

**Youth Vulnerabilities to Economic Shocks:**

**A Case Study of the  
Social Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Youth  
in Four Districts in Hanoi, Vietnam**

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\* Disclaimer: The views presented in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI.

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## Acronyms

CRS	Catholic Relief Services
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-depth interview
KII	Key informant interview
LH	Life History
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ULSA	University of Labour and Social Affairs
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US\$	United States Dollar
VBSP	Vietnam Bank for Social Policies
VND	Vietnamese Dong

## **1 Introduction**

The purpose of the project was to ascertain youth perspectives on their vulnerabilities and obtain qualitative data on key questions relating to youth risks, vulnerabilities, development capacities, well-being and future opportunities. In particular, the research addresses a knowledge gap on the social impacts of the global economic crisis by analysing how its effects are being experienced by youth in the three focus countries, Ghana, Mozambique and Vietnam. Additionally, the research will explore if and how recovery is impacting on young people; how the young, particularly the poor, face vulnerabilities in their search for a more socially and economically stable present and future. A strong gender and exclusion analysis, including ethnicity and disability, will be essential.

In the joint research with the UK's Overseas Development Institute (ODI), four young researchers from the University of Labour and Social Affairs (ULSA), Hanoi, Vietnam, conducted qualitative research to investigate how poor and vulnerable youth are impacted by the global economic crisis. The research was carried out in five areas: Ba Dinh, Bo De, Luong Son, Me Linh, Thuong Tin and Trung Hoa, although the results presented focus on Ba Dinh, Luong Son and Me Linh where findings more clearly reflected the situation of youth vulnerability. All field sites are located inside or near central Hanoi. The research was conducted from July 2010 to February 2011. The research included in-depth interviews (IDI), focus group discussions (FGD), life history (LH), and key informant interviews (KII) in order to create a more complete picture of the perspectives of young people.

This report presents the key findings of the research. At first it explains the methodological aspects, followed by a presentation of the key findings structured by the themes of economic activities and employment; poverty, hunger and coping strategies; education; health; emotional and social well-being and gender differences in experiences of vulnerability. Chapter four gives a brief overview of government programmes that favour poor and vulnerable youth, discussing some of their shortcomings and challenges, as well as more positive effects. Trend analysis of quantitative economic data will be introduced briefly in chapter five. Lessons learned will be shown in chapter six, followed by conclusions in chapter seven.

## **2 Methodological aspects**

### **2.1 Analytical process**

#### **Sites visited**

As mentioned above, the report will mainly focus on the findings of surveys conducted in three areas: Me Linh, Ba Dinh and Luong Son. In all three sites the researchers talked to

young vulnerable people aged 15-25 years. The key characteristics of these field sites are presented below.

Me Linh district is about 30 km away from central Hanoi. This area is characterised by a transition from rural to urban. Formerly, Me Linh was part of Vinh Phuc province, but it was incorporated in Hanoi in 2008 following a municipal reform. Now, as a suburb of Hanoi, much has changed due to the appearance of industrial parks and factories. Because of this development many people have moved to Me Linh (particularly to Van Khe and Tien Phuong villages) to find jobs as unskilled workers in the parks, nearby factories or construction sector. These unskilled migrant labourers originate from the northern provinces of Bac Giang, Lang Son and Thai Nguyen. A lot of them are between 20 and 30 years old.

Ba Dinh, an urban district in central Hanoi, is located close to the Red River near the wholesale market of Long Bien and Duong Xuan market. Most people living there are involved in trade, such as selling fruit and/or clothes, or work as porters and drivers for goods. The trading activities attract a lot of people from outside Hanoi, mainly from Hung Yen, Ha Tinh and Ha Nam provinces. In particular, young people aged 20-30 tend to migrate to Ba Dinh.<sup>1</sup> The research mainly focused on Phuc Xa ward since this part of Ba Dinh is where many unskilled young migrants live in cramped dwellings.

Luong Son, a peri-urban area, is located 50 km to the north of Hanoi and formed part of Hoa Binh province until the 2008 municipal reform when it was transferred to the capital. In Luong Son, people live mainly from subsistence agriculture or work in nearby industrial park. It is one of the poorest areas of Hanoi. A lot of ethnic minorities, such as Muong, Hmong and Dao, live in Luong Son.<sup>2</sup>

### **Interviews conducted**

In Me Linh the research focused mainly on young unskilled workers aged 15-25 working in industrial parks, brick manufacture and construction. For the In-depth Interviews (IDI) 13 young people (eight male, five female) were selected in the above sectors or because they were deemed particularly vulnerable due to early school drop out (8<sup>th</sup> grade), a migrant or came from a poor family. The four Life Histories (LH) were addressed to young vulnerable people who had migrated either to or from the community, a street hawker, or were disabled.<sup>3</sup> The five Focus Group Discussions (FGD) included two female, two male and one mixed group. Each group had at least three participants from the two age groups, 15-19 years old and 20-25 years old. For the five Key Informant Interviews (KII) the young researchers talked to government officials and representatives of one of the local mass organisations (mainly women's unions) liaising with communities and

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<sup>1</sup> The age group 15-25 accounts for 15 per cent of the population in Ba Dinh, according to a local key informant .

<sup>2</sup> Muong accounted for over 60% of the population of Luong Son in 2006. In 2004, according to the World Bank, over 60% of ethnic minorities were living in poverty. See

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/VIETNAMEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21705492~menuPK:3949587~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:387565,00.html> [accessed March 15<sup>th</sup> 2011]

households concerning loans from the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies.<sup>4</sup> They also interviewed managers in an industrial park and in a brick-making plant.<sup>5</sup>

In Ba Dinh, the researchers completed 14 IDIs with mainly unskilled workers (seven female and seven male) ranging in age from 17 to 25 years old. Most were quite poor – some had to drop out of school to increase their family income. Respondents for the four LHs were mainly migrants, street hawkers, the disabled or had married early (female). The four FGDs consisted of two mixed groups, one female group and one male group, divided into the two age groups mentioned above. All the participants were unskilled migrants. The researchers held two KIIs: a government official and a representative of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in the locality.<sup>6</sup>

In Luong Son, the researchers completed 12 IDIs with young unskilled workers and ethnic minority youth, as well as early school dropouts, young orphans, young people with disabilities and youth from poor families (receiving support from the government). All were between 15 and 20 years old. Respondents for the four LHs were young street hawkers, young people with disabilities, migrants and a woman who had married when she was 16 years old. Additionally, the young researchers completed six FGDs, each with at least three participants (two male, two female and two mixed). Participants were mainly ethnic minority youth, young subsistence farmers or unskilled workers in the nearby industrial park. As before groups were divided into two age groups, 17-25 years old and 21-25 years old. In Luong Son, the researchers completed six KIIs with government officials at district and commune level, and with representatives of the women's union and local farmers association liaising with communities and households over social policy loans.

To obtain a fuller picture of the situation of poor and vulnerable youth, the researchers also interviewed national key informants, including representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Action Aid and the Ministry for Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA).

## **2.2 Challenges in data collection**

### **Identifying respondents**

Generally, people were very open and cooperative in participating in the research. On very few occasions did people refuse to be interviewed. Nevertheless, identifying appropriate respondents for interviews was challenging for the young researchers.

First of all, before researchers visited a field site the local authorities had to be informed and to give permission, which took some time. In some field sites the local authorities

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<sup>4</sup> The Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) was established in October 2002 to provide credit to the poor and other beneficiaries. Source: [http://www.vbsp.org.vn/evbsp/view\\_detail.php?mtt=117&mamm=10](http://www.vbsp.org.vn/evbsp/view_detail.php?mtt=117&mamm=10) [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2011]

<sup>5</sup> Due to regulations, the young researchers were not permitted to enter the industrial parks.

<sup>6</sup> In Ba Dinh, the researchers had difficulty finding key informants willing to be interviewed. Five KIIs were planned, but they realised only two.

recommended that the researchers interviewed certain people, which did not meet the selection criteria for interviewees (see above). This caused delays since the young researchers had to return on a second occasion to find the appropriate respondents. However, in all three field sites the local authorities were cooperative and helpful, particularly when it came to setting up the FGDs.

Secondly, the interviewees' time availability did not always match with that of the researchers, who were also either studying or working. This caused some delays in conducting the interviews.

Thirdly, the last phase of the research took place during the Vietnamese *Tet* holiday.<sup>7</sup> At this time of the year, most people are busy preparing for the festivities. Hence, the researchers had little spare time for interviews. Furthermore, in areas with a lot of migrants, people went home to visit their families, staying about two to three weeks. This caused further delays for the project.

Besides *Tet*, the unskilled workers in Ba Dinh and Me Linh were difficult to contact due to their long day shifts. When they go home, they are so tired they can hardly prepare a meal, let alone spare an hour or more for an interview.

### Asking questions

Although the researchers piloted all kinds of questionnaires, they still faced a lot of challenges:

- In particular the **length of the IDI questionnaire** caused difficulties and it took the researchers to get used to the questions. At the start, therefore, they relied on the questionnaires and were unable to facilitate a natural conversation with the interviewees. In addition, the researchers sometimes forgot some of the questions and continued with others, which did not cover the themes of the research.
- The researchers were unaccustomed to asking **probing questions** and encountered difficulties in getting to the bottom of some answers/statements. In other cases, the researchers used leading questions or suggested possible answers, which influenced the interviewees' replies.
- Though translated into Vietnamese by ULSA, the **language of the questionnaires** was quite academic. Sometimes the interviewees did not understand the questions and, in most cases, avoided asking for further explanations.
- **The setting for an interview** was not always ideal. Many interviews took place in noisy markets, streets and factories where interviewees were easily distracted or disrupted.
- **The lack of knowledge and information regarding programmes and policies for youth** in Vietnam raised difficulties for the researchers. Additionally, it took some

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<sup>7</sup> *Tet* is the Vietnamese New Year and the country's most important holiday. In 2010-11 *Tet* took place from 29 January until 8 February. Even after *Tet*, many shops and companies remain closed and only re-open a week later.

time before they were able to internalize the underlying concept of the research, e.g. the transmission pathways of the economic crisis.

### **Note-taking**

At first the researchers conducted the interviews individually. However, after the mid-term review, we decided that all interviews should be done in pairs (with one person asking the questions and the other taking notes) to make the process easier. This significantly helped the researchers to note the information they were given.

### **Recordings**

At first, the beginning, there were a number of technical problems especially when transferring recorded data to computers. Although new dictaphones resolved this issue, other challenges remained. Firstly, some interviewees did not feel comfortable being recorded. One 23-year old female fruit seller in Me Linh said: *'Without being taped, I could talk with you all day, but if I'm being taped, I do not want to talk anymore.'*

Furthermore, as mentioned above, many of the interviews were conducted in noisy surroundings where the recording quality was not clear. This caused problems when transcribing interviews.

## **2.3 Challenges to the project**

In addition to what is mentioned above, the following issues should also be considered. Firstly, the researchers usually stayed only one day at a field site, which hardly facilitated trust building between them and local people. A longer stay over a few days would have made the research process easier. Moreover, working in groups divided along gender lines (each group was composed on one male and one female) caused logistical challenges because of their conflicting study schedules. Thirdly, one researcher had to leave mid-project to do military service so the teams had to be reconfigured.

The local and national KIIs caused difficulties for some researchers. Often local authorities were unwilling to share information about their communities, either because they thought it was a sensitive topic or they did not know. As a result, the information that the researchers extracted from the KIIs interviews was of somewhat limited value.

## **3 Key findings**

The key findings extracted from almost 80 interviews, including IDIs, LHs, FGDs and KIIs in the three areas of Me Linh, Ba Dinh and Luong Son, will be structured by theme: employment and economic activities; poverty, hunger and coping strategies; education; health; emotional and social well-being; and gender differences in experiences of

vulnerability. These themes have been chosen as they influence young people's lives significantly.

### **3.1 Employment/economic activities**

The main vulnerabilities that young people face with regard to work in all three field sites are unstable working conditions, low-paid jobs, unemployment and rising living costs.

Young, unskilled migrant workers in Ba Dinh and Me Linh earn about VND2m (about US\$100) per month. Most came to the two places to increase their family incomes so, besides covering daily expenses, they are trying to send money home. In Luong Son, young people working on farms or in the industrial park earn less, some at little as VND1m (about US\$50) a month.

All interviewees noted that prices for food and fuel are increasing while wages do not. In fact, the economic crisis has caused companies to lower production, leading to reduced wages (about 70% of the original) and lay-offs. A young, unskilled worker at Thang Long industrial park in Me Linh explained: *'Our company has about 700 people. One hundred people had to leave work. Some people are on a two-to-three month probationary period; those people along with the ones who have seasonal or short-term contracts were fired first.'*

Another 19-year-old male migrant in Ba Dinh said: *'In private enterprise, an employee's pay depends on the profits and sales of the company. When prices increase, there will be a tendency for lower demand, accompanied by a fall in the sales level of companies, then we will have less work to do and will earn less money.'* Most you interviewees admitted that they did not know much about the economic crisis and its impacts, but they could clearly see that there were fewer job opportunities *'I don't know much about the economic crisis but I can see that there are less job opportunities,'* said a 19-year-old male migrant worker in Ba Dinh.

Young, unskilled migrant workers in Ba Dinh have neither working contracts nor insurance. In Me Linh and Luong Son the situation is slightly better and most had a formal contract (e.g. for six months or a year, including probationary period time) and basic health care. This applies to workers in industrial parks and the brick factory, but not to people working in construction which, in health terms, is a more dangerous work environment.

Most young, unskilled migrant workers in Ba Dinh and Me Linh went there to escape unemployment in their hometowns. In Me Linh, the young people who had finished high school, gone to college or completed some form of vocational training found it difficult to get jobs in their fields of study, according to one interviewee: *'It may be due to the economic crisis that there is less of a recruitment need in some companies and that their requirements are higher. There are limited job opportunities for those, like me, who have just left school.'* As a result, a lot of recent graduates ended up in unskilled jobs at the industrial parks.

In Me Linh, the young researchers gained insight into working conditions by interviewing young people who worked in garment factories. A young, unskilled female worker (22 years) in Thang Long industrial park stated: *'If you are a minute late for work, your payment will be cut by one hour. If you are off work too much they will cut off your bonus allowances.'*

In Luong Son, young subsistence farmers noted the increased prices for fuel and food. Since they cannot earn enough from agriculture many were looking for additional jobs, either in the industrial park or as shop assistants. Some are considering migrating to central Hanoi to find a job there.

To conclude, most interviewees stated that their economic vulnerability was worse due to unstable jobs with low incomes and increased prices. Low incomes, due to companies reducing production, and the increased cost of food and fuel were the results of the economic crisis. Even young people who were better off initially had become more vulnerable. They had finished high school, college or vocational training but still faced unemployment.

### **3.2 Poverty, hunger and coping strategies**

Poor, vulnerable young people in all three field sites had created their own coping strategies to deal with hardship. As prices increased so did the need to cut down on expenses. A lot of coping strategies addressed food consumption and accommodation. Migrants were most challenged by increasing prices. A national key informant (thematic coordinator, Right for Food section, Action Aid, Vietnam) explained: *'The high prices, compared to the wages they receive, make them [the migrants] the new "poor people".'* Poor migrants in Me Linh know this too well, as they told the young researchers: *'At the moment our salaries stay stable but market prices are dramatically increasing. All kinds of services and items, such as house rent, electricity, water and food, have increased. This makes us poorer and directly affects our daily meals.'*

Unskilled, young people living away from home and working in the industrial park in Me Linh or in the markets of Ba Dinh try to reduce the cost of meals by cooking together. A male labourer at Dong Xuan market said: *'In the past, cooking a meal for three of us cost each of us VND17,000 (US\$0.80), so in total it was about VND50,000 (US\$2.40). Nowadays rice, oil, vegetables, everything is more expensive; so, cooking a meal for three people needs around VND70-100,000 (US\$3.35-4.80).'* Others stopped eating out and started cooking at home. A worker in Dong Xuan market explained: *'If you eat out it costs VND40,000 (US\$1.90) a meal, but if you cook it is only about VND20,000 (US\$0.96) a meal.'*

Moreover, some young people were buying cheaper, lower quality food to save money, while others cut down on the quantity of food they ate to reduce expenses. *'I used to buy five or six ounces of meat. Now I just buy a half that—as long as the quality is good,'* said a female vendor in Ba Dinh. Other poor farming families in Luong Son only buy rice, tofu and vegetables, as meat is the most expensive item. *'We don't have money to buy food. We just have vegetables,'* stated a 23-year-old disabled male in Luong Son.

As well as rent, the cost of utilities has also gone up. In Phuc Xa ward (Ba Dinh) the price of electricity rose from VND2,000 (US\$0.10) per kWh in 2008 to VND3,500 (US\$0.17) per kWh in 2010. To cut down on housing costs some interviewees share rooms with three others, rather than with one. Their accommodation is often inadequate, in a polluted environment, and smells badly. Some young, unskilled migrant labourers working in Dong Xuan market explained: *'I share with others and then I pay much less. However, it's too cramped. You know, how small a room for 4-5 people living together is?'*

Some workers were looking for a second job or doing overtime to handle increased living costs: *'Before, I only did administrative work. Now I have to do some other extra jobs so that I can earn more money for my daily life.'*<sup>8</sup>

Many young people had to cut expenses related to entertainment, such as purchasing clothes, going out and eating meals with friends. The decline in socialising means fewer opportunities for meaningful exchanges with their peers. Young migrants in Me Linh and Ba Dinh chose to go back to their hometowns less often in order to save money.

In Luong Son, where a lot of farm land has been turned into industrial parks, people switched from growing rice to animal husbandry, according to one 25-year-old female interviewee. Poor families can borrow some money from the women's union to buy and raise animals, which is common according to the above interviewee.

To summarise, the rise in prices is dragging young people into poverty, and the economic crisis has worsened living conditions for young migrants and young people in farming families in Luong Son. Their poverty was exacerbated.

### **3.3 Education**

In general, young people said that the quality of education had improved in the last couple of years, but it was difficult to find any changes in the sector due to the economic crisis.

According to reports on the economic and social development of Me Linh district, 39 schools were renovated in 2009-10 as part of the Hanoi People's Committee plan.<sup>9</sup> However, the improvements had a downside because they led to higher school fees. A 16-year-old school boy in Me Linh said that his school fees have increased from about VNS1.5m to VND2m (US\$75-100) per year. A young female in Luong Son said that her tuition fees for high school had increased from VND1m (US\$50) per term in 2008 to VND2m (US\$100), but she also stated that the quality of education had improved.

The higher costs mean that some families can no longer afford schooling for all of their children. Interviewees in Luong Son said that the oldest child (regardless of sex) tends to leave school early to help support the family. Young people from poor families often pay

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<sup>8</sup> A 25-year-old female worker in Trung Hoa.

<sup>9</sup> Report on the economic and social development in 2010 in Me Linh district.

reduced tuition fee, said a 16-year-old disabled school boy. His family pays only VND1m, instead of VND1.5m, per year.

When asked about the gender differences in education, researchers found that in rural areas, like Luong Son, the percentage of female dropouts was higher than males. Girls are thought to be better off staying at home and getting married. *'When they are not going to school, they can help their parents do housework,'* said one girl in an FGD in Luong Son.

But not all parents think like that. A 17-year-old school girl from an ethnic minority living in Luong Son said that her parents wanted her to learn in order to have better living conditions in future so they had sent her to live with friends nearer to school. This saved her a round-trip journey home of around 16 km each day. *'This is my parents' idea. They want me to have better conditions to learn. In the hamlet of my family, a number of people don't learn so they don't have jobs. My parents want me to learn so I can have a better life.'* In Luong Son, young interviewees observed that boys were dropping out of school because they wanted to play computer games: *'As boys, they are addicted to computer games and they are losing their studies,'* said one of the female FGD participants in Luong Son. *'Teachers nowadays seem not to be responsible enough to care for these boys, that is why they drop out.'*

In general, poor, young people noted that both the quality and cost of education had increased in recent years. Poor families struggle to afford tuition fees for their children and many children drop out after secondary school to work to increase the family income. However, the researchers did not see that the economic crisis had exerted any direct influence on the education sector.

### **3.4 Health**

In all three field sites vulnerable young people complained of the increasing cost of health care. Because of the cost, they rely on self-treatment and only visit medical professionals when seriously ill. Rather than seeing a doctor, they buy self-prescribed medicine at the pharmacy.

A national key informant told the researchers: *'Some people think it's simple to go to hospital, but in fact it's for the rich. For the poor, going to a hospital is a big deal. Even those who are seriously sick don't dare to go to hospital as they don't have the money.'*

A 19-year-old, unskilled male worker in Ba Dinh said that the high cost for health care is one of the main difficulties young people face: *'In my opinion, they have to cope with many difficulties. For instance, if they have a low salary, they cannot be sure they can cover their monthly living expenses. If that's the case they don't dare go to a hospital for treatment, instead they buy medicine on their own. In some cases, medicine can work well. In other cases it doesn't and only a doctor can treat them.'* Young people are aware in some cases that it might be better to see a medical professional or go to a hospital but they just cannot afford it. When asked why she did not go to the hospital when she was ill, one young female worker in Phuc Xa (Ba Dinh) replied: *'I've just started working so I didn't have money to go to hospital.'*

The health of young migrant workers in Me Linh and Ba Dinh is not good due to their hard work loads. A young unskilled migrant worker in Ba Dinh said of his health status: *'Honestly speaking, as a manual labourer, we feel tired all the time, we have pain in our feet when going to bed, aching hands and even a headache. To have aching arms and leg pain is normal for us. Every day is the same.'*

When asked about coping strategies when in stressful situations, a labourer at Thang Long industrial park (Me Linh) replied: *'Any time I feel tired or too stressed, I stop working and go back to my home village for one or two days. When I feel comfortable again I go back to work.'*

Since most vulnerable young people interviewed hardly went to hospitals, they were unsure about the quality of health care. Some mentioned that health services were of a low standard. In Me Linh, a 20-year-old female migrant worker believed that: *'Doctors did not care much about their patients.'*

It is particularly difficult for poor families to get access to good health services as they cannot afford it. The following example of a poor family in Luong Son, with a disabled teenage son, demonstrates this:

*'Yes. I was told that he has an innate defect. I don't remember what year it was that foreign doctors came to Ba Vi-Son Tay hospital to provide treatments for people with leg defects. This commune had six disabled children going to the hospital. There were six patients that could be treated during the shift of a surgeon. Four children from our commune had money so they got to see the surgeon first and we were sent home without treatment because we didn't have money. [...] We were poor and we didn't have money to bribe doctors so we didn't get support. I said we are the poor. The head of the hamlet called for help from other people in the hamlet. Each person contributed VND50,000 (US\$2.40) so that the children would have money for their meals. We didn't have money left to give to doctors. I spoke frankly to the doctors but they didn't give my son surgery. Our district had six children waiting but four of them never got treatment.'*

Most interviewees mentioned that hardly any programmes addressed reproductive health care for youth. The few that do exist focus mainly on married young women. However, the researchers found no evidence showing changes in family planning issues for young people.

To sum up, poor young people in all three field sites had noticed an increase in the cost of health care services, but the increase did not seem directly linked to an increase in quality. As a result of the economic crisis, interviewees had less money than before and, therefore, less to spend on health. As all the interviewees were around 20 years old, it is hard to determine how their health will be affected by this increased cost in the long

term. However, due to the crisis, a lot of young unskilled workers were accepting hard work which will definitely impact on their health in the short run.

### **3.5 Emotional and social well-being**

Economic crisis can trigger changes in emotional and social wellbeing as a result of workplace stress (production downsizing, fewer jobs, unemployment), family tensions (decreased family income) and less time for social exchanges with peers (more work or household chores, less disposable income).

Some vulnerable young people in Luong Son agreed that: *'There are a number of unemployed people. This leads to their involvement in drug addiction, gambling and stealing.'* In rural areas like Luong Son it is particularly difficult for unemployed young people to find jobs. Usually, they end up as subsistence farmers with their families or migrate to central Hanoi to find work.

Another challenge young migrants face in Me Linh and Ba Dinh is that they live apart from their families. Some female migrant workers stated that they needed to leave children with their grandparents in their home provinces while they worked to send money back. All young migrant workers try to go home as often as possible, both to socialise with friends and take care of family business.

The living conditions in Ba Dinh also had an impact on young people. Young migrant workers felt stressed from living in very small rooms (about 10m<sup>2</sup>) with three others and could not really rest. Additionally, sanitation facilities are shared by 30-40 people, a condition that hardly contributes to the well-being of female workers. Young unskilled workers in industrial parks in Me Linh and Luong Son found their work surroundings stressful. They complained of having few or no opportunities to rest or take short breaks. Besides a basic income, they are paid according to productivity, which places them under great pressure.

Active discrimination between migrants and local people in all three field sites is hardly visible. Most young migrants said that they were too busy to notice it and that they have little interaction with the local community. However, it may be a form of passive discrimination since local people do not care for them.

To conclude, young unskilled migrants in all three areas faced the emotional stress of living apart from their families. Young unemployed people in Me Linh and in Luong Son felt desperate about their situation. In most cases, the stress young people felt originated from the economic hardship they have to face as a result of the economic crisis.

### **3.6 Gender differences in the experience of vulnerability**

As economic crises tend to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of already vulnerable people, the researchers tried to take a closer look at gender differences in experiences of vulnerability.

A 25-year-old female worker in Luong Son acknowledged the inequality between boys and girls within families: *'Generally speaking, we are unable to eliminate the preference for a son.'* She replied frankly when asked whether men still play the dominant role in families. *'Definitely, they do.'* But she also added: *'In some families, men negotiate with women and children in decision making. In other families, men make all decisions and women are inferior. In general, it depends on each man. Those who have better education and knowledge have a better understanding.'*

It seems that young girls in rural areas are getting married early as a result of their families' worsening economic situation. However, the young researchers could not prove this hypothesis in Luong Son where rather the contrary was found. An ethnic minority 17-year-old girl explained that her parents advised her to find a stable job first, and then think about marriage. In all three field sites the researchers found out that girls from poor families dropped out of school after secondary education to help their parents at home or work as childcare assistants, rather than marrying early.

Today, nearly as many young women migrate to urban areas as young men, and generally share the same challenges.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, young vulnerable people noticed some differences in regard to income. As women do physically lighter jobs (e.g. in garment factories), they earn less. When asked about income differences between men and women, a 19-year-old male migrant in Ba Dinh said: *'Yes, very different. The women are weaker and slower than men. I think people still prefer male labourers to female, especially with cargo carriers. That's why a man's income is often higher than a woman.'*

Only one interviewee mentioned the risk that women might enter prostitution to increase their (and their families') incomes: *'As far as I know, the proportion of men who drink alcohol and gamble is higher than women. But women may face another challenge: temptation of money. They have the "natural capital" which may take them to another job if they haven't got enough money for living expenses. I think you know what I mean.'*

To summarise, the researchers found it challenging to find out more about gender differences in the experience of vulnerability as a result of economic crisis. Most interviewees said that men and women were affected by the crisis in a similar way, mainly through lower income. They pointed out that there is still inequality in terms of family roles, but this is not related to the economic crisis.

#### **4 Programmes for youth**

This section presents and examines the key national programmes that focus on poor and vulnerable young people. In Vietnam, most national and local youth programmes are directly implemented by the government, local authorities or mass organisations, like the women's union or the youth union.

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<sup>10</sup> Locke, Nguyen and Nguyen (2009) Paper for presentation at IUSSP, Marrakech.

Generally, the researchers struggled to find concrete information about performance and the impact of these programmes because as evaluations (if they existed) were hard to access.

The table below shows that key national programmes for poor and vulnerable young people focus mainly on support for education in the form of exemptions (complete or partial) from tuition fees. Other programmes focus on vocational training to enhance young people's job prospects. Most poor young people receive financial support for the *Tet* holidays so they can buy tickets to visit their families at this special time.

**Table 1: National key programmes/policies addressing poor and vulnerable youth**

Name of programme	Year	Targeted population (young people/age group/female/male/poor/ disabled, others)	Source of information
<p>Implementing the support programme for students at university, college and vocational levels (No 21/2007/CTTTg, 4 September 2007).</p> <p>Budget (Social policy bank): VND4,254 billion (US\$210,000)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For 287,000 new poor high school students who passed the entrance exams (this is 20% of those passing the university entrance exam) with VND1.2m per student.</li> <li>- Continuing support for 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students.</li> </ul>	2007	Poor young people who cannot afford tuition fees.	<a href="http://www.cpv.org.vn">www.cpv.org.vn</a>
<p>Education development scheme for ethnic minority phase 2010-15</p> <p>Budget: VND341b.</p>	2010 – 2015	Students from ethnic minorities: in the six provinces of Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Nghe An, Kon Tum; all levels: kindergarten, primary school and high school; students from poor households studying at high schools, colleges, universities and vocational schools.	<a href="http://www.chinhphu.vn">www.chinhphu.vn</a>
<p>Free and reduced cost of learning for children in poor households.</p>	2010-2011	Poor children	<a href="http://www.thanhvien.com.vn">www.thanhvien.com.vn</a>

<p>Supporting youth in vocational training and job creation: To increase quickly the quantity and quality of job training, especially for young people, to meet the private sector's requirements</p> <p>Specific measures: - providing loans for young people - supporting the modernisation of job centres introduced and managed by the Youth Union</p> <p>Estimated Budget: about VND10b</p>	2008-15	Youth	<a href="http://www.chinhphu.vn">www.chinhphu.vn</a>
<p>Tet ticket donation programme 27,000 tickets for poor students to return home for Tet -A programme by the HCMC Vietnam Student Association (Student Support Center) in collaboration with the National Committee of Vietnam Fatherland Front Budget: VND750m</p>	January 2011	Students from rural central provinces hard-hit by the typhoon, poor students, disabled students, students from ethnic provinces.	<a href="http://www.caothang.edu.vn/index.php/tin-tuc/tin-giao-dc">www.caothang.edu.vn/index.php/tin-tuc/tin-giao-dc</a>

In Vietnam, migrants do not usually have access to local government programmes in the places they move to. They only have access to programmes, loans and other grants in their hometown or home province. One reason why migrants go home as often as possible is that their needs are somewhat neglected in the areas where they work.

Another is that unskilled workers working all day and barely notice the opportunities that might otherwise have been offered (e.g. by NGOs). Hence, young unskilled migrant workers in Ba Dinh and in Me Linh know very little about governmental or NGOs activities to support them. *'I only do my work, said a 19-year-old male migrant worker in Ba Dinh, 'so I have no idea.'*

Not only are potential support programs unknown to young migrant workers in Ba Dinh and Me Linh, so are policies that address young migrant workers. A 20-year-old female

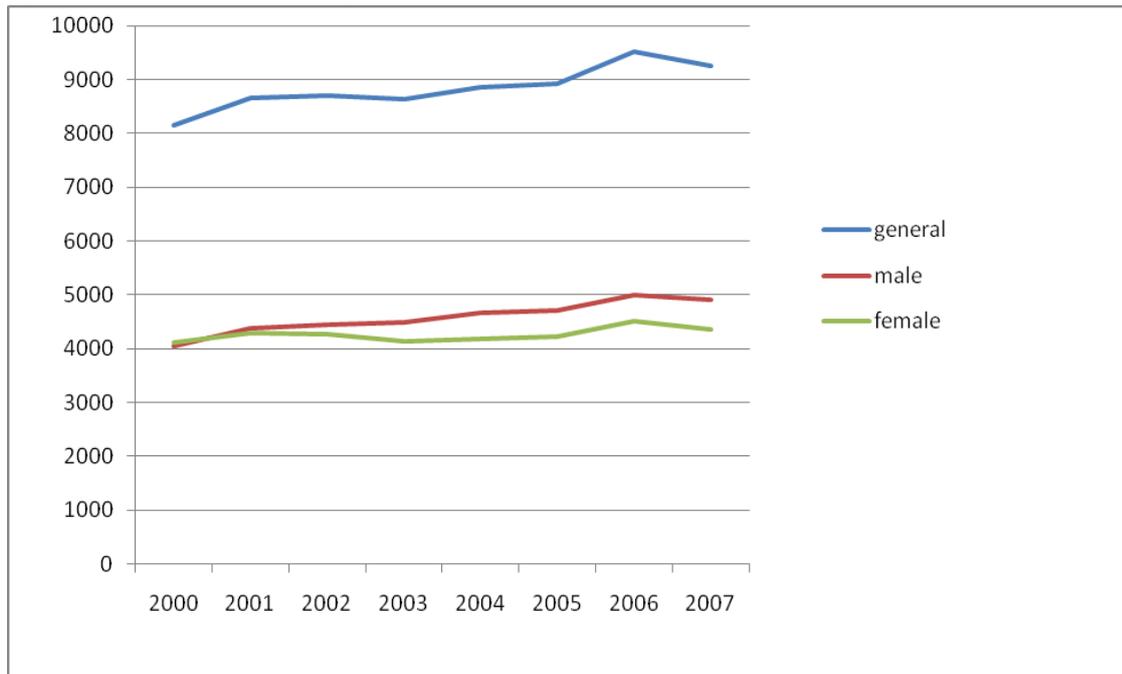
migrant worker in Ba Dinh explained: ‘Yes, labourers like us really need them [policies and programmes to support them]. However, the state’s support cannot happen to us because many state policies are unknown to us. If we do not search the internet, we don’t know about them.’

Only a few organisations focus explicitly on poor, vulnerable youth between 15 and 25 years old. International NGOs, like UNICEF, CRS and Action Aid, mostly target children but do include beneficiaries in the above-mentioned age range. As part of its child protection activities, UNICEF implements ‘case management’ which addresses children up to 16 years old. Within this context, it supports children with housing, health care, food, employment, education and legal support, if needed. Action Aid includes youth in its programmes to increase young people’s involvement in governance actions (e.g. support for building a self-governance group for young people) or in its ‘End Poverty Together Year 2009’ campaign, which explicitly addressed female workers in Hai Phong.<sup>11</sup> CRS is implementing programmes for youth infected, or impacted, by HIV/AIDS: children whose parents are HIV-infected are often discriminated against by their communities.

However, even when young interviewees knew of these programmes they noted their ineffectiveness in reaching the target population. Most young people were missing out on programmes that could help them develop their skills to find better employment opportunities. This also applies to programme regarding youth-related health care.

## 5 Trend analysis of quantitative indicators

Figure 1: Youth employment, ages 15 to 24 ('000s) Source: Labour and Social Trends in Vietnam 2009/10,



ILO and Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2010, Hanoi, Vietnam, page: 59.

<sup>11</sup> A city about 100 km northwest of Hanoi.

**Table 2: Youth employment-to-population ratio, ages 15 to 24 (%)**

Youth employment-to-population ratio, ages 15 to 24 (%)								
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>General</b>	53.6	57.2	56.1	54.3	53.5	52.5	53.3	51.5
<b>Male</b>	52.5	56.8	55.7	54.6	54.3	53.3	54.2	52.8
<b>Female</b>	54.6	57.5	56.5	53.9	52.7	51.5	52.2	50.1

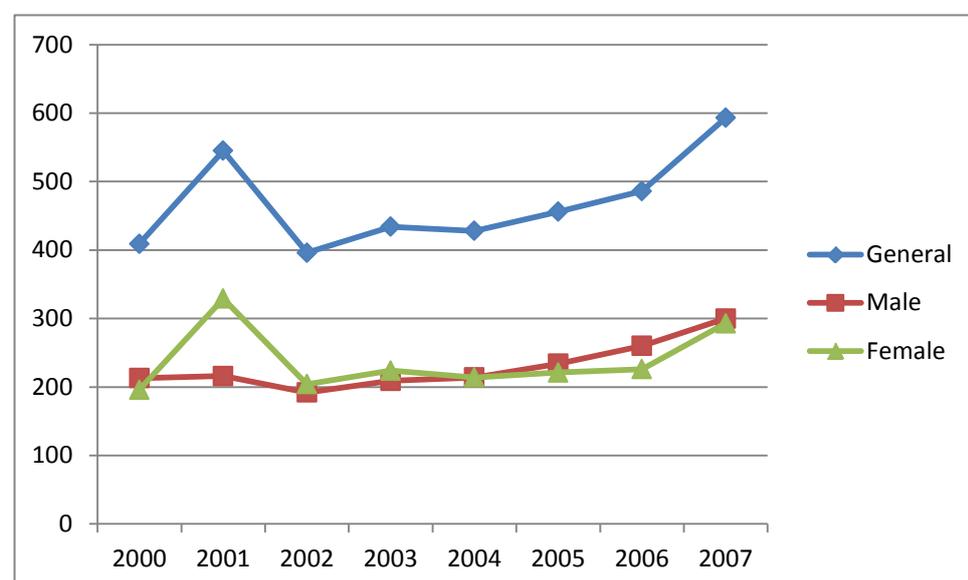
Source: Labour and Social Trends in Vietnam 2009/10, ILO and ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2010, Hanoi, Vietnam, page: 59.

**Table 3: Share of vulnerable employment in total employment**

Share of vulnerable employment <sup>12</sup> in total employment								
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>General</b>	80.1	77.5	78.3	77.0	73.9	74	76.9	76.7
<b>Male</b>	76.9	74.2	75	73.1	69.5	69.8	73.6	75.3
<b>Female</b>	83.2	81	81.8	81.1	78.5	78.4	80.3	78.2

Source: Labour and Social Trends in Vietnam 2009/10, ILO and ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2010, Hanoi, Vietnam, page: 65.

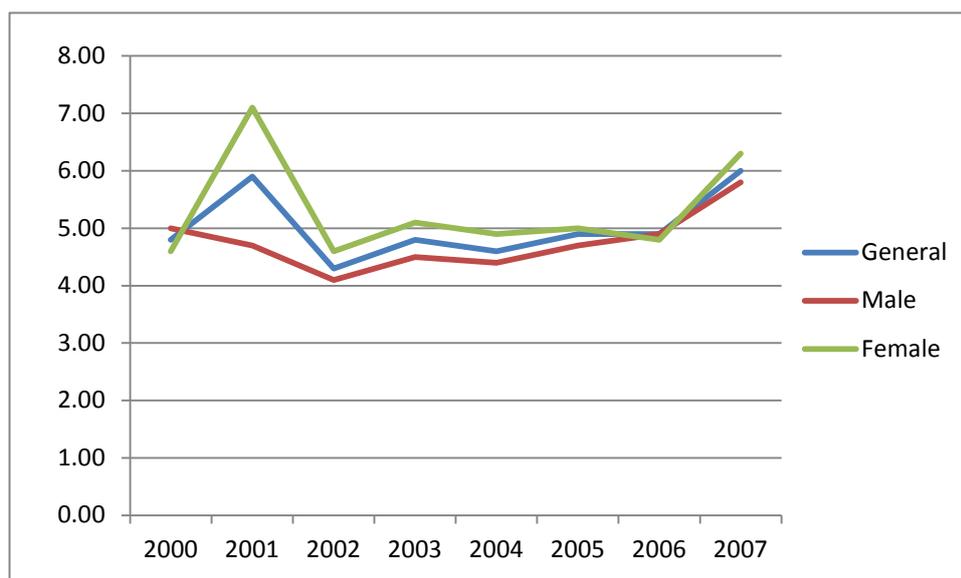
**Figure 2: Youth unemployment, ages 15 to 24 ('000s)**



Source: Labour and Social Trends in Vietnam 2009/10, ILO and ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2010, Hanoi, Vietnam, page: 66.

<sup>12</sup> Vulnerable employment is defined as the sum of own-account and contributing family workers.

**Figure 3: Youth unemployment, ages 14 to 25 (%)**



Source: Labour and Social Trends in Vietnam 2009/10, ILO and ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2010, Hanoi, Vietnam, page: 66.

## 6 Lessons learned

This chapter addresses the research process and its methodology. By and large, the researchers learned a lot; their ability to facilitate and conduct interviews greatly improved; and their knowledge about poor and vulnerable youth in Vietnam has advanced. They know much more about the global economic crisis and how it has influenced Vietnam. In addition, they are more familiar with group work, working in pairs and interview techniques.

However, there are issues to be considered for similar research projects in future.

### Selection of young researchers

- The selection of the young researchers should be combined with a needs assessment or SWOT<sup>13</sup> analysis to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of researchers, and react accordingly.

### Capacity building for young researchers

- According to the needs assessment results, the researchers should receive continuous training rather than only having an initial capacity-building workshop. The training session should explicitly focus on interview techniques (e.g. how to ask probing questions, how to avoid leading question, etc.)
- As well as continuous training, it is crucial to facilitate briefing and debriefing sessions before and after field visits.

<sup>13</sup> Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats.

## **Questionnaires**

- For most of interviewees the language in the questionnaire was very academic. Sometimes respondents did not understand the question, and did not (dare to) ask for clarification.
- To avoid this in future, one option might be to let young researchers develop the questionnaires themselves. This would not only strengthen the participatory approach, but ensure that the researchers have fully internalised the concept of the research. It would also ensure that the language used is not too complicated. However, this would require a longer time frame, and closer supervision and guidance for researchers.

## **Fieldwork**

- The field sites need to be selected according to a strong set of pre-determined criteria.
- To find interesting interviewees and facilitate interviews with key informants, young researchers should always be accompanied by a supervisor in the field.

## **7 Conclusions**

Most young people interviewed did not admit to confronting 'new' challenges, but rather the economic crisis had exaggerated their existing vulnerabilities. Hence, nearly all vulnerable young people noted an increase in the cost of rent, food, transport/fuel, education and health care (particularly medicines). Generally, this applied to all groups of young people the researchers talked to, including migrants, unskilled workers, ethnic minorities and disabled young people of different ages and sex.

In particular, female and male migrants and unskilled workers in Ba Dinh and Me Linh are directly affected by the increase in living costs mentioned above. They live apart from their families and so pay for everything themselves. They migrated to Ba Dinh and Me Linh to earn money to support their families, but cannot send as much home as they used to because of their own increased overheads. However, poor young people from Luong Son did not identify any great difference between the present situation and the one prevailing a couple of years earlier. Researchers observed similar attitudes with regard to gender differences in the experience of vulnerability. Interviewees acknowledged gender inequality but could not attribute any changes specifically to the economic crisis. (see figures 2 and 3 and tables 2 and 3).

In all three field sites, particularly among the 20-25 age group, interviewees had noticed crisis-related changes in their daily lives. Younger interviewees did not recognise them as clearly, possibly because they were still living with parents and had less immediate knowledge of issues affecting income and expenditure.

The most common response to increased prices was a reduction in spending on leisure activities, such as eating in restaurants, meeting friends and buying clothes. They also cut

down on health-care spending on medical professionals, but rather bought medicine from pharmacies and treated themselves. Others accepted work in risky environments, notably construction, to avoid joblessness. Few young interviewees had access to loans although some received government support to reduce the impact of higher school fees. Due to their poor economic situation, few interviewed young people made plans for the future. However, some said they were saving up to open their own small shop or workshop.

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## Annexe

### Interviews in Ba Dinh

IDI	KII	FGD	LH
Female (21), migrant 2 Males (20), migrants Male (19), migrant Male (17), migrant Male (18), migrant Male (23), migrant 3 females (20), migrants Male (25), migrant Female (24), migrant Female (18), migrant Female (21) migrant	Social worker at Blue Dragon (NGO), focusing on poor children. Women's Union in Phuc Xa, focusing on population and family planning and (female) migrants.	3 Females (23, 2x25), migrants, fruit vendor 3 Males (21, 24, 25), migrants, porters, drivers and vendor Mixed group (15-19), migrants, unskilled workers Mixed group (19-25), unskilled workers	Female (19) unskilled worker, disabled Female (16) shoeshine girl Female (24) unskilled worker, married early Female (19) unskilled worker, migrant

### Interviews in Me Linh

IDI	KII	FGD	LH
Female (22), unskilled worker (brick factory) Male (23) unskilled worker (brick factory) Male (23), unskilled worker (industrial park) 2 Males (24), unskilled workers (industrial park), migrants Female (18) unskilled worker (industrial park) Male (19) unskilled worker (construction sector) Male (23), unskilled worker (construction) Female (15), poor high school student Female (20), unskilled worker (brick factory)	Vice-director of brick factory Manager in industrial park (about 20 employees) Youth Union, secretary, district level Chairwomen of Women's Union, district level Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs Officer, Van Khe [commune of Me Linh] People's Committee Report on Social and Economic Development in 2010 in Me Linh (given by the	3 males (20, 23, 24), building worker (Sabai joint stock company) 3 females (19, 24, 25), two are migrants, unskilled workers (industrial park) Mixed group, 2 males (2 x 22) and 2 females (20, 21), unskilled workers (industrial park) 3 Males, (17, 18, 19) workers (construction) 3 Females (18, 20, ?) unskilled workers in industrial park	Female (24), unskilled worker, (industrial park) Male (16), disabled and very poor Female (24), street hawker Female (24) unskilled worker (fruit vendor at a grocery)

Male (19), finished secondary school Female (17), coming from poor family Male (18), unskilled worker	Women's Union)		
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### Interviews in Luong Son

IDI	KII	FGD	LH
Female (17) from poor family Male (19), unskilled worker Female (24), unskilled worker (post office), ethnic minority Female (25), unemployed Female (19), unskilled worker, ethnic minority Female (22), unskilled worker (industrial park), ethnic minority Male (24), unemployed, ethnic minority Female (25), unemployed, ethnic minority Male (19), unskilled worker, ethnic minority Male (19), school drop out Male (25), disabled Male (24) unemployed	Vice chairman of Luong Son People Committee/Director of Centre for Community Learning; Chairman of Women's Association; Head of farmers' association Village leader Chairmen of Fatherland Front Deputy secretary of the Youth Union	3 females (19, 2 x 20), students (high school and community college), ethnic minority Mixed group, 2 females (17, 19), 3 males (2 x19, 20) unemployed, workers and students, mostly ethnic minorities 3 males (23, 24, 25), unskilled workers 3 females (16, 17, 18), students 4 males (15, 17, 2x18), 1 student and three unskilled workers; Mixed group, 1 female (23) and 3 males (21, 23 25), mostly unskilled	Male (23), disabled, very poor Female (23), early child, single mother Male (22), unskilled worker, migrant Female (20), market fruit seller

### Matrix of national programmes and policies for poor and vulnerable youth

Name of programme/policy	Implementation	Regional coverage	Target population
Policy promoting the role of youth participation in economic- social development.	Government, ministries, departments and sectors concerned	Nationwide	Youth
Policies to promote youth on duty at the border and island areas with special difficulties.	Government, ministries, departments and sectors concerned	Nationwide	Youth
Strengthening exam capabilities	Central Communist Youth Union	Nationwide	Students preparing for university exams
Vocational training for ethnic youths	Vocational Youth Center in Quang Nam	Bac Tra My, Nam Tra My, Nam Giang and Dong Giang	Youth
Sixty-minute radio programme, 'You and I', exchange, chat and share ideas, views of friendship, love, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and other topics	Ministry of Health HIV/AIDS prevention project for youth,	Provincial radio	Youth aged 16-24
Labour export programme 30A	Government	Poor households in 62 poor districts	Youth
Policies for cadres of Communist Youth Union of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam Student Association, Youth Union of Vietnam in universities, colleges, secondary vocational schools, vocational and secondary schools	Government	Nationwide	Officials and Communist Youth Union of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam Student Association, Youth Union of Vietnam in universities, colleges, secondary vocational schools, vocational and secondary education.

'Month of Youth for Environmental Action'	Central Communist Youth Union	Nationwide	Youth
Action plan for the prevention of drugs in schools	Ministry of Education and Training, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Security	Nationwide	Teenagers
For Agent Orange victims and disabled poor	Vietnam Red Cross	Nationwide	All people
Vocational training for rural workers by 2020.	Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Welfare	Rural	Rural Youth
Support youth developing economy, reducing poverty	Youth Union, Krong Ana People's Committee (Dac Lac province)	District	Unemployed, poor youth
'Warm- up Students' Hearts	Sinh Viên Support Centre, Ho Chi Minh city	Colleges and universities in Ho Chi Minh City	Students in difficult situations
Building a student hostel with 60,000 places	Committee people in Binh Dương, and Ho Chi Minh City, National University	Ho Chi Minh City	Students
Ho Chi Minh City Students – 'Young Human Resources' Jobs Festival 2010	HCMC Economic University	Ho Chi Minh City	Youth, Students
Job counselling and labour export for Youth	Hoa Binh Youth Union, Dolisa	Hoa Binh province	Youth
Credits for students, 2009-10	Bank for Social Policies, Agriculture and Development Bank, Commercial and Trading Bank	Nationwide	Students in difficult situations
Programme started in 2010	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry(VCCI)	Nationwide	Youth
Support for vocational training and youth employment 2008-15	Central Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union	National wide	Mostly youth
Credit for pupils and students	Social Policy Bank, with Minister of Finance, to Prime Minister for consideration and decision to adjust capital lending	Nationwide	Students with payment difficulties

