QH15 on the rearrangement of provincial-level administrative divisions*.

2 Using August 2025 statistics from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA).

continued engagement with the newly merged provincial and municipal authorities to ensure sustained support for inclusive and climate-resilient SEDP processes.

1.4 Approach of this Synthesis and the Report Outline

(9). **Approach of this synthesis**: This synthesis draws primarily on six review reports covering Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang provinces, which serve as the main sources of evidence for consolidating findings and drawing comparative insights. As a synthesis, this report does not undertake substantial new analysis, but rather reviews the discussions presented in the six reports and distills their key findings and recommendations. In some cases, additional data sources were used to validate or cross-check specific synthesis results. However, these inputs were only applied for confirmation and do not alter the original findings of the review reports. In most cases, the analysis synthesizes findings across all three provinces. Provincial distinctions are highlighted when these are significant and relevant for the discussion.

(10). **Synthesis report outline**: The synthesis report begins with an introduction outlining the objectives, scope, and methodology of the review. Section 2 provides the socio-economic and environmental context of the three former provinces, establishing the backdrop against which planning, and implementation take place. Section 3 examines how environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and the inclusion of children, women, and other vulnerable groups were mainstreamed into provincial SEDPs for 2021–2025. Section 4 turns to the national and provincial frameworks on climate change, green growth, sustainable development, and environmental protection, analyzing their relevance, integration with SEDPs and implications for inclusion of children, women, and other vulnerable groups. Section 5 distills cross-cutting lessons from the analysis, while practical recommendations are directed at central government agencies, provincial authorities, and development partners to strengthen inclusive socio-economic and climate-resilient planning.

(11). **Limitations of the synthesis:** This synthesis is based on six provincial review reports prepared by different teams, each with varying levels of detail, analytical depth, and methodological rigor. While the consolidation highlights characterized facts and common trends across provinces, it also seeks to capture significant provincial innovations where evidence is available. However, differences in detail and quality of the background reports sometimes limits the extent to which findings can be compared systematically. The background papers were also presented in different ways. For instance, while the three SEDP reviews broadly followed the same structure, the content of some key sections – such as the assessment of results from implementing environment and climate change commitments related to children, women and other vulnerable groups – varied considerably and made cross-provincial synthesis more challenging. In some areas, information gaps or uneven coverage constrained the analysis, meaning that conclusions should be read as indicative rather than exhaustive. The synthesis should be read with reference to the original background reports when needed.



2. BACKGROUND OF THE THREE PROVINCES

02

(12). **Contextualizing the analysis**: Before analyzing how environmental protection, climate change adaptation and the degree to which inclusion of children, women, and other vulnerable groups were mainstreamed into SEDPs and related frameworks, it is important to first establish the broader context. Section 2 provides an overview of the socio-economic situation of the three provinces, together with the key environmental and climate challenges they faced. This context is essential for understanding both the opportunities and constraints that shape policy choices, planning priorities, and implementation capacities at the provincial level.

2.1 Socio-Economic and Environment Context

(13). **Common strengths and shared development trends:** Across the former provinces of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang, socio-economic development advanced steadily, with improvements in poverty reduction, expansion of education and health services as well as investments in climate-resilient infrastructure. All three provinces emphasized the dual priorities of economic growth and climate adaptation, reflecting their shared vulnerabilities to saline intrusion, erosion, flooding, and drought in the Mekong Delta. Social indicators such as school enrollment, health insurance coverage, and access to electricity and clean water have improved across the board in the recent decade, creating a stronger foundation for inclusive development. An important common feature was an increased focus on integrating environmental protection and disaster risk reduction into planning, with SEDPs and other provincial climate-related action plans highlighting the need for sustainable livelihoods, social inclusion, and climate resilience.

(14). **Key differences among provinces:** Despite these shared trends, each province demonstrated distinct strengths and emphasis areas. Bac Lieu leveraged its aquaculture and renewable energy base to prioritize clean water, sanitation, and education while piloting "green, clean, and beautiful schools," but its SEDP still lacked child-specific CCA indicators despite strong sectoral initiatives. Ca Mau, as the southernmost province facing severe coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion and land subsidence, stood out for embedding disaster resilience into its planning, including safe housing schemes, drowning prevention, and expanded immunization coverage, although gender and vulnerable group integration remained weak. Soc Trang, with its ethnically diverse population and relatively smaller fiscal base, showed the strongest social inclusion results, with poverty reduction among ethnic Khmer households exceeding the provincial average and innovative child participation mechanisms such as the provincial children's council and UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Project, though resource limitations constrained wider application. These distinctions highlighted that while provinces shared similar challenges, their policy choices and implementation pathways differed, reflecting geographic, socio-economic, and institutional conditions and offering complementary lessons for integrating climate resilience and inclusion into development planning.

(15). **Bac Lieu – Growth anchored in aquaculture, renewable energy, and services:** With a population of more than 900,000 in 2024, this former province was characterized by its ethnically diverse population, including significant Khmer and Hoa communities (9.2 per cent of total population). The province displayed a strong economic performance, with GRDP growth reaching 8.3 per cent in 2024, surpassing the national average, and

GRDP per capita at approximately VND76.5 million. The economy has transitioned toward industry, construction and services, while agriculture, especially high-tech shrimp farming, remains a key strength. The province recorded a 32.86 per cent increase in shrimp output and 17.14 per cent rise in the Industrial Production Index from 2021 to 2023. Social investment totaled VND21 trillion, while retail, services, and tourism all posted double-digit growth. The poverty rate declined to 0.71 per cent, with more than 20,000 jobs created and trained labour exceeded 69 per cent of the provincial workforce. Bac Lieu also positioned itself as a leader in renewable energy, particularly wind power, and invested in CCA measures and public administrative innovation.

(16). **Ca Mau – Balanced sectoral growth with strong performance in industry and services:** With a population exceeding 1.2 million, Ca Mau was predominantly Kinh (97 per cent), with Khmer and Hoa minorities. The province posted a GRDP growth rate of 7.09 per cent in 2024, with a per capita GRDP of nearly VND70 million. It maintained robust growth across sectors. Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries grew by 3.44 per cent, while industry-construction and services grew by 8.92 and 9.02 per cent respectively. The province's significant marine economic potential is reflected by the marine sector contributing 55 per cent of GRDP through a diversified base of capture fisheries, aquaculture, seafood processing.[3] By of end-2024, poverty and near-poverty rates stood at 0.94 and 1.26 per cent, respectively, reflecting steady reductions. The province ranked third in the Mekong Delta and 16th nationwide in terms of economic growth in 2024, with noticeable improvements in labour productivity and living standards.

(17). **Soc Trang – Steady recovery with strength in agriculture and logistics:** Strategically located with extensive coastal and riverine advantages, it achieved a GRDP growth rate of 7.07 per cent in 2024 and an average growth rate of 4.82 per cent over 2020–2024. The province's agriculture sector remained a cornerstone, particularly rice and aquaculture, with ST25 rice continuing to earn international recognition. Industrial output also grew, with the processing industry increasing its share of GRDP to 18.25 per cent. Exports reached US$1.5 billion in 2024, with an average annual growth of 11.64 per cent over five years. Transportation and logistics showed substantial increases over 2020 levels. Household income grew by 19.78 per cent in 2024, while per capita rural income rose steadily to VND45.64 million. The overall poverty rate dropped by 2.25 per cent between 2020 and 2024, including a 2 per cent reduction among Khmer households, who accounted for 30 per cent of the provincial population. Compared to Ca Mau and Bac Lieu, Soc Trang's economy was more diversified, balancing strong agriculture and aquaculture with expanding industry, trade, and logistics services, which provided a broader base for recovery and poverty reduction.

2.2 Vulnerability to Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

2.2.1 Environmental Degradation and Climate Change

2.2.1.1 Environmental Degradation

(18). **Water quality and ecosystems:** Across the three former provinces, untreated effluent from aquaculture, seafood processing, and domestic sources is consistently discharged into rivers and canals. Many waterways are now heavily polluted, stagnant, and foul-smelling, with reduced capacity to assimilate waste. Brackish shrimp farming generates large volumes of wastewater, often 9,000–12,000m³ per hectare per crop, that is rarely treated before discharge. At the same time, intensive rice, vegetable, and orchard cultivation relies heavily on chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and growth stimulants, which leach into canals and groundwater, compounding nutrient overload and contaminant levels. This runoff not only degrades freshwater and brackish ecosystems, but also accelerates eutrophication and threatens long-term soil and

3 Ca Mau's marine economy was diversified, with capture fisheries, aquaculture, and seafood processing. In contrast, Bac Lieu's marine economy was far more specialized, centered on intensive and super-intensive shrimp farming, making it a leading shrimp exporter nationally.

water safety. Industrial zones and seafood processors add to the pollution load, while in rural areas, low waste collection rates (often below 60 per cent) mean solid waste is frequently dumped or burned in open areas, further degrading soil and water quality.

(19). **Soil degradation, salinization, and waste:** Shrimp aquaculture and intensive agrochemical use accelerate soil salinization and nutrient accumulation, undermining land fertility and leading to declining soil quality. Across all three provinces, saline intrusion has become a defining hazard, penetrating far inland during dry seasons and leaving tens of thousands of hectares of agricultural land degraded or abandoned. In Ca Mau, documented contamination already covers tens of hectares of aquaculture and farmland, with nearly 20,000 hectares of shrimp farms suffering heavy losses due to salinity spikes. In Bac Lieu, saline intrusion during the 2022–2023 dry season reached unprecedented levels, forcing temporary abandonment of rice land and reducing freshwater availability for production and household use. Soc Trang likewise faced earlier and deeper saltwater intrusion in 2016 and 2020, causing widespread agricultural disruption before easing slightly in later years. In addition, land subsidence and erosion are aggravated by excessive groundwater extraction and inadequate irrigation systems. Rural waste mismanagement further contributes to soil pollution, drainage blockage, and localized flooding.

(20). **Localized air pollution:** Air quality challenges are apparent, but more confined compared to water and soil degradation. In urban centres, particulate matter sometimes exceeds World Health Organization thresholds, especially during peak traffic hours and in densely populated districts. Shrimp-farming areas in Bac Lieu emit ammonia and hydrogen sulfide gases, while Soc Trang's Xuan Hoa charcoal-kiln craft village releases untreated smoke and dust, affecting surrounding orchards and settlements, while localized livestock operations add odor and methane emissions in rural communes. In Ca Mau, open burning of household waste and emissions from seafood processing plants contributed to periodic smog in peri-urban areas. While these were localized pollution hotspots rather than province-wide phenomena, their persistence and cumulative impacts on health, crops, and living conditions have raised concern.

2.2.1.2 Climate Change Across Provinces

(21). **Hydro-meteorological stresses:** The three provinces faced recurring and intensifying hazards. Droughts are more frequent and prolonged, especially during El Niño years, reducing river flows and groundwater reserves. Saline intrusion has become a regular dry-season problem, penetrating further inland and lasting longer, with salinity levels at times exceeding permissible limits for consecutive days. Tidal flooding often affects low-lying coastal and urban areas from September to November, when high tides combine with surges. Pluvial flooding from short, intense rains is also more common, as drainage systems struggle to cope. Rainfall overall has grown more irregular, disrupting seasonal patterns and bringing alternating scarcity and sudden excess. Together, these changes mark a shift from episodic to chronic hydro-meteorological pressures, with the focus provinces among the most climate-volatile in the Mekong Delta.

(22). **Erosion, subsidence, and sea-level rises:** Coastal and riverbank erosion, combined with subsidence, are now persistent rather than episodic. Ca Mau has lost more than 6,200 hectares of land and protective forest since 2011 due to shoreline retreat and wave action, with more than 700 active erosion and subsidence sites recorded in 2023–2024 alone. In Bac Lieu and Soc Trang, riverbank collapses and shoreline erosion accelerated, with some areas losing 10–25 metres annually, threatening residential clusters, schools, and productive farmland. The weakening of natural buffers such as mangroves has further exposed dikes and settlements to tidal surges. Groundwater over-extraction, widely used for aquaculture and household consumption, was a key driver of subsidence across all three provinces, lowering land elevation and undermining the stability of irrigation and transport infrastructure. In Soc Trang, widespread over-pumping caused measurable declines in groundwater levels, intensifying risks of saline

intrusion and land collapses. Projections indicate that with a one metre sea-level rise, large portions of what was Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and more than half of Soc Trang's land area could be inundated, displacing communities and jeopardizing livelihoods on a massive scale. These combined processes are transforming erosion and subsidence from localized environmental issues into systemic development threats, demanding urgent and coordinated adaptation measures.

(23). **Extreme weather and temperature shifts**: Climate change has brought more frequent thunderstorms, lightning, and tornadoes, particularly during seasonal transitions, which damage homes, schools, and rural infrastructure. Storm surges and whirlwinds were increasingly destructive in coastal and riverine communes, with incidents of roof losses, collapsed classrooms, and fishing boat damage reported almost every year. Heatwaves intensified, raising health risks and driving higher evapotranspiration that exacerbated crop stress. In Bac Lieu and Ca Mau, sudden localized downpours were increasingly common, overwhelming drainage systems and disrupting agricultural cycles. In Soc Trang, extended periods of irregular rainfall alternated between flash floods and prolonged dry spells, damaging paddy fields and aquaculture ponds. These trends were accompanied by a steady rise in average temperatures, which amplified drought severity and pest outbreaks. Shifts in pest and disease patterns, including brown planthopper in rice and white-spot disease in shrimp, were noted and compounded production risks and further undermining household resilience.

2.2.1.3 Shared and Province-Specific Patterns

(24). **Shared provincial patterns:** Across the trio, environmental degradation was largely driven by intensive aquaculture and agro-industrial practices, insufficient wastewater treatment, and weak rural waste management systems. These drivers degraded water and soil quality, disrupted ecosystems, and generated knock-on health risks for communities. Heavy use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and veterinary drugs in rice, orchards, and aquaculture further accelerated nutrient loading and contamination, while weak enforcement of environmental standards allowed untreated effluent from processing industries to enter rivers and canals. Solid waste, often dumped or burned in rural areas, added to cumulative pollution loads. Climate stressors were also broadly similar and intensified across the provinces: with recurrent drought, saline intrusion, tidal and pluvial flooding, coastal and riverbank erosion and land subsidence placing mounting pressure on agriculture, aquaculture, infrastructure, and essential services. Taken together, these shared pressures transformed seasonal or localized challenges into chronic, system-wide risks for sustainable development in the Mekong Delta.

(25). **Province-specific distinctions:** Despite these shared patterns, distinct features shaped each province's vulnerability. Bac Lieu was marked by high-density shrimp aquaculture, intensive agrochemical application, and rural waste gaps, alongside localized air-quality exceedances and aquaculture gas emissions. Climate risks were dominated by saline intrusion, tidal surges, and flood-prone lowlands. Ca Mau's three-sided coastal exposure made land loss, subsidence, and shoreline retreats defining risks, compounded by dry-season water scarcity and saline well intrusion that intensify WASH vulnerabilities. Soc Trang faced distinctive pollution pressures from industrial park and processing-sector wastewater, heavily contaminated urban canals, and untreated emissions from the Xuan Hoa charcoal-kiln craft village. Climate challenges included inundation in low-lying areas, irregular rainfall, saline intrusion, and accelerating erosion and subsidence.

2.2.2 Impacts of Environmental Degradation and Climate Change

2.2.2.1 Impacts of Environmental Degradation

(26). **Environmental degradation has undermined public health and living conditions:** Pollution of surface and groundwater sources increased the prevalence of diarrheal diseases, respiratory infections, and skin ailments, particularly among children more exposed to contaminated water and poor sanitation. In Ca Mau, saline and

stagnant water use during the 2023–2024 dry season was linked to skin irritation and gastrointestinal illnesses in thousands of households. Open burning of waste and emissions from aquaculture and processing plants aggravated respiratory risks in rural and peri-urban areas, with residents in Bac Lieu's intensive shrimp-farming zones reporting frequent foul odors from hydrogen sulfide and ammonia gases. In Soc Trang, smoke from the Xuan Hoa charcoal kilns not only reduced air quality, it also damaged nearby orchards, affecting food security and household income, while urban residents faced polluted canals that served as breeding grounds for dengue-carrying mosquitoes. Across all three provinces, degraded environmental quality created cumulative health risks that disproportionately affected women, children, and the elderly, who have less access to medical care and preventive measures.

(27). **Environmental degradation is eroding agricultural and aquaculture productivity:** Soil salinization, nutrient accumulation, and agrochemical contamination have reduced land fertility, leading to falling yields and declining incomes for farming households. In Bac Lieu, excessive chemical fertilizer and pesticide use in rice-shrimp systems degraded soil quality, reducing productivity and prompting farmers to temporarily abandon land during the 2022–2023 dry season when saline intrusion reached unprecedented levels. In Ca Mau, salinity spikes caused shrimp losses of up to 75 per cent in some farming areas, with nearly 20,000 hectares of improved extensive shrimp farms suffering partial or total damage during the 2023–2024 dry season. Soc Trang has seen aquaculture ponds fail due to untreated wastewater and chemical runoff, particularly in districts adjacent to processing zones where effluents accumulated, causing disease outbreaks in brackish water shrimp ponds. These disruptions undermined household livelihoods and strained local economies dependent on export-oriented agriculture and seafood, with downstream effects on provincial export revenues and employment in processing industries.

(28). **Environmental degradation is weakening resilience and increasing social vulnerability:** Ecosystem declines—through mangrove loss, polluted rivers, and degraded soils—reduced natural protection against storms, flooding, and erosion. In Ca Mau, more than 6,200 hectares of protective mangroves and coastal land have been lost since 2011, leaving coastal communes exposed to tidal surges and shoreline retreats. Polluted rivers and canals in Bac Lieu and Soc Trang, often choked with untreated effluents and solid waste, diminish the availability of safe water for irrigation and domestic use, further constraining household coping capacity. As environmental shocks combine with poverty, ethnic minority households, women, and informal workers are disproportionately affected, facing greater food insecurity, water shortages, and barriers to health care. In Soc Trang, Khmer households—already among the poorest—reported higher vulnerability to crop failures and disease outbreaks linked to water pollution. Women in aquaculture-dependent households faced added burdens when pond failures wiped out income, forcing them into precarious informal work. The cumulative effect is a deepening of socio-economic inequality: while better-off households could invest in safer housing, water treatment, or alternative livelihoods, vulnerable groups remained exposed to both immediate health risks and long-term livelihood insecurity, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion in climate- and pollution-affected communities.

2.2.2.2 Impacts of Climate Change

(29). **Climate change is disrupting agricultural cycles and food security:** Irregular rainfall, prolonged droughts, and saline intrusion have reduced crop yields and undermined aquaculture stability across all three provinces. In Soc Trang, alternating floods and droughts between 2020 and 2024 destroyed thousands of hectares of rice fields, with poor and Khmer households suffering the greatest losses due to limited adaptive options. In Ca Mau, extended dry seasons forced shrimp farmers to abandon ponds after repeated losses, with nearly 20,000 hectares of improved extensive shrimp farms reporting productivity declines of 35–75 per cent during the 2023–2024 season. Bac Lieu also saw reduced yields in its shrimp-rice systems, as salinity spikeed and erratic rainfall shortened growing cycles and weakened soil fertility. Rising temperatures and shifting pest and disease patterns, such as brown planthopper in rice and white-spot

disease in shrimp, compound production risks, leading to greater reliance on costly pesticides and veterinary drugs that raised production costs and increase household indebtedness. Together, these pressures threatened household food availability and undermined the stability of provincial export-oriented agriculture and aquaculture sectors.

(30). **Climate change is amplifying water scarcity and WASH vulnerabilities:** Seasonal droughts and saline intrusion reduce access to clean water, with thousands of households forced to rely on unsafe or saline water during dry seasons. In Ca Mau, the 2023–2024 dry season saw more than 2,600 households face shortages of potable water, many relying on stagnant or saline sources that failed to meet hygiene standards. Saline well intrusion affected household supplies, forcing communities to truck in water or purchase it at high cost. In Bac Lieu and Soc Trang, shortages in rural communes are increasingly common, with groundwater over-extraction accelerating both subsidence and the deterioration of freshwater quality. In Soc Trang, more than 107,000 wells supply nearly 182,000 households, but declining water tables have reduced reliability and increased contamination risks. These stresses increase the risk of waterborne disease and place heavy burdens on women and children, who often shoulder the task of securing water for daily use. Schools and health facilities in low-lying areas also reported interruptions in safe water access during saline intrusion episodes, further exposing children to hygiene and sanitation risks.

(31). **Climate change is damaging infrastructure and disrupting essential services:** Riverbank and coastal erosion threatened roads, dikes, and irrigation canals, leading to recurrent repair costs and service interruptions. In Ca Mau alone, more than 130 canal and embankment sections experienced subsidence and erosion in recent years, with damage estimated at more than VND19 billion. Floods and storms regularly damaged schools and health facilities, forcing temporary closures and reducing access to education and care. During the 2023–2024 season, storm-related flooding in Soc Trang led to the temporary suspension of classes in multiple communes, while health stations reported difficulties maintaining clean water and electricity supply. In Bac Lieu, tidal surges flooded low-lying neighbourhoods, damaging transport links and disrupting local markets, while in Cà Mau, repeated embankment failures have caused major local damage and displacement of households. The cumulative burden of repeated repairs and emergency responses diverted scarce provincial resources away from longer-term investments, leaving infrastructure more fragile and widening gaps in service provision for rural and vulnerable communities. These disruptions not only affect service provision, but also undermine local governments' ability to maintain development gains.

2.2.2.3 Children and Other Vulnerable Groups Disproportionately Affected

(32). **Children are disproportionately affected by degraded environments and climate stressors**: Water pollution, saline intrusion, and poor sanitation increase children's risk of diarrheal disease, skin conditions, and vector-borne illnesses such as dengue. In Ca Mau, more than 2,600 households faced shortages of clean water during the 2023–2024 dry season, with many children relying on saline or stagnant water sources, contributing to spikes in gastrointestinal illness. Floods and storms disrupt education, with schools in low-lying Soc Trang communes suspending classes several times in 2023 due to inundation. It also recorded 814 dengue cases in the first nine months of 2024, disproportionately affecting school-aged children. Nutritional risks are also closely tied to climate and environmental shocks: in Bac Lieu, 8.33 per cent of children under-five remained underweight and 16.88 per cent were stunted, with higher prevalence in climate-exposed coastal areas. In Ca Mau, child malnutrition rates, though declining from 19.9 per cent in 2022 to 10.4 per cent in 2023, remain elevated in drought- and salinity-affected communes. In Soc Trang, food insecurity linked to floods and saline intrusion threatened children's growth and cognitive development, compounding education and health impacts. Yet, provincial SEDPs and climate strategies rarely included child-sensitive indicators to track these impacts or guide protective measures.

(33). **Women face heightened livelihood and care burdens:** When aquaculture ponds or crops failed in Bac Lieu and Ca Mau, women often entered insecure informal jobs to replace lost income. In Ca Mau, nearly 20,000 hectares of shrimp farms reported productivity declines of 35–75 per cent in 2023–2024, forcing many households—where women are primary caregivers and secondary earners—to rely on unstable work. In Soc Trang's ethnic Khmer communities, women have limited access to credit and extension services, as survey data showed only 20–25 per cent of participants in agricultural training were women, with even lower rates for Khmer women. Reports from Bac Lieu highlighted that during saline intrusion and prolonged drought, women and children were typically tasked with securing household welfare, such as collecting potable water and ensuring food security, which imposed substantial physical and psychological burdens. In rural areas of Soc Trang, women also faced heavier workloads as water scarcity and waste mismanagement increased daily household labour, leaving less time for income generation or community participation. Water scarcity compounds these burdens, as women remained responsible for household water collection, with many in Ca Mau and Bac Lieu reporting longer collection times during saline intrusion episodes. These patterns illustrated a clear increase in unpaid care work under climate stress, but no provincial data was found on gender-based violence.

(34). **Low-income and ethnic minority households were among the most exposed to environmental degradation and climate change across the three provinces:** In Soc Trang, dependence on rain-fed rice and low-value aquaculture left the poor, especially Khmer households, highly vulnerable to droughts, saline intrusion, and irregular rainfall. Between 2020 and 2024, alternating floods and droughts destroyed thousands of hectares of rice fields, with Khmer households reporting the greatest crop losses due to limited adaptive capacity and restricted access to extension services and credit. In Ca Mau, poor households in coastal communes faced mounting WASH and livelihood risks: during the 2023–2024 dry season, 2,620 households reported clean water shortages, and nearly 20,000 hectares of shrimp farms and 940 hectares of rice were lost, pushing vulnerable families deeper into debt cycles despite the province's low poverty rate of 1.54 per cent. In Bac Lieu, saline intrusion degraded or forced the temporary abandonment of tens of thousands of hectares of farmland, cutting into the incomes of smallholders and near-poor households. Although rural water coverage expanded, only 73.3 per cent of the population had access to water meeting national quality standards in 2023, leaving poor families reliant on untreated or saline water. These combined pressures underlined how poor and ethnic minority households were disproportionately affected, with higher risks of income loss, indebtedness, food insecurity, and intergenerational poverty traps.

(35). **Elderly people and persons with disabilities faced compounded disadvantages:** Repeated floods, erosion, and embankment failures in 2023–2024 underscored their limited mobility and heightened exposure to disaster risks. In Bac Lieu, tidal surges and localized flooding repeatedly damaged homes and roads in low-lying districts, with provincial reports noting particular risks for elderly residents and people with disabilities who could not evacuate without assistance. In Ca Mau, more than 130 canal and embankment sections were damaged by subsidence and erosion, disrupting transport and access to essential services in 2024. In Soc Trang, authorities reinforced and relocated households in erosion-prone districts such as Ke Sach and Cu Lao Dung, yet evacuation and resettlement schemes did not always account for the mobility or health constraints of elderly residents. Health stations in Bạc Lieu and Soc Trang also reported difficulties in maintaining uninterrupted care for older patients and people with chronic conditions during prolonged flooding and saline intrusion. Despite various disaster risk management projects underway, neither province developed tailored indicators or protocols to ensure the safe evacuation, sheltering, and continuity of care for these groups, leaving them disproportionately excluded from adaptation and recovery efforts.



3. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW OF 2021-2025 SEDPs

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(36). **Role of the Five-Year SEDPs**: These SEDPs serve as the overarching and legally binding framework that defines objectives and directions for socio-economic development over the medium term, approved by the National Assembly at the national level and endorsed by Provincial People's Councils at the provincial level. Once adopted, SEDPs provide the foundation for sectoral policies, annual socio-economic development plans and action programmes, while also anchoring the two medium-term financial instruments: the Medium-Term Budgetary Plan (MTBP), which sets the fiscal envelope for recurrent and capital spending, and the Medium-Term Investment Plan (MTIP), which translates SEDPs into concrete investment projects. Annual budgets and plans then act as one-year operational slices of these frameworks, ensuring continuity between strategy, financing, and implementation. This nested system means that mainstreaming environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and the inclusion of children, women and other vulnerable groups into SEDPs is not only important, it is also a prerequisite for ensuring these cross-cutting concerns are systematically carried into subsequent policies and programmes. Given the importance of SEDPs, this section analyzes how environmental protection and climate change adaptation – with a focus on children, women, and other vulnerable groups – were mainstreamed in 2021–2025 SEDPs at the national level as well as in the three spotlighted provinces. It then reviews, drawing on papers synthesized in this report, how these commitments were implemented in practice.

3.1 Mainstreaming Environment and CCA into SEDPs

3.1.1 National SEDP 2021-2025

(37). **Integration of sustainability into national priorities**: The national SEDP 2021–2025, adopted under Resolution No.16/2021/QH15 (27 July 2021)[4], explicitly mainstreams environmental protection and climate change adaptation as central pillars of development. The plan affirms the principle of "leaving no one behind," emphasizing that economic growth must go hand-in-hand with environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and social welfare. This framing positions environmental and climate considerations not as separate technical issues, but as fundamental conditions for achieving sustainable socio-economic progress. Environmental protection and climate change adaptation are presented not as sectoral add-ons, but as guiding principles that cut across the economic, social, and governance dimensions of the plan. They are embedded in the overall development vision, integrated into objectives on growth quality and inclusiveness, and framed as essential for ensuring long-term national competitiveness and resilience.

(38). **Establishment of measurable environmental targets:** To translate these commitments into practice, the plan sets out a clear framework of 13 indicators, accounting for 18 per cent of total SEDP indicators defined in Resolution No. 99/NQ-CP (30 August 2021[5]), of the GoVN to implement Resolution No.16/2021/

4 National Assembly of Viet Nam. (2021, July 27). *Resolution No.16/2021/QH15 on the five-year socio-economic development plan for 2021–2025.*

5 Government of Viet Nam. (2021). *Resolution No.99/NQ-CP on promulgating the national strategy on climate change to 2050.*

QH15. These include the proportion of urban and rural populations with access to clean and hygienic water, the percentage of municipal solid waste safely collected and treated, the share of industrial zones equipped with centralized wastewater treatment systems, and the rate of remediation of polluting facilities. Maintaining national forest coverage at no less than 42 per cent is a headline target, complemented by indicators on hazardous waste treatment, energy intensity, renewable energy uptake, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Together, these indicators embed environmental sustainability and CCA into the core measurement of development performance.

(39). **Comprehensive policy and institutional measures:** The national SEDP defines a wide range of strategic tasks to ensure that environmental and climate goals are pursued systematically. Out of the plan's 13 strategic solutions, at least five directly address environmental protection and climate change adaptation, underscoring their centrality in national development. These include strengthening the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity, developing green, circular, and low-carbon economies, improving water resource management, and enhancing resilience against floods, salinity intrusion, coastal erosion, and other climate-related risks. The plan also stresses the importance of environmental impact assessments, monitoring and law enforcement, alongside greater community participation and international cooperation in environmental governance. Resolution No.99/NQ-CP specifies detailed responsibilities and establishes mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. Priority is placed on raising public awareness, strengthening compliance with environmental regulations, and remediating facilities that cause severe pollution.

(40). **Equity and inclusion principle embedded:** The national SEDP 2021–2025 clearly situates environmental protection and climate change adaptation within the overarching principle of *"leaving no one behind"*. The general objectives include "ensuring social progress and justice, improving the people's living standards, and ensuring a harmonious connection between economic development and cultural as well as social development," along with "ensuring social security and welfare, improving the material and spiritual life of the people." This framing ensures that access to clean water, sanitation, pollution control, and disaster risk reduction are positioned as universal entitlements. By defining environmental quality and resilience as shared public goods, the plan implicitly acknowledges their importance to the well-being of children, women, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable groups, for whom safe environments and protection from climate risks are especially critical. The plan goes further by referring to the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 and the Programme on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence 2021–2025, thus embedding gender concerns in its commitments.

(41). **Lack of explicit operationalization:** Despite this inclusive principle, the national SEDP 2021–2025 provides only a limited set of indicators that relate to vulnerable groups, such as the multidimensional poverty reduction rate, health insurance coverage, and access to clean water in rural and urban areas. These are important but remain broad, aggregated measures that do not capture the distinct needs of children, women, or other vulnerable populations. The plan assumes that universal improvements will benefit all, yet this is not always upheld in practice, especially when environmental and climate shocks disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups. Critically, the SEDP does not articulate group-specific targets or require disaggregated indicators, such as child malnutrition rates, gender-sensitive adaptation strategies, or disability-inclusive measures, leaving monitoring frameworks unable to evaluate whether benefits are equitably shared. Without tailored measures, such as child-centered disaster preparedness, gender-sensitive adaptation strategies, or age- and sex-disaggregated data, the risk remains that the most vulnerable will be insufficiently protected. As a result, the LNOB principle functions more as a guiding vision than as an operational mechanism, with the absence of tailored measures raising the risk that the most vulnerable will remain insufficiently protected.

(42). **Linkages between SEDPs and budgetary processes:** SEDPs set ambitious development goals that serve as the legal framework for socio-economic planning, approved by the National Assembly and provincial People's Councils alongside annual budgets. By law, the MTBP and MTIP are required to align with the orientations and priorities of the SEDPs, and together they determine the fiscal space and project portfolio for implementation. In practice, however, the translation of SEDP commitments into these financial instruments is uneven. While SEDPs articulate broad and often aspirational goals, the MTBP reflects tighter fiscal ceilings and recurrent expenditure pressures, and the MTIP channels most public investment into sectoral projects and hard infrastructure. As a result, cross-cutting commitments—such as environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and inclusion of vulnerable groups—face resource constraints and are often only partially supported. Moreover, although regulations establish the principle of alignment, detailed guidance on how SEDP priorities should be systematically costed and embedded in the MTBP and MTIP is lacking, leaving much discretion to line agencies and provincial authorities. This gap creates uncertainty over whether environment- and climate-related priorities, despite being prominent in SEDPs, are fully captured in financial frameworks and then reflected in annual budgets and plans. The outcome is a recurrent disconnect between the ambition of the SEDPs and the resources actually mobilized to deliver on them.

3.1.2 Provincial SEDPs 2021-2025

Mainstreaming of Environment and CCA in Provincial SEDPs

(43). **Environmental and climate principles embedded in provincial SEDPs:** The Five-Year SEDPs 2021–2025 of Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang integrate environmental protection and climate change adaptation as guiding principles for sustainable socio-economic development. Across all three provinces, these priorities are presented as cross-cutting foundations that underpin economic growth, public health, and community resilience rather than as stand-alone sectors. The SEDPs share a strong emphasis on balancing economic expansion with ecological sustainability and recognize the need to safeguard natural resources for long-term development. Each plan highlights the urgency of addressing common climate risks (such as saline intrusion, flooding, erosion, tidal surges, and land subsidence) as recurrent threats to agriculture, aquaculture, and infrastructure. All three also commit to improving access to clean water, sanitation, and waste management, reflecting the recognition that environmental quality is integral to human well-being. Taken together, the provincial SEDPs demonstrate a shared orientation toward embedding environment and climate considerations as integral to development planning in the Mekong Delta.

(44). **Indicators to measure progress, broadly aligned with national targets:** Provinces defined measurable indicators largely compatible with those in the national SEDP. Common indicators included rural access to clean and hygienic water, with targets set at 95 per cent in Bac Lieu, Ca Mau (98 per cent) and Soc Trang (97 per cent) by 2025, broadly matching national standards. Household and industrial waste collection was also prioritized, with Ca Mau aiming for 95 per cent urban waste collection and Bac Lieu and Soc Trang at 90–95 per cent. Industrial pollution control is reflected in commitments to ensure that 100 per cent of operating industrial parks and clusters have centralized wastewater treatment systems in Bac Lieu and Soc Trang, while Ca Mau linked this indicator to seafood-processing zones. All three provinces also monitored forest or tree cover, with Ca Mau targeting 25 per cent forest coverage rate, driven by its mangrove areas, and Bac Lieu and Soc Trang committing to stable or slightly increased tree-planting and greening ratios. Climate-related indicators focused on water security, structural safety of dykes and reservoirs, and disaster prevention against erosion, salinity, and flooding. This alignment ensured coherence and comparability, but also carried risks: provincial SEDPs may become overly "compliance-oriented," reproducing national targets rather than reflecting local realities. Unique challenges – such as aquaculture-related

salinity in Bac Lieu, mangrove degradation in Ca Mau, or riverbank erosion in Soc Trang – were acknowledged in narrative sections, but not consistently translated into distinct quantitative indicators. Reliance on standardized benchmarks discourages innovation in locally-tailored or equity-sensitive indicators.

(45). **Operationalization through annual SEDPs and related policies:** Five-year SEDPs are highly strategic and comprehensive documents that frequently acknowledge cross-cutting concerns such as environmental protection, climate change adaptation, gender equality, alongside the needs of vulnerable groups including children and women, typically framed as guiding principles, objectives, or broad indicators aligned with national strategies. The real challenge, however, lies in moving from these strategic commitments to concrete policy actions. To address these challenges, provinces translate five-year commitments into MTBPs and MTIPs, and then annual SEDPs. Beyond annual SEDPs, complementary policies reinforced these objectives: Bac Lieu's Decision No.448/QD-UBND detailed wastewater control, remediation of polluted rivers, and provision of rural and ethnic minority water and sanitation services, Ca Mau's sectoral appendices added disaster-preparedness indicators in education, health, and natural resources and Soc Trang issued sectoral guidance on agriculture, transport, health, and education, with indicators on early warning, resilient infrastructure, and environmental monitoring.

(46). **Mainstreaming of children, women, and other vulnerable groups:** All three provinces applied the *"leave no one behind"* principle, framing clean water, sanitation, safe environments, and disaster preparedness as universal entitlements. This ensures that children, women, ethnic minorities, and the poor are beneficiaries, even if not explicitly targeted. Across provinces, mainstreaming is strongest where universal services overlap with the needs of vulnerable groups—particularly rural water supply, sanitation, resilient schools, and health facilities. References to women are largely tied to their roles in household water use and livelihood security, while ethnic minority households are mentioned in the context of poverty reduction and social support. However, explicit group-specific measures remained limited: disaggregated indicators were mostly absent, gender-based risks were not systematically addressed, and the particular vulnerabilities of children, women, and ethnic minorities to environmental degradation and climate change were acknowledged in principle, but not translated into tailored strategies. The shared approach across provinces, therefore, relies heavily on the assumption that universal improvements will indirectly benefit vulnerable groups, rather than designing commitments specifically around their needs.

Provincial Distinctions in Mainstreaming

(47). **Bac Lieu:** The province shows a shifting placement of environmental and CCA priorities in its annual SEDPs. In some years, these issues appeared as a stand-alone task group, giving clear visibility and accountability. In other years, they were folded into broader categories such as urban planning or social development, where environmental content risked being diluted by competing priorities. The SEDP 2021–2025 commits to maintaining 95 per cent rural clean water access and 90–95 per cent waste collection, and explicitly links these to school and health facility infrastructure. While child health and sanitation are mentioned, gender-specific or vulnerable-group indicators are not included, leaving commitments heavily reliant on universal service expansion. This fluctuation (or inconsistency at times) reflects flexibility in responding to changing contexts, but it also makes environmental commitments less stable and potentially harder to monitor consistently over time.

(48). **Ca Mau:** The province demonstrates the most systematic institutional linkages between environmental/CCA objectives and sectoral development outcomes. Beyond core environmental targets, its sectoral appendices specify climate-related indicators in health (immunization coverage during disasters), education (resilient schools, DRR curricula), natural resources (coastal erosion prevention,

mangrove restoration), and social affairs (child malnutrition reduction). The SEDP highlights protection of more than 25 per cent forest cover, with a special focus on mangrove restoration in erosion-prone coastal communes, and set a 98 per cent rural water access target linked to household health outcomes. Ca Mau also included programmes for safe housing for poor households in flood- and erosion-prone areas, and drowning-prevention campaigns for children in high-risk districts. This makes Ca Mau the only one of the three provinces to embed child- and equity-sensitive climate actions within its sectoral planning framework. This approach extended environmental and climate objectives into the responsibilities of multiple line departments, ensuring a more integrated and accountable system across sectors.

(49). **Soc Trang:** The province adopted a technically comprehensive, but equity-light approach. Its SEDPs include broad sectoral appendices covering agriculture, industry, transport, education, and health, with numerous indicators on DRR, early warning, and infrastructure resilience. However, these are framed in largely technical terms (percentage of roads with warning signs, percentage of erosion areas with protective measures), without explicit reference to gender or the needs of vulnerable groups. Targets included 97 per cent rural water access and 95 per cent urban waste collection, alongside commitments to stabilize riverbank erosion and ensure all industrial parks have centralized wastewater treatment. Ethnic Khmer households—who made up nearly 30 per cent of the provincial population—were referenced in poverty reduction programmes, but their specific vulnerabilities to climate change (rain-fed rice dependence, saline intrusion) were not systematically integrated into environment or CCA targets. As a result, the province had strong coverage of environmental and climate issues in its planning machinery, but fewer institutional mechanisms to ensure that children, women, and disadvantaged groups were prioritized.

3.2 Implementation of Environment and CCA in SEDPs

3.2.1 Translation of SEDP Commitments into Practice

(50). **Shared approaches to operationalization**: Across the three focus provinces, the translation of SEDP commitments on environment and climate change adaptation followed a broadly similar pattern, anchored in regulations, infrastructure investment, and community awareness. Provinces issued decisions on solid and hazardous waste management, expanded clean water networks to cover nearly all households, and upgraded dike and embankment systems to counteract flooding, saline intrusion, and erosion. Forest protection and afforestation were carried out, with Ca Mau focused on mangrove restoration to stabilize its eroding coastline and Soc Trang combining tree-planting programmes with Khmer community livelihood models. Awareness and education campaigns such as *Clean Up the World* and anti-plastic waste drives became institutionalized annual events. Schools and health facilities were also targeted for resilience upgrades: Ca Mau invested in storm- and flood-resilient classrooms, Soc Trang piloted climate-resilient health stations in low-lying communes, and Bac Lieu linked school sanitation improvements to safe water and waste management programmes. Together, these measures reflect a common approach of translating high-level SEDP commitments into visible action through a combination of regulatory frameworks, investment in physical infrastructure, and mobilization of public awareness and participation. However, the focus was largely universal in nature. While women, children and ethnic minorities benefited indirectly from safer water, schools, and health services, few measures were explicitly tailored to their distinct vulnerabilities.

(51). **Variation in implementation focus**: Within this shared approach, however, each province emphasized different aspects of implementation. Bac Lieu focused strongly on issuing regulatory frameworks and developing long-term master plans, particularly for solid and hazardous waste treatment, signaling its reliance

on institutional rules and planned infrastructure. The province adopted decisions to standardize urban waste collection and began planning for hazardous waste treatment facilities, but implementation lagged, with school and health-sector links to environmental programmes largely indirect. Ca Mau took a more integrated approach, embedding DRR and climate change adaptation into multiple sectors, with explicit indicators for education, health, and child-sensitive disaster planning. This included investments in storm- and flood-resilient classrooms, expansion of drowning-prevention campaigns, coastal embankment reinforcement, and restoration of more than 25 per cent forest cover through mangroves, while maintaining rural clean water access at 98 per cent. These efforts represent the most deliberate attempt among provinces to mainstream social inclusion dimensions into environmental and climate priorities, explicitly addressing risks to children and poor households in flood- and erosion-prone areas. By contrast, Soc Trang placed its emphasis on ecosystem-based approaches, notably coastal mangrove restoration and afforestation, combined with livelihood initiatives such as aquaculture under forest canopies. The province also prioritized riverbank protection work and community-based disaster preparedness in Khmer-majority communes, but the framing of these programmes remained with minimal integration of gender or equity considerations.

3.2.2 Delivered Measurable Results

(52). **Expanded access to safe water and sanitation:** All three provinces recorded significant progress in improving water supply and sanitation, which directly benefits women and children as primary household water users and caregivers. With 2025's targets, Bac Lieu and Soc Trang achieved 95–97 per cent rural clean water coverage, while Ca Mau reached 98 per cent, surpassing national averages for rural areas. The expansion of piped water networks and safe wells reduced reliance on unsafe surface water, especially during dry-season saline intrusion. In Soc Trang, more than 182,000 households are now served by wells, and in Bac Lieu rural households reported a steady reduction in time spent collecting water. Provinces also reported that all schools and health facilities now accessed hygienic water and sanitation facilities, reducing children's exposure to waterborne diseases and easing women's caregiving burdens. These gains are particularly important in ethnic minority-dominated areas, where poor sanitation and unsafe water were previously more prevalent.

(53). **Improved resilience of schools and health services:** Investments in climate-resilient infrastructure have strengthened the protection of children and vulnerable populations. Ca Mau upgraded more than 120 classrooms to storm- and flood-resilient standards during 2021–2024, alongside the introduction of DRR curricula in schools that reached thousands of students. These measures ensured not only safer facilities, but also the integration of preparedness skills into children's education. Bac Lieu upgraded sanitation and water systems in rural schools and connected more health facilities to safe water sources, which reduced service interruptions during saline intrusion periods. Soc Trang piloted climate-resilient health stations in low-lying communes, ensuring continuity of maternal and child health services during saline intrusion and flooding, and strengthened cold-chain storage for vaccines to maintain immunization coverage. Together, these results demonstrated that when education and health systems integrated resilience measures, children, pregnant women, and elderly patients are better protected against climate shocks.

(54). **Targeted child safety and health initiatives:** Where explicit child-focused indicators were included, results were more visible. Ca Mau implemented drowning-prevention campaigns in high-risk communes, reporting coverage of more than 12,000 children in 2023–2024, supported by school-based training and community awareness drives. In addition, the province invested in safe housing for poor households in flood-prone areas, which directly reduced children's exposure to unsafe shelter. Ca Mau also maintained immunization rates during disasters above 95 per cent,

even in flood-affected districts, demonstrating the resilience of health services to climate impacts. Bac Lieu organized annual "safe school" weeks focused on disaster preparedness, engaging teachers and parents, while Soc Trang expanded school nutrition programmes in flood-prone districts, indirectly supporting child resilience by reducing malnutrition risks during emergencies. These measures not only safeguarded children's lives, but also ensured continuity of basic health outcomes in climate-stressed settings, highlighting the effectiveness of explicit child-sensitive programmes.

(55). **Ecosystem and livelihood protection with community participation:** Results also generated benefits for vulnerable rural and ethnic minority households when ecosystem-based solutions were combined with social measures. Soc Trang restored more than 2,000 hectares of mangroves and riverbank protection areas between 2021 and 2024, integrating aquaculture-under-forest models that provided stable livelihoods to ethnic Khmer households, who made up nearly 30 per cent of the population. In Ca Mau, mangrove restoration contributed to maintaining 25 per cent forest cover and creating income diversification for poor coastal families, with more than 1,500 households reported to have benefited from combined forestry–aquaculture models. Bac Lieu focused on urban greening and rural tree-planting initiatives, linking them with community clean-up campaigns and youth environmental clubs. These actions not only helped buffer against climate risks, but also provided livelihood opportunities, food sources, and community mobilization channels for women and ethnic minorities. The evidence suggests that ecosystem-based approaches deliver wider and more inclusive benefits when explicitly linked to household income and community participation.

(56). **Waste management and cleaner environments:** Bac Lieu and Soc Trang achieved more than 90 per cent urban solid waste collection by 2024, while Ca Mau reached 95 per cent coverage, reducing household exposure to pollution and improving neighbourhood hygiene. These improvements are especially relevant to women and children, often most affected by local waste mismanagement. Ca Mau also expanded hazardous waste collection and treatment for seafood processing zones, reducing water and soil contamination that previously affected aquaculture-dependent communities. Annual community campaigns such as Clean Up the World and anti-plastic waste drives became institutionalized events, often mobilizing students, youth unions, and women's groups to lead activities. Soc Trang's Women's Union reported engaging more than 20,000 members in waste-reduction campaigns, while Bac Lieu integrated school-based recycling programmes into its environmental education efforts. These achievements illustrate how combining waste management infrastructure with education and community mobilization creates cleaner and safer living environments benefit vulnerable groups.

(57). **Evidence of stronger results with explicit measures:** Outcomes were consistently stronger where provinces adopted explicit, group-sensitive indicators and programmes. In Ca Mau where child-focused DRR, safe housing for poor households and school safety were written into the SEDP, results included tangible improvements in child safety, household resilience, and continuity of education. Soc Trang's integration of mangrove restoration with Khmer livelihoods showed measurable gains in environmental protection and social inclusion, demonstrating how linking climate adaptation with ethnic minority livelihoods can multiply impacts. By contrast, provinces relying mainly on universal service expansion recorded steady progress in water and sanitation, but showed fewer demonstrable results specific to women, children, or vulnerable households. This contrast provides evidence that mainstreaming vulnerable groups through explicit measures and disaggregated targets not only raises visibility, but also leads to more pronounced and measurable benefits for those groups.

3.2.3 Key Gaps Remaining

(58). **Shared structural weaknesses:** Despite tangible progress, all three provinces shared a structural weakness: results were reported in general terms and lacked disaggregated indicators to capture outcomes for children, women, and vulnerable groups. Indicators such as 95–98 per cent rural water coverage or 90–95 per cent urban waste collection were only recorded in aggregate, masking persistent inequalities in access for poor households, Khmer communities, or women-headed families. Access to clean water, sanitation, and environmental services is recorded in aggregate percentages, without differentiation for disadvantaged households, schools, or health facilities. Wastewater treatment remained especially weak in rural areas and small-scale livestock zones, with untreated aquaculture effluent in Bac Lieu and Soc Trang and livestock waste in Ca Mau continuing to contaminate canals and ponds. Climate adaptation projects are dominated by large-scale engineering or ecological solutions, such as sea dikes, embankments or mangrove planting, while complementary social support measures are minimal or absent. Across the provinces, no earmarked budget lines for child-sensitive DRR, gender-responsive adaptation, or ethnic-minority inclusion were evident. Limited funding for these purposes were mainly from national target programmes rather than SEDP-specific allocations. This creates a consistent gap between broad commitments in SEDPs and inclusive, equitable outcomes in practice.

(59). **Differences in the nature of gaps:** These gaps differed across provinces. Ca Mau stood out for introducing explicit child-sensitive indicators, with more than 12,000 children reached by drowning-prevention programmes and immunization coverage maintained above 95 per cent during disasters. Yet, gender equality, ethnic inclusion, and disability-sensitive measures remained absent, resulting in a partial and uneven inclusion profiles. In Bac Lieu, progress relied heavily on regulatory and infrastructural measures, such as decisions on hazardous waste management and expansion of urban waste collection, but without clear mechanisms to integrate social targeting, resulting in general improvements without evidence of equitable access. In Soc Trang, efforts to conserve mangroves and resettle high-risk households are commendable, with more than 2,000 hectares of mangroves restored between 2021 and 2024, but these projects lacked accompanying social support packages to ensure that women-headed households, poor families, or ethnic minorities benefited fully. These distinctions suggest that while the provinces differed in the tools prioritized, the underlying weakness remains the same: environmental and climate action was not systematically tailored to the realities and needs of vulnerable groups.

(60). **Shared gaps across provinces:** Implementation of environmental and CCA commitments in SEDPs faced persistent limitations despite visible progress. Indicators remain broad and general, rarely disaggregated to show outcomes for children, women, or vulnerable groups. Monitoring frameworks tracked aggregate water, sanitation, and waste coverage but did not provide evidence of climate-resilient access in schools, clinics or disadvantaged communes. Engineering-heavy projects such as dikes, embankments, and saline intrusion systems dominated investments, while softer social measures for livelihoods, health, or gender equity were weak or absent. Participation of vulnerable groups in SEDP implementation is limited, confined mainly to public campaigns such as *Clean Up the World* or anti-plastic drives, leaving them as indirect beneficiaries rather than active stakeholders in shaping environmental and climate priorities.

(61). **Financing gaps in implementing environment and climate commitments for vulnerable groups:** A critical weakness across all three provinces is the lack of clarity on how environment and climate change priorities are financed. SEDP reviews contain no discussion of key financing instruments, such as MTBPs and MTIPs, making it unclear how resources were allocated to SEDP priorities and to environment and climate commitments, in particular. Provincial SEDPs set ambitious targets, such as achieving 95–98 per cent rural clean water coverage, expanding wastewater treatment or restoring mangroves, yet evidence across

provinces shows that resources to implement these targets remained limited and fragmented. No dedicated budget lines were identified for addressing the needs of children, women, or ethnic minority households in the implementation of environment and climate priorities, meaning that these groups benefited only indirectly through general service expansion. Instead, financing appears to come largely from National Target Programmes (NTPs) with limited envelops. This financing gap weakens the ability of provinces to systematically translate inclusive SEDP commitments into equitable outcomes for those most at risk.

(62). **Provincial distinctions in gaps:** Challenges take different forms across the provinces. Bac Lieu emphasized regulatory frameworks and large infrastructure, but lacked mechanisms to integrate social inclusion, leaving progress general and undifferentiated. Ca Mau embedded DRR into education and health, yet gender equality and ethnic inclusion remained under-addressed, creating a partial approach to social integration. Soc Trang invested in ecosystem-based measures such as mangrove restoration and resettlement projects, but these were not accompanied by tailored social support for women-headed households or poor ethnic minorities. Together, these differences showed that while each province selected distinct pathways—regulatory, sectoral mainstreaming, or nature-based—the underlying challenge remained the same: SEDPs have not fully bridged the gap between broad commitments and inclusive, equitable outcomes.



4. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW OF CLIMATE, ENVORONMENT AND GREEN GROWTH PLANS

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(63). **From SEDPs to other climate-related frameworks:** While the previous section analyzed SEDPs as the binding planning instrument that guides socio-economic development and resource allocation, this section turns to climate, environment, green growth, and related frameworks that operate in parallel. These frameworks set out strategic visions and sectoral commitments, but are not always systematically embedded into provincial or national SEDPs. The analysis, therefore, examines the extent to which these frameworks were mainstreamed into SEDPs, where they remained separate, and what this meant for coherence, financing, and the inclusion of children, women, and other vulnerable groups.

(64). **Implementation context:** National policy frameworks on green growth, climate change, environmental protection, and sustainable development are overarching in nature, setting long-term visions, goals, and strategic orientations that align Viet Nam with global agendas, such as the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. They provide the conceptual foundation for sectoral and provincial action, but remain largely normative: they establish directions and targets without dedicated budgets. Implementation thus relies on being translated into more concrete instruments such as sectoral action plans, and most importantly SEDPs. In practice, while national frameworks define the broad vision, SEDPs are more commonly referred to in actual planning and, in the case of annual SEDPs, are directly tied to resource allocation. This makes the integration of frameworks into SEDPs critical: otherwise they risk remaining aspirational, with uneven progress across sectors and provinces and gaps between strategic commitments and measurable results. Within this context, the following analysis synthesizes how children and other vulnerable groups were mainstreamed into these frameworks at the national level, as well as into provincial frameworks of the three former provinces.

4.1 Mainstreaming Children and Other Vulnerable Groups in Climate, Environment, Green Growth, Sustainable Development Plans

4.1.1 Mainstreaming Children and Vulnerable Groups in National Frameworks

(65). **National Action Plan for Sustainable Development:** Viet Nam's National Action Plan for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Decision No.622/2017/QĐ-TTg[6]) provides the overarching framework to align domestic development objectives with global SDGs. It sets out 115 Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goals (VSDGs), with Goals 1–6 directly related to child well-being (poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, and water/sanitation), and

6 Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2017). *Decision No.622/2017/QĐ-TTg on the promulgation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

several others indirectly relevant. To support implementation, the government and the now former MPI issued resolutions, directives, and ministerial guidance to integrate SDGs into five-year SEDPs and establish monitoring indicators. However, the monitoring framework does not consistently include child- or gender-disaggregated indicators, meaning equity-sensitive tracking heavily depends on sectoral initiatives. This framework offers a structured foundation for sustainable development, but its effectiveness relies on sectoral and provincial translation into policies, plans, and resource allocation.

(66). **National Strategy and Action Plan on Green Growth:** The National Green Growth Strategy 2021–2030 (Decision No.1658/2021/QĐ-TTg[7]) and Action Plan 2021–2030 (Decision No.882/2022/QĐ-TTg[8]) advance a human-centred green transition, aiming for inclusivity, equity, and resilience. While children are not mentioned explicitly, the strategy's emphasis on responsible living, equitable access, and reduced vulnerability positions them as indirect beneficiaries. The action plan highlights two particularly relevant themes: communication and education for green living in schools and communities, and equity in the green transition to ensure vulnerable groups—including women, children, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities—can access opportunities, infrastructure, and services. Notably, the action plan assigns implementation roles to the education sector and Viet Nam Women's Union, offering institutional entry points to directly address gender and intergenerational equity in green growth programmes.

(67). **National Strategy on Climate Change:** The revised National Climate Change Strategy to 2050 (Decision No.896/2022/QĐ-TTg[9]) places strong emphasis on adaptation, resilience, and protecting vulnerable groups. It sets clear targets such as ensuring national food security, providing hygienic water to 95 per cent of the population by 2030, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Importantly, it includes education-related solutions: strengthening community knowledge, particularly for women and children, and integrating climate change into school curricula. The strategy also mandates gender mainstreaming and requires ministries and provinces to prepare sectoral and local action plans, creating formal accountability for addressing the needs of women and children in climate adaptation. This strategy provides one of the most explicit recognitions of the disproportionate risks faced by children and women, framing them as groups requiring targeted awareness and resilience-building measures.

(68). **National Adaptation Plan (NAP):** The updated NAP (Decision No.1422/2024/QD-TTg[10]) outlines a comprehensive agenda to build adaptive capacity, reduce risks, and strengthen institutions for climate resilience. Its three pillars focus on enhancing adaptive capacity in natural, economic, and social systems, whereby reducing disaster risks through improved forecasting and management and strengthening governance, institutions, and financing. Although children are not explicitly identified as a target group, the NAP highlights social protection, gender equality, and public awareness as integral parts of climate adaptation, providing entry points for integrating child-sensitive measures in implementation. Importantly, the NAP references integration with the NTPs on New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction, which are among the few financing channels with potential to support vulnerable households in climate-affected areas.

(69). **Environmental Protection Policies:** Viet Nam has progressively strengthened its environmental protection framework through the 2020 Law on Environmental

7 Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2021). *Decision No.1658/2021/QĐ-TTg approving the National Green Growth Strategy for the 2021–2030 period, with a vision to 2050*.

8 Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2022). *Decision No.882/2022/QĐ-TTg approving the National Green Growth Action Plan for the 2021–2030 period*.

9 Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2022). *Decision No.896/2022/QĐ-TTg approving the National Climate Change Strategy to 2050*.

10 Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2024). *Decision No. 1422/2024/QĐ-TTg approving the National Adaptation Plan for the period to 2030, with a vision to 2050*.

Protection[11], National Environmental Protection Strategy to 2030, and supporting biodiversity and solid waste management strategies. These documents set ambitious goals: halting pollution and degradation, restoring environmental quality, and ensuring every citizen's right to a clean and safe environment by 2050. Implementation has been advanced through master plans, ministerial guidelines, and local monitoring frameworks. While primarily environmentally-focus, these policies establish the enabling conditions—clean air, safe water, and reduced pollution—that directly influence child health and welfare. Yet they remain largely silent on equity-sensitive implementation, creating a need for stronger operational linkages with gender and child protection frameworks.

(70). **Other relevant strategies and regional frameworks:** The National Strategy for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control to 2030[12] emphasizes mainstreaming disaster knowledge into school curricula, awareness campaigns, and community capacity-building. Regionally, Resolution No.120/2017/NQ-CP[13] on sustainable development of the Mekong Delta in response to climate change and the Mekong Delta Master Plan (Decision No.287/2020/QĐ-TTg[14]) prioritize people-centred sustainable development in a region highly vulnerable to climate change. While these frameworks do not mention children explicitly, their focus on inclusive development, resilient livelihoods, and integrated water resource management offers indirect benefits that support child and community well-being. The Mekong Delta Master Plan, in particular, identifies ethnic minority and poor households as priority beneficiaries of livelihood diversification programmes, opening opportunities to strengthen the child- and gender-sensitive dimensions of climate adaptation in the region.

(71). **Synthesis on integration of children and other vulnerable groups in climate-related strategies and frameworks:** Across the frameworks, explicit attention to children and vulnerable populations is not always apparent. The National Action Plan for Sustainable Development, aligned with global SDGs, provides the most direct entry points for children's welfare. The revised National Climate Change Strategy to 2025 explicitly acknowledges children and women as vulnerable groups needing targeted awareness and resilience-building measures, while the Green Growth Action Plan introduces a thematic focus on equity in the green transition. However, the NAP, environmental protection strategies, regional plans and other frameworks tend to classify children only as part of broader vulnerable groups, without specific objectives or indicators. The background papers also highlighted that participation of children and other vulnerable groups in policy development was minimal. Overall, while there are entry points, the mainstreaming of children and vulnerable groups into these frameworks remains limited, highlighting the importance of targeted integration in implementation to ensure no one is left behind.

(72). **Linkages to the five-year SEDPs:** A critical observation is the mismatch in timing between the adoption of national frameworks on climate change, green growth, adaptation, and environmental protection and approval of the 2021–2030 Socio-Economic Development Strategy (SEDS) and the SEDP 2021–2025. With the exception of the National Action Plan for the 2030 Agenda, almost all other frameworks were issued after approval of the SEDS and SEDP. This sequencing made it impossible for these frameworks to be systematically mainstreamed into the five-year SEDPs for the 2021–2025 cycle. As a result, while SEDPs include general commitments on environmental protection and climate adaptation, as discussed in Section 3, they are not explicitly anchored in or derived from these

11 National Assembly of Viet Nam. (2020). *Law on Environmental Protection (Law No.72/2020/QH14)*.

12 Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2021). *Decision No.1054/QĐ-TTg approving the National Strategy for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control to 2030, with a vision to 2050*.

13 Government of Viet Nam. (2017). *Resolution No.120/2017/NQ-CP on sustainable and climate-resilient development of the Mekong Delta*.

14 Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2020). *Decision No.287/2020/QĐ-TTg approving the Master Plan on the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta for the period 2021–2030, with a vision to 2050*.

overarching frameworks. Without integration into SEDPs, frameworks on climate change, green growth, adaptation, and environmental protection coexist alongside the five-year SEDPs, embedding operationalize of the frameworks in practice. Provincial CCA reviews also reveal sequencing gaps that created uncertainty at local level: while provinces acknowledge the new frameworks in their annual plans, they often continued to rely on older SEDP targets, resulting in fragmented priorities and uneven monitoring.

(73). **Linkages to budgetary processes:** A key feature of the national frameworks on climate change, green growth, adaptation, and environmental protection is they set principles, objectives, and targets, but do not come with dedicated budgets. Achieving their objectives depends on how effectively they are translated into concrete policies with accompanying budget allocations. Unlike SEDPs, the State Budget Law does not require budget estimates or medium-term investment plans to be prepared in accordance with priorities set out in these frameworks. This makes mainstreaming them into SEDPs the most practical pathway to secure financing for their objectives. Without such integration, there is a risk of duplication, allocating resources separately for environmental protection and CCA within SEDPs and again for implementation of these frameworks, while neither is fully resourced or aligned. Provincial CCA reviews confirmed this gap: in Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Soc Trang, financing for climate and environment continued to depend heavily on NTPs (New Rural Development, Poverty Reduction) rather than being reflected in dedicated lines of the MTBP or MTIP or annual SEDPs (being operational slices of these MTBP and MTIP).

4.1.2 Mainstreaming Children and Vulnerable Groups into Provincial Frameworks

(74). **Operationalization of national frameworks in provincial contexts:** In all three provinces, national policy frameworks on sustainable development, green growth, climate change, and environmental protection were primarily operationalized through issuances of provincial plans and action programmes that mirrored national strategies. Each province translated major national frameworks – such as the National Green Growth Strategy, National Climate Change Strategy, NAP, and National Action Plan for Sustainable Development – into corresponding provincial plans. These provincial plans typically outlined objectives, task groups, and solutions aligned with national frameworks, and assigned responsibilities to local departments, agencies, and authorities. This indicates that provincial responses are strongly compliance-driven, reflecting national priorities in local contexts. Some provincial highlights are as follows:

(75). **Bac Lieu:** It issued a comprehensive set of provincial plans, including action plans for the SDGs (Plan No.18/2020/KH-UBND), implementing Resolution 120/2017/NQ-CP on Mekong Delta sustainability and climate change responses (Plan No.96/2023/KH-UBND, Decision No.371/2024/QD-UBND) and a provincial green growth plan (Decision No.148/2024/QĐ-UBND). Several explicitly addressed children and vulnerable groups, particularly through task groups on equity in the green transition and on communication and education that integrated climate change and disaster preparedness into school curricula and community awareness campaigns. In addition, Bac Lieu issued its own complementary policies, such as plans for climate-resilient agriculture, disaster prevention, and awareness campaigns which show a degree of provincial initiative beyond compliance. The inclusion of resource mobilization provisions in the green growth plan suggests an intention to link frameworks to budgetary processes, but evidence of actual budget allocations was not observed in the review paper.

(76). **Ca Mau:** It developed a wide range of provincial frameworks, such as the Green Growth Action Plan (Decision No.2243/2023/QĐ-UBND replacing Decision No.1601/2018/QĐ-UBND), a Provincial Action Plan on Climate Change Response to 2050 (Plan No.49/2023/KH-UBND), and a plan to implement the updated National

Adaptation Plan (Plan No.36/2025/KH-UBND). The province introduced specific monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, such as the Climate Adaptation M&E Plan (Plan No.20/2023/KH-UBND) with 63 indicators across multiple sectors. Many of its frameworks explicitly mentioned social protection, gender equality, and equity in the green transition. Several action plans highlighted community participation and identified women, children, and ethnic minorities as target groups, at least in principle. This suggests a relatively stronger integration of social dimensions compared to the other two provinces. Financial provisions were included in the Green Growth Action Plan, which emphasized resource mobilization, but budgetary allocations remained unclear from the available evidence, as was the case in Bac Lieu.

(77). **Soc Trang:** This province issued provincial action plans for the Paris Agreement (Plan No.47/2017/KH-UBND), Resolution 120 (Plan No.43/2018/KH-UBND), green growth (Decision No.133/2018/QĐ-UBND, Plan No.198/2023/KH-UBND), climate change response (Decision No.1422/2021/QĐ-UBND), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Plan No.116/2019/KH-UBND). These plans closely reflected national frameworks and objectives, focused on resilience, GHG emission reductions, and sustainable livelihoods. However, unlike Ca Mau and Bac Lieu, the integration of child- and vulnerability-related priorities were less visible in Soc Trang's action plans. The Department of Education and Training has issued sectoral plans aligned with provincial action plans, but the content of these plans was largely repetitive, with limited evidence of innovation. While provincial frameworks defined responsibilities and portfolios of projects, no evidence was found linking these directly to budgetary processes or earmarked resources.

(78). **Mainstreaming children and vulnerable groups to provincial frameworks:** Among the three provinces, Ca Mau displayed the most consistent efforts to include children and vulnerable groups in provincial climate change and green growth frameworks, with specific references to safe housing for poor households, child drowning-prevention programmes, resilient schools, and health-sector preparedness during disasters. The province also highlighted the role of women and mass organizations in awareness campaigns, giving community participation a clearer institutional basis. Bac Lieu has introduced some relevant elements, particularly in green growth and awareness-raising plans, such as school-based environmental education and Women's Union–led campaigns on plastic waste reduction, but are less comprehensive than in Ca Mau. Soc Trang's frameworks showed commitments focused heavily on technical solutions such as mangrove restoration, coastal protection, and flood control, while children, women, and ethnic minorities—especially Khmer communities—are only indirectly referenced through poverty reduction or general equity goals. In all three provinces, children were usually mentioned as part of broader "vulnerable groups," rather than as a distinct category requiring tailored interventions, and none of the provinces include disaggregated targets or budgets specifically for children, women, or persons with disabilities in their climate-related action plans.

(79). **Level of innovation and budgetary linkages:** The evidence suggests that provincial frameworks are predominantly compliance-driven, largely mirroring national policies and strategies. Bac Lieu and Ca Mau introduced some complementary initiatives that go slightly beyond replication, such as Bac Lieu's pilot climate-resilient agriculture and aquaculture models and integration of school-based awareness campaigns, and Ca Mau's inclusion of monitoring and evaluation indicators for adaptation, as well as child-sensitive DRR actions like resilient classrooms and drowning-prevention programmes. These measures represent modest innovations, though they remained limited in scope. Soc Trang showed its plans that largely focused on technical replication of national frameworks, centred on mangrove restoration, erosion control and dyke construction, offering little attention to social inclusion or locally-tailored solutions for Khmer households. At the same time, although some provincial plans (notably in Bac Lieu and Ca Mau) included provisions on resource mobilization or assigned financing responsibilities to departments, the CCA reviews revealed no evidence of earmarked budget lines

or integration with the MTBP or MTIP. Financing references are general in nature—such as "mobilizing domestic and international resources"—without quantified commitments or equity-sensitive allocations. As a result, linkages between provincial frameworks and budgetary processes remained weak across all three provinces, with implementation heavily dependent on subsequent annual SEDPs and NTPs, as follows:

(80). **Linkages between provincial frameworks and SEDPs:** Evidence from provincial CCA reviews showed that provincial frameworks on green growth, climate change, environmental protection, and sustainable development were primarily issued as separate action plans to implement national strategies, rather than being systematically embedded into the provincial SEDP processes. The fact that almost all these frameworks were issued post-approval of the 2021–2025 SEDP rendered it impossible to mainstream these frameworks into provincial SEDPs. Therefore, these frameworks set out objectives, assigned responsibilities and introduced monitoring indicators in some cases, but generally coexisted alongside five-year and annual SEDPs rather than being integral parts of them. The only partial exception was Soc Trang, where environmental protection efforts were reported as implemented mainly through the annual SEDP. It is also clear from the provincial SEDP reviews that environmental protection and CCA were mainstreamed to some extent, reflected in principles, objectives, and selected indicators. However, there is no direct evidence that provincial SEDPs explicitly cite or build upon overarching frameworks on green growth or sustainable development. Without explicit integration, these frameworks risk remaining aspirational, with weak enforceability and limited prospects for stable resource allocation.

4.2 Children and Other Vulnerable Groups in the Implementation of Climate, Environment, Green Growth, Sustainable Development Plans

4.2.1 Translation of Commitments to Practice

(81). **Children, women, and other vulnerable groups in objectives and targets of provincial climate-related strategies:** Across the three provinces, objectives and solutions for children and vulnerable groups were embedded indirectly within broader policy frameworks on green growth, climate change, environmental protection, and sustainable development. These targets commonly focused on access to clean and hygienic water, sanitation, healthcare coverage, nutrition, poverty reduction, and school quality. Solutions emphasized communication and education campaigns, integration of climate and environmental content into curricula, climate-resilient infrastructure, and strengthened public services such as immunization and nutrition programmes. For instance, all three provinces reaffirmed commitments to maintaining rural clean water access rates above 95 per cent by 2025 and ensuring 100 per cent of schools and health facilities have safe water and sanitation. Immunization coverage is targeted to remain at or above 95 per cent, while provincial SDG action plans highlighted reducing child malnutrition and ensuring inclusive education. Child-specific targets were most visible in provincial SDG action plans, while green growth and climate change strategies generally categorized children and women under "vulnerable groups," without setting measurable sub-targets. In addition to these shared similarities, variations across provinces in setting objectives and targets were apparent.

(82). **Bac Lieu**: Plan No.18/2020/KH-UBND mainstreamed several SDG child indicators, including under-five malnutrition reductions and universal access to hygienic water in rural schools. The Green Growth Action Plan (Decision No.148/2024/QĐ-UBND) linked awareness and green living to households and schools, with targets to engage 70 per cent of students in environmental education campaigns. Climate action plans such as Plan No.96/2023/KH-UBND and Decision No.71/2023/QĐ-UBND introduced resilience and WASH goals relevant to children and health,

including commitments to expand climate-resilient school infrastructure and strengthen community health services during saline intrusion and floods.

(83). **Ca Mau**: Green Growth Action Plan (Decision No.2243/2023/QĐ-UBND), the Climate Change Strategy Implementation Plan (Plan No.49/2023/KH-UBND), and Environmental Protection Strategy Plan (Plan No.263/2023/KH-UBND) emphasized equity and inclusiveness, safe housing, relocation of high-risk households, and universal climate awareness. These documents highlighted commitments to relocate more than 1,000 households from erosion-prone coastal zones by 2025, with priority given to poor and vulnerable families, and to ensure that 100 per cent of relocated households have access to schools and health services in resettlement areas. They included child-focused drowning-prevention programmes and targets to maintain more than 98 per cent rural clean water coverage.

(84). **Soc Trang**: SDG Action Plan (Plan No.116/2019/KH-UBND) included a wide range of child-related indicators, such as reducing the stunting rate among children under-five to below 20 per cent and ensuring universal lower secondary education completion. The Green Growth Plan (Plan No.198/2023/KH-UBND) and Climate Change Response Plan (Decision No.1422/2021/QĐ-UBND) addressed awareness, education, and resettlement in disaster-prone areas. Targets included resettling at least 600 households from high-risk flood and erosion zones by 2025 and increasing community-based disaster preparedness training to cover 80 per cent of households, with Women's Union and Youth Union explicitly mobilized for outreach.

(85). **Implementation approaches in practice:** The main focus of implementation has been on communication campaigns, school-based education, climate-resilient infrastructure, and public service delivery. All three provinces integrated disaster risk reduction and climate change education into school curricula, organized awareness campaigns through media and public events, and promoted safe schools and child-friendly learning environments. Infrastructure investments focused on dikes, embankments, saline intrusion control, and water supply systems, which indirectly benefitted children by reducing exposure to disasters and ensuring safer living environments. Service-delivery components included high immunization coverage, child nutrition monitoring, and expanded health insurance access. For example, immunization rates were maintained above 95 per cent in all three provinces, and nutrition monitoring continued to target children under-five in line with provincial SDG commitments. Tailored measures for children and vulnerable groups – such as Safe School initiatives, drowning-prevention training, and disability-inclusive school facilities – were present but limited relative to the broader population-wide interventions. CCA reviews noted that while vulnerable groups benefited indirectly, only Ca Mau and Soc Trang documented child-specific or equity-focused pilots, underscoring the uneven depth of mainstreaming across provinces. Some observed distinctions across the three provinces, as follows:

(86). **Bac Lieu:** Concentrated on infrastructure (coastal protection, dyke upgrades, mangrove restoration), including reinforcement of more than 30 kilometres of dikes and the planting of several hundred hectares of mangroves between 2021 and 2023. These were supported by awareness campaigns and a province-wide child protection network that linked schools, health stations, and community groups to promote child safety and climate awareness.

(87). **Ca Mau:** Provincial stakeholders operationalized broader frameworks with stronger measurement systems, introducing 63 adaptation indicators across sectors and reporting on school resilience, household water safety, and coastal protection. The province also promoted Safe Homes or Safe Schools, upgrading more than 120 classrooms to be storm- and flood-resilient, drowning-prevention initiatives that reached more than 12,000 children in high-risk communes during 2023–2024, and climate awareness contests such as "A Day as a Junior Reporter on DRR," which engaged both schoolchildren and teachers.

(88). **Soc Trang:** Maintained regular operation of the Provincial Children's Council, which provided a platform for children to voice concerns on climate risks during provincial consultations. It also promoted the "Child-Friendly Commune/Ward/Township" model and strengthened child protection and care activities. In addition, the province mobilized significant resources, including donor contributions, to resettle 600 households from high-risk erosion and flood zones by 2025 and expand WASH schemes in vulnerable rural communes. The province was also supported by UNICEF's Child-Friendly Soc Trang initiative (2022–2026), which integrates child-focused objectives into climate and sustainable development programming, with specific activities on safe water access in schools, community-based disaster preparedness, and awareness campaigns for Khmer children and families.

4.2.2 Delivered Measurable Results

(89). **Overlaps of results across SEDPs and climate-related frameworks**: The achievements observed from implementation of provincial action plans on green growth, climate change adaptation, environmental protection, and sustainable development were largely consistent with results already recorded under SEDPs. This overlap reflects the fact that provincial climate-related strategies and frameworks are often derived from, or implemented in parallel with, SEDP commitments, covering the same domains of water supply, resilient schools and health services, household resettlement, mangrove protection, and awareness-raising. As a result, many improvements—such as expanded WASH access, strengthened disaster education in schools, and protection of high-risk households—mirrored outcomes achieved through SEDP implementation. The similarity suggests that SEDPs serve as the primary channel through which climate and environmental frameworks are operationalized, while the frameworks themselves provide complementary policy signals rather than distinct, additional areas of action.

(90). **Integration of climate change into education and awareness programmes:** Provincial action plans translated high-level commitments into regular campaigns and community engagement activities. In Bac Lieu, more than 70 per cent of schools had incorporated green living and climate awareness into classroom activities by 2023, supported by province-wide campaigns on plastic waste reduction and energy saving, with the Women's Union and Youth Union mobilizing thousands of members. Ca Mau introduced innovative awareness initiatives, such as the "A Day as a Junior Reporter on DRR" contest, which engaged several thousand students in climate reporting and disaster preparedness, while also organizing climate-awareness contests and essay competitions in secondary schools. Soc Trang institutionalized children's voices through the Provincial Children's Council, which met regularly and explicitly raised concerns about flooding, salinity, and unsafe schools the council's recommendations were reported to provincial leaders, helping ensure that children's perspectives were incorporated into action plans. These achievements illustrate that integrating climate issues into education and communication is becoming a sustained practice across the three provinces, benefiting children and vulnerable communities through knowledge and participation.

(91). **Resettlement and protection of high-risk households:** Provincial climate change and environmental protection plans also prioritized relocation and safe housing for households in areas exposed to erosion, flooding, or saline intrusion. Ca Mau relocated more than 1,000 households from erosion-prone coastal zones into safer settlements, with the provincial plan explicitly requiring that all resettled households have access to schools, clinics, and clean water supply. Soc Trang mobilized both state and donor resources to relocate more than 600 households from flood-prone communes, and resettlement projects included improved WASH schemes to reduce health risks for women and children. Bac Lieu implemented safe housing programmes for poor and vulnerable households, particularly women-headed households, in saline-affected areas, reporting that more than 300 families benefited during 2021–2023. These resettlement and housing programmes provided more

secure living environments, reduced risks of displacement, and ensured continuity of access to basic services for vulnerable families, demonstrating tangible benefits of adaptation measures when linked to social inclusion.

(92). **Strengthened local monitoring and planning systems:** Achievements included introduction of monitoring and evaluation tools for climate adaptation, which enhanced accountability at the local level. Ca Mau developed and applied 63 adaptation indicators across sectors, covering school safety, household water security, coastal protection, forest coverage, and disaster preparedness. This provided a more comprehensive evidence base for tracking adaptation outcomes compared to other provinces. Bac Lieu piloted climate-adaptive agriculture indicators in its green growth action plan, including measures to monitor salinity intrusion impacts on rice–shrimp farming systems. Soc Trang expanded its disaster early-warning coverage, ensuring that 80 per cent of rural households received warnings through community loudspeakers, mobile messaging systems, and school networks, while also training teachers and commune officials in emergency response protocols. Together, these monitoring and planning initiatives helped embed climate adaptation into day-to-day governance, ensuring that results for households, schools, and communities are better documented and communicated.

(93). **Partnerships and external support for child-sensitive initiatives:** Provinces also benefited from external partnerships that helped integrate vulnerable group concerns into climate planning. In Soc Trang, UNICEF's Child-Friendly initiative (2022–2026) supported integration of child-focused objectives into WASH, school safety, and disaster-preparedness programming, with specific outreach to Khmer children and families in vulnerable communes. In Ca Mau, partnerships with mass organizations, schools, and donors enabled the expansion of drowning-prevention training to reach more than 12,000 children in 2023–2024, while community-based "Safe Home" models for poor households were introduced in erosion-prone areas. Bac Lieu expanded cooperation with youth organizations and schools to establish more than 100 environmental clubs in rural communes, engaging adolescents in climate awareness, recycling initiatives, and local conservation activities. These partnerships not only enhanced the scope of provincial action plans, but also ensured that the benefits extended directly to children, women, and ethnic minorities, complementing State investments with targeted, community-centred initiatives.

4.2.3 Key Gaps Remaining

(94). **Systemic gaps across provinces:** Despite visible progress, provincial CCA reviews confirmed that all three provinces faced persistent structural weaknesses in mainstreaming climate and environmental priorities into inclusive implementation frameworks. Indicators remained highly aggregated, focused on broad outcomes such as rural water coverage (95–98 per cent), forest protection, or waste collection rates, but without disaggregation by sex, age, disability, or ethnicity. Monitoring and evaluation systems are fragmented and lack institutional mandates, with only Ca Mau introducing a more detailed set of 63 adaptation indicators. Yet even there, results were reported in aggregate, making it impossible to assess whether women, children, or Khmer households have benefitted equitably. Budgets remained aggregated at sectoral or programme levels, with no reference in provincial reviews to earmarked funds for vulnerable groups, and no integration into MTBPs or MTIPs. Instead, provinces continued to rely on National Target Programmes (New Rural Development, Poverty Reduction, DRR) and annual allocations, which are often short-term and fragmented. As a result, high-level commitments are not consistently translated into equitable financing or accountability mechanisms, leaving vulnerable groups dependent on indirect benefits from universal programmes rather than targeted support.

(95). **Equity and participation gaps:** While children, women, and ethnic minorities are

mentioned in provincial action plans under the broad category of "vulnerable groups," they are rarely treated as distinct groups requiring tailored interventions or dedicated targets. None of the provincial climate change or green growth plans include indicators disaggregated for girls, children with disabilities, or women-headed households. Participation opportunities have expanded through schools, youth clubs, and councils, yet these remain largely symbolic without structured mechanisms for influencing decisions or resource allocations. For example, Soc Trang's Children's Council raised concerns about unsafe schools, flooding, and salinity during its annual sessions, but the CCA review noted that its recommendations were advisory and not systematically taken up by provincial planners. Data systems on children remain fragmented, with separate reporting streams across education, health, and social protection, but no consolidated database linking child outcomes with climate and environmental indicators. This limits the ability of provinces to monitor equity outcomes or adjust programmes in response to the specific needs of disadvantaged groups, especially Khmer households in Soc Trang and poor coastal families in Ca Mau.

(96). **Province-specific gaps**: While these systemic and equity gaps are shared across provinces, the CCA reviews also revealed that the depth and nature of shortcomings varied by context. Each province adopted distinct approaches—Bac Lieu emphasizing regulatory and infrastructure measures, Ca Mau investing in monitoring frameworks and sectoral pilots, and Soc Trang relying more on external partnerships—yet none consistently embedded child- or gender-sensitive mechanisms. The result is gaps manifested differently across provinces, but all led to the same outcome: progress remained broad in scope, while equity for vulnerable groups was insufficiently addressed.

(97). **Bac Lieu**: Relied heavily on regulatory and infrastructure measures (dike upgrades, mangrove planting), but lacked integration of social targeting. While the Green Growth Action Plan (Decision No.148/2024/QĐ-UBND) included references to households and schools in awareness campaigns, it did not specify how many poor or vulnerable households will be reached. The CCA review also noted that while water supply coverage has improved, monitoring reports do not clarify whether Khmer households in remote communes were equally benefiting. Without disaggregated targets, progress remained broad but unverified in equity terms.

(98). **Ca Mau**: Developed a monitoring and evaluation plan with 63 adaptation indicators and piloted Safe Schools and Safe Homes models. However, child- and gender-disaggregated data are absent, and financing for these pilots is *ad hoc*. The CCA review confirmed that while more than 12,000 children participated in drowning-prevention training during 2023–2024, there is no guarantee of sustained funding to expand or institutionalize these programmes. Likewise, relocation of more than 1,000 households from erosion-prone areas was reported, but provincial data did not specify whether relocated households included ethnic minorities or women-headed families.

(99). **Soc Trang**: Mobilized development partners for child-focused initiatives such as UNICEF's Child-Friendly initiative, but weaker fiscal base and ODA delays limited sustained inclusion. The CCA review reported that more than 600 households were resettled from erosion- and flood-prone areas by 2025, yet monitoring frameworks did not record how many households had Khmer or poor families. While the Women's Union and Youth Union are active in climate awareness campaigns, their contributions were not captured in official provincial reporting, reinforcing the gap between practice and documentation. This makes it difficult to verify equity outcomes or ensure continuity once donor support concludes.

5. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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(100). **Looking forward**: The review of SEDPs and climate-related, green growth frameworks highlighted both progress and persistent limitations in mainstreaming climate, environment, and social inclusion. While commitments are in place, gaps remained in integration, budgeting, and measurable outcomes for children, women, and vulnerable groups. At the same time, promising local practices and external support showed that stronger alignment, innovation, and participation were possible. Against this backdrop, This chapter draws out the key lessons learned and proposes practical recommendations for central agencies, provinces, and development partners to strengthen coherence, financing, and inclusion in the next 2026–2030 planning cycle.

5.1 Lessons Learned

(101). **Mainstreaming requires stronger alignment with SEDPs:** Frameworks on green growth, CCA, environmental protection, and sustainable development are overarching, intended to guide socio-economic development, including SEDPs. Yet at provincial level, they were mostly implemented through separate action plans, existing in parallel rather than systematically embedded into five-year and annual SEDPs. Without such integration, budgetary linkages remained weak, and risks of duplication arise between SEDP resource allocations and those for standalone frameworks. The provincial reviews revealed that commitments in Ca Mau, Bac Lieu, and Soc Trang were restated across multiple plans without clear prioritization, while financing continued to depend largely on NTPs rather than other financial instruments linked directly to SEDPs or other climate-related strategies. Mainstreaming these frameworks into SEDPs is therefore essential for enforceability, financing, and coherence.

(102). **Strategic principles must be operationalized through concrete measures:** SEDPs and climate/green growth frameworks emphasize strategic objectives such as inclusion, resilience, and environmental sustainability. However, principles are not consistently upheld in implementation policies and sectoral plans. Ensuring that investments under either SEDPs or climate-related frameworks respond to the needs of children, women, and other vulnerable groups requires concrete measures such as targeted programmes, sectoral guidelines, and clear budget allocations. With Ca Mau's drowning-prevention training reaching more than 12,000 children and Soc Trang's resettlement of 600 high-risk households show that when measures are explicit, results are tangible. In contrast, where commitments remain general—as in Bac Lieu's awareness campaigns—the equity impact is less visible.

(103). **Budgetary resources are decisive for implementation:** SEDPs and climate-related frameworks are largely financed through the budget envelop identified through the MBTP (for recurrent expenditure and capital spending) and particularly the MTIP (for public investment allocations subject). These important financial instruments are prepared after approval of five-year SEDPs and are, by law, required to align with SEDP priorities. On these basis, annual SEDPs are prepared as yearly slices of both the MTBP and MTIP. As a result, many commitments on environmental protection, CCA, green growth and inclusion of children, women, and other vulnerable groups risk remaining unfunded unless clearly reflected in the MBTP and linked to MTIP

projects. At present, arrangements for mainstreaming child, gender, and vulnerable group priorities into these budgetary and investment programming are limited, highlighting the need to strengthen links between planning and financing. Provincial reviews confirmed no dedicated budget lines existed for child- or gender-sensitive climate action. Instead, provinces relied heavily on fragmented allocations from sectoral budgets or short-term projects and NTPs, leading to uncertainty and underfunding of inclusive priorities.

(104). **Financing and institutional mandates must move in tandem:** Even where financing sources exist—through NTPs, donor projects, or sectoral budgets—absence of clear institutional mandates for inclusion weakens accountability and long-term sustainability. For example, Ca Mau's child drowning-prevention campaigns reached more than 12,000 children, but were implemented through short-term school and community initiatives without being anchored in education or health department official budget lines. Similarly, Bac Lieu's awareness campaigns on green growth and waste reduction relied on the Women's Union and Youth Union, but lacked assigned departmental responsibility or earmarked resources, making continuity uncertain. These experiences show that siloed financing is insufficient: inclusive measures require both dedicated resources and explicit assignment of responsibility within provincial departments and annual budget law. Without this dual anchoring, equity-sensitive priorities remain dependent on temporary projects and at risk of disappearing once external funding or political momentum subsides.

(105). **Inclusion must be upheld during operationalization:** Mainstreaming children, women, and other vulnerable groups in SEDPs and frameworks on green growth, CCA, and environmental protection is important at strategic level. However, the real challenge lies in ensuring these principles are not "lost" when strategies are translated into concrete sectoral policies, plans, and investment projects. Without deliberate mechanisms, commitments to inclusion risk remaining rhetorical rather than guiding actual implementation. For instance, Soc Trang's Children's Council raised concerns on climate risks, yet these inputs were not strongly reflected in provincial budget decisions. Moreover, Bac Lieu's green growth action plan referenced schools and households, but without measurable outcomes for vulnerable families.

(106). **Indicators must be specific, measurable, and disaggregated:** Commitments to inclusion and resilience remain broad unless accompanied by concrete and measurable indicators. Provinces introduced some indicators in education, health, clean water, and sanitation, but child- and gender-sensitive metrics remained scarce, fragmented across different plans, and in some cases duplicated or inconsistent. The lack of disaggregated data by age, gender, and vulnerability status makes it difficult to monitor impacts and ensure accountability. In Ca Mau, despite the introduction of 63 adaptation indicators, none track outcomes for girls, women-headed households or Khmer communities, while in Bac Lieu and Soc Trang reporting relies mainly on aggregate coverage rates (rural water access), which mask disparities between low-income or ethnic minority households and better-off populations. Moreover, none of the three provinces integrated child- or gender-sensitive climate indicators into official statistical reporting systems, meaning that data collection remained *ad hoc* and dependent on sectoral reports rather than the formal statistics practice overseen by the National Statistics Office (NSO). This illustrates how progress can be measured without equity being captured.

(107). **Move from symbolic to meaningful participation:** Provinces launched awareness campaigns, forums, and school-based initiatives that engaged children, but these efforts remained largely communication-focused. Children's perspectives were rarely integrated into planning, monitoring, or evaluation processes, reflecting a systemic gap in participatory mechanisms. Ensuring a shift from symbolic to genuine participation is essential to make climate, environmental, and development policies more responsive and sustainable. Soc Trang provides an important example: while the Provincial Children's Council is active, its recommendations were advisory and not fully embedded into formal planning processes, underscoring the

need for mechanisms that give children and women real influence in decision-making.

(108). **Innovations are modest, but show potential:** Provincial frameworks are predominantly compliance-driven, mirroring national policies. Nonetheless, some local innovations have emerged, such as Bac Lieu's climate-resilient agriculture and aquaculture pilots, Ca Mau's climate adaptation monitoring and evaluation framework with 63 indicators, and child-sensitive Safe Schools and Safe Homes programmes, as well as Soc Trang's partnerships with UNICEF's Child-Friendly initiative, which linked climate adaptation to child protection and WASH services. These examples show that while resources are constrained, local adaptation and innovation were possible and should be scaled-up. It also demonstrates value adding of development partners' external support in introducing child-sensitive approaches.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 For Central Government Agencies

(109). **Overview of central-level recommendations:** At the central level, recommendations focus on creating enabling conditions for mainstreaming climate change adaptation, green growth, environmental protection, and inclusion of children, women, and vulnerable groups into the upcoming SEDP 2026–2030. This includes embedding these priorities systematically into the SEDPs, issuing technical guidance, clarifying budgetary linkages, introducing fiscal incentives, strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, and promoting capacity building and knowledge exchanges. The emphasis is on providing provinces with the policy framework, tools, and incentives needed to translate national commitments into actionable and financed plans.

(110). **#1. Ensure systematic mainstreaming of climate and inclusion in SEDPs 2026–2030 at all levels:** The GoVN should embed national frameworks on climate change adaptation, green growth, environmental protection, and inclusion of children, women, and vulnerable groups directly into the national SEDP 2026–2030 as cross-cutting priorities, with clear objectives, indicators, and strategic solutions. At the same time, provinces should be required to demonstrate how these overarching frameworks (green growth, climate change, sustainable development) and inclusion of vulnerable groups, are reflected in their five-year and annual SEDPs. This alignment should include cross-references to sectoral strategies and quantified indicators. Approval of provincial SEDPs could be conditioned on showing such integration. By mainstreaming at both national and provincial levels, planning and implementation of these frameworks would become enforceable through the SEDP process and the resultant budgetary and investment processes (through MTBP and MTIP), directly linked to budget allocation and resource mobilization. This mainstreaming at national and sub-national levels should be guided by a Prime Minister's Directive or Decision to guide preparation of 2026–2030 SEDPs.

(111). **#2. Develop and issue technical guidelines and toolkits on mainstreaming:** Based on a Prime Minister's Directive to guide preparation of the SEDPs 2026–2030, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) should prepare a uniform technical guideline for mainstreaming environment, climate change, child rights, gender equality, and inclusion of vulnerable groups into five-year and annual SEDPs was well as other climate-related action plans. This should not remain at the principle level, but provide practical tools for provinces, including:

(112). A checklist for sectoral planning (education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, etc.)

(113). A menu of sample indicators with child-, gender-, and climate vulnerability-sensitive disaggregation

(114). Templates for linking strategic objectives with budget lines and public investment project proposals

(115). Guidance on participatory processes to incorporate the voices of children, women, and vulnerable groups into SEDP planning.

(116). **#3. Strengthen budgetary linkages:** Mainstreaming climate-related frameworks into provincial SEDPs is the most practical way to ensure that their priorities are linked to financing, since SEDPs form the legal and institutional bridge to both the MTBP and MTIP. At present, frameworks on climate change adaptation, green growth, and other climate-related strategies largely operate as standalone documents, without clear pathways to the budget process. Provinces should, therefore, be required to demonstrate explicitly how climate, environmental, and inclusion targets from these frameworks are embedded into five-year and annual SEDPs, and how these commitments are reflected in MTIP projects and MTBP allocations. This is crucial because the MTIP is the main vehicle for channeling public investment, while the MTBP defines the fiscal space for recurrent spending. Without such integration, climate priorities risk duplication across plans, while commitments to children, women, and vulnerable groups remain underfunded.

(117). **#4. Incentivize inclusive innovation through annual SEDPs within the MTBP/MTIP framework:** Priority goals on environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and sustainable development should be concretized into projects under the MTBP and MTIP. Within this framework, annual SEDPs serve as the operational "slice" of MTBP/MTIP and provide a practical entry point for piloting and incentivizing inclusive approaches. Central agencies should introduce incentives—through guidance notes or directives of the Prime Minister or MoF guidance—that reward provinces for innovative and equity-sensitive ways of implementing the legally required integration of children, women, and vulnerable groups into annual SEDPs, for example Bac Lieu's clean water and sanitation initiatives or Ca Mau's child-centred disaster risk reduction models. Incentives could take the form of preferential scoring or fast-track approval in MTIP project appraisals, access to matching funds or earmarked climate-finance windows, targeted technical assistance and capacity-building support, and public recognition of pioneering provinces through annual government reviews or awards. Such measures would create positive competition among provinces, encourage innovation in implementation, and ensure that inclusive priorities are systematically financed and sustained through medium-term and annual planning cycles.

(118). **#5. Establish a core monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework:** While regulations on gender and child statistics exist, there is no systematic requirement for disaggregated monitoring of climate, environment, or adaptation outcomes. To close this gap, the MoF should assign the NSO to develop a core set of disaggregated indicators by age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and vulnerability status. Provinces would then be required to adopt this set as part of their SEDP monitoring and reporting. These should cover environmental outcomes (e.g., access to clean water, exposure to climate risks) and social outcomes (e.g., school attendance, child nutrition, health impacts in climate-affected areas). The framework should be harmonized with the Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goal (VSDG) indicator system and linked to provincial statistical yearbooks, enabling evidence-based planning, inter-provincial comparability, and stronger accountability. A decision by the MoF Minister or NSO director would be required to guide this establishment, accompanied by technical guidance to ensure consistency and feasibility in provincial data collection.

(119). **#6. Support capacity building and structured knowledge exchanges:** Institutionalize periodic training programmes for provincial planning officials focusing not only on integrating environment, climate, and inclusion into SEDPs and sectoral plans, but also on linking these priorities to budget formulation under the MTBP and MTIP. Training modules should cover practical tools, case-based exercises, and use of disaggregated indicators for monitoring equity outcomes.

Beyond training, establish a national peer-learning mechanism where provinces can share innovative practices. For instance, Ca Mau's climate adaptation M&E framework with 63 indicators or Soc Trang's UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Project should be systematically documented, evaluated, and made available for replication in other provinces. Bạc Lieu's piloting of climate-resilient agriculture and aquaculture models could also be captured as a learning case for other Mekong provinces. An annual "Inclusive Green Growth and Climate Planning Forum" could be convened to promote cross-provincial exchanges and partnerships with development partners. The forum should serve as both a reporting platform on provincial innovations and a venue for structured technical dialogue with central agencies, ensuring that lessons inform national guidance. The MoF could convene this forum with technical support from development partners, including UNICEF, while the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment could contribute sectoral expertise to broaden ownership and ensure technical rigor.

5.2.2 For Provincial Level Agencies

(120). **Overview of the provincial recommendations:** At the provincial level, recommendations stress the importance of adaptation and innovation rather than mere compliance with central guidance. Provinces are encouraged to tailor national priorities to their specific contexts while piloting inclusive models, strengthening participatory planning, linking SEDPs to concrete budgets, and improving local monitoring. The goal is to ensure that commitments made at the strategic level are operationalized in ways that respond to local vulnerabilities and directly benefit children, women, and other at-risk groups.

(121). **#1. Localize national priorities through tailored and innovative approaches:** Provinces should move beyond simply replicating national frameworks and adapt them to specific climate and socio-economic contexts. This means identifying locally relevant risks and vulnerabilities (such as salinity intrusion in Bac Lieu, coastal and riverbank erosion in Ca Mau, or poverty among Khmer households in Soc Trang) and embedding targeted responses into five-year and annual SEDPs. Local action plans should cross-reference national frameworks, but adjust solutions to community realities, ensuring that children, women, and vulnerable groups are central to implementation. At the same time, provinces should pioneer innovative pilots that demonstrate how climate resilience can be integrated with child- and gender-sensitive approaches. Examples include climate-resilient schools with safe water and sanitation, livelihood-linked mangrove restoration that supports women-headed households, or safe resettlement schemes for disaster-prone communities. Provincial People's Committees should issue decisions or plans to operationalize these approaches, while the DoF and line departments should allocate initial resources, coordinate monitoring, and ensure that successful pilots are incorporated into MTIP project lists for scaling-up.

(122). **#2. Link SEDPs to concrete budget proposals:** Inclusive climate and social priorities in SEDPs should be translated into costed projects with clear budget lines under the MTIP, MTBP, and associated provincial action plans. Provinces should avoid vague commitments by ensuring that targets related to children, women, or other vulnerable groups—such as clean water access, improved sanitation, school safety, and safe resettlement—are tied to well-defined investment proposals with identified funding sources. The DoF should then issue technical guidance on costing, budget classification, and integrating child- and gender-sensitive interventions into submissions of MTIP and other plans of actions. This process should include support for line departments in preparing project dossiers, applying consistent budget codes for inclusion-related spending, and ensuring that inclusive projects are prioritized in MTIP appraisal and annual SEDP allocations.

(123). **#3. Strengthen participatory and consultative processes in policymaking:** To ensure inclusive planning, provinces should establish formal, mandatory mechanisms to capture the voices of children, women, and vulnerable groups in

preparation of SEDPs and climate-related plans. This could be done by building on existing forums, school-based initiatives, or children's councils and expanding them from symbolic consultation to structured, recurring participation linked to the planning cycle. Mechanisms should include documented consultation processes, feedback loops to show how inputs were addressed, and reporting requirements in provincial SEDP and climate action plans. Based on central level guidance, the Provincial People's Council should adopt resolutions requiring such consultations during SEDP and climate-related policy preparation, making them a binding step in the planning cycle. The Provincial People's Committee and line departments should be tasked with ensuring that consultation outcomes are reflected in draft SEDPs and MTIP submissions, thereby embedding participation into planning and budgeting.

(124). **#4. Strengthen monitoring at the local level:** Disaggregated monitoring is essential to understand how children, women, and vulnerable groups benefit from climate and environmental interventions. Provinces should develop localized M&E frameworks directly aligned with provincial statistical yearbooks and harmonized with the national M&E framework and VSDG indicator system. This requires assigning responsibilities to line departments for collecting data disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity, and vulnerability status. Standardized tools and training should be provided to ensure consistency and quality across departments. Data should be integrated into the provincial statistical system rather than treated as one-off project reporting. The Provincial People's Committee should lead this process by mandating standardized reporting formats, while the DoF could consolidate results into SEDP monitoring reports and link them to MTBP/MTIP implementation reviews. Periodic public reporting on inclusive climate and environmental outcomes should also be institutionalized to enhance transparency and accountability to citizens.

(125). **#5. Mobilize diverse resources through partnerships:** Given limited provincial budgets, partnerships with development partners, NGOs, and the private sector are critical to co-finance inclusive climate initiatives. Provincial reviews showed that such partnerships are already delivering results: Soc Trang's collaboration with UNICEF under the Child-Friendly Initiative supported child-sensitive WASH and disaster-preparedness programmes, Ca Mau leveraged donor support for resettlement of erosion-prone households and mobilized mass organizations for drowning-prevention and Bac Lieu attracted private investment in wind and solar energy while engaging the Women's Union and Youth Union in awareness and waste-reduction campaigns. These examples highlight the potential to scale-up partnerships to complement State financing. To institutionalize this, Provincial People's Committees should issue partnership frameworks or MoUs that define priorities, roles, and co-financing mechanisms, while ensuring alignment with SEDPs and MTIP project lists. Provincial People's Councils would only need to approve agreements requiring significant co-financing from provincial budgets. Structured partnership frameworks can also create predictable platforms for mobilizing technical expertise, tapping climate finance, and ensuring that contributions from NGOs and private actors are targeted at children, women, and vulnerable groups.

(126). **#6. Invest in local capacity and coordination:** Finally, effective mainstreaming depends on institutional capacity and cross-sectoral coordination. Provinces should establish an inter-departmental taskforce, chaired by chair or vice chair of the Provincial People's Committee with DoF director being the vice chair, and DoF staff providing the secretariat. The taskforce would oversee integration of climate, environment, and social inclusion into SEDPs and sectoral plans. These taskforces should include representation from mass organizations (such as the Women's Union and Youth Union) to ensure that perspectives of children, women, and vulnerable groups are systematically reflected. They should meet annually to review progress, exchange lessons, and align with national frameworks, using standardized templates and reporting formats linked to SEDP monitoring. This review process could be joint and technically supported by development partners, helping to identify scalable innovations (e.g., Safe Schools in Ca Mau, child-friendly

models in Soc Trang) and coordinate external funding with provincial priorities. The Provincial People's Committee could establish these taskforces through formal decisions, giving them a clear mandate and accountability, and embedding them into the regular provincial planning and budgeting cycle rather than treating them as *ad hoc* coordination bodies.

5.2.3 For Donors, Development Partners

(127). **Overview of donor and development partner recommendations:** For donors, development partners and UNICEF, the recommendations are clustered around two complementary roles. First, providing technical support and knowledge (through assistance to central agencies, piloting innovative approaches at the local level, generating data, and convening learning platforms to encourage uptake). Second, supporting financing and safeguards by introducing innovative financing mechanisms, co-financing inclusive pilots, and leveraging influence in infrastructure lending to integrate social inclusion into climate and environmental investments. Together, these roles position donors not only as providers of resources, but also as catalysts for innovation, accountability and scaling of inclusive practices.

(128). **#1. Provide targeted technical assistance to central agencies:** Donor and development partners should support the GoVN in operationalizing mainstreaming commitments into the SEDP 2026–2030 cycle. This includes technical assistance to the MoF and other central level agencies, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, in preparing technical guidelines, toolkits, and disaggregated indicator frameworks (as discussed in Sub-section 5.2.1). Partners can provide international good practices, comparative analysis, and draft technical modules (checklists, sample indicators, budget-linkage templates) to accelerate preparation of official guidance. UNICEF (and other relevant UN agencies) could lead on integrating child rights, gender equality, and vulnerable groups into these national tools.

(129). **#2. Support provincial pilots and scale-up pathways:** Donors and development partners should finance and provide technical support for locally relevant pilot models that link climate resilience with inclusion. Examples include child-friendly green schools, gender-responsive livelihood-linked mangrove restoration, or climate-resilient housing schemes. These pilots should be co-designed with provincial authorities, communities and evaluated with rigorous evidence. The results should then be used as learning cases to inform provincial SEDPs, MTIP and MTEF submissions. Partners can convene provincial-to-provincial peer exchanges, ensuring that successful pilots in one province (Ca Mau's climate M&E framework, Soc Trang's UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Project) are disseminated across the Mekong Delta and beyond.

(130). **#3. Introduce innovative financing approaches:** Given the limited fiscal space at provincial level, development partners can help expand financing options. This includes piloting blended finance instruments, climate bonds, or child- and gender-responsive budget tagging linked to public investment projects. Partners could also support provinces in developing project proposals that meet the eligibility criteria of international climate funds (such as Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund). Development banks (World Bank, Asian Development Bank) could embed inclusive requirements (child-sensitive design standards, gender impact assessments) into loan-financed infrastructure projects, ensuring that children, women, and vulnerable groups are systematically considered in climate-resilient investments.

(131). **#4. Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and learning:** Donors and partners should help create structured platforms for cross-level dialogue, linking central agencies, provinces, and communities. This can take the form of an "Inclusive Climate and Development Forum" (as mentioned in the central recommendations), co-hosted by MoF with technical backing from UNICEF and other UN agencies. Development partners can fund evidence-sharing, organize thematic sessions (climate-smart education, child protection in disaster contexts), and promote

structured policy dialogue between local governments and the central level.

(132). **#5. Strengthen monitoring, data, and accountability systems:** Partners can support the NSO and provincial statistics offices in developing disaggregated data systems on climate, environment, and social impacts. This could include digital dashboards, GIS-based mapping of vulnerable populations, or integration of climate–social indicators into provincial yearbooks. UNICEF, for example, could help design child-focused indicators (such as school disruption from floods, child nutrition in climate-affected zones), while UN Women could support gender-sensitive monitoring frameworks. Beyond technical design, partners should also support training of provincial staff and provide independent evaluations of pilot models to ensure accountability and learning.

(133). **#6. Strengthen policy leverage in loan negotiations:** For development banks and bilateral donors financing climate-resilient infrastructure, there should be systematic negotiations with the GoVN to embed social inclusion safeguards. This means requiring environmental and social impact assessments that explicitly identify and mitigate risks to children, women, and vulnerable groups. This will ensure consultation processes include marginalized voices and link disbursement conditions to demonstrable inclusion outcomes. This approach would align large-scale investments with commitments to inclusivity under SEDPs and national frameworks.

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