



Community-Based Early Childhood Care and Development in Viet Nam

Status and Effects of Childhood Poverty

Viet Nam is densely populated with 80 million people, 41% of whom are children.¹ Despite having one of Southeast Asia's dynamic and fastest-growing economies, almost 50% of its people in rural areas continue to live in poverty.² Many children in Viet Nam are suffering from some form of hardship. In 2007, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs estimated that more than 2.6 million children, or nearly 10% of all Vietnamese children, were living in special circumstances.³

One-third of Vietnamese children below 5 years old are stunted as a result of chronic malnutrition. More than one out of every three children is not fully immunized by the age of 5. Furthermore, almost half of all children do not have access to a hygienic sanitation facility in their homes. Childhood poverty is higher in the northern mountainous regions, up to 78% in the northeast, and as much as 60% in the Mekong River Delta. In addition, user fees for health and education place more burden on families.⁴

Government Programs

The government has developed a rigorous program to support disadvantaged children by building new schools, and providing free primary schooling and free textbooks to poor children in highland areas. In fact, the government's expenditure on education is set to rise from 15% in the late 1990s to 20% by 2015.⁵

Early childhood education in Viet Nam is centrally controlled. It consists of kindergarten, nursery, and preprimary school. In 2005, a new education law regulating the basic framework of the education system was established. The law covers early education from infant, 3 months old, to 6 years old with the objective

of helping children develop physically, emotionally, intellectually, and aesthetically.⁶

The government's policy on early childhood care and education is stipulated in the Education Law and the Law on Child Protection and Care, and provides for (i) children's care and education for comprehensive physical, emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic development; (ii) children's free primary health care, medical examination, and treatment in public medical facilities; and (iii) financial subsidy for entertainment and recreation activities.⁷

Despite the government's commitment to quality early childhood education, International Study of Childhood Poverty cited some challenges that the government is trying to address, such as (i) low basic skills acquisition; (ii) overreliance on private tuition; (iii) limited early childhood development coverage; (iv) unequal access to education for poor, disabled, and ethnic minority children; and (v) children failing to perform well due to inadequate nutrition.⁸ The Ministry

The project is expected to reduce stunting in children under 5 years in ethnic minority target areas, improve nutrition and health-seeking behavior of caregivers in at least 60% of communes, sustain community-based and poverty-targeted ECCD in 70% of communes, and improve the school readiness in at least 60% of the children

of Education and Training reported that the biggest difficulty in preschool education is how to resolve the controversy between the need to increase quantity and the need to upgrade quality, which has forced preschool education management to address the problems of inadequate schools, equipment, and qualified teachers.⁹

ADB Assistance to Viet Nam Early Childhood Education

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recognizes the need to invest in children, and targets assistance that integrates health, nutrition, education, and care for young children, which not only offsets the effects of poverty but also reduces future public expenditures on health, education, and social welfare.¹⁰ Recognizing the importance of ensuring good health, proper nutrition, and mental stimulation to young children as the foundation for lifelong learning capacity, ADB is increasing its support for early childhood development with special emphasis on low-cost, community-based provisions.

In an effort to sustain growth through development of the country's human resources, ADB approved the Community-Based Early Childhood Care and Development project in 2008. The goal of the project is to improve health, nutrition status, and cognitive and social development of children. It aims to identify an integrated early childhood care and development (ECCD) model, especially for children under 3 years, with a community- and poverty-targeted focus for selected ethnic minorities and migrant workers. Specific objectives are to (i) identify and pilot cost-effective programs that are accessible for the poor target groups; and (ii) strengthen the capacity of central and local governments in the planning, financing, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of integrated ECCD interventions.¹¹

In line with the government's priority of reducing childhood poverty, the project is expected to reduce

stunting in children under 5 years in ethnic minority target areas, improve nutrition and health-seeking behavior of caregivers in at least 60% of the communes, sustain community-based and poverty-targeted ECCD interventions in 70% of the communes, and improve the school readiness of at least 60% of the children.

To address the need for child care and development of disadvantaged populations, such as the children of migrant workers and ethnic minorities, the project identifies locally appropriate models of ECCD services for each target group. It addresses the needs of children 0–3 years to improve their health and nutrition, as well as their cognitive and social development. The subcomponent of the ECCD for migrant workers focuses on promoting the establishment of child care centers or *crèches* in factories in the southeast industrial zones of Binh Duong province, and identifying possibilities for public and private child care providers. On the other hand, the ECCD subcomponent for ethnic minorities attempts to strengthen the network of community-based workers, expand coverage, and improve the quality of ECCD through community-based and/or home-based care in the north-central mountainous regions of Quang Binh provinces.¹²

The project also supports capacity building for ECCD, which is aimed at strengthening the national and local technical and human resources capacity of the General Office for Population and Family Planning for planning, budgeting, coordinating, and monitoring ECCD interventions, and focused on targeted community-based interventions. The advocacy and communication component of the project is expected to raise the awareness of and mobilize support from key national, provincial, and district leaders to sustain and expand investments in ECCD. The advocacy is also targeted on behavioral change communication in an effort to improve child care and development through mass media and peer education.

Endnotes

- ¹ Neugebauer, R. 2007. Global Trends in ECE: Early Childhood Trends Around the World. www.childcareexchange.com/library/5017502.pdf
- ² Child Fund Australia. Updated 9 August 2010. Why Children in Vietnam Need your Help. www.childfund.org.au/asiapacific/vietnam
- ³ Government of Viet Nam, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs; and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Viet Nam. 2009. Creating a Protective Environment for Children in Viet Nam: An Assessment of Child Protection Laws and Policies, Ha Noi. Quoted in UNICEF Viet Nam. Child Protection—An Overview. www.unicef.org/vietnam/protection.html (accessed 9 September 2010).
- ⁴ UNICEF Viet Nam. n. d. The Children in Viet Nam. www.unicef.org/vietnam/children.html (accessed 8 September 2010).
- ⁵ Young Lives: An International Study of Childhood Poverty. n. d. Education for All in Vietnam: High Enrolment, But Problems of Quality Remain. *Young Lives Policy Brief 4*. www.younglives.org.uk/pdf/publication-section-pdfs/policy-briefs/Policy-brief4.pdf
- ⁶ Hamano, Takashi. n. d. Trends in Early Childhood Education in Vietnam –The “Socialization of Education” and the Management of Disparity. Child Research Net. www.childresearch.net/PROJECT/ECEC/asia/vietnam/report10_01.html (accessed 9 September 2010).
- ⁷ World Bank. n. d. Education in Vietnam: Development History, Challenges and Solutions. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1121703274255/1439264-1153425508901/Education_Vietnam_Development.pdf
- ⁸ Endnote 5.
- ⁹ Government of Viet Nam. Ministry of Education and Training. Updated 12 October 2006. Early Childhood Education in Vietnam <http://en.moet.gov.vn/?page=6.9&view=4381>
- ¹⁰ ADB. 2008. Proposed Grant Assistance to Viet Nam for the Community-Based Early Childhood Care and Development. Manila
- ¹¹ Endnote 10.
- ¹² Endnote 10.

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