

VIETNAM



POPULATION

98.9 million

Inhabitants (2023)

Plastic Waste Reduction in Schools

In recent years, the surge in plastic waste in Vietnam has significantly heightened the risk of pollution, placing significant pressure on the country's environmental management system. As the economy and population grow, so too does the consumption of single-use plastics, leading to an overwhelming volume of waste that existing infrastructure struggles to manage, causing environmental degradation, with plastic waste contaminating rivers, coastlines, and urban areas.

To mitigate pollution in marine ecosystems and prevent potential health risks in communities, the government has taken decisive action by implementing new Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations, holding producers accountable for the entire lifecycle of their products, including waste management. Additionally, the government has introduced effective solid waste management models and demonstrated practical measures to reduce single-use plastics. Public education campaigns have also been launched to raise awareness about waste responsibility, management, and pollution prevention, empowering citizens to actively participate in these efforts. These comprehensive strategies aim to create a more sustainable and environmentally conscious society.

Several programs have been implemented in schools, supported by various international funding institutions, all focused on reducing plastic waste and educating students, teachers, and administrative staff on plastic recycling and pollution mitigation strategies. These initiatives included comprehensive training on plastic recycling and waste management, equipping participants with the knowledge and skills to tackle plastic pollution effectively. Additionally, schools have organized outreach activities within their local communities, raising awareness about the issue of plastic pollution and promoting practical methods to reduce waste. These efforts are fostering a culture of environmental responsibility both within the schools and the broader community, empowering students and community members to take action against plastic pollution.





PLASTIC WASTE FREE SCHOOL MODEL

The "Mitigating Marine Plastic Debris in Viet Nam" project, led by WWF-Viet Nam and overseen by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Agency of Seas and Islands, launched the Plastic Waste Free Schools model as of 2020. Nowadays it is being implemented in more than 100 schools. This initiative prioritizes students as ambassadors of environmental action, beginning with effective waste management. The project involves steps such as introducing the model to schools, conducting focus group discussions, performing waste audits, and analyzing results to create action plans. Key activities include integrating waste reduction criteria into school standards, establishing rules for waste classification, and embedding environmental protection into school curricula and extracurricular activities.

The impacts of the initiative include increased awareness among students and teachers about environmental protection and the dangers of plastic pollution. Teachers now incorporate content on plastic waste management in their lectures. Mitigation measures include waste segregation in classrooms, the reuse and recovery of materials, and composting of green waste. Creative projects, such as making decorations from recycled plastic, are also part of the curriculum. Additionally, some schools have banned single-use plastic items like bags, straws, Styrofoam boxes, cups, and bottles in their canteens. Students are actively participating in Plastic Waste Free Clubs, where they serve as advocates and engage with community members, encouraging them to reduce their plastic use.

SCHOOLS STEM THE TIDE OF PLASTIC POLLUTION, SPARK WASTE REDUCTION

USAID's "Municipal Waste Recycling Program" (MWRP) was aiming to reduce land-based sources of ocean plastics pollution in Vietnam, among three other countries. As part of the MWRP initiative, the Centre for Social Research and Development (CSR) in Vietnam provided training on plastic waste management and recycling to 15,600 students, teachers, and school administrators across nine schools in Hue. The schools initiated recycling programs for canteen plastic waste and established environmental clubs. To raise awareness about plastic pollution and promote waste reduction, youth groups and teachers organized various activities, including poster competitions, fashion shows featuring recycled materials, urban sculpture projects, and beach cleanups within their schools and communities.

The initiative led to a significant reduction in single-use plastic consumption in the canteens of the nine schools, by implementing measures such as mandating eat-in lunches, introducing reusable cups and plates, and adding drinking stations. As a result, over 10 tons of recycled waste were collected from these schools in Hue. The program's impact extended beyond the schools, as students, armed with a deeper understanding of plastic waste and recycling, encouraged their families to start separating waste at home.

This success garnered attention from other schools, leading to a commitment by over 35 institutions to adopt CSR's curriculum on the challenges of plastic waste and the importance of recycling by 2020.

Students performing a waste audit at school



Presentation of Plastic Reduction Action Plans by Students



Source: WWF Viet Nam



Students are being taught about waste segregation at a school in Hue City



Source: USAID MWRP/Nguyen Minh Duc



PLASTIC WASTE REDUCTION IN SCHOOLS IN HUE CITY

Since 2022, the Plastic Smart Cities project has supported 52 schools in Hue City, in their initiative to instill plastic reduction habits in students, encouraging them to share these behaviors with their families and communities. In total, 32 primary and 20 secondary schools, have engaged nearly 37,000 students in plastic reduction models. The project provided 72 "Greenhouses" to promote waste separation at source, and introduced a teaching reference book on plastic reduction. Over 200 teachers received training to integrate these practices into their classrooms. Schools were also supported to pilot composting activities to use organic waste for gardening. Additionally, 25 environmental clubs like "I Love the Environment" were established, involving over 500 students as "Green Ambassadors" to promote waste separation and plastic reduction in their classrooms, families and communities. The project also connected schools with local stakeholders to organize activities like making paper bags for vendors, school waste audits, and a Recycling Fair. All activities in 2023 resulted in the collection of 8.5 tons of materials, including over 1.2 tons of recycled plastic waste, and have inspired students to spread eco-friendly habits within their families and communities, fostering a greener lifestyle in Hue City.



Source: Plastic Smart Cities

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT



Stakeholder involvement is essential in addressing plastic pollution, with professors, administrative staff, and particularly students playing pivotal roles. Educating professors and school staff ensures that they can effectively model and reinforce sustainable practices within the school environment. However, educating children is especially impactful, as they not only learn about plastic pollution reduction, waste management, and recycling but also become ambassadors of these practices. When children are empowered with this knowledge, they often share it with their parents, families, and communities, inspiring a collective shift toward more sustainable behaviors. This grassroots approach amplifies the message, fostering widespread awareness and action to combat plastic pollution at both the local and broader levels.



SOURCES

- Plastic Smart Cities – <https://plasticsmartcities.org/plastic-free-school-vietnam/> ; <https://plasticsmartcities.org/environmental-education-schools-in-hue-adopt-waste-reduction-model/>
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- WWF Vietnam – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptuJvLK8kQ0>
- Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research – <https://www.apn-gcr.org/project/environmental-education-in-combatting-marine-plastic-waste-the-role-of-youth-in-schools/>
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