



Lisbon School
of Economics
& Management
Universidade de Lisboa

MASTER
DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

MASTER'S FINAL WORK
DISSERTATION

VIETNAM: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNDER A SINGLE-
PARTY POLITICAL SYSTEM (CPV – COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM)
1986-2000

CARLA CRISTINA DOS SANTOS GOMES

OCTOBER - 2023



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SUPERVISION:
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“The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a socialist rule of law State of the People, by the People and for the People.”

Constitution of Vietnam

“The Geneva Accords establish North and South Vietnam with the 17th parallel as the dividing line. The agreement also stipulates that elections will be held within two years to unify Vietnam under a single democratic government. These elections never happen.”

HISTORY, 2017

GLOSSARY

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CPV – Communist Party of Vietnam

EFA – Education for All

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GNI – Gross National Income

HDI – Human Development Index

IMF – International Monetary Fund

NAV – National Assembly of Vietnam

UN – United Nations

ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia's Vietnam has a rich and intricate history that underwent significant transformations from 1986 to 2000. The Human Development Index (HDI) came to be a crucial measure of nations' progress and overall well-being in recent decades. This dissertation delves into the correlation between Vietnam's five-year development plans from 1986 to 2000 and the evolution of the HDI in Vietnam. The study takes inspiration from Amartya Sen's "capability approach" to assess human welfare. The analysis will examine Vietnam's Five-Year Plan during the aforementioned period, as well as the historical events that influenced Vietnam's policies from a theoretical framework.

This analysis evaluates Vietnam's developmental advancements during a critical time frame in its history. Through the implementation of a comprehensive methodology, essential HDI metrics (life expectancy, educational attainment, and income distribution) will be assessed. The objective is to better understand the accomplishments, obstacles, and fundamental patterns that have influenced the nation's developmental pursuits.

Based on careful analysis of pertinent statistical data and a thorough review of the literature, it can be observed that Vietnam's HDI has shown an upward trend over the years. Despite particular challenges, this positive progress can be attributed to the government's commendable policies and development plans.

KEYWORDS: Vietnam; Human Development Index; Development Plan; Đổi Mới; Socialism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

During my academic pursuits, I was fortunate to scrutinize and assess several cases from developing nations and the Global South. Although most of these cases centered on China and Africa, regrettably, other noteworthy countries, such as Vietnam, were overlooked. Vietnam's remarkable economic advancement over the past few decades serves as a valuable model for countries that do not adhere to the conventional "Western approach to development." Armed with the theoretical expertise acquired through this master's degree, analyzing local development strategies at a practical level becomes an excellent analytical guideline for the social area.

In the last 30 years, Vietnam has experienced an extraordinary shift from a country devastated by war to a flourishing economy. While Vietnam's GDP per capita still trails behind other Asian Tiger Economies¹, the country thrives and is now part of the Tiger Cub Economies club², alongside Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Although Vietnam's institutional structure has been impacted by previous central planning, the country's steady progress in this area promises a bright future.

With the Western community's historical interest in Vietnam³, it is essential to analyze the history of the country, its development process, and international influence. Quoting James Baldwin, *"To do your first work over means to reexamine everything. Go back to where you started, or as far back as you can, examine all of it, travel your road again, and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to yourself: but know whence you came."*⁴ Still, in the present day, to contain the Chinese advance, the United States continues to invest in alliances with the Vietnamese government, a government that it once considered a communist enemy.

¹ "The Four Asian Tigers are the high-growth economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Fueled by exports and rapid industrialization, the Four Asian Tigers have consistently maintained high levels of economic growth since the 1960s and have collectively joined the ranks of the world's wealthiest nations." Bloomenthal, 2021.

² "Tiger Cub economies is the name given to five developing economies of Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The name is meant to imply that these economies follow the same growth model as those of the Four Asian Tigers—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan." Chen, 2022.

³ See Statler, K. C. (2007). "Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam." University Press of Kentucky. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcn93>.

⁴ James Baldwin: *The Price of the Ticket*, 1985.

For decades, Vietnam was under French colonization and faced numerous conflicts that resulted in the oppression and exploitation of its people⁵. They yearned for independence, freedom, and basic necessities to live fulfilling lives. In 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established (North Vietnam), giving every Vietnamese citizen the right to vote for deputies to the National Assembly, the highest organ of state power. Vietnam is ruled by a socialist rule of law state of the people, by the people, and for the people, led by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). According to the CPV, this government is the result of the Vietnamese people's progress in compliance with the law, and it represents their aspirations and choices (National Defence Journal, 2021).

Over the past 40 years, Vietnam has made impressive strides in terms of institutional systems and human development following a tumultuous period marked by conflict and the fall of the Soviet Union. The country is governed by a single communist party, the CPV, which has prioritized transforming the economy into a socialist-oriented market and establishing a socialist rule of law through judicial and legal reforms, including the 1992 constitution reform. Additionally, the government has placed a greater emphasis on improving human well-being in its national Five-Year plans. These efforts have led to substantial changes in the original Constitution's socialist foundations, reflecting a new human, political, and social rights approach. While the government has shown respect for these rights, there is still room for improvement within the system (Bui, 2014).

This paper aims to analyze and illustrate how the development concept evolved in Vietnam since the post-civil war era (1975) through their Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Five-Year Plans and how the HDI (life expectancy at birth; years of schooling; and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita) helped and changed the development plans of the country's human rights regime, despite being governed under one single communist Party. By analyzing these geometric indices, it is possible to answer the following questions:

- ⇒ Has Vietnam incorporated the HDI concepts into its development plans since its creation (1990)?

⁵ HISTORY, 2017. "Vietnam War Timeline" & National Defence Journal, 2021.

- ⇒ What are the most significant economic, social, and political events from 1986 to 2000 that influenced Vietnam's Five-Year Plans?
- ⇒ Was there an improvement in the HDI despite the restrictions imposed by the political regime (communism)?

The years between 1986 and 2000 were pivotal in Vietnam's history, marking a significant turning point for the country's social and economic progress. The series of market reforms, known as *Đổi Mới*, brought about a profound transformation, enabling Vietnam to shift from a war-torn and isolated nation to a dynamic emerging market economy. This era was critical for Vietnam, as it introduced economic growth, social changes, poverty reduction, and integration into the global economy, among other reasons. As a result, Vietnam has now become an essential player on the world stage. This period ultimately reshaped Vietnam's approach to socio-economic development, paving the way for a brighter future (Baum, 2020).

2. WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

The concept of 'development' is an intricate and multifaceted concept that lacks a uniform definition. The theories surrounding it are more complex than even the Big Bang theory⁶. It remains one of the most critical and controversial subjects in social sciences, having provoked numerous theories. Although scholars have studied the connotation of the term 'development' for over 70 years, it is still challenging to comprehend due to its dependence on the context and the user. Development can mean different things to different people, ranging from a long-term societal transformation process to a short-to-medium-term outcome of desired objectives and even a dominant discourse of Western modernity. Some view development as an economic power, others as a measure of human well-being, and still others as social improvement, making it a complex and thought-provoking topic of discussion. (Desai; Potter, 2014).

⁶ "Widely held theory of the evolution of the universe. Its essential feature is the emergence of the universe from a state of extremely high temperature and density—the so-called big bang that occurred 13.8 billion years ago. Although this type of universe was proposed by Russian mathematician Aleksandr Friedmann and Belgian astronomer Georges Lemaître in the 1920s, the modern version was developed by Russian-born American physicist George Gamow and colleagues in the 1940s." Britannica, 2023.

The idea of development became popular after World War II in 1945. However, many experts claim that it actually originated during the later stages of colonialism. The post-war development ideology aimed to eliminate global poverty, which is widely attributed to the colonial legacy. Colonialism is often seen as the leading cause of poverty and inequality in today's world. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the link between colonial development and post-colonial/post-war development (Desai; Potter, 2014).

Over the years, the scope and agendas of development agencies have significantly broadened. Initially, development academics focused on economic development, believing it to be synonymous with human development. They aimed to provide access to essential needs like clean water, medicine, and poverty eradication. Nevertheless, history has taught us that this is not always the case. There have been instances where increased economic development (such as industrialization or scientific progress) has resulted in a growing divide between the affluent and the impoverished, leading to more underdevelopment and poverty (Rist, 2007).

Since the 1990s, poor institutions have been the leading cause of the lack of development and increased poverty in least-developed countries (LDCs)⁷. This theory has gained support among several academics, and organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have enforced "governance-related conditionalities" to provide international aid to recipient countries. Developed countries have also used their bilateral assistance to enforce these standards. Global Standard Institutions (GSI) are not defined by a single definition but rather by increasing market-free guidelines and private property rights for developing countries. Institutional reform and investment in industrialization are challenging but possible, as proven by the success cases of South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Having good, relevant institutions is critical to achieving development. Political institutions and decisive state intervention are essential, and the Vietnamese government aims to lead by example (Chang, 2011 & Chang; Andreoni, 2019).

⁷ "Least developed countries (LDCs) are low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets." United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023.

Numerous authors offer a critical perspective on the traditional understanding of development, including Felwine Sarr, a highly regarded Senegalese economist, philosopher, and writer, and Trinh T. Minh-ha, a Vietnamese writer and feminist theorist. These authors challenge the mainstream Western development concept, emphasizing the importance of cultural diversity as a fundamental aspect of human development. They argue that development should not be led by Western values, which have been imposed by Western powers, spreading cultural imperialism. Instead, local cultures, values, and systems should be supported. Furthermore, these authors highlight the impact of colonialism on development, stressing the need for "decolonizing development." Western-centric models have perpetuated inequality and marginalization in former colonies, and it is essential to acknowledge and rectify these historical inequalities to achieve equitable and sustainable development. As Sarr (2019) argues, recognizing and addressing these issues is crucial.

Professor Minh-ha, a distinguished graduate school faculty member at the University of California, Berkeley, has highlighted the importance of recognizing how gender dynamics intersect with broader power structures. Traditional development concepts often fail to consider this crucial aspect. For a more inclusive and equitable development, Professor Minh-ha stresses the need to address gender disparities (Minh-ha, 1988).

These are some of the authors that propose alternative forms of development, prioritizing human well-being, sustainability, social justice, and cultural diversity and preservation.

2.1. Development according to the Human Development Index

“Growth of GNP or of individual incomes can, of course, be very important as means to expanding the freedoms enjoyed by the members of the society. But freedoms depend also on other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements (for example, facilities for education and health care) as well as political and civil rights (for example, the liberty to participate in public discussion and scrutiny).”

(Sen at “Development as freedom”, 1999)

I will define “development” according to the Human Development Index (HDI) for this paper.

Although, in theory, the concept of development had undergone some changes in focus, by the 1970s, a fundamental shift occurred. New development approaches and practices started emerging; there was a need to re-evaluate the earliest concept's assumptions. An increasing consensus took center stage: economic growth was necessary but not enough for development. Without redistribution of revenue and economic means, inequalities would only increase, aching states and their people. ‘Development’ must be synonymous with human rights and well-being in general. This new “mindset” was captured by Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen with his human development approach (capability approach) – base for the Human Development Report (UNDP). Sen, economist and philosopher, has made significant contributions to the field of development economics, including his work on human development, and played a crucial role in creating the HDI in the early 1990s. According to Sen, ‘development’ must be theorized as the increase of the fundamental freedoms that people desire and value, always keeping in mind social change, equality, and justice for all (Amaro, 2003).

“If life is seen as a set of "doings and beings" that are valuable, the exercise of assessing the quality of life takes the form of evaluating these functionings and the capability to function. This valuational exercise cannot be done by focusing simply on communities or incomes that help those doings and beings, as in commodity-based accounting of the quality of life (involving a confusion of means and ends). "The life of money-making", as Aristotle put it, "is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else.”⁸

Sen's approach to development goes beyond traditional economic measures such as GDP and emphasizes the importance of focusing on people and their capabilities rather than merely economic growth. He argued that development should be assessed based on the opportunities and freedoms individuals have to live the lives they value, emphasizing human development's multidimensional nature and arguing that income or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) cannot adequately capture people's well-being. He highlights the significance of education, healthcare, social inclusion, political freedoms, and other factors contributing to a person's quality of life. In this context, the HDI, a composite

⁸ Sen (2003). "Development as capability expansion."

measure of life expectancy, education, and income, aligns with Sen's broader perspective on human development (Fukuda-Parr, 2003).

The HDI was created by economist Mahbub ul Haq and Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in response to criticisms of only GDP as a measure of development. Haq and Sen argued that GDP was too narrow and failed to capture critical dimensions of human well-being, such as health and education. The HDI is part of the human development approach, which distinguishes that human capabilities are infinite and allows one to measure and rank each country over time and across space. "*The HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone.*"⁹. It is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income used to rank countries based on their level of human development, developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990. It ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating higher levels of human development (Britannica, 2023).

“People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This may appear to be a simple truth. But it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth.”¹⁰

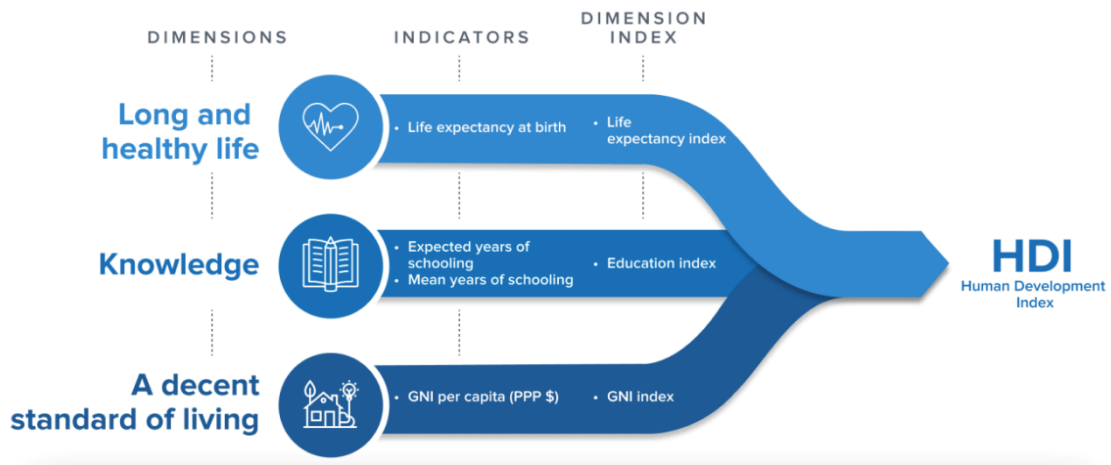
This index was shaped to provide a more comprehensive measure of human development beyond the traditional economic indicator of GDP. The HDI includes the capability to survive and be healthy, to be knowledgeable, and to enjoy a decent standard of living across three meters: life expectancy, literacy and schooling rates, and income.¹¹ Since its creation, the HDI has become widely used to measure human development. It is used by governments, international organizations, and researchers to track progress and identify areas for improvement in various countries around the world. The HDI is updated annually and includes data from over 190 countries (UNDP, 2023 - data).

⁹ United Nations Development Programme (2023). “Human Development Report.”

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme (1990). “Human Development Report.”

¹¹ See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 – HDI Dimensions and Indicators



Source: UNDP, Human Development Index (2023)

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a crucial metric that assesses a country's progress in human well-being and identifies areas that require intervention to enhance people's lives worldwide. The information provided by the HDI can influence policy decisions and resource allocation, guiding policymakers in determining the most effective ways to promote sustainable development. With the ability to compare countries, the HDI is an essential tool for measuring development and assessing global progress towards development goals. It plays a pivotal role in shaping policies and strategies aimed at promoting sustainable and equitable development across the globe (Fukuda-Parr, 2003 & UNDP, 2023).

Although the concept of human development is more compound and broader than its measure, as it is about people being able to live in freedom and dignity and being able to exercise choices to pursue an entire and resourceful life, this index includes universal values made ranking almost all the world's countries feasible, but not without criticism, as it left out several other capabilities. It entails that the index allocates the same weight to each indicator when the trade-off is different; therefore, countries can achieve the same HDI via various combinations of life expectancy, schooling rates, and GNI per capita (Fukuda-Parr, 2003).

In chapter 5 of this dissertation, I will analyze the inclusion, or not, of these development metrics (life expectancy, literacy and schooling rates, and income) in

Vietnam's development plans and the consequent evolution of the HDI throughout the years in the country.

3. VIETNAM'S FRAMEWORK & THE 1975 UNIFICATION (SINGLE COMMUNIST PARTY)

Vietnam has been the "victim" of numerous conflicts throughout its history. Since the 1800s, during the French Indochina (Tonkin, Annam, Cochin, China, Cambodia, and Laos), Southeast Asia dealt with conflict, culminating with the Vietnam War ending in 1975. In 1975, as a result of the "Fall of Saigon" (South Vietnam), Vietnam was formally reunited as one country with the unification of North Vietnam and South Vietnam, which had been previously divided by the Geneva Accord in 1954:

"The Geneva Accords establish North and South Vietnam with the 17th parallel as the dividing line. The agreement also stipulates that elections will be held within two years to unify Vietnam under a single democratic government. These elections never happen."¹²

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was born under an extreme communist regime (HISTORY, 2017).

By 1975, the country was in shambles. Vietnam's economy was one of the poorest in the world, and all major infrastructure and landscapes were utterly destroyed by bombing and toxic chemicals (Agent Orange). More than two million civilians and 1.3 million soldiers died in the conflict. North Vietnam was convinced that a socialist revolution with a long-term communist objective was the way to build a solid and efficient socialist economy/state. Despite promises by the North Vietnamese state not to lead a communist-ruled regime in South Vietnam, this did not happen, and as soon as the country was unified, the North created the five-year development plan for the whole country (1976). There was an agreement that South Vietnam would continue to exist as a sovereign state until both parties could agree on the best way to unify the country via elections that never materialized. Since the country was weak and had a solid and uncompromised communist regime, there was little opposition (Asia Pacific Curriculum, 2023).

To this day, Vietnam is a single-party state, with the CPV being the only legal political Party in the country. Ever since the country's reunification in 1975, the CPV has been the

¹² HISTORY (2017). "Vietnam War Timeline."

ruling Party and controls all characteristics of the government and Vietnam's society. State Constitutions in socialist countries are different from Western democracies. It is a common idea among East Asian countries that the Western notion of the rule of law has its deficits. Therefore, the CPV adopted a socialist law and built a "socialist rule of law" state since its unification, following Marxist theory. The fundamental principles are: "(1) *supremacy of the Constitution and the law*; (2) *equality of all people before the law*; (3) *respect of human rights, as well as community values*; (4) *significance of the social order*; and (5) *democratic centralization of State powers*." ¹³ (Cohen; Tan; Nababan; Kong, 2016).

This socialist law has three different main characteristics from the Western countries: non-pluralist democracy, only one Party is accepted, in this case, the CPV; centralization of state powers; the three branches of power are all under the National Assembly of Vietnam (NAV); and assurance of individual rights as well as state interest and community beliefs. The state of Vietnam ensures the individual rights of its citizens but, more importantly, wants to ensure social order. The main governing body in the country is the National Assembly, which is responsible for making laws. Members of the CPV hold the majority of seats in the National Assembly, and the General Secretary of the Party also leads the government. Although there are a few non-party members in these institutions, they usually share similar viewpoints and policies as the CPV (Bui, 2014).

In 1980, after the Vietnam War (1955-1975) and subsequent unification, Vietnam had its first Constitution reform. In 1976, the National Assembly of unified Vietnam held its first assembly, officially naming the country "Socialist Republic of Vietnam" and expressing the need and will to write a new Constitution. The former Constitution, created against US imperialism, was no longer fitting. National reconstruction and internal economic policies and development plans were at the forefront of the 1980 Constitution. It granted power and leadership to the Communist Party and advocated socialist ideas and principles. The country was in a clear state of transition into a modern era.¹⁴ There was

¹³ Cohen, D.; Tan, K.; Nababan, A.; Kong, F. S. D. R. (2016). "Update on the Rule of Law for Human Rights in ASEAN: The Path to Integration."

¹⁴ "Modernization, in sociology, the transformation from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to a secular, urban, industrial society." The modern era in Vietnam refers to the period of time following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 up until the present day. Kumar, K. (2023).

an unclear perception of the law, both economic and social, in this "new" socialist law-governed state (Rose, 1998)

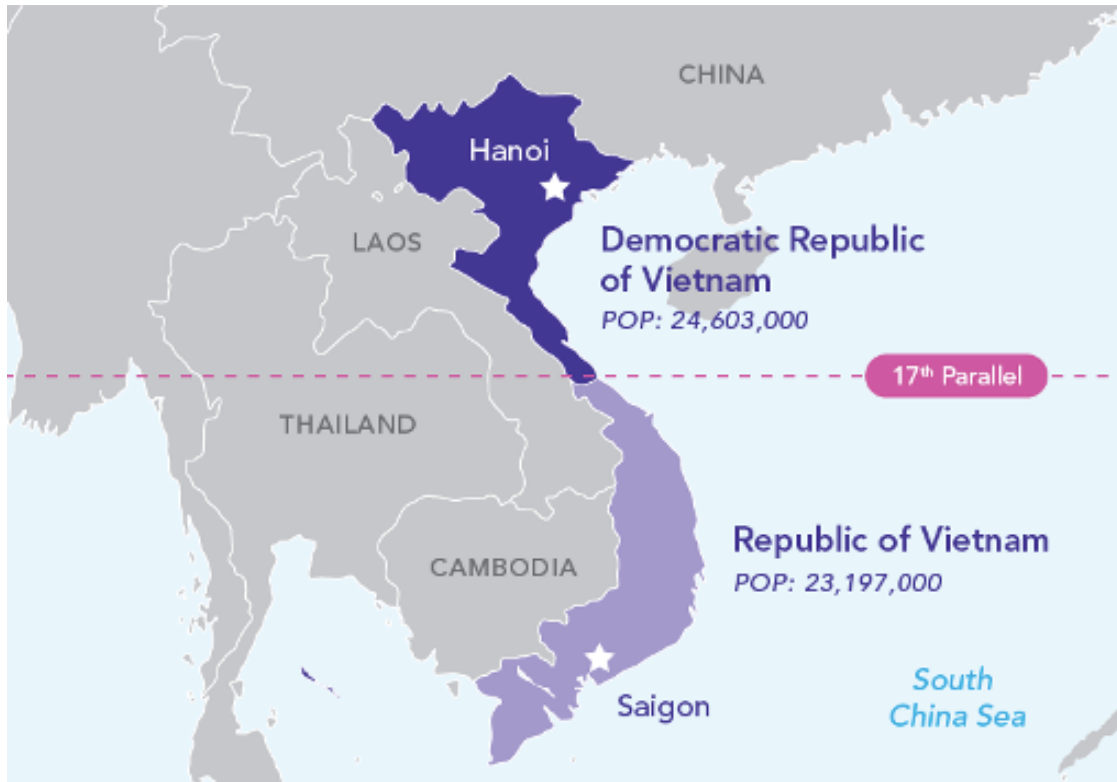
Following the unification of Vietnam in 1976, the country launched its inaugural five-year development plan intending to attain lofty benchmarks through centralized planning and self-reliance. Despite these aspirations, the government could not fulfill its ambitious targets in the initial two five-year plans (1976-1980 and 1981-1985) due to insufficient foreign investment. Consequently, in 1986, Vietnam adopted a renovation policy and initiated a series of market reforms referred to as *Đổi Mới*.

“With the inspiration and pride of the Great Spring Victory in 1975, the whole country started implementing the 1976-1980 five-year plan (the 4th Party Congress) and the 1981-1985 five-year plan (the 5th Party Congress). However, "the initial optimism had not been realized, and in the late 1985, the economy totally fell into crisis and inflationary spiral." Most of the people were short of food and clothing, short of accommodation, with extremely difficult transportation and inflation rate of about 800%. The economy actually did not grow.”¹⁵

Legal and political reform was an essential component of this renovation policy with the introduction of Western legal systems. The Vietnamese government was compelled to introduce international legal cooperation in trade and investment law. The topic of human rights is still an area where the government of Vietnam is not open to foreign legal assistance due to fear of losing its power. Although the *Đổi Mới* had its downsides, it provided a lot of benefits and improvement in people's lives by reducing the percentage of people living below the poverty line and increasing the literacy rate to almost 95 percent towards a more open market, giving way to the 1992 constitutional reform. Many say that the *Đổi Mới* process was the main driver for the creation of the 1992 Constitution (Rose, 1998).

¹⁵ Korea Institute for National Unification (2005), “Korea-Vietnam International Conference Report: Economic and Social Reform of Vietnam and its Lessons for North.”

FIGURE 2 – The Two Vietnams, 17th parallel dividing line



Source: Asia Pacific Curriculum (2023)

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Bogdan (1982) notably underscored the significance of diligent document analysis as a critical qualitative research methodology. Documentary research involves a comprehensive and methodical examination of written or printed materials, such as articles, reports, and other document types. This research approach is frequently employed in qualitative research, providing valuable insights into historical events, cultural facts, and social developments. By meticulously examining and interpreting the content of these documents, it is possible to obtain qualitative data that can be applied to various research objectives. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The methodology section of this master's dissertation details the research design, analytical framework, and data collection techniques utilized to examine the implementation of development plans in Vietnam between 1986 and 2000. The objective of this investigation is to gain insights into the evolution of HDI during this time frame

in Vietnam, and the methodology employed is closely tied to the analysis of the gathered data, which allows a better understanding of how the Vietnamese government adopted these metrics into their plans.

The research aims to assess the effectiveness of Vietnam's development plans, identify key factors contributing to their success or failure, and analyze the impact on the country's socio-economic landscape. By examining the historical context, policy reforms, and development strategies employed, this research sheds light on the role of the HDI in measuring Vietnam's development progress during this transformative era. The research contributes to understanding the linkages between development planning and human development outcomes in Vietnam. The insights from this study can inform policy formulation and implementation processes used in and by Vietnam and facilitate evidence-based decision-making, contributing to the effectiveness of development plans.

Drawing upon primary and secondary sources, including government reports, academic studies, and statistical data, a systematic analysis is conducted to evaluate Vietnam's progress and challenges during this period. This study examines changes in life expectancy, educational accomplishment, and income distribution to assess the population's overall well-being. By identifying specific areas of success and areas requiring further attention, this research contributes to the existing knowledge on development indicators and informs policy-making in Vietnam.

This study incorporates qualitative documentation analysis and quantitative analysis of HDI data. The qualitative analysis examines the goals, strategies, and priorities outlined in Vietnam's five-year development plans, as well as the significant historical events that occurred before and during 1986-2000, while the quantitative analysis assesses the evolutions of the HDI indicators. While examining the multidimensional aspects of development, this research contributes to the broader discourse on development indicators and their implications for policy formulation and implementation.

There are some limitations that need to be considered when reviewing the official documentation provided by the Vietnamese government. Vietnam has a one-party regime, the CPV, that controls all official information. This presents challenges when researching and analyzing development plans. Certain aspects of this topic are politically sensitive, which can limit the availability of data or other primary sources. To fully understand

Vietnam's development plans, it is essential to consider the historical context and analyze events and policies within the broader historical background. Failure to contextualize the development plans within more significant political and social spheres can lead to challenges in understanding Vietnam's history.

The subsequent chapters (Vietnam's Development Plans) will present the analysis and findings based on the methodology outlined in this chapter.

5. VIETNAM'S FIVE-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The concept of the Five-Year Plan originated in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. During that era, the Soviet Union was a socialist nation that aimed to industrialize and modernize its economy quickly. It was necessary since the economy had suffered greatly due to the effects of World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the civil war. The Soviet Union introduced its first Five-Year Plan in 1928. This plan was intended to serve as a detailed economic strategy to steer the country's progress and elevate it to an industrial powerhouse. The idea of the Five-Year Plan gained popularity among other socialist nations such as China, Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and some African countries (Hunter, 1973).

In Vietnam, the CPV plays a central role in setting policies and strategies for the country. The Party Congress, which convenes approximately every five years, serves as the primary decision-making body for policy direction. However, policies are also developed by the Central Committee during the periods between Party Congresses. Like China and all countries ruled by communist governments, Vietnam has the so-called "Five-Year Plan," influenced by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union significantly influenced Vietnam's economic development in the past, particularly after the end of the Vietnam War and the country's unification when the country was aligned with the Soviet bloc. The plans are permanently established on communist foundations and principles with the goal of economic development and mapping social growth targets (Kelemen, 1984).

The Five-Year Plan is a strategic economic development framework employed by numerous nations, including the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, to outline their key objectives and goals for the upcoming five-year period. These plans were considered a

valuable strategy for accomplishing socialist objectives, including eradicating poverty, creating a classless society, and building a socialist state in communist ideology. Although the success of these plans varied in different countries, the concept of the Five-Year Plan is still associated with communist economic planning. It has been implemented in various forms in several socialist nations over the years. Vietnam has a long history of implementing these plans to achieve economic growth and development, making it an essential tool to reach its long-term economic and social development goal (Hunter, 1973).

The legacy of Soviet-style economic planning was visible in Vietnam's first Five-Year plans (from 1961 to 1991). This influence can still be seen in some aspects of Vietnam's current economic policies, such as the continued emphasis on state-owned enterprises and the use of indicative planning to guide economic development. However, these policies have also been adapted to the realities of a market-oriented economy, emphasizing private sector development and foreign investment (Kelemen, 1984).

The first "Five-Year" plans developed by Vietnam post-Vietnam War (1975) were very self-centered. Vietnam's government thought they could reconstruct their economy only with internal resources and investment. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this was proved not to be the case, and both five-year plans, 1975-1979 and 1980-1984, were unsuccessful. High goals and very ambitious objectives were the main reasons for its failure. Vietnam saw it self-compelled to some market reforms - *Đổi Mới*. Since the 1980s, Vietnam has shifted towards a more market-oriented economy and adopted a series of economic reforms to promote private sector development and integration into the global economy - mainly due to *Đổi Mới*. To many, the *Đổi Mới*. (1986) is considered the turning point in Vietnam's economy (Rose, 1998).

Vietnam joined the United Nations in 1977, focusing on war reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. Over the years, Vietnam, with the overlook of the United Nations, has reinforced its institutions, policies, and laws and pledged to promote justice and good governance within its development plans. The UN works in and with Vietnam on four main pillars: "*investing in people; ensuring climate resilience and environmental*

*sustainability; fostering prosperity and partnership; and promoting justice, peace, and inclusive governance.”*¹⁶

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, but its practical implementation has remained a topic of debate. Across the globe, perceptions of human rights are challenged, and their application is becoming increasingly important. Human rights are an evolving and ongoing process, and this is no different in Vietnam. In the late 1980s, the perception of human rights in Vietnam began to shift with the implementation of *Đổi Mới*, and the topic surfaced as an essential subject in Vietnam's political and legal domains. At the Party's annual Congress in 1991, they emphasized the importance of promoting democracy by building a system of laws and strengthening socialist legislation. Upholding and implementing democracy is a common goal in the nation, evident in the following five-year plan (Thayer; Marr, 1992 & Cohen; Tan; Nababan; Kong, 2016).

*5.1. The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1986–1990) & the *Đổi Mới* (1986)*

The period from 1986 to 1990 is considered the “beginning period of renovation cause.” From July to December 1986, Politburo¹⁷ and the 5th Central Committee of the CPV convened numerous meetings to compile and endorse the Fourth Vietnamese Five-Year Plan. Due to multiple mistakes and shortcomings, Congress heavily criticized the previous socio-economic used guidelines. During the 6th National Congress of the CPV, held in Ba Đình Hall, Hanoi, between 15 and 18 December 1986, the *Đổi Mới* was introduced as the “renovation guideline.” Improving and enhancing the effectiveness of external economics has been given paramount importance by Congress. One of the goals presented by the state was a new management approach that distinguishes the state's administrative-economic function from its role in production and business control, allowing Cooperative members' families to gain full ownership of their land and its produce, becoming independent economic entities¹⁸. This newfound freedom granted the Vietnamese population to engage in various forms of business and production under multiple conditions that used to be impossible (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2023).

¹⁶ United Nations Vietnam (2022). "The United Nations in Viet Nam."

¹⁷ The executive and policy-making committee of a Communist Party. In communist countries, the Politburo is the chief committee that decides on government policy and makes decisions.

¹⁸ Resolution 10-NQ/TW on the reform of agricultural management (called Contractual System 10).

Even though by 1986, the Soviet Union faced several issues on all levels (economic, political, and social), Vietnam was still receiving significant economic and technical assistance from the Party, and Soviet economic models and planning methods were often used to guide Vietnam's economic planning. After two non-success "Five-Year" plans, this idea of self-served economic development changed, and Vietnam adopted the *Đổi Mới*, marking a shift to the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1986–1990). During the Fourth Five-Year Plan period, the CPV introduced a new economic policy known as "*Đổi Mới*" or "renovation," which marked a significant departure from their previous approaches. The *Đổi Mới*, which translates to "restoration," is a socialist-oriented market economy program and marked a turning point in Vietnam's economic growth and subsequent social development (Beresford, 2008).

Before the 1980s, Vietnam's economy operated within a traditional centrally-planned system. The government regulated the physical input, output, and prices while also owning the means of production. As a result, goods and services were highly regulated, with no business autonomy and a lack of factor markets. A mono-banking system dominated the banking and financial sector, and there were no effective policies to encourage domestic savings, leading to a reluctance among households to save. Most investments were funded through external sources. Before the *Đổi Mới* launch, there were minimal efforts to improve export and import policies and integration. After the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the economy was mainly self-sufficient and focused on recovering from the conflict. Until the late 1980s, State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) monopolized international trade. (Anh, Duc, Chieu, 2014)

The *Đổi Mới* is a series of economic and political reforms to transition the country from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one (still regulated by the state's plan), which had been struggling after years of war, isolation, and mismanagement. The CPV introduced the reforms in response to a growing economic crisis and pressure from the international community to liberalize its economy. These reforms involved several critical changes to Vietnam's economic system, including the introduction of a system of market prices and wages and the liberalization of trade and investment, as well as changes to the political system, such as the decentralization of power, the strengthening of local governments, and the promotion of greater political participation and pluralism. For CPV, a crucial aspect of the "*Đổi Mới*" policy is that all policies must stem from the country's

practices and draw upon the experiences of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China. Additionally, consideration must be given to the socio-economic development experiences of East Asian countries while considering the world's new characteristics and development trends. (Van Arkadie; Mallon, 2004).

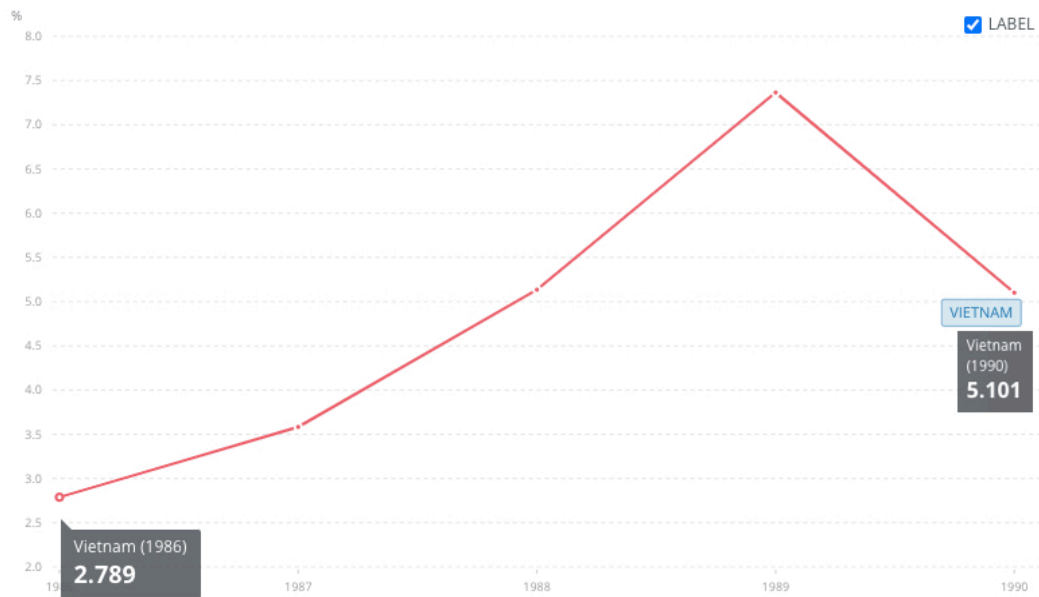
Although these reforms were initially met with some opposition from within the Communist Party, they soon proved to be successful in revitalizing Vietnam's economy. Since the introduction of *Đổi Mới*, Vietnam has experienced significant economic growth. It became one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, with a rapid expansion of the private sector and a growing middle class. The reforms have also significantly impacted Vietnamese society, leading to greater prosperity and a more dynamic and open economy. Currently, Vietnam's economic policies are still guided by the principle of *Đổi Mới*, with the government striving to liberalize the economy, draw in foreign investment, and motivate the growth of the private sector. Despite this, they remain committed to their socialist political system (Beresford, 2008).

Implementing the *Đổi Mới* program marked a significant turning point for Vietnam's economic policy, recognizing the role of multi-ownership in the country's economy. The program brought about a gradual shift in trade policies, leading to the removal of most commodity quotas by 1989. However, strict control with licenses and quotas remained until normalization occurred between 1998 and 2001. The policy re-engineering included the removal of checks on internal trade, increased autonomy for SOEs, and approval of the Law on Foreign Investment in 1987. In 1988, the central bank and commercial banks' functions were separated, and in March 1989, Vietnam adopted a comprehensive reform package to stabilize and open the economy, fundamentally changing the country's economic management system (Thanh & Ha, 2004).

As part of the *Đổi Mới* process, Vietnam decided to shift from an import-substitution approach to an export-oriented strategy, aiming to avoid the same economic failures experienced by Latin American countries and follow the prosperous industrialized nations and newly industrialized economies in East Asia (NIEs), also known as the "flying geese." By the late 1990s, the impact of the *Đổi Mới*'s business, trade, and agricultural reforms was undeniable. Over 30,000 private businesses were established, and the economy grew annually by over 7 percent. The reforms aimed to increase economic efficiency,

encourage foreign investment and trade, improve social welfare, and reduce poverty. The resulting economic growth played a critical role in improving Vietnam's GDP¹⁹, and the CPV established social policies linked to it (Anh, Duc, & Chieu, 2014).

FIGURE 3 – Vietnam's GDP Growth (annual %) 1986-1990



Source: World Bank national accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files (2023)

Vietnam's GDP decline in 1990 was mainly due to the country's economic challenges at the time. Despite the positive changes brought by the country's economic reforms, Vietnam faced several significant concerns, such as inflation, budget deficits, and a shortage of foreign exchange. Furthermore, the country's economy relied heavily on the Soviet Union, which faced economic difficulties then. The international landscape also played a role in these challenges as during these times, Vietnam was still subject to a trade embargo by the United States of America, which restricted their participation in international trade and hindered economic development and with the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vietnam lost a vital trading partner and aid source. As a result, Vietnam faced a 5 percent decrease in GDP due to a drop in industrial output and

¹⁹ See Figure 3.

agricultural production. The government reacted with various policy adjustments, including currency devaluation and cuts in public spending. These measures led to a gradual economic recovery in the subsequent years (Riedel; Turley, 1999).

The Đổi Mới reforms and the Fourth Five-Year Plan were accompanied by a comprehensive social agenda, prioritizing expanding education and electricity to ensure no one was left behind. During the Đổi Mới era, the government emphasized developing education, science, and technology as national policies. People and culture were also recognized as crucial factors for driving socio-economic growth. As a result of these policies, the country experienced significant economic growth rates, moving from being one of the poorest countries to becoming a lower emerging market economy in just 25 years. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the HDI was created in 1990, so it was not included in Vietnam's Fourth Five-Year Plan from 1986 to 1990. Nevertheless, education and health have been a top priority for the nation since implementing Đổi Mới, with remarkable outcomes. In Vietnam, implementing the Đổi Mới reform facilitated improvements in all three areas considered by the HDI (health, education, and income), resulting in a remarkable increase in the country's HDI score in future years (Baum, 2020).

Vietnam's current education outcomes are a testament to the government's steadfast dedication to prioritizing education in national strategies (Fourth Five Year Plan, 1986-1990) since 1986. Education became a national priority since implementing the Đổi Mới policy. Changes in education policies are based on the strategic goal of transitioning the educational system from serving a centrally planned economy to a market economy with socialist leanings. The government fully understood that focusing solely on educating the youth would not be sufficient in the short term to alleviate poverty, as it takes time for children to enter the workforce. Hence, the government's efforts to enhance education have been directed toward young students and those not attending school. Vietnamese government started investing more in education and health in their development plans, and progress was made across all levels of education. (Baum, 2020).

Although the health sector received less focus than the education sector under the Fourth Five-Year Plan, the mentality of “*leaving no one behind*” was still imperative. The economic transition has also resulted in a significant transformation to the healthcare system. Despite the small budget associated with the health sector (5 percent of GDP,

with public funding amounting to just one-third of the spending and barely 3 percent financed by Official Development Assistance (ODA)), Vietnam has achieved remarkable health outcomes with essential reforms. The country's success can be attributed to crucial reforms initiated in the late 1980s. Healthcare and pharmaceutical markets were liberalized, and official user fees were introduced in public health facilities to ensure financial sustainability. To provide extensive access to health services, all communes were mandated to establish community clinics (Baum, 2020).

The Đổi Mới reforms, which served as the framework for Vietnam's Fourth Five-Year Plan, played a critical role in the country's economic and social advancement. Following the implementation of these reforms in 1990, Vietnam experienced remarkable improvements in its Human Development Index (HDI). The reforms enabled the country to achieve economic growth, improve access to healthcare and education, and elevate the living standards of millions of Vietnamese citizens.

5.2. Fifth Five-Year Plan (1991–1995)

"For the first time, Vietnam's 1992 Constitution contained respect for human rights, with Article 50 stating that "human rights such as political, civil, economic, cultural and social rights, are respected, as expressed in the citizen's rights and enacted in the Constitution and in laws."

(Cohen, Tan, Nababan & Kong, at "Update on the Rule of Law for Human Rights in ASEAN: The Path to Integration," 2016)

Vietnam's Fifth Five-Year Plan was a national development plan that covered the period from 1991 to 1995. The Vietnamese government developed the plan to *"get over the crisis, stabilize the socio-economic situation, try to get out of the status of a poor, under-developed country, improve people's lives, strengthen national defense and security, create favorable conditions for the country to develop at a faster pace in the early 21st century, make a double increase in GDP compared with 1990."*²⁰ This plan was developed under severe and essential changes to the country, such as the adaptation

²⁰ Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2023). "Vietnam Economy Overview."

of the HDI (1990), the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), the new Constitution (1992), and following the adoption of the Đổi Mới reform.

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union had a profound impact on Vietnam's development planning, especially regarding its Fifth Five-Year Plan. Prior to this event, Vietnam heavily relied on Soviet aid and support. However, with the loss of this significant economic and political backing, the country faced instability in these crucial areas. Consequently, Vietnam had to seek out new financial support and diversify its economy to reduce dependence on Soviet aid (Riedel; Turley, 1999)

The fall of the Soviet Union also led to significant changes in Vietnam's political landscape. As a former close ally of the Soviet Union, Vietnam had to adapt to a new political reality and find new allies to support its development plans. The dissolution of the Soviet Union also had notable implications for the "Five-Year" plan, prompting the government to re-evaluate its priorities and explore alternative funding and investment sources. The country had to focus on the most critical areas for its development and adapt to a new economic and political environment. This situation necessitated quick and efficient adaptation from the government to ensure Vietnam's continued progress (Webber, 1992).

With the renovation policy (Đổi Mới) and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Vietnam felt the need for constitutional reform in line with the new open market concept, forcing the Communist Party into transitioning to a more orderly and accountable government. The government understood the importance of the rule of law to economic development and introduced the concept of the rule of law to their legal systems. With the 1992 Constitution, Vietnam was looking to "renovate" itself. The Party still believed socialism was ideal but saw benefits in opening their economy and individual initiatives – the private sector. This reform took place in 1992, and for the first time in Vietnam's history, the Constitution professed the building of a law-governed state with Article 2:

“The Socialist Republic of Vietnam State is a law-governed socialist State of the people, by the people, and for the people. All State powers belong to the people and are based on the alliance between the working class, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia. The State powers are unified and

decentralized to State bodies, which shall coordinate with one another to exercise the legislative, executive and judiciary powers." ²¹

Respect for human rights and political, civil, and social rights were mentioned and written down as law. Article 50 - Human Rights:

“In the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, human rights in the political, civic, economic, cultural, and social fields are respected. They are embodied in the citizen's rights and are determined by the Constitution and the law.”²²

According to Karl Marx, known for his revolutionary writings favoring socialism and a communist revolution, society creates people, and people also create society. With this in mind, Vietnam always considered people their most valuable capital and the center of the development process and plans. This new Constitution still acknowledged the leading role of the Communist Party, but a lot of the communist wording was felt out due to the need for social and human rights inclusion. Rights such as free housing, education, and health care were now among the 120 articles in the Constitution. Vietnam also enacted legal and political reforms to respond to the new open market economy obligation. A more Western legal system and political institutions were adopted to transition to the rule of law. Although some Western laws and policies were implemented, due to its social-economic conditions and historical circumstances, Vietnam's rule of law reform was and still is different from the Western countries (Viet, 2006).

In 1992, Vietnam's Five-Year Plan (1991-1995) underwent significant changes due to the implementation of the Constitution. There was a shift in focus towards human rights and social development, leading to the creation of the HDI. Vietnam had to adopt a more socially-oriented development plan, which proved challenging for the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) due to its fear of losing absolute power. Vietnam follows the "socialist" rule of law (Khng, 1992).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vietnam moved towards a more market-oriented economy. Consequently, the Soviet Union's influence on their economic Fifth Five-Year planning significantly decreased. Vietnam based its development strategies and economic policies on domestic needs, priorities, and global economic trends despite

²¹ The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1992), Article 2

²² The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1992), Article 50

its proximity to Russia and other former Soviet countries. There was a heightened emphasis on improving the education system, healthcare, and fundamental human rights, with the state playing a significant role in the economy (Thayer; Marr, 1992).

During the transition towards a market-oriented economy and facing economic and social challenges, Vietnam's Fifth Five-Year Plan demonstrated the country's unwavering dedication to enhancing the quality of life for its citizens. The government recognized that economic growth alone was insufficient for human development and well-being. Therefore, they comprehended that investing in education, health, and other social sectors was crucial for holistic development. The plan incorporated the HDI, reaffirming their unwavering commitment to improving the well-being of their citizens. A committee formed by representatives from various government ministries, academic institutions, and international organizations was tasked to develop a comprehensive set of indicators to measure the state of human development in the country. The indicators chosen were modeled after those utilized in the HDI, including literacy, school enrollment, access to safe water, and life expectancy (International Monetary Fund, 1997).

The Fifth Five-Year Plan aimed to develop Vietnam's agriculture, industry, infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Its objectives included expanding access to education and healthcare services, improving transportation and communication infrastructure, enhancing agricultural productivity, and stimulating industrial growth. One of the plan's key priorities was to promote the private sector and attract more foreign investment to Vietnam ((Baum, 2020).

During this period, Vietnam saw impressive economic growth, with an annual GDP growth rate of 8.2%. Vietnam has experienced consistent growth in investment over this period, largely thanks to foreign investment. Foreign trade has also proliferated and diversified, with imports and exports achieving double-digit annual growth rates. The country made progress in improving access to education and healthcare, reducing poverty, and advancing infrastructure. However, the era also presented economic obstacles, including high inflation and an expanding trade deficit, which posed significant challenges (Riedel; Turley, 1999).

Education has been a consistent priority area in Vietnam's Five-Year plans, demonstrating a clear understanding by the government of how crucial this sector is for

human development and driving economic and social progress. In 1992, Vietnam included in its development plans the “Education for All” (EFA) action plan (1993 to 2000). This plan included the precise objectives of providing first-rate primary education to all, encouraging education and training opportunities to out-of-school young adults and adults lacking primary education, and ensuring gender equality at all educational levels. Education costs in Vietnam are covered by the public sector and private expenditures (International Monetary Fund, 1997).

Vietnam may have a low-income level, but it has achieved an impressive literacy rate and high enrollment in schooling. By the end of 1995, the literacy rate in Vietnam was approximately 87 percent, and the mean years of schooling increased to 4.78 years from 4.23 years at the beginning of the Fifth Five-Year Plan (UNDP, 2022).

Following the commitment to improvements to the health sector in the Fifth Five-Year Plan, the government has been implementing National Target Programs for health since the early 1990s. These programs, included in the Five-Year Plan, prioritize vaccination, nutrition, and food safety. In 1992, health insurance was first introduced to provide coverage for sector workers and the less privileged by implementing several policies to increase accessibility to healthcare. These vulnerable groups were exempt from paying user fees or had health insurance coverage. The government “*subsidizes 100 percent of premiums for the very poor, ethnic minority children, and children under six years of age, at least 70 percent of the premium for the “near poor” and at least 30 percent of premiums for school children and students as well as the rest of the informal sector*”²³ which allows a remarkable portion of the population access to health care. Before 1994, agricultural cooperatives were responsible for paying salaries to all health staff. The central government has taken on this responsibility. Furthermore, the health sector has achieved exceptional capacity through the rigorous and centralized training of health staff (Baum, 2020).

Despite the challenges posed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vietnam has achieved outstanding progress in human development due to the integration of the HDI during the Fifth Five-Year Plan period. The country has successfully reduced poverty and improved access to essential services like healthcare and education, steadily increasing

²³ Baum, A. (2020). “Vietnam's Development Success Story and the Unfinished SDG Agenda.”

its HDI score. From 1991 to 1995, Vietnam’s literacy rate experienced a notable increase from 89% in 1990 to 93% in 1995, with an increase in mean years of schooling from years 4.24 (1991) to 4.79 years (1995), while the life expectation at birth surged from 69.849 years (1991) to 71.3837 years (1995). Vietnam’s HDI improved from 0.493 (1991) to 0.539 (1995). Most of the 1991-1995 plan targets were achieved and exceeded (UNDP, 2022).

TABLE I – VIETNAM HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX 1991-1995

Year	HDI	HDI Ranking
1991	0.493	107°
1992	0.504	106°
1993	0.515	104°
1994	0.526	103°
1995	0.539	106°

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2023)

5.3. Sixth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000)

The period from 1996-2000 was marked by two major events in Vietnam’s socio-economic history: integration into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (1995) and the Asian Financial Crisis (1997). Although Vietnam joined the ASEAN in 1995, the impact was visible in the Sixth Five-Year Plan from 1996 to 2000. This alliance allowed them to seize fresh economic opportunities and encouraged regional collaboration. As a result, membership in ASEAN significantly impacted Vietnam's economic policies and development strategies during the period covered by the Sixth Five-Year Plan.

Vietnam took a significant step towards international integration by joining the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which brought numerous benefits and significantly enhanced its economy. The 1996 Five-Year Plan budget allocated funds to

areas such as education and health, resulting in a variety of benefits for Vietnam, including:

1. Trade and Investment Opportunities: ASEAN integration led to increased economic cooperation and intra-regional trade, resulting in a surge of exports and foreign direct investment for Vietnam. As a member of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), Vietnam gains access to a vast market of over 650 million people.

2. Access to Regional Markets: ASEAN membership provides excellent access to regional markets. Implementing the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) allows members to benefit from reduced tariffs and trade barriers among member nations.

3. Access to Regional Development Plans: ASEAN provides an exceptional platform for open dialogue and collaboration on critical issues, such as public health and education. Vietnam can benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experiences other member nations possess in tackling these challenges.

4. Security and Political Cooperation: ASEAN is a crucial platform for diplomatic dialogue and regional cooperation on political and security matters in the region. As a member, Vietnam can promote peaceful solutions, establish stronger security ties with neighboring countries, and tackle regional challenges.

Vietnam's integration into ASEAN was a noteworthy strategy that positively impacted the country's economic, political, and social development. It also facilitated cultural exchange and enabled Vietnam to embrace diverse cultures and values, all towards the goal of regional peace and cooperation. The Vietnamese government slowly demonstrated signs of change during this period (Tung, 2007).

The 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis, also known as the "Asian financial contagion," started in Thailand when the Thai baht came under intense speculative attack in July 1997, leading to the baht's fixed exchange rate being unsustainable, and the currency fell abruptly. This caused a contagion that rapidly spread to other Asian economies, such as Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines, resulting in significant currency declines across the region. The crisis led to losing confidence in the area and forced governments to re-evaluate their economic strategies and policy priorities (Goldstein, 1998).

The Asian financial crisis was a pivotal moment that laid bare the vulnerabilities of nations with fragile economies and the perils of rapid capital movements. This crisis underscored the need to implement sound macroeconomic policies, maintain adaptable exchange rate systems, and fortify financial regulations to mitigate future financial crises. Its profound impact on the region's economic history cannot be overstated. It sparked significant policy changes and reforms in the affected countries while also playing a crucial role in prompting a reevaluation of the global financial framework (Aghevli, 1999).

A combination of internal and external factors caused the crisis. These included unmanageable external debt, fixed exchange rate systems, asset bubbles, and fragile financial institutions. Although Vietnam was not one of the countries directly affected by the Asian financial crisis, its economy, and policies were significantly impacted due to its close economic ties with other Asian nations and its involvement in the global economy. Before the crisis, Vietnam had undergone significant economic growth and implemented economic reforms to shift towards a more market-oriented economy. However, when the crisis hit Southeast Asia, Vietnam faced several challenges and had to adjust its policies to mitigate the adverse effects. This led to policy adjustments to the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000) (Tønnesson, 2001).

Amid the crisis, the Vietnamese government took swift action to stabilize its economy and mitigate its effects. This entailed enacting monetary and fiscal policies and implementing structural reforms to safeguard the financial sector's sustainability and attract foreign investment. Thanks to their single-party political system, the government responded promptly to the crisis, re-evaluated its development strategies, and adapted to the uncertain climate (Leung, 1999).

To achieve economic stability, the Vietnamese government pursued a range of measures, such as regulating the money supply, enhancing exchange rate management, fostering export trade, expanding the scope of sectors and goods for export, establishing social safety nets, and launching poverty reduction programs aimed at aiding vulnerable members of society. Additionally, they sought to enhance policy transparency and governance accountability to curb corruption and promote the rule of law, creating a more favorable environment for investment and economic growth (Aghevli, 1999).

Despite the challenges posed by the Asian financial crisis, Vietnam's economy displayed remarkable resilience over the long term. The government's timely response, along with policy adjustments, economic reforms, and diversification of trade and investment partners, helped the country bounce back and sustain economic growth in the years that ensued. It was the perfect “wake-up call” for the Vietnamese government to re-evaluate its economic and social policies and make needed reforms (Leung, 1999).

The year is 1996 (July), and the 8th National Congress of the CPV was held to discuss and draft the set of tasks/goals and strategy for the next five-year plan (1996-2000). Ten years after the implementation of the Đổi Mới reform, the focus of the Vietnamese government for the next five years was industrialization and modernization:

“The task set for the first stage of the transitional period, which is to prepare fundamental premises for industrialization, has basically been fulfilled, enabling us to move on to a new stage, that is, to promote the cause of national industrialization and modernization. The target of the industrialization and modernization cause is to build our country into an industrial nation with a modern technical foundation, a proper economic structure, a progressive production relation compatible with the development level of the production force, a decent spiritual and material life, a firm national defense and security, wealthy people, a powerful country, and an equal and civilized society.”²⁴

This investment had positive outcomes. The industry sector experienced significant growth that allowed other sectors of the economy to experience rapid growth, as well as the services sector. A fundamental guideline for Vietnam's economic plan involves developing a mixed ownership economy that operates on market principles but maintains state management and a socialist orientation (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2023)

Vietnam's Congress recognized that economic development must match social and cultural progress to establish parity. To attain this objective, the education sector offered primary education to all, eliminated illiteracy in the youth workforce, and encouraged vocational and tertiary education. These objectives were a substantial element of the Sixth Five-Year Plan in Vietnam, which followed the EFA action plan introduced by the previous Five-Year Plan. During this period, Vietnam undertook crucial educational reforms to enhance the accessibility and quality of its education system (International Monetary Fund, 1997).

²⁴ Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2023). “Vietnam Economy Overview.”

Vietnam's Sixth Five-Year Plan included several action plans, such as enhancing rural education, upgrading infrastructure, revising the curriculum with more pertinent and current content, providing teacher training, and establishing programs to address adult illiteracy. These measures aimed to boost literacy rates and offer better educational prospects for the country's youth (Duggan, 2001). The efficacy of these reforms can be seen in the heightened enrollment rates for primary and secondary education, with mean years of schooling increasing from 4.96 years in 1996 to 5.64 years in 2000 (UNDP, 2022).

The implementation of this plan in the healthcare sector had various objectives in mind. These objectives included the establishment of health clinics in every village with reasonable fees to improve healthcare access, extending health insurance coverage to all citizens and sectors, and enhancing life expectancy to 70 years. The decentralization of the health sector aimed to empower local authorities to make decisions based on the specific healthcare needs of their communities. This provided more responsibility to provincial and district-level authorities while expanding accessibility to healthcare services. The government prioritized primary healthcare services by adding more facilities, training professionals, and supplying essential medicines. Additionally, it invested significantly in enhancing healthcare infrastructure, including hospitals, clinics, and medical equipment (Baum, 2020).

All these reforms and developments allowed Vietnam to close this five-year circle with a surpass of 2.46 years for life expectancy at birth, ending in 2000 with a life expectancy of 72.46 years. During this period, the GDP increased by an average of 6.94 percent, and Vietnam experienced a growth of the HDI from 0.550 (1996) to 0.588 (2000).

TABLE II – VIETNAM HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX 1996-2000

Year	HDI	HDI Ranking
1996	0.550	106°
1997	0.560	105°
1998	0.569	104°
1999	0.578	104°
2000	0.588	112°

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2023)

6. VIETNAM’S DEVELOPMENT PLANS OUTCOMES ANALYSE

In 1975, Vietnam's economy was among the poorest in the world after years of conflict, and the country was considered one of the least developed nations. Due to the Đổi Mới reform and its five-year plans from 1986 to 2000, Vietnam has emerged as a shining example among the world's emerging markets, allowing for significant and speedy socio and economic developmental progress for all its citizens. At the same time, the CPV and the government have implemented domestic policies to preserve and maintain political stability. They have also sought support from foreign countries through foreign relations (Riedel; Turley, 1999).

Vietnam has experienced significant economic growth since introducing the Đổi Mới policy (1986), improving access to education, healthcare, and social protection. Following the Đổi Mới reforms, Vietnam underwent significant economic transformations, abandoning centralized planning and embracing international trade. The nation also focused on social reforms to ensure the “leaving no one behind” ideology, such as improving access to education and healthcare. Despite all this economic and social progress, some governmental restrictions and regulations still obstruct full participation in political and social endeavors from its citizens. (International Monetary Fund, 1997).

Despite numerous challenges and significant events throughout its history, such as the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992, the adoption of a new Constitution recognizing human

rights, and the Asian crisis of 1997, all three indicators of the HDI increased over time. This success can be attributed to the adoption of open-door policies and a market-oriented economy, acknowledged by both the International Monetary Fund (1997) and the OECD, Riedel & Turley (1999). This study agrees with the IMF and OECD's previous assessments, showing that open market policies and social policies in education and health have increased the HDI.

The commendable economic and social reforms provide valuable insights that can benefit other nations, as mentioned by the Korea Institute for National Unification during their conference with the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (2015), "*Agricultural, economic, and social reforms in Vietnam provide many valuable lessons that can be applied to North Korea.*"²⁵ A comprehensive education reform that considers all children in society aligns with the current demands of the labor market and adapts to economic changes is significant for many low-income and emerging markets today. Similarly, healthcare reform that grants access to healthcare services to families of all income levels is necessary (Baum, 2020).

Vietnam's unwavering commitment to education and skills enhancement has created a youthful and highly educated workforce. Furthermore, the country has introduced social programs to enhance access to healthcare and education. Fellow nations would do well to take a page out of Vietnam's book and prioritize the development of human capital for the betterment of their workforce and to provide vital services to their populace.

According to this study and analysis of Vietnam's five-year plans, it is likely that Vietnam's population of 98 million is still under the stringent control of the Communist Party - the only legal political Party in the country. The National Assembly, where the Communist Party selects most members, chooses the government. While some constitutional amendments in 1992 improved human rights protection, the government continues to use oppressive and punitive laws to target critics of the one-party rule, hindering its path toward a truly democratic system. Complete democratization would imply a decentralization of power and, consequently, a loss of control for the CPV, not appreciated by their side (Bui, 2014).

²⁵ Korea Institute for National Unification (2005), "Korea-Vietnam International Conference Report: Economic and Social Reform of Vietnam and its Lessons for North Korea."

7. CONCLUSION

Three questions were posed for this study and after careful analysis of the literature, answers to these questions were offered. Despite facing challenges and significant historical events, considering the data analyzed regarding the HDI indicators, we can conclude that Vietnam has achieved impressive and steady economic growth and social development since implementing the Đổi Mới Policy in 1986. The Vietnamese government included the HDI in its development plans, prioritizing the education and health sectors.

Consequently, Vietnam has made impressive advancements in these areas, with an increase in years of schooling for the entire population and a boost in the life expectancy at birth. From 1990 to 2000, the Vietnamese HDI experienced consistent progress, and the country ascended the global rankings from 0.482 in 1990 to 0.588 in 2000, improving its citizen's well-being. This showcases Sen's capability approach, which prioritizes people as the focus of development. Economic growth is only valuable as a means to expand people's capabilities rather than the end objective.

This research explores the connection between Vietnam's development plan objectives and the resulting HDI outcomes. Following the theoretical learnings from this master's program on the HDI and the development concept, the linkage to the study of Vietnam's five-year plans can provide valuable insights concerning development efforts and potentially contribute to future analyses on other “nontraditional” development plans.

The aim was to identify the policies that have contributed to advancements in human development and to uncover any discrepancies between the goals and the actual outcomes. The results highlight a strong correlation between Vietnam's five-year plans and the evolution of the HDI during the study period (1986 to 2000), indicating that targeted policies and investments in education, healthcare, and poverty reduction have positively impacted human development outcomes. However, the research also reveals specific challenges that must be addressed, including government restrictions and regional disparities. This underscores the importance of more comprehensive and focused interventions in future studies.

Vietnam's Five-Year Plans have been considered a valuable tool in the development field due to its long-term vision, promotion of economic stability, and emphasis on social

development. In light of ongoing debates and the emergence of alternative development models, it is crucial to maintain a vigilant eye on Vietnam's development plans. By conducting follow-up studies of recent years and examining the broader trend in national Vietnamese literature production, we can delve deeper into unconventional development plans and processes, as well as economic and social reforms that diverge from Western approaches.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Measuring HDI

Step 1: creating the dimension indices (defining minima and maxima)

Dimension	Indicator	Minimum	Maximum
Health	Life expectancy (years)	20	85
	Expected years of schooling (years)	0	18
Education	Mean years of schooling (years)	0	15
	Gross national income per capita (2011 PPP \$)	100	75,000

Step 2: calculate the country's dimension indices for each dimension:

$$\text{Dimension index} = \frac{\text{actual value} - \text{minimum value}}{\text{maximum value} - \text{minimum value}}$$

Source: UNDP, Human Development Index (2023)

Appendix 2 – Timeline Of Vietnamese History

Date	Event
1954	Geneva Accord partitioned Vietnam into North & South – separate states
1955	Beginning of the “Vietnam War”
1975	End of the “Vietnam War” & Vietnam’s reunification under a single-party political system
1986	Vietnam’s Fourth Five-Year Plan & Đổi Mới Implementation
1990	Human Development Index (HDI) introduction
1991	Vietnam’s Fifth Five-Year Plan & dissolution of the Soviet Union
1992	Vietnam’s new Constitution acknowledging human rights
1995	Vietnam becomes a full member of ASEAN
1997	The Asian Crisis
2000	UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Source: made by Carla Gomes (2023)

Appendix 3 – Gross National Income Per Capita (1991-2000)

Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1991)	1656.983675
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1992)	1799.139508
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1993)	1898.469647
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1994)	2055.383788
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1995)	2263.338912
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1996)	2420.236155
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1997)	2564.376914
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1998)	2661.435576
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (1999)	2766.88644
Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$) (2000)	2933.150458

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2023)

Appendix 4 – Vietnam’s Mean Years of Schooling (1991-2000)

Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1991)	4.238818279
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1992)	4.376225944
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1993)	4.513633609
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1994)	4.651041274
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1995)	4.78844894
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1996)	4.959167554
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1997)	5.129886168
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1998)	5.300604783
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (1999)	5.471323397
Mean Years of Schooling (years) (2000)	5.642042011

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2023)

Appendix 5 – Vietnam’s Life Expectancy at Birth (1991-2000)

Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1991)	69.849
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1992)	69.9579
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1993)	70.6212
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1994)	70.7587
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1995)	71.3837
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1996)	71.5098
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1997)	71.8017
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1998)	72.1068
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (1999)	72.3169
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) (2000)	72.462

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2023)