Viet Nam: Information sheet on climate change, air pollution, and health

Climate change and air pollution are closely related and pose significant risks to human health, environments, and economies. Climate change directly harms health while also impacting social and environmental determinants of health – clean air, safe drinking water, secure and sufficient food, housing, education and livelihoods. Greenhouse gases (GHGs), air pollution, black carbon, and methane emitted from energy, industry, transport, household, agricultural, and waste management sectors harm environment and population health. Countries have a unique opportunity to improve both the environment, population health and wellbeing by integrating meaningful health and air pollution mitigation activities into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). This info sheet provides an overview of some of the main health impacts of climate change in Viet Nam to help shape adaptation plans while also identifying opportunities to reduce GHG emissions and air pollution – and thus promote public health.

Ambient air pollution from human activities was responsible for more than 63,800 deaths from particulate air pollution ($PM_{2.5}$) in Viet Nam in 2021 [1]. Of these deaths, 30 percent came from fossil fuel burning, with 13 percent from coal burning alone, and 9 percent from biomass burning (Figure 1) [1]. The estimated economic value of these premature deaths was US$22.9 billion [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports for Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 3.9.1 (Mortality from air pollution) that deaths attributable to ambient air pollution in Viet Nam represent 12 percent of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, 21 percent of ischemic heart disease, 13 percent of ischemic stroke, 18 percent of lower respiratory infections, and 7 percent of lung cancer deaths [2]. Most of these deaths can be prevented by shifting to renewable energy sources that avoid the combustion of fossil fuels and biomass, while reducing GHG emissions.

VIET NAM'S ENGAGEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE, AIR POLLUTION, AND HEALTH

Viet Nam has a humid subtropical climate in the north and tropical savannah climate in the south; it is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and air pollution and actively engaged in multilateral environment policy and mitigation efforts that integrate air pollution, climate change, and health. Viet Nam's constitution specifies that "citizens have the right to health protection and care" [3]. Viet Nam's NDC 2.0 of 2022 includes multiple health references and highlights the need reduce emissions [4]. Furthermore, Viet Nam has endorsed meaningful action to reduce short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) including methane, black carbon, and hydrofluorocarbons, joining the Climate and Clean Air Coalition in 2017 [5], the Global Methane Pledge (GMP) in 2021 [6] and partnering with the Clean Cooking Alliance [7]. In 2024, the Viet Nam Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment co-hosted a conference with international partners –

"Fourth International Conference on Environmental Pollution, Restoration, and Management," focusing on air pollution from Industry, transportation, and chemical emissions, including public health impact and remediation strategies [8]. Viet Nam committed to build a climate-resilient health system by joining the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH) [9]. Complementing this, Viet Nam endorsed the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health in which countries committed to "*take health into account, as appropriate, in designing the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions...*" [10]. In 2018, Viet Nam passed Decision No. 891/QĐ-BTNMT as a "National Plan on Air Quality Management for the 2021-2025 period" [11]. These policy objectives can be further strengthened in Viet Nam's third NDC, providing benefit amplifiers for public health, wellbeing, development, and the economy.

SOURCES OF HEALTH-HARMING AIR POLLUTANTS IN VIET NAM

Particulate matter (PM) or particle pollution is a mixture of airborne solid particles and liquid droplets. Out of these, $PM_{2.5}$ (inhalable particles 2.5 micrometres or smaller in diameter) are particularly harmful to health, increasing the risk of heart, cardiovascular, lung, and neurological disease, and cancer, amongst others. Black carbon, or soot, is a powerful pollutant and a short-lived climate pollutant (SLCP, also known as super pollutants). Methane (CH4) is a GHG, SLCP, and major contributor to ground level ozone, which has powerful impacts on both human health and climate change. Polluting emissions share the same general sources as GHG emissions – namely energy / power, transport, industry, waste sector combustion, and agriculture. The leading sector sources of $PM_{2.5}$ in Viet Nam are residential buildings, anthropogenic dust, industry, waste, energy, and transport [12]; while the lead sector sources of black carbon include industry, transport, waste, agriculture, buildings, and energy; and the leading sector sources of methane are agriculture, energy, buildings, industry, and transport [13] (Table 1).

Table 1: Viet Nam sector sources of PM2.5, Black Carbon, and Methane

$PM_{2.5}$ *(source: State of Global Air* [12])		Black Carbon *(source: Community Emissions Data Systems* [13])		Methane *(source: Community Emissions Data Systems* [13])	
Residential buildings	37.0 %	Industry	38.1 %	Agriculture	47.4 %
Anthropogenic dust	10.2 %	Transport	16.2 %	Energy	26.9 %
Industry	9.5 %	Waste	15.5 %	Waste	23.8 %
Waste	8.1 %	Agriculture	13.5 %	Buildings	1.52 %
Energy	6.3 %	Buildings	11.6 %	Industry	.26 %
Transport	6.2 %	Energy	4.9 %	Transport	.11 %

Sources: State of Global Air 2024 [12]; Community Emissions Data System for Historical Emissions 2024 [13].

POTENTIAL FOR HEALTH BENEFITS RESULTING FROM MITIGATION IN VIET NAM

Climate change mitigation efforts could provide major opportunities for the health of local populations in Viet Nam. By targeting leading sources of GHG emissions, and reducing $PM_{2.5}$, black carbon, methane, and other super pollutants, Viet Nam can achieve near-term climate gains while improving its air quality, public health, and the economy. Strengthening the links between climate and GHG mitigation policy, and air pollution and health objectives, including through Viet Nam's third NDC, could help shape policy and plans that save thousands of lives, promote healthier populations, improve well-being, and boost productivity.

These targeted actions to reduce emissions can lead to substantial health benefits:

- Avoiding death and disease associated with human-caused air pollution:

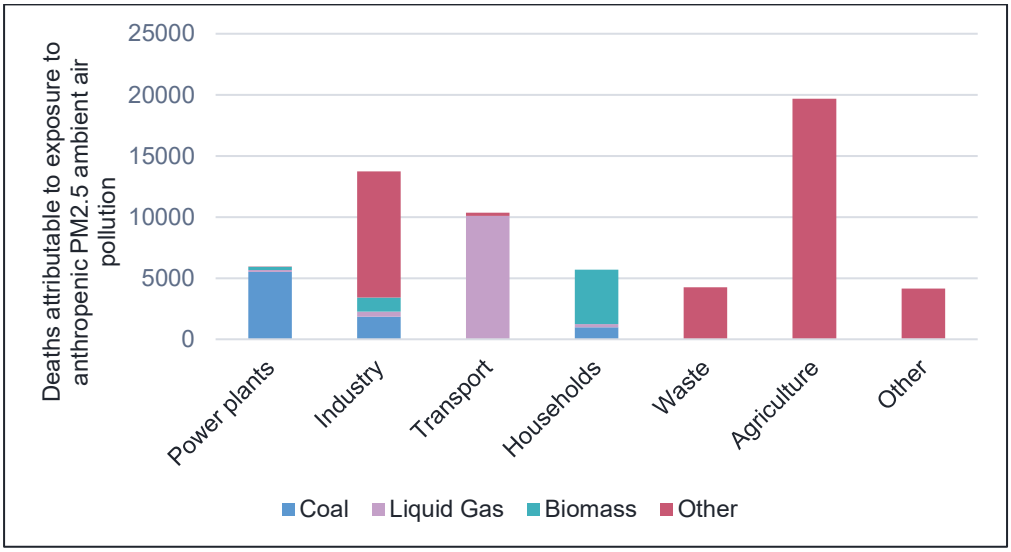
In addition to helping reduce climate change-related threats to people's health and wellbeing, interventions to reduce the use of dirty fuels would have major benefits to people's health. Replacing dirty fuels with clean renewable energy sources, as well as increasing energy efficiency, can significantly reduce exposure to air pollution, which increases the risk of asthma, respiratory infections, cardiovascular disease, cancer, dementia, and many other adverse health outcomes. If supported through adequate technology transfer, capacity building, and finance, the deployment of clean renewables can also help reduce energy poverty, providing clean fuel sources in remote locations.

- Sectors with the highest potential to save lives from improved air quality:

Transport sector: Air pollution from the use of fossil fuels in the transport sector was responsible for 10,300 deaths in 2021, 16 percent of all air pollution-related deaths [1]. These deaths could be prevented by transitioning to zero-emissions transport systems, including by promoting the use of zero-emission public transport, electric vehicles, and active travel. Active travel, in turn, can have major health benefits by increasing physical activity.

Household sector: With 39.5 percent of its household energy supply coming from biomass and fossil fuels, Viet Nam has the opportunity to prevent each year 5,700 deaths caused by exposure to household-derived outdoor air pollution, by promoting the transition to clean renewable energies in the household sector [1]. In addition to this, interventions in the household sector can also help avoid thousands more deaths coming from exposure to air pollution inside people's homes.

Figure 1: Deaths attributable to exposure to anthropogenic PM2.5 ambient air pollution in Viet Nam by sector and source of emissions in 2021



Source: The 2024 Report of the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change [1].

HEALTH IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND NEEDS FOR ADAPTATION IN VIET NAM

People in Viet Nam face growing threats to their health and wellbeing due to climate change. Complementing mitigation efforts, adequate adaptation measures can help address these threats and save thousands of lives every year. Including these opportunities in Viet Nam's NDC and National Adaptation Plan offers a unique opportunity to build resilience and protect communities:

- Health impacts from heat exposure:

As temperatures rise, populations in Viet Nam face growing risks of disease and mortality associated with heat exposure. Elderly populations, those with underlying chronic health conditions (including cardiovascular disease, heart disease, diabetes), and very young children are most at risk. From 2014-2023, each infant under the age of one and adult over the age of 65 in Viet Nam was exposed to an average of 13 and 14 heatwave days per year, respectively [1]. The total number of heatwave days experienced by each group were approximately 178 percent and 384 percent higher than annual averages from 1986-2005 [1].

The rising temperatures also pose a health threat of heat stress and heat stroke to those undertaking physical activity, including recreational or labour-related activities. In 2023, individuals were exposed to heat levels that posed a moderate or higher risk of heat stress if undertaking light physical activity (like walking), for over 8 hours each day on average [1].

Rising temperatures and aging populations resulted in a 148 percent increase in average annual heat-related deaths among adults over 65 from 1990-1999 to 2014-2023 [1]. Without climate change, the increase would have been just 64.5 percent (driven mostly by a growth in the size of the over-65 population), showing how much rising temperatures have worsened heat-related mortality [1].

- Labour productivity loss due to heat exposure:

Beyond presenting a direct risk to health, exposure of workers to high temperatures also reduces labour productivity, as workers' capacity to do physical labour decreases, and they need to take more breaks. In the period between 2014 and 2023, heat exposure of local workers caused the loss of nearly 18.4 billion potential labour hours annually on average in Viet Nam - a 31.5 percent increase in the loss of potential labour hours due to heat exposure from the 1990s [1]. This translates to an estimated US$25.3 billion in potential income lost annually due to heat exposure between 2014 and 2023, with the agricultural sector bearing 60 percent of the total impact (losing approximately US$15.2 billion) [1].

- Growing risk of transmission of infectious diseases:

The rising temperatures and changes in humidity and precipitation patterns caused by climate change are changing the likelihood of transmission of infectious diseases transmitted by vectors (like mosquitoes or ticks). Climatic conditions in Viet Nam have remained highly suitable for malaria transmission through *Plasmodium falciparum* and *vivax*, with an average suitability period exceeding seven months per year; and, for dengue by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, at a climate-defined transmission potential (R0) of 3.68 [1]. Conditions are also becoming increasingly suitable for the transmission of dengue by *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes, the transmission potential for which has increased by 51 percent, from 2.06 on average in 1951-1960, to 3.11 in 2014-2024 [1]. As a result, Viet Nam is likely to see an increase in dengue incidence, demanding increased actions to protect local populations. Similar patterns for disease transmission are observed for Zika and chikungunya [1].

- Drought and extreme weather impacts:

Climate change is changing precipitation patterns and, alongside increased incidence of extreme heat events, is increasing incidence of droughts. Droughts have multiple and pervasive impacts on health, including threatening crop yields, undermining food security, water security and sanitation, increasing the risk of malnutrition, promoting the transmission of infectious diseases, and causing erosion. From 2019 to 2023, 39.6 percent of Viet Nam's land area experienced increasing extreme droughts for at least 1 month on average per year, 22.5 percent for at least 3 months, and 6 percent for at least 6 months [1].

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

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ABOUT THE LANCET COUNTDOWN

The Lancet Countdown: Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change is an international research collaboration tracking the world's response to climate change, and the health benefits that emerge from this transition. The Lancet Countdown was established in partnership with Wellcome, which continues to provide core financial support. Based at University College London (UCL), it brings together over 300 researchers from academic institutions and United Nations (UN) agencies and publishes its findings annually in The Lancet journal ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference.

The data in this report can be explored in further detail in the Lancet Countdown's Data Platform. For more information, including previous annual reports, visit www.lancetcountdown.org.

ABOUT UNDP

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the United Nations' lead agency on international development. We support countries and communities as they work to eradicate poverty, implement the Paris Agreement on climate change and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We advocate for transformative change and connect countries to the resources they need to help people build a better life. Working with a broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, UNDP helps nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at undp.org or follow at @UNDP.

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The Global Climate and Health Alliance (GCHA) unites and mobilizes the health community worldwide and accelerates climate action to protect and improve health for all. With 200+ organizational members, from every region and reaching over 125 countries, we work at the frontline of a global movement of health professionals and health and development organizations dedicated to promoting a healthy, equitable, and sustainable future for all. We address the climate crisis through evidence-based advocacy, policy, movement building, research and strategic communications.