**Child Right in Vietnam - Progress and Challenges**

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**Definition**

A child is a human being, a valuable person with rights and values

* Children have the right to a good life and to be protected.
* They need to thrive and sheltered in a healthy and caring environment where good health, good nutrition and psychosocial stimulation are provided.
* They have the right to play and to be with their families where they are loved and cared for.
* They have the right to learn and obtain a quality education.
* They should be able to go to school where the learning environment allows them to learn using the language they understand, where their cognitive, emotional and social development need are promoted.
* They should not be discriminated against because of their gender or race or medical history.
* They should be able to voice their opinion in a respectful way.
* And they should not be beaten.

**Problems:**

* Child rights were not respected in schools due to limited awareness among teachers about the concept and the participatory methods.
* Parents work long hours in factories and come home late at night. Some mother/father has to go to the cities for 3 – 4 months at a time. Children suffered and without supervision, they get into trouble such as addiction to game, dropping out of school, gangs etc… "The best thing I know is being with my parents, but they never have time to be with me, except during Tet." One boy said as they were interviewed.
* Education is still more often built on one-way communication, with very traditional and hierarchical relations between teachers and students.
* Discipline and obedience, common concepts in Vietnamese society, are considered important both by adults and children. The expectations of both society and family toward the child are based on these values, which are critical components in the education of a child and the overall education system.
* Corporal punishment is still being used widely, both at school and at home, as the only form of punishment. "My parents beat me when they think I've said or done something bad," said one boy. "And in school you can be punished in different ways. You might be hit or forced to stand turned to the wall or on your knees for half an hour."
* Boys are treated better than girls. It's typical in a family where the parents give everything the son asks for. He does not help at home while his sister cooks and takes care of the house.
* The children's cognitive, emotional and social development is not promoted.
* Discrimination and bigotry toward ethnic minority and special need children. They do not receive the help they need to succeed in school. Special need children are not treated with the same level of attention. Teachers in general, prefer helping good students instead of children with disabilities or special needs.
* The ethnic minority children are forced to attend school where the primary language is Vietnamese but they receive no help in learning the Vietnamese language, thus caused many to fall behind and eventually drop out by the time they finish middle school.
* The phenomenon of having to “buy a job” where one has to pay substantial of money to bribe an official when applying for a government job (many of the jobs in Vietnam are government jobs) had caused many recent college grad to not be able to secure a job.

**Progress:**

- Vietnam is the first Asian state and second in the world to ratify the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990. The National Assembly ratified the law entitled “Protection and Care and Education of the Child” on 12 August 1991.

- During early 1990s, Save the Children in Vietnam placed high attention to raising awareness on the CRC. Awareness-raising workshops on CRC were organized for different stakeholders such as police, educationists, journalists, parents, community members etc. Quizzes/contests were organized for children. Training manuals were developed and training workshops were organized.

- A project to promote basic understanding of teachers about child rights and to build their skills for organizing child-rights-related activities was started in 2000 with the collaboration of SCS and the Department of Teachers (DoT). Initially, child rights trainings were introduced in 17 teacher-training colleges (TTCs).

- During the 1997-1998 school year, rights education activities were implemented in 32 districts in 8 provinces/cities of Vietnam.

- In 1997 the Office of the Government approved 'Week of Child Rights and Obligations,' which later on changed to the 'Month of Education on Child Rights and Obligations.' The subject is taught for five weeks, one lesson and one theme a week. The themes are:

* I am a child, a valuable person with rights and values
* My Family - where I am loved and cared for
* Country and community - my huge family - my right to protection
* School - where I learn and play - My rights to education
* My opinion is also important

- An evaluation was conducted in late 2000 to assess the outcome of the project. According to this assessment, the project brought about changes in knowledge, attitudes and behavior of stakeholders namely the education officials, students, teachers, and parents. According to this assessment, students are in general happy, excited and proud in learning this subject. After the education activities there are obvious positive changes in their attitudes. They are more compassionate and treat each other more equally. They have more self-esteem and are more mature, more self-confident and less timid in all school activities.

**Challenges**

- There is a big difference between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation. The reasons are twofold: students' values and way of thinking, and the lack of knowledge of the society at large.

- Teachers and their training are of key importance to the success to child rights education program. Teachers in Vietnam work in a society that perceives children as having obligations rather than rights. For a teacher to internalize the education on the rights and obligations of the child she/he has to change her/his own values, knowledge, attitudes and subsequently behavior from what she/he has grown up to believe in and act from. What made a difference was the degree to which the teacher had adopted the message and was able to apply the participatory methods.

- Teachers play vital role in this activities but they were the last one trained in the long chain. The multi-tiered training process where the message was watered down made it more difficult for teachers to internalize the message as well as the methods.

- The quality of the activity depends largely on teachers' skills and motivation, and the training the teachers receive is not of high quality.

- There was little time for them to practice skills so it depends much on their motivation and internalization of the subject. Without motivation lessons become boring.

- Many of the problems still exist and were not addressed due to lack of commitment and corruptions.

**Solutions:**

* Government should implement educational programs where teachers must be given the opportunity to increase their skills, to become more flexible and creative.
* Knowledge of child rights and obligations should be spread widely, so that it reaches the family. In this way the messages in school and at home are harmonized and the rights and obligations are balanced.
* Government should implement educational programs where the children can be gathered and learned during the summer.
* Mother will have a break and do not work long hours. Set hours at factory.
* School to implement programs where it teaches Vietnamese language to the ethnic minority and should pay special attention to them to ensure successful assimilation.
* Implement programs where children are required to be in school before 12th grade to prevent families forcing the children to drop out to help out the families.
* Provide employment opportunities for recent grad without having to bribe to “buy a job”

Ref: UNICEF (2000), *Vietnam - Children and Women: A Situation Analysis*, UNICEF Vietnam, p. 30