

Press Review 03/2012 - Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology,

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No	Title	Date	Source	Region	Catalogue	Description
1	Ceremony to confer honorary doctorate on Professor Karl Ulrich Rudolph	23/3/2012	VNU	Hanoi	Others	On March 28th 2012 at the Le Van Thiem Hall – Vietnam National University, Ha Noi (VNU) has organized a ceremony to confer honorary doctorate on Prof. Karl Ulrich Rudolph – Witten University – Germany.
2	New Grant Program for Practical Partnerships	30/3/2012	DAAD	Vietnam	Others	Financed by funds from BMZ, the new program “Practical Partnerships with Universities and Companies in Germany and Developing Countries” supports the realization of cooperation projects between universities and economic partners.
3	Mekong sub-region tackles haze pollution	01/3/2012	VN News	Mekong	Pollution	Mekong sub-region countries have agreed to remain vigilant to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires, even as wetter weather conditions approach.
4	Conference focuses on climate change	04/30/2012	VN News	Can Tho	Climate Change	A three-day conference on developing towns that are well adapted to face climate change challenges opened in Mekong Delta's Can Tho City.
5	City needs better waste treatment technology	05/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Waste Treatment	HCM City buries much of all its solid waste instead of classifying and processing it, thus affecting the environment.
6	Highlands’s homes go without running water for 4 years	05/3/2012	VN News	Lam Dong	Water Management	About 550 local households in Lam Dong Province's Di Linh District have been living without clean water for four years.



MOST-BMBF Office for
Water+Environmental Technology

Vietnamese – German Office for Water and Environmental Technology

Funded by MOST and BMBF

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7	Mining sector seeks solutions	05/3/2012	VN News	Hanoi	Mining	Widespread and uncoordinated exploitation of mineral resources has resulted in huge losses and negative environmental impacts and threatened the health and safety of industry workers.
8	HCM City to fine tune flood control	09/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Environment	Experts discussed the merits and demerits of at least four dyke and sluice gate solutions that have been proposed to help HCM City deal with increasingly frequent flooding that it has faced over the past few years.
9	New crack down on river sand dredging	09/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Environment	HCM City has launched a plan to prevent landslides in the city, with fines for illegal sand exploitation – a major cause of landslides along Sai Gon and Dong Nai rivers – to be imposed by district-level People's Committees.
10	VN launches climate-change strategy	09/3/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Climate Change	MONRE has launched a national climate change strategy to deal with rising sea levels.
11	AusAID, World Bank confirm support	10/3/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Others	AusAID and the World Bank have confirmed their commitment to support Viet Nam's long-term socio-economic development in a recently signed strategic partnership agreement for the next five years.
12	Farmers to be paid for pollution damage	10/3/2012	VN News	Dong Nai	Pollution	Wastewater from the Sonadezi Long Thanh Company in southern Dong Nai Province has caused great damage to local aquaculture and fruit farming in the area.



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13	Experts urge 'green' investments	13/3/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Enterprises' reluctance to invest in green technology and poor enforcement of environmental laws are hampering Viet Nam's sustainable development, experts said.
14	Japan helps improve water environment in Hue	14/3/2012	VN Plus	Hue	Environment	A water environment improvement project using Japanese ODA capital has begun in the former imperial city of Hue.
15	City looks to raise funds for clearance, resettlement	15/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Others	The Finance Department of HCM City has submitted a plan to create a land development fund that would provide money for land clearance and resettlement costs.
16	Perfume River tributaries to be dredged, beautified	15/3/2012	VN News	Hue	Environment	The provincial authority of Hue has approved investments of over US\$12.7 million for projects to dredge and beautify two tributaries of the Huong River in the ancient city of Hue.
17	Belgium funds irrigation work	15/3/2012	VN News	Ha nam	Environment	A Belgian delegation led by Brussels's Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade Benoit Cerexhe arrived in the northern province of Ha Nam.
18	Delta footbridges to be replaced under regional development plan	15/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Others	Mekong River Delta plans to replace all footbridges in the region as part of its socio-economic development plan.
19	Modern villages to be built near Sai Gon River	15/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Others	Modern agricultural villages along the Sai Gon River would be built under a plan by HCM City authorities to create new rural areas and more destinations for tourists.



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20	Young people to work on climate change solutions	17/3/2012	VN News	Danang	Climate Change	A seminar to raise initiatives on climate change among young people was held in Da Nang City yesterday.
21	Experts warn against sea dyke proposal	19/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Environment	A number of leading academic experts have voiced strong opposition to a flood-prevention proposal that calls for construction of a sea dyke connecting the coastal regions of Ba Ria-Vung Tau and Tien Giang provinces.
22	Water pollution, loss getting more serious in urban areas	19/3/2012	VN Net bridge	Vietnam	Water	Though having spent big sums of money of the state budget, relevant agencies have not done much to ease the water pollution and reduce the water loss level
23	VN worries about future supplies of water, food	22/3/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Water	About 20-30 per cent of agricultural land in Viet Nam is expected to be flooded by the year 2100 due to rising sea levels, leading to a vast reduction in the country's food production capacity.
24	Meeting in response to World Water Day	22/3/2012	Vfej	Hau Giang	Water	MONRE held a meeting in Hau Giang province on March 22 in response to World Water Day 2012.
25	WB supports urban infrastructure, energy efficiency, forestry sectors	24/3/2012	VN News	Washington DC	Others	WB approved a total of US\$522 million in credit for the development of Viet Nam's urban, energy, and forest sectors
26	Old kilns pollute southern skies	26/3/2012	VN News	HCM	Pollution	Smoke discharges from thousands of brick-kilns in Mekong Delta have polluted the environment and impacted human health and agri-productivity



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27	Polluting firm forces residents' relocation	27/3/2012	VN News	Danang	Pollution	Central Da Nang City authorities have asked relevant agencies to promptly resettle the nearly 260 households currently located near two steel plants in Hoa Vang District's Hoa Lien commune due to issues with the plants' pollution.
28	Operator of leaky dam ordered to make flood plan	28/3/2012	VN News	Hanoi	Environment	The Committee on Flood Prevention People's Army's Military Zone 5 and Quang Nam Province has ordered Hydropower Plant Managing Board No 3 to urgently develop a flood control plan for the Tranh River Hydroelectric Plant.
29	Dam leaks to be fixed 'before flood season	29/3/2012	VN News	Hanoi	Environment	Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Hoang Quoc Vuong promised no more leaking at the biggest dam in central Viet Nam by mid-April and full repairs to be finished before the flood season starts.
30	Experts urge data system for sea, island management	29/3/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Data system for sea and island	Viet Nam should have an integrated data information system to manage activities relating to the national sea and islands, said Nguyen Van Cu, head of the Viet Nam Administration of Sea and Islands under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.



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Ceremony to confer honorary doctorate on Prof. Karl Ulrich Rolph

On March 28th 2012 at the Le Van Thiem Hall – Vietnam National University, Ha Noi (VNU) has organized a ceremony to confer honorary doctorate on Prof. Karl Ulrich Rudolph – Witten University – Germany.



On behalf of VNU, Dr. Nguyen Kim Son has expressed appreciation for contribution of Prof. Karl Ulrich Rudolph - Director of Institute of Engineering and Environmental Management, University of Witten - an excellent German scholar, a friend of Vietnam in general and in particular of VNU. Prof. Karl Ulrich Rudolph is an outstanding scientist. He dedicates time, energy and wisdom for the success of many cooperation projects with Vietnam during 10 recent years. Prof. Rudolph special focuses on capacity building for postgraduate and scientific research in the field of water, waste water and water resources management in Vietnam. Associate Professor Dr. Cam - Rector of Hanoi University of Sciences informs that Professor Rudolph is implementing a AKIZ project in Vietnam with a total budget of more than 7 million Euro, cooperating with Hanoi University of Science and five other universities.

Speech at the ceremony, Prof. Rudolph has expressed his gratitude to the leaders of VNU, Hanoi and Hanoi University of Science. Receiving honorary doctorate of Vietnam National University, Hanoi is his great honor, he shared. He is very happy when VNU - a center for excellence training and research of Vietnam is continuing to confirm its position in the world. He is proud that cooperation between VNU and University of Witten is increasing continuously. This is a bridge, contributing to success of the two side's cooperation.

New Grant Program for Practical Partnerships

Financed by funds from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the new program “Practical Partnerships with Universities and Companies in Germany and Developing Countries” supports the realization of cooperation projects between universities and economic partners. Support is granted to partnerships with companies and other organizations in order to introduce systematic practical orientation to the developing country’s higher education sector.

The program aims at all faculties and seeks to strengthen a practical-oriented study approach and the economic profile of partner universities. Through cooperation with the German and the local economy, it targets quality improvement of offers by universities in developing countries in order to provide for the requirements of the local and regional labor market.

German universities may apply and file the application for a cooperation project at institute or faculty level. The submission of a partnership agreement with the partner university in a developing country (according to OECD’s DAC list) referring to the specific project is required. Furthermore, a statement of confirmation between the university and the economy needs to be handed in. A further requirement is a financial contribution by the economic partner.

The program grants financial support for mobility costs (transport and residence costs), material costs and staff expenditures. The support of a project may start by August 2012. Maximum time of support is 2.5 years.

In order to apply, applicants are asked to complete the online application and submit it on the DAAD-Portal (<https://portal.daad.de/irj/portal>) no later than May 15, 2012.

For further information on the program please go to
<http://www.daad.de/praxispartnerschaften>

or

download this document.

For further questions please contact:

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Mekong sub-region tackles haze pollution

Mekong sub-region countries have agreed to remain vigilant to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires, even as wetter weather conditions approach.

The commitment was made at the second meeting of the sub-regional ministerial steering committee on transboundary haze pollution in the region held yesterday in Ha Noi, attracting environment ministers and representatives from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Ha Cong Tuan, deputy director of the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry, said Viet Nam considered forest protection a critical task in dealing with the effects of climate change and drier weather conditions.

Viet Nam had made efforts to reduce the number of forest fires and managed to increase forest coverage of the country to 40 percent, Tuan said, thus contributing to a drop in haze pollution.

Chiang Keng Oon, acting senior meteorological officer from the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre, said wetter weather conditions were expected with the start of the rainy season in June 2012.

"While hotspot activities are mostly subdued due to the wet weather conditions, sporadic outbreaks of fire can be expected during short occasional dry spells," he said.

The committee noted the escalation of hotspot activities over most parts of the region had been more severe due to dry season which became more established toward the end of 2011 and early 2012. The region agreed to work towards reducing the cumulative hotspot count to less than 50,000 by 2015.

Countries have taken various initiatives to mitigate land and forest fires and to control smoke haze pollution this dry season, such as regulating agricultural residual burning, setting national hotspot reduction targets and strengthening law enforcement in protected forest areas.

Viet Nam had recently enacted new policies on forest protection and development that had been approved by the Government, according to director of the Forest Protection Department Nguyen Huu Dung.

Countries will also work towards setting targets based on criteria such as air quality data and the actual burned area.

An ASEAN-wide fire danger rating system is also being developed, which will help regional countries assess ignition potential, occurrence and spread of fires based on weather, fuel and soil conditions.

Conference focuses on climate change

A three-day conference on developing towns that are well adapted to face climate change challenges opened yesterday in Mekong Delta's Can Tho City.

Organised by the Can Tho City People's Committee and the Can Tho University, the conference brought together 90 experts and officials, 33 of them from Eastern Asian countries, the US and Russia.

Participants will discuss policies for climate change adaptation, practical actions and construction ideas at grassroots and national levels for each country.

The progress thus far made on climate change adaptation by Can Tho City will be reported at the conference.

The city is co-operating with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation on finding ways to ensure sustainable urban development amidst climate change challenges during the 2011-15 period.

Conference participants will go on a field trip to study the impacts of climate change in the city as well as tasks undertaken in the region to adapt to the phenomenon.

Information collected from the conference will be sent to the Australian Agency for International Development and Australian Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Community for building programmes and projects for climate change adaptation in East Asia.

A similar conference organised with support from Australia-based CSIRO- SEWPaC is also being held in Indonesia's MaKassar City.

City needs better waste treatment technology

HCM City buries much of all its solid waste instead of classifying and processing it, thus affecting the environment, and officials are calling for seeking investment from more sources and greater use of technology.

According to Vo Thanh Huynh Anh of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, of the 7, 2000 tones' of waste generated every day, around 60 per cent are buried underground instead of being appropriately classified and treated.

It is done by the HCM City Ltd. One Member Urban Environment and Viet Nam Waste Treatment Ltd. Company, both State-run utilities.

The rest is processed to make compost fertiliser by Vietstar, Tam Sinh Nghia, and Thanh Cong companies.

However, the compost plants are not operating efficiently, causing economic loss.

Dr Thai Van Nam of the HCM City-based University of Technology, said burying waste was not an environmentally friendly method.

Dr Le Van Khoa of the HCM City Polytechnic University said the problem was that the city lacks technologies to classify waste before treatment.

Since 2004 the city has been running a pilot programme to classify solid wastes before treatment in Districts 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, Binh Thanh, Phu Nhuan, and Cu Chi and at wholesale markets.

But it has not proven effective since only 25 per cent of the solid waste is classified before treatment.

The city lacks the funds required to invest in infrastructure for solid-waste classification systems and regulations for such classification.

According to Mushtaq Ahmed Memon of the United Nations Environment Programme's International Environment Technology Centre, in most developed countries domestic and industrial wastes are categorised carefully and treated or recycled depending on whether it is organic or inorganic.

Waste that cannot be recycled is incinerated at 950 – 1,000 degrees Celsius and the resultant ash buried safely.

Dr Nam said to learn these lessons Viet Nam, and especially the city, would need to have regulations on solid-waste management.

The city would also need to have proper policies so that it could attract investments from all sources into waste treatment.

Dr Khoa said the city should make environmental education mandatory to improve students' awareness of protecting the environment by treating waste properly.

Highlands's homes go without running water for 4 years

About 550 local households in Central Highland Lam Dong Province's Di Linh District have been living without clean water for four years – despite the fact 19 wells have been dug by the local authority for residents' use.

However, the electricity supply to the electrical pumps for 11 of these wells is not working.

Ka Khanh, a female resident in the district's Tan Thuong Commune, said her family was forced to bring water from far away, even though they lived near one of the newly dug public wells.

However, she said residents had never been able to draw clean water from the well since it was finished in 2008.

Local residents said they had to dig their own wells, which are each about 20 metres deep. However, because they are relatively shallow, they often run out of water in the dry season, which falls between November and April in Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands).

Four years ago, the district dug 19 public wells at a cost of VND800 million (US\$38,400) each, under Government Programme 134.

Local residents do not have to pay to use the wells, though they have to pay a nominal fee to cover the cost of powering the pumps.

The wells, which are at least 100 metres deep, are managed by the district People's Committee.

The quality of the water in the wells has been tested and found to meet health and safety standards.

However, Le Viet Phu, vice chairman of the district People's Committee, said local residents had in some cases, refused to pay for the electricity to run the pumps, which in effect made the wells inoperable. In other cases, the local power supply was incompatible with that needed by the electrical pumps.

Phu added that the committee's staff, in co-operation with the electricity department, planned to upgrade local transformer stations to provide power for the wells' pumps.

The wells should be operational at the end of this quarter, he said.

Mining sector seeks solutions

Widespread and unco-ordinated exploitation of mineral resources has resulted in huge losses and negative environmental impacts and threatened the health and safety of industry workers, experts said at a workshop in Ha Noi on Friday.

The workshop was organised to discuss the current situation in the mineral exploitation industry and actions that could be pursued to reduce related environmental threats.

According to a report issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, provincial level People's Committees have granted about 4,400 mineral exploitation licences to date.

Experts said the issuance of mineral exploitation licences was not wisely considered by many localities which resulted in management difficulties.

Nguyen Khac Vinh, Chairman of the Viet Nam Union of Geological Sciences said the export of raw minerals including bronze, lead, zinc and coal had reduced the country's supply of mineral resources, which was already limited.

Vinh called for stricter management and inspections of exploitation licences, if not a limitation or prohibition of exports of metallic minerals with limited reserves.

Nguyen Canh Nam of the National Coal – Mineral Industries Corporation agreed, saying that mineral deposits were the country's valuable, limited and non-renewable resources.

The exploitation and use of mineral resources, therefore, must first give priority to meeting the country's demands, he said.

Nguyen Thanh Son, director of management for Song Hong (Red River) Delta coal projects said over the past few years, a large amount of Viet Nam's mineral resources had been exported to China, while priority should be given to using the resources for the national economy.

"This supply should have been used to provide input materials for domestic industries and meet domestic demand," said Son.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade, 15-60 per cent of the country's natural resources remained untapped during the exploitation process, especially among illegal operations, because available technology was unable to reach the entire supply.

The highest untapped resources were recorded in the petroleum and gas industry, with statistics showing that 50-60 per cent remained inaccessible.

Many exploiters did not take environmental protection seriously, experts said, adding that they did not take the proper measures to reduce dust and noise pollution, or deal with the waste produced during the exploitation process.

Nguyen Khac Vinh of the Viet Nam Union of Geological Sciences pointed out that the unorganised exploitation of mineral resources in many areas had negatively affected the road system and living environments.

Ha Tat Thang, head of the Labour Safety Department under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs said workers in the mineral industry suffered from exposure to toxic chemicals but they often did not receive favourable treatment or compensation.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the mineral industry contributed an average 10-12 per cent to the country's GDP during the last several years.

Last year, the mineral industry's total export turnover reached US\$9.1 billion, making up 9.4 per cent of the country's export turnover.

HCM City to fine-tune flood control

Experts on Wednesday discussed the merits and demerits of at least four dyke and sluice gate solutions that have been proposed to help HCM City deal with increasingly frequent flooding that it has faced over the past few years.

They said the city should carefully consider its choice or combinations of choices before taking a decision on the issue.

One local solution that has been proposed is to build a flood prevention system in the city itself by upgrading its irrigation facilities and building small dykes at the estuaries of rivers and canals to block high tide inflows.

The second solution calls for a master project that would close estuaries and efficiently operate reservoirs in the upper reaches of Sai Gon and Dong Nai rivers.

According to the HCM City Steering Committee for Flood Prevention and Control, the city is investigating four options of sluice and open dyke construction in parallel with a Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) supported project to upgrade its irrigation system.

The first option, proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, is an open dyke system with 12 small sluice gates that borders the city's coast.

This plan has been criticised as focusing solely on controlling vulnerability to floods and lacking measures to tackle other flooding risks.

The city has come up with a second option that adds several variations to the ministry plan to reduce the risks. Details of this option were not immediately available.

Prof Nguyen Tat Duc of the HCM City University of Industry has recommended building a 1km-wide sluice on the 3-km Soai Rap estuary of Dong Nai River. With this sluice, the number of sluices planned by the ministry would be reduced from 12 to six.

Dac's recommendation is considered the third option.

The last one is a 23-km long sea dyke that would be extended from one point on the coastline near Vung Tau City to another point on the coastline off Long An Province. This idea was mooted by Dr Dao Xuan Hoc, deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, early last year.

Speaking at yesterday's seminar, Peter Kerssens, a Netherlands flood control expert, said research indicated that the sluice recommended by Prof Duc "could prevent a large amount of tide (inflow) to the city."

The sluice will block only part of the Soai Rap estuary and will not block the Long Tau estuary. These two estuaries are the largest on the city coast and crucial to the city's seaport development plans as well as natural water flows.

Guus Sutmuller of the Netherlands Royal Haskoning, an architect and engineering consultancy firm said he preferred the first option proposed by the ministry. "This plan is probably the best solution for protecting the urban areas in the city until 2025," he said.

Nguyen Ngoc Cong, deputy director of the Steering Committee for Flood Prevention and Control, said the seminar was part of a project to formulate a master strategy for flooding prevention in the city.

The project has received US\$2 million in assistance from the Netherlands Government and is technically supported by Dutch firms like Royal Haskoning, Deltares and DHV.

Experts at the seminar agreed that the city should take care to choose the optimal solution for flood prevention because it affects residents' daily lives, the environment and socio-economic development.

Hoang Van Thang, deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, said: "Flood prevention in HCM City is an urgent task but it also needs a long-term vision. A very important thing is that we should change our outlook from controlling flooding to controlling the vulnerabilities caused by natural disasters".

New crack down on river sand dredging

HCM City has launched a plan to prevent landslides in the city, with fines for illegal sand exploitation – a major cause of landslides along Sai Gon and Dong Nai rivers – to be imposed by district-level People's Committees.

March to September, when tides were at their lowest, was the peak period for landslides in HCM City, said the deputy head of the city's Flood and Storm Prevention, Search and Rescue Committee, Le Thanh Liem.

There were 62 landslide hotspots, he said, with 29 of the worst in Thu Duc, Binh Thanh, No 2, No 8, Binh Chanh and Nha Be districts.

The committee has identified the primary causes of landslides to include the geology and hydrology of the region as well as changes in the East Sea tides. The building of houses, warehouses and wharves along waterways was also blamed for the high number of landslides.

Nine landslides affected an area of 4,500sq.m in the city and destroyed 10 houses last year.

The total damage was about VND12.6 billion (US\$605,000).

Homes collapse in An Giang

AN GIANG — Six homes and three temporary workshops collapsed in a landslide earlier this week along Hau River in the city of Long Xuyen in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta province of An Giang.

Another landslide destroyed two houses and three construction material shops in the same location last Sunday. No deaths or injuries have been reported, but authorities have relocated 56 additional households in the area to safer ground.

Waterway traffic on Hau River was ordered to travel around Ong Ho Island to avoid hazards, said An Giang People's Committee vice chairman Vo Anh Kiet.

VN launches climate-change strategy

MONRE has launched a national climate change strategy to deal with rising sea levels.

At the launch ceremony in Ha Noi on Wednesday, Minister Nguyen Minh Quang said the Vietnamese Government had ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol and was completing legal documents on the control and mitigation of natural disasters.

The strategy, which was approved by the Prime Minister on December 5, 2011, comprises six components with 10 strategic tasks to deal with climate change. It outlines overall objectives, priority projects to be implemented in 2011-2015, and plans for 2016-25, as well as objectives for 2050, with a vision to 2100. It also identifies strategic tasks to cope with global climate change.

Director of the Viet Nam Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment Dr Tran Thuc said MONRE had completed the plan in 2009 based on estimates of greenhouse gas emissions and the global climate change scenario by the Inter-Governmental Commission on Climate Change.

Also at the event, the international community highlighted the Vietnamese Government's efforts to cope with global climate change and pledged continued financial and technological assistance in the field.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has also organised discussions on increasing co-ordination in coping with and implementing policies on climate change and financial issues arising from global warming. Viet Nam will also enhance awareness of climate change through education and training programmes, as well as scientific and technological research.

AusAID, World Bank confirm support

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the World Bank have confirmed their commitment to support Viet Nam's long-term socio-economic development in a recently signed strategic partnership agreement for the next five years.

Under this partnership, AusAID will provide the World Bank with 58 million Australian (US\$61.7 million) for the bank's investment and advisory programme to support Viet Nam.

The partnership aims to foster an enabling environment for improved economic competitiveness, increased environmental sustainability, and broadened access to economic and social opportunity.

An agreement for \$97 million in additional funding for the third rural transport project was also signed yesterday between the State Bank of Viet Nam and the World Bank.

The project aims to increase the number of communities connected to new and improved all weather roads; improve rural road conditions through better management and maintenance; and improve institutional effectiveness to plan, implement and maintain improvements in rural transportation.

The additional financing comes from the International Development Association, the World Bank's funding resource for low income countries.

The improved transport system is expected to benefit up to five million people in all 32 participating provinces in central and northern Viet Nam, including 14 mountainous provinces.

To date, the project has rehabilitated about 2,100 km of roads and completed the maintenance of approximately 13,000 km of district roads and bridges.

Also yesterday, the Asian Development Bank and the State Bank of Viet Nam signed loan agreements worth \$180 million to help the country improve irrigation and urban infrastructure.

The first agreement is to develop irrigation infrastructure and management of water resources and services in the northern Chu and southern Ma river basins in central Thanh Hoa Province. The second involves improving urban infrastructure and municipal services in the northern economic centres of Viet Tri Town in Phu Tho Province, Hung Yen Province and Dong Dang town in Lang Son Province.

Farmers to be paid for pollution damage

Wastewater from the Sonadezi Long Thanh Company in southern Dong Nai Province has caused great damage to local aquaculture and fruit farming in the area.

The statement was made by the HCM City-based Institute of Environment and Resources, entrusted to assess the effects of pollution on local farmers living around the Ba Cheo canal in Bien Hoa City and Long Thanh District.

Institute analysis show that wastewater discharged by the company from 2008 until August last year polluted an area of nearly 114ha along the canal, which flows into the Dong Nai River, with great effect on local farming.

The provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment, working with relevant agencies in assessing the report, will soon define adequate compensation for farmers.

Earlier, around 200 affected households filed complaints with local authorities demanding more than VND16 billion (US\$768,000) in compensation from the company when it was found to be discharging untreated wastewater into the canal.

Sonadezi Long Thanh, responsible for treating the wastewater of 42 companies in the Long Thanh Industrial Park in Dong Nai Province, was found discharging 9,300 cubic m of untreated wastewater into the river via three underground pipelines in August last year.

The company was fined VND405 million (\$19,440) for violating the environmental protection law.

Experts urge 'green' investments

Enterprises' reluctance to invest in green technology and poor enforcement of environmental laws are hampering Viet Nam's sustainable development, experts said.

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) and Director General of Viet Nam Environment Administration Bui Cach Tuyen said the country's economy was still too dependent on industries such as mining that polluted the environment.

He said the country's natural resources needed to be exploited more efficiently. To achieve this, firms must invest in better infrastructure, waste disposal technology and improve employees' environmental awareness.

Cao Sy Kiem, a member of the National Monetary Policy Consulting Committee and chairman of the Viet Nam Small and Medium Enterprise Association, said cash-strapped enterprises did not have the funds to invest in green technology and were instead directing resources towards new technology and better working conditions for employees.

In addition, some do not see the benefits of investing in environmental protection, he said. "But enterprises' biggest concern is about transparency and equality when it comes to enforcement of environmental regulations," he said.

Tran Vu Hoai, vice chairman of Unilever Viet Nam, a founding member of the Viet Nam Business Council for Sustainable Development, said enterprises needed to be made fully aware of the need to protect the environment.

He also said a roadmap should be formulated to force firms to become more environmentally friendly that included better supervision and stiffer sanctions.

Hoang Duong Tung, vice general director of the Viet Nam Environment Administration, said awareness about the need for environment protection had improved in recent years. He also said the Government allocated 1 per cent of its national spending each year on environmental protection.

However, he said enterprises needed to be better informed about the Law on Environment (1993), which was amended in 2005 and may be further revised next year.

Tung said stiffer penalties needed to be imposed on firms that broke environmental laws. He said a lot of firms at the moment would rather pay the existing fines than go to the expense of treating their waste.

In the last few years, environmental authorities have stepped up inspections. Fines have also increased 10-fold. The most serious environmental infraction can incur a fine of VND400-VND500 million. Tung also said firms that violated the law should be named and shamed in the media.

Christoph Von Walderssee, managing director of Asia Water Development Corporation, said that emerging economies such as Viet Nam always faced environment issues resulting from rapid growth. "When investing into public utilities, the private sector usually looks for high yields... while the public sector can generate the political will, legal framework and share both the burden and profits," he said.

The forum on economic growth and its environmental impact was co-organized by Viet Nam Holding Limited and MONRE last week.

Japan helps improve water environment in Hue

A water environment improvement project using Japanese ODA capital has begun in the former imperial city of Hue .

The first phase of the project has an investment capital of 20.8 billion JPY (220 million USD), funded through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

It will be carried out in communes south of the Huong (Perfume) river. It includes the construction of 280km of sewers, nine pumping stations and a waste water treatment plant with a daily capacity of 20,000 cu.m, dredging parts of the An Cuu, Phat Lac and Nhu Y rivers and erosion prevention works.

The project aims to mitigate flooding in the city and collect and treat waste water, improve the quality of the Huong and other rivers and the ecological environment, and improve the living conditions and community awareness of environmental sanitation.

City looks to raise funds for clearance, resettlement

The Finance Department of HCM City has submitted a plan to create a land development fund that would provide money for land clearance and resettlement costs.

Money for the fund would be raised from four sources: the state budget, land-use rights, land rentals, revenue from public auctions organised annually for land-use rights; city government advances for compensation for land clearance and resettlement; and aid and entrusted capital from organisations and individuals.

The main objective of the land development fund is to prepare corresponding capital sources for the existing land-fund development centre to distribute money for land clearance and resettlement.

This would contribute to compensation and resettlement for people whose land had been purchased for public works or new building projects.

Other organisations would also be allowed to advance capital from this fund to create land funds or build or buy houses for resettlement activities.

The land development fund would also be used to help people who have been allocated housing for resettlement but have not received sufficient compensation to buy a house or apartment in the resettlement area.

According to the city's Finance Department, the land development fund would encourage the city to take the initiative in using money from the state budget.

In other words, state budget expenditures and revenue could be used at times when local governments have to temporarily supply capital for urgent projects that remain without investment capital.

Perfume River tributaries to be dredged, beautified

The provincial authority of Thua Thien - Hue has approved investments of over VND265 billion (US\$12.7 million) for projects to dredge and beautify two tributaries of the Huong (Perfume) River in the ancient city of Hue.

The first project will revive the 1.5km long Lap Tributary which links the famed Huong River with the Ke Van Canal as it flows through the Kim Long Village.

With an investment of VND99.2 billion (\$4.75 million), the project will dredge the bed of the currently-blocked tributary, build embankments and roads, and plant trees along its banks.

An investment of VND166 billion (\$7.95 million) will be made to renovate the 2.5km long Ke Van Canal, which was dug centuries ago as part of an outside canal network to protect the Royal Citadel of Hue.

This project will dredge the canal bed, build roads and install lighting systems.

Work on these two projects, scheduled for completion by March 2016, aims to facilitate waterway transport, curb flooding and help develop river tourism in the ancient city, city authorities said.

Belgium funds irrigation work

A Belgian delegation led by Brussels's Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade Benoit Cerexhe arrived in the northern province of Ha Nam yesterday.

Ha Nam is one of the localities of Viet Nam that benefits from the Belgian government's Official Development Assistance.

A Belgian-funded drainage system and wastewater treatment project in Phu Ly City is expected to be completed in the second quarter of this year.

The provincial People's Committee Chairman Mai Tien Dung expressed the desire that the Belgian government would continue providing ODA capital for the province to support environmental pollution treatment on Nhue River and wastewater and rubbish treatment in industrial parks and trade villages.

Benoit Cerexhe said he was impressed by the locality's economic development, adding that the meeting helped the delegation to learn more about projects being implemented by Belgian businesses in Ha Nam Province.

In the framework of the meeting, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding on provision of ODA capital worth 10 million EUR (US\$13 million) for a project to build and improve sewage pumping stations in Phu Ly City.

Delta footbridges to be replaced under regional development plan

Cuu Long (Mekong) River Delta plans to replace all footbridges in the region as part of its socio-economic development plan.

Over the past decade, the region has replaced more than 4,000 footbridges made of bamboo and wood, and built more than 11,000 new bridges.

The 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta have an interlacing system of canals and rivers with thousands of temporary bridges built to connect the region.

Poor transport infrastructure hinders travelling, student trips to schools, and circulation of goods in the region.

The increase in transport costs has resulted in losses for farmers who have to pay 15 per cent of their income for travelling and goods transport, according to Nguyen Van Son, an expert from the Mekong Delta Institute for Research and Development.

The regional provinces have generated financial support from organisations and individuals to implement the programme to replace footbridges with concrete ones.

Ben Tre, among the leading provinces in this programme, has replaced more than 2,600 bridges in the past 12 years with most of the financial sources coming from local residents.

The province has spent VND1.3 trillion (US\$62 million) to build bridges and upgrade roads in rural areas.

Since 2006, the An Giang government and its residents have built nearly 500 bridges while Ca Mau built more than 1,580 bridges in 2009 and 2010 in its rural areas, with a total investment of VND350 billion (\$16.6 million) from civil society.

Last month, a transportation development plan until 2020 for the Mekong Delta was approved by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. It targets building a comprehensive interprovincial transport system to boost the region's economic development.

The plan calls for building access roads to communes and paving district roads with concrete in all Delta provinces.

Modern villages to be built near Sai Gon River

Modern agricultural villages along the Sai Gon River would be built under a plan by HCM City authorities to create new rural areas and more destinations for tourists.

After completing a fact-finding trip along the river last week, Le Minh Tri, deputy chairman of the city's People's Committee, said the area should focus on modern agriculture to create high economic value for the city.

At the same time, the development would protect the city's environment, adapt to climate change and preserve national character.

The agricultural areas would be organised to become impressive tourism sites for the city.

The city Planning Construction Institute has proposed planning for eight communes in Cu Chi District – Phu My Hung, An Phu, An Nhon Tay, Nhuan Duc, Phu Hoa Dong, Trung An, Hoa Phu and Binh My.

Under the plan, the eight communes will be divided into 10 subdivisions to develop agricultural villages combined with tourism.

The institute is currently conducting studies in order to develop plans for other districts along the river.

Young people to work on climate change solutions

A seminar to raise initiatives on climate change among young people was held in Da Nang City yesterday.

The seminar, under the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience network (ACCCRN), aims to encourage young people to build up their involvement in programmes that fight climate change and the rising sea levels in Da Nang, Quy Nhon and Can Tho from 2012 to 2013.

The programmes, organised by the British-based Non-Governmental Organisation Challenge to Change, will reserve a fund of VND1.2 billion (US\$54,000) to cover the cost for initiatives of young people in the three cities.

"Young people will play an important role in the fight against global climate change. They are also a vulnerable community to the rising sea levels in 10 or 50 years," said Vu Thi My Hanh, a staff from the Challenge to Change.

"It means that young people should be involved in solution seeking discussions and decisions that could natural disasters resulting from climate change," she told the seminar.

She added that the ACCCRN programme has been organised in Thailand, Indonesia, India and Viet Nam, but the Youth Initiatives Programme in Viet Nam is unique.

All young people groups can air their ideas or solutions to climate change and ask for sponsorship from the Challenge to Change.

Da Nang was chosen as the first city to launch the programme because the central coastal city has a quite crowd of young people.

As scheduled, all initiatives will be sent to the Challenge to Change for approval next month.

Experts warn against sea dyke proposal

A number of leading academic experts have voiced strong opposition to a flood-prevention proposal that calls for construction of a sea dyke connecting the coastal regions of Ba Ria-Vung Tau and Tien Giang provinces.

The tentatively named Go Cong-Vung Tau sea dyke, an idea initiated by Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Prof Dao Xuan Hoc, has met with opposition for more than a year because of its environmental and economic impact.

Its main purpose, to prevent flooding in HCM City, cannot be realised, according to experts.

The dyke would have a length of 23km and extend from one point on the coastline near Vung Tau City to another point on the coastline off Go Cong District in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta province of Tien Giang.

The dyke would block the strait, which was created by two land cliffs in Vung Tau City and Go Cong District, thus turning the area into a 56,000ha lagoon, with a total volume of 3.3 billion cu.m of water.

The dyke, which would cost about VND50 trillion (US\$2.4 billion), would also block the Soai Rap, Long Tau and Thi Vai estuaries, the three key gateways for vessel circulation to HCM City and Dong Nai and Ba Ria-Vung Tau provinces.

The dyke would have an entrance that would close and open for vessels and a 500m sluice for water flow.

Prof Le Huy Ba of the Institute of Science, Technology and Environment Management has opposed the proposal, saying the dyke would have only "tiny economic benefits in agriculture and aquaculture, and would create severe losses to the economy and environment".

Many experts agree with Ba, saying the dyke would create serious irreversible environmental problems.

Prof Nguyen Ngoc Tran, former member of the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee, said the dyke would change the hydrographic conditions of both the areas outside and inside the dyke.

The coastal section where the dyke would not cover, in Go Cong and the coastal area of Ben Tre Province, would become heavily eroded, he said.

When the dyke blocks tides, the areas around Can Gio Mangrove Forest, which has semi-diurnal tides and a natural cleaning mechanism, would change completely.

Ba and Tran said these changes would kill the forest. Tran added that alluvia soil from the rivers of Vam Co, Soai Rap and Dong Nai would create large deposit mounds in the areas, causing a lower water capacity for the lagoon.

Experts are also concerned that the lagoon would become an unexpected huge reservoir of waste water.

"The dyke blocks the escape route to the sea for waste water from HCM City and the provinces of Dong Nai, Binh Duong and Long An," Tran said. The four cities and provinces are the biggest industrial hubs in the south.

Associate Prof Hoang Xuan Nhuan of the Port, Waterway and Continental Shelf Association warned about economic damage as well.

"The dyke would spoil the planning of the seaport systems for the southern key economic zone by blocking the Soai Rap and Thi Vai rivers," he said.

Experts argue that vessels coming to a wide range of ports in HCM City and Ba Ria-Vung Tau would face many inconveniences because of the dyke. Although there would be an entrance for vessels, it would be open only part of the time.

Nhuan added that the dyke would degrade the channels for vessels, and the dredging of canals would be prohibitively expensive.

"Construction and operation of the vessel entrance, which is under sea water, would cost a lot," he said.

Nguyen Van Tang of Song Cau Watery Work Consultation and Construction Company agreed about the high construction and operation costs. He said the dyke would be essentially "worthless".

"The dyke would work in the dry season, but not in the rainy season," he said. "Theoretically, the lagoon created by the dyke would work well only if the water in the lagoon is at its lowest level. When heavy rains occur and water from upper reservoirs near HCM City flow down to the lagoon, the sluice gate will have to open so the water in it can be discharged into the sea, thus lowering the lagoons water level."

"But what if the tide is high at the time that the sluice needs to open to release water?" he said, adding that water from the Sai Gon and Dong Nai rivers and heavy rains, as well as high tides entering from the south, would cause the lagoon to be too full.

Many leading professors in the field said it was crucial to prevent flooding in HCM City, but they have urged the Government not to build such a dyke, saying it would create economic and environmental problems.

Prof Nguyen Tat Dac of the HCM City University of Industry has developed another proposal that would block only part of the Soai Rap estuary. This proposal is one of several options being considered for flood prevention in HCM City.

Speaking to Viet Nam News yesterday, Director of the agriculture ministrys Dyke Management and Flood and Storm Control Department Nguyen Xuan Dieu said the proposal had just been put forward for consideration.

If approved, it would take 20-30 years for the proposal to be operational, as directed by the Government, he added.

Water pollution, loss getting more serious in urban areas

Though having spent big sums of money of the state budget, relevant agencies have not done much to ease the water pollution and reduce the water loss level

According to Nguyen Hong Tien from the Ministry of Construction, by August 2011, Vietnam had had 755 urban areas with the urbanization rate of 31 percent which would rise to 50 percent by 2025. However, the high water loss level, which was 25 percent in 2011, would be a big challenge for the urbanization process in Vietnam.

Besides, the water pollution has become more and more serious. In Hanoi, only 5-7 percent of waste water is treated before discharging to the environment, while about 500,000 cubic meters of waste water discharge directly to the rivers without any treatment. The current operational waste water treatment factories in the urban areas have the total capacity of 565,000 cubic meters per day. However, the poor water drainage system remains a big reason which causes the serious pollution to the water sources, both the surface and underground water.

At present, the drainage systems are being used for both the rain water and waste water, which is the popular model applied in all provinces and cities.

The lack of waste water treatment systems can also be seen in industrial zones. A survey conducted in 2009 showed that only 74 out of the 171 industrial zones had waste water treatment works with the total capacity of 453,180 cubic meters per day.

Currently, 70 percent of the one million cubic meters of waste water are being discharged directly to the environment from the industrial zones without any treatment.

Minister of Construction Trinh Dinh Dung said that Vietnam is facing big challenges caused by the rapid urbanization process. The government has released the plan to develop water drainage system in urban areas and industrial zones by 2025 with the vision until 2050, which says that by 2025, the regular flooding in urban areas would be settled.

The plan also says that by that time, the operation scale of the rain water drainage system would be expanded to 90-95 percent, while 100 percent of the urban areas at the fourth and higher classes would have concentrated waste water collection and treatment systems.

Seeking new technologies. Dr Ludo Diels from Belgium introduced the 8 suggested measures to treat waste water at a recent workshop held in HCM City, affirming that all the measures allow saving costs and the energy for the waste water treatment process.

Commenting about the measures, Tran Anh Duc, Deputy General Director of Koastal Eco Industry Company said that Belgium enterprises have experience in waste water treatment, and that Belgian technologies are reliable. However, Duc said that the high costs always exist as a barrier to access its technology. If a solution can be found to settle the problem, Vietnam would be able to feel secure to use Belgian technologies.

According to Pham Gia Minh, Director of the Investment and Trade Consultancy Company, Vietnam has been using electricity to filter water. Meanwhile, the Belgian technologies allow using the organic matters in the waste water, which ferments and turns into gas, as the energy for the water filtration. This would allow to reduce the costs by 50 percent.

Minh went on to say that he is considering cooperating with Belgian partners. The Belgian side would provide technologies and the core solutions, while his company would provide the hardware, installation and training services.

VN worries about future supplies of water, food

About 20-30 per cent of agricultural land in Viet Nam is expected to be flooded by the year 2100 due to rising sea levels, leading to a vast reduction in the country's food production capacity.

In coming decades, climate change was forecast to cause bad weather conditions such as flooding, drought and salt water intrusion that would have a severe impact on the water resources and agriculture, threatening food security particularly for poor communities, said Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Nguyen Minh Quang.

In order to ensure food security for Viet Nam's population, which was expected to increase to nearly 100 million by 2020, an estimated of 3.8 million hectares of land should be kept for rice cultivation, where enough water was certain to be available, he said.

Quang said the agriculture accounted for up to between 70-80 per cent of water demand among economic sectors.

In Viet Nam, the agricultural production accounted for 20.6 per cent of GDP in 2010 and the figure is expected to reach 18 per cent by 2015.

The relationship between water resources and food security is also the main theme of World Water Day 2012, which is held annually on March 22.

"Agriculture is by far the main consumer of fresh water. Unless we increase our capacity to use water wisely in agriculture, we will fail to end hunger and we will open the door to a range of other ills, including drought, famine and political instability," said UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in his message for this year's World Water Day.

"In many parts of the world, water scarcity is increasing and rates of growth in agricultural production have been slowing. At the same time, climate change is exacerbating risk and unpredictability for farmers, especially for poor farmers in low-income countries who are the most vulnerable and the least able to adapt," he said.

Nearly 1 billion people are now hungry and some 800 million still lack a safe supply of fresh water.

There are 7 billion people to feed on the planet today and another 2 billion are expected to join by 2050.

Statistics say that each of us drinks between 2 to 4 litres of water every day, but most of the water we 'drink' is embedded in the food we eat: producing one kilo of beef, for example, consumes 15,000 litres of water while one kilo of wheat 'drinks up' 1,500 litres.

Viet Nam was ranked in the middle of countries facing water resource problems, facing challenges due to its dependence on international water resources, unequal allocation of water resources among regions and seasons, population growth and climate change, said Quang.

Viet Nam needed comprehensive measures to protect its water resources, including effective policies for planning and allocation that would improve the capacity of management agencies and apply advanced scientific and technological methods, Quang said.

It was also essential to raise public awareness of the importance of saving water and protecting water resources for food security, he added.

A national meeting would be held today in Vi Thanh City in Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta's Hau Giang Province to mark World Water Day with the participation of around 4,000 people.

A workshop on water and food security was also held yesterday in the city by the ministry. The workshop provided a venue for both domestic and international experts to discuss issues relating to protecting water resources and treating water pollution.

Other activities include a four-day photo exhibition on water resources and a boat race.

World Water Day, initiated by the UN, attempts to focus attention on the importance of fresh water and the sustainable management of fresh water resources.

The first World Water Day was held in 1993.

Meeting in response to World Water Day



The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) held a meeting in Hau Giang province on March 22 in response to World Water Day 2012.

Among more than 4,000 participants were Minister Nguyen Minh Quang and representatives of local departments of natural resources and environment in the Mekong Delta.

Minister Quang said water is a valuable natural resource connected to the people's daily life and production. Where there's no water, there's no agricultural production, no food security. So, the reasonable protection and usage of water has become a hot issue. People are asked to use water economically, avoid waste and prevent water sources from being polluted for the benefit of Vietnam's sustainable development.

Martin Junker, consultant of a Belgian project to improve Vietnam's capacity to assess and manage natural resources in Vietnam, said most of Belgian projects in Vietnam are related to climate and environmental protection.

The Belgian side is committed to supporting Vietnam in reducing water resource pollution to cope with climate change, protecting and using water resources in a reasonable manner, he said. At the meeting, Hoang Van Bay, Director of Water Resources Management Department under the MONRE, called people to protect water resources as insisted by Secretary General of United Nations Ban Ki-moon in his World Water Day 2012 speech.

WB supports urban infrastructure, energy efficiency, forestry sectors

The World Bank approved on Thursday a total of US\$522 million in credit for the development of Viet Nam's urban, energy, and forest sectors.

Three projects will receive the funds: the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta Region Urban Upgrading Project; the Second Power Sector Reform Development Policy Operation; and the Forest Sector Development Project – Additional Financing.

All three projects support the World Bank's new Country Partnership Strategy (2011-2016) for Viet Nam, the bank said in a press release.

"The approval of the three operations demonstrates the continued strong partnership between Viet Nam and the World Bank. They address emerging challenges such as rapid urbanisation, the need for an efficient power sector to meet Viet Nam's rapidly growing demand for power to support rapid growth, and the importance of sustainable management of Viet Nam's forest resources to help move rural communities out of poverty," said Victoria Kwakwa, World Bank Country Director for Viet Nam.

The Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta Region Urban Upgrading Project will improve infrastructure and services for more than 1.5 million people in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta cities of Can Tho, My Tho, Cao Lanh, Ca Mau, Rach Gia, and Tra Vinh.

The bank release said an estimated 275,900 people living in low income areas of these cities will directly benefit from improved infrastructure such as roads, drainage, canals, water supply and sanitation, public facilities and power supply.

The bank's International Development Association (IDA) will fund this project with \$292 million.

The Second Power Sector Reform Development Policy Operation is one of three policy operations that support the Government in implementing reforms in the power sector to facilitate and promote effective competition in power generation; transparency and predictability in electricity pricing and tariffs; encourage investment in power generation; and implement programmes and incentives for efficient use of electricity.

"The programme is organised around four key policy areas, which are the development of a competitive power market, power sector restructuring, electricity tariff reform, and improving demand side energy efficiency," the press release said.

For this operation, the Bank provides \$200 million, half of which comes from IDA, and the other half from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The Forest Sector Development Project aims to promote sustainable smallholder plantation forestry to help raise rural incomes and support biodiversity conservation across Viet Nam's priority conservation areas.

The project supports the National Forestry Strategy through restoring and increasing forest cover, promoting market-based approaches to forestry, increasing roles and responsibilities of local forest owners, strengthening protected areas management and conserving biodiversity with the involvement of local communities.

Under the Additional Financing operation, IDA will provide an additional \$30 million over three years to the project covering six provinces in the central coastal region of Viet Nam.

Old kilns pollute southern skies

Smoke discharges from thousands of brick-kilns in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta have polluted the environment and impacted human health and agricultural productivity.

Under a Government decision, all traditional brick-kilns were supposed to stop operations by December 31, 2010 but a lack of investment capital has made it difficult for owners to make the switch to modern production methods.

The southern province of Dong Thap had about 510 brick-kilns using traditional technology which was causing serious pollution, said Le Minh Hoan, chairman of the provincial People's Committee.

Cao Van Manh, 76, has lived in close proximity to 12 brick-kilns along the banks of the Sa Dec River for 37 years and blames his lung cancer on breathing in the kilns' smoke for such a long time. One of Manh's neighbours said she used to plant fruit trees in her gardens but pollution from the kilns had gradually killed them.

Samples from recent air tests conducted by the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment showed that fluorhydric acid was the only regulated substance to surpass acceptable levels. Other toxins such as nitrite, sulphur dioxide and carbon dioxide were below the regulated levels.

The acid can destroy the cells in tree leaves and have a negative impact on productivity and quality. The acid can also cause congestion, inflame mucus membranes and cause lung diseases in people, said Nguyen Hong Mai, a chemistry lecturer at the Ha Noi National University.

Vu Thi Nhung, director of the Dong Thap Environmental Protection Department, said that the air samples could change at different moments in time, meaning the tests did not show comprehensive results about the level of pollution. Provincial authorities researched the possibility of switching to more environmentally friendly tunnel brick-kilns but discovered they were too expensive for most producers, reaching up to VND10 billion (US\$476,000) to construct, he said. In addition, bricks produced in tunnel-kilns were double the price of those produced with traditional kilns making them difficult to sell, he said.

Meanwhile in the southern province of Vinh Long's Mang Thit District, tests were conducted on air samples taken from the Co Chien pottery kiln. Results showed that hafnium levels exceeded the regulated levels by 10-33 times, and the amount of carbon dioxide exceeded acceptable levels by 1.2-7.7 times.

The province currently has more than 1,350 brick manufacturing enterprises operating more than 2,000 kilns in Mang Thit and Long Ho districts, according to statistics of the provincial People's Committee. More than 12,000 workers earn their living at the kilns.

Last year, the National Assembly Standing Committee asked the provincial authorities to provide assistance to brick manufacturing enterprises to minimise pollution but so far, no effective measures have been found. Chairman of the Vinh Long People's Committee Nguyen Van Diep said the province had a plan to use Chinese brick kiln models, which ranged in price from VND400-600 million (\$19,000-28,600) each.

However, the province was limited to lending VND30 million (\$1,420) at a prime interest rate to each producer, causing most enterprises to hesitate about making the switch, he said.

Polluting firm forces residents' relocation

Central Da Nang City authorities have asked relevant agencies to promptly resettle the nearly 260 households currently located near two steel plants in Hoa Vang District's Hoa Lien commune due to issues with the plants' pollution.

The move was made following a household complaint about noise and air pollution caused by operations at the Thai Binh Duong and Dana-Italy steel plants.

The resettlement work is expected to be completed by June 30 this year, said Vice Chairman of Hoa Vang District's People Committee Dang Thuong at a tripartite dialogue between representatives of local authorities, the plants and local residents on Sunday.

However, Thuong told Viet Nam News yesterday that the resettlement was not expected to be finished until August or later this year due to the shortage of land funds.

Da Nang authorities will allocate the resettlement land project funds. Leaders of the two plants also committed to contribute capital, he said, remaining vague about the exact costs of resettlement.

"If the resettlement is not ready, local authorities are willing to provide financial assistance to any household that wants to rent a place to live to avoid pollution," he added.

At the dialogue, local residents complained that the two plants operated around-the-clock, causing noise and serious air pollution.

Nguyen Tuan, a resident living near Dana-Italy steel plant, said his children could not concentrate on studying while others could not rest as a result of the noise and dust from the plant.

Director General of Dana-Italy plant Ho Nghia Tin admitted to his plant's pollution and said the plant had invested in building two air treatment facilities but still could not completely ameliorate the problem.

"The plant will install one more air treatment facility with the hopes of minimising the pollution," he said.

He added that the plant suggested that Da Nang authorities resettle surrounding residents last year and would help pay for the resettlement work.

Director General of Thai Binh Duong plant Nguyen An also admitted that the plant's night-time operation annoyed local residents and explained that the lower cost of electricity at night required the plant to operate during these hours.

He pledged to gradually reduce the pollution and was ready to help relocate the local residents.

The two plants were put into operation more than three years ago.

Operator of leaky dam ordered to make flood plan

The Committee on Flood Prevention People's Army's Military Zone 5 and Quang Nam Province have ordered Hydropower Plant Managing Board No 3 to urgently develop a flood control plan for the Tranh River Hydroelectric Plant.

Military and provincial officials toured the facility on Monday, following recent incidents of leaks from the facility's dam, raising doubts about its integrity.

Tran Anh Tuan, vice chairman of Quang Nam's Bac Tra My District, where the dam is located, was concerned for public safety as there were no flood prevention plans in effect for the enormous facility.

Maj Gen Nguyen Quy Nhon also emphasised that the plan must prioritise public safety and said it was necessary to develop a detailed plan in close co-operation with the local people, providing them updated information on how to deal with severe climate change.

The plan, which needed to clearly define responsibilities on all sides, should be in place for the start of the rainy season in April, said the director of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Nguyen Thanh Quang.

"They must confirm the safety of people in the downstream area or we cannot stop feeling concern for our lives," Quang said. "They hold more inspection tours and public meetings to give us good reason to believe [that the facility is safe], but it will be hard to feel safe with the rainy season coming."

The National Steering Committee for Storm and Flood Control and Prevention has already worked with Hydropower Plant Managing Board No 3, Military Zone 5, and Quang Nam Province on disaster preparedness and search-and-rescue plans.

According to the latest statement from Electricity of Viet Nam (EVN), there were still leaks in the dam's expansion joints.

EVN also said that it has taken comments from functional offices and experts and directed the hydroelectric facility's managing board, construction team and designers to reinspect the facility and report fully to local authorities in order to reassure the public. EVN said about 80 per cent of the leaks had been repaired, but a significant amount of water continued to leak from the dam.

Military Zone No 5 and Quang Nam authorities have called for independent construction inspectors to examine the dam in order to ensure transparency.

Dam leaks to be fixed 'before flood season'

Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Hoang Quoc Vuong promised no more leaking at the biggest dam in central Viet Nam by mid-April and full repairs to be finished before the flood season starts.

"The leak at the Song Tranh 2 hydro power plant needs to be curbed by that deadline or by the end of March if possible," he said at a press meeting in the capital yesterday.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT), water has been leaking from the dam in Quang Nam Province since February, worsening 10 days ago due to faulty repair carried out by the Management Board of Hydro power projects 3, an Electricity of Viet Nam unit which directly manages the plant.

Vuong said the leak had reduced after the EVN adjusted repair methods. Water had been leaking at a speed of 7 litres per second yesterday morning, instead of at 30 litres a couple of days ago.

The information was confirmed by Chairman of the Bac Tra My District People's Committee Dang Phong via telephone.

"Water flowing down to low-lying areas is currently much less, but we are still worried since the leakage remains," he said

The MoIT said water was flowing out through so-called "thermal gaps" — small openings placed between concrete blocks to prevent cracking in the heat.

To date, no cracks in the dam have been found, according to the deputy minister, who concluded that the \$249-million plant "remains safe and stable".

"There's no possibility of any further accidents that could cause damage to low-lying areas," Vuong said.

The 96m-high dam, part of the hydro power plant that began operations in January 2011, is capable of holding 729 million cubic metres of water - equivalent to 43 West Lakes in Ha Noi.

While denying any mistakes in design and construction, Nguyen Tai Son, director of Electricity Construction Consultancy Company 1, admitted that "water leakage outside the dam was abnormal".

Initial assessments by experts from the MoIT, the EVN and the State Council for Assessment and Acceptance of Construction Works showed some water holes were blocked, resulting in water leaking from thermal gaps.

Water holes were designed to receive water absorbed from inside the dam's concrete walls (concrete is not an absolute waterproof material) into water ditches before it could leak out of the dam.

The MoIT said most of the blocked water holes had been clear, which reduced water leakages and the unblocking process was expected to finish by the end of March.

"More assessment and repair to prevent further water leakage must be done before the flooding season [end of July]," Vuong noted.

Meanwhile, independent expert Hoang Xuan Hong, from the Viet Nam National Committee on Large Dams and Water Resources Development, said that there must be something wrong

with the waterproof shields inside the thermal gaps that normally prevent water from flowing out.

"There are technologies available in the world to fix these, but they are very costly," Hong added.

"It is important to fix these thermal gaps before they get larger under high water pressure during the rainy season or during earthquakes," he said.

Minor quakes, measuring at 3 on the Richter scale, were recorded in the surrounding area earlier this month.

The plant has passed its first State assessments which allowed it to run at part of its total capacity while awaiting full assessment in May.

"This means all repair costs must be born by the bidder, the Irrigation Construction Corporation 4," Son said.

Experts urge data system for sea, island management

Viet Nam should have an integrated data information system to manage activities relating to the national sea and islands, said Nguyen Van Cu, head of the Viet Nam Administration of Sea and Islands under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

At a conference in the capital on Tuesday, Cu said the system would help supervise and control illegal exploitation of Viet Nam's exclusive economic zone, quickly identify the positions of oil slicks and other polluting sources, monitor ecosystems in the sea and provide information to manage and protect sea resources.

He said the system would operate with co-operation from Collected Localisation Satellites, a French Space Agency organisation, adding that it was imperative in strengthening sea security.

In a related move, international and domestic scientists released nine reports as key components for building the system.

The reports outline activities to establish more sea radar stations, applying remote sensing technology and equipping satellite-monitoring devices on 3,000 fishing vessels in 28 coastal provinces.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Nguyen Minh Quang, said the building of the integrated data information system was part of the Viet Nam Sea Strategy up to the year 2020 to make the nation stronger and richer.

Cu said Viet Nam had a 3,260-km coastline and more than 3,000 islands. "So, our country has high potential for sea resources to contribute to the national socio-economic development," he added.

However, he said the current data system for studying the sea resources and environment was scattered and inconsistent. This led to ineffective management of these resources.