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Newport, R.I.**

**GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTALISM IN VIETNAM:
How Communities Can Initiate Change**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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01 November 2013

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ABSTRACT

GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTALISM IN VIETNAM: How Communities Can Initiate Change in a One-Party State

Severe environmental degradation brought about by Vietnam's rapid expansion into an export driven market economy threaten the continued economic growth and social stability of the nation and must be reversed. The Government of Vietnam has proven unable to enforce environmental regulations, but evidence shows that citizen initiated, community based movements have been effective in coercing industry and governmental action to remedy environmental problems. The United States should assist Vietnam in adopting environmentally sustainable business and social practices by promoting citizen initiated environmental movements. To support this position, the author describes the scope of the environmental degradation, the state of Vietnam's regulatory system, the characteristics of effective community based environmentalism and the role of extra-local actors as advocates for local movements. The author concludes by drawing connections between the efforts of the state and non-state actors and makes recommendations for the United States Government to assist Vietnam in reversing environmental degradation.

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's program of economic reforms, implemented under the 1986 Doi Moi (Renovation) Policy, resulted in rapid industrial and agricultural production growth. For the first time since the unification of the country under communist rule in 1975, privately owned enterprises were permitted to enter the marketplace. A bleak consequence of this rapid economic growth, however, has been severe environmental degradation caused by industrial pollution, population growth, urbanization, and resource exploitation. These conditions have outpaced the Government of Vietnam's ability to manage or remedy them through regulatory enforcement.

Environmental degradation has acted as a catalyst for a succession of social and economic ills in Vietnam. Population migration, food and water insecurity, and over exploitation of remaining natural resources may result in decreased economic prosperity and a greater likelihood of social upheaval. Instability in Vietnam is not in the best interests of the United States, as it seeks a stable, balancing regional partner in Southeast Asia. While the United States Government (USG) does provide environmental development aid to the Government of Vietnam (GVN), the demonstrated ineffectiveness of the GVN to enact meaningful environmental regulatory reforms should lead the USG to pursue other courses of action. To that end, the United States should assist Vietnam in adopting environmentally sustainable business and social practices by promoting citizen initiated environmental movements.

In support of this argument, this paper will explore the connection between economic growth and environmental degradation in Vietnam and analyze the effectiveness of measures taken by the Government of Vietnam to address the problem. Next, the elements of effective environmental grassroots movements will be discussed and compared with existing community driven environmentalism in Vietnam. The role of external organizations, including the USG,

Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in Vietnam's environmental system will be described. Finally, recommendations will be made on how the U.S. Government can engage Vietnamese civil society and the GVN to reverse environmental degradation, sustain economic growth and maintain internal stability.

While the Vietnam has established environmental regulatory agencies and enacted a body of environmental law, the government's emphasis on sustaining economic growth, unwillingness to tackle corruption, and hampering of enforcement mechanisms are powerful disincentives to effecting meaningful environmental improvement from within the system. On the other hand, there is compelling evidence that citizen initiated, community based environmental advocacy in Vietnam has been effective in remedying local environmental problems by engaging directly with polluters and forcing governmental action.¹

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Since 1986, the economy of Vietnam has expanded at a tremendous rate. According to World Bank data, annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose 7.1 percent on average from 1988 to 2012 while the worldwide average GDP rose less than two percent in the same period.² Manufacturing capacity expanded nine percent annually over the past decade and over 30,000 private businesses entered the marketplace in the first fifteen years of Doi Moi.³ Much of the manufacturing growth, however, has been in highly polluting industries.

Textile, paper, and chemical manufacturing interests have been attracted to Vietnam by cheap labor and weak regulatory mechanisms. Dyes, glues and solvents from garment factories;

¹ Dara O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation: Balancing Development and the Environment in Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press), 107.

² World Bank, accessed on October 23, 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org>.

³ Marco Breu et al., *Sustaining Vietnam's Growth: The Productivity Challenge* (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012), 1.

toxic waste and by-products from chemical plants; and pulp and bleaching agents from paper mills are discharged untreated into the air, ground and waterways.⁴ A study conducted by Vietnam's National Environmental Agency and the Asia Development Bank concluded that 275,000 tons of hazardous environmental waste was dumped untreated into the environment during the 1990s.⁵ Lack of zoning rules and urban planning allows industries to set up shop in the midst of population centers, creating air and water pollution hot spots that affect the health and quality life of nearby residents. Residential and industrial wastewater is comingled with storm drain runoff and discharged directly into rivers and seas. As of 2010, only 14 percent of all urban wastewater was treated prior to discharge.⁶ Air pollutants in urban areas are at dangerously high levels as a result of industrial emissions and the ubiquitous motorbikes clogging the streets and belching exhaust. In Hanoi, the Air Quality Index, which measures particulate and gaseous pollutants against weather conditions that effect dispersion, is in a range considered hazardous to the health of all inhabitants, and is seven times higher than air quality levels posing no health risks.⁷ Pollution and environmental degradation lead to increased strain on remaining resources.⁸ For example, a farmer whose crops have been destroyed by industrial air pollution may try aquaculture, creating a new demand on the local water supply. If the fish are subsequently killed by polluted water, the farmer may be forced to migrate to find new land, creating competition for resources in a different area.

While certain economic models predict that there is a point in emerging economies in which increased wealth naturally leads to improving environmental conditions, Vietnam's

⁴ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 23.

⁵ Neil W. Adger et al., *Living with Environmental Change: Social Vulnerability, Adaptation and Resilience in Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 2001), 42.

⁶ Bill Hayton, *Vietnam: Rising Dragon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 174.

⁷ Air Quality Index, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://aqicn.org>.

⁸ Adger et al., *Living with Environmental Change*, 269.

current policies will not lead to environmentally sustainable economic growth without regulatory input from the government.⁹ In fact, Vietnam may already be past the point where the real costs of environmental degradation exceed the costs of remediation. The World Bank has reported that environmental pollution costs Vietnam approximately five percent of Gross Domestic Product annually, or almost five billion U.S. dollars in 2008.¹⁰

VIETNAM'S REGULATORY SYSTEM

On the surface, Vietnam appears to have a robust environmental regulatory system. The National Assembly enacted a national environmental action plan in 1991, establishing a comprehensive environmental management framework with political, legal, and institutional elements.¹¹ Vietnam's National Environmental Agency (NEA) sets standards for air quality, water quality, emissions, and natural resource utilization. Vietnam has established what looks like a command and control regulatory system not unlike the United States, in which the state sets standards and limits, issues permits, inspects businesses, and punishes violators.¹² Peeling back the veneer, however, reveals a different picture. As in other areas of governance, Vietnam has a problem with enforcement of its environmental regulations. Three factors contribute to this problem: small underpaid agency staffs, a weak judicial system, and rampant systemic corruption.

Vietnam has one of the lowest per capita levels of environmental regulatory staffing in the region. As of 2004, the NEA had only 80 staffers.¹³ While other ministries and local governments also have environmental enforcement personnel, there are simply too few to

⁹ Adger et al., *Living with Environmental Change*, 211.

¹⁰ "WB: Environmental Pollution Costs Vietnam 5.5 pct of GDP," Vietnam Plus: Vietnam News Agency, Last modified September 4, 2013, <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/Home>.

¹¹ Adger et al., *Living with Environmental Change*, 46.

¹² O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

conduct routine monitoring and inspections of polluting enterprises. Vietnam has established regulatory command but ignored the control. In reality, the environmental protection system is complaint driven, with problems addressed only if powerful enough interests cause businesses or government agencies to take action.

While Vietnam has established environmental laws, lack of an independent judiciary able to rule on the constitutionality of the law prevents uniform application.¹⁴ Many of the environmental laws are so broadly written that multiple valid interpretations are possible, and therefore effective enforcement is impossible.¹⁵ National, provincial and local governments establish environmental laws that are purposefully contradictory, allowing business interests to influence or buy regulations that suit their needs.¹⁶ Without a strong judicial system, there is no mechanism to determine which body of law takes precedent.

These conditions are both a result of, and an enabler for, systemic corruption at all levels of business and government. Vietnam scored only 31 out of 100, where 100 is good, on Transparency International's corruption perceptions index.¹⁷ Poorly paid civil servants are easily bribed into ignoring illegal pollution, falsifying test results, or establishing favorable local regulations.¹⁸

The structure of the environmental regulatory system also contributes to its ineffectiveness. The NEA was originally established under the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment (MOSTE), which had other agencies responsible for promoting business development.¹⁹ The NEA mission was at cross purposes with competing and much more

¹⁴ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 162.

¹⁵ Hayton, *Vietnam: Rising Dragon*, 164.

¹⁶ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 152.

¹⁷ "2012 Corruption Perceptions Index," Transparency International, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>.

¹⁸ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 167.

¹⁹ Adger et al., *Living with Environmental Change*, 48.

powerful interests of its parent organization, and was therefore marginalized by the leadership of MOSTE. The NEA subsequently moved to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, but new friction replaced the old in that environmental matters now compete with resource utilization interests like coal mining, rather than manufacturing interests. The NEA remains understaffed and has too little enforcement authority to effect meaningful environmental regulation. Increasing the capacity of the NEA with a larger, better trained and resourced staff will not lead to improved regulatory enforcement as long as the state prioritizes economic output over protecting the environment.²⁰

Provincial governments in Vietnam also exercise environmental regulatory authority through local Departments of Science, Technology and Environment (DOSTE), which are not sub-agencies of the national Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, but report directly to local or provincial People's Committees.²¹ As a result, there is little coordination or information sharing between DOSTEs, the NEA and other environmental agencies, or even among various branches within the NEA. Cumbersome bureaucratic processes prevent the free exchange of environmental data, best practices and lessons learned. Entities hoard information in the hope that it can be used to generate income or influence, rather than make data available for the common good.²² In many cases, however, the DOSTEs have proven to be more successful in remedying environmental problems than the national agencies.²³ The provincial regulators are closer to the problem and therefore more responsive to citizen initiated concerns. They are not as constrained by competing interests as the NEA, especially when the offending enterprise is state owned or has influence with national officials. Just as all politics are local, all

²⁰ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

²² *Ibid.*, 162.

²³ *Ibid.*, 178.

environmental problems are local, and therefore the most effective advocacy for change will be local, even in the seemingly authoritarian communist system of Vietnam.

COMMUNITY BASED ENVIRONMENTALISM IN VIETNAM

Perhaps a stereotypical view of modern Vietnamese society is that it is racially and culturally homogeneous and acts in a unitary manner under the direction and control of the central government. While there is some truth to this perception, the concept of community in Vietnam is centered more on local identity than on national identity.²⁴ In a historically rural agrarian society, the village or commune is the hub of society for the majority of the Vietnamese population. With respect to community effectiveness in influencing environmental protection, it is instructive to first define what community is, and then explore the elements of community that are necessary for effective environmental advocacy. Merriam-Webster describes community as, “people with common interests living in a particular area.”²⁵ This broad view does not bind the notion of community in a certain scale of geography, or through any particular commonalities such as race, religion, kinship, or politics. With respect to environmental issues, a community could be the employees of a factory with a hazardous working environment, the village or neighborhood affected by a polluting industry, the larger population affected by a polluted river, or a geographically dispersed but economically connected group like fishermen affected by polluted coastal fisheries. Regardless of the type or scale, there are four characteristics of communities, or civil society networks, cited in the literature that relates to their effectiveness in influencing environmental concerns: linkages, cohesiveness, capacity, and knowledge.²⁶

Linkages are the connections between the community and external actors who can exert influence in favor of the community’s position. Linkages may be with important government or

²⁴ O’Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 55.

²⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

²⁶ O’Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 235.

Communist Party officials, business owners, industry leaders, media outlets, or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who can mobilize a larger community to action. Cohesiveness refers to the internal solidarity within the community surrounding the environmental problem. Capacity is the community's ability to mobilize around an issue. Leadership is a key element of capacity, as is the maturity of the community. Knowledge is the community's ability to understand the cause and effect relationship between the environmentally harmful activity and the degradation of their quality of life. Educational level and information technology access come into play here. These factors are, of course, related. A community with higher levels of knowledge and education are more likely to have important linkages. A respected leader can rally the community, increasing cohesiveness and knowledge of the problem.

Ownership matters

There is a growing body of evidence that civil society networks are becoming effective advocates for environmental improvement under the complaint-based regulatory system in Vietnam.²⁷ However, the willingness of an enterprise to change bad environmental practices is also connected to its ownership status. Although Vietnam has had market economy reforms for nearly three decades, a majority of the country's industrial base is state owned. State owned enterprises are some of the worst polluters and most resistant to formal regulatory or community initiated reform. Old, dirty factories are kept open long after free market forces would have dictated their closure or upgrade.²⁸ Weaknesses of the environmental agencies are compounded when dealing with state enterprise, as the system essentially becomes self-regulating, with no separation of the regulator from the regulated. The state is unlikely to impose fines or require

²⁷ Andrew Wells-Dang, *Civil Society Networks in China and Vietnam: Informal Pathbreakers in Health and the Environment* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 187.

²⁸ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 109.

pollution remediation on its own factories, for example. State enterprises are also more likely to ignore community-based efforts. Linkages to government or party officials are not as effective when the government owns the business. Private and multi-national companies will often partner with the state in order to take advantage of the state's immunity from regulation. Multi-nationals also use partnerships, contractors, and subcontractors to hide their connection to hazardous and polluting manufacturing facilities in Vietnam. In these circumstances, communities need linkages external outside of Vietnam in order to create change.²⁹ The United States Government, IGOs and NGOs have assisted Vietnam with environmental issues and can facilitate linkages to a broader community of interest.

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has partnered with the Government of Vietnam on three programs aimed at environmentally sustainable economic growth. While geared toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions for the purpose of minimizing climate change impacts, they will also help reduce air and water pollutants in certain industrial and agricultural sectors, and are worth consideration here as part of the United States' environmental strategy toward Vietnam. The Vietnam Clean Energy Program partners with several Ministries and agencies in Vietnam to increase energy efficiency in industries that are significant users of conventional energy sources through process improvement methods and investment in energy efficient technologies.³⁰ Through its Enhancing Capacity for Low Emissions Development Strategies (EC-LEDS), USAID assists the Government of Vietnam in crafting development strategies that maintain economic growth while lowering greenhouse gas

²⁹ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 187.

³⁰ U.S. Agency for International Development, *Global Climate Change*, September 04, 2013, <http://www.usaid.gov/vietnam>.

emissions across all sectors of the economy.³¹ The Vietnam Forests and Deltas Program works to end greenhouse gas emissions from the unsustainable harvesting and burning of wood, and to remedy the resulting pollution of Vietnam's rivers and deltas from unchecked runoff.³² These programs are important in advancing USAID's global climate change strategies and will help reverse the environmental degradation in Vietnam. They also demonstrate the willingness of the GVN to work with the USG on environmental matters. Because they are formal assistance programs, however, they must be coordinated with and approved by GVN partner agencies and subjected to the bureaucratic machinations and institutional shortcomings of the Vietnamese system. In fact some observers contend that Vietnamese officials accept international assistance for economic reasons like funding their agencies, creating new jobs and the potential for kickbacks, rather than out of genuine concern for the environment.³³ These problems will cause direct aid programs to take longer to implement and be less responsive than smaller locally focused efforts supported by non-state entities, which leads to a discussion of the role IGOs and NGOs as environmental actors in Vietnam.

In addition to its direct aid programs the U.S. Government contributes to a number of IGO environmental funds that are administered by the World Bank. The Climate Investment Fund, for example, sponsors a number of projects in Vietnam including urban light rail modernization, sustainable energy initiatives and energy strategy development.³⁴ This indirect connection allows the USG to support the work of these organizations without the attendant problems of direct coordination with the GVN.

³¹ U.S. Agency for International Development, *USAID Climate Change and Development Strategy 2012-2016*, January 2012 (Washington, DC: USAID), 12.

³² U.S. Agency for International Development, *Environmental Fact Sheet for USAID/Vietnam*, June 2013.

³³ Hayton, *Vietnam: Rising Dragon*, 178.

³⁴ Climate Investment Funds/Vietnam accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org>.

As the premier regional IGO, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) seems an apt venue for fostering intergovernmental action on environmental concerns facing its member nations. ASEAN has, in fact, formed a number of committees and produced a number of agreements on regional environmental and climate change issues. Vietnam currently chairs the ASEAN Working Group on Multilateral Environmental Agreement, which addresses the vague topic of “Global Environmental Issues,” and three Vietnamese cities are participants in ASEAN’s Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Cities, which focuses on water quality and waste water management.³⁵ There is, however, significant scholarly criticism of ASEAN’s effectiveness as a governing body, which revolves around its primary guiding principle of non-interference in member states’ internal affairs.³⁶ The impressive volume of meetings, working groups, and non-binding agreements give the appearance of action, but there are no enforcement or deterrent mechanisms to back up the words. The literature contends that this false sense of action actually worsens environmental degradation, rather than remedy it.³⁷ Until these shortcomings are addressed, ASEAN won’t be an effective regional governing body, nor will it be an effective external linkage for community based environmental movements in Vietnam. NGOs, on the other hand, have demonstrated success as advocates for local initiatives, but diligence is required when considering the independence of NGOs in Vietnam.

Since the GVN eased restrictions on their operations in the 1990s, NGOs have proliferated in Vietnam. As of 2004, over 160 foreign NGOs had a presence in the country with dozens sponsoring environmental and pollution control projects.³⁸ The International Union for

³⁵ ASEAN Cooperation on Environment accessed October 21, 2013, <http://environment.asean.org>.

³⁶ Lorraine Elliott, “ASEAN and environmental cooperation: norms, interests and identity,” *The Pacific Review* 16 no. 1 (2003): 30.

³⁷ Vinod K. Aggarwal and Jonathan T. Chow, “The Perils of Consensus: How ASEAN’s Meta-Regime Undermines Economic and Environmental Cooperation,” *Review of International Political Economy* 17 no. 2 (May 2010): 48.

³⁸ O’Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 197.

Conservation of Nature, for example, conducts a number of projects in Vietnam aimed at water resource management and restoration of coastal ecosystems.³⁹

Home grown NGOs have also sprung up in great numbers. Some appear to be legitimate, independent advocacy groups, like Education for Nature, which formally organized in 2001 and primarily conducts grassroots environmental outreach programs in primary schools. The group has also gained access to political leaders and actively lobbies for top down environmental reforms.⁴⁰ In many cases, however, Vietnamese officials have created NGOs that are really affiliates of agencies, institutions or academia in order to hide the state's connection to activities that should be independent.⁴¹ In one example, the manager of a provincial Department of Science, Technology, and Environment (DOSTE), was also the head of his own NGO. As the DOSTE manager, he hired his NGO to write Environmental Impact Assessments on factories in the region, which he then reviewed as DOSTE manager.⁴² Needless to say, there is little impartial assessment in such an arrangement.

Some of the best cases of NGOs acting as external advocates for local environmental initiatives, though, are international NGOs operating externally. This linkage is most effective when the polluting entity is, or at least associated with, a multinational firm with global brand recognition.⁴³ A well-known example involves a Nike Corporation contractor operating an environmentally hazardous factory in Vietnam. Toxic glues and solvents were used without air filtration systems or protective gear for the workers, a required wastewater treatment plant was not installed and scrap shoe rubber was illegally burned in the factory's boiler, releasing toxic

³⁹ International Union for Conservation of Nature Vietnam, accessed 31 October 2013, <http://www.iucn.org>.

⁴⁰ Hayton, *Vietnam: Rising Dragon*, 166.

⁴¹ Benedict J. Kerkvliet et al., *Getting organized in Vietnam: moving in and around the socialist state* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 6.

⁴² O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 188.

⁴³ O'Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 187.

pollutants into the air. The local DOSTE was unable to enforce environmental regulations as the South Korean factory owner had hired the chairman of the local Communist Party as a “problem solver” to deal with government regulators.⁴⁴ As news of these conditions spread from the local community, however, a coalition of international and American NGOs mobilized to expose Nike’s connection to the factory. The campaign involved protests at Nike stores, calls for consumer boycotts and a letter signed more than fifty U.S. Congressmen demanding that Nike correct the problems in its overseas contractor facilities. As a result, Nike not only required this contractor to clean up its operations, but also pledged that all of its overseas manufacturing facilities would be brought up to American standards.⁴⁵

In this example, a foreign corporation, responding to global pressure brought by an NGO and initiated at the community level, was more effective in correcting an environmental problem than the government agencies that had the authority and responsibility to enforce their own regulations. This model has proven successful in other instances in Vietnam, and around the world, but its success is related to the global recognition of the enterprise and its vulnerability to public opinion. Anonymous state-owned enterprises are less likely to be swayed by threats of a boycott and public protests, while growing in frequency, are technically illegal in Vietnam. These factors support a counterargument that state interests can override community-based environmentalism.

As Vietnamese citizens gain access to the internet and social media, however, the effectiveness of local activism will increase as communities increase linkages and exchange information on the negative effects of environmental degradation. These media venues allow individuals and local organizations to broadly and rapidly expose the shortcomings of regulatory

⁴⁴ O’Rourke, *Community-Driven Regulation*, 192.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 194.

agencies in remedying environmental problems and have proven effective in mobilizing the government to action.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Vietnam suffers from some of the worst environmental conditions in the world. Industrial and urban pollution is released untreated into the environment and natural resources are exploited in an unsustainable and environmentally damaging manner. Emphasis on production and economic growth, ineffective regulatory agencies and rampant corruption are major contributing factors to the GVN's failure to manage and protect the environment. Environmental degradation threatens to derail Vietnam's growing prosperity and could lead to internal instability unless the government takes a more proactive approach. Community-based environmental movements, often with the aid of extra-local actors, have demonstrated success in compelling industry and government action on environmental matters. Greater access to the Internet and social media increase the efficacy of local movements and expand the role of civil organizations in Vietnamese society. The United States should assist Vietnam in adopting environmentally sustainable business and social practices by promoting citizen initiated environmental movements. The USG should take a whole of government approach that includes USAID sponsored environmental programs, institutional capacity building initiatives and indirect support to IGOs and NGOs who sponsor grassroots environmental programs and movements in Vietnam. As the USG pursues a regional partnership with Vietnam, environmental concerns must be part of the engagement strategy. The consequences of ignoring the environmental problems are too severe to ignore.

⁴⁶ Ole Bruun and Thorkil Casse, *On the Frontiers of Climate and Environmental Change: Vulnerabilities and Adaptations in Central Vietnam* (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 184.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Governance approach: Environmental issues cannot be addressed as independent variables. Urban and industrial development, population growth and migration, education and health care systems, tourism and trade are all linked to the environment. The USG should leverage relationships built through USAID's environmental assistance programs to help the GVN break down existing bureaucratic stovepipes, thereby improving the capabilities and capacity of government agencies to conduct integrated development planning. U.S. Department of State and USAID good governance programs are potential vehicles for implementing this approach.

Although it may run counter to the notion of integrated governance, at least in the short term, the USG should promote the concept of a more independent National Environmental Agency in Vietnam. The current arrangement, in which the NEA falls under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, results in conflicts of interest between resource exploitation and environmental protection. The NEA should be functionally and practically independent from elements of government with productivity driven goals.

Indirect approach: The USG, through USAID, should partner with international NGOs who have proven to be effective advocates for community-based environmental movements. The USG should encourage the NGOs to transfer information strategies used in successful international campaigns, as in the Nike example, to local groups in Vietnam. With increasing access to social media, these techniques can directly influence Vietnamese public opinion and business and government leaders without the need for extra-local or international NGO involvement.

Traditional approach: The USG, through the State Department, USAID and implementing partners, should foster the traditional Vietnamese value of equity, as it relates to communal land

use customs, to promote sustainable environmental practices in the context of a greater communal equity.

ASEAN approach: The USG, through its diplomatic mission to ASEAN, should encourage that body to take a more forceful role in crafting multi-lateral environmental agreements that have meaningful incentive and enforcement mechanisms. The USG should also encourage Vietnam to take a similar stance. Vietnam could become a thought leader on environmental matters within the organization, increasing its standing in the region.

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