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# Integrating Sustainable Development into National Policy: The Practice of Vietnam

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**Abstract:** By 2015, the United Nations have adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to further promote sustainable development in the world, with particular emphasis on the importance of integrating sustainable development into each nation's development policy. This paper is an attempt to review the process of sustainable development in Vietnam in terms of institutional arrangement and related policies. By reviewing the framework for integrating sustainable development dimensions into development policies in the world, the paper assesses the initial results of integrating sustainable development into national socio-economic development strategies and plans by the goals and priorities of sustainable development as well as by its dimensions or components in Vietnam. The paper also addresses the main challenges and constraints as the shortage of technical guidance to integrate sustainable development into development policies and the lack of resources needed.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development; sustainable development goals; millennium development goals; integration of sustainable development; development policy.

## 1. Introduction

The year of 2015 is the time to complete the implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and also the time for countries in the world to prepare to implement Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, proposed by United Nations. Therefore, many countries have developed plans to implement the Agenda and specify 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their national development plans. As a responsible country, Vietnam has been pursuing a sustainable development process very early, from participating in the Summits (Rio 1992, Johannesburg 2002, Rio 2012), to the successful completion of the MDGs and to strong commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda. In particular, Vietnam has made great efforts in integrating sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals into the country's Socio-Economic Development Strategy and Plan and has achieved some remarkable results. These initial results of Vietnam can be shared with the domestic and international community to contribute to the sustainable development process of humankind.

## 2. Methodology

This *paper* is one of the results of project "Strengthening the Capacity of Selected Developing Countries to Mainstream Sustainable Development into National Development Strategies" in the framework of the cooperation of United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and Vietnam's Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). This report addresses the integration framework applied in the world, the review of Vietnam's sustainable development policies, and the initial results of integrating sustainable

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development into development policy and some proposed recommendations (Vo Thanh Son 2016).

Two main methods were used for this study. The first method is an overview of the literature concerning process in the world and in Vietnam, classified by topics and arranged in timeline, to clarify the process of sustainable development, as well as current situation of integrating sustainable development dimensions into Vietnam's development policies. Secondly, the method of consulting experts and stakeholders in the consultation workshops of ministries and non-governmental organizations was also conducted, in order to clarify and correct the information that is not been shown in the available documents. In addition, information and data in the development of Vietnam's Voluntary National Report for 2018 is also used to clarify the results of sustainable development integration in Vietnam (MPI 2018).

### **3. Results**

3.1. Sustainable development and frameworks for integrating sustainable development dimensions in the world

#### 3.1.1. Context in the world

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Council was established in 1992, and later the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2012, which is the UN organization responsible for promoting sustainable development progress in the world.

The First Summit was held in 1992 (Rio de Janeiro – Brazil) by adopting the Agenda 21 on Sustainable Development, the Second in 2002 (Johannesburg - South Africa) by launching the Program "Implementation of Johannesburg Action Plan" and continuing to affirm the goals set by the Rio Conference in 1992 based on three pillars - economic, social and environmental, and the Third in 2012 (Rio de Janeiro – Brazil) by emphasizing the trend of sustainable development related to green economy and the contents of sustainable development implemented in the context of climate change. Furthermore, the Outcome Document of the Rio+20 Conferences of 2012, *The Future We Want*, demonstrates a strong commitment to mainstreaming economic, social and environmental dimensions into national development strategies.

In 2001, the United Nations have adopted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the period 2000-2015 and in 2015 presented 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific targets for the period 2016 - 2030 (United Nations 2015). This is an important foundation for every country in the world to develop sustainable development goals appropriate to its own context.

The concept of sustainable development has been increasingly clarified in order to build a more practical tool for implementing and evaluating this process in the world and in each country. Several models have been proposed, such as the concept of sustainable development based on three socio-economic-environmental pillars (Bass 2015), or assessing the interaction between natural and social systems by considering ecosystem services for the benefit of humans

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(MEA 2005), or assessing sustainable livelihoods by considering five livelihood capitals proposed by DFID (1999). Thus, the IUCN used the interlocking circles model to demonstrate that the three objectives need to be better integrated, with action to redress the balance between dimensions of sustainability (Adam 2006).

The concept of "Planetary boundaries" or the life-supporting systems of the planet is proposed by Rockstrom and other scientists in 2009 (Rockstrom et al. 2009a, b) in order to define the safe operating space for humanity, as premise for sustainable development. This model with 9 planetary boundaries can be used to examine the limits of the Earth in the orientation of the world's development strategy and has been interested by policy makers in the world, including governments, United Nations organisations and international non-governmental organisations and development organisations, even several Europe countries have the first attempt to apply this concept for their national development policies (Pisano and Berger 2013).

In this context, the "Doughnut model", proposed by Raworth (2009a, b) of Oxfam, aims to combine social dimensions with the planetary boundaries, highlighting global poverty and injustice and proposing a safe and just space for humanity, while also institutionalizing the components of sustainable development, and contributing to the process in the world (Raworth 2014). The Doughnut model is considered as model for just and sustainable development. It brings into one conceptual framework the concerns of environmental sustainability and social justice, which are too often portrayed as competing rather than inter-related aims. In short, it acts as a barometer, measuring the sustainability of our development. The Doughnut model has three main components: domains, indicators and thresholds: i). The domains are the broad areas we wish to explore: for example, biodiversity loss and land use change within the planetary boundaries, and adequate income, food and shelter within the social floor; ii). Within those domains we have selected indicators to measure our current status.

Thus, two these models, "Planetary boundaries" and "Doughnut model" can be used as reference to understand the model of sustainable and be also be applied while reviewing the implementation of sustainable development in Vietnam.

3.1.2. Frameworks for integrating sustainable development dimensions into development policies

3.1.2.1. Nature of integration

The United Nations' International Conference led by UNDESA / UNEP / UNDP on "Sustainable Development Integration in Environmental Policy and Development" (Bass 2015) emphasized the nature of integration as a process going from separate activity to cooperative activity (synergy) and finally to sustainability. Theory and practice of integrating sustainable development, a consolidated relationship between environment and development, to serve as the basis for the proposed integration of sustainable development strategies into the world's development policies as well as for the country has been proposed (Bass 2015).

The agenda for nature and environment goes from the philosophy of "Conservation for Preservation", i.e., the conservation works separated from human, to the principle "Conservation for Human", i.e., the nature integrated with the development. In the opposite direction, the development agenda goes from converting and exploiting nature for development to eventually moving towards a harmonious development with nature (win-win). Thus, the level of integration goes from "no integration" to "high integration".

### 3.1.2.2. Level and approach of integration

Policy integration is a process, not just as a result, nor the set of coherent policies, not just the sum of policy coordination and policy coherence. Policy integration is a process of strategic and administrative decision-making to achieve a goal, not only including the design and implementation stages but also requiring integrated governmental actions (Cejudo and Cynthia 2015). Furthermore, policy integration, is not only horizontal integration between ministries, but also vertical integration along different levels of government and even diagonally across different ministries and other stakeholders (ESDN 2009) (See Figure 1).

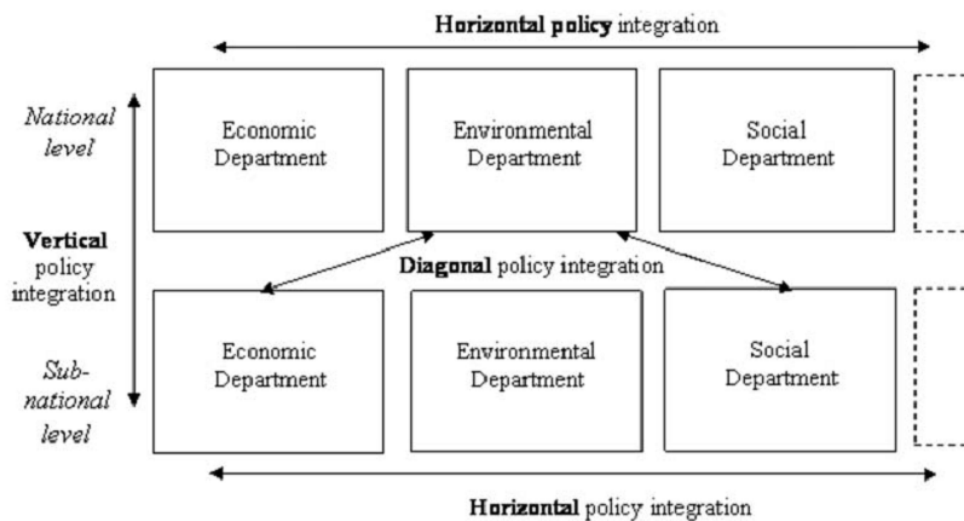


Figure 1. Integrating policies horizontally, vertically and diagonally (SDN, 2009: 4).

In fact, the concept of policy integration has been applied for different sectors. While studying the vertical and horizontal integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation, Gregorio et al. (2017) emphasizes that the Indonesian authorities can carry out effective coordination activities to respond to climate change in the land use sector if the sectoral ministries internalize a strong mandate on internal and external climate policy coherence. Furthermore, studies on integrating Australia's sustainable development policy into fisheries also point out the challenges and difficulties in the implementation process although the policy framework with ecologically sustainable development objectives is proved to be coherent (Farmery et al. 2019). Integration of sustainable development is applied not only for sector's policies, but also for social sector such as the higher education. A study (Vargas et al. 2019) has shown that vertical policy formulation and integration at international, national and institutional level has important role to support effective implementation of sustainable development in the education system.

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The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a Technical Guideline to assess sustainability in national development policies as a whole unity, including 3 dimensions – economic, social and environmental and applied in sustainability impact assessment (SIA) (OECD 2010). The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) of the United Nations has developed a framework and tools to integrate three economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development policies into national development policies (UN-ESCAP 2015). The integration of sustainable development dimensions must be based on the cycle, according to system thinking and while understanding and dealing with trade-offs (UN-ESCAP 2015: 7-12). Integrated tools including quantitative tools such as development of different scenarios for sustainable development policymaking and quantitative tools such as input-output analysis (UN-ESCAP 2015: 13-22). This is really good suggestions for other countries to apply integration of sustainable development into national development policies.

Furthermore, the case study of Lake Chad Basin on the interaction between climate change adaptation policy and water resources management also points out the difficulties and challenges in harmonizing the implementation of these policies and shows that "integrated policy thinking" needs to be emphasized in order to achieve sustainable development goals in the short and long term (Okpara et al. 2018). Sector's policy integration has become an approach when forest policy integration and integrated forest management become two constituting elements of integrated forest governance, especially to develop theoretical concepts and analytical dimensions of European policies (Sotirov and Arts 2018). Under the tendency of more environmentally friendly development, forestry policies in European countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden have to change in the direction of integrating biodiversity conservation, use of bioenergy and response of climate change (Sotirov and Storch 2018). Finally, assessing the practical implementation of 17 sustainable development goals (SDG) in the world, the study has pointed out the limitations of interlinkages and interdependencies between these goals in three areas: across sectors, across societal actors, and between and among low, medium and high income countries (Stafford-Smith et al. 2017).

### **3.2. Initial efforts to integrate sustainable development into national development policy, strategy and plan in Vietnam**

#### **3.2.1. Legal system and policies to implement sustainable development in Vietnam**

Vietnam actively participates in the process of sustainable development in the world, especially in the summits on sustainable development in 1992, 2002 and 2012. Vietnam has also signed many international conventions related to environmental protection and sustainable development.

In 2004, Vietnam promulgated the Strategic Orientation for Sustainable Development in Vietnam (Agenda 21 of Vietnam) (Government of Vietnam 2004), which emphasized 8 principles of sustainable development and 19 priority areas, divided by economic, social and environmental sectors. The National Sustainable Development Strategy for the period 2011-2020 (Government of Vietnam, 2012a), emphasizes with the

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overall goal of promoting sustainable, effective growth in line with progress and social justice, conservation of natural resources and environmental protection, and the National Action Plan to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (VSDG) up to 2030 and 115 specific targets (Government of Vietnam 2017).

Vietnam's legal system, especially specialized laws, can also be divided according to economic pillars (such as laws on land, energy, urban, natural resource tax), social (healthcare, education) and environmental (environmental protection, forestry, water, minerals, biodiversity, seas, marine and island, and disaster prevention). This division is also very convenient for promoting activities related to the pillars of sustainable development and therefore, several laws are still in the process of adjusting to adapt to changing reality.

Strategic Orientation for Sustainable Development in Vietnam (2004) is the foundation for the development and implementation of economic strategies (such as strategies on, green growth, cleaner production, forestry, irrigation) and social (such as strategies related to poverty reduction, education, healthcare) and natural resources and environment (such as strategies for environmental protection, forest and water resources, biodiversity, disaster prevention, and response with climate change, and waste management) and is specified in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2001-2010 and 2011-2020, and especially in the National Sustainable Development Strategy for period 2011-2020. Furthermore, the priority areas of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the period 2011-2020 are compatible with the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 17 Development Goals of Vietnam (VSDGs).

Thus, the approach to integrate 3 sustainable pillars (economic, social and environmental) into Vietnam's development strategy and policies are relatively systematic and comprehensive.

### 3.2.2. Institutions and arrangement to implement national sustainable development strategy and sustainable development goals (SDGs)

A national organizational structure for sustainable development was formed and developed with the establishment of a National Sustainable Development Council (2005), then renamed National Council on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness Enhancement (2012) which consists of 4 specialized committees on economically sustainable development, socially sustainable development, sustainable development of natural resources and environment, and on the decade of education for sustainable development (Government of Vietnam 2012a). The Ministry of Planning and Investment, namely its Sustainable Development Office, plays a very important role in developing and coordinating the implementation of the national sustainable development strategy, socio-economic development strategies and national action plan to implement SDGs in the country. The Institutional arrangement for SDG implementation in Vietnam is demonstrated in Figure 2.

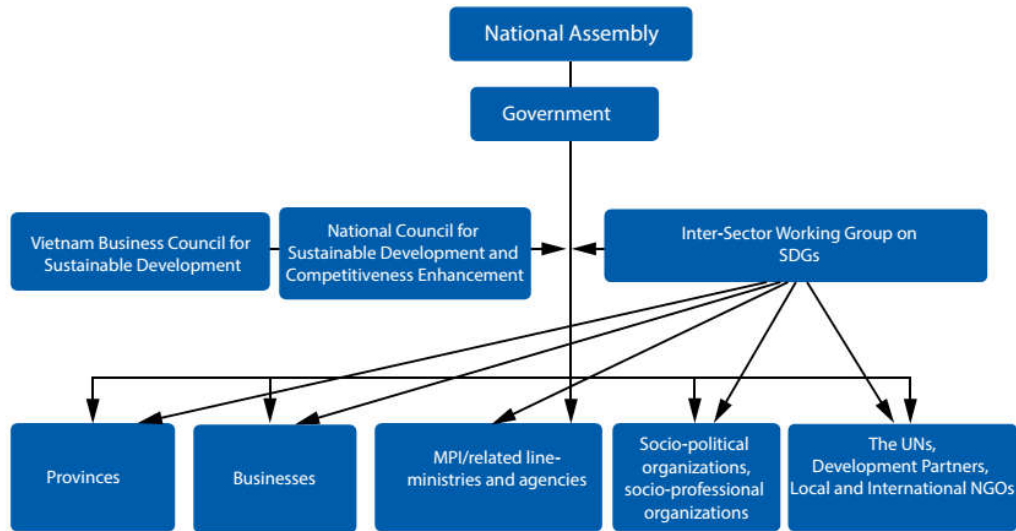


Figure 2. Institutional arrangement for SDG implementation in Vietnam (MPI 2018)

At the sectoral and local level, a Council for Sustainable Development has also been established in several ministries, sectors and a number of provinces and cities in the country (MPI 2015: p. 16). At the enterprise level, the Vietnam Business Council for Sustainable Development was established in 2010 by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) to develop a sustainable, dynamic and successful business community, contributing to the national sustainable development course. Based on their functions, ministries or sectors will be responsible for developing, synthesizing and implementing national sustainable development indicators, as indicated in the Sustainable Development Strategy for the period of 2011-2020 and National Action Plan to implement Agenda 2030 and 17 SDGs. Organizationally, line ministries coordinate with each other through national, ministerial and local Councils or Steering Committees. In terms of content, the policies of the ministries on sectoral development or local policies on socio-economic development will integrate the national sustainable development goals and are specified in the implementation of the their particular targets. Regarding the planning, the 5-year and annual plans are the basis for ministries and local authorities to realize their goals and targets.

Moreover, the process of integrating sustainable development into the development policy is carried out in the form of vertical and horizontal coordination (See Table 1). Vertical coordination is largely about sectoral coordination and management from the central to provincial and district levels. Horizontal coordination is often realised within the same level of government, as between central ministries, or within provincial and district authorities (i.e. people's committee). At the central governmental level, the Prime Minister coordinates ministries and sectors within the government to achieve the national goal of sustainable development. At the provincial and city governmental level, the Chairman of the People's Committee of the province and city will coordinate relevant departments and agencies to implement the socio-economic development plan and the development of local sectors. This type of coordination is also applied to lower levels, such as for district's and commune's

level. Government agencies (ministries, sectors), or local authority agencies at the same level maintain different forms of cooperation to ensure the performance of assigned tasks.

Table 1. The coordination and cooperation between and among the government / authority to implement sustainable development in Vietnam

Administrative level	Agency responsible	Agency responsible	Agency responsible	Coordination and cooperation
Government at central level	Ministry A	Ministry B	Ministry X	Ministries are coordinated by Government (Prime Minister) and Ministries have cooperation among them by their main functions and policies concerned
Local authority at provincial level	Department B		Department X	Departments are coordinated by Provincial People' Committee (Chairman) and Departments have cooperation among them by their main functions and policies/tasks concerned
Local authority at district' level	Division A	Division B	Division X	Divisions are coordinated by District People' Committee (Chairman) and Divisions have cooperation among them by their main functions and tasks concerned
Local authority at commune' level	Unit A	Unit B	Unit X	Units are coordinated by Commune People' Committee (Chairman) and Units have cooperation among them by their main functions and tasks concerned
Activities of coordination and cooperation	Sectoral coordination	Sectoral coordination	Sectoral coordination	Sectoral coordination (vertical) and administrative/territory coordination (horizontal)

With such an organizational structure, the implementation of the sustainable development process is carried out effectively.

### 3.2.3. Main achievements of sustainable development integration into development policy in Vietnam

#### 3.2.3.1. Some characteristics of integrating sustainable development into national development policy



In general, the integration of sustainable development into national development policy is the initial efforts. The process of this policy integration, perhaps, is quite far from achieving full meaning of "policy integration" discussed by Cejudo and Cynthia (2015), in which policy integration is a process, not just as a result, nor the set of coherent policies, not just the sum of policy coordination and policy coherence.

At present, although there are no formal and institutionalized guidelines on sustainable development integration into socio-economic development policies, the implications for sustainable development are considered and integrated into national and local development policies during the process of policy drafting, approval and implementation.

*(i) Integration at the level of the objectives and priority areas of sustainable development*

The integration of sustainable development into the development strategy and policies is clearly demonstrated in integrating objectives and priority areas of sustainable development into the national Socio-Economic Development Strategy for the period 2011-2020 and the implementation of main objectives are measured by the sustainable development indicators (See Table 2). Thus, the Green GDP indicator measures the target of rapid and sustainable growth, the Human Development Index HDI - the goal of social development and the Environmental Sustainability Index - the environmental goal.

Table 2. The relations between objectives of SEDS 2011-2020 with 3 dimensions of sustainable development

STT	Objectives by sustainable dimensions	Objective in SEDS 2011-2020	Indicators for monitoring and evaluating sustainable development in NSDS 2011-2020
1	Economic objectives	Rapid and sustainable growth, with GDP growth rate 7-8 % / year	Green GDP (Methods of calculation still in the process of test)
2	Social objective	Human Development Index (HDI) achieved at higher average group of the world	Human Development Index (HDI)
3	Environmental objective	Improvement of environmental quality (Forest, pollution situation, pollution treatment, climate change)	Environmentally Sustainable Index (methods of calculation still in the process of test)

Source: Communist Party of Vietnam 2011; Government of Vietnam 2012a.

Furthermore, in the process of implementing sustainable development, perspectives, principles and objectives of sustainable development are specified and integrated into the strategy, planning, and plans for national and local socio-economic development as well as sectors development policies for the ministries, that link to specific economic, social and environmental indicators.

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This circular 02/2013/TT-BKHDT (MPI 2013) spent the entire chapter III to guide how to integrate contents of sustainable development into the strategy, planning, and plans of economic and social development of the country, sectors and ministries while emphasizing integrating principles (such as integrating perspectives, objectives and orientations for sustainable development) and integrating requirements (such as strategies, planning, and plans under current regulations). Furthermore guidelines to conduct the 5 year Socio-economic development period 2016-2020 for sectors and localities (MPI, 2014) have emphasized aspects to ensuring sustainable development, whereas economic development must link closely to the cultural and social development and environmental protection, and pro- active response to climate change and ensuring national defence and security. A study on sustainable impact assessment in planning also proposed a method to formulate socio-economic development strategies, plans and plans by integrating sustainable development (economic, social and environmental dimensions) and climate change aspects in the policy making process and these may be the first technical proposals to fully integrate sustainable development into national development policies (MPI and UNDP 2011).

Finally, a practical example is that Vietnam has well implemented in-depth integration of the MDGs into important national plans, strategies and policies (Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy, Development Strategy Socio-Economic Development 2011-2020), developing specific action plans (5-year and annual socio-economic development plans) and achieved remarkable results (Vietnam Socialist Republic, 2015).

*(ii) Integration of components and dimensions of sustainable development*

a) Integration of environment into development policies

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is one of the important tools aimed at integrating environmental issues into policies, plans, programs and assessing their relationships with economic and social issues. The Law on Environmental Protection (Vietnam National Assembly 2014) emphasizes that the SEA is the analysis and forecast of the environmental impacts of a strategic project, planning, and development plan before approval, to ensure sustainable development goals and it becomes important and effective tool for development of strategies, plans and policies in Vietnam.

Moreover, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI 2011) summarized and developed "Guidelines to Implement the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in setting up strategy, planning and socio-economic development plan", including additional guidance on the integration of climate change issues into strategic environmental assessment.

b) Integration of climate change into development policies

Government's political commitment to integrate climate change into development policy is presented clearly in the National Target Program to Respond to Climate Change, lasting for the period of 2009-2015 and years after that (MONRE, 2008), where all new policies and strategies must consider and integrate climate change in their activities,

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especially in the formulation and implementation of socio-economic plans of sectors and localities toward sustainability. A number of ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2011), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (2010), the Ministry of Industry and Trade (2010), and the Ministry of Transport (2011) have developed action plans. Responding to climate change, including emphasizing the consideration and integration of climate change aspects in its development policies (Vo et al. 2015). The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has also developed and proposed technical documents to integrate climate change in socio-economic development plans (IMHEN 2012; Tran Thuc et al. 2012), but so far, these guidelines have not been institutionalized in planning work.

As an agency of the Government responsible for guiding the formulation and implementation of the country's socio-economic development plans in the short, medium and long term, the Ministry of Planning and Investment has issued a framework to guide the selection of priority investment projects to adapt to climate change under Decision No. 1485 / QD-BKHDT in 2013 (MPI, World Bank and UNDP 2015). At the macro level, the Environmental Law (National Assembly of Vietnam 2014) also has a chapter dealing with climate change, which emphasized response activities integrated into strategies, planning and social economic development plans. A specific step in the effort to integrate climate issues is that the Ministry of Planning and Investment has issued a circular (No. 05/2016 / TT-BKHDT) guiding the integration of natural disaster prevention and control into socio-economic development planning and plan.

c) Integration of green growth into socio-economic development plan

Vietnam's Green Growth Strategy (Decision 1393 / QD-TTg, 25/09/2012) is actually promoting sustainable economic development in the context of climate change by greening production and consumption, and applying modern technology in order to efficiently use natural resources and reduce the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions (Government of Vietnam 2012b). Furthermore, the National Action Plan for Green Growth period 2014-2020 (Decision 403 / QD-TTg, dated 03.20.2014) specify the content of sustainable economic development by proposing and implementing nation-wide large scale programs and projects (Government of Vietnam 2014).

Ministry of Planning and Investment developed and proposed the methodology for calculating the Marginal Abatement Cost Curve Analysis for the energy sector (MPI and UNDP 2013a) and the land use, land use change and forestry sector (MPI and UNDP 2013b) as a basis for building green growth plan at provincial level. This important tool has been revived from the project "Strengthening Sustainable Development and Climate Change" and used to build the different emission scenarios for socio-economic development and is applied to complete the Provincial Green Growth Action Plans, such as province Bac Ninh (MPI and KOICA 2015), Quang Nam (MPI and KOICA 2014a) and Ben Tre (MPI and KOICA 2014b).

*(iv) Integration of Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals into Vietnam's development policies*

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## **Integration of Millennium Development Goals**

In the end of MDG implementation period, Vietnam had completed 3/8 targets on poverty reduction, primary education universalization and gender equality and obtained remarkable results for several goals (MPI, 2018). One of the important lessons learned from Vietnam's success, which is widely recognized by the international community, is that Vietnam has chosen the right ways to "nationalize" MDG, in which, the integration of MDG into national and local socio-economic development strategies and plans is considered an innovative step. Experience of MDG implementation in Vietnam also shows that the 5-year and annual socio-economic development plans are the best mechanism to allow the integration of development goals with resources to realize them.

### **(b). Integration of Sustainable Development Goals**

Successful lessons learned in integrating the Millennium Development Goals are still valid for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals on the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, Vietnam has nationalized the global 2030 agenda to set up a National Action Plan to implement the 2030 Agenda with 17 sustainable development goals and 115 specific goals consistent with the country's development conditions and priorities. The National Action Plan sets out the task of "Integrating sustainable development goals in the development of annual Socio-Economic Development Plans and development strategies, policies, planning of ministries, sectors and local authorities. By 2020, fully integrate Vietnam's sustainable development goals into the content of the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for the period of 2021-2030, the Socio-Economic Development Plan for the period of 2021-2025, and the Development Plans of sectors and localities in the 2021-2030 period" (Government of Vietnam 2017).

In fact, the perspective of sustainable development is integrated throughout the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2011-2020 and the Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020. Many SDGs have been integrated into the national development policy system, from laws, strategies and socio-economic development plans, action plans of ministries, sectors and localities. The SDGs will continue to be considered for inclusion in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2021-2030, the Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021-2025 as well as the Annual Socio-Economic Development Plan of Vietnam in next time.

Although the Government has only promulgated National Action Plan in 2017 to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Vietnam's National Voluntary Review on the implementation of the sustainable development goals in 2018 (MPI 2018) has confirmed 5 goals with the achieved good results, including SDG 1 (Eradicate poverty), SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (Clean energy and reasonable price), SDG 11 (City and sustainable communities) and 13 (Climate protection action) (See Figures 3). Several other goals also achieved encouraging results such as SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 9 and SDG 15. The achieved results confirm that these goals have been earlier integrated into the strategy and development plan in order to maintain such positive progress (United Nations 2019).

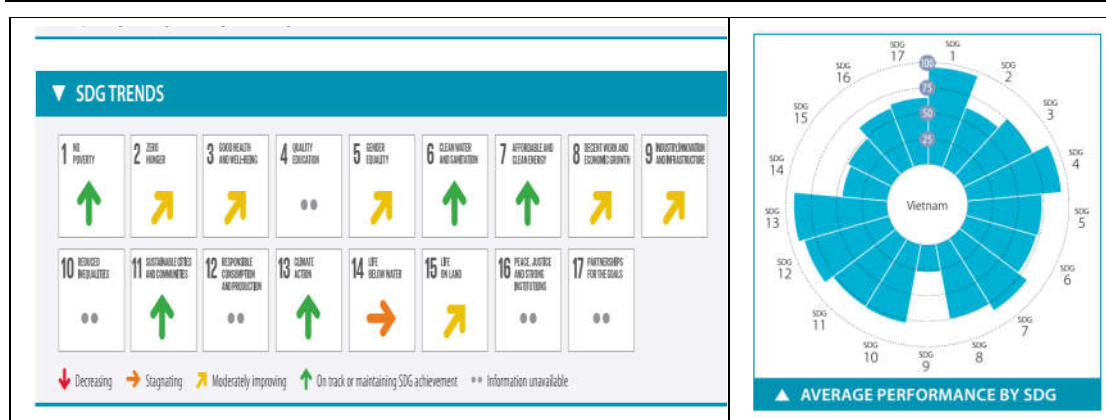


Figure 3. Effectiveness in implementation of Vietnam's SDG Sustainable Development Goals in 2019  
(Source: United Nations 2019: 458)

Finally, at the request of the Government expressed in the Prime Minister's Directive on sustainable development (No. 13 / CT-TTg, 20/5/2019), the Ministry of Planning and Investment has a responsibility to develop and issue guidelines for integrating sustainable development goals into the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for period 2021-2030 and guidelines for monitoring and evaluating sustainable development goals (SGD) during year of 2019. This demonstrates the urgent need of integrating sustainable development and sustainable development goals into socio-economic development planning and plans in Vietnam.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

Sustainable development in the world is a long-term process, but the important milestones are the United Nations' Summits organised since 1992 up to now and by that time, the concept and contents of sustainable development have been specified, especially the model based on economic, social and environmental pillars. Vietnam has made great efforts in the socio-economic development of the country towards sustainability with the development and improvement of the institutional system and related policies, especially the strategy of sustainable development, green growth in the context of climate change and action plan to implement the 2030 agenda.

The Government of Vietnam has obtained initial results in integrating sustainable development and its dimensions into the country's development policies, through the rational integration of goals, principles and priority areas of sustainable development into Vietnam's entire development policy system, especially socio-economic development strategies and 5-year socio-economic development plans during the period 2000-2020. Furthermore, Vietnam has good success in integrating the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the period 2000-2015 into economic and social policies. Vietnam gives high commitment to implement United Nations' Agenda 2030 by issuing 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 115 targets to implement up to the year of 2030.

However, as the integration is a complex and broad process and there are not many good practices in the world to be consulted, Vietnam is currently facing the challenges and difficulties, as follows:

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i) Shortage of technical guidance to integrate sustainable development as a whole in the development policies of Vietnam. In practice, at present, there is no overall comprehensive technical guidelines helping integrating sustainable development into the development policies of Vietnam. Several policies, such as Circular No 02 (MPI 2013) is recommended only to integrate the principles of sustainable development identified in NSDS into the development policies, i.e. strategy-planning-plan but has not yet clarified how to do this integration technically. The policies related to sectoral development, such as Law on Environmental Protection (Vietnam National Assembly 2014) or Vietnam's Green Growth Strategy (Government of Vietnam 2012b) or National Target Program to Respond to Climate Change (MONRE 2008) have only given the principles of integration, but not specific approach and methods to do that. Several technical guidelines of integration (green growth, climate change) have been developed, but not institutionalized officially.

ii) Deficient resources to fully integrate sustainable development into development policies. Although the government has great efforts to mobilize all resources possible to build development policies taking into account components and dimensions of sustainable development, such as human resources, technical support, financial resource and infrastructure but these resources are not adequate to fully meet practical requirements. At the national level as well as at the local level, the shortage of financial resources or lack of financial line or financial source allocated to inter-sectoral coordinating works in development policy formulation and implementation, may limit the effectiveness and efficiency of integrating objectives and priority actions into development policy system of nation, sectors, ministries and localities. Many offices for the sustainable development in the provinces do not have specialized staffs responsible for coordinating works, including support and guidance to integrate sustainable development in the policy making process of local socio-economic development plans. Moreover, sometimes these staffs do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to perform complex tasks and difficulties in integrating the objectives and dimensions of sustainable development in setting up provincial 5-year or annual socio-economic development plans.

Therefore, a number of recommendations to promote the integration of sustainable development in general, and sustainable development goals (SDGs) in particular, into development policies in Vietnam have also been proposed for implementation as follows:

- + Sustainable development must be integrated in the development planning steps to ensure the sustainability of development policies.

- + Improving mechanisms and resources suitable for the integration of sustainable development at central and local levels, and relevant ministries.

- + Implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the period 2011-2020 and the national and local sustainable development monitoring and evaluation indicators must be properly integrated with the implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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+ Continue to consolidate and develop international cooperation in order to use technical, human and financial support in promoting sustainable development in Vietnam in the context of climate change.

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