



Photovoice - a new playground for ethnic minority children.
Photo: Tran Minh Ngan/Oxfam.

PROMOTING THE PARTICIPATION OF STAKEHOLDERS **IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION MAKING PROCESSES**



OXFAM

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- CCM** : Child-Centred Methodology
- CSOs** : Civil Society Organizations
- HIDE** : Belgium Development Agency's study on Households Informal Disbursements for Education in Vietnam
- INGOs** : International Non-Governmental Organizations
- MOET** : Ministry of Education & Training
- NGOs** : Non-Governmental Organizations
- SEDP** : Socio-economic development plan
- UN** : United Nations
- UNFPA** : The United Nations Populations Fund
- UNICEF** : United Nations Children's Fund
- VNEN** : Vietnam Escuela Nueva - the new teaching and learning practices in the classroom targeting the most disadvantaged groups of primary students
- WB** : The World Bank



Cham & H'mong ethnic minority students confidently took the role of MC for the open dialogue "Learn, Play, Work through the Voices of Children" in Hanoi. Photo: Phan Vu Hung/Oxfam.

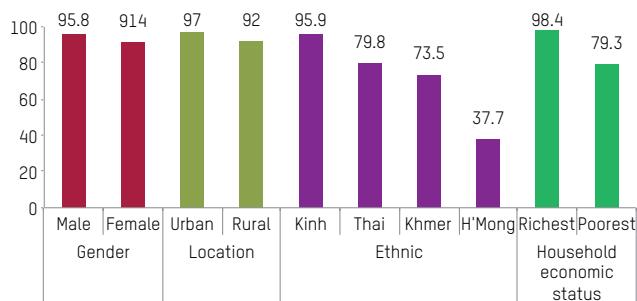
KEY MESSAGES

- **T**he realization of stakeholders' right to participation¹, first and foremost the right of beneficiaries (students and their parents), in educational decisions could result in more effective resource management, better educational quality² and decrease inequalities in accessing education services for disadvantaged groups (including ethnic minorities, female students and students in rural areas).
- **A**ctive citizenship" is a concept associated with quality education where the ultimate outcome is to build citizens with adequate health, intellectual capacity, good ethics, lifelong learning ability and especially the capacity to participate in social management in the future. Therefore, promoting and facilitating children's participation in the educational issues at school, village/commune will help them form the habit and capacity to participate in social governance.
- **P**ublic investment for education³ is considered one of the critical macro solutions to eliminate the disadvantaged situation of the vulnerable groups (ethnic minorities, poor and/or female students) in accessing education services. Yet the facts show that public investment effectiveness is below the expectation, which is partly due to the limited participation of stakeholders⁴. Therefore, the barriers to participation must be removed so as to improve public investment for education.
- **T**hough there already exist fundamental regulations enabling/encouraging the participation of stakeholders in the process of educational decision making, the current legal framework in Vietnam has not created a "corridor" wide enough for an effective and efficient participation of stakeholders.
- **E**nabling the participation, beside a favorable institutional condition, requires a capacity to participate of the right holders (students, parents) and duty bearers' awareness of and readiness for accountabilities and sharing decision-making power with other stakeholders.

CONTEXT

Vietnam has made substantial progress and achieved significant results in education development since Doi Moi reforms. Despite this progress, there is still unequal access to education services between different demographic and social groups. There are documented inequality gaps between females and males, ethnic minorities and the Kinh population, those living in rural and urban areas and the poor and the rich. This is clearly illustrated by the literacy rate of the population aged 15 and over (Figure 1). A large number of factors contribute to this. Being unable to afford education-related expenses is a key factor that has been evidenced by several studies. According to the World Bank, about 30 percent of ethnic minority households said that at least one of their children dropped out of school due to high education-related expenses, while the dropout rate in Kinh households was just 16 percent. According to the report on An Analysis of the Situation of Children in Vietnam (UNICEF, 2010), education-related expenses are one of the main reasons preventing poor and ethnic minority students from accessing public education services or pursuing higher education. The study on Households' unofficial spending on education in Vietnam (HIDE) (Belgium Development Agency, IRC, 2011) shows that if a household has two children who are studying at basic educational levels, the total spending for education accounts for 30 percent of average household income.

Figure 1: Literacy rate of population aged 15 and over (2009) (%)



Source: Population and Housing Census 2009

The macro solution to relieve the burden of expenses and close the inequality gap would be to enhance public investment and promote the application of a program-based approach to poverty alleviation. An output or indicator of those programs would be closing inequality gaps in accessing public services and supporting the development of a universal quality education by supporting education infrastructure development in disadvantaged areas (Program 30A, 135, is a good example of this in action).

However, the efficiency and effectiveness of such public investment and supporting policies/programs is questionable. The Report on Multidimensional Child Poverty (Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs, IRC, UNICEF, 2013) shows that in 2012, 21.3 percent of children in the most difficult villages (in Program 135 areas) suffered from education poverty. The proportion in 2007 was 19.8 percent. This modest reduction of 1.5 percentage points in 5 years is the collective result of several education-promoting policies. This implies that the policies for education have not succeeded in addressing the cause of difficulties in accessing to education services in the most difficult communes and villages.

With this in mind, between September and December 2013 Oxfam and IRC Development Research and Consulting Limited Company (IRC Consulting) conducted the research "Stakeholders' Participation in Educational Decision Making Process" to try and identify answers to the following two questions. 1) "What needs to be done to enhance the effectiveness of public investment in closing the inequality gap in accessing education services?", and 2) "Is the participation of students, parents and other stakeholders in educational decision making process the solution to closing the inequality gap?". The research hypothesis was "the realization of stakeholders' right to participate in educational decisions, could result in more effective resource management, better educational quality and decrease inequalities in accessing quality education services, especially for disadvantaged groups (including ethnic minority, poor and female students)".

The research is a collaborative product of Oxfam and IRC Consulting. It was conducted in three provinces, Lao Cai, Dak Nong and Ninh Thuan. Research methods included an extensive desk study, and primary data collection. A sample of 736 students at primary and secondary education levels, 94 parents, and 411 government officers were surveyed by questionnaire. In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with a sample of 350 participants, of whom 144 were students and 80 were parents. As the data collection was done in Oxfam Education Governance Program's three partner provinces, the findings of the research are not representative of all areas of the country. Nonetheless, this research answers important questions regarding (1) current levels of stakeholders' participation, (2) the impact of their participation, and (3) barriers that need to be removed to promote the participation of stakeholders in educational decisions and processes. Policy makers, international organizations, local authorities, governmental agencies in education sector, education institutions and interested individuals may find useful data, information and recommendations in the Report of this research.

KEY FINDINGS

PARTICIPATION HELPS IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Several studies have found a positive correlation between grassroots' participation and the quality of public services. This research also demonstrates consent among respondents about the positive relation between participation and education quality and governance.

BOX 1: PARTICIPANTS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE BENEFIT OF PARTICIPATION

Enhance transparency: "Parents should have information about local budget allocation for education. If the school management use the budget badly, [parents can]...report the incidence to local authority".

Promote cooperation between citizens and Government: "We want to have information about the budget for education... all parents wanted to know about the budget allocated for the purchase of textbooks and notebooks for students in 2010-2011; this funding is no longer available and we want to know why. We are all poor households, we need to know these things in advance so that we can prepare.

(Focus group discussion among parents)

Enhance the appropriateness of the decision: "The long-term planning for education in the district should also involve students. Many teachers still think that "students don't know enough to participate". But I think students need to be involved because they are the main beneficiaries of education. If they don't agree with the orientation of a policy, they won't participate in its implementation. The expression "dependent on the actual situation" included in all planning documents implies that planning from higher level authorities must be suitable with the reality on the ground. In the monitoring activities of Division of Education and Training to schools, there are multiple issues that need to be approved by students, parents, unions and teachers. Without the approval of these agents, it will be very difficult to understand the reality on the ground"

(In-depth interview with an education officer)

About 90% of Government officers who took the survey agreed that stakeholder participation had a positive impact on aspects of education governance including planning, financial management, pedagogical issues, etc. at all levels (school, commune, district/province). More or less 50 percent of students agreed that their participation has positive impacts on these aspects. The proportions of parents agreeing the impact of their participation on education ranged from 50 or 80 percent from issue to issue.

The specific level and scope of participation depends on the characteristics of each stakeholder group. However, it is a common belief that the higher the stakeholders' participation is, the more effective educational decisions will be, especially for decisions related to disadvantaged groups.

Most Government officers in the survey identified a low level of participation from schools and departments/divisions of Education and Training in decisions regarding the allocation of funding for education. They agreed that the limited public funds could have been used more effectively if students/parents, school managers and sectorial education agencies had a stronger voice in the decision-making, planning and monitoring processes. This supports the research hypothesis that stakeholders' participation increases the effectiveness of public investment in education.

BOX 2:

PARTICIPANT'S OPINIONS ON A LACK OF PARTICIPATION IN FINANCIAL DECISIONS

"We [school management] almost have no idea about the investment for education infrastructure of our school. We only sign the acceptance certificate when the construction is completed and then hand it over. Even then, we don't know the value of the investment."

(In-depth interview with a principal of a primary school)

"The education sector is given autonomy in managing schools and takes the responsibility in decentralizing, but the bodies in charge of finance issues rarely take our opinions into account. For example, education professionals propose that the priority should be given to communication, but the financial bodies advise that the priority should still be given to purchase. Or in investment for schools' facility, the construction rigidly followed the design [set out by the finance department] and ignored the ideas of school management. As a result, the school yard was concreted, then the schools had to hire people to drill holes in the concrete to plant trees, which is very wasteful."

(In-depth interview with a local government, education manager)

"Schools' participation in the investment of infrastructure construction is very limited. Take my school as an example, we did propose ideas regarding school design so buildings would meet our needs, but they kept the old design. After a few years, now [the design] doesn't match our needs and we have to propose to rebuild this building."

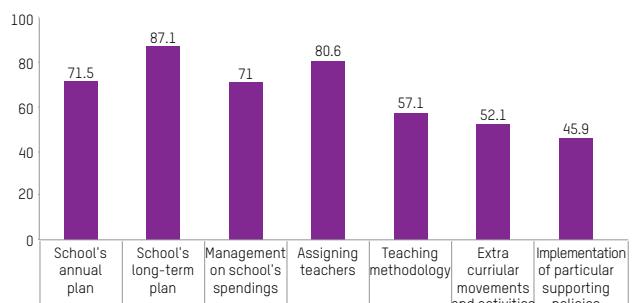
(In-depth interview with a principal of a high school)

THE SITUATION OF STAKEHOLDERS' PARTICIPATION IN THE MAKING OF EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS

Students

In almost all school governance issues, student participation is limited. A student is considered not participating if he/she (i) is not informed/ does not participate in any form, and (ii) is merely informed for obedient implementation. In almost all of the surveyed issues, the proportion of students not participating is high. The participation of students is lowest in contributing to the school's long-term plan. The highest levels of participation come from the implementation of policies supporting education development in areas with extreme difficulties. Even in areas where learners' participation is clearly described in the Regulations on the Implementation of Democracy such as, "organizing study movements, competitions or activities concerning learners", more than half of the students said that they did not participate.

Figure 2: Proportion of students not participating in school governance (as % of students' responses)



Source: Oxfam, IRC (2014)

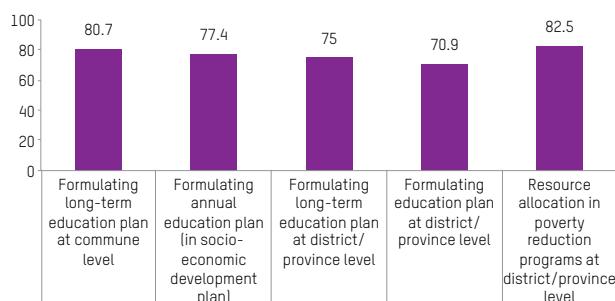
Regarding the education plans of local authorities (commune, district/province levels), non-participation is the norm among students. There is no evidence to show that any students have participated in any way in decisions concerning the construction of a new school in the locality or moving school to a new location or building a new road to their school. So far, there is no specific legal regulation stipulating the obligation of local authorities to involve children in the process



Students were excited at a warm-up game before Ninh Thuan Provincial Child Forum 2014 with the theme of "My Rights, My Voice".
Photo: Vu Thu Trang/Oxfam.

of education planning or socio-economic development planning in general. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that a child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, and these views must be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. Clearly, education directly affects children, yet they are barely given the opportunity to input into educational planning at any level.

Figure 3: Proportion of students not participating in the formulation of education plans outside school (as % of responses by government's officers) (%)

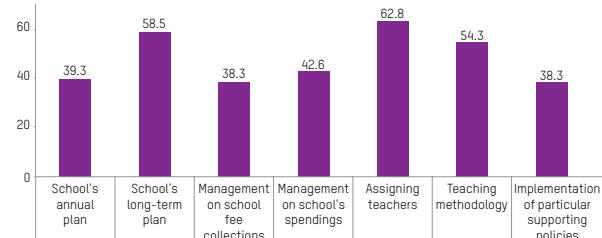


Source: Oxfam, IRC (2014)

Parents

The proportion of parents not participating in school governance is lower than that of students, yet it is still high, particularly with regards to long-term school planning and pedagogical technical issues. The survey results show that there are hardly any issues where parents regularly join education managers in making educational decisions. The exception to this are decisions on parental contributions and the use of funds mobilized under Socialization Policy as provided by current laws and regulations.

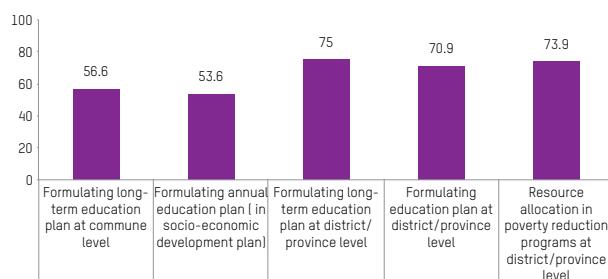
Figure 4: Proportion of parents not participating in school governance (as % of parents' responses)



Source: Oxfam, IRC (2014)

In this research, findings from groups of Government officers about parents' participation are fairly consistent with parents' self-assessment. More than half of officers told us that parents do not participate in the formulation of both short and long term, local education plans. More than 2/3rds of the surveyed officers claimed that parents do not participate in budget allocation decisions for education as part of poverty reduction programs. This situation is a result of the depletion of legal basis for the participation of parents in this area of governance.

Figure 5: Proportion of parents not participating in the formulation of education plans outside school (as % of responses by officers) (%)



Source: Oxfam, IRC (2014)

Meanwhile, parents demonstrate their desire and strong demand to be fully informed about the budget spending for each individual school as well as the general investment for the education sector as a whole with the reasoning that "parents need to grasp the overall picture of investment resources so that they can be more active in the implementation of "socialization" policy [which mobilizes private resources for education]. The



Parents together with students and teachers organized the Child Festival and Forum in Le Loi primary school, Krong No district, Dak Nong province.
Photo: Tran Thi Minh Hue/Oxfam.

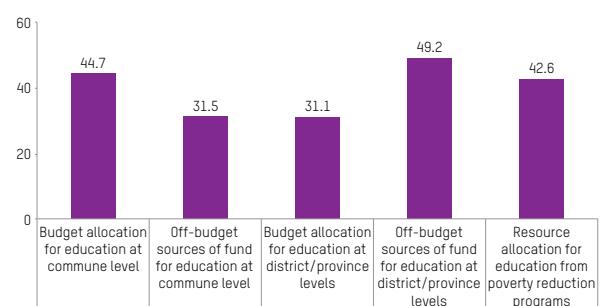
transparency of resource management will enable them to discuss and manage parental payment effectively" (taken from a focus group discussion with parents). In contrast, Government officers view it unnecessary that parents participate in managing education budgets.

Schools' participation in making decisions on allocation of material resources for education

The participation of school managers/teachers in the decision making process related to resources (including state and non-state budget) needs to be enhanced. Even though schools are directly delivering services to end-users, this research found a large proportion of schools do not participate in making decisions regarding investment. The mismatch between schools' needs and the investment provided (especially in developing educational infrastructure as part of poverty reduction programs) reported by educational management officers provides a gloomy picture of inefficiency in public investment. This situation is due to the lack of mechanisms enabling the participation of the wider education sector and schools at a higher

level of governance. The current decision making process only allows educators to be "consulted".

Figure 6: Proportion of school managers/teachers not participating in the allocation and use of resources (from both state budget and off-budget sources) for education at all levels (% of responses by government's officers)



Source: Oxfam, IRC (2014)

The participation of CSOs

The level of participation of CSOs in education is diverse and dependent on various factors, including legal frameworks, local government regulations and local government directions. CSOs participate in education governance processes as much as legally provided.

Regarding the issues such as mobilizing children to go to school at the right age or instructing parents in child bearing and rearing, some mass organizations (The Women's Union, Youth Union), are actively participating. These organizations also play active roles in collaborating with schools to provide extracurricular activities. However, current regulations regarding the role and participation of these mass organizations remain inadequate. As the quantitative results show, the participation of these organizations in other issues such as allocating public resources for education, developing annual and long-term plans is limited. This is explained majorly by the fact that the laws do not clearly specify how CSOs should be involved. Thus, where the provinces have provided specific regulations to shorten the gap in central legal regulations, the actual level of participation is much higher. Where schools actively and positively cooperate with CSOs, the involvement of CSOs was significant.

BOX 3:

SOME OPINIONS ON THE PARTICIPATION OF UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

"Provincial authority always provides detailed direction for the unions and associations to join the implementation of educational tasks, especially mobilizing students to attend school."

(In-depth interview with provincial Government officer)

"It depends on the closeness in relationship between Board of Principals of school and the unions and associations. Board of Principals in our school is very proactive, so the collaboration with these organizations is good."

(In-depth interview with a teacher)

"In general, the unions only perform their responsibility as regulated, such as mobilizing people to send their children to schools, in other educational activities, their roles are not significant."

(In-depth interview with a commune People's Committee official)

THE MECHANISM FOR REALIZATION OF STAKEHOLDERS' RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

The common mechanisms for mobilizing the participation of beneficiaries, students and parents to participate are often conducted in traditional ways and focus on the provision of information, and discussion/consultation, but not sharing the decision-making power. For instance, (i) students are informed in class meetings, or the information is posted on the notice boards; (ii) parents are informed in parents meetings, via Parents' Representative Committees, by public posters on the notice board, or notice sent to families via letter; (iii) CSOs are mainly informed in meetings with People's Committees, People's Councils or via dispatches of People's Councils for directing and proposing coordination. These mechanisms are totally confined to current regulations.

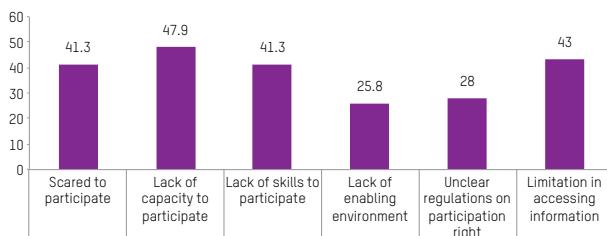
The survey records some other mechanisms that can be considered as good practices in encouraging the participation of beneficiaries. Unfortunately, these mechanisms or practices are case-by-case ideas (practicing within a specific school or district).

The mechanisms allowing stakeholders to participate in making investment decisions have not been reported in any case.

MAJOR BARRIERS LIMITING THE PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS AND PARENTS

There are a number of subjective barriers preventing students and parents from participating in the decision making process (i) People are scared to participate (ii) they have limited knowledge and understanding of educational issues, and (iii) they have limited participation skills.

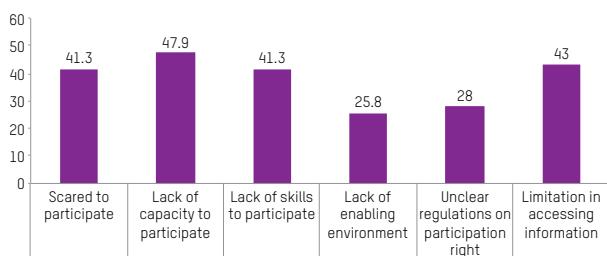
Figure 7: Major barriers to students' participation in educational decision making (% of students in the survey)



Sources: Oxfam, IRC (2014)

There are also objective barriers, when these are combined they create a "double effect" limiting the participation of beneficiaries in education governance. A lack of access to relevant information is frequently cited as the biggest barrier to participation. Over a quarter of parents and over 38% of students mentioned the barrier that schools/teachers not creating enabling environment to promote participation of the students is frequently mentioned. The barrier acts as a multiplier when combined with fear of participation. Last but not least, the current institutional system is not strong enough to encourage the effective participation of students and parents.

Figure 8: Major barriers to parents' participation in the making of educational decisions (% of parents in the survey)



Sources: Oxfam, IRC (2014)

CURRENT LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BASIS FOR PARTICIPATION

Vietnam has a system of policies which stipulates the participation of stakeholders in education processes and decisions. The



Parent representative presented monthly meeting plan of the Parent Associations at village level in Ta Phin commune, Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province. Photo: Tran Thi Minh Hue/Oxfam.

educational management bodies (schools, educational management agencies) follow most of specific regulations, for example publicizing relevant information, establishing Parent's Representative Committees, providing information on what learners are entitled to be informed about and discuss, etc. However, after consulting students and parents, it appears that the implementation has not managed to ensure the participation required by the laws and regulations. For instance, the schools abide by the regulations and publicize the required information (by posting at places accessible to students and parents; informing in the parent meetings, etc.); yet parents reported that they did not access to the information (mostly because they were not aware of their right to access the information and/or the methods used by the schools were not appropriate).

Although there are certain fundamental regulations enabling and/or encouraging the participation of stakeholders in educational decision making processes, the current legal framework doesn't allow "a wide corridor" for the participation of stakeholders.

- » Guidance on including "democracy practices" at schools and educational institutions is in place, but there are no guidelines or regulations on practices allowing students to discuss and monitor issues outside of the control of schools, such as decisions on how to allocate public resources at the district and provincial level.

There is also a lack of legislation relating to (i) beneficiaries' participation in educational strategies/plans/policies/programs beyond school level; (ii) mechanisms to receive feedbacks from beneficiaries on assessing quality of education and school activities; (iii) mechanisms to handle complaints of students and parents, and (iv) mechanisms realizing education agencies' accountabilities to students and parents for educational activities at all levels comprehensively (providing and publicizing information as provided by laws are only the first steps of being accountable).

- » As stipulated by current regulations, the concept of "grassroots democracy" (which is known in brief as "people know, people discuss, people conduct, and people supervise") is commonly considered as participation. Hence "participation of learners in education" is regulated by legal documents related to grassroots democracy. And the interpretation of "learner's participation" as "the right to know" and "the right to discuss" in specific issues at schools has narrowed the scope of "participation" of students in reality. The students/parents' participation at the highest level - sharing decision-making power has not been stipulated by laws and regulations.
- » A good policy practice is found in poverty reduction programs. Specific policies enhancing students access to education services for disadvantaged groups (female, ethnic minority, poor, and rural students), the regulations on the participation of beneficiaries are usually clear. For instance, Program 135 has detailed regulations on participatory planning. Thereby, people can participate in the planning at village level in order to submit investment portfolio (including investment in constructions for educational purposes) and in selecting the poor households to be beneficiaries of the Program. This can be considered for replication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on previous research on the correlation between public governance effectiveness and citizen participation, as well as the findings of this research, the following recommendations are proposed to promote the participation of all stakeholders, with a focus on students and their parents:

SOLUTIONS FOR ENHANCING INFORMATION DISSEMINATION, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

1. The sharing of information, communication and education should focus on enhancing common understanding of the concepts of "participation" and "participation rights". If participation is understood as just "being informed", "being consulted" or "implementing" as defined in the current Regulation on the Implementation of Democracy, the facilitation of participation in education will only improve slowly. The full participation should reach the highest level of "sharing the right to make decision" as the theory has shown, meaning that decision-making power is shared by persons affected by such decisions (i.e. students and their parents regarding education issues/ decisions).
2. The concept of "active citizenship" should be continuously promoted in association with the concept of "education quality". Together they promote an education whose final outcome is the creation of citizens with adequate health, intellectual capacity, good ethics, lifelong learning ability and the capacity to engage in the governance of society. Therefore, the current participation of students in education issues at schools and community will give them the capacity to get involved in broader social governance.

- The message "Participation is the responsibility of community", should be disseminated in order to promote participation in education issues as well as social governance issues. This helps raise the community's awareness of and readiness in sharing the responsibility of education governance with the government.

SOLUTIONS FOR COMPLETING LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- Regulations on how democratic participation in decision making should be specified for participation activities at all levels. It is particularly important to pilot the practice outlined in the guidance, enabling students to participate in the formulation of SEDP at all levels, of which education is one component.
- Regulations on students and parents' participation in the allocation of resources for infrastructure development in education should be reviewed and adjusted. With regards to programs/policies with an element of investment in education, it is necessary to clearly define the procedures of consultation and minimum weight of students and parents' participation in making investment decisions (with pilot at commune and village levels).
- Regulations on the participation in decision making regarding infrastructure investment/development should also be reviewed with regards to the role of schools as the main beneficiaries and users of the construction, and the role of education sector as direct management agencies.
- A model where schools are to build their own guidelines on students'/parents' participation in decision making regarding schools' issues beyond what have been stipulated by current regulations needs to be piloted. Pilot outcomes should then be evaluated to measure the relationship between levels of participation and students'/parents' satisfaction with the schools' education services.



Giang Thi Chu, a H'mong ethnic minority student confidently told her own stories through her photos at the photovoice exhibition "Hey Friends! Listen Up!" in Vietnam Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi.
Photo: Phan Vu Hung/Oxfam.

8. A mechanism where students'/parents' evaluation is used as an official channel to get information about teachers' and school management's performance should be piloted on larger scale.
9. Regulations on the disclosure of information to students/parents about budget allocation for education should be developed. The proportion of funding from the state budget and funding mobilized from parents and other sources should be clarified.
10. Regulations on the participation of students and parents in education strategies/plans/policies/programs at all levels should be revised and supplemented.
11. Participatory planning should be enhanced in all aspects from school management to SEDP development at all levels. If participation continues to be perceived to be costly and time-consuming for the decision makers, or its values and benefits are neglected and denied, there would be no motivation to facilitate this practice. Participatory decision making practices should be encouraged by Government authorities at all levels with the provisions that (i) it includes information provision/feedback, consultation and negotiation; (ii) interaction/participation should be ensured throughout the decision making process and for all stakeholders; (iii) open participation leads to good decisions; (iv) it focuses on mobilizing supports, and (v) the success is measured by agreement on actions to be taken.
12. Models encouraging children's participation should be piloted so that children can participate in the planning of community issues and annual SEDP at levels, starting at the commune level. Decisions on investment, such as school construction and refurbishment, need to incorporate students' or their representatives' consultation as a compulsory practice. Other models such as students acting as an "advisory board" for commune, district and province authorities should also be piloted, reviewed and replicated.

SOLUTIONS FOR MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGAL REGULATIONS ON PARTICIPATION

13. The supervision and monitoring implementation of regulation on stakeholders' participation that have already been prescribed in current laws and regulations (Education Law, Anti Corruption Law, etc.), need to be strengthened. The supervision and monitoring can be performed in various ways and by different entities. First and foremost, the supervising agencies must be People's Councils at all levels, CSOs, inspectorate, etc. In the supervising and monitoring process, the feedback from beneficiaries of education services (students and parents) is a must.
14. In the long-run, promoting the participation of the beneficiaries and organizations will help establish an effective and practical monitoring and supervising mechanism. This is also a measure to mobilize social resources to share the responsibilities with the state management agencies in public governance.

SOLUTIONS FOR ENHANCING PARTICIPATING CAPACITY TO REMOVE BENEFICIARIES' SUBJECTIVE BARRIERS

15. Parents should be equipped with the necessary skills to cooperate and coordinate with the schools in promoting effective school governance.
 - o The first would be improving the parents' skills to cooperate with schools in managing school education quality by: (i) cooperating with organizations which can have influence on children's pre-school years such as medical units and NGOs to help mothers to gear their children for school entrance; (ii) asking for parents' participation in monitoring

and evaluating their children's performance; (iii) employing different measures to enable parents to help their children with after-school activities; (iv) equipping parent with skills to evaluate the schools' quality of education, including teacher evaluation. The barriers to parents' participation such as limited educational background and lack of evaluation skills can be mitigated if parents are instructed about suitable evaluation methods.

- o The second would be expanding information provided to parents, especially to issues of the total budget for school operation and proportion of school's budget resources. Methods to disseminate information to parents should be adjusted by replacing the passive one-way methods (such as posting information on virtual notice boards or at the principal's office) with interactive, two-way measures to ensure that parents are explained about and understand the information.
16. Application of student-centered methods should be promoted to boost students' and parents' participation in school management. Two well-known and approved methods are CCM (which has been implemented by Oxfam in surveyed areas for many years), and the VNEN new school model (which has been rolled out by Ministry of Training and Education since the 2012-2013 school year).
17. Models and initiatives designed to boost students' and parents' participation should be assessed and if effective, replicated. Many school models and initiatives have succeeded in creating an enabling environment in which students and parents take the ownership of the education process to deliver an inclusive education. These models and initiatives need to be adopted on a larger scale, with their success factors fully analyzed to provide information and evidence for policy makers.
18. Special attention needs to be paid to female students and students from ethnic minorities. The above recommendations, if carried out, need to weave in specific actions for these two disadvantaged groups to close the inequality gap.

ANNOTATION

1. Participation: Participation in development context is a process where all the individuals in the community participate and influence the decisions on the development activities affecting their lives (United State of America Africa Development Fund).

Children's participation: A continuous process in which students represent and actively participate in the decision-making process (at various levels) on issues related to children. This process requires the sharing of information and dialogue between adults and children, based on mutual respect and shared power. Participation truly empowers children to identify/shape both the process and results. Participation is proactive." (Save the Children)
2. Quality education is a comprehensive definition, including: (i) Learners: are healthy individuals who are fully grown-up and ready to participate and learn with the support of families and communities in the learning process; (ii) Education Environment: needs to satisfy criteria of healthy, safe, protective, gender equality and provide adequate resources and facilities; (iii) Education Content: reflected in the relevance of curricula and teaching materials to meet the requirements of the basic skills, especially the ability to read and write, calculate, life skills and know how in the field of sex, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS and peace; (iv) Training processes to help teachers to apply child-centered teaching method in learning

environment such as class and school with reasonable organization and careful evaluation to promote learning process and reduce inequalities; (v) Education Results: knowledge, skills and attitude acquired by learners should have linked to the national goals on education and positive social participation.

3. Public sources of fund: Including state budget, equipment, textbooks, facilitations, teachers and their professional knowledge, information sources (especially information about new education policies) etc.
4. The stakeholders mentioned in this report include: (i) Group 1 - Direct beneficiary of education services (students) and indirect (parents), (ii) Group 2 - Managerial bodies in Education and Training sector (from MOET downward), (iii) Group 3 - State managerial bodies: People's Committees and managerial bodies (non-educational sectors) including Planning & Investment, Finance, Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs; Ethnicity Affairs, etc. and the elected bodies (People's Councils at all levels), (iv) Group 4 - Socio-political organizations - civil society organizations (e.g. Woman's Union, Youth's Union, Association for Education Promoting)
5. Even though the Government issued the regulation on tuition exemption for primary students national-wide and for poor or ethnic minority students in middle high school and high school levels.
6. This study identified 15 main groups of formal fees and informal parental payments at schools. More than half of surveyed fee/payment groups had a high frequency of occurrence and regarded as a burden to household budget. These fees/parental payments conclude: tuition fee, admission fee, contributions for school infrastructure, contributions for school annual expenditures, lab fee, funds of class and school, expenditures of textbooks and educational tools, school uniform fee, lunch fee, daily travelling and parking fee, extra class

and tutor fees, and gifts and "envelopes" to teachers. The poor households tend to pay less (in absolute terms), however, education-related expenses still account for the large proportion (in relative terms) of their total income.

7. On average, each household in HIDE spent 7.038 million VND for a child in school year 2010-2011, accounting for 14.5% of the total household income.
8. Some relevant studies are:
 - o Anne T.Henderson & Kren L.Mapp (2002), A New Wave of Evidence The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement
 - o Save The Children (2013), Children's participation in the Analysis planning and design of Programmes
 - o Young Lives (2006), Fostering the right to participation Children's involvement in Vietnam's poverty reduction policy process
9. The levels of participation used in this research:
 - o As for students and parents, levels of participation are in accordance with the ladder of children's participation developed by Roger A. Hart (1992), including: Non-participating; Being informed for implementation; Being consulted; Implementing (officially being assigned with the task and provided with information); and Supervising.
 - o As for other stakeholders including teachers, schools, unions, CSOs, etc., the levels of participation are in accordance with the Regulation on Implementation of Democracy in Organization, including: Non-participating; Being informed for implementation; Being consulted; Implementing (officially being assigned with the task and provided with information); Making decision; and Supervising.

10. Decision No.04/2000/QĐ-BGDDT on the issuance of the democratic regulation at school level
11. Vietnam is the first country in Asia and the second in the world to sign in the Convention.
12. These best practices are: (i) Disclosing list of teachers assigned for classes before every new school year so that parents can choose teachers for their children [the high ratio of selected teachers reflects their good teaching quality and reputation]; (ii) The mechanism of confidential information exchange between school management board and students/ parents; (iii) The mailbox "What I want to say" at schools being participants in Oxfam's programs in Vietnam, which encourages students to share their joys, their favourite things, or to feedback, express their anxiety, questions, and recommendations to teachers and school management; (iv) The model of class self-management board enables students to involve in making educational decisions at school level via representatives of each class (president of the self-management board). Then classes' representatives have a meeting with the Principal every two weeks to share these ideas to contribute to school activities; and (v) Organizing whole school parents meetings instead of class parents meetings. These models are recognized as more effective ways to encourage the participation of the beneficiaries of educational services.
13. Education Law has provisions stipulating the schools' responsibility for coordinating with learners' families, organizations and individuals in educational activities in accordance with Article 58 and Article 93. Meanwhile, the right of learners, learners' families and society to receive adequate information and to participate is also stipulated in this Law. Specifically, Clause 1 and 6 of Article 86 regulates that learners have right to receive information about their own learning and training activities and to express their own opinions directly or through

their legal representatives for developing schools, protecting legitimate rights and interests of learners.

According to Article 95, parents or legal guardians have rights to request schools to inform them about results in learning and training of their children or persons under their guardianship and to take part in educational activities and activities for parents or guardians at schools. Article 96 stipulates that the Parent Representative Board is established as a mechanism for representing parents of a class or school during the implementation process of its educational operations. Circular 55/2011 was issued by Ministry of Education and Training on the regulation of the Parent Representative Board. Accordingly, the Parent Representative Board is responsible for coordinating with teachers and schools in educating their children, and has rights to organize and take consultation among parents in class. Parents, the Parent Representative Board, and schools have to unify opinions on the contribution, management and disbursement of the receivable amounts in accordance with the democracy mechanism between families and schools, and of other legitimate grants from individuals, organizations for the Parent Representative Board's activities.

According to Clause 2, Article 23 of the Consolidated Anti Corruption Law (no. 10/ VBHN-VPQH dated 12/12/2012 by Office of Vietnam National Assembly) on the "transparency in education sector", "the educational management agencies shall disclose the content of management, use of State budget, assets, infrastructure, employment of staff, state workers and financial resource for education activities, grants, investments for education and other fees in accordance with legal regulations"; Clause 3 stipulates: "the state-run education institutions shall publicly disclose their commitment on the education outcomes; the collection, management and use of tuition, entrance fee, fees from consultation,

technology transferring activities, the grants and investments for education, other fee collections and expenditure in accordance with legal regulations". These regulations show that the publicizing of information is considered a mechanism to prevent corruption in educational sector. Making the information available to public will lay the foundation for the participation of people and communities in monitoring the educational activities in general and the use of investment resources for education in particular.

14. "Participation" in general, and others like "citizen participation" or "participation of children" are commonly used all over the world, however, these concepts are still in the development process of an unified concept being accepted widely and used as the basic for policy process. In Vietnam, these concepts are also undergoing the development process and are discussed in studies of INGOs or organizations pursuing right-based approach like organizations in UN system (such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA).



Provincial authority leaders responded to questions raised by primary & secondary school children in Ninh Thuan Provincial Child Forum 2013.
Photo: Vu Thu Trang/Oxfam.



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