



# POLICY BRIEF

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## Plastic Pollution in Vietnam: What Policy Makers Can Do in Regard to Plastic Waste Problems

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### Highlights

To address plastic pollution in cities, policy makers should focus on the two groups that can make the most effective impact to the situation: Students (young generation) and Lawmakers (law regulators).

### Recommendations

- The status of plastic pollution and its consequences must be integrated into education programs to let students understand the source, routes, and destination of plastic waste in the city. Education programmes should present the current status and potential damage of plastic waste to environments and ecology in a specific and intuitive way. From this foundation, younger generations can spread the news and knowledge on the issue and promote new projects and ideas for dealing with plastic waste.
- The government and authority from the national level to city level should improve old policies as well as produce new policies to target plastic littering, plastic collecting, and plastic recycling specific to each region and source of pollution. The most crucial point of plastic pollution must be identified, followed by projects and mitigation plans to deal with the pollution source as soon as possible. Laws-makers should also plan new programs to adapt new technology to resolve plastic waste problems and find alternative for plastic materials.

## The Needed Relationship of Plastic Problem and Education Provider

The problem of city's plastic pollution in developing countries is not an easy issue that can be solved after several programs or campaigns. Instead, a whole system of plastic waste must be addressed with a mitigation plan and policy must be built around this in order to effectively reduce the damage caused by plastic pollution. The Vietnamese government already has plans for implementing both old and new policies to reduce the sources of waste plastic, including plastic bags, and preventing them from entering the natural environment (For example, policy number 582/QĐ-TTg, April 11, 2013 for enhancing environmental pollution prevention through the reduction in and use of biodegradable plastic bags in daily life up to 2020). The emphasis is on the source of plastic waste, which is typically from normal daily life in cities, as the report by Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in 2019. However, the problem of environmental pollution due to plastic waste and plastic bags in cities in Vietnam is still very complicated. Along with the growth of population and economy, plastic waste also increased in quantity and variety, with a high percentage of this mass that has not been classified, collected, and/or thoroughly treated. Replacements for plastics that become waste are not readily available in Vietnam. This is because cheaper, more convenient materials have not been made available yet; or when they have, these products that have not been used due to the people's perception from manufacturers and consumers about the damage of plastic waste and plastic bags are inadequate.<sup>1</sup>

Facing the emerging danger of plastic pollution in cities, many policy instruments and technical solutions for mitigating and responding to the problem have been made. In these policies, the role of education providers in changing the behavior of individuals and organizations towards plastic pollution will be the most critical component of the process. The purpose of these education initiatives should be to make sure that plastic waste is not generated in the first place.

### *Recommendation 1: Integrated the status of plastic pollution and its consequence into education programs.*

It is a common belief that big problems like global climate change, fossil fuel crisis or plastic pollution affecting ecosystem and environment seems to be too big for young generations to understand. That is an old statement and not reflective of the current generation in schools. Young students now, with the support of internet and variety of media, can and understand global environmental situations better than previous generations<sup>2</sup>. The problem of plastic is not a faraway theory, it occurs in every city and in country all around the world. Policy makers working on plastic pollution must understand that engaging the younger generation is critical, and frame their policy around making new education programs focusing on the plastic pollution, specific to each education region.

Education policy on plastic pollution has not been a focus point for Vietnamese education providers. In fact, student and younger generations know little to nothing about the current status of plastic pollution and its damage to the environment from their official education program. With the dire situation of plastic pollution getting worse with each passing day, the knowledge about plastic pollution must be introduced to people directly and indirectly involved to the problem. This includes family members who use plastic in their daily life, as well as companies who use plastic as their input material or output waste.

Education policy on plastic pollution must be started with information providing to students<sup>2</sup>. Plastic pollution may come from many sources, and travel through many routes until its accumulation can cause damage

to environment. Student must know the sources of plastic pollution, then encouraged to create their own solutions to the issue and obtain the skills to prevent the pollution effectively. Plastic pollution education programs can be integrated into the main education curriculum through extracurricular sessions to help students access information about plastic waste pollution in an intuitive way. In the program, students would need to identify and observe the sources of plastic waste in their own school, home, and city, as well as the path of the plastic waste takes while moving through their community. Then locations with high-levels of plastic pollution must be identified along with their damage to the human life, ecology, and environment plastic pollution in these sites can cause. The students need to understand what plastic pollution is, how it can affect human life and the world, and brainstorm about methods to stop it.

The critical point is that any education policy or strategy on understanding and knowledge must lead to action. When students have a deep insight into the situation of plastic pollution in their own city, they can then share their knowledge with their family, community, and other generations. Education providers could also organize contests or competitions for students to find the solution for plastic pollution, and select the best ideas to implement as funded student projects. Many good projects with high potential for success could be born from such a competition, and education providers could select, improve and fund them into a larger scale project that can have significant effect on the plastic pollution situation in each city.

## *Recommendation 2: Improving current policy and adapting new technologies.*

Currently in Vietnam, the policies and laws targeting the plastic pollution issue are not completely effective. However, with the increasing amount of plastic pollution originating from Vietnam each year, the government has begun to focus more on the issue and started to form new policies and laws for regulating plastic pollution. The problem with plastic waste is not an easy issue and require much more effort and work to cope with. With the government agencies and laws-makers, enhancing laws and regulations to stop abusing and discriminately littering plastic into the public places is one of the most necessary point to focus on. Besides just preventing more plastic waste being released into the environment, new policies should also support adopting technologies and methodologies to deal with the current situation of plastic pollution within the country.

There are several policy highlights suggested by Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment that could be referenced for a risk mitigation project in Vietnam:

- Raising the awareness and responsibility of all organizations and individuals about the impact of environmental pollution caused by using plastics containers and plastic bags, changing the perception of users into reducing the use of plastics products, and replacing with products that are environmentally friendly;
- Encouraging and creating opportunities for organizations and individuals to apply new technologies to produce biodegradable, re-usable and environmentally friendly products in replacement of plastics and plastic bags which are difficult to disintegrate in landfills;
- Organizing information activities, launching a movement and projects for "anti-plastic littering" practices;
- Limiting the production of plastic bags that are harmful to environment;
- Developing infrastructure and services to collect and recycle waste plastic and plastic bags before they enter landfills;

- Encouraging the classifying of garbage at the source, collecting and recycling plastic waste and hard-to-decompose plastic bags;
- Managing plastic waste separated from other types of waste before it enters landfills;
- Improving the collecting and transporting of plastic waste to a more effective and efficient method without any leaking and/or losing of plastic content along the way;
- Designing sanitary landfills and ensuring appropriate siting, operation, monitoring and closure, ensuring no leachates could enter the ecosystem;
- Promoting the public to stop mixing plastic into daily waste.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Vietnam Recycling Fund (2018). Direction for recycled plastic industry in Vietnam. Source: <https://www.moitruongvadothi.vn/moi-truong/nhan-dinh-phan-tich/huong-di-cho-nganh-nhua-tai-che-a32829.html>

<sup>2</sup>Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2017/dec/20/this-is-a-generation-challenging-their-parents-on-the-environment-how-schools-are-taking-on-plastic-waste>