

Towards Transparency Newsletter

May 2019

Empowering the Vietnamese youth to fight corruption

Building a generation of young leaders who uphold integrity and have the knowledge, skills and courage to demand for greater transparency in government and society, has always been at the heart of Towards Transparency (TT)'s work. TT believes that for a change to be sustainable, it must be underpinned by a widespread public and more specifically by the support and engagement of the youth who makes up more than half of the Vietnamese population. To translate its beliefs into action, TT periodically published the Youth Integrity Survey (YIS) that measures the youth perceptions about integrity and their concrete experiences in corruption. Moreover, TT has initiated the "Vietnam Integrity School" (VIS) since 2017, the first of its kind in Vietnam to engage the youth to promote integrity and fight corruption in Vietnam. With the funding support from Irish Aid, VIS has to date welcomed 132 university students and young professionals coming from all over Vietnam. After studying at VIS, the graduates start taking action not only in practicing personal integrity, but also in disseminating knowledge on corruption and integrity amongst their friends, communities as well as to the wider society.

The youth has a role to play in fighting corruption

Engaging the youth in anti-corruption remains a challenge in Vietnam. Our experience shows that there is a gap in knowledge on corruption and integrity amongst the youth. The effectiveness and outreach of the official anti-corruption education is limited. Indeed, TT's 2014 Youth Integrity Survey (YIS) indicates that 85% of the Vietnamese youth considered the lack of integrity harmful to their country, family and themselves, and 87% said they have a role to play in fighting corruption. It means that most young people in Vietnam are aware of

their responsibility and are willing to take action to tackle corruption. However, 74% of the Vietnamese youth said they have no or very little knowledge about corruption, anti-corruption and integrity. Only 18% of the youth received anti-corruption education through the official government program (Project 137) that started in 2009. In other words, despite being enthusiastic and large in population, the young people are not sufficiently equipped with knowledge and skills to embark upon the fight against corruption. This challenge, however, opens up a great opportunity in itself, i.e. once the youth are ready, the end of corruption in Vietnam might just be around the corner.



VIS Winter 2018 Training Programme

Vietnam Integrity School (VIS) – An incubator for integrity leaders

TT's mission is to fill the gap in knowledge on corruption and integrity amongst the Vietnamese youth, so that they can be game changers in this fight against corruption. The goal of VIS in Vietnam is to create space for young people to learn about, practice and promote integrity by enabling them to



VIS gathers students and young professionals across Vietnam to learn about, practice, and promote integrity

develop and work on their own ideas and projects.

Participants are chosen through a competitive process with selection criteria including motivation, impact outreach, geographical representation and gender. Notably, one of the criteria is their strong personal commitment coupled with their capacities to share with their peers and communities the knowledge they acquire from VIS. VIS takes place for 4-5 days in Hanoi. Its curriculum is academically and practically intensive with back-to-back lectures delivered by TT's team, leading experts, academics (Fulbright University), and government anti-corruption agency.

Attending VIS, learners are enabled to engage in integrity debates and discussions from different lenses, ranging from everyday practice, education, business to the public sector.

After VIS, selected initiatives from the students to promote integrity are funded with TT's technical and seed grant to spread out integrity to their wider community.



VIS creates an open environment where students can freely voice their opinions and collaborate with each other

Growing interest in VIS at national and international levels

VIS was first piloted in 2017 and immediately attracted interest from the youth and other stakeholders, including experts and the media. VIS became increasingly popular: VIS Summer 2018 attracted 200 applications, almost triple the



Ms. Nguyen Thi Kieu Vien, TT's Director, talked about VIS at the Asian Development Bank/OECD Regional conference

number of the applications received in the first VIS. A number of lecturers joined consecutive seasons of VIS and expressed strong commitment to continuing their support for the program. The school also attracted an increasing number of young people wanting to volunteer for VIS. Importantly, several media agencies (e.g. VTV6) and government bodies (General Inspectorate) reported on VIS and the youth's role in fighting corruption.

VIS also received international interest and recognition. TT was invited in November 2017 to share its experiences in promoting youth integrity using the innovative VIS initiative at the Asian Development Bank/OECD Regional conference "Nurturing an Anti-corruption Culture in the Asia-Pacific Region".

VIS' initial impacts: From awareness to behavior changes to concrete actions

The success of VIS reflects the rising demand for education on integrity, especially from young people across Vietnam. VIS's impacts can be illustrated through various examples. A VISer

stated **"I knew nothing about integrity before joining VIS, but VIS has totally transformed me. I have a plan to establish my own start-up business. My business will be one with integrity."** Also, many VISers realized that **"integrity starts with me"** and hence, pledged to change their daily behaviors and put integrity into practice. This includes a range of actions, from pledging

not to cross the traffic red light, nor giving gifts to their boss during the Tet holiday, nor using office vehicles for personal use. They also indicated their commitment to sharing the knowledge gained from VIS with their friends and communities.

"This is the last day of VIS but won't be the last day of my integrity journey", said a VISer at the end of VIS Winter 2018. Likewise, graduating from VIS is not an end but rather marks a beginning of VISers' journey to promote integrity and fight against corruption through implementing their own initiatives. VIS 2018 received 18 initiatives in total (one example of the initiatives is described on the right side).

A Mini-VIS reaching out to disadvantaged children

One of the VISers, Tram, always wanted to do something useful for the children but did not know exactly what. At VIS, she met six other VISers who shared her desire to help children. The group agreed that they should take advantage of the lessons learnt at VIS about integrity and project development.

They decided to develop a mini-VIS in Khanh Hoa, a South Central province where Tram lives, to teach the disadvantaged children about integrity. The group members are from different provinces and work in different sectors, but they will continue to work together to finalize the proposal and put it into action. With Irish Aid's support, TT will provide seed funding for this project in 2019.



Ambassador Cait Moran presented certificates to VIS Winter 2018 participants

Towards long-term VIS sustainability

Rome was not built in one day. While being inscribed as a long-term goal, VIS's sustainability is an integral part of the project. TT explored voluntary contribution from Summer 2018 VISers of 500,000 VND (around 19 EUR). In VIS Winter 2018, the same amount was requested, but on a compulsory basis. All

selected 46 students did fulfill this contribution. It is a modest but promising start. To secure sustainability for VIS, TT aims at establishing a financially sustainable school model based on complementary income from non-ODA funders, including the private sector and students themselves.

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A VISer helping a friend to say "NO" to bribery

A friend of Chi Doan, a VISer, was requested to pay a bribe to obtain a government license for his company to organize a business event. Doan's friend said he was planning to pay, fearing not to get the license. Doan shared with him the knowledge on integrity learned at VIS, suggesting strong arguments, and reminding him the role of the government to provide services to its citizens. Doan also pointed out to his friend that while paying the bribe may provide short-term benefits, in the end the friend would have to face more personal dilemmas on paying bribes in the future. The friend took Doan's advice. He refused to pay the bribe, kept his integrity... and still got the license for his event!



VIS is not an end, but the beginning of VISers' journey to promote integrity and fight corruption

YIS and VIS: Upcoming events

- *YIS, the Youth Integrity Survey*, whose third edition will be published in summer 2019 by TT, provides detailed data on youth perceptions about integrity and their concrete experiences in corruption in daily lives as well as their views about government anti-corruption efforts. Since its first publication in 2011, a growing number of universities, NGOs and other organizations in Vietnam have initiated activities to engage the youth in promoting integrity and transparency. The Government Inspectorate of Vietnam (GI) also highly values YIS results, stating that "YIS is a useful reference for the GI in evaluating anti-corruption in Vietnam".*
- *VIS 2019 is planned to take place this winter to welcome around 40 motivated Vietnamese youth.*

*YIS 2014: https://towardstransparency.vn/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/YIS-2014-TT_Executive-Summary_EN_FINAL.pdf