

FACT SHEET

Young People & Participation



- Today's young people are more formally educated, more empowered, more globally integrated and more consumer-minded than previous generations. Yet they also have a need for constructive outlets for **self-expression** and participation and **engagement in political, social and economic life**.¹
- The 2006 Family Survey indicates that although the traditional norm of respect for elders is still present in Viet Nam, families are becoming more democratic, with **more dialogue between young people and their parents**. This may indicate that parents are becoming more willing and capable of listening to young people. It may also be caused by the smaller size of families, within which there is a potentially greater role for each member of the family, especially in urban areas. Nonetheless, the Family Survey indicates that some children would not "dare to say directly" if they thought their parents were unfair.²
- According to the 2005 Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY I), 68 per cent of young people aged 14-25 felt that they were listened to by their family.³ It should be noted that **children from the upper-middle class**, as in other countries, **tend to have more opportunities** (in terms of channels, facilities and accessibility to seek information) to participate in more activities (including leisure, education and community activities) and in a more confident manner than children from lower social groups.
- MOET has adopted a child-centred methodology nation-wide and made notable efforts to make sure that participatory teaching methods are used. Despite these efforts, **interactive teaching and learning opportunities remain limited**. There are many reasons for this, including a generally didactic curriculum, a lack of adequately trained staff and appropriate teaching resources, lecture-based approaches, large class sizes and inappropriate class infrastructure. Most students expect to come to school to listen to and simply write down the lectures given by their teachers. Such teaching processes constrain students' freedom of expression and active participation.⁴
- **Life skills education** piloted by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and mass organizations in schools and community-based **youth clubs** has helped adolescents develop the confidence and capacity to communicate more effectively with their parents.⁵ As a result, children feel much more respected and confident. In places where both children and parents have been provided with Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) training and awareness-raising, children are consulted much more often.⁶
- Teaching children about their right to participate in the learning process remains largely piecemeal and theoretical. Schools focus on knowledge transfer rather than the development of skills such as communication, **critical thinking and making choices** (all of which are essential to exercising genuine choice in life). Some students have witnessed or experienced instances of their rights being violated through various forms of **corporal punishment**,⁷ highlighting the fact that children's right to participation cannot be exercised in an unsafe and unfriendly school environment.
- **Language barriers** hinder children from ethnic minorities from fully accessing information and therefore can prevent full participation.⁸
- Despite good efforts by the Government, **child participation is generally ad hoc, scattered and tokenistic**. There is a general lack of awareness and skills among adults and young people and no clear mechanism to systematically mainstream child participation or facilitate child participatory

¹*Synthesis Report*, United Nations Viet Nam (2010).

²*Family Survey 2006*, MOCST et al., 2008.

³SAVY I.

⁴*An Analysis of the Situation of Children in Viet Nam*, UNICEF, 2010.

⁵Ibid.

⁶*Evaluation Report on Early Childhood Care and Development Project*, Save the Children UK, 2007.

⁷*Educating or Abusing: Physical and Emotional Punishment of Children in Viet Nam*, Save the Children US, Plan Viet Nam and UNICEF Viet Nam, 2006.

⁸*An Analysis of the Situation of Children in Viet Nam*, UNICEF, 2010.

processes at all levels. In some places, children's participation is hindered by unfavourable conditions. These include unfamiliarity with the language, an unsuitable physical environment, **lack of adult awareness or skills** concerning children's participation, and inadequate reference materials for children.

- Gradual erosion of long-held traditional values and changing intra-family dynamics, as well as young people's rapidly changing cultural values and expectations, including among ethnic minorities, may lead to a possible '**generation gap**' and difficulties in inter-generational communication, including the expression of children's views in interactions with adult family members.
- Youth is the biggest demographic group in Vietnam and therefore has the potential to provide substantial contributions to the country's development through volunteerism. There is an existing gap between the number of skilled and semi-skilled young people and **opportunities for volunteering** in Viet Nam, despite great need across different sectors.
- The **growing access to the Internet** in urban areas creates both advantages and disadvantages regarding children's right to participation. On the one hand, online blogs and other such forums constitute a channel for children to express their views. However, some children lack adequate parental supervision and spend long hours on the Internet at home and in cafes, risking **exposure to various abuses**, including **online sexual exploitation**. Internet addiction is also a potential cause for concern for these children.⁹

Recommendations

- Children and young people's meaningful and sustained participation requires radical changes in adult-child/young people relationships.
- The Government and young people need dialogue in order to come up with a mutual understanding of how to jointly address the challenges ahead.
- The enactment of a **National Volunteer Policy** would encourage all sectors to facilitate more youth participation through volunteerism as well as strengthen the recently established Volunteer Information Resource Centre within the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. The centre is envisioned to be the country's primary platform for providing information on volunteer resources and opportunities, and enhancing the capacity of volunteers and volunteer-involving agencies, including advocating for greater recognition of the positive role volunteerism can play in the country's socio-economic development.
- More government investment in the **development of sports and cultural centres, youth clubs and fora**, and the development of volunteer programmes, is required to improve the social development of young people.

⁹An Analysis of the Situation of Children in Viet Nam, UNICEF, 2010.