

CASE STUDY

Improving SDG Implementation in Viet Nam



One of the SDG policy priorities of Viet Nam is to ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of important wetland eco-systems, eco-system services, particularly forest eco-systems and dry lands. Photo credit: Lester Ledesma/ADB.

Coordination between environment, social and economic targets, and sufficient data to monitor progress, are required to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals in Viet Nam.

Overview

Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in May 2017, Viet Nam was one of the first countries in the Asia–Pacific region to issue a National Action Plan for the implementation of the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This was followed by the adoption of a Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) Action Plan for the implementation of NRE-related SDG targets in December 2018.

A review of Viet Nam’s NRE-related SDG targets and indicators, supported by an Asian Development Bank [technical assistance](#), revealed a lack of coordination with social and economic targets, as well as insufficient data collection and management, at the national and provincial level. Guidance on improving policy coherence and data management was developed with the support of the Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment (ISPONRE) for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) who are mandated to lead on NRE-related SDG target implementation.

Challenges

An Asian Development Bank stocktake found that countries in the Asia-Pacific region face a number of challenges in delivering the environmental dimensions of the SDGs. Most of the countries surveyed were focusing on “conventional” environmental issues within the traditional remit of environment ministries or agencies and doing so with limited regard for other sectors.

In Viet Nam, a **Policy Review** highlighted there is generally a lack of coordination between NRE targets and social and economic targets, making it easy for NRE management to be de-prioritized, and for social and economic policies not to consider their environmental impact. Incentives to collect data to monitor progress against NRE targets are also limited, and not tied to budget decisions.

In Viet Nam, a **Data Review** identified there is limited data available, even for NRE indicators that should have been prioritized, namely those in the National Statistical Indicator System and relating to the targets of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan. Although data collection methodologies are generally robust, in practice there are data gaps and overlaps between similar indicators. Information on indicators is often distributed across different policy documents making it confusing for officials to know what to monitor. In addition, there is limited quality control or training for government officials involved in data collection.

Context

The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) was tasked with managing the overall implementation of the SDG National Action Plan and is the key coordinating ministry at national and provincial level. In terms of horizontal coordination, line ministries were given specific targets according to their mandate and functions. The SDG National Action Plan indicated both direct and indirect responsibility for SDG targets, with MONRE given responsibility for the NRE-related SDG targets of 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15.

Within MONRE, responsibilities for SDG targets and indicators that fall under the themes of Pollution Control, Water, Land and Minerals, Climate Change and Natural Disasters, and Biodiversity are split across six agencies with data and statistics consolidated by the Department of Finance and Planning. In addition to horizontal coordination, vertical coordination can be a challenge as each agency is responsible for collecting and managing data from provincial environment units.

At the provincial level, the environment is only the responsibility of provincial environmental units and not the provincial Departments of Planning and Investment. Therefore, environmental issues are often given limited consideration by the Provincial People’s Committees that create and implement policies in their respective provinces. Just as importantly, there are limited financial incentives for achieving environmental targets, as budget allocations are based on inputs rather than outputs. In addition, only socio-economic criteria are considered in budgeting.

Solutions

An approach was taken that:

- Identified priority NRE-related SDG targets and related indicators;
- Engaged stakeholders in cross-sectoral ways of working; and
- Initiated the collection of relevant data to monitor progress towards delivering the NRE-related SDG targets.

A **Policy Review** was carried out to identify the links between NRE-related SDG targets and existing NRE targets. It also looked at the critical interlinkages between these targets and social and economic targets. The review used a Critical Policy Interlinkages Tool based on the SDG Interactions Framework. This highlighted where there was a lack of consistency between targets, and which NRE-related SDG targets were most important in terms of contributing to social and economic targets. Based on the assessment, 13 NRE-related SDG targets were prioritized and nine of these targets were selected as the focus for initial implementation efforts on data collection as listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Indicators for Prioritized NRE-related SDG Targets

Theme	Viet Nam SDG Target	Viet Nam SDG Policy Priorities
Pollution Control	12.4	By 2020, adopt and implement a lifecycle management approach to chemicals and wastes in accordance with international commitments that Viet Nam has signed, in order to reduce soil, water, air pollution and their adverse impacts on human health and the environment
	11.6	Reduce adverse environmental impacts on people in urban areas including by strengthening the management of air quality, urban waste and other sources of waste
	6.3	By 2030, improve water quality and successfully control sources of pollution, end the use of hazardous chemicals in agricultural, industrial and aquatic production that pollutes water sources and degrades biodiversity, treat 100% of hazardous waste water; halve untreated urban waste water; increase the safe re-use of water

	14.1	By 2030, prevent, significantly reduce and successfully control marine pollution of various forms, particularly pollution from land-based activities, including solid waste, waste-water and organic substances pollution
Water	6.5	By 2030, implement integrated water resources management by river basin, including trans-boundary water sources, through international cooperation
Land and Minerals	12.2	By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources; reasonably exploit and economically, sustainably utilize mineral resources
	15.3	By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world
Climate Change and Natural Disasters	13.1	Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and capacity in responding to natural and other disasters
Biodiversity	15.1	By 2030, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of important wetland eco-systems, eco-system services, particularly forest eco-systems and dry lands in keeping with obligations under international agreements

Source: Asian Development Bank.

A **Data Review** was also carried out using the Environmental Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT) and considering the departmental collection of NRE data.

A multi-stakeholder working group was established and national and provincial level workshops organized to identify actions to address policy coherence and data issues; the recommendations arising from them were later included in **Environmental Monitoring and Evaluation Implementation Guidance** (the Guidance).

Results

In terms of implementing the NRE-related SDGs, from both a policy coherence and data management perspective, the Guidance sets out the following key principles:

- Targets can only be achieved where there is a coordinated policy response.
- Indicators should inform policy development and management decisions.

- Professional oversight and quality control of data collection are required.
- New technologies for and new sources of data collection can be applied.
- Data sharing within and between ministries and agencies and with the public should be improved.

The Guidance suggests actions at national and provincial level to address the policy coherence and data issues identified during the reviews (with corresponding responsibilities and resources):

Issues	Actions to Address
Coordinated policy response	Link and prioritize environment targets. Link NRE indicators to social and economic targets.
Data informs management decisions	Link investment to environmental criteria.
Professional oversight	Strengthen professional management. Self-assessment of statistical quality.
Technologies and sources of data collection	Monitor data collection effectiveness. Increase third party data sharing and outsource data collection. Increase digital-based monitoring activities.
Data sharing	Clearly advise provinces on data that can be shared.

Lessons

Implementation of NRE-related SDGs may be limited if government focus remains on how things have always been done rather than taking a more strategic and integrated approach. Too often, environment ministries and agencies focus on monitoring what is within their mandate rather than seeking to link that mandate to social and economic targets and advocating for changes in institutional processes. The [UN ESCAP Data/Priority Matrix](#) is useful for making links between policy and statistics. The learning process facilitated by the Asian Development Bank [technical assistance](#) supported reviews and stakeholder consultations helped identify remedies for some of the sources of this incoherence in Viet Nam and illustrated that working on data can help support policy and institutional changes.

Policy Coherence

MONRE needs to take a strategic and integrated approach to delivering the NRE-related SDG targets to ensure that drivers and pressures outside its mandate will not negatively impact on achievement of its targets. For these targets to be considered more systematically, MONRE needs to engage other ministries where achievement of an environmental target will be critical to the achievement of social and economic targets. Aligning NRE indicators with policy development and management decisions, such as budget allocation is the most significant way to facilitate progress in SDG implementation.

Whilst MPI have adopted a target in line with SDG target 17.14 on policy coherence for sustainable development, it has not yet been prioritized for implementation. Change takes time and the process of building mutual understanding has been initiated by the policy review process and stakeholder consultations. In addition, working arrangements that allow for greater interaction between stakeholders have been shown to be beneficial. To further address challenges with coordination, more cross-sectoral ownership within and between ministries and agencies should be considered with joint ministerial or departmental focal points and agreed Terms of References for members of Technical Working Groups.

Data Management

The information shared horizontally and vertically by provincial environmental units varies considerably. Data management needs to be coordinated, with representatives from each agency being appointed to liaise with the Department of Finance and Planning on strategic issues. Data collection should also be monitored annually in terms of both investment and staff resourcing.

Concern about the quality and sensitivity of data can inhibit sharing. However, if information is not shared, it can be difficult to constructively engage politicians, policy makers, and the public on environmental issues. Sharing of data needs to be prioritized, to aid consistency in data collection, as well as to link provincial environment webpages to the MONRE webpage to ease the sharing of information.

Resources

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United Nations Statistics Division. 2013. Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool.

United Nations Statistics Division. 2017. Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES).

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Emma has over 20 years experience in the fields of environmental and sustainability assessment. Her current responsibilities include undertaking environmental safeguard compliance reviews for ADB projects, and managing preparation of the ADB Sustainability Report. Prior

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Katharine has experience in facilitating sub-national environmental action in Indonesia, India, the Philippines, and Nepal, supporting cross-sectoral stakeholders to identify synergies between agendas and better link data collection to decision making.



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