



1 in 5

children in rural Vietnam **have to work** to support their families.



Our Presence in Vietnam



Country Information

Population	95.5 million
Land area	331,212 km ²
Languages of instruction	Vietnamese
Launch of operations	2001
Room to Read offices	Ho Chi Minh City

Country Overview

Vietnam has had a booming and growing economy since 1986 when the government, the Communist Party of Vietnam, implemented market reforms and shifted to a socialist market economy system, called the Đổi Mới reforms. These changes spurred economic growth and transformed Vietnam from an impoverished, war-torn nation into a lower middle-income country. The World Bank shows that between 2002 and 2018, poverty rates declined from more than 70 percent to less than 6 percent, where 45 million Vietnamese people were lifted out of poverty. The Economist reports that this was the second-fastest economic growth rate worldwide at that time.

However, this economic rise is not guaranteed to continue, and there is a need for the country to upskill its labor force. The Asian Development Bank estimates that approximated 1 million agricultural workers transition into industry and service jobs every year in Vietnam. Alongside this economic change, Vietnam is experiencing demographic and social change, as well. Today, World Bank data shows that 70 percent of the population is under 35 years old.

Yet there remain disparities between economic equity and access. Vietnamese women receive a 25 percent lower income than men on average (World Bank). Additionally, the 53 ethnic minorities that make up 14 percent of the population are often discriminated against and not offered the same job opportunities as the majority.

Vietnam also faces challenges regarding its high vulnerability to climate change. Rapid growth, industrialization and salinization have harmed the country’s environment and natural assets, such as exploitation of sand, fisheries and timber. The World Bank explains how this could negatively affect long-term growth throughout the future.

The government of Vietnam is aware of their need to lower the country’s environmental footprint while maintaining progress and is actively working to address these challenges.

Educational Landscape

Over the past decades, Vietnam has focused on the modernization of its education system to achieve further economic growth. The government has increased its education spending, which stood at 14 percent in 2018, after peaking at 19 percent in 2012 (World Bank). Education is free and compulsory for children until the age of 11 in Grade 5. However, UNESCO reports that current reforms seek to universalize and extend compulsory education until age 15 in Grade 9.

Despite these efforts, there are also significant additional educational costs that lead to inequalities across regions. Students from poor, rural and ethnic backgrounds such as those who reside in the Mekong Delta and Highland regions, are more likely to drop out at the age between 6-15. Based on a recent UNESCO report, many primary schools charge a variety of supplementary fees for textbooks, uniforms and other materials, and secondary schools are allowed to charge tuition and other fees. In addition, many parents pay for private lessons for their children to ensure academic success. This causes children from low-income families – such as economically disadvantaged ethnic minorities – to fall behind and be unable to attend school regularly. Therefore, there is a large gap in education access and achievement.

History and Results

Room to Read implemented our Literacy and Girls’ Education Programs in Vietnam in 2001 as our second country of operation. We initially ran programming in areas along the Mekong Delta and have since expanded to northern Vietnam and across the central coast.

The Vietnamese government’s educational policies closely align with our program areas, allowing us to collaborate with the government and amplify our impact to effect system-level change. In 2015, the government adapted parts of our library model to help students build a habit of reading. Then in June 2018, we hosted a National Library Partnership Workshop to explore how to replicate our model across high-need regions nationwide.



Most recently, we expanded our technical assistance work with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and introduced our school library model at scale. Our team inaugurated nearly 700 libraries across our provinces in 2019, the highest number of libraries we have reached in one academic year. The project uses an innovative, three-tiered I do, We do, You do approach, which incorporates the MoET’s partnership through demonstration libraries, collaboration libraries and expansion libraries respectively. This partnership model ensures that multiple stakeholders from communities, governments and schools are passionately working to develop the reading culture. In 2019, the MoET also agreed on a three-year partnership with Room to Read to pilot a school-based mentoring model in seven schools. This pilot project will be evaluated in 2021 to prepare for scale.

We are proud to see that our programs and projects are successful across Vietnam in 35 out of 63 provinces, and we will continue to be a catalyst for change by transforming the lives of thousands of children across the country.

Our Results in Vietnam

Literacy Program

New children benefited in 2018	75,836
Children benefited cumulatively	948,678
New schools in 2018	115
Schools cumulatively	1,335
New children’s books published in 2018	10
Books distributed cumulatively	1,894,194

Girls’ Education Program

New participants in 2018	469
Number of participants cumulatively	5,653
New secondary school graduates in 2018	235
Secondary school graduates cumulatively	1,046

Give with confidence. Room to Read has achieved 13 fourstar ratings from Charity Navigator since 2007, an achievement that less than 1% of charities can claim.

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