

Press Review 04/2012 - Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology,

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1	Urban growth fouls waterways	2/4/2012	VN News	HCM	Water Resource	Many rivers and canals in HCM City are being filled illegally for private purposes, causing environmental damage, according to the municipal Department of Transport.
2	Tien Giang improves hospital waste treatment capacity	4/4/2012	Vfej	Tien Giang	Waste Treatment	MOH has decided to invest 42 billion VND to solve the overload of sewerage facilities at four hospitals in the southern province of Tien Giang .
3	HCM City to fix 10 flood-prone areas	6/4/2012	VN News	HCM	Environment	HCM City's authorities plan to take steps to prevent flooding in 10 of 21 sites in the city that are particularly prone to heavy flooding during the rainy season.
4	Waterways to ease road traffic	6/4/2012	VN News	HCM	Water Resource	Viet Nam plans to develop waterway transport to ease congestion on busy roads, particularly in major cities like Ha Noi and HCM City.
5	World Bank approves a US\$ 26 million grant for Mekong Integrated Water Resource Management Project	7/4/2012	MONRE	Mekong	Water Resource	Washington, March 8, 2012 - The Mekong River is one of the largest international rivers in the world with significant biodiversit
6	Heavy rains wreak havoc on garlic kingdom	7/4/2012	VN News	Quang Ngai	Environment	Farmers on central Quang Ngai Province's Ly Son Island, known as the garlic kingdom, have suffered the worst crop ever due to torrential rains, the Ly Son Island District People's Committee said.



MOST-BMBF Office for
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Vietnamese – German Office for Water and Environmental Technology

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7	Vietnam used as dumping ground for toxic waste	9/4/2012	Vfej	Vietnam	Environment	The Government is currently attempting to create a legal system to deal with the problem of importing toxic waste from other countries.
8	River bank collapse undermines homes	9/4/2012	VN News	Phu Tho	Environment	More than 30 households have been impacted by the collapse of the right bank of the Thao River and the left bank of the Lao canal in Bang Gia Commune, in the northern province of Phu Tho.
9	Fine on polluters may reach \$100,000	10/4/2012	VN Net Bridge	Vietnam	Pollution	The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) has proposed the government to raise administrative fine up to VND2 billion (\$100,000) on acts of individuals and organizations that cause environmental pollution.
10	Quake warning systems urged near leaking dam	11/4/2012	VN News	Quang Ngai	Environment	The Institute of Geophysics decided to build earthquake warning systems around the Song Tranh 2 Hydro-power Plant in the central province of Quang Nam to assess possible impacts of ongoing tremors on the leaking dam.
11	Seismic observation to be conducted near Song Tranh 2 hydro-power plant	11/4/2012	VN Net Bridge	Quang Ngai	Environment	Song Tranh 2 hydropower plant in Quang Nam Province, central Vietnam, is located on an active fault zone, which can cause earthquakes anytime, scientists from the Geo-physics Institute said.
12	Waste import standards set	12/4/2011	VN News	Vietnam	Waste	MONRE has drafted a new circular regulating types of waste that can be imported to Viet Nam for treatment and disposal.



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13	Irrigation fee reduction boosts production	14/4/2012	VN News	Quang Tri	Water Resource	The Government's policy to reduce irrigation fees for farmers has cut their production costs by 3-10 per cent and increased their yield.
14	Green Climate Fund to be set up in VN	16/4/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Climate Change	A national Green Climate Fund will soon be set up to facilitate future financial flow from the global Green Climate Fund into Viet Nam.
15	Illegal export of minerals rampant	16/4/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Illegal mineral exploitation is rampant in the border provinces, according to the Government.
16	Over half of hospitals yet to complete waste treatment systems	17/4/2012	Vfej	Vietnam	Waste Treatment	Some 56% of the hospitals in Vietnam have yet to complete their medical waste treatment systems.
17	Climate policy needs local voice	20/4/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Climate Change	Communities, despite playing a vital role in climate change adaptation.
18	Finland helps VN adapt to climate changes	20/4/2012	Vfej	Vietnam	Climate Change	Finland's Foreign Ministry has funded a 500,000 EURO project to help Vietnamese coastal localities adapt to climate change.
19	Environmental protection plan requires 'radical policy changes'	21/4/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Bui Cach Tuyen, Deputy MONRE, spoke with Viet Nam Economic Times about the country's environmental problems.
20	Polluting tapioca firm to be punished	26/4/2011	VN News	Ninh Thuan	Pollution	Ninh Thuan Province DONRE the provincial PC to punish Fococev Company's tapioca processing factory for polluting the environment.
21	City aims for green canals after project ends	28/4/2012	VN News	HCM	Environment	Nguyen Thi Thom remembers when the canal stank horribly and was bordered with makeshift houses.



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Urban growth fouls waterways

Many rivers and canals in HCM City are being filled illegally for private purposes, causing environmental damage, according to the municipal Department of Transport.

The agency cites 112 cases that have violated regulations on the protection of rivers and canals.

Of these, 34 cases involved encroachment on rivers and canals, and 78 others construction of houses on corridors used to protect rivers and canals.

Violators included individual households and companies.

Tran Van Phuoc, who lives in District 12's Thoi An Ward, for example, is one of many individuals who have filled waterways for personal purposes.

He has yet to be fined or penalised for filling 1,500 sq. metres of the Cho Cau River in 2000.

Among the companies violating regulations is Hao Huong Company in Hoc Mon District's Nhi Binh Commune.

The company filled parts of the Sai Gon River for the construction of its production facilities.

The Lien Thanh Fisheries Company in Thu Duc District's Linh Dong Ward has occupied nearly one kilometre of the Sai Gon River's bank for its private purposes.

Most of the serious violations took place at points that are under the management of local government officials, but many rivers under State management have also been used illegally for personal and company uses.

These include a section of the Cho Dem River in District 8, part of the Dong Nai River in District 9, and the Sai Gon River in districts 6, 2 and 12, Binh Thanh, Thu Duc, Cu Chi and Hoc Mon.

In 2011, 7,000 sq. metres of rivers and canals in the city were filled and illegally used.

Phan Hoang Tri, deputy director of the Inland Waterways Authority, said the construction of solid concrete works along the banks of the rivers and canals were one of the main reasons causing serious landslides.

In 2011, nine landslides took place at points where these violations had occurred, resulting in one death and 20 collapsed houses.

Tri said that violations of river and canal corridor-protection regulations had been increasing rapidly in recent years, but only 30 per cent of these cases had received penalties.

The Inland Waterways Authority has several times asked local authorities to strictly deal with these violations, but Tri said they continued to allow the activity to occur or just ignored violators.



Part of an irrigation dyke on the right bank of the Sai Gon River in HCM City. The city's Transport Department has raised the alarm over rampant pollution of the city's waterways.

Tien Giang improves hospital waste treatment capacity

The Ministry of Health has decided to invest 42 billion VND to solve the overload of sewerage facilities at four hospitals in the southern province of Tien Giang .

The hospitals that will benefit include Cai Be General Hospital and hospitals in Cai Lay and Go Cong as well as the Central General Hospital.

Waste water treatment systems in each hospital will be upgraded so they can handle a capacity of 1,300 cu.m of waste water per day. Incinerators will also be upgraded to increase their capacity for disposing solid waste.

According to the Tien Giang Department of Health, everyday hospitals in the province release about 500 kilos of solid waste and nearly 2,000 cu.m of waste water into the environment, of which only 1,000 cu.m is processed.

HCM City to fix 10 flood-prone areas

HCM City's authorities plan to take steps to prevent flooding in 10 of 21 sites in the city that are particularly prone to heavy flooding during the rainy season.

Nguyen Huu Tin, deputy chairman of the city People's Committee, proposed that the city Steering Centre for Anti-flooding Programme eliminate the other flood-prone sites by 2015. The 10 sites are located in districts 6, 9, 11, 12, Binh Thanh, Go Vap and Thu Duc.

Speaking at a meeting on Wednesday, Tin said last year the city cleared 39 out of 70 flooding sites by installing more than 200km of sewers and dredging 100 canals and sluices.

The construction of a culvert system and pumping station were completed during the first phase of the Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe Environmental Sanitation project.

Wastewater and rain water in the basin will be collected at a pumping station and then treated and released into the Sai Gon River.

The construction of sluices on the east bank of the Saigon River is expected to be completed next month.

The Nhieu Loc- Thi Nghe canal runs through several districts, including districts 3, Tan Binh, Phu Nhuan and Binh Thanh.

Tin said the heads of district people's committees would be held responsible for the dumping of rubbish into canals and illegal building of structures on riverbanks.

Waterways to ease road traffic

Viet Nam plans to develop waterway transport to ease congestion on busy roads, particularly in major cities like Ha Noi and HCM City.

The Ministry of Transport has given priority to the development of inland waterways along with road-transport improvement.

Both Ha Noi and HCM City often have chronic traffic congestion caused by the increasing number of vehicles on the roads.

Although the two cities have introduced many preventive measures, including limiting the number of personal vehicles, popularizing public transport and changing working hours, traffic congestion remains a serious problem.

Waterway transport is seen as an alternative means of travel that could reduce heavy traffic on the roads. Viet Nam has one of the densest system of rivers in the world, which would be convenient for the development of waterway transport, according to a Transport Ministry survey.

However, inland waterways have not been used to the fullest because investment in waterway transport is still low, around 2.5 per cent of the total capital for the country's transport system.

There are more than 4,500km in the northern waterway system in use for transport, of which more than 2,600km are national, running through almost all the key economic, urban and industrial regions.

In the north, there are more than 30 river ports being used, but most of them were built in the 1980s and are old and outdated and unable to meet loading and transport demand. None is able to load containers.

The ministry's plan on inland waterway development until 2020 would exploit the advantages of the waterways for transport of overweight and over-sized goods.

Minimizing pollution is another benefit of increased waterway transport.

Total investment for developing infrastructure of the inland waterway system until 2020 is estimated to be around VND37 trillion (US\$1.76 billion).

The inland waterway transport system would be developed in a complete system that would provide safe and good quality services at reasonable prices, according to the plan.

The ministry's plan is to connect inland waterways with other transport networks to create a comprehensive transport system that would help boost local socio-economic growth. To help the plan succeed, the ministry is calling on economic sectors to do business in the transport sector.

Accordingly, to encourage the participation of other private holders, state-owned enterprises would take only 10-15 per cent of shareholding. Recently, the Viet Nam Inland Waterways Administration completed an outline plan through 2020 for a northern inland water port system.

HCM City has approved a plan by a private company to develop waterway boat routes within the city.

The Transport Ministry has also planned to upgrade and modernise key ports in major economic zones to make sure they would be able to transport 190-210 tonnes of goods and 530-540 millions of passengers by 2020.

World Bank approves a US\$ 26 million grant for Mekong Integrated Water Resource Management Project

Washington, March 8, 2012 - The Mekong River is one of the largest international rivers in the world with significant biodiversity. The catchment of the Mekong comprises 795,000 square kilometers, and the river stretches nearly 5,000 kilometers from the Tibetan Plateau to its southern most point at the Mekong Delta, ranking as the 21st largest river basin worldwide. It is a precious resource of significant socio-economic and cultural value. At present much of the population in the region still lives under the poverty line and relies mainly on the exploitation of the natural resources of the Mekong and its tributaries for basic food security and livelihood.

Integrated water resource management (IWRM) in the Mekong River Basin is at critical juncture, mainly because of the growing pressure for increased utilization of water resources to sustain regional economic growth. To implement IWRM in practice, it is an urgent task to strengthen countries' capacity in river basin management. Having adequate institutional and human resources at the national level will be critical to implementing IWRM effectively.

The Mekong Integrated Water Resource Management (MIWRM) Project, newly approved by the World Bank's Board of Directors, follows on the Mekong Water Resources Assistance Strategy, developed jointly with the Asian Development Bank in 2006. It is also a follow-up to a Water Utilization Project, funded by the Global Environment Facilities supporting the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and contributing to more sustainable river basin development in the Lower Mekong Basin through supporting the implementation of the IWRM at the regional, national and sub-national level.

The MIWRM comprises the following three main components: (a) the Regional Water Resource Management to be implemented by the MRC, aiming at developing technical dialogues among the LMB countries to address key transboundary water resources management issues in the Lower Mekong Basin and establish common approach for disaster risk management; (b) the Natural Water Resource Management to be implemented by Lao PDR, designed to strengthen policy, and institutional and human resources capacity in Lao PDR to improve water resource planning; and (c) the Floodplain and Aquatic Resources Management to be implemented by Lao PDR, aimed at helping to achieve a difficult balance between livelihood support for the local communities, while also enhancing regional biodiversity in wetlands and increasing sustainability of fisheries in the Southern Lao PDR. Project implementation period will be 6 years.

Over the course of its implementation, the Mekong Integrated Water Resource Management Project is expected to serve as a key example of how to implement quality, integrated water management practices in the Lower Mekong Basin at the regional, national and sub-national levels.

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Heavy rains wreak havoc on garlic kingdom

Farmers on central Quang Ngai Province's Ly Son Island, known as the garlic kingdom, have suffered the worst crop ever due to torrential rains, the Ly Son Island District People's Committee said.

This year, farmers grew garlic over 290ha of land, but heavy rains during the past three months have ruined 80 per cent of the crops. Productivity is currently about 3,000-3,500 kilos per ha, reduced by half compared to last year, it said.

Ly Son garlic, a well-known local specialty, has been sold nation-wide for its special taste. Garlic crops are grown only one time per year, usually at the end of August.

"All the garlic was rotten. I've got nothing left this year," Vo Thi Mia, a farmer in An Hai Commune said.

Mia grows six sao (2,160 sq.m) of garlic. Last year, it brought her VND50 million (\$2,400) in profit.

"It kept raining. We had to use nilon canvas to avoid too much water to reaching each bulb, but it was useless," she said.

Another farmer Vo Thanh Long was luckier in collecting 400kg of garlic, despite normally making two tonnes.

Apart from suffering from crop loss, farmers had to deal with fake products, Truong Nghia, chairman of the district's Garlic Manufacturing, Processing and Trading Association said.

"Some traders transport garlic grown in central Khanh Hoa Province's Ninh Hien District to the island and sell them under the name of Ly Son," he said.

District inspectors have kept examining products sold at the island's markets to find the fake ones. All of Ly Son's products were required to attach labelling. Last year, a trader was fined up to VND40 million (\$1,920) for selling fake garlic, Nghia said.

Currently, farmers receive no support from the Government when they face poor crops, he said.

Vice Chairman of the People's Committee Pham Thi Huong has required border inspection stations to strengthen inspection on products transported from the mainland and fine those who use the Ly Son labelling for their products.

Vietnam used as dumping ground for toxic waste

The Government is currently attempting to create a legal system to deal with the problem of importing toxic waste from other countries.

Currently, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment is collecting opinions on a draft decree, which would regulate the amount of waste materials accepted from foreign countries.

Under the new regulation, 37 waste materials, including mollusk, crustacean and invertebrate shells, tailings from the metallurgy industry, plastic, paper and silk waste, as well as that of the metal-making process, may be imported for domestic recycling.

It would still allow the importation of a large number of waste materials from enterprises in 'export processing zones' and 'border economic zones'. The materials that would still be allowed include mica, rubber manufacturing, waste paper, wood byproducts, and tailings from metal production.

Under the proposed new regulations, these would have to be inspected and cleared as 'clean' before entering the country.

Out of the tonnes of waste being sent to Vietnam each day, a lot of which is toxic. Much of it comes by way of southern provincial borders, consisting largely of paper, nylon, plastic, electronic components and chemicals.

The environmental police of Haiphong have also had to deal with several cases of illegally-imported waste, especially through the port of Dinh Vu. The waste poses a significant threat to the environment of the country.

River bank collapse undermines homes

More than 30 households have been impacted by the collapse of the right bank of the Thao River and the left bank of the Lao canal in Bang Gia Commune, in the northern province of Phu Tho.

The local government has reported erosion along 400 metres of the Thao River and 100 metres of the Lao canal.

Resident Nguyen Thi Thao said her garden and bathrooms were swept away after the erosion became worse in mid-March.

Large cracks were also reported on the ground near many other houses.

Thao's family spent more than VND100 million (more than US\$4,750) last year fortifying a stretch of the river embankment behind her house to no effect, she said.

Chairman of the communal People's Committee Phung Tien Long said the construction of large new houses on weak ground had caused the erosion along the Lao canal.

Meanwhile, landslides along the Thao River banks, which had been occurring naturally for dozens of years, became more serious after construction began on the Ha Hoa Bridge earlier this year, he said.

A new road was built to transport materials to the construction site, leading the flow of the river to change direction.

"The commune is looking for land to use as an urgent evacuation site if the landslides continue to get worse," said Long.

The local government plans to fortify the embankments on part of the river to ensure safety for residents and the nearby National Road 32C.

Fine on polluters may reach \$100,000

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) has proposed the government to raise administrative fine up to VND2 billion (\$100,000) on acts of individuals and organizations that cause environmental pollution.

Deputy Minister Bui Cach Tuyen said that the higher fine is added to the draft Law on Administrative Fine. The highest fine on polluters at present is VND500 million (\$25,000).

Mr. Tuyen said that around 65 percent of industrial zones in Vietnam have waste water treatment systems but they do not fully use these systems, causing complaints from local residents of environmental pollution.

He urged local governments to learn from the southern province of Binh Duong, which keeps an eye on industrial zones through cameras. This province regularly sends environmental data to the General Department of Environment.

Mr. Tuyen also said that the MoNRE would issue regulations on automatic supervision of waste at industrial zones.

“We will strictly cooperate with local administrations to punish polluters in order to curb environmental pollution,” the official stressed.

According to the Environmental Police Agency, many factories have waste treatment equipment but they keep discharge waste to the environment at night in order to save cost.

The Environmental Police Agency has detected some big cases, including the Vedan in Dong Nai province and Tung Kuang in Hai Duong province. These companies discharged huge volumes of toxic chemicals to the environment for years.

Quake warning systems urged near leaking dam

The Institute of Geophysics decided to build earthquake warning systems around the Song Tranh 2 Hydro-power Plant in the central province of Quang Nam to assess possible impacts of ongoing tremors on the leaking dam.

The dam is the largest of its kind in central Viet Nam. Concerns for its safety were brought up after a recent tour of the facilities by geophysicists. Continual minor earthquakes have been reported in the region in the last year, said Le Huy Minh, the institute's deputy director.

"These stations will be important in identifying fault lines, where earthquakes are likely to take place. They will also play a vital role in the possible implications seismic activity on the dam," he said.

Leakage from the 96 metre-high dam, built as part of the hydro-power system that came into operation in January, 2011, has significantly reduced from 30 litres per second, recorded in February and early March, according to chairman of Bac Tra My District People's Committee Dang Phong.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT) admitted that the leakage was unusual, and a number of experts questioned the quality of the dam's construction. The entire reservoir is roughly 43 times the size of Ha Noi's West Lake.

Phong said that, even though tremors have been recorded near the \$249-million plant, they are not as major as the record measured of March 6, which hit 3.4 on the Richter scale.

He is hopeful that warning systems will ease worries. "We hope that the scientist's work will show there is no danger to the dam, its safety system or the surrounding areas," he said.

Minh said that the recent tremors in the vicinity could be attributed to the operations of the dam itself, adding that it was a common occurrence in areas where large man-made reservoirs have been built.

Quang Nam is said to be located on an active geological area, but much less prone to quakes than other parts of Viet Nam, especially the mountainous regions of the north-west, Nghe An, or the coastal region stretching from Ba Ria to Vung Tau.

Previously MoIT did not consider the tremors a safety risk to the dam.

"This is a normal occurrence which happens during the construction of hydro-power dams," said Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Hoang Quoc Vuong.

Similar tremors have been recorded near the Hoa Binh hydro-power plant, constructed in the north in 1989, but they subsided within five years of construction, he said.

Seismic observation to be conducted near Song Tranh 2 hydro-power plant

The Song Tranh 2 hydropower plant in Quang Nam Province, central Vietnam, is located on an active fault zone, which can cause earthquakes anytime, scientists from the Geophysics Institute said.

Recently-reported underground explosions at the Song Tranh 2 plants were defined as reservoir induced quakes, with the highest intensity of 3.4 Richter scale.

The quakes were caused by the operation of the Song Tranh 2 reservoir, which enhanced the fault's intensity. However, the recent quakes did not make serious impacts on the dam.

The reservoir has a capacity of 730 million cubic meters of water, making it one of the largest reservoirs in the central region.

The above information was released at a meeting between scientists of the Geophysics Institute, the Song Tranh 2 plant management board and the authority of Bac Tra My district--where the plant is situated, on April 9.

At the meeting, the related parties decided to build five seismic observation stations around the plant.

Scientists will survey five locations in the communes of Tra Bui, Tra Doc, Tra Mai, Tien Hiep and Tien Ngoc for construction of the seismic observation stations, which will be located within a radius of 10-40 km from the dam.

Once the stations become operational, they will provide necessary data for experts at the Geophysics Institute to analyze the mutual correlations between the dam's operation and the development of the fault zone. Based on the data, the Institute will recommend optimal solutions for the plant's operation to minimize the risk of earthquake damage.

The Institute's Deputy Director, Dr Le Huy Minh, noted that though the earthquakes are weak in intensity and have yet to have an impact on the dam's structure; they seem to be getting stronger. Residents in the downstream area of the power plant have been living in fear after underground explosions and water was found leaking from the dam last month.

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Similar tremors have been recorded near the Hoa Binh hydro-power plant, constructed in the north in 1989, but they subsided within five years of construction, he said.

Waste import standards set

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has drafted new circular regulating types of waste that can be imported to Viet Nam for treatment and disposal.

The draft circular, which aims to prevent imports of hazardous waste, is based on the amendment of the Ministry's Decision 12 issued in 2006.

The updated list included 37 types of waste that can be imported to Viet Nam. The circular, which was made public last month for public comment, also lists 43 types of waste that can be collected at border economic zones, including waste paper, plastics, fabrics and scrap metal that can be reused for production.

In addition, waste must be cleaned to ensure hazardous and prohibited chemicals have been removed. Waste must also be categorized before it is imported to ensure compliance with international standards.

Nguyen Hoang Duc from the Environment Administration's Department of Pollution Control said the circular would encourage enterprises in border economic zones to recycle garbage created during the manufacturing process, which would help save resources while reducing environmental pollution.

Dozens of tonnes of waste are imported into Viet Nam each day.

Irrigation fee reduction boosts production

The Government's policy to reduce irrigation fees for farmers has cut their production costs by 3-10 per cent and increased their yield.

Deputy head of the Irrigation Department under Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry Vu Van Thang said the area of irrigated farmland reported had increased 4-10 per cent since the policy was launched in 2008, meaning farmers qualified for more water, which had helped improve productivity.

Under the previous fee system farmers were understating the amount of land under cultivation to save money on water fees. They were thus getting less than the optimum amount of water for the true area and the crops were suffering.

Now that farmers were accurately reporting areas under cultivation, they were qualifying for more water and thus production had increased.

The Government partly funds irrigation service providers to operate irrigation works (for example, canals and pumping stations). To get water from the sluices to inner-field irrigation systems, farmers pay a fee to the service providers.

However, Quang Tri Irrigation Ltd vice director Tran Van Tho said while fees were reduced, the fund the providers received from the Government remained the same and had not kept up with inflation, posing difficulties for the company.

Another shortcoming of the policy was that irrigation work in remote mountainous regions required more maintenance due to harsh conditions, and the funds provided by the Government were not enough.

Head of Nhon Hau Agriculture Co-operatives in central Binh Dinh Province Mai Duc Anh said inner-field irrigation fees were too low for the company to cover the costs of service delivery, including costs to pump water to the fields.

Deputy Minister Dao Xuan Hoc said policy makers would review the shortcomings and propose solutions, including reasonable Government funding, to ensure benefits for both farmers and irrigation service providers.



Construction work at Thach Nham drainage canal in central Quang Tri Province. The ADB-funded canal will supply water to 30,000ha of agricultural land.

Green Climate Fund to be set up in VN

A national Green Climate Fund will soon be set up to facilitate future financial flow from the global Green Climate Fund into Viet Nam.

Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung requested the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to work with relevant finance and planning ministries to establish the fund after reviewing the United Nations COP 17 climate summit held in Durban last December.

The global Green Climate Fund, which aims to channel aid to developing nations to adapt to climate change, was first approved at COP 16 in Cancun and formally established in Durban.

The global fund is expected to raise US\$100 billion a year by 2020, to which all developing countries will have equal access.

Currently, development aid for climate change and the environment in Viet Nam comes from the Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Fund, Global Environment Fund and the Clean Development Mechanism.

The Prime Minister has subsequently called for a report on the operation of these funds and their efficiency.

The ministry has also requested the review of relevant policies and legal documentation in accordance with international conventions and Viet Nam's strategies on climate change.

Illegal export of minerals rampant

Illegal mineral exploitation is rampant in the border provinces, according to the Government.

A recent report by the Ministry of Industry and Trade stated that the export of illegally mined minerals was worsening and seriously depleting the country's natural resources.

According to another report by the Steering Committee for Smuggling, Counterfeit Goods Trading and Commercial Frauds Prevention (also known as Steering Committee 127), more than 124,000 tonnes of illegally mined ore and coal were confiscated in 2011, an increase of 25 per cent against 2010.

The committee said the illegal trade had proved difficult to control because documents of origin were often faked.

Another tactic employed by fraudsters was to export unprocessed or poorly processed ore, but describe it as refined, which was illegal, the committee said.

Tran Manh Hai, head of the Investigation Guidance Section at the Police Department for Drug and Criminal Prevention under the Viet Nam Border Guard Force, said coal, titanium and iron ore were among the most commonly smuggled minerals that were chiefly destined for China.

He said coal was often illegally traded in the northern province of Quang Ninh and Hai Phong City, while titanium was being smuggled in the central and southern provinces of Quang Nam, Ninh Thuan, Binh Dinh and Khanh Hoa.

Committee 127 said loose management by local officials when it came to issuing mineral exploitation licences was mainly to blame.

The committee also stated that inspectors were often poorly equipped and trained to carry out their duties.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Industry and Trade blamed ignorance and poverty among the local people for mineral smuggling.

Nguyen Khac Vinh, chairman of the Viet Nam Geology General Association, said the export of minerals was seriously depleting the nation's mineral reserves.

Meanwhile, Hai said closer supervision of ports was necessary.

"Those transporting minerals by sea often take advantage of poor weather conditions when it is misty or dark, or windy with high waves to escape police detection," Hai added.

He said in the next four to five months, the Border Guard Force would step up maritime patrols where mineral smuggling was thought to be worst.

The move follows a recent directive by the Prime Minister prohibiting the export of many kinds of ore.

Committee 127, meanwhile, said minerals were among the 10 most illegally transported and traded goods, after drugs, fuel and foreign currencies.

Over half of hospitals yet to complete waste treatment systems

Some 56% of the hospitals in Vietnam have yet to complete their medical waste treatment systems, said Nguyen Huy Nga, head of the Department of Health Environmental Management under the Ministry of Health.

The recent diseases like hand-foot-mouth and H5N1-type influenza A are all concerned with environmental pollution and medical waste treatment, said Nga at the press briefing on Monday in preparation for the seminar named “Environment and health protection” to be held in Hanoi on April 12.

There are currently some 13,600 healthcare facilities nationwide, including 1,300 hospitals. At present, the daily amount of medical wastewater is about 150,000 cubic meters, which will double to 300,000 cubic meters in 2015.

In addition, local hospitals discharge 350-400 tons of solid waste every day, consisting of 40 tons of hazardous medical waste that need to be burnt in incinerators. Therefore, the demand for medical garbage treatment in Vietnam is very huge and is becoming an urgent need.

Catherine Galtier at APB France Environment Vietnam said expenditure is the primary difficulty of completing medical waste treatment systems at local hospitals. The hospitals have yet to include the expenses for waste treatment in their budget estimates and neglect this issue during their operations.

Regarding the investment in medical waste treatment, Nga said the capital can be sourced from credit funds, the State budget and others. Lately, the Government has allowed the health ministry to borrow some US\$150 million for investment in waste treatment, in which US\$140 million will be used for building waste treatment systems at the hospitals and US\$10 million for developing policies and observatory systems.

One of the greatest challenges for environment and health protection is that about 50% of the households in rural areas lacks sanitary latrines. Even the already-constructed latrines have yet to meet the technological standards.

Related agencies and French experts hoped the situation would be remedied when the environment improvement technology that has been successfully applied in France is introduced in Vietnam at the upcoming seminar to be organized by the French Embassy in Vietnam and French International Trade Agency (Ubifrance).

Climate policy needs local voice

Communities, despite playing a vital role in climate change adaptation, did not have their own voice in major dialogues, prompting a change in the way we should communicate about climate change.

Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction, pointed out that although communities were often the first to be affected by natural disasters, very often they were only heard through intermediaries.

She said: "When I met strong communities who have gone through and recovered from serious disaster issues, they told me their biggest concern was how they could impact the policy-making process in their Governments."

Wahlstrom was speaking at the sixth international conference Community-Based Adaptation that opened in Ha Noi yesterday with more than 300 participants from 61 countries to discuss adaptation at the community level with a focus on communication.

Participants discussed how to scale up communication at local levels into broader dialogues.

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in her video message for the conference emphasised the need to bring all the stakeholders together to ensure the success of adaptation.

"Connecting the dots – between the policy and implementation among different levels from the global down to the local – is important to really get the adaptation agenda moving and unleash an unprecedented drive for adaptation implementation," she said.

Harjeet Singh from ActionAid said a main challenge for communicating climate change was that how communities were able to understand why changes were occurring.

When it comes to what is the key message to communicate, Wahlstrom said, it should begin with a perception that disaster should be seen as a development issue.

She emphasised: "Unless we can get it into development thinking, planning, action and investment, it is going to be a major challenge to make some sustainable progress."

She further explained that as many communities in disaster prone areas were also the poorest, they actually needed more development assistance than just disaster assistance.

"The right approach is to work on strengthening the economic capacity of these vulnerable people while making sure they have capacity to cope with disasters," Wahlstrom told Viet Nam News.

This conference is the first major community-level adaptation conference following the UN climate summit in Durban last year to keep track of how communities around the world are adapting to climate change.

As the host of this year's conference, Viet Nam has an opportunity to showcase its efforts in adapting to climate change.

Statistics from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment showed that over the last 10 years, 10,000 people were killed or missing due to unusual natural calamities believed to have been triggered by climate change. The monetary loss accounted for nearly 2 per cent of total GDP.

Deputy Chairman of the National Committee on Climate Change Dao Xuan Hoc said Viet Nam was implementing an ambitious community-based disaster risk management programme involving 6,000 communes in the most at risk parts of Viet Nam.

The communities, for the first time, would receive extensive training on disasters that could potentially occur in their areas and how to best prepare for them, he said, adding that the first batch of trainers for 18 provinces were ready to go into the field.

He said what was no less important than awareness-raising for communities was to have certain infrastructure in place.

"Even if a resident is well aware that he has to go to higher ground to avoid a storm, what is the point of it if there isn't a road?" Hoc said.

Finland helps VN adapt to climate changes

Finland's Foreign Ministry has funded a 500,000 EURO project to help Vietnamese coastal localities adapt to climate change.

The project started in the northern central province of Thanh Hoa and the southern province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau in late 2011 and is scheduled to be completed by October 2013.

As part of the project, a seminar on developing measures to combat climate change in the country's coastal regions was held in Thanh Hoa province on Apr. 18.

It will help appraise moves to deal with climate change and socio-economic development.

The impact of populations on the environment and defining threats of risks to underground water resources will also be discussed.

Participants hoped to come up with ways of promoting socio-economic development while dealing with impacts on the environment and climate change.

The project will give Vietnam the opportunity to set up new linkages to deal with urban geology, planning and surveys of water resources in the future.

Environmental protection plan requires 'radical policy changes'

Bui Cach Tuyen, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, spoke with Thoi bao kinh te Viet Nam (Viet Nam Economic Times) about the country's environmental problems.

What is the main reason for such high pollution coming from industrial parks, processing zones and traditional handicraft villages over recent years? Has the law on environmental pollution, issued in 2005, been brought into full play?

The implementation of the law has largely been a failure at the lower levels of our ministry's industries.

One of the reasons may be the low level of public awareness. Managerial agencies have also failed to grasp the idea of sustainable growth. The lack of expertise on environmental protection has compounded the problem.

For one thing, agencies must appeal to employees who work in other industries. Despite inspections, the situation is still complicated. Around 1,600 producers have been inspected, and fines of VND40 billion (US\$1.9 million) have been collected in three years.

You have to realise that the law on environmental protection were issued in 2005. This was a long time ago, and many of them are not up to date, leaving loopholes that industries take advantage of.

The law drafted at this time do not differentiate between economic zones and industrial parks. In reality, the workings of the two are different. An economic zone may contain a number of industrial parks. The assignment of these titles industrial parks and economic zones has been unclear thus far. The law should be changed to meet new socio-economic realities.

But there is a legal framework in place that covers both industrial parks and economic zones. Why are violators of the law not forced to cease their operations?

In the first phase of economic development in all countries, if their economies strongly grow so does the environmental pollution.

Until the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increases to a certain level, both governmental agencies and individuals will be able to take action to reduce pollution levels. According to the experiences of other countries, when the GDP per capita rises to a certain level, pollution will be reduced. Historically, once the GDP per capita reaches US\$6,000-12,000 per annum, pollution will decline.

Viet Nam is still a developing country, and currently the GDP per capita is just over \$1,000. Still, we can set realistic targets that could help with this problem.

The most important thing is to raise the awareness of both enterprises and individuals. It is also necessary to set up automatic observation stations to help authorised agencies to monitor and control sources of air and water pollution. Another priority is to establish a Law system that can deal with the various sources of polluters in a legal and fair way.

For example, local leaders order the closing of polluting enterprises, while local department heads say that such decision are not in line with investment or commercial laws. This lack of co-ordination adds to the inability of agencies to enforce the law.

Also, jobs must be taken into account. Many of these companies, while they might cause pollution, also provide jobs to many people.

In your opinion, what is the best solution to solve the pollution problem?

As far as I know, in the northern province of Bac Ninh, the People's Committee has approved a VND80 billion (\$3.8 million) project to treat the pollution that comes from Phong Khe traditional paper-making village. However, we still have to keep in mind that this is just one craft village. There are many others around the country that pose the same problem.

In reality, the Government has made efforts to reduce the pollution coming from these villages. But, because of a lack of managerial mechanisms, much of these investments to curb their harmful effects have been wasted.

If we want to properly tackle this problem, it will take drastic measures from the Government and local people's committees, as well as the co-operation of social and political organizations, interested individuals and non-governmental organizations.

Polluting tapioca firm to be punished

Ninh Thuan Province Department of Natural Resources and Environment asked the provincial People's Committee to punish Fococev Company's tapioca processing factory for polluting the environment.

According to the department's deputy director Le Huyen, analysis of the factory's waste water samples revealed that the pollution level exceeded the permissible standard.

The department also ordered the factory to treat waste following its approved environmental impact assessment report.

City aims for green canals after project ends

Sitting in front of her house near the Tau Hu-Ben Nghe canal, Nguyen Thi Thom remembers when the canal stank horribly and was bordered with makeshift houses.

Her family has lived near Cau Kieu Bridge which spans the Tau Hu-Ben Nghe canal in Phu Nhuan District for nearly 40 years.

"During the time, I have seen countless changes but the life of people here only really changed when the city's water environmental improvement projects began," she said.

"In the past, I noticed that no species could live in the putrid water of Tau Hu – Ben Nghe Canal, but now my family members and neighbours have a peaceful life here, thanks to the project."

Thom as well as thousands of other households that live along the Tau Hu – Ben Nghe and Nhieu Loc – Thi Nghe canals benefited a great deal from the environmental sanitation projects.

The city's two major canals, the Tau Hu-Ben Nghe and Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe, run through 10 inner-city districts including Districts 1, 4, 5, 6 and Phu Nhuan.

Over the last 37 years, the city government has made great efforts to improve canals in the city.

Currently, the city is implementing a water environment improvement project and an urban environmental sanitation project.

Although the projects are not finished, they have made important contributions to reducing street flooding, improving traffic and public health as well as the quality of life in the city.

Wastewater has been collected and treated from nearly three million households in districts of 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, Phu Nhuan, Tan Binh, Binh Thanh, Go Vap and Binh Chanh.

Luong Minh Phuc, head of the managing board of the Water Environment Improvement Project, said the project's first phase had been completed.

The Binh Hung wastewater treatment plant was built with a capacity of 141,000 cubic metres per day.

Equipment was installed to collect wastewater from households living near the Tau Hu-Ben Nghe Canal's basin and to transfer water to the Binh Hung wastewater treatment plant in Binh Chanh District.

"The water discharged into the Tau Hu-Nhieu Loc Canal now contains rainwater and treated water. The canal's bed was also dredged," Phuc said.

The Water Environment Improvement Project is supported by the Japanese Government with a total ODA loan of US\$235.7 million through the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC).

Work on the Environmental Sanitation Project in the basin of the Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe Canal officially began in 2003, also helping the city fight flooding woes and environmental pollution stretching over 33 square kilometres in seven districts.

The Nhieu Loc – Thi Nghe basin is home to about 1.2 million people. The area's canal is also heavily polluted by untreated wastewater from an aged sewer system inadequate to serve the rapidly growing population.

To meet the city's goal of becoming a modern economic hub for Viet Nam, wastewater flows needed to be removed from the basin and canal.

The Environmental Sanitation Project includes a massive 800,000 cubic metres per-day wastewater pumping station, as well as wastewater, drainage and solid waste components. It also treats the water to improve its quality.

Phan Chau Thuan, deputy head of the managing board of the Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe Environmental Sanitation Project, said: "The Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe in the near future will be a green canal because wastewater in the canal will be collected and treated at a wastewater treatment plant that is expected to be built in District 2."

The first phase of the project, expected to be done by the end of June, has cost about \$317 million, including \$294 million from Official Development Assistance funds and local counter-capital of nearly \$23 million.

City authorities have recently worked with related agencies and the project's managing board to consider the design of land that borders the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa roads, which run along the canal.

"Although the project is not complete, the work done thus far has helped to improve the city's image as well as the living conditions of residents," Thuan said.