

# EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

## DEVELOPMENT HISTORY, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

### Introduction

#### Overview of Vietnam - Significant Achievements - Purpose of the Report

1. Vietnam is an S-shaped country, stretching from 8°02' to 23°23' north of the equator. It borders China in the north, Laos and Cambodia in the west, and the Pacific Ocean in the east. Its surface area is approximately 331 thousand square kilometers. The population is over 83 million persons<sup>1</sup>, and includes 54 ethnic groups with the Vietnamese majority group accounting for 90%. Vietnamese is the common language for the ethnic group community. With regard to administration, Vietnam is divided into 64 centrally managed provinces and cities; 659 districts, towns and provincially managed cities; and 10,732 communes, quarters and towns<sup>2</sup>.
2. Despite being a poor country, Vietnam has made significant achievements in increasing the value of its gross national product, raising its export turnover, controlling the population growth rate, raising living standards and reducing poverty in rural areas. In the education sector, Vietnam has obtained impressive results compared with those countries with similar economic development: over 90% of the working-age population is literate; more than 98% of children of primary school age attend schools; and the enrollment rates for boys and girls are more or less similar.
3. In order to share experience with policy-makers from six African countries<sup>3</sup> during their study tour organized by the World Bank (WB), this report aims to provide brief description of Vietnamese educational development history over the last decades, especially the efforts made to overcome different challenges and to reach the current achievements. At the same time, it endeavors to clearly present challenges to Vietnam to achieve the *Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015* and enhance educational development with a view to *meeting the requirements of industrialization and modernization* in the context of globalization, and development of information and communication technology.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimate in 2005

<sup>2</sup> As of 1 April 2004

<sup>3</sup> Including Ethiopia, Cameroon, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique and Tanzania

## **Part 1**

### **History of Educational Development - Milestones**

#### ***Education in Vietnam during Feudal and Colonial Periods***

4. Promotion of learning and respect for teachers are one of the traditional values of the Vietnamese people. In the old days, there was the perception among intellectuals in Vietnamese society that a teacher's position was higher than parents were and only lower than the king. Ordinary people understood that they should give their children opportunities *to learn to know how to be human beings*. In many communes and villages, rich people invited teachers to stay in their houses to teach their own children and those from other families. The selection of mandarins (civil administrators) during the historic dynasties required a candidate to have excellent learning achievements and have gained high marks in competitive exams in order to become a leader. The first such exam for civil administrators was conducted in 1075.
5. For nearly one thousand years, Vietnamese people learnt Chinese characters and used them for writing, but pronounced them in a different, Vietnamese way. This development of learning and the preservation and strengthening of an awareness of national independence ensured that the Chinese did not assimilate the Vietnamese people. Besides the use of Chinese characters, the Vietnamese people adapted such characters to invent an ancient Vietnamese script for writing and expressions. Thanks to this, a number of valuable works of literature and history in ancient Vietnamese script have been kept for future generations.
6. At the end of 19th and first half of 20th centuries, the French forcibly colonized Vietnam and the entire Indochina. The traditional Confucian-oriented education, which had been built and maintained by Vietnamese people, was replaced by French-Vietnamese education aimed mainly at training people to serve the colonial apparatus. At the most prosperous period of French-invaded Indochina, Vietnam only had 2,322 elementary schools (for the first 3 years of primary education) with an average of one elementary school for every three villages, and the number of students accounted for 2% of total population; 638 primary schools (for the last years of primary education) with the number of students making up 0.4% of total population; 16 primary colleges (for 4 years of post-primary education) with students accounting for 0.05% of population; and 6 secondary schools of which 3 were public with only 0.019% of the population as state secondary students. The whole of French-colonized Indochina had only three universities (of Law, Medicine-Pharmacy and Sciences) located in Hanoi with 834 students, of which 628 were Vietnamese. Under the French-Vietnamese education system, French was the dominant language and the language of instruction at the higher education level<sup>4</sup>. With such an education system, 95% of Vietnamese people were illiterate.

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<sup>4</sup> According to "50 Years of Development of Vietnamese Education and Training Cause (1945-1995)" - Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), Education Publishing House

### ***From Independence Day to the Victory of the First Resistance War (1945-1954)***

7. After our people took control and declared the country's independence, during the first meeting session of the Government President Ho Chi Minh identified "fighting against poverty, illiteracy and invaders" as three key important tasks of then Vietnamese Government and people. On 6 December 1945, the President sent an open letter to students on the occasion of the opening of the 1945-1946 school year, confirming the birth of a new education system with its mission to preserve independence and rehabilitate the country.
8. Starting from the philosophy "an illiterate nation is a powerless one", the Government issued, on 8 December 1945, important legal documents such as: Decree No. 17-SL: "Everyone in the country has to be literate"; Decree No. 19-SL: "For the entire country, there will be literacy classes established for farmers and workers to attend at night"; Decree No. 20-SL: "While waiting for the establishment of compulsory primary education, teaching the national language will be compulsory from now on and free for everyone"<sup>5</sup>. Then, on October 1945, President Hochiminh issued the "Call for Anti-illiteracy".

In response to the Government policies and President Ho Chi Minh's call, there were, within less than a year, 75 thousand literacy classes with nearly 96 thousand teachers to help 2.5 million people get out of illiteracy.

Therefore, with the establishment of the democratic republic, anti-illiteracy and improvement of people's learning qualifications became the national policy. Learning how to read, write and calculate was perceived as a criterion for demonstrating a person's education. Since then, Vietnam has, for a number of decades, been committed to anti-illiteracy and improvement of people's learning qualifications. This explains why Vietnam quickly responded to the World EFA Declaration (1990) and actively carried out Jomtien Action Plan, and has been strongly committed to the achievements of Dakar goals.

9. In 1946, in the context of its emphasis on fighting against the war plans of the colonialist forces, Vietnam tried to establish the legal framework for its educational policies by issuing two decrees, namely Decrees No.146-SL and No.147-SL with the main following contents:
  - a) Statement: the new education system is built on three fundamental principles: *national, scientific, and popular*, and aimed at serving the *national ideals and democracy*.
  - b) Identification of the structure of the new educational system, i.e. after the pre-school level, there are three levels of education:
    - *First level*, i.e. the basic education level, in 4 years.
    - *Second level*, with two sub-sectors: (i) general, including two sub-levels of 4-year general education and 3-year specialized education; (ii) specialization, including two sub-levels of 1-year experiment and 1-3-year vocational education (depending on each stream).

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<sup>5</sup> The person who signed, on behalf of President Hochiminh, these three Decrees was General Vo Nguyen Giap, who was the Minister of Internal Affairs of the then Provisional Government of Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

- *Third level*, with universities (including literature, sciences, laws, etc.) and specialized colleges of at least 3 years. Next to universities were “research institutes”.
  - In parallel with three levels of education, there were three levels of pedagogy (teacher education), namely elementary, intermediate and advanced.
- c) Establishment of legal provisions for basic levels of education: all children from 7 to 13 years old could attend schools on free basis, and from 1950, basic education level would be compulsory. As for universities, all subjects would be taught in Vietnamese from 1950. This was a reckless decision, which showed the national spirit of then Vietnamese intellectuals as French had been used as the instructional language in all universities over a long period.<sup>6</sup>

10. During the years of resistance war (1946-1954), schools continued to operate in demilitarized areas. In order to prepare skilled human resources to contribute to the resistance war and the country’s development after victory, the Government officially passed an *education reform* project in 1950.

The training objective for schools was defined as educating and fostering the younger generation to become future citizens, loyal to people’s democracy regime, and competent to serve people and the resistance war. In accordance with the war context, the main contents of the reform were to transform the structure of general education (with reduced number of years) and to adjust the relationship between various components of the education system in order to make it consistent with such a transformation. Accordingly, general education consisted of three levels with a total of 9 years: primary education of 4 years, exclusive of Vietnamese language reading and writing class; lower secondary education of 3 years; and upper secondary education of 3 years. In respect of teaching content, several subjects were suspended (such as foreign languages, music, drawing, housework), and some subjects were added (current affairs, policy, citizenship, production). Due to the temporarily condensed general education curriculum, students had to follow pre-university courses at the completion of Grade 9 (initially of 2 years but subsequently changed to 1 year) before entering universities. At the same time, the anti-illiteracy and professional education system also changed (following general anti-illiteracy programs, there were primary and secondary programs, etc.). Medical/pharmacy and science (mainly literature and mathematics) universities continued to operate.

11. In temporarily occupied areas, schools taught a 12-year curriculum which was based on one adjusted by several patriotic scholars at the beginning of 1945 when French-administered Indochina was invaded by the Japanese<sup>7</sup>. The characteristic of the education system in such temporarily occupied areas was a reduction in the domination of colonial education emphasis. Vietnamese language was used in teaching in schools to replace French, and a number of

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<sup>6</sup> In preparation for the use of Vietnamese as the transfer language in universities, Vietnamese scientists had to make great efforts to develop a system of terminologies in Vietnamese language for a number of subjects. The excellent examples of these are “Nouns about Math, Physics and Chemistry” (Hoang Xuan Han), “Nouns about Natural Sciences” (Dao Van Tien), “Nouns about Medical Sciences” (Le Khac Thien), and “Agricultural Sciences” (Le Van Can and Nguyen Huu Quan).

<sup>7</sup> The curriculum developed by the patriotic scholar Hoang Xuan Han.

national elements were included in school curriculum. However, the curriculum used in the temporarily occupied areas was still heavily influenced by French education.

### *Years of Temporary Separation (1955-1975)<sup>8</sup>*

12. Once peace was achieved in the North, the Vietnamese Government took over the education system in the newly liberated areas and actively prepared for a new education reform in the context of economic rehabilitation, building the North and the fight for the reunification of the whole country.

Under this second education reform, the purpose of education was identified as training and fostering young people to become “people who had all-round development in all aspects, and were good citizens and officials”. In order to achieve this, educational content was made more comprehensive (with an emphasis on moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic aspects) with the motto of “linkages between theory and practice, and school and social life”.

From methodological perspective, this reform abolished the command education system, began a more equitable relationship between teachers and students, brought into play the usefulness of extra-curricular activities, and gradually introduced production activities into schools as an important way to shape personalities.

Through the second education reform, the 12-year and 9-year general education systems in newly liberated and freedom areas respectively were combined into a 10-year system (primary education: 4 years, lower secondary education: 3 years, and upper secondary education: 3 years)<sup>9</sup>. This system was somewhat similar to the USSR’s education system.

13. In order to meet people’s demand for learning the Government planned “to make use of resources for the development of general education”. At the end of 5-year plan cycle (1961-1965), the school network was expanded: most of communes had primary schools; every two or three communes had one lower secondary school; and most districts had upper secondary schools. Schools that provided both academic and technical education were established, e.g. industrial schools in cities, agriculture schools in rural areas, and boarding schools in mountainous provinces. In response to the Government’s policies, "School Protection Committees" were established in most communes in the North. These Committees’ tasks were to mobilize human and financial resources for construction of primary and lower secondary schools; to nominate local people as teachers; and to determine contribution norms for salary payment to teachers. These activities resulted in the emergence of people-founded schools. The Government decided that teachers working in people-founded and public schools would be allowed to enjoy similar incentives and policies, and that the only

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<sup>8</sup> According to Geneva Convention (reestablishment of peace in Indochina), from 1955, Vietnam was temporarily separated into two regions: namely, Northern region managed by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Southern region managed by pro-France Government. It was planned to achieve the country reunification by a General Election in 1957. Americans took the place of the French, built pro-American government, gradually sent US army to Vietnam, and, through air forces, expanded the war into the North. The Vietnamese people’s second resistance war last in 15 years and ended with the victory on 30 April 1975, bringing liberation to the South and country reunification.

<sup>9</sup> In essence, the general education programs included reading and writing classes before entering Grade 1.

difference was that local authorities would fund salary expenditure for teachers in people-founded establishments with reasonable support from the State.

During the same period, new universities in addition to the existing Medical/Pharmacy, Pedagogy and Science institutions, were established in areas such as Agriculture and Forestry, Polytechnics, Economy, etc. The higher education system was further strengthened to train the new pool of intellectuals. Professional secondary and vocational schools were established, with special importance placed on vocational classes attached to enterprises. This contributed to provision of human resources for developing the Northern region, Fatherland protection and country reunification.

14. In parallel with the reform of general education, the Government created the “Central Steering Committee on Illiteracy Elimination”, which identified popular education as an integral part of the State plan<sup>10</sup> and launched a 3-year plan for illiteracy elimination (1956-1958). As a result, 2,161,362 people escaped illiteracy; most residents in delta provinces could read and write; and the percentage of literate people in 12-50 age group increased to 93.4%. However, such anti-illiteracy achievements, like those gained in other periods, were not sustainable due to various reasons, of which "do-it-only-once" perception was the most common.

Based on the anti-illiteracy achievements, the popular education system moved its emphasis to improving the education levels of adults/people in the working age group. This was called, in parallel with general education, the “complementary” education system. Together with the development of complementary education, the Government gave permission to open industrial and agricultural complementary schools, which provided learning opportunities for workers. A number of graduates from these schools were accepted to study in domestic and foreign universities. Some of them then became well-known intellectuals and local/national leaders.

15. During US air force attacks on the North (1965-1972), schools became bomb targets<sup>11</sup>. In this context of violent war, the Government identified the goals for education as continued development of education, ensuring safety of students, and strengthening links between school and real life, production and fighting activities. General schools, vocational schools and higher education institutions were evacuated from cities, towns, key transportation points and large residential areas to allow the continuation of teaching and learning activities. The biggest success achieved during this period was that schools and institutions at all levels continued to educate and produce a generation of young people, who were ready and willing to fulfill their citizen obligations, making contributions to the establishment of a values system that emphasized patriotism, national pride and confidence in the national independence, and socialism.
16. In the South during 1954-1975 period, within Saigon Government-controlled and subsequently liberated areas, educational activities still took place to meet people's learning

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<sup>10</sup> Circular No. 114/TTg dated 27 March 1957

<sup>11</sup> According to “Escalade de guerre et du crime par Nixon au Vietnam”: In the first 4 years of American air force attacks, there were 1,558 schools and institutions destroyed (1,334 primary schools, 179 lower secondary schools, 38 upper secondary schools and 7 universities).

demands and to fulfill the responsibility of human resource training. However, the educational activities in these two types of areas had different, even opposing, characteristics:

- a) In Saigon Government-controlled areas, education gradually transitioned from European- and French-influenced education to North American-dominated education. General education experienced several changes with the components of primary education (5 years), lower secondary education (4 years), and upper secondary education (3 years) including many streams. Higher education was more academic than practice-oriented with an emphasis on fundamental sciences, laws, economy and administration. Universities of engineering, technology, and agriculture and forestry went through slower development. Despite the impact and influence of North American education, young people still maintained their spirit of resistance during the period when the Saigon Government controlled the Southern urban areas.
- b) After the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Southern Vietnam had been established in liberated areas, students followed 12-year curriculum with textbooks that were very different from those used in temporarily occupied areas, demonstrating patriotic and resistance spirits.

### ***10 Years of Pre-Reform (1975-1985)***

17. In April 1975, the Vietnamese people's resistance war to protect independence and reunify the country achieved complete success. After the victory day, for the education sector in Southern provinces, the Government focused on two tasks: (i) removal of leftover influences from the old education system; (ii) implementation of anti-illiteracy activities for people in the age group of 12-50 years old.

*Regarding the first task*, the Ministry of Education quickly developed and issued a new 12-year curriculum, and developed and printed 20 million copies of new textbooks to replace the old ones used in the South. Most of teachers working under the old regime were re-employed. At the same time, the nationalization of private schools<sup>12</sup>, removal of schools from religious influence and gradual bringing private schools under state management also took place.

*Regarding the second task*, the Government planned, as the first priority, to quickly eliminate illiteracy and strengthen complementary education. Once again, anti-illiteracy activities were seen as a patriotic symbol, and attracted millions of people to participate in teaching, learning and helping others learn. At the beginning of 1978, all Southern cities and provinces basically eliminated illiteracy. Out of 1,405,870 people who had been identified as being illiterate, 1,323,670 people were helped to escape from illiteracy, achieving 94.14% of the plan.

While carrying out these urgent intermediate tasks, the Government prepared for an education reform to put in place a unified national education system that was appropriate to the national reconstruction strategies and development of the country.

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<sup>12</sup> In the old regime, there were 2,500 private schools, half of which opened by religious organizations.

18. The third education reform<sup>13</sup> started in 1981-1982 school year. The important characteristics of this reform were:
- a) Educational objectives were defined as: the provision of care and education for the younger generation from early childhood to adulthood with the aim of laying the initial foundations for all-round human development; implementing universalization of education to facilitate carrying out three revolutions (of productive relationships, science and technology, and culture and ideology); training and fostering --in line with the requirements of labor division-- an increase in the size of the working staff.
  - b) For education content, focus was placed on “Improving the quality of comprehensive education, and producing a new type of worker who were masters and able to shoulder the cause of people’s socialism construction.”
  - c) Educational principles included learning together with practice, education and work, and the school and society linkages were strengthened.
  - d) The structure of the education system was revised; the 12-year system in the South and 10-year system in the North were replaced by a new 12-year general education structure, in which primary and lower secondary schools were combined and preparation was made for streaming in upper secondary schools. A number of specialized universities were established and developed.
19. The replacement of textbooks at all school levels --the most important task in the third education reform and completed in 1996-- brought consistency to general education across the nation. As for educational content alone, the reformed curriculum comprised of elements that are more modern and therefore created pre-conditions for the improvement of education quality.

However, this reform faced a number of challenges and revealed several limitations during implementation. The biggest limitation was the unrealistic, non-feasible, objectives and solutions, e.g. very large expansion of the size of the system, educational subsidies for all, universalization, etc. Meanwhile, there was a lack of adequate resources due to the border war and economic recession. An example of unfeasible solution proposed by the third education reform --a reflection of centralized planning-- was the combination of primary and lower secondary schools. Due to inappropriate actual conditions (i.e. weak and poor teachers and educational managers, insufficient equipment, etc.), these combined schools were separated again in later stage. The general perception was one where large subsidies and education welfare support were expected by all. But this led to the educational underdevelopment as, having been influenced by such perception, the expenditure for education only accounted for small proportion in the state budget in comparison with other sectors. However people thought that their children’s education, even vocational or higher education should have been subsidized. The expectation of subsidies was totally inappropriate in a poor and underdeveloped country like Vietnam, especially in the context of post-war period and economic crisis.

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<sup>13</sup> Principle orientations for this education reform were outlined in the Resolution No. 14 -NQ/TW dated 1979 by Politburo, Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Term 3).

### *Twenty Years of Reform (1986-2005)*

20. The biggest challenge faced by Vietnamese education in early 1980s was that the State was not able to provide financial resources while it dismantled the importance of the collective economy. Consequently, education like other social sectors, faced a serious shortage of resources. Schools had little or no operating funds and finances for teacher salaries were insufficient. As a result both teachers and students left schools, and the size of the education system and its quality declined. Universities, colleges and professional secondary schools did not have an adequate minimum budget for maintaining their regular activities. Graduates could not find employment. Lecturers had to supplement their meager income with inappropriate jobs. Universities, colleges and professional secondary schools had no autonomy within a bureaucratic system.
21. In order to overcome the economic crisis, Vietnamese leaders planned, in 1986, for a major national reform to move from the centralized planning system to socialist-oriented market mechanism<sup>14</sup>. As a direct consequence of this overall change in national policy the education sector also needed to reform. The content and scope of this education reform were broad. One fundamental issue was to change past inappropriate perceptions and solutions, and to forcefully propose and implement new solutions so as to halt the recession, stabilize and strengthen the system, and bring about a situation with the resources needed for continued development. To meet this objective required changes in the areas of socialization, democratization, diversification, and mobilization of social, family and school resources for the younger generation. The education sector made efforts to maintain, enhance and develop the national education system, and to put emphasis on improving the material and spiritual lives of teachers and educational managers -- those with a decisive role in achieving better educational quality and efficiency.
22. *For general education*, reform orientations were: to continue to carry out and make modifications to curricula objectives and content, textbooks and education-related perceptions; to gradually achieve comprehensive quality in a manner appropriate to each type of student, teacher, school and locality; to link general education with vocational education; to continue strongly affirming the State's responsibilities and to implement educational socialization. And while implementing socialization activities, it was important to avoid any unrealistic expectation of public subsidies.
23. Some solutions used in the reform of general education were as follows. The Government allowed the collection of tuition fees at all levels (with the exception of primary education as this sub-sector has a target of universalization); permission was given to open private kindergartens, and semi-public and people-founded classes/schools at all levels. The education sector classified learning activities according to levels of student abilities; it established specialized schools at lower and upper secondary levels for gifted students; and established selective classes for excellent students in normal/teacher-education lower and upper secondary schools (specialized schools and selective classes were not proposed at primary level in order to avoid overload, that might compromise children's development).

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<sup>14</sup> This important decision on the historic reform was approved in the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (December 1986)

The reform strengthened the pilot work on streaming the upper secondary curriculum; prepared for streamed curriculum expansion to allow classification of learning activities according to student's abilities and expectations, and provide different pathways. Work and vocational skills were provided through linkages between general and vocational education. As for primary education level, together with the gradual finalization of the on-going reformed curriculum, various programs were also developed for ethnic minority children and disadvantaged children to introduce more flexible classes. Drawing on the experience in previous anti-illiteracy campaigns, the Government established the "National Committee on Anti-Illiteracy", and attached the anti-illiteracy task to primary education universalization.

24. *For vocational education*, reform orientations were to: transform the training of human resources that had previously been oriented towards the state-owned and collective sector to training oriented to the needs of the market economy. The reform aimed to adjust the structure of training disciplines/areas according to labor market needs with a view to meeting the requirements of a labor structure appropriate to the economic transition. The reform aimed to improve training quality to fulfill the requirements of increased human resource quality and to create competitiveness within economic relationships in domestic and international markets.
25. Some solutions used to carry out vocational education reform were to ask for student contributions through tuition fees and covering the costs during their practical sessions; the state budget was used to maintain the existing professional secondary and vocational schools, to build infrastructure, and to cover teacher-training activities. Permission was given for the establishment of semi-public/private/people-founded vocational institutions. Technical teaching activities were organized for students in schools to provide vocational skills for young people and to establish a technical education system in the society. A model for a vocational secondary school was adopted – a combination of general and vocational education. A pilot training scheme for highly skilled technicians in the fields of post office and telecommunication, light industry, transportation, mine engineering, chemicals and culture/arts was launched to replace those with secondary qualifications. Training was to be conducted on the basis of vocational skill modules (the so-called MES), which classified vocational skills system into various skill components equivalent to those required for carrying out a job. The training to carry out a job would mean an accumulation of various skill components; as there were different various skills required by different jobs, linkages among various training areas were achieved.
26. *For higher education*, reform orientations were that instead of training for public organizations and a part of the collectives, training was provided for various economic components and to meet the diverse learning needs of the society. Instead of reliance on the state budget, all possible financial sources were to be mobilized and used. Instead of implementing the plan targets set by the State, other non-State targets were also set and fulfilled. Instead of rigid training programs, various flexible and diverse training programs were developed to meet the requirements of employment creation and finding a job in the market economy with many job-related changes.

27. Some solutions used in the higher education reform were to manage the organization and quantity of the required minimum knowledge and escape from the perception that higher education was simply considered as vocational training. The reform aimed to renovate the training process with broad disciplines and it divided learning at the higher education level into two stages; replacing year-based courses with credit-based training. It aimed to improve checking, assessment and testing procedures; to delegate authority to higher education institutions to organize their entrance examinations; and to allow a candidate to sit such exams in several institutions. The reform aimed to renovate management activities and to strengthen state management functions with laws and regulations; to decentralize and reduce professional activities undertaken by the Ministry; to increase autonomy for higher education institutions; and to give a green light to institutions to set and fulfill their own targets to meet socio-economic development requirements. It required that higher education institutions expand their student intakes, carry out continuous screening during the learning process, and provide accurate evaluation of outputs. It also encouraged and facilitated connections between research institutes/enterprises in training, research and application activities. It aimed to renovate the higher education organization model and restructure the institutional network to overcome the “patchwork” or “piecemeal” problem; establishing new types of higher education institutions (universities with various members, open universities, community colleges, semi-public/private/people-founded universities, etc.).
28. Thanks to such sound directions, after 10 years of this reform the education sector had experienced positive development and gained considerable achievements. In the 1993-1994 school-year, the size of the education and training system at all levels from pre-school, general education, vocational education to higher education had expanded and surpassed the most successful year during pre-reform period.

For primary level alone, the dropout rate decreased from 12.7% in 1989-1990 to 6.58%<sup>15</sup> and repetition rate fell from 10.6% in 1989-1990 to 6.18%. In mid-1990s (in the last century), the total numbers of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary students were over 10 million, 3.7 million and 860,000 respectively. After 5 years, localities mobilized more than 1.7 million out-of-school children to attend schools, of which 200,000 children fulfilled primary education universalization requirements and hundreds of thousands of them returned to school; more than 1.2 million adults were provided opportunities to attend anti-illiteracy classes, of which nearly half a million could read at the equivalent level of Grade 3<sup>16</sup>.

As for vocational education, the number of those following short training course increased from 95,500 (1993) to 128,700 (1994). Vocational secondary programs were organized by 50 schools and many graduates found work in economic units<sup>17</sup>. The pilot program of training highly skilled technicians was conducted in six professional secondary schools in the fields of

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<sup>15</sup> In 2004, repetition rate at primary level was 1.01%; lower secondary 0.83%; upper secondary 1.34%.

<sup>16</sup> In early 1990, there were about 2.1 million out-of-school children in the age group of 6-14 years old, and 2 million illiterate adults in the age group of 15-35 years old.

<sup>17</sup> The biggest challenge to this type of programs was that it was only advantageous when academic and technical knowledge and skills were taught in parallel; academic theory and vocational practice were structured in integrated way, not just a simple combination of complementary and vocational training components. Due to the failure to address this challenge and the lack of physical facilities and equipment, the vocational secondary programs could not be maintained.

post office and telecommunication, light industry, transportation, mine engineering, chemicals and culture/arts. The biggest challenge was the organization of training process (shortage of teachers, teacher required to teach multiple subjects, etc.). There were also insufficient laboratory experiment units for various subjects, leading to the inadequate training quality. MES training was conducted in 15 training areas/disciplines, and five sets of MES-based teaching and learning materials for five areas were developed and published for wide application. Several vocational schools with longer-term programs in the fields of construction, and post office and telecommunication also started to offer module-based training programs.

As for higher education, these institutions gradually stabilized and expanded their size with their lecturers getting better income through their own professional activities. Within the higher education institution network, five major multi-disciplined universities were established in Hanoi, Hochiminh City, Thai-Nguyen, Hue and Danang. More non-public universities were also established. International relations were expanded with opportunities for leaders, professors and lecturers to have academic exchanges with their international colleagues.

29. Although various serious challenges were addressed at the beginning of reform period, some of the above-mentioned solutions were difficult to implement and to not fully effective, or faced distortions and required adjustments. At the end of 1996, Vietnamese leaders conducted a 10-year review of educational reform that identified strategic orientations for educational development for industrialization and modernization, and the tasks for education sector in the last years of 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>18</sup>. Several of the initial solutions of the reform were adjusted such as: discontinuation of selective classes in general schools, and specialized schools at lower secondary level; abolishment of rigid and widespread regulations on the two stages and transition exam between two stages in higher education; better preparation for school curriculum and textbook reforms, especially the streamed upper secondary curriculum; discontinuation of vocational secondary education, etc.
30. In the most recent ten years, the size of the education system has continued to expand with an increase of the total number of students from 20 million (in 1996) to 23 million (in 2005). The universalisation of primary education at the correct-age and lower secondary education universalization activities are very positive achievements. In the 2004-2005 school year, the participation rate of primary school age children was 98.0%; the transition rate from primary (graduates) to lower secondary (Grade 6) levels was 98.5%; the participation rate of lower secondary school age children was 84.0%; the transition rate from lower secondary (graduates) to upper secondary (Grade 10) levels was 77.1%. The school network has continued to expand and basically met children's learning needs at primary and lower secondary schools. The new school curriculum and textbooks were introduced in 2002-2003 school year and should become universal by the 2008-2009 school year, thus laying the pre-conditions for improved educational quality. And in the most recent five years, 5.3 million people were trained in vocational training institutions, of which two-thirds followed the longer courses. The average rate of enrollment growth was 14.7%/year in professional

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<sup>18</sup> According to the Resolution of the Second Conference of Vietnamese Communist Party Central Committee, Term VIII (December 1996).

secondary education. As for higher education, the number of students increased from 760,000 to more than 1.3 million during 1998-2004 period with the average increased rate of 6.4% per year. Non-formal education was strengthened with the continuing education center network covering in all districts nationwide. Community learning centers were established in more than half of the nation's communes. Together with this significant growth of the system, important progress was also made in the equity of educational opportunities. The gaps in educational access across ethnic groups were narrowed. The average increase rates in the number of ethnic minority children attending lower secondary and upper secondary schools were 7.3% per year and 26.1% per year respectively<sup>19</sup>.

However in parallel with these achievements, the Vietnamese education system still faces a number of weaknesses and mismatches such as low educational quality and efficiency, especially in vocational and higher education. Several negative cases and slow progress are causing social concern. Therefore, education has become a hot topic of discussion in media, conferences, workshops, seminars as well as the National Assembly's Congresses. Given today's significant developments in science and technology and socio-economic fields, and considering globalization and the requirements for the development of a knowledge-based economy, both the Vietnamese leaders and people are not satisfied with the current situation and are calling for stronger reform in the education sector.

## **Part 2**

### **The Current Vietnamese Education System – Issues, Policies, Experience**

#### ***System Structure - School Network***

31. Since 1945, adult education in form of non-formal education (initially anti-illiteracy classes, subsequently “complementary” education and currently continuing education) has existed in the Vietnamese education system. However, at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, some educational policy-makers and researchers saw continuing education as only a delivery mode and not a part of the education system structure. The Education Law 1998 shows some conceptual hesitance in relation to non-formal education, by stating, “Non-formal education units consist of continuing education centers...” However, in the Education Law 2005, this regulation was modified: “The national education system consists of formal education and continuing education”. Therefore, it should now be understood that continuing education is not just a delivery mode but also a part of the overall system.

In terms of different sub-sectors and training qualifications, the Vietnamese education system comprises of:

- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), including crèches and kindergartens;
- General education, including three levels: primary, lower secondary and upper secondary;
- Vocational education with 3 levels: elementary, intermediate and college level;

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<sup>19</sup> Cited in Paragraph 30: Draft report on Phase I (2001-2005) implementation of the Strategic Plan for Educational Development during 2001-2010 period, the National Institute for Educational Strategy and Curriculum, the Ministry of Education and Training.

- Higher education: college, undergraduate, master and doctorate levels.

In terms of curricula/programs, there are some structured on the basis of educational levels and training qualifications as stated above; there are also those not direct equivalent to an educational level or training qualifications (such as continuing education programs or professional training, in-service training, updating knowledge/skills, etc.).

Educational institutions include: schools, colleges, universities, institutes and educational centers. Vietnam is also making efforts through the media to offer distance learning and education.

32. As for the school/class network, the principle that is followed is one of schools that are “close-to-people”. Up to now, educational institutions are present in all residential areas nationwide. More specifically:
- a) Each commune, quarter has at least a pre-school unit, a primary school, a lower secondary school or combined primary and lower secondary school (this type of school only exists in socio-economically disadvantaged areas); most communes have community learning centers.
  - b) In addition each district, town or provincially managed city has one or more upper secondary schools, and a district-level continuing education center. Towns, urban districts and many rural districts have comprehensive technical and career orientation centers. Each mountainous and island district has a lower secondary boarding school for ethnic minority students<sup>20</sup> and a general school with different levels.
  - c) Furthermore each province and centrally managed city has a specialized upper secondary school for excellent (gifted) students, a normal or pedagogical training school and/or a junior college, and a provincial continuing education center. Mountainous provinces and those provinces with a large proportion of mountainous districts have an upper secondary boarding school for ethnic minority students. Some provinces and centrally managed cities even have art and sports/physical education schools for students gifted in these specializations, and also schools for those with disabilities.
  - d) Colleges and universities are concentrated in Hanoi, Hochiminh City, and some other cities such as Haiphong, Thai-Nguyen, Hue, Danang, Cantho, etc.

### ***Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) - Implementation of Children's Rights***

33. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Vietnam provides nurturing, caring and learning services for children from 3 months old to 6 years old. Crèches accept infants from 3 months to 3 years of age. Kindergartens accept children from 3 to 5 years of age. In the 2004-2005 school year, there were 2,754,094 children attending 47,906 ECCE units; of which 37,520 were crèches with 421,436 infants, and 10,386 were kindergartens with 2,332,658 children.

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<sup>20</sup> Lower secondary level

34. The Vietnamese Government's policy towards children in ECCE institutions is to ensure all children's rights as stipulated by the Education Law and the Law on Child Protection and Care. More specifically:

- a) Children are provided with nurturing, care and education for the comprehensive physical, emotional, intellectual and aesthetic development that is appropriate to their age psychology.
- b) Children are provided with free primary healthcare, medical examination and treatment in public medical units.
- c) Children are provided with a fee reduction for entertainment and play activities.

The establishment of kindergartens aims to help mothers by providing them with somewhere that can take care of their children while they are working or participating in social activities. This service contributes to the fulfillment of gender equity by providing mothers with wider opportunities.

35. According to the Education Law, ECCE units in Vietnam are established under the authority of the District People's Committee (for public units), or communities (for people-founded units) or individuals (for private units).

- The establishment of public ECCE units is only allowed in socio-economically disadvantaged or poor communes and ethnic minority areas.
- People-founded ECCE units are mainly located in rural areas. Residents in the community make their contributions to the creation of the unit, the purchase of equipment and the operating costs; the local authorities are responsible for providing resource-related assistance.
- The Government encourages individuals to open private ECCE units. These units will enjoy special treatment such as being provided with space or rental land or physical facilities, and given tax or credit preferences.

36. Vietnam's ECCE objectives for the period up to 2010 are:

- a) To improve the quality of care of children before they reach the age of six. To reduce the child malnutrition rate to less than 15% in ECCE units<sup>21</sup>.
- b) To expand the system of crèches and kindergartens in all types of residential areas, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas, in order to attract 18% and 67% of under 3 and 3-to-5 year-old children respectively. As for 5-year-olds alone, 95%<sup>22</sup> will be mobilized to prepare them for entering Grade 1 of primary education.
- c) To strengthen the dissemination of knowledge and advisory activities for grandparents and parents in relation to children's development, nurturing and education.

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<sup>21</sup> 20% in 2005

<sup>22</sup> These were 15%, 58% and 85% respectively in 2005.

## ***Primary Education***

37. Primary education in Vietnam consists of five grades, starting with 6-year-old children. Therefore, children will, without repeating, complete primary schools at the age of 11.

In the current primary school curriculum, children in Grades 1-3 should study 6 subjects: the Vietnamese language, Mathematics, Natural and Social Sciences, Moral Education (civics), Physical Education, and Arts. While only Vietnamese language and Mathematics have textbooks (for student's use); the remaining subjects have teacher's guides (for teacher's use). Children in Grades 4-5 have to learn 7 subjects: the Vietnamese language, Mathematics, History and Geography, Sciences, Moral Education (civics), Physical Education, and Arts. In these grades the four subjects of Vietnamese language, Mathematics, History and Geography, and Sciences have pupils' textbooks, while the remaining subjects have teacher's guides.

38. In the 2004-2005 school year, Vietnam had 14,518 primary schools and 1,034 combined primary and lower secondary schools. The total number of primary students in the 2004-2005 school year was 7,773,484. In recent years, the number of primary students has continued to decline<sup>17</sup>. Analysts believe that this phenomenon is due to the decreasing population growth rate (i.e. the declining number of 6-11 year-old population) and the achievement of correct-age enrollment (previously, with pupil repetition and late-entry or over-aged pupils the number of students in primary schools was larger than 6-11 year-old population).

In order to fulfill the regulations stipulated in Primary Education Universalization Law in 1991 (i.e. every child must complete primary school at the age of 14 at the latest), for the past ten years the 5<sup>th</sup> of September has been chosen as the "*Day for bringing children to schools*" with the aim to encourage all families with 6-year-old children to bring their children to Grade 1. In 2000, the enrollment rate for 6-11 year-olds was 95%; this figure was more than 98% in the 2004-2005 school year.

39. The objectives for primary education in the period up to 2010 are: to achieve the goal of the universalization of primary education with the correct-age (attracting 99% children to enroll in schools, and minimizing the repetition and drop-out rates); to improve the quality and efficiency of such schooling, moving towards full-day schooling; to introduce foreign languages to students, starting from Grade 3; to encourage the use of information technology in teaching and learning; and to reduce the student/teacher ratio and class size.

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<sup>17</sup> In 2001-2002 school year, the number of primary students was 9,311,010. Therefore, there is an average decrease of nearly 400-500 thousand students.

## *Secondary Education*

40. Secondary education in Vietnam is divided into two levels: lower and upper secondary. Lower secondary education consists of four grades (Grades 6 to 9). Upper secondary education comprises of three grades (Grades 10 to 12). As the lower secondary level is universal, every primary student who completes primary school is allowed to enter Grade 6. As for upper secondary, all lower secondary students have to be successful in a selection examination in order to continue to upper secondary school. The selection can be made in three ways, either through an exam, or through consideration based on Grade 9 learning achievements, or through a combination of both. The decision on which selection method should be used in a particular province or centrally managed city will be made by the provincial/city People's Committee.
41. In the 2004-2005 school year, Vietnam had 10,075 lower secondary schools (of which 1,034 were combined lower secondary and primary schools) with 6,670,714 students; 2,224 upper secondary schools (of which 396 were combined lower and upper secondary schools) with 2,802,101 students. In provinces with a high proportion of ethnic minorities (i.e. mountainous provinces and those with many mountainous districts), there are some lower and upper secondary boarding schools. The total number of boarding schools for ethnic minority children is 325, of which 11 are central-level schools with 4,400 students; 48 are provincial-level (upper secondary) schools with about 20,000 students; and 266 are district-level (lower secondary) schools with some 60,000 students.
42. Implementation of a streamed upper secondary curriculum is one of the important parts of the education reform. From the 2006-2007 school year, the upper secondary curriculum will be divided into three streams: (i) Basic, (ii) Natural sciences (and mathematics), (iii) Social sciences and foreign languages. All three streams include the following subjects: Literature, History, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Foreign Languages, Politics and Citizenship, and Physical Education/Sports. The requirements for the three key streams are knowledge and skill standards (i.e. minimum and essential requirements) in all subjects in the curriculum. The Natural sciences stream requires advanced level for four subjects: Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. The social sciences and foreign languages stream requires advanced level for four subjects: Literature, History, Geography and Foreign Languages.

For a school, the principal/school council can make a choice on how many streams and which stream(s) to be applied after reporting and getting approval from the Director of Provincial Department of Education and Training. For those schools operating the basic stream, they may also organize teaching advanced subjects in the two other streams of natural sciences (and mathematics), and social sciences and foreign language in order to widen the students subject selection options.

43. Objectives in secondary education for the period up to 2010 are: to achieve universal lower secondary education; to attract 99% of children at the age of 11-15 and 50% those at the age of 15-18 to attend lower and upper secondary education respectively; to reduce the repetition

and drop-out rates; and to make sure that all students are provided with the opportunity to continuously study a foreign language from Grades 6 to 12.

### ***Vocational Education***

44. Vietnam's vocational education sub-sector aims to train workers and assist them to find jobs or further their professional/technical skills/qualifications. According to the new Education Law, vocational training covers three levels: elementary, intermediate and college. Elementary training is carried out over a period of less than a year; intermediate and college-level training takes place over 1 to 3 years, depending on the profession's characteristics and requirements, and student's qualifications.
45. Vocational institutions include professional secondary schools under the management of the Ministry of Education and Training; and vocational training schools and centers under the management of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). According to the Education Law, the vocational training system under the responsibility of MOLISA will move to provide training at all three levels -- elementary, intermediate and college.

In the last five years (2001-2005), the vocational education network (under MOLISA's management) was forcefully strengthened and developed. At present, there are 1,688 vocational training institutions nationwide distributed across all provinces. These include 236 vocational schools (doubled by comparison with that in 1998), 404 vocational centers and more than 1,000 vocational training classes<sup>18</sup>. In the vocational institution system, there are public, private and foreign-funded schools as well as those belonging to the army that train demobilized soldiers. As for professional secondary schools (under MOET management), in the last five years the number of these has increased despite the upgrading of some of the stronger schools to become colleges. Specifically, there were 253 schools in 2000-2001 academic-year and 285 schools in 2004-2005 academic-year with 283,335 students. Of these there were 238 public schools and 47 private ones. These were ministry and locally-managed schools, with an average of 3 to 5 schools in each province (excluding three newly established provinces)<sup>19</sup>.

46. *The shortcoming that needs to be addressed* in relation to the vocational training institution network is that although vocational schools and centers are distributed evenly across provinces, some lower-level localities still do not have any. In 2004, there were only about 100 out of over 600 districts with vocational centers (16.6%). Meanwhile, the objective for the period up to 2010 is that 100% of districts will have vocational training centers. With such a narrow vocational training institution network, it is difficult to meet the training demands in localities, especially in rural areas. In addition, the demand for skilled human resources, especially for foreign-funded enterprises, is becoming increasingly urgent.

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<sup>18</sup> Source: Draft report on Phase I (2001-2005) implementation of the Strategic Plan for Educational Development during 2001-2010 period, the National Institute for Educational Strategy and Curriculum.

<sup>19</sup> In 2004, there were 286 schools, of which 246 public schools and 40 non-public ones. From management responsibility perspective, 211 and 75 schools were managed by localities and central agencies/Ministries respectively.

However, the training capacities of Vietnamese vocational training institutions are still very limited.

47. Objectives in vocational education for the period up to 2010 are: to establish the practical technical training system that meets the demands of socio-economic development; to pay attention to short-term vocational training of skilled workers, technicians and professional staff at college level on the basis of upper secondary or intermediate levels; and to attract 30% of students that finish/complete lower secondary education and 10% of students that finish/complete upper secondary education to attend vocational schools at the intermediate and college levels respectively.

### ***Higher Education***

48. Higher education in Vietnam includes four levels: college, undergraduate, master and doctorate. Specifically:
- a) College-level training over 2-3 year courses is available for upper secondary or professional and vocational secondary graduates; or over 1-2 year courses for those graduates in the same training area/discipline;
  - b) Undergraduate-level training over 4-6 year courses is available for upper secondary or professional and vocational secondary graduates; or over 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-4 year courses for graduates from the same training area/discipline at secondary level; or even 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-2 year courses for graduates in the same training area/discipline at college level;
  - c) Master-level training courses of 1-2 years are available for university graduates;
  - d) Doctorate-level training over 4 years is available for university graduates; and over 2-3 years for master degree holders.

49 Higher education institutions in Vietnam include:

- a) Junior colleges;
- b) Colleges and universities, including those with different university members and others with only faculties, academies;
- c) Universities and research institutes are only allowed to provide master and doctorate training if they are qualified by having a sufficient pool of professors and associate professors, physical facilities, equipment and experience in taking on the responsibilities of conducting state-level scientific research.

In the 2004-2005 academic-year, Vietnam had 230 colleges and universities with 1,319,754 students; 122 postgraduate training units with 34,789 master students<sup>20</sup> and research students<sup>21</sup>. In 2005, the proportion of students per ten thousand population was 140.

50 In the last 20 years of reform, Vietnam's higher education has experienced significant development, expansion of enrollments, extension of training objectives and diversification of ownership and resources for investment. As for the enrollment growth during 2001-2002

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<sup>20</sup> Those trained to hold master degrees

<sup>21</sup> Those trained to hold doctorate degrees

to 2004-2005 academic-years alone, the number of college students increased by 29.7%; university students by 37.1%; and master and doctorate degree students by 62.4%. Managers, scientists, teachers, social workers, businesspersons and civil servants - most trained in Vietnam with university and postgraduate degrees - have actively and efficiently made their contributions to the reform.

However, Vietnam's higher education still faces mismatches in fulfilling the needs for industrialization, modernization and international economic integration, and the sub-sector does not yet meet the people's demand for tertiary learning. Universities and research institutes have lacked close linkages with reality; training quality and efficiency have been poor; teaching and learning methods have been out-of-date; resources have been very limited and resource utilization has been inefficient; and institutional autonomy and accountability have not been made full use of. These shortcomings and mismatches require further strengthening of the higher education reforms.

### ***Continuing Education***

51. For a long period, Vietnam has been consistent in its determination to achieve the goals of literacy and development of adult education (initially with anti-illiteracy classes, then through complementary education and currently with continuing education). The result has been that tens of millions of people have escaped illiteracy. Millions of people, through complementary and in-service training classes, have expanded their knowledge and understanding.

At present, continuing education aims to help people work and study at the same time, to achieve life-long learning, to improve personal characteristics, and to expand their knowledge. Through continuing education people should raise their knowledge levels and professionalism, improve the quality of their life, self-employment and job creation opportunities, and make better contributions to society.

52. Continuing education comprises of the following:

- a) Anti-illiteracy and post-literacy programs;
- b) Tailor-made programs for updating knowledge and skills, and technology transfer;
- c) Programs for in-service training, retraining and upgrading professional qualifications;
- d) Educational degree granting programs in the national education system.

53. The organization of the Continuing education network consists of provincial and district continuing education centers and community learning centers. In parallel, general schools, and vocational and higher education institutions are also involved in providing continuing education programs.

In 2004-2005 academic-year, there were 61 provincial continuing education centers, 517 district continuing education centers, 29 complementary schools, 478 informatics and foreign language training in cities, and 5,383 community learning centers (in communes in rural areas).

54. The objectives for continuing education in the period to 2010 and 2015 are:
- a) To improve anti-illiteracy achievements and the literacy rate among the population aged 15-35;
  - b) To expand learning opportunities for adults and workers, helping them access and benefit from training programs to improve their knowledge, working abilities and quality of life;
  - c) To establish continuing education units in all locations nationally.

### **Part 3**

#### **Challenges to Education in Vietnam and Key Solutions**

##### ***Reform of General Education Curricula***

55. The renovation of general education curricula in Vietnam officially started in 2000<sup>23</sup>. From then up to the present (2006), the new curricula and textbooks have been introduced and used for teaching and learning in all grades at primary and lower secondary schools. Streamed upper secondary curriculum and textbooks will be introduced in the coming 2006-2007 school year.

In order to produce the new curricula and textbooks, a collective of distinguished teachers and scientists conducted a tight research and development process with 2-5 years of piloting before nationwide expansion. The number of pilot schools was 450 primary schools, 159 lower secondary schools and 48 upper secondary schools, spread across different locations in more than ten provinces. As for textbooks, the draft manuscripts followed a two-stage appraisal process before being cleared for printing for pilot and official use. Trial printing was subject to further comments before books were final issued for classroom use.

56. The overall view is that this renovation of the general education curricula has met the objectives and requirements of educational content and methodology at different levels as laid down in the Education Law. The revised curricula has improved consistency in learning, and has also facilitated continuation and development among levels; it has enhanced linkages across general, vocational and higher education; and provided the basis for creating pathways in the national education system. The revised curricula have made for better harmonization between a subject's content and the teaching/learning methodology, and it has improved links between curriculum/textbook and teaching equipment. It has strengthened practical components and lightened theoretical elements; and recognized social and humanity sciences, and science and technology achievements that are appropriate to a student's cognitive abilities.

Although streamed upper secondary curriculum is not a new concept; it has taken more than 10 years of piloting, debate and modifications to reach a final decision. The main constraint here has been wavering between two choices: on the one hand a single comprehensive

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<sup>23</sup> Some people perceived this as the fourth education reform.

curriculum and on the other a streamed curriculum that is seen to give more options to students.

Despite the achievement of such encouraging progress, Vietnam's general education curricula have not yet escaped from the classical approach and maintain a distinct separation across various subjects (literature, history, geography, mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc.). Consequently, the integration of different specializations that was expected has not yet been achieved.

The biggest challenge to curriculum renovation is that curriculum specialists/authors always want students to follow the same path that they themselves have already experienced. Most curriculum specialists/authors have not been able to go beyond their established perceptions or approaches implied by the traditional division into subject specializations. Objectively speaking, the current school management capacities and teacher qualifications cannot yet meet the requirements of renovated curricula. Nevertheless, the learning content provided by schools cannot be allowed to fall behind the scientific and technology discoveries constantly and rapidly emerging in today's world. The question of "what should secondary schools teach students today?" is still a challenge to Vietnamese policy-makers in education sector. Moreover, this is not the question for Vietnam only<sup>24</sup>.

### ***Reform of Higher Education***

57. In order to enhance the national intellectual capacity, the competitiveness of human resources and the country's economy, the Government tasked the Ministry of Education and Training to develop *Higher Education Renovation Project for 2006-2020 period*.

The overall objectives of the renovation of higher education over the next 15 years are: to make fundamental changes in higher education quality and size; to improve institutional and system competitiveness; and to make higher education institutions responsive to -and operate efficiently within- the socialist-oriented market mechanism. On that basis, higher education should better fulfill its mission of training highly qualified human resources that meet the country's socio-economic development requirements and people's learning needs

58. To achieve the above objectives, universities, colleges and the entire higher education sub-sector will need to address the following *specific objectives*:
- a) Complete the national network of higher education institutions with distinct organizational tiers (national, regional, provincial etc.), that are in line with socio-economic development plan.
  - b) Refine the division of training programs into two categories of research and career-application. Shift to a system of credit-based courses. Finalize the higher education quality assurance and accreditation system; and reach agreements on certification with

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<sup>24</sup> France – a country considered as having perfect secondary education system – has also to concern with this question (See Le defi XXI, Relier les Connaissances-21<sup>st</sup> century Challenges, Knowledge Linkages, Edgar Morin as Chief Editor, Vietnamese Version, Hanoi National University Publishing House, 2005).

other countries in the region and elsewhere; and consequently establish several international-level universities.

- c) Expand enrollments to meet the target of 200 students/10,000 people by 2010 and 450 students/10,000 people by 2020, of which 70-80% of the students will follow career-application programs and 40% of students will attend non-public institutions.
- d) Ensure that by 2010 at least 40% and 25% of academic and lecture staff have master and doctorate degrees respectively; and also ensure that the student/lecturer ratio in higher education institutions will not exceed 20.
- e) Use modern management methods and technology, especially information technology and media in higher education institutions; and establish a national database center for training and scientific research, and an e-library system.
- f) Significantly improve the scope and efficiency of science and technology-related activities within higher education institutions. Major universities will need to become strong national scientific research centers. Income from scientific research, technology transfer, production and services taking place in institutions should account for about 15% of their total revenue. More than 1% of state budget will be allocated for universities to carry out scientific research tasks.
- g) Ensure greater institutional autonomy and accountability of all aspects. The latter by making sure that the State management and the society's monitoring and evaluation roles are carried out on the activities of higher education institutions.

59. Higher education renovation will be implemented in three phases:

- a) In the period 2006-2010 the detailed higher education renovation project should be finalized. Emphasis will be placed on several of the above-stated approaches such as: renewal of training content and methods, and renovation of management and resource mobilization mechanisms in order to bring about quality improvements.
- b) During 2011-2015 the renovation should concentrate on strengthening achievements gained during the first phase. Timely implementation of solutions should focus on improved efficiency of human resource utilization, and provision of sufficient --in both quantity and quality terms-- lecturing staff and higher education managers. The renovation should strive for significant improvements in quality so as to come closer to regional and international standards.
- c) In the 2016-2020 period the renovation should ensure the establishment of a modern higher education system with an appropriate qualification structure and network. This system will be equal to that of other countries in the region, and basically meet the demands for highly qualified human resources for industrialization and modernization.

### ***Universalization of Education***

60. The implementation of universal education in Vietnam has the following notable features:

- a) *Encouragement without sanctions.* Although primary education is compulsory as stipulated in Universal Primary Education Law 1991, Education Law 1998 and Education Law 2005, there are no sanctions where parents do not follow this. The difference

between compulsory and non-compulsory levels is that students in public schools at a compulsory level are free from tuition fees.

- b) *Enrollment at the correct-age can be fulfilled on phased basis.* For primary education, the universalization process is divided into two phases:
  - Before 2000, the objective was that most of 14-year-old children will complete primary schools.
  - From 2000, the objective is that most of 14-year-old children will complete primary schools at the right age, i.e. *correct-age universalization*.
- c) After universal primary education, universal lower secondary education has been implemented without following the model of cumulatively increasing the number (i.e. 5 then 6 and 7) of compulsory years like other countries.
- d) *Evaluation and recognition of achievements made by each administrative unit.* Specifically, the National Assembly laid down the certification criteria for universal education at commune, district and provincial levels. As regulated by the Government, the Ministry of Education and Training and local authorities will undertake the checking and certification at different levels.

61. Criteria for certification of universal lower secondary education are set by the National Assembly<sup>25</sup> for each administrative unit as follows:

*Communes, quarters and district towns should:*

- Maintain, strengthen and consolidate the achievements of universal primary education.
- Ensure that the annual transfer rate of primary school graduates to lower secondary schools is 95% (80% or more in socio-economically disadvantaged communes).
- Improve education quality at lower secondary level by reducing the repetition and dropout rates; making sure that the annual lower secondary completion rate should be 90% or more (75% or more in socio-economically disadvantaged communes).
- Ensure that the proportion of young people in the age group of 15-18 with lower secondary education is 80% or more (70% or more in socio-economically disadvantaged communes).

*Districts, provincial towns and provincially managed cities should:*

- have achieved universal lower secondary education objectives in 90% of their communes, quarters, and district-towns.

*Provinces and centrally managed cities should:*

- have achieved universal lower secondary education objectives in 100% of their districts, provincial towns and provincially managed cities.

62. The responsibilities for checking and certifying universal lower secondary education results for each administrative unit are regulated by the Government<sup>26</sup> as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> Cited in Resolution No. 41/2000/QH10

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Decree No. 88/2001/ND-CP

- The central steering committee, chaired by the Ministry of Education and Training with the participation of relevant ministries/agencies, is responsible for providing checking and certification for provinces;
- The people's committees of provinces and centrally-managed cities establish provincial-level steering committees to provide checking and certification for districts, provincial towns and provincially-managed cities;
- The people's committees of districts, provincial towns and provincially managed cities establish district-level steering committees to provide checking and certification for communes, quarters and district towns.

62. *Vietnam's target for universal lower secondary education and correct-age primary education* is that by 2010, all provinces meet the national universalization standards. By March 2006, 35 provinces and centrally managed cities were certified by the Ministry of Education and Training as meeting the national standards on universal correct-age primary education and 32 met the national standard on lower secondary education respectively. Among these provinces and centrally managed cities, some were certified as achieving universal lower secondary education but not universal correct-age primary education, and others vice versa.

64. The lessons drawn from success and shortcomings faced during anti-illiteracy and universal primary education process are being applied to universal lower secondary education activities. They are:

- a) In order to achieve definite success, the *development of minimum knowledge foundation for the entire population* must be carried out simultaneously in three ways: (i) to facilitate universal education for children, adult illiteracy must be prevented; (ii) universal education for children must be met to prevent new numbers of illiterate people; (iii) non-formal education modes should be used to maintain and promote anti-illiteracy and universal education achievements, and to prevent the danger of repeated illiteracy. Among these three aspects, the establishment, maintenance and development of school/class network according to principle "*school-close-to-local people*" is the decisive factor.
- b) Everyone should closely link the development of the basic or minimum knowledge foundations of the entire population with key national tasks by everyone. This should be considered part of the goal of nation-building, socio-economic development and growth, and the preservation of national independence. With the national spirit and citizen awareness, all stakeholders from teaching staff, learners, to sponsors can recognize the social importance of their activities.
- c) Socialization is the most important lesson drawn from the first anti-illiteracy campaign (1945-1946), and has been continuously strengthened during the education development process. The success of anti-illiteracy and universal primary education campaigns in Vietnam is the combination of efforts made by tens of millions of people, ranging from teachers, learners, organizers, etc. In addition, it is also the result of active participation by mass organizations, and support and assistance from other sectors.
- d) The establishment of an enabling cultural environment that promotes and maintains all achievements already gained, is an integral part of the development of minimum knowledge foundation for the entire population. In addition to dissemination, culture

agencies, publishing houses, media, television and radio all play a very important role in the introduction of appropriate materials, contributing to improving people's knowledge and skills. Moreover, it also helps them access knowledge treasured in a developing society, and to continually make use of media during their life-long learning process, helping them learn and apply what they have learnt in real life.

### ***Goals of Education for All (EFA) – Building a Learning Society***

65. In response to the Dakar commitment, the Government of Vietnam provided guidance for drafting the Learning Society Building Project for the 2005-2010 period, and on 18 May 2005, the Prime Minister approved this project.

*The overall objectives* as stated in the project document are to facilitate people of different ages and educational levels to conduct regular and life-long learning; and to promote the development of -and linkages between- both formal and continuing education, in which continuing education is the pre-condition for building a learning society.

*The specific objectives* up to 2010 are to:

- a) Enhance anti-illiteracy achievements; increase the proportion of literate people in the age group of 15-35 from 94% to 99% with an emphasis on ethnic minority areas; remove differences and create gender equity in anti-illiteracy activities.
- b) Make sure that: 80% of officials at commune, quarter and district levels have opportunities for learning and updating their knowledge and skills on management, law, economy and social affairs; 100% of civil servants in state agencies are provided with professional training and upgrading in terms of management, politics, informatics and foreign languages; and 85% of workers in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishery can access and benefit from programs to improve their knowledge and working abilities, and subsequent quality of life.
- c) Make efforts so that 100% of provinces and centrally managed cities and 100% of districts and provincial towns have continuing education centers; and 80% of commune and quarters nationwide are able to establish community learning centers.

66. In order to achieve the above-stated objectives, the intermediate tasks for Vietnam's education sector are to:

- a) Strengthen and develop continuing education as part of the national education system; refine continuing education and community learning center networks; make the activities of continuing education and community learning centers relevant in content, lively in format, meet the learners' needs and provide learners with knowledge and problem-solving skills in their daily lives.
- b) Finalize degree-granting programs of continuing education; and develop educational programs in order to meet the learning demands of the entire population.
- c) Develop and improve the quality of teaching staff and managers of continuing education; implement measures to attract teachers, scientists and social workers to participate in teaching at continuing education and community learning centers. Educational

management bodies should actively cooperate with local Learning Promotion Associations to conduct training and provide mentoring for key staffs that are responsible for the development and operation of community learning centers.

- d) Renovate continuing education management mechanism; strengthen the linkages and coordination among various sectors; implement socialization activities so that continuing education makes considerable contributions to building learning societies.

### ***Social Equity in Education and Equity in Opportunities for Access to Education***

67. Social equity in education and equity in opportunities for access to education is the major challenge to such a poor country like Vietnam. Since the day of independence, the Government of Vietnam has, together with people, made efforts to overcome this challenge. Within the context of socialist-oriented market economy, implementation of social equity in education and equity in education access is the underlying principle of Vietnamese national education system.
68. According to Vietnam's Education Law, every citizen has equal learning opportunities, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, family background, social status and economic conditions. To achieve social equity in education, the Government of Vietnam creates learning conditions for everyone --with priorities given to ethnic minorities, children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, and people with disabilities-- to implement their learning rights and obligations.
69. For ethnic minorities, children from socio-economically disadvantaged and poor families, and people with disabilities, the Government has policies for social subsidies, scholarships and fee exemptions or reductions. For primary and lower secondary students in socio-economically disadvantaged communes, the Government has schemes for provision and distribution of textbooks and learning materials. An important step to achieve social equity in education is that in the near future, the Government will provide financial support so that private schools will be able to apply fee exemption/reduction policy to these children<sup>27</sup>.

In order to develop the human resources of the ethnic minorities, the Government established 4 pre-university institutions, 11 central-level boarding schools, 48 provincial-level boarding schools, 266 district-level boarding schools and 680 semi-boarding schools. These institutions provide learning places for nearly 300,000 ethnic minority students. Students in these schools receive scholarships, textbooks and learning materials. At the same time, the Government also uses a “nomination” mode to select ethnic minority students (most of them are upper secondary boarding school graduates) for training in universities without sitting the entrance exam. Other children from ethnic minority groups, socio-economically disadvantaged and rural areas also benefit from slightly lower entrance requirements (less than 3 marks, 2 marks and 1 mark respectively) than other students in the university selection process.

70. Two important indicators showing the equity in learning opportunities are the proportions of females and ethnic minority students in the total student population.

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<sup>27</sup> According to the education Law 2005

The past efforts to achieve gender equity are clearly reflected in the current teaching force. The proportions of female teachers and lecturers in education are high: nearly 100% of teachers at ECCE are women, 78% of primary school teachers are women, 70% of teachers in lower secondary schools are women, as are 55% in upper secondary schools, and 40% in professional secondary schools. Even in colleges 47% of teaching staff are women, and 36% of lecturers in universities are women<sup>28</sup>. The high proportion of women teachers has been built upon gender equity in enrollments in the student population. In the 2004-2005 school year, the proportion of female students were 47%, 47% and 49% in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools respectively. This figure was even higher in professional secondary schools, i.e. 58%. In university entrance exams, the newly enrolled female students accounted for 48%.

The gaps in access to education among different ethnic groups have been narrowed. In 5 years (2001-2005), the number of ethnic minority students has experienced significant increase, e.g. by 7.3% per year and 26.1% per year at lower and upper secondary schools respectively. In 2004-2005, the percentages of ethnic minority students out of total enrollments were 15.7%, 18.5%, 13.7% and 9.4% in general, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools respectively. However, in university entrance exams, the newly enrolled ethnic minority students accounted for less than 4% of entering students. Therefore, the proportions of ethnic minority students (9.4%) in upper secondary schools and newly enrolled ethnic minority students (4%) in higher education institutions are relatively low and need improvement. The Ministry of Education and Training has been asked by the Government to investigate and draft a Decree that revises the “nomination” mode in order to better facilitate ethnic minorities access to higher education programs.

The Government has paid special attention to education for children with disabilities. At present, Vietnam has approximately 1 million children with disabilities, and many of them are the victims of Agent Orange used by the American army during wartime. Because of many difficulties in provision of care and education for children with disabilities, the enrollment rate is only about 24.2% for these children, of whom 3% attend special schools and 97% attend inclusive classes in regular schools. In respect of training teachers for children with disabilities, there are 4 universities and 3 colleges that have established faculties/sections of special education. However, challenges, in relation to provision of care and education for children with disabilities, still exist due to the perceptions, lack of physical facilities and shortage of such specialized teachers.

### ***Preservation of Ethnic Minority Languages - Teaching Foreign Languages and Teaching through Foreign Languages***

71. In the community of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, each group has its own spoken language. However, except for the ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh), only about 10 out of the 50 plus ethnic minority groups (e.g. Chinese, Cham, Khmer, Thai, Tay, Hmong, Nung, Ede, Giarai, Bana,

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<sup>28</sup> 2002-2003 school-year statistics; Sources: Draft report on Phase I (2001-2005) implementation of the Strategic Plan for Educational Development during 2001-2010 period, the National Institute for Educational Strategy and Curriculum, the Ministry of Education and Training.

Xedang, K'Ho...) have a written scripts. The Government's language policy is to facilitate ethnic minorities to learn their spoken languages and scripts with a view to maintaining and promoting national cultural diversity.

72. For those ethnic minorities with written scripts, their languages are -in parallel with Vietnamese language- taught as a separate subject and used in anti-illiteracy and complementary classes. Teaching ethnic minority languages in primary schools is carried out according to the following principles:
- For those languages with the script in Latin characters, the teaching of such languages starts from Grade 3 to avoid the burden of learning two systems of Latin characters (i.e. Vietnamese and mother tongue languages) at the same time.
  - For those languages with the script in traditional (non-Latin) characters, the teaching of such languages starts from Grade 1.

The requirement is that, regardless of starting from Grade 1 or 3, all schools must ensure that their students will be good at reading and writing their mother tongues<sup>29</sup>.

Generally speaking, ethnic minority languages are taught in ECCE units, helping children use their mother tongues and understand Vietnamese before entering Grade 1. In order to help ethnic minority children easily acquire knowledge, the Government plans, in parallel with teaching the mother tongue, to encourage parents to send their 5-year-old children to schools and learn Vietnamese before entering Grade 1 at the age of 6.

73. *For foreign languages*, in most Vietnamese lower and upper secondary schools, students can learn one out of four foreign languages (English, Russian, Chinese and French) as a compulsory subject. In several large cities, the foreign language is considered as an optional subject in some primary schools. In some specialized schools, the foreign language is considered as a specialized subject for training gifted students. And for French alone, a handful of localities have implemented a project that uses French as the language of instruction. Due to the shortage of foreign language teachers, especially experienced ones, the organization of foreign languages instruction in Vietnam faces a number of difficulties: limited instruction time and low quality. Despite being compulsory, foreign language has only recently been made an examination subject for graduation at upper secondary school. Initially students could choose between foreign language and another subject in the examinations, but later foreign language became a compulsory subject. In 2001-2002 school year, the number of examination candidates doing foreign language tests accounted for over 90%.
74. To meet the needs of socio-economic, scientific and technological development, as well as international economic integration, the Government of Vietnam has asked the Ministry of Education and Training to prepare for a project on the improvement of foreign language teaching. Under the proposed project, instruction time will be increased starting from Grade 6 (Grade 3 in advantaged locations).

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<sup>29</sup> According to Circular No. 01/GDDT dated 3 February 1997 by the Ministry of Education and Training on the instructions on teaching ethnic minority spoken languages and scripts.

Together with strengthened foreign language teaching, in several training disciplines under some international projects the use of English or French as the language of instruction has been followed in some universities. In the near future, foreign languages (primarily English) as the medium of instruction will be encouraged in various universities.

### ***Development of Teaching Staff and Educational Managers***

75. In order to produce sufficient teachers for the growth of the education system, Vietnam has made many efforts to develop its teacher training system, and it has operated intensive teacher training courses (9+3, 12+1, etc. where 9 or 12 is the number of years of schooling and 3 or 1 relates to the intensive teacher training courses). As of the 2004-2005 school year, Vietnam had 986,604 teaching staff with an increase of 213,644 compared with 1998-1999 school year. Among the total number of teaching staff in 2004-2005 school year, there were more than 7,000 vocational trainers<sup>30</sup>, 155,699 pre-school teachers, 360,624 primary teachers, 295,056 lower secondary teachers, 106,586 upper secondary teachers, 13,937 professional secondary trainers, 13,677 college lecturers, and 33,969 university lecturers. Notably, the number of teacher continues to rise at primary level even though the number of primary students is declining due to demographic changes. In the future, this will also happen at lower secondary level. This provides an opportunity to reduce the student:teacher ratio - an important factor for quality improvement. However, it is also a challenge for education management as there is a need for some redeployment of these staff.
76. In terms of qualifications of teaching and lecturing staff, the Education Law states that pre-school and primary teachers must possess an upper secondary pedagogical diploma; lower secondary teachers must possess college diplomas; upper secondary and professional secondary teachers must possess a pedagogical university degree (or university degree plus a certificate of pedagogy training); college and university lecturers must possess a university degree or higher and a certificate of pedagogy training; a masters degree or higher for teaching specialized subjects or supervising a master thesis, a doctoral degree for teaching specialized subjects or supervising doctoral thesis. However, as previously stated, due to the proportion of unqualified teachers, the upgrading of staff (through in-service training courses) remains a critical requirement of the education sector. In the 2004-2005 school year, the percentage of qualified teachers in ECCE sub-sector was 75.8%; 82% at primary level, of which about 10% were holding higher (college or university) qualifications; 93% at lower secondary level, of which about 20% were holding higher (undergraduate or postgraduate) qualifications; 97% at upper secondary level, of which about 3% were holding higher (postgraduate) qualifications; 68.7% and 75.3% in vocational and professional secondary schools respectively.
77. To improve education quality, Vietnamese educational policy makers and managers feel that the *human factor* -teaching staff and educational managers- plays a decisive role. Therefore, Vietnam is trying to overcome weaknesses in pre-service and in-service training, deployment, organization and utilization of teachers. The aim is to develop a pool of teaching staff of sufficient numbers, organized in an appropriate structure, and that meets the moral and

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<sup>30</sup> 7,056 vocational teachers were the statistics for 2003-2004 school year.

professional requirements of the education renovation. At the same time, it is important to support educational managers with increased professionalism and standardized management capacities and qualifications. Within the current context, Vietnam pays special attention to enhanced professional ethics and knowledge of teachers and educational managers; and, in order to protect the reputation of schools and educational bodies, to address all cases of dishonesty and mistreatment of students. On the other hand, teaching staff and educational managers are also increasingly faced with a requirement for computer skills and improved foreign language skills, primarily in English.

78. With respect to incentives and policies for teachers, the Education Law states that in addition to salary, teachers shall receive allowances and other preferential rewards while working in: areas with extreme socio-economic difficulties, specialized schools, schools for gifted students, boarding schools for ethnic minorities, and schools for people with disabilities. Teachers nominated to attend professional and pedagogical enhancement programs will receive full salary and subsidies. Trainees at teacher training institutions are exempted from tuition fees and given scholarship priorities. Where system expansion occurs through non-public institutions, the trend will be towards achieving equity in teacher rewards and responsibilities with no distinction between teachers working in public and non-public schools, and those who are permanent and contracted.
79. In training the human resources needed for the education system, Vietnam's pedagogical institutions have focused only on training teachers with little attention paid to other skills (such as curriculum developers, educational planners, etc.). The college for training educational managers mainly focuses on in-service training and does not have a scientific pre-service manager training programs. Therefore, the development of a system similar to that of other countries remains a challenge to be addressed.

In the short-term, in order to improve education quality, the Ministry of Education and Training requires teacher training institutions and the educational manager training college to strongly renew teaching and learning methodologies. Such institutions should actively apply information technology to teaching, learning and management and use this as a means to achieve a breakthrough for the renewal of teaching, learning and management.

### ***Investment into Education - Mobilization of all Resources for Educational Development***

80. The biggest challenge faced by Vietnamese education system during the entire development process is the *contradiction between the goals of system growth/expansion and continual improvement of quality, and the limited resources*. During the long pre-reform period, the education system relied for its resources on the state budget. In making the transition, the Government wishes to mobilize all possible resources in the society for educational development. Past evidence proves the efficiency of this policy. According to the Education Law, financial sources of investment for education comprise of:
  - a. The State budget;
  - b. Charges and Fees: tuition fees; admission fees; income from consulting work, technology transfer, production, business and service activities of educational

institutions; investments from domestic and international organizations; educational development registration fees; and other funding from domestic and international organizations and individuals as regulated by law.

81. Together with people's contributions, especially from wealthy families and those from advantaged areas, the Government has continuously increased the budget share for education over the recent reform years. The share of GDP spent on education increased from 3.5% in 1994 to 4.6% in 2004. Compared with other sectors, education has been given priority, education spending as proportion of total public expenditure increased from 14% in 1997 to 18.6% in 2005. Vietnam's objective is to continue to increase education spending as a proportion of total public expenditure to 20%, thus contributing towards improved educational quality and efficiency, and the achievement of national goals.
81. With the education sector's increased share in the growing budget, the public expenditure structure for different levels and sub-sectors has also changed with an increased percentage for general education and ECCE (called education or schooling component), and decreased percentage for vocational and higher education (called training component). This demonstrates the Government's policy of giving priority to basic education and education in socio-economic disadvantaged and ethnic minority areas. Specifically, in 1998, the public expenditure spending shares were 73.3% for education (schooling) and 26.7% for training respectively; and by 2002 the figures had moved to 77.7% for education and 22.3% for training respectively. During this period, the public spending share for higher education also declined from 12.4% to 9.7%, as at the higher education level cost-sharing can be obtained from the contributions of learners and their families.

In respect of public expenditure for education and training by spending functions, the ratio of recurrent and capital expenditure components was not significantly changed during 1999-2002 with 73% on recurrent expenditures and 27% on capital spending respectively. In terms of absolute figures, capital expenditures doubled from 2,418 thousand billion dongs in 1999 to 4,375 thousand billion dongs in 2002. The current challenge is that spending on the education component (schooling) for the purchase of fixed assets (including pedagogical and teaching equipment) and small repairs is a low 10%, while the overall spending on salaries remains high. In 2002, spending on salaries and allowances in education component (schooling) accounted for 71.3% of total expenditure while this figure in training component (vocational and higher education) was only 27.4%. Since 1999, the spending on teacher salary per student has increased in all education sub-sectors (in line with general civil service pay rises). But primary level salary spending per student has experienced the sharpest increase, doubling in the last 4 years (from VND 263,023 per student in 1999 to VND 516,023 per student in 2002). This reflects the priorities and incentives given to teachers (a decisive factor in educational quality improvement process) and the decline in the primary school-age population.

83. In response to the national policy of socialization in the education sector (cost sharing and financial participation from users and their families), non-public education has been considerably expanded since 1994. This expansion has been strongest at ECCE and upper secondary levels. The number of non-public pre-schools increased from 30% in 1994 to 58%

in 2004. Similarly, the number of non-public upper secondary schools increased from 20% in 1994 to 32% in 2004.

Regarding parents' contributions, there are two different types of contribution, i.e. compulsory and voluntary. According to the Government regulations, parent's compulsory contributions include fees for tuition, examinations and construction/building. These contributions are considered as state budget revenues that are collected and retained by the school for financing educational activities. In line with their better incomes, parent's average spending on their children's learning went up to VND 627,000 per student in 2002: a 14.6% increase in comparison with 1997-1998 period. However, even while parents spent more, the parents' share of total spending on primary pupils --from contributions by, and direct costs to, families-- decreased as the state budget spending increased much faster. Thus, even as parents spent more on their children's education, between 1993 and 2002 the parents share of total spending on primary students declined from 55% to 27% as the state budget spending on education substantially increased. It is important to note that the share of state budget spending in total spending on students at the earlier levels of education is greater than that at upper levels of education. For example, in 2002 the state budget's share in spending for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education levels were 73%, 59% and 52% respectively. These figures once again demonstrate the Government's efforts to give priority to the education (schooling) sub-sector and to foster equity in education.

84. In the coming years, educational socialization and mobilization of people's contributions, especially from wealthy families and those in advantaged areas, will continue. The approach needed by the education sector is a continuation in the increase of the State's budget for education. Based on that assumption, adjustments to the structure of state budget spending will be made with greater focus and priority being given to the development of education in disadvantaged, ethnic minority areas, and to support for poor families and those who benefit from special policies, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas or study in public or private schools. In parallel with the refinement of support policies for students from poor families and those with special benefits, the Government's Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy and sector strategies have set targets for the abolition of fees and charges in primary and lower secondary education. Vietnamese educational policy makers and managers believe that only if the above-mentioned solutions are systematically addressed, can the gaps and differences in access and benefits among various areas and components of the society be narrowed quickly.

### ***Cooperation and International Integration in Education***

85. In response to the Government's policies on open international relations, in the last 5 years by diversifying various patterns of international cooperation, the Ministry of Education and Training has actively expanded and established international relations and cooperation with an increasing number of partners. Presently, the Ministry of Education and Training has partnerships with nearly 60 countries, and 36 international, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. It has signed 14<sup>(1)</sup> official documents on the strengthening and expansion of its relationships with 12 countries.

86. Through international activities, Vietnam's achievements and experience in the education sector have been shared with international friends. Thanks to these activities, the number of overseas students who have studied and done research in Vietnam (under bilateral cooperation agreements and at their own cost) has significantly increased. Moreover, the number of scholarships provided for Vietnam has also increased, giving opportunities for 4,000 Vietnamese students to study overseas in the last 5 years. In order to encourage and facilitate overseas studies by Vietnamese students, the Vietnamese Government spends, every year, about VND 100 billion to send 350-400 students overseas to study the advanced areas that Vietnam is in need of, but not yet capable of training. Another supporting strategy is that the Government provides some subsistence allowance support to Vietnamese students to study in 13 countries, and some other ways of support to motivate student's studies.
87. In parallel with student exchanges, Vietnam has actively exploited various sources of aids to supplement to the education budget. The total funding of aids and loan projects signed in the last 5 years is USD 217,8 million, in which the share of grants is significantly increasing. Part of this funding has already been disbursed while the remaining amount will be spent over the next 5 years. In general, these projects have contributed to improved educational quality and efficiency, enhanced education access to disadvantaged children, strengthening the capacities of teaching staff and educational managers, and provided better physical facilities and equipment for educational institutions, especially those in disadvantaged areas.
88. A number of Vietnamese universities have taken advantage of international funding sources to establish hi-tech and science centers so as to improve the quality of training and research. Those centers have put their emphasis on science and technology in priority areas such as bio-technology, new material sciences, information technology, automation, etc. Despite different sizes, these centers have been provided with modern and up-to-date equipment.
89. Vietnam's active participation in the activities led by regional and international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, AIF, AUF, ASEAN+1,2,3, Gang and Mekong Rivers Cooperation, and SEAMEO is part of a major effort to achieve regional and international integration in education sector. Annually, hundreds of lecturers, researchers and educational managers participate in conferences and seminars; long-term and short-term training courses are organized by various countries and international organizations to exchange and share experience and expertise with foreign colleagues.
90. In response to the Vietnamese Government's policies, a relative large number of foreign partners have stepped in Vietnam to establish 100% foreign-funded education institutions or to cooperate with Vietnamese counterpart institutions on undergraduate training, vocational training, distance education, short-term training courses, etc. With their high quality infrastructure, advanced training programs and selected teaching staff, foreign education institutions in Vietnam have contributed to the training of high quality human resources who are highly sought after in the labor market.

Through joint training programs, Vietnamese education institutions are able to access training methodologies initiated by developed countries, that can be use to renew content, programs and instructional methods. This is helping Vietnamese education institutions develop and

implement their own programs to meet international standards. By adopting the models of joint training programs or 100% foreign-funded education institutions, Vietnamese students now have more opportunities to “*study overseas in Vietnam*” and choose the most appropriate type of studies. Through this approach the education sector can mobilize people and parent’s resources, and save them the high costs of sending their children overseas.

However, the management, oversight and evaluation of the operations of foreign-related education institutions present challenges because some do not strictly follow the Government’s regulations. The breaches made by some of these institutions are to operate without following registered activities; they condense the training curriculum/programs, and do not ensure the required quality standards and conditions are met. Some foreign-funded education institutions have not been certified as meeting the quality standards required by their own countries. In addition, due to the absence of a legal framework for the definition of profit or not-for-profit institutions, the majority of foreign investors have considered themselves as not-for-profit organizations in order to avoid tax and or duties. To address this issue, Vietnam needs to refine its legal system and at the same time to be able to accredit foreign-funded education institutions operating in Vietnam, thus protecting learner’s rights and interests, and avoiding the import of “foreign made” -but low quality- programs.

### ***Educational Management - Decentralization, and Increased Autonomy and Accountability\****

91. In Vietnam, the concept of management includes two components: state management and professional management. State management at a macro level consists of development and guiding the implementation of strategies, plans and educational policies; issuing and overseeing the implementation of education related legal documents; inspection of and checking the application of education related laws, decrees and regulations, etc. According to the Government Organization Law, the Education Law and the Government's assignment, the Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for providing the state management of ECCE, general education, higher education and part of vocational education (professional secondary education); while the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs manages vocational education (excluding professional secondary education). According to the People's Council and the Committee Law, the Education Law and the assignment made by Government, people's committees at different level provide state management; ensure the conditions of the teaching staff, the finance, the physical facilities, and the teaching/learning equipment in public schools. People’s Committees should also meet the requirements of educational quality and efficiency improvement in their own localities, and at the same time control the fulfillment of regulations by non-public schools.

The education management responsibilities of provincial and district people's committees are divided as follows. Provincial people's committees provide management of upper secondary schools, professional secondary and vocational schools, and provincial-level colleges and continuing education centers. District people's committees provide management of primary and lower secondary schools, district comprehensive career orientation and technical centers, district continuing education centers, and district vocational training centers. The technical body that provides education sector management support to the provincial people’s committee is the provincial department of education and training; while the technical body

that provides education sector management support to the district people's committee is the district bureau of education and training.

92. In spite of their contribution to the achievement of successes in the sector, education management activities are, due to their shortcomings, an important source of constraints and weaknesses in education sector. Therefore, Vietnamese educational policy makers and managers are putting emphasis on renewal of educational management activities with a view to bringing about fundamental changes in education development.
93. The intermediate task for renewal of educational management is to direct educational institutions by following the public administration approach, and to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the socialist-based regulations in education sector. Following the National Assembly's approval of the Education Law, the Ministries of Education and Training, and Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs are actively preparing to submit, during this and next term of the National Assembly, a Vocational Education Law, a Teachers Law, a Higher Education Law and a Continuing Education Law to complete the legal framework for educational and training activities.
94. In the short-term, the Ministries of Education and Training, and Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs will gradually finalize the educational management mechanism with clear and strong decentralization of functions, responsibilities and rights across ministries, sub-sectors and localities. The increased institutional autonomy and accountability will go together with strengthened oversight and inspection. Democracy will be enhanced in the development, implementation and monitoring of the implementation of education-related policies, guidelines and incentives; while transparency and equity in the mobilization and use of resources for education will be ensured through publicity .
95. A key task is to start with the perception that quality management is part of educational management. Vietnam's educational management bodies are investigating and learning from the experience of developed countries to renovate educational management activities, and to understand modern quality management methods that are appropriate to Vietnam's level and cultural/social characteristics. According to authorized officials, the decisive action will be to establish and finalize a *national educational standards system*, forming a basis for monitoring, overseeing, and conducting assessment and quality assurance of all chains in education process across all various learning modes.
96. As school teaching and the learning experience are the key factor for quality, the school is the true reflection of educational management effectiveness and efficiency. Vietnamese educational officials believe that educational management bodies are, on the basis of increased school autonomy and accountability, responsible for making educational management activities realistic, and listening to the voices of teachers, parents and the society in order to make accurate, suitable and feasible decisions. One of the current requirements is to quickly modernize and computerize management activities so that a two-way and reliable information exchange channel will be established between educational management bodies and schools, families and the society, and among schools, teachers, parents and students.

## Conclusions

### Lessons learnt - Prospects for Vietnamese Education

97. *The first lesson* learnt from the actual development of Vietnamese education, especially over 20 years of reforms, is: the Government should be always determined and consistent in its actions and perceptions, and should constantly *regard education and training, together with science and technology, as the top national policy*. This viewpoint should be made visible through a series of important decisions, ranging from the establishment of the legal environment (issuance of laws, decrees and regulations), to strengthening operational conditions for the education system (policies relating to finance, teaching staff, school physical facilities, etc.), as well as the evaluation of educational activities, making the system's responsiveness to socio-economic development a fundamental requirement. Starting from this viewpoint, education awareness has been increasing, and education has actually become a cause of both the Vietnamese State and its people.
98. *The second lesson is* that for its development, the Vietnamese education system must be fundamentally and comprehensively renewed to follow the directions of *democratization, socialization, diversification, standardization and modernization*.
- a) In respect of *democratization*, Vietnam has continuously made efforts to build an education system which is *of people, by people and for people*; to transform from the command to the democratic styles with a learner-centered approach to education, to establish and continuously refine the legal system in order to ensure the rights and interests of learners, teachers and parents; to gradually increase the institution's autonomy and accountability; and to carry out appropriate decentralization in educational management.
  - b) In respect of *socialization* (direct support from learners and their families), the Vietnamese education system has gone through fundamental changes: all social resources have been mobilized; non-formal education has experienced strong development with many non-public institutions established and different educational modes applied in order to meet people's diverse learning demands. At present, the demand for human resources for industrialization, modernization and the knowledge economy requires the Vietnamese education system to further strengthen the socialization process, bringing into play the strengths of State and the peoples' cooperation, and facilitating life-long learning with a view to building a *learning society*.
  - c) In respect of *diversification*, the Vietnamese education has been transformed from a 'monotonous' system with lacking distinction between uniformity and uniqueness into the one with diverse organizational and operational styles, leading to the expansion of learning opportunities and increased responsiveness to people's learning demands.
  - d) In respect of *standardization*, the Vietnamese education system is trying to shift from following general regulations to specific and detailed regulations so that, in the context of continuing quantitative expansion, measurement of quality performance can take place and underpin quality assurance. This started with the development of *national standards system* in education sector, and at the same time the establishment of curriculum/program *accreditation* as well as conditions for educational quality assurance. The Vietnamese

educational policy makers expect that the Vietnamese education system will be able to, in respect of standardization, achieve the *consistency in diversification* and accelerate the process of integration, cooperation and competition with other advanced education systems regionally and internationally.

- e) In respect of *modernization*, the Vietnamese educational policy makers expect to bring our education system to regional and international levels. This requires high standards in the national education standards system. Within the context of a poor country like Vietnam, this is a big challenge and requires educators to actively seek for ways to rapidly narrow the gaps with various advanced education systems in the world.

99. *The third lesson is that, in order to bring about fundamental and comprehensive changes to the Vietnamese education system that reflect the goals of standardization, modernization, socialization and democratization, Vietnamese educational policy makers and managers believe that it is important to renovate the way of thinking, to escape from the so-called traditional ways of thinking and doing things, and especially to avoid a piecemeal management style. The most challenging task while renovating the current way of thinking in education is to establish an overall vision for education that is relevant to the country's socio-economic development in the context of globalization and knowledge economy. At the same time, a new working style needs to be established for all teaching staff and educational managers, with a focus on quality and efficiency as the basis for assessment. Moreover, as education is a very sensitive area, renovating the way of thinking of educational policy makers and managers must be translated into renovating the way of thinking of the entire society. In order to achieve this, all changes must come from real needs and serve the long-term interests and benefits of people; hence, publicity and transparency must be considered as the most important elements in educational policy-making and management styles. Here, a major challenge needed to be addressed, that is the relationship between renovation and stability. With a view to maintaining the necessary stability in education, all changes must follow an appropriate pathway, that is well understood by all teaching staff and educational managers and agreed by parents and the society, and one that leads to the preservation of order in education reform process.*

100. An important goal for Vietnam's socio-economic development in the coming years is: '*Lay the foundations for accelerating industrialization, modernization and development of knowledge economy*'<sup>31</sup>. That is, to continuously increase the *knowledge content* in all socio-economic development activities, and to bring about *fundamental changes in education and training*. From the country's reality and lessons learned in other countries, many Vietnamese educational policy-makers and managers believe that the education system that Vietnam expects must be an *open* education system which is easily accessible by everyone; an education system which nurtures and promotes the creativity of young people, with educational institutions -primarily universities- as cradles of science and technology innovation; an education system closely linked with science and technology progress, especially information technology and telecommunication, in order to *continuously renovate but preserve stability*; and an education system which promotes *competition* among various educational institutions to improve the *quality*, and to gradually *raise*, through cooperation

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<sup>31</sup> Report on the Directions and Tasks for 5-year Socio-Economic Development for 2006-2010 period, presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

and competition with foreign educational institutions, Vietnam's regional and international *status*. Moving towards such an education system is not only the challenge to but also opportunity for Vietnam; and future success will be dependent on the policy-maker's sensitivity to new factors and the capacity for carrying out renovation within the current context, as well as the efforts made by teaching staff, educational managers, parents, students and the entire society.

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