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BUILDING RESILIENCE IN VIETNAM'S MEKONG DELTA

The people of the Mekong Delta face challenges ranging from digital divides and health disparities between different groups, to economic threats from a changing climate to pressures on traditional livelihoods. This southern region of Vietnam, home to one-fifth of the population, is an agricultural powerhouse producing roughly half of Vietnam's rice harvest and nearly three quarters of its fruit, aquaculture, and fisheries products. Yet, this region is the country's most vulnerable to climate change, with farmers already facing impacts such as saltwater intrusion and land erosion. One meter of sea level rise, a plausible scenario by 2100, could inundate 40% of the Mekong Delta. The region's future is made more uncertain by young people leaving to pursue employment elsewhere. In response, USAID partners with Vietnam on a comprehensive suite of activities to build resilience in this vital but increasingly vulnerable region.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Mekong Delta's natural ecosystems, including mangroves, coral reefs and floodplains, all play a crucial role in reducing disaster risk, supporting livelihoods, and improving food and water security. USAID supports Vietnam's restoration of coastal biodiversity and the sustainable management of marine resources, such as commercially important sea bass and snapper. To help vulnerable communities adapt to climate change, USAID provides assistance to improve their farming practices and strengthen their livelihoods. Agriculture ranks as the country's number two source of greenhouse gas emissions, and USAID is partnering with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to reduce methane emissions from rice

cultivation and develop climate-resilient, low-emissions policies for agriculture. USAID also empowers young people to tackle the Mekong Delta's environmental challenges through a partnership with Can Tho University (CTU), the leading university in the Mekong Delta. Additional USAID efforts address environmental pollution issues, including ocean plastics.

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Vietnam recognizes that its future lies beyond labor-intensive manufacturing. Yet the country faces a shortage of the highly skilled workers required to lead its transition to a knowledge economy. The Mekong Delta region accounts for only 5% of the country's information and communications technology (ICT) workforce, and risks being left behind by a rapidly changing, ICT-reliant economy. USAID supports Vietnam to accelerate its digital transformation, with a concerted effort on addressing the digital divide in the Mekong Delta. USAID is training the workforce in digital skills and mobilizing resources to support innovation. In addition, USAID is helping small and growing businesses remain competitive in domestic and international markets by introducing new business practices and technologies. Finally, with the out-migration of young workers from the Mekong Delta to elsewhere in Vietnam, there is an increased risk of human trafficking. USAID provides training to provincial officials in the Mekong Delta region to help identify and provide assistance to trafficking survivors.

HEALTHY POPULATIONS

Recent years have shown an increase in tuberculosis and HIV case finding, which can exacerbate social and economic vulnerabilities of Mekong Delta communities. Vietnam has high rates of tuberculosis, with the highest case notification rates concentrated in the Mekong Delta provinces. The HIV epidemic persists among the most at-risk populations. And the Mekong Delta region faces increasing threats of emerging and other diseases spreading from animals to humans. USAID works closely with provincial governments in the region to strengthen Vietnam's effectiveness in preventing, detecting, and responding to health threats, and ensure better health for its people. USAID is also providing essential rehabilitation and social support to persons with disabilities in two Mekong Delta provinces.