



The Global Youth Wellbeing Index

A VIETNAM CASE STUDY

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ABOUT HILTON WORLDWIDE

Hilton Worldwide supports the development of the Global Youth Wellbeing Index: A Vietnam Case Study to raise awareness about youth wellbeing and to advocate for increased resources to support youth development. These publications serve as an important roadmap for the company's commitment to connect, prepare and employ one million young people by 2019. The content of this publication is the responsibility of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the International Youth Foundation and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of Hilton Worldwide.

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Foreword



Vietnam's achievements in reducing poverty, boosting the economy, and creating early gains in youth development make it a real success story. Yet according to the report you are about to read, that trajectory of growth and development can only be sustained with more targeted investments in the country's younger generation—in such areas as marketable skills training, expanded civic engagement opportunities, and attention to the specific challenges facing Vietnamese young women. This study, supported by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and Hilton Worldwide (Hilton), ensures that government, business and civic leaders in Vietnam and globally have the data analysis and background context they need to effectively shape those critical investments and policies.

This Vietnam Case Study is an outgrowth of the Global Youth Wellbeing Index, a groundbreaking measurement and information tool launched last year by IYF, Hilton, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Released in April 2014, the Global Index was the first comprehensive assessment of youth wellbeing—presented through the lens of six interconnected areas: citizen participation, economic opportunity, health, education, information and communication technology, and safety and security.

Today, an estimated 620 million young men and women worldwide are neither working nor studying. To effectively address their needs and hopes for the future, we must know who these young people are, what they say they need to be successful, which services they can already access, and gaps that must be closed. Through its holistic, data-driven analysis of young people in 30 countries, the Global Index is designed to help all of us—business executives, government leaders, policy makers, donor organizations, and civil society organizations—make informed decisions and strategic

investments that support youth programming where it is most needed and can deliver the greatest impact.

So why did IYF and Hilton decide to develop this one-country study of Vietnamese youth? We knew the Global Index was a valuable tool in our collective pursuit for more relevant, data-driven analysis. But we also recognize that to guide pro-youth investments and policies even more effectively, stakeholders would need more nuanced portraits of young people's lives and aspirations and greater detail on the local context. This Vietnam study demonstrates the practical "value add" of these deeper dives.

The global partnership between IYF and Hilton is based on a shared belief that making strategic investments that ensure young people find their place in the 21st Century workforce is critical for both business development and human progress. By 2025, the travel and hospitality sector will support the employment of 357 million people—including the creation of 80 million new jobs over the next decade.¹ Many of those jobs will need to be filled by young people seeking to build their careers and futures. A well trained workforce is the pipeline to successful growth within this and other global industries. It is also the path to a more economically stable and ultimately peaceful planet. That is why we are working together, and with many others, to open doors of opportunity for millions of youth worldwide.

Today's young men and women have enormous potential to secure economic growth and prosperity not only in Vietnam—but in all countries across the globe. By promoting a more informed body of work that helps all of us more successfully expand their social and economic opportunities, we can truly transform young lives and our collective futures in the years ahead. So please, read this report and then join us in this global youth empowerment effort. There is much more to be done.

William S. Reese, President and CEO, IYF

Christopher J. Nassetta, President and CEO, Hilton Worldwide

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Global Youth Wellbeing Index Rankings

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Australia | 16 Mexico |
| 2 Sweden | 17 Jordan |
| 3 South Korea | 18 Turkey |
| 4 United Kingdom | 19 Indonesia |
| 5 Germany | 20 Morocco |
| 6 United States | 21 Ghana |
| 7 Japan | 22 Philippines |
| 8 Spain | 23 South Africa |
| 9 Saudi Arabia | 24 Egypt |
| 10 Thailand | 25 Russia |
| 11 Vietnam | 26 India |
| 12 Peru | 27 Kenya |
| 13 Colombia | 28 Tanzania |
| 14 China | 29 Uganda |
| 15 Brazil | 30 Nigeria |

Summary



Vietnam is considered by many to be a development success story. Its dramatic success in poverty reduction, robust economic growth, and significant progress on social indicators has helped the country achieve many Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This case study looks at Vietnam's development story through a youth-centric lens. In the inaugural Global Youth Wellbeing Index² ("Global Index"), Vietnam's results demonstrate that with strategic policies and investments, youth can be well served even where resources are constrained, but also that youth are not necessarily benefitting from national growth and development. This paper uses findings from the Global Index along with absolute and additional available data, trends and policy considerations to inform stakeholders on the current state of youth in Vietnam, to highlight gaps, and to advance an even brighter and more inclusive future.

In the Global Index, Vietnam shows strong performance relative to its income peer group in economic opportunity and health, but comes up shorter in other areas of youth wellbeing including education, information and communications technology, and citizen participation. Young people are generally, but not without exception, found to be optimistic about their state of affairs and their futures. At the same time, the deeper dive and closer look at further disaggregated data by gender and region reveal more nuanced opportunities and challenges. Given Vietnam's demographics, youth today present a resource for growth and progress if their potential is unleashed, their talents utilized, needs understood and met, and aspirations realized. However, as birth rates fall and the population ages, the ability to cash in on a "demographic dividend" may be limited.

1 Introduction: Snapshot of Development and Youth in Vietnam

PROGRESS MADE

Vietnam is considered by many to be a development success story due to its dramatic achievements in poverty reduction, robust economic growth, and significant progress on social indicators and achievement of many MDGs. In 2013, Vietnam posted a score of .638 on the Human Development Index, ranking at 121 of 187 countries and landing in the “medium” category. Impressively, between 1980 (the first HDI) and 2013, Vietnam has increased her score by 38 percent. Gross National Income Per Capita has more than quadrupled.

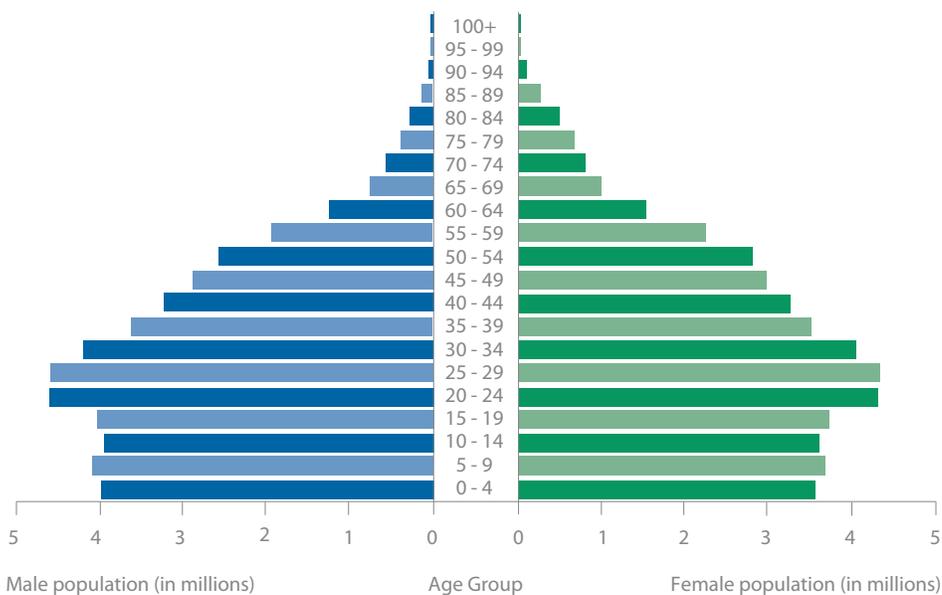
The country has also made impressive progress against the MDGs³ as it has achieved MDG 1 on eradication of extreme hunger and poverty ahead of the 2015 expiration. Under the MDG framework, notable progress has been made on the youth-oriented targets:

- Youth literacy (MDG2) stands at about 98 percent with near parity between males and females.
- At the same time, progress toward gender equality (MDG3) also has been recorded in terms of upper secondary enrollment.
- Under maternal health (MDG5), young women have also seen improved outcomes, lower maternal mortality, and increasing access to contraception, and promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health rights.
- In the economic sphere, young people are likely seeing benefits indirectly from Vietnam’s progress in partnering for development (MDG8) including entry into the World Trade Organization and expansion of ASEAN agreements.

BUT RISKS REMAIN

Despite the positive trajectory, many wonder whether Vietnam can consolidate these gains and stay on course to capitalize on future growth opportunities. Similarly, to be sustainable, progress against remaining gaps needs to be more inclusive and targeted around inequality, as well as proactive in addressing new risks. Like its neighbors and peers, Vietnam struggles to grow with equity: her inequality adjusted HDI score drops 14.9 percent (Thailand's score drops 20.7 percent, Philippines' 18.1 percent and Cambodia's 24.7 percent)⁴ Since 1998, with the exception of a jump in 2002 to 37.6 and a 2010 high of 39.35, Vietnam's GINI index (World Bank) has remained steady between 35 and 36.

Vietnam—2014



Vietnam currently enjoys a favorable population structure and large youth workforce. This brings the potential of a demographic dividend akin to the economic boom experienced by its Asian Tiger neighbors in the 1980s and 1990s. Youth currently account for more than a quarter of the country's population, but the "dividend window" is closing. Declining fertility means that the country is passing through its demographic transition and aging towards a less favorable population structure.

At the same time, as the structure of the economy shifts away from agriculture, the youth labor market is struggling to provide graduates with the skills the market demands ('skills gap') as well as to overcome a scarcity of workers in some occupations ('skills shortage'). In one recent

survey, for example, 80 percent of professional employers and 83 percent of technical employers reported young applicants lack required skills.⁵ As the economy continues to grow, so too does the risk that there will be insufficient labor to power the rapidly growing economic engine.

Vietnam's youth are a resource for growth and progress if their potential is unleashed, talents utilized, needs understood and met, and aspirations realized.

Social and political risks could also threaten continued youth development and economic growth. Vietnam's single party rule and more limited accountability and personal and societal freedoms may activate its more educated, empowered, globally-connected and integrated youth to seek more outlets for self-expression and political participation than current structures and systems allow. Similarly, in a 2011 survey by Transparency International 78 percent of youth said that a lack of integrity (including corruption) had a direct impact on their family and friends, and 86 percent perceived this integrity gap to be very harmful for their generation, the economy and the development of the country.⁶

Global Youth Wellbeing Index

DOMAIN

INDICATOR

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Economist Democracy Index
Existence of youth policy
Volunteer frequency
Candidacy age for national office
Youth perception of value in society
Youth feeling served by government

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

GDP per capita
Economic climate and competitiveness
Youth lending from a financial institution
Youth involved in early-stage entrepreneurial activity
Youth unemployment
Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)
Youth income and wealth expectations

EDUCATION

Public spending on education
School enrollment secondary
School enrollment tertiary
Youth literacy
School life expectancy, primary to tertiary
Educational satisfaction

HEALTH

Improved water source
Life expectancy at birth
People living with HIV/AIDs
Adolescent fertility
Tobacco use among youth
All causes of youth mortality
Self-harm among youth
Perceived stress levels among youth
Youth prioritization of healthy eating and living

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

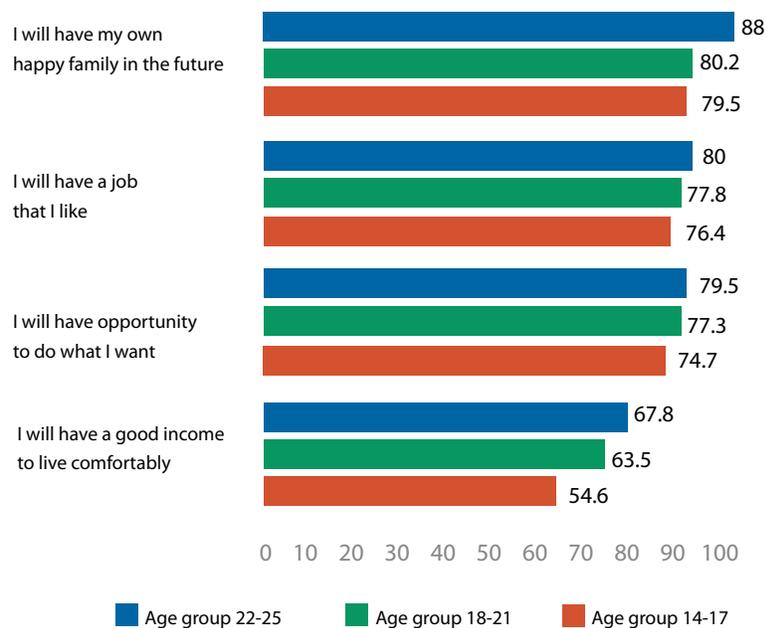
Access to electricity
Households with radio
ICT for development score
Digital natives
Youths' dependence on the internet

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Global Peace Index—Internal
Trafficking—U.S. State Department Tier Placement
Global disaster risk reduction score
Fundamental Rights—World Justice Report
Interpersonal violence among youth
Road injuries among youth
Youth concern for personal safety from crime and violence

2 The Wellbeing of Vietnamese Youth: Expanding the Analysis

To better catalyze, inform, and influence policy and investment decisions on behalf of the world's young people, the International Youth Foundation and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) partnered with Hilton Worldwide to develop a first-ever Global Youth Wellbeing Index. The inaugural Global Index launched in April 2014, compiles data for 30 countries across five major regions and all income categories, representing nearly 70 percent of the world's youth population. The Global Index includes 40 indicators comprising six domains: citizen participation, economic opportunity, education, health, information and communications technology, and safety and security. The following section analyzes the overall wellbeing of Vietnamese Youth in each of these domains, using finding from the Global Index as well as additional external sources.



Source: Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth Round 2 (SAVY 2) Hanoi Viet Nam: Ministry of Health, General Statistics Office, World Health Organization and the United Nations of Children's Fund, 2010.

Vietnam ranks 11th overall in the composite Global Index, first among the eight lower-middle income countries, and fifth among the nine countries in the Asia-Pacific region (Australia, China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam)⁷. Her scores show strengths and weaknesses that highlight both Vietnam's rapid growth and its challenges in terms of inclusivity. Vietnam achieves particularly robust results in the economic opportunity and health domains. The country is on par with other nations in terms of safety and security, but has room for improvement in the other areas. At the same time, across the domains, youth are generally optimistic about their circumstances and future prospects. When the eight subjective indicators included in the Global Index (the survey-based measures of youth attitudes, outlook or satisfaction) are removed, Vietnam sees a decrease in overall ranking moving from 11th to 16th place. The Government and UN-sponsored 2010 Survey of Vietnamese Youth 2 (SAVY 2) also found youth in Vietnam to be generally optimistic about their futures; and as shown in the graphic on the preceding page, levels of optimism increased with age; and perhaps, by association, with education or social capital.⁸

EDUCATION

Rank
20

Across the Global Index, a country's performance in education generally tracks closely with its other domain rankings. However, this is not necessarily the case for Vietnam, which falls vis-a-vis its showing in other areas. It ranks 20th behind its ASEAN peers (Thailand at 10th, Indonesia at 18th, Philippines at 19th) and ahead of China at 22nd. While scores are above the Index average for youth literacy, public spending on education, and satisfaction; Vietnam records substantially below par levels of secondary school enrollment, tertiary school enrollment, and school life expectancy. Early leaving remains a challenge, with net enrollment in upper secondary at 60 percent at large, with roughly only a third of students from the poorest quintile of the population in attendance at this level.

When one considers additional absolute data and learning metrics not included in the Global Index, an interesting success story emerges with regard to learning outcomes and workforce readiness (among those who stay in secondary school) which is likely contributing to more robust performance in economic opportunities (discussed below). In 2012, Vietnam participated for the first time in the Program for International

While Vietnamese youth are strong on fundamentals ... they do not possess the technical, technological, or cognitive and behavioral “soft” skills that the market increasingly demands.

Student Assessment (PISA), and its results demonstrate that its education system is doing a better job of developing skills in literacy and numeracy than a majority (roughly $\frac{2}{3}$) of peers and wealthier nations. PISA tests 15-year-olds on reading and numeracy. Among the 65 participating countries and economies Vietnam stood out among ASEAN peers, coming in 18th in math, 19th in reading and 8th in science. Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia ranked significantly lower in all three disciplines. Experts⁹ have attributed such success to implementing centrally-planned standards that improve “the fundamental school quality level” in country-wide primary education, as well as with a high level of professionalism and capacity among teachers. However, results are not consistent across the country and children from more disadvantaged households and in schools with weaker infrastructure (especially sanitation, electricity, and computers) and less access to learning materials were likely to earn lower scores.

At the same time, recent studies¹⁰ also demonstrate that young people struggle to transition from education to employment in a modernizing and increasingly global knowledge and technology economy. These constraints as well as a traditional prejudice against the role of the private sector in public education are widening the skills gap. While Vietnamese youth are strong on fundamentals, as PISA scores suggest, they do not necessarily possess the technical, technological, or cognitive and behavioral “soft” skills that the market increasingly demands.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Rank

6

Across all 30 countries included in the Global Index, the domain score in economic opportunities had the lowest global average of the six domains; likely resulting in part from the lingering but often overlooked impacts on youth by the global recession and financial crisis. Yet, relative to her results in the other domains and the results of her peers, Vietnam positions well here—ranking 6th; just behind Thailand in 5th and ahead of China in 10th, Indonesia in 18th, and the Philippines in 24th. Vietnam demonstrates above average financial inclusion and employment opportunities for youth, as well as robust lending to youth and comparatively fewer numbers of idle youth not in education, employment or training (NEET). As seen globally however, young people in Vietnam

are likely underrepresented in larger enterprises and comprise a larger share of the workforce in the more precarious informal economy which poses risks to their economic future. And still, poverty remains the reality for many Vietnamese as evidenced in part by a lower middle income per capita GDP; and youth suffer from a weak macroeconomic climate and relatively unfavorable enabling environment. Furthermore, entrepreneurial activity among Vietnam's youth is relatively low.

National level data and additional data not included in the Global Index, however, tell a more nuanced and perhaps slightly different story of youth economic opportunity and participation in Vietnam. SAVY 2 data reveals that the majority of those in paid work are in unskilled jobs—suggesting a need to examine the quality of work and the pathways they do or do not provide for future lifelong opportunity and national growth. Among those aged 18 to 21, 77 percent report having unskilled jobs; the figure drops to 60 percent for those aged 22 to 25.¹¹ Further, a recent Household Living Standard Survey (HLSS) revealed that those aged 15 to 29 accounted for nearly 50 percent of the total unemployed. At the same time, the labor force participation among both young men and women aged 15 to 19 is rising, suggesting that teens are increasingly foregoing education in favor of an earlier start in the workplace. This could affect their longer term trajectory for advancement, perpetuate the pattern of underemployment, and lead to rising unemployment and NEET levels if the supply of entry level or lower skill jobs and opportunities for future skills upgrading cannot meet this demand.

This skill mismatch is likely to negatively impact growth industries such as travel and tourism as Vietnam continues to transition from an agrarian to a service economy. In 2013, the industry contributed 9.6 percent of total GDP and that number is forecast to rise by more than 6 percent from 2014–2024.¹² The impact on employment has been equally profound, with the total contribution, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, at 7.9 percent in 2013. Young people, if provided with quality skills training and job placement services, are well positioned to assume many of these employment vacancies.

It is also worth noting that the unemployed in Vietnam tend to be relatively highly educated, with one third having an upper secondary or higher level of

Young people in Vietnam are likely underrepresented in larger enterprises and comprise a larger share of the workforce in the more precarious informal economy which poses risks to their economic future.

attainment (2009 Census). This pattern suggests demand side constraints in hiring and job creation that echo Vietnam's weaker performance on the environmental indicators measuring macroeconomic, investment and business climate. It also suggests that information gaps between employers, educators and students loom large—a challenge seen worldwide—where more efforts like the collaboration between the Ministry of Labor, Industry and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Central Youth Union to establish 10 centers for job counseling, vocational training and employment service are needed to bridge this gap.

With regard to entrepreneurship, one recent survey found youth to have strong interest in starting a business but capital remains a significant constraint along with corruption, bureaucracy, and societal pressures.¹³ Similarly, unfortunately, Vietnam's results in the 2015 Doing Business Index are mixed. Though Vietnam ranks 78 overall out of 189 economies, Doing Business also shows that it became more difficult to start a business in the past year. Vietnam dropped multiple spots in the areas of starting a business, getting credit, and protecting minority investors.¹⁴ Comparatively, Vietnam stands to learn from neighboring Malaysia (18th) and Thailand (26th); but demonstrates a better environment than China (90th), the Philippines (95th) and Indonesia (114th).

Similarly, trends show that due to limited opportunities and the skills mismatch, Vietnamese youth are

taking up second choice employment activities or working in the informal (or even illicit) economy where work may be lower pay, less productive or more insecure. Of additional concern is the level of youth in working poverty, where a majority of young people in the informal sector find themselves trapped in insecure and low wage work. At one point it was reported that working poverty rates among youth in Vietnam were five points above that of adults.¹⁵ Still, in surveys youth do express a relatively positive outlook on their economic future. Additionally, the rates of child and hazardous labor are concerning, especially among ethnic minorities for whom as many as 25 percent report working before age 15; also affecting educational outcomes and promoting inequality and social divides and potentially threatening cohesion.

HEALTH

Rank

6

Across the Global Index, countries demonstrate the most success in advancing the health of their youth populations. Indeed, Vietnam shares its highest domain ranking (6th) in health (as well as economic opportunity), perhaps due to substantial improvement in recent years on both population-wide and early child health indices. In health, Vietnam outranks all other

included countries of the Asia-Pacific, except Australia who came in 2nd. In the Global Index, Vietnam scores better than average on each of the nine health-related indicators, and compares particularly well on the indicators related to youth stress, tobacco use, and adolescent fertility rates. Interestingly, while younger adolescents (aged 13 to 15) are not smoking at high rates, older male Vietnamese youth (aged 15 to 24) are picking up the habit at alarming rates (last reported at 23.4 percent but just 0.3 percent among young women)¹⁶. This indicates that tobacco education and regulation has not been as successful in reaching older youth, and that cultural norms may be affecting girls' decision-making more than official policy or education programs.

Vietnam has a relatively low birth rate among teen women that is likely a reflection of a high knowledge of contraception—in a recent survey 92 percent knew about oral contraception and 95 percent condoms¹⁷, widespread access to reproductive health services, more limited instances of child marriage, being highly educated, and a relatively higher average age at the time of first birth, 22. Yet, while condom use has increased over the past decade in Vietnam, there are still significant gains to be made in terms of sex education and mitigating risks associated with sexual activity.¹⁸ Other factors impacting the future health of young people are newer health issues like Avian influenza, and the rising rate

of non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. Vietnam's results in the health domain model without subjective indicators indicate Vietnamese youth feel, on average, that their life is less stressful, and that they prioritize healthy eating and lifestyle which likely contributes to other positive outcomes. If emerging risks can be mitigated, there is certainly space for even further gains to young people's health, but the picture remains positive.

There are a significant number of disabled people living in Vietnam, many of which seek support through an active disability movement. Among the 78.5 million persons aged five years or older in Vietnam in 2009, almost 6.1 million, or 7.8 percent, live with one or more disability in seeing, hearing, walking or cognition, according to the Vietnam Population and Household Census (VPHC).¹⁹ Of the persons with disabilities registered in the VPHC, 4.7 percent are children and adolescents aged five to 17 years. Approximately 14 percent of Vietnamese youth report having a disability, many of which are vulnerable to extreme physical violence.²⁰ Among the most severely disabled are the children and youth who were born with defects linked to Agent Orange/dioxin exposure of a parent or grandparent as a legacy of the US-Vietnam war.²¹ Many of these children and youth live in remote and rural areas which were heavily sprayed with Agent Orange. The government provides some income support and free medical examination and treatment to those without means, but quality care is difficult to access and

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Given the rise of unwanted pregnancies, drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS in Vietnam, Tamsubantre seeks to utilize the Internet to offer free online counselling on HIV/AIDS and sexuality and reproductive health issues using a website that provides information dissemination and email discussion to Vietnamese youth. Launched in 2003, the website, www.tamsubantre.org, has been one of the top websites on education on these issues and has been designed and created by youth for youth, targeting those between the ages of 14 to 25.²⁵

many potential recipients are unaware of this support.²² Foreign NGOs and community-based organizations actively provide services in the disabled community, but adequate care, social inclusion and independent living remain a challenge. This has led to a rise in the number of Vietnamese youth migrating from rural areas to the city to access better care and services and to seek greater opportunity.²³

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Rank
22

Vietnam's lowest ranking falls within the ICT domain at 22nd; behind China at 15th, Thailand at 19th and just ahead of other ASEAN peers Indonesia in 24th, Philippines in 23rd. However, a closer look at individual indicators and absolute numbers and trends reveals a more promising situation that demonstrates progress. On the percentage of households with radios measure, Vietnam posts substantially lower rates than others in the Global Index, which drives down its domain score and rank. However, this could also point towards increasing access to and use of new media and technologies. While Vietnam scores better than the global average in households' access to electricity, its numbers of youth digital natives and the ITU's ICT for Development Index position (101st) were comparatively lower than other Global Index countries, including regional neighbor Thailand at 81st and China at 86th.

According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), internet penetration in Vietnam doubled between 2006 and 2011, and by 2013 mobile cellular subscriptions had risen to 130.9 per 100 inhabitants, with young people at the forefront of this surge in use. Meanwhile, other data points also point towards progress: the number of pay-TV subscribers almost doubled, 100 percent of State agencies developed their websites and portals increasing government transparency and accountability, and—of particular importance to young people—ICT training was also maintained in both scale and form; there were 290 universities and colleges providing IT and telecommunications training programs.²⁴ At the same time however, as internet access and usage among youth increases, so too do accompanying risks. Low digital literacy among parents and use of mobile phones and public access points pose emerging threats to child and youth safety online.

In one policy forum with experts and youth, discussions around the opportunities offered by digital tools focused on their potential for educational purposes. While data collected by UNICEF shows gaming, social networking, and entertainment are the dominant activities online, more than half of urban children and one third of rural children surveyed reported using the internet for educational purposes and sending education-related text or chat messages.²⁶ Indeed, when it comes to youth, ICT is often closely linked with expanding education, economic and civic opportunities. Furthermore, the rise in ICT may be linked to Vietnam's strong performance in other domains, such as health. For example, the online counseling and sexual education project "Tamsubantre," as mentioned on the previous page, provides a useful example of how improvements in access to ICT empower young people of Vietnam.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Rank
21

In citizen participation, Vietnam's 21st position is based on interesting and somewhat conflicting trends in youth civic and political participation. On the six Global Index indicators in this domain, its results are evenly split with above average performance on three and below average scores on three. Vietnam compares positively in terms of having a comprehensive national youth policy, lower candidacy age for parliament (21), and young people's faith in government. This is perhaps due to strength in the Communist Party's youth platforms and national organizations including the National Committee on Youth of Vietnam (NCYV), the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and the Vietnam Youth Federation. However, Vietnamese youth also indicated they felt less valued by society, they volunteer less frequently than similar Asian peers, and of great import, they face a less democratic environment overall.

Limitations to political or civil liberties threaten not only youth's ability to thrive, but also that of society overall. While Vietnam has yet to see the kind of unrest experienced by its neighbors and around the world, the risks are mounting, and Vietnamese civil society organizations long regarded by the donor community as capable of catalyzing reform have struggled to do so. A cross-section of available data helps explain the country's weaker results and need for improvement. For

In Concordia's 2014 study of Vietnamese youth, many respondents refused to answer questions on youth influence over government, levels of free speech, and corruption; suggesting that respondents feared repercussions over their responses.

example, Vietnam placed 100 out of 109 countries in Civicus' 2013 Civil Society Enabling Environment Index, well behind fellow ASEAN countries Indonesia at 59th, Thailand in 65th, Malaysia in 68th, and China at 89th. It scored even worse on the governance dimension, landing in 105th, which includes the largest share of indicators. Poor civil society-State relations, inadequate legal protections of civil and political rights and frequent violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are the principal reasons that these countries have very low scores in the governance dimension.²⁷ Similarly, in its 2014 World Report, Human Rights Watch warned of a seriously deteriorating situation which only worsened in 2013; a year marked by a severe and intensifying crackdown on critics, including long prison terms for many peaceful—young—activists whose “crime” was calling for political change.²⁸ Lastly, youth are acutely aware of and acknowledge the limits to their expression. For example, in Concordia's 2014 study of Vietnamese youth, many respondents refused to answer questions on youth influence over government, levels of free speech, and corruption; suggesting that respondents feared repercussions over their responses. This is supported by Transparency International's research that ranks Vietnam as 116 out of 177 countries on its 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Rank
15

At 15th, Vietnam sits just behind China (14th) at the bottom of the upper middle performance tier in the safety and security domain, and demonstrates a safer environment than Thailand at 22nd and Indonesia at 24th. Young people are faring well on indicators around societal crime and conflict (lower rates of interpersonal violence among youth, higher levels of internal peace as measured by the Global Peace Index, and an expressed sense of safety among youth surveyed). However, youth wellbeing is negatively affected by a weak judicial and enforcement environment as evidenced by poorer standing in the World Justice Report, as well as the prevalence of disaster risk. Road safety is also a significant issue, and in line with worldwide trends, traffic accidents—especially involving motorcycles—are the leading cause of death and serious injury among Vietnamese youth.

Like China and Indonesia, violence among youth is comparatively low vis-à-vis other Global Index countries including other ASEAN countries. Yet recent incidents and upward trending absolute numbers of youth involved in crime are of concern. In Ho Chi Minh City, for example, the police recorded more than 5,000 crimes

last year, 20 percent of which were serious crimes; and a rising number of which were committed by an “emergence of young criminals who are reckless, highly violent and brutal.” Nationwide, there were 37,221 crimes in 2012, a 2.67 percent increase over the previous year. A 2013 report by the Ministry of Public Security indicated that there has been an increase in crimes caused by young people; blaming the increase in youth criminality on unemployment, economic difficulties and other negative influences—including the availability of drugs and other ‘unhealthy cultural products’ via the internet.²⁹

Despite efforts to improve prevention, protection and prosecution, trafficking continues to victimize and put estimated thousands of youth—of both genders—at risk for labor and sexual exploitation as well as recruitment into the illicit economy and trade in humans.³⁰ According to the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), Vietnam is a major source country of formally recruited foreign labor, many of which end up in exploitative situations despite the Government’s adherence to bilateral, regional, and international laws and regulations.³¹ Young people may be lured into these situations by the false promise of valid employment and then may wind up in Vietnamese cities, or trafficked to Asian nations, or countries in Europe and the Middle East.³² Trafficking victims also include children who are coerced into Vietnam’s growing sex tourism industry; infants trafficked through counterfeit adoption; and young people in rural areas, particularly females. Despite myriad efforts to raise awareness, train local authorities, and alleviate poverty through school scholarships, vocational skills training and micro-credit programs, trafficking remains a significant impediment to overall youth wellbeing in Vietnam.

3 The Gender Dynamic

Although Vietnam outranks its regional peer group in gender equality, disparities exist between males and females. In the 2014 Human Development Report, Vietnam placed 58th of 149 countries, where Cambodia and Thailand placed 105th and 70th, respectively, in its Gender Inequality Index. Women and girls in Vietnam are both educated and employed at very similar rates as men and boys in comparable income, region, and age groups. Unfortunately, in spite of promising indicators that put women on par with men in many situations, traditional gender biases still hold strong in Vietnam and may threaten the ability of women to excel in public life. While nearly a quarter of legislative seats are held by women, a recent Asia Foundation study of over 2,500 young Vietnamese found only half of respondents believed that women are well suited for leadership in government or business. Surprisingly, male and female respondents were equally likely to believe that women should not pursue leadership roles.³³ However, in a separate study of urban youth on employment, gender was not seen as a major factor in finding a job; rather, education and social connections were seen as the greatest determinants.³⁴ In spite of this perception of gender not playing a large role, when privately surveyed, most Vietnamese youth do not identify females with the characteristics necessary for leadership in public life or business. This confidence gap and lack of incentives for women to pursue leadership roles can be viewed throughout the Vietnamese education system.

In education, female primary school enrollment slightly exceeded that of boys in 2012 and boys and girls showed nearly equal levels of youth literacy. While a 10 percent enrollment gap in favor of boys lingers at the secondary level, tertiary enrollment is largely equal. In spite of overall positive PISA results as discussed earlier, results indicate gender disparities, both in performance and in students' confidence in their abilities. Girls, and even those with equal performance to boys in

mathematics, had less confidence in their ability to learn and use mathematics. Girls were also slightly more likely to feel insecure when doing a math problem. In order to achieve at higher levels and pursue leadership, young girls must be as confident in their abilities as young boys. In terms of reading skills, girls outperformed boys in all countries included in the PISA, and Vietnam was no exception.³⁵

These differentials in learning outcomes may help explain why relative equality in education and even better test results, is not necessarily translating into equal economic participation and success among female youth. Generally speaking, economic inactivity trends higher among women than men, and especially among youth. While employment rates for young men and women have remained fairly stable since 2008, male employment ratios are still consistently higher, ranging from 60.4 to 61.9 percent, while the female employment ratio has ranged from 55.9 to 57.2 percent.

Notably, there is a significant gender gap in terms of education levels of the unemployed.³⁶ Data from the 2009 census also indicates that the percentage of unemployed females is higher at low education levels than at high ones, suggesting that there are fewer low-skill opportunities for females than males. Women increase their likelihood of employment as they gain more skills; 60.7 percent of unemployed individuals who never

attended school are female, whereas only 43.7 percent of unemployed individuals who completed upper secondary school or higher are female. Furthermore, available data, anecdotal evidence and experience suggest that young women may also confront stronger societal hurdles in starting a business and are less likely to access credit. World Bank financial inclusion data shows that Vietnamese women are generally less likely to have an account with a formal banking institution than their male counterparts (19 percent versus 24 percent).³⁷ Similarly, the 2013 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor for Vietnam reveals that entrepreneurial intention and activity are both higher among men compared to women, 25.3 percent versus 22.9 percent and 17 percent versus 14 percent respectively.

When considering health and safety, interesting patterns emerge where young men tend to be at the disadvantage. Overall, males are more likely to engage in risk-related behavior that can lead to illness and injury. For example, 2010 data show that male youth in Vietnam are at a higher risk of self-harm than females of the same age group (15 to 24). Young men are also significantly more prone to interpersonal violence. Increased alcohol consumption on the part of young males also raises the likelihood of personal injury and a number of other risk-related

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outcomes. One study of Nha Trang City showed that 78.2 percent of males aged 16 to 24 had consumed alcohol, in comparison with 56.1 percent of female respondents.³⁸ Young men are also more prone to road traffic injury. Where female youth aged 20 to 24 experienced 234 fatalities, young men of the same age who died as a result of traffic accident reached 2,050 in 2010 alone.³⁹

While young men are more likely to engage in so-called risky behaviors, the prevalence of infections (including HIV/AIDS) and increase in overall sexual activity among youth is reason for an increased focus on sexual education for both genders. One study shows that 28.6 percent of youths who engaged in premarital sex used condoms in their first sexual encounter, but that it was less common for females to do so.⁴⁰ Additionally, a 2013 study by the Ministry of Health reported that 16 percent of young people associated condoms with infidelity and sex workers.⁴¹ Perhaps owing to inconsistent use of contraception and resulting unintended pregnancies, Vietnam also has a comparatively high rate of abortion; in one estimation 40 percent.⁴² In response, the government and NGOs should consider how it can scale existing programs and capitalize on shifting views to increase contraception use.

4 The Rural-Urban Divide

Just as the life experiences and wellbeing of Vietnamese youth are impacted by gender, province or region also impacts their quality of life and opportunity. Urban and rural youth are likely to face different challenges and have different needs. Rural to urban migrants, in particular, are often among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged; and reports estimate that roughly half of such internal migrants are youth. Though the world is trending toward rapid urbanization, especially across the developing African and Asian continents, Vietnam's cities and metropolitan areas have been growing at a comparatively slower rate, a trend which may be influenced by the *ho khua* system.⁴³ The estimated rate of urbanization is 3.03 percent, from 2010 to 2015.⁴⁴ As of 2009, 70.4 percent of the country was considered rural, and 29.6 percent urban.⁴⁵ The pace of change in Vietnam, however, is expected to accelerate and it is estimated that 50 percent of the population will live in urban areas by 2025.⁴⁶ In Vietnam, the urban population has increased from 29 percent of the gross population in 2008 to 32 percent in 2013.

Educational opportunities and economic participation vary greatly depending on region in Vietnam. In 2009, the largest concentration of those who had never attended school was in the Central Highlands and Northern Midlands and mountains, rural areas with large ethnic minority populations.⁴⁷ Indeed, in the Young Lives school survey, the most disadvantaged sites studied are mostly in the rural, mountainous Lao Cai province, while the most advantaged are predominantly in the urban Da Nang metropolitan area.⁴⁸ Interestingly, the share of youth aged 15 to 24 in the labor force in urban areas was lower than in rural areas, but the share of labor force of those in prime working age (25 to 54) in urban areas was higher than in rural areas. This could suggest that urban youth tend to enter the labor force later than those in rural areas due perhaps to extended schooling, the inability to find a formal sector job, or accept what is available. Indeed at the same time, while not necessarily

uncommon in the developing world, urban unemployment was highest among those with a college degree (6.4 percent) but lowest for vocational training graduates (3.4 percent).⁴⁹

In 1993, less than 10 percent of employment in Vietnam was in non-agricultural sectors, but by 2010, over 20 percent of work was found outside of agriculture and trending even higher as urbanization picks up pace. Employment in the formal sector, in industry and services often suggests higher job quality than work in agriculture. For youth, wage employment outside agriculture was 39.4 percent compared to 33.7 percent for those aged 25 to 54 and 16 percent for 55 to 59. In general, the proportion of wage workers in non-agricultural sector is only 31.1 percent of total employment, and this was over twice as high in urban than in rural areas. Most of the non-agricultural work can be found in manufacturing, construction, and services, sectors that typically experience greater productivity than agriculture.⁵⁰ The highest concentration of unemployed youth was in the North and South Central Coast (27.1 percent of unemployed youth), followed by the Mekong Delta (21 percent)⁵¹.

The composition of unemployment also differs in rural and urban regions. In cities, youth are more likely to be unemployed than older workers (over age 50), while in rural areas, patterns are the opposite.⁵² While younger, more educated individuals

are more likely to find work in urban areas, older, less-skilled workers can become unemployed when no longer able to fulfill manual roles in agriculture. Beyond wage employment, anecdotal evidence also suggests that entrepreneurial opportunities are weaker for rural youth than their peers in the city. Many government training and business support programs are targeted in urban areas. NGO programs on the other hand, may cater to rural youth, but are viewed as having mixed results.⁵³

On many health and social indicators, rural youth—especially young women and girls—are likely to be at a disadvantage. Adolescent marriage for example (defined as marriage between individuals aged 15 to 19) was three times more prevalent in rural areas in 2009.⁵⁴ Predictably, as indicated by larger and younger marriage rates, rural young women also get pregnant earlier and more often.⁵⁵ While 16 percent of urban women report problems with their most recent pregnancy, 22.8 percent of rural women reported problems. Women aged 16 to 25 from urban areas also averaged more prenatal care visits than women in rural areas or from ethnic minority backgrounds. Rural women from ethnic minority backgrounds are also least likely to have a professional present when

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giving birth, increasing the likelihood of complications. Additionally, while rural youth are less likely to regularly exercise, they are also less likely to regularly smoke tobacco. The SAVY 2 shows interesting results

in terms of mental health, in that rural youths were less likely to experience depression or consider suicide than their urban counterparts.

In terms of other infrastructure and sanitation-hygiene, as of 2012, 98.2 percent of urban residents in Vietnam have access to improved water, as compared to 93.6 percent of rural dwellers. Just four years prior, this gap was five points higher, with only 86.4 percent of rural dwellers with access to improved water sources.⁵⁶

In spite of these gains, there remains a sizeable gap between rural and urban youth populations in terms of access to sanitation and other vital services. Though the challenges in each setting differ, surveys and studies consistently show

that living environment dramatically shapes the experience of young people in Vietnam and local policies and programs should be designed accordingly.

5 Policy Considerations

The results in the Global Index affirm the importance of enabling environments in which strong, cohesive, well-funded and enforced policies can make a significant difference in bringing positive development outcomes. Due to the many positive trends in youth development, Vietnam is often seen as a good example of strategic use of policy, programs and investments to support and promote young people even where resources may be more constrained. While an exhaustive review of every policy⁵⁷ that touches youth is outside the scope of this analysis, the Law on Youth and a number of 'domain' policies that help explain success are worth exploring.

The ministry charged with overall youth-related policy in Vietnam is the National Committee on Youth of Vietnam, which shapes and monitors youth-related policies and their implementation and executes cross-sector youth programs. Its Law on Youth of Vietnam, first drafted in 1981, addresses people aged 15 to 35 and includes a law that recognizes and supports youth volunteering.

The updated Law of 2005, which redefines youth as those aged 16 to 30, comprises 36 articles including regulations of youth to state, as well as of the state to its youth—and mandates the state to develop policies for youth in areas such as education, employment, health and recreation. The Law directly informs the Vietnamese Youth Development Strategy 2011-2020.⁵⁸ Its objectives include preparing a patriotic generation and equipping the nation's youthful workforce to meet globalizing market demands as well as to be qualified public servants and leaders. Unlike many other national youth policies, it includes a number of measurable targets including:

- Annually, 100 percent of young men and women to be in uniformed services;
- Every year, 600,000 new jobs to be created for young people, as more than 80 percent of young people receive career and employment advice; The unemployment rate among the urban youth to be reduced to below 7 percent and the rural youth's jobless rate reduced to below 6 percent;
- By 2020, at least 80 percent of Vietnamese young people to be equipped with sound life skills and awareness of gender equality, reproductive health, building a happy family, domestic violence control;
- By 2020, 80 percent of young people to obtain senior secondary education or its equivalent; a ratio of 450 college students in every 10,000 population to be achieved;
- By 2020, 70 percent of young members of the workforce to be skilled workers; 100% of young people and school students to receive vocational training;
- Every year, refresher training and capacity building on public administration to be delivered to at least 20 percent of young commune level public officials and employees;
- Annually, communication, dissemination and legal education to be delivered to 500,000 self-employed young people and young workers in industrial parks and economic zones; and legal counsels to be provided to 300,000 rural, upland, ethnic young people;
- Expectedly by 2020, the average height of 18-year-old young men and women to measure 1.67 meters and 1.56 meters, respectively.

In addition to the Law and Strategy, numerous sector-level policies, strategies and government-sponsored projects (and an increasing number of partnerships) explicitly seek to improve conditions and outcomes for youth, a selection of which are highlighted below. However, due in part to inadequate or inaccessible data and transparency, the extent of implementation, enforcement, and effectiveness of many policies and programs remains at times unclear.

In education for example, the government adopted a resolution at the end of 2013⁵⁹ to address historical weaknesses in the education system such as corruption, hidden costs, and outdated pedagogy based on rote memorization through reforms to address the sector's targets, methodology, mechanism and policies. With regard to technical education, in 2006 the government instituted a well-regarded law on Vocational Training. The law sets the policies on vocational training including: (i) encouraging investment in the vocational training network,

and improving vocational training quality; (ii) improving quality through renewed syllabuses, curricula, teaching methods, trainer development, modernized equipment, and scientific research; (iii) developing some vocation training institutions to regional and world levels; (iv) paying due attention to disadvantaged areas, and supporting target groups such as the poor, disabled, homeless, orphans, landless agricultural workers, ethnic minorities, and veterans; (v) giving priority to training for occupations required by the market but that are difficult to “socialize;” and (vi) “socializing” (or privatizing) vocational training by encouraging stakeholders to set up vocational training institutions. In addition, the law provides forward-thinking guidance on flexible provision, quality control, governance and management, financing, and the role of enterprises.⁶⁰

With regard to health and gender, relatively strong policies may help explain their robust results and provide some insights for other countries. In an effort curb the alarming levels of smoking for example, a new Law on Prevention and Control of Tobacco Harms was promulgated in May, 2013. It includes a number of provisions on marketing, ban in public spaces, and several stipulations aimed at youth such as: the prohibition of tobacco sales within 100 meters of educational and health care facilities and a ban on packs with fewer than 20 cigarettes that youth and others find more affordable.⁶¹ In sexual and reproductive health, the policy environment is supportive: the Penal code criminalizes intercourse between adults and children aged 13 to 16; decrees legal marriage for women aged 18 and men aged 20; and the 1989 Law on Protection of People’s health guarantees that women have the right to choose. Further, a Law on Gender Equality was approved in 2006; UN Women in Vietnam has taken the lead on funding many programs and young women are likely benefiting from implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality that seeks to eliminate gender-based discrimination and stereotypes, and propel women from all backgrounds to leadership roles in government and the private sector.

In the safety and security domain, new legislation on trafficking in persons was adopted in Vietnam in March of 2011. The new law covers all forms of exploitation indicated in the UN Trafficking Protocol. In July 2013, the Supreme People’s Court, the Supreme People’s Procuracy, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Ministry of Justice issued a joint circular establishing criminal penalties for the trafficking crimes defined in Vietnam’s 2012 anti-trafficking law. However, the effectiveness of the new measures in preventing and

prosecuting these activities is yet to be seen. With regard to road safety, Vietnam began mandating helmet use for motorcycle drivers and passengers in 2001, but enforcement of this policy has been limited, especially concerning young riders. Helmet use, overall, has drastically increased among adults and young adults; but more effort needs to be made to educate, raise policy awareness and counter the false perception that helmet-use can increase the likelihood of injury in children, significant risk remains for children and younger riders.

Conclusions

In a 2007 analysis of Vietnam's growth and its youth, the World Bank noted that "growth has not fixed all problems. Indeed, it may have brought some new ones to Vietnamese youth: exposure to new health risks, difficult conditions among rural migrants, frustration with the inability to find jobs that match their higher levels of education and the inadequacy of the skills produced by the education system relative to the changing needs of the labor market."⁶² We learn from the Global Index and this analysis that while progress is being made, the status of youth is not necessarily improving as quickly. It affirms the importance of enabling environments, strong systems, robust policies, and accountable, transparent leadership and governance for youth success. In the context of looking to the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and global frameworks, the Global Index provides a useful point of departure for comparative and national assessments, but this analysis underscores that policies and programs to address the diversity of youth and reach those most disadvantaged should be informed by additional data collection, analysis and consultation among regions and segments of the youth population. Chiefly, closer attention needs to be paid to where young men and women, rural or urban, disabled or able-bodied, may be falling behind—even where youth trend positively overall.

Otherwise, to improve the education to employment pathway for example, Vietnam needs more communication and partnership among and between policy-makers, businesses, and educators at secondary and tertiary levels. This will enable the government to understand market demand and to equip youth with the necessary skills and competencies, especially to ensure that rural youth are not left out of technical training opportunities. The workforce will then be better able to adapt as the structure of the economy moves away from agriculture towards manufacturing, service and technological sectors. In health, Vietnam could benefit from more targeted sexual education programs that work with females to learn about contraception and their right to make their own reproductive decisions; as well as with vulnerable populations such as LGBT youth. Similarly, more attention is needed on emerging health risks.

In terms of participation, the stifling of free speech, civil society, and perception of corruption threatens to undermine economic progress. Government should actively engage its young citizens in two-way dialogue, increase transparency and provide more open data, promote volunteerism and service learning, and offer other concrete channels of societal participation. If young people are afforded meaningful avenues of participation, they may play a constructive role in Vietnam's future growth and development as a resource and asset.

Though risks remain, Vietnam is on a positive growth and development trajectory. With increased strategic investment, young people can see a brighter future for themselves and the nation will be poised to seize the opportunity in its youth.

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