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Vietnam, Infrastructure

Connecting Mountains and Valleys: Advertise, Educate, and Fund

Before I discuss Vietnam's social and economic problems, let's visualize the vast, glimmering beaches of Da-Nang, a beach city in the central coast of Vietnam. According to my mom who was born and raised in Vietnam, the water at the sandbars was so clear she could see the fineness of the sand and the tiny fishes smoothing along the shore. Also, the contours of the mountains nearby along with bright blue sky creates a perfect picturesque souvenir postcard in my mind. I would love to visit Da-Nang one day to meet my relatives and experience the majestic beauty of this beach city. The closest I have been to Da-Nang was Saigon, and even now, I can vividly picture some of the neighborhoods I visited. My experiences in Saigon and its surrounding suburbs were quite opposite from the beauty of Da-Nang that my mom told me.

In kindergarten, I took my first trip to Saigon. I remember complaining of the sweltering, humid heat, but my parents patiently replied that I would get used to it in no time. Despite the unbearable weather, I saw many kids who looked like elementary school students roam the broken, noisy streets; barefoot, feeble, and extremely tanned. Looking back, this came as a surprise because that year, 2011, was Vietnam's record low for percentages of primary-aged children that weren't attending school ([CEIC/World Bank, 1977-2013](#)). When I asked my parents why they weren't in school, they simply answered that these unfortunate children were from low-income families that barely had the means to survive. Young students had to sacrifice their education to either beg for money on the streets, find scraps to feed on, or work for their families' small-scale businesses, usually shacks that sell goods or mobile carts. Not just that, even during 2011, kids in Vietnam didn't have online websites to enjoy watching their favorite shows or connect with friends on Facebook. They continued the social traditions of tightly knit neighborhoods by playing outdoor games such as *cá sấu lên bờ* (Vietnamese name for the equivalent of sharks and minnows), hopscotchs, and having as much fun as they could with the few toys they could share. As innocent as they were, they didn't know that one out of five children in Vietnam at the time had at least two hardships in "education, health, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation, or social inclusion" ([UNICEF, 2022](#)), meaning that some of the lesser fortunate have a deprivation in food security, in which an accessible, stable source of food wasn't available, therefore cannot be utilized sufficiently and safely ([Table Debates/FAO, 2021](#)). Ever since my bittersweet vacation, I appreciate how lucky I am to be able to grow up in San Jose, a city with stable infrastructure, modern technology, and an ideal climate. My trip inspired me to return to the home of my ancestors not only to learn and relish its nature, culture, and cuisine, but also to contribute to the advancements in infrastructure and social services.

Even with the unanimous rule of the one political party since the end of the Vietnam War, this socialist republic country continues to shock the rest of the world with its rapid increase in both population and GDP. Its economy is reliant on the international trade market for products of agriculture, forestry, and hunting ([Brittanica, 2021](#)); the main exports are rice, seafood, coffee, and tea, among several others. The temperate jungles and highlands of the North were formerly used as collective farms during the years of the DRV, while the tropical, marshy flatlands of the South are still used to cultivate rice and coffee, being dated back to the Kingdom of Champa. However, because of the policies modified in the Constitution of 1992, families cannot bear more than two children, so as a result, the typical family size has been decreasing since, now at a low of 3.6 people per household ([Environmental Systems Research Institute/Michael Bauer, GmbH, 2020](#)). In a typical family, from the stories my parents and grandmothers told, the role of the father is to obtain income from work outside the home; the mother either works as the housekeeper, a worker, or both; the grandparents take care of the young; and the children either take care of their grandparents, attend school, work in the family business, or even taking on multiple tasks.

However, the children of Vietnam attend school for only about 8-9 years ([UNICEF, 2022](#)) because of the economic hardships given by the post-war circumstances. Going back to malnourishment and food security, from the typical meals served in my house, a family meal always includes something made with rice as the main carbs source. Notable examples include rice paper, vermicelli, and rice rolls used to make *bánh cuốn*. Most meals also include a big bowl of piping hot soup made from a vegetable or meat broth, and toppings vary from boiled pork meatballs to pumpkin and fermented bok choy, unless the main dish is already a soup like *phở*. Since fresh vegetables and herbs are very affordable and easy to find, there are always platters of vibrant greens on the table. They also have plates of savory seafood and/or meat, always exuding the infamous aroma of fish sauce to an extent, prepared by either deep-frying, grilling, braising, boiling, or stir-frying. Depending on the dish that is being prepared, there may be some dipping sauces included, such as hoisin sauce, Sriracha, and *mắm ruốc*. Unfortunately, this entire combination is an ideal throughout daily life, for meals usually include one dish to eat with plain jasmine rice.

As defined by ([Merriam-Webster, 2022](#)), infrastructure is either “the system of public works of a country, state, or region”; “the resources (such as personnel, buildings, or equipment) required for an activity”; “the underlying foundation or basic framework (as of a system or organization)”; or “the permanent installations required for military purposes”. In the case of Vietnam’s food security, only the last definition doesn’t apply to the problems of insufficiency in food and education. Also according to UNICEF’s Vietnam page, it can be inferred that the Hmong (also spelled as Mong) people, an ethnic minority from areas of Laos, Vietnam, and China, are one of the poorest groups in Vietnam, as shown by higher stunting rates and reduced access to safely managed water sources. As they have constantly been struck by natural disasters, financial instability, and limited education of poor quality ([Global Playground, 2013](#)), the chances in which ethnic minorities’ infrastructure will improve is slim as of now. Not just that, because of the language and culture barriers between minority groups and the majority Kinh people, it is difficult for them to urbanize and educate themselves of the Vietnamese language, customs, governmental structure, upon many other topics. On top of that, because these groups live in isolated villages high up in the mountains, and that the government has clearly not given the slightest amount of attention to their struggles, there is a lack of communication between urban and suburban communities and an insufficiency of physical modes of connection via Internet, electricity portals such as solar panel installations, and most importantly, companies that bring safe, affordable transportation to minority groups. Although deficiency rates aren’t as severe in urban communities, poverty and child labor are nationwide issues due to lack in fundings originated from the corruption and greed of the Communist government. According to ([East Asia Forum, 2021](#)), “By the end of 2020, more than 11,700 economic crime cases were investigated, prosecuted and brought to court for first-hearing trials. This included 1900 corruption cases involving 1400 suspects. More than 800 people, including one incumbent member of the Politburo, seven former and incumbent members of the central committee, four former and incumbent ministers and seven military and police generals — linked to nearly 90 corruption and economic wrongdoing cases — have been convicted.” ([Facts and Details, 2014](#)) further confirms this by demonstrating past cases of bribes taken by officers, technological companies, and bank employees. Because the loss of trillions of Vietnamese *đồng* is on a national scale, it affects everyone equally because without the funding needed to enforce laws and support businesses and schools, the welfare of Vietnam will be nearly extinct, where the government and aristocracy engulf themselves in riches while everyone else is left to starve in depression and undeserved stupidity.

Fortunately, there are some solutions that can further curb the greediness of the Communist officials, while enhancing the quality and accessibility to education and basic survival needs. These two results combined, hopefully, will level out poverty to an all-time low by protecting and utilizing the capital in underprivileged areas for the most appropriate needs. Looking at the Japanese education model, their curriculum focuses on the moral development of their future intellectuals ([WENR, 2021](#)). By teaching the young different forms of art, cultural values, and real life skills such as finance and economics, not

only do they gain more well-roundedness, they develop a sense of higher standards of living, such as strong food security, empathy, and the importance of self-sufficiency and success. This model is proven to work as shown by their undernourishment rate of 2.5% ([Trading Economics/World Bank, 2020](#)) and the third highest GDP in the world ([Worldometers/World Bank, 2017](#)). If Vietnam can promote this model via the ratification of mandatory educational development laws from the United Nations and constant news report updates, not only can they increase not only the numbers of civilians who hold at least a college degree, they can also decrease the occurrence of court trials and sentences, which will both make Vietnam look like a safer and happier country. If a certain parameter is reached, perhaps Vietnam will indirectly promote travelers, educators, and businesses to invest in them, gaining even more profits from diverse sources of income rather than international trade, which has proved to be unstable during pandemics and war seasons. Therefore, with this money and a better educated government and younger generation, they can all help each other to protect and defend their resources to invest more into scientific and technological advancements in agriculture and cultivation of land in the central and northern coasts, which will reduce the food shortage overall.

My second proposal consists of two steps; the main goals of this proposal are to eradicate corruption and guarantee income for poor families. Once the income is satisfactory, corruption will reduce and more children gain access to education without having to financially support their family. The first step of the proposal is to improve connectivity between urban and suburban areas. The goal of the first step is to create business and generate income for the government to spend on education and other aspects of society. Different companies can be drafted by the government into suburban areas to install wifi routers, electrical cables, solar panels into homes and huts. As for transportation, the government can hire construction workers, engineers, and transportation companies to pave smooth, flat roads for buses, cars, and trucks to freely use. In addition, policymakers could use Britain's former model of road tax, which proved to be successful in the midst of their economic hardships. That way, the government doesn't have to spend as much money on maintenance and usage. Then, in return, the government can use some of the surplus budget from the educational department to pay these companies and workers a compensation bonus to promote further business. The second step is to continue increasing the nation's capital into education, but for the government to create or modify their existing educational department to confirm that the money is being used effectively while installing an educational program on the culture and current issues of the ethnic minority groups.

My final proposal is to advertise Vietnam's affordable source of labor and intentions to modernize to the world market. By connecting the world market, Vietnam can illustrate itself as a more affordable alternative for labor supplies and a business hub that has land available to build factories and offices. In the end, with more businesses active on Vietnam's soil, the more profit the government can gain from taxation. As a matter of fact, many companies began to branch out to Vietnam during the pandemic ([Love Money, nd](#)). However, in order to make it easier for potential businesses to establish themselves within Vietnamese soil, an organization which represents diversity and opportunity needs to be established by the United Nations. In turn, this potential organization doesn't have to apply to just Vietnam and can work with many bureaucracies and companies at the same time. However, this project would be better funded by the United States because not only are they on friendly terms with Vietnam, the States also has tremendous influence in governance and commerce methods. Back to this organization, there will be different headquarters based on rough geographical areas, and one of them could be in Saigon. With the support and maintenances from the Vietnamese government, other United Nations members, and the grants given by international non-profit foundations and organizations, I think that with time, at least one of my proposals may be successful. In summary, to address the problem of food security in Vietnam, we have to implement new goals for the education system, specifically in moral and artistic development to reduce the corruption rooted within the government while promoting the generation of income.

In summary, improving food security in Vietnam requires the country to target corruption, which increases access to food and education to the people, while addressing the source of financial funding for education via opening Vietnam's market to the world market. With the above plans, I believe that we will make a difference in the food security issue of Vietnam while attaining other important achievements in the process such as reducing corruption and gaining access to education for children.

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