

Saigon Children's Charity CIO (SCC)

Strategy 2015-2017

Vietnam in 2013-14

WEF – Global Competitiveness¹:

“Up five positions, Vietnam ranks 70th, regaining half of the ground it lost last year. Despite these encouraging developments, the foundation of Vietnam's economy and prosperity remain fragile.”

Millennium Development Goals – United Nations²

- **MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger**

“Great progress but applying the new approach³ adopted by Vietnam of measuring child poverty shows that about one third of all children under 16 can be identified as “poor”. This equates to around 7 million children or nearly 29% of all children. The Mekong Delta and the Northwest now have the highest child poverty rates of 52.8% and 64.6% respectively.”

- **MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education**

“Vietnam has made significant progress. In 2009, the net enrolment rate in primary school was 95.5% and primary school completion rate was 88.2%. To build on these achievements several areas need attention – particularly relating to equity and quality of education. Despite the progress the poorest households, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities still lag behind.”

Vietnam Sustainable Development Strategy 2011 – 2020⁴

“To advance the quality of education and training in order to improve intellectual standard of people and professional skills in favour of the requirements for national, regional and local development”.

Vietnam Education Development Strategy 2011 – 2020⁵

Vietnam aims to “achieve universal education.....the rate of children at primary school age is 99%, at secondary school is 95% and 80% of young people graduate from High School; 70% of children with a disability have the opportunity to access education.”

¹ World Economic Forum – Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013

² United Nations Vietnam – October 2012

³ Multi-dimensional approach adopted with UNICEF which includes education; health; nutrition; shelter; water; sanitation; child work; social inclusion and protection.

⁴ <http://chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/strategies/strategiesdetails?categoryId=30&articleId=10050825>

⁵ http://vanban.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/hethongvanban?class_id=2&mode=detail&document_id=160806 and http://giaoducmoitruong-qiz-baclieu.com/images/c/c2/The_education_development_strategy_from_2011-2020.pdf (English)

Strategy 2008-2014 – Summary

Core elements of the strategy for the years 2008-2014:

- i. To maintain current core activities – school building, individual child scholarships, Thang Long School and vocational training – but adjusted to meet current and future needs.
- ii. Introduce new and complimentary programmes:
 - Aim to do more for those we currently support
 - Broaden to capture children we do not currently support
 - Be recognised as a quality organization.

Strategy 2015-2017: Summary

With a new Director in place, the strategy for 2015-2017 does not include significant new elements but aims to consolidate and continue the natural evolution of SCC following its conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). It also seeks to benefit from the increasingly open and cooperative nature of authorities, and looks for additional ways in which SCC can support children and families that may not have been possible in the past.

Vietnam is at risk of falling into the ‘middle-income trap’, where many remain below the poverty line, but national resources are not sufficient to provide necessary support or investment to address this.

There are still a great number of families with children in Vietnam who are below the poverty line. These families and children continue to need the help and support of organisations like SCC, without whom their conditions will not improve and, worse than that, their children will continue to struggle and suffer. There is still, therefore, a great amount of work to do in simply getting children into school and keeping them there, particularly in more remote rural areas.

It is true that the various levels of government are committed to changing this but, with a population of 25 million children under 16⁶, even a 1% miss rate would still mean 250,000 children. This means that SCC’s core activities and ambitions will remain relevant and required for some time to come.

There are three elements within the proposed strategy:

1. Maintain current direction

Maintain and develop the core programmes of Child Development (CDP), School Building (SB), Development and Integration (DIP - Vocational Training, Thang Long School and Working With Others (WWO)), evolving them as need and opportunity dictates.

2. Greater Engagement around Core Programmes

Work more closely with schools, particularly, but also with families and communities to support children’s development and build our expertise.

3. Development of SCC

Update infrastructure, systems and processes to continue to make the organisation more professional without losing the soul of the charity, its core focus on improving the lives of children, or its reputation for quality and transparency. Consider a process towards full or partial localisation of the SCC CIO entity if appropriate.

⁶ Source. MOLISA. <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/news/detail/tabid/75/newsid/54402/seo/Qui-mo-dan-so-tre-em-du-bao-den-nam-2020/language/vi-VN/Default.aspx>

Strategy 2015-2017: Further Detail

Vision and Mission

The vision for SCC should remain unchanged from our inception: *“Eliminating Poverty in Vietnam through Education”*.

The Mission Statement was refined in 2008, and a further change is proposed to reflect better the wide age range of children supported by SCC:

“SCC enables disadvantaged children and young adults in Vietnam to reach their full potential through receiving a quality education relevant to their needs.”

“Disadvantaged” is defined as ‘any disadvantage physical or mental, visible or invisible which affects a child’s ability to access education or to learn to their full potential’.

Guiding Principles

These have been evolved from those within the 2008-2014 strategy. These are our tactical fundamentals and will guide the route and style of our work as well as the spirit in which it is conducted.

1. Education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty, but simply getting children to school is not enough: ensuring they have the best quality and quantity of education is important too.
2. SCC works without discrimination for the benefit of all disadvantaged children and youngsters in Vietnam, and prioritises our work towards those who most need our help.
3. SCC fully recognises and supports the rights of children, but applies a needs-based approach to assessing how and where best to apply developmental programme activity.
4. We are interested in the ‘whole child’, in as much as this affects their ability to enter and maintain education, to learn effectively and to develop relevant life and employment skills.
5. We always look for existing solutions through partners we trust and create new programmes/activities only when we are sure of the need, becoming a deliverer only when there is no alternative and it is within our abilities. SCC should always ‘add value’.
6. SCC operates with integrity, ensuring that our work is of the highest quality: we aim to hold our partners and others we work with to the same standard, particularly in construction.
7. All of our work should be researched properly, monitored and fully evaluated. Results and outcomes should be disseminated widely to our donors, sponsors and supporters.
8. We foster independence in those we support, ensuring that we do not create dependency, and never replacing the responsibility of parents, the authorities or the child.
9. We should always look for ways to involve the community in designing and delivering answers and leave behind learning when we can.
10. SCC always aims to maintain low but realistic overhead costs thereby maximising the effective use of donor funds for programme activity.

Geography:

Over the next three years we will continue to work in areas that need our help the most. This will see us continue our focus on the Mekong Delta where the drop-out rate is highest⁷ and where the population of children is growing the most⁸. We will particularly work in those provinces currently covered by our license which, in 2014, are: Ho Chi Minh, Tra Vinh, Tay Ninh, Dong Nai, Tien Giang, Hau Giang, Kien Giang and Ca Mau.

It is possible that we will withdraw from at least one of these within the timeframe of this strategy. Withdrawal would depend on a judgment being made about the relative position and strength of any locality to manage without support from SCC. Those provinces most likely to be considered will include the three Provinces in which we have worked longest: Tay Ninh, Tien Giang and Dong Nai.

Working in the North and Centre. Initial research carried out in response to encouragement from both authorities and donors to deliver programmes in Northern provinces, has identified both genuine need and local partners of appropriate quality and capability. We should therefore explore this option cautiously, testing capability to deliver in areas more remote from HCMC (something we have already done in Quang Tri), while ensuring we do not lose focus on our core areas, and that we remain strategic in our choices, rather than donor driven.

Delivering programmes in these areas will also allow us to assess whether this may open up an additional donor base in the north of Vietnam, and to explore the need and the benefits of SCC having an office in Hanoi within the next three years. Such a move could broaden our geographical reach, enable us to engage more closely with government and relevant authorities and may also justify the selection and appointment of a Hanoi-based Trustee

Target groups of children and young people

- Our core target group remains children of mainstream school age, those from 6 to 18 from severely disadvantaged backgrounds. Our activities may occasionally have a broader catchment of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds aged between 3 and 25.
- With an increasing emphasis on the link between school and work, SCC will naturally end up working more with young adults. Our work with young adults (18+) would be limited, mainly, to working with those with whom we have worked previously - while they were at Thang Long School, for example, or supported within the Child Development Programme. This particularly applies to all of our current Tertiary Education support such as university, college and vocational training scholarships. There will be occasions when we will augment this audience, particularly in HCMC around vocational training, with “new” young people who fit our criteria and demonstrate that they would benefit.

⁷ Source: UNFPA Fact Sheet -

http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/vietnam/shared/Factsheet/FINAL_Factsheet_Education_ENG.pdf

⁸ Source: MOET. <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/news/detail/tabid/75/newsid/54402/seo/Qui-mo-dan-so-tre-em-du-bao-den-nam-2020/language/vi-VN/Default.aspx>

Key Elements of SCC Strategy 2015-2017

1. Maintain current direction

- ❖ **Continue to deliver the core benefits of the current programmes**, and aim to layer additional services on top which help to keep children in school, with a quality education.
- ❖ **Focus on children/young people “dropping out”** and getting them back into school. Especially at crunch points such as transition from primary to secondary school and from secondary school to High School. Access to primary school is much easier and records show almost 100% of children now starting. We would continue to support those who cannot get to school for whatever reason but we know that the times when children are most vulnerable to dropping out are those where there is a natural change from one school to another.
- ❖ **Focus on children/young people who have dropped out** – support and counseling, getting them into vocational training and jobs. It can often be impossible to get children and young people back to school even if they are below the legal working age of 15. This is already an element of work at SCC, run out of Thang Long School, but is likely to expand to cover District 8 in the short to medium term. We will also continue to provide guidance and counseling for those too young to work and vocational training and advice for those who are old enough to enter the workforce.
- ❖ **Minimise the risk of children “dropping out”** through counseling, life skills training and other support that enables them to remain at school and provide them with options for developing themselves if they fail to continue within mainstream school.
- ❖ **Provide advice and counselling to better equip families**, children and young people to manage their own affairs, remaining loyal to two core elements of SCC philosophy:
 - *“Fostering independence and avoid creating dependency”*. Highlight ways that children and families manage by themselves and access SCC only when they are struggling. This may include signposting to relevant state agencies and other sources of support and may lead, in the future, to full advocacy.
 - *“Never replace the responsibility of parents, the authorities or the child”*. We must judge whether those we support have what they need to make informed choices and meet their responsibilities. More than half of all parents of children SCC support never attended school and their ability to advise their child is limited. The same is true of authorities with responsibility but no training or budget to conduct the work required.
- ❖ **Remaining with our children through to young adulthood** and until they are in meaningful and gainful employment⁹ to ensure we meet our overall vision. This has been the subject of much debate about where the responsibilities in meeting the vision of SCC might end; particularly with reference to age groups. Ultimately we feel that much of our work and the work of others would potentially be wasted if we missed this last connection, especially in the absence of good services for this age group from almost anyone else.
- ❖ **Better/faster communication with the children** directly and via local authorities, schools and their community. Getting help to children and their families when they are in need as quickly as possible is crucial. If the problem is bad enough to knock a child out of school, the quicker that support is made available the lower the potential damage. After an absence of 4 months, for instance, it is almost impossible to get them back to school at all. This response involves training authorities and schools and developing better local communication networks such as that being piloted in Tra Vinh – the Community Based Supporting Children Network (CBSCN).

⁹ SCC defines this as earning a minimum of 3million VND per month for 6 continuous months in the same job

- ❖ **Thang Long School (TLS)** must reflect the educational and infrastructure standards SCC seeks to install elsewhere. Currently TLS does not reflect the standards which we apply in our own school building programme or in the care and maintenance that we expect from the communities in which we operate. The new Director will seek to develop and agree a fresh and coherent strategy for the school with the Management Board, engage District 4 authorities so that they may be regarded as a high quality local partner, and seek Trustee approval to invest in uplifting the quality of facilities and teaching provided.

2. Greater Engagement around Core Programmes

A consequence of Vietnam opening up is that support from organisations like SCC is increasingly welcomed by local authorities and schools to work more and more within schools. They are often overwhelmed with government requirements to support the children but not always supported with budget or training to carry out these duties. SCC's approach would be to provide technical and other support to help them to fulfill those requirements.

In the short term this will mean that children and young people can benefit from support that has already been identified as important. In the longer term this will also mean that authorities will increasingly be able to provide this support themselves and SCC can step away.

- ❖ Getting involved in areas where we are welcomed, such as around issues in school of bullying and abuse, as well as broader child counseling and general teaching quality, all of which can detrimentally affect a child's education.
- ❖ Child health matters. Good nutrition and ability to learn are closely linked. SCC will consider ways in which we can work with schools, families and relevant partners to optimise nutrition and address medical conditions which prevent school attendance.
- ❖ Greener schools, buildings and better environment. SCC will develop its school building programme to ensure that we make best use of materials and techniques which limit our impact on the environment. SCC will also continue its work with schools and children around environmental matters such as recycling and good hygiene.
- ❖ Developing better quality facilities with equipment, teacher advice and support. If education is the right way to provide options for children, then the quality of teaching and equipment available are key too. SCC will continue to provide materials in support of teaching as well as networking and learning support for teachers across our schools. We will aim to pilot a complete ICT technology solution in one secondary or High School within a donor partnership over the next three years.
- ❖ Providing advice on further education, careers and work. This is already a requirement for schools but is provided very badly, if at all. SCC has trialed, in 2014, a **Getting Ready for Work** programme which provides careers advice and personal education counseling to children and to appointed teaching staff. This will be rolled out across CDP if it proves successful, and early evaluation suggest it is.
- ❖ **Children with disabilities** continue to be the group most disadvantaged when it comes to accessing any kind of education. During the last three years SCC has been successfully funding work and building a reputation in this area through the **Working with Others** grant scheme. One aspect of the funding was to help SCC determine which disabilities or areas of work were most in need of support. A paper will be developed on this and the majority of funding from 2015 is likely to be committed to one or two facets of disability and education.

3. Development of SCC

- ❖ We will continue to focus on quality and professionalism. We feel that every child's life is partly in our hands and that we therefore owe every child and family we work with the best possible support.
- ❖ We will continue to foster close cooperative links between our programme and support teams, developing leadership capability and building overall SCC team spirit.
- ❖ SCC will continue to improve control systems, including upgraded IT infrastructure and technology, for effective, transparent communication, sharing and reporting.
- ❖ We will aim to ensure that we employ the right people and support them with training. We will also identify high quality, appropriate partners for those areas where SCC needs to operate, but where others offer more resource or experience.
- ❖ We will always ensuring prioritisation of SCC work for those who need our help most. We will continually strive to maintain the soul, spirit and heart of a "small and beautiful" SCC, in balance with the need for professionalism, efficiency and accountability.

4. Funding

- ❖ SCC annual income has more than doubled during the last 5 years in spite of the global financial crisis. The range of sources from which funds are gained has also broadened considerably, as true geographically as it is in terms of the type of source: individuals, companies, foundations and SCC's own fundraising efforts. SCC is not dependent on any one individual event or funder although a small number now provide regular committed amounts over \$50,000, and there are two significant corporate partners within the school building programme.
- ❖ It is increasingly clear that some funds traditionally targeted at Vietnam (of note such as DfID in the UK) will now target their resources elsewhere.
- ❖ SCC will seek more local sources of income, mainly Vietnamese businesses and wealthy individuals, also taking account of the increasing success of local celebrity fundraisers. This continues to be a "grey area" for INGOs and in the short term is unlikely to represent a large or a broad source of revenue. However other INGOs are increasingly fundraising locally and it makes sense for SCC to mirror this.
- ❖ In line with this strategy SCC will explore local structures and tax benefits. There may be merit in developing a local partner entity, with Vietnamese Trustees, which may also form part of a longer term localisation and exit strategy for UK-based SCC.
- ❖ We will aim to improve and expand our network of contacts in all areas but particularly with international foundations and companies based in Vietnam, as well ensuring continued and well managed good communications with the existing network of friends and supporters that SCC has developed over the years, including SCC's own nascent Alumni network within Vietnam. Improved IT infrastructure will help greatly with this.
- ❖ We will ensure high quality and professionalism in our contact management, fundraising and communications work as in every other aspect of our work.
- ❖ SCC will develop its international strategy, particularly in the area of fundraising, including annual events in Hong Kong, Singapore and perhaps London. In particular, a reinvigorated SCC USA could potentially generate significant regular income for SCC. SCC will support SCC USA to help achieve this if appropriate governance, leadership, strategy and commitment is apparent on the US side.