BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN THE TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS IN VIETNAM

VIETNAM SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

Prepared for

AGRITEAM Canada
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The implementation of studies of this kind is always a challenge given the international nature of the research team, the geographic location of the project’s key locations in the Mekong Delta and the complexity of the subject matter. In addition, the mere logistics of moving many people to multiple places in a short space of time in the field posed problems. Finally, there were the usual language and communications barriers and the desire to build a participatory team initiative.

In spite of all the possible pitfalls, the study experience was rewarding and went smoothly. Many people deserve our thanks for the combined effort and the cooperative spirit. Our Vietnamese Team partners – SDRC were a pleasure to work with and certainly provided us with valuable research assistance, advice, group facilitation support and much more. Their enthusiasm and commitment to the work was impressive.

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Nguyen Thanh Hien, Administration Officer
Pham Phi Anh, Provincial Coordinator

College students, teachers, managers – community people – industry representatives
We would also like to thank those people from the three community colleges in Hau Giang, Vinh Long, and Binh Thuan and the men, women students, interpreters and company managers from the area communities who agreed to spend their time with us to provide valuable advice and information.

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Dal Brodhead & Wendy Quarry, Study Co-Leads, VSEP Barriers Study and Karen Sjolin, TVET Advisor (who deserves our special thanks for her work in the Canadian experience.)
ACRONYMS

ADB  Asian Development Bank
BTCC Binh Thuan Community College
CC Community College
CSR Corporate Social Responsibility
EM Ethnic Minorities
LMNA Labour Market Needs Analysis
MOET Ministry of Education and Training
MOLISA Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
PAR Participatory Action Research
PSE Post-Secondary Education
SDRC Social Development and Research Consultancy
TVET Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WUSC World University Service of Canada
VSEP Vietnam Skills for Employment Project
VLCC Vinh Long Community College

Definition – for the purposes of this Barriers Study, the terms *marginalized* and *disadvantaged* populations are used interchangeably to refer specifically to the specific populations that are the focus of the research – namely, rural and remote populations, women, youth and ethnic groups.

A cohort of the data collection team escaping the rain
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To continue its rapid economic growth and to maximize the benefits to local populations from this development, Vietnam has recognized that it needs a growing, well-trained workforce. Its increasing demands for skilled labour in the industrial and services sectors, has led Vietnam to plan for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system to fill the gap between labour supply and labour demand. Specifically, the Government of Vietnam has emphasized the need for improved human resource management and training.

The Vietnam Skills for Employment Project (VSEP) was launched to address these issues. TVET is a multi-year (2014-2020) initiative of the Government of Vietnam, with Canadian support. The project is designed in part to support reform at the institutional and sub-national levels and it is aimed at strengthening the community college network and the TVET system. Within its goal of supporting a process of innovation, priority has been placed upon working with three designated Community Colleges in the Mekong Delta: Hau Giang, Vinh Long and Binh Thuan. The Government of Vietnam has also committed itself to increase the access and inclusion of marginalized groups and minorities in the opportunities created by economic growth and development – this commitment is expressed as one of the key objectives of their blueprint for change.\(^1\) Within this context, as part of the VSEP Project, a *Barriers Study* has been put in place to identify barriers to access, and inclusion of women, youth, ethnic people and rural and remote populations.

The Study methodology consists of an adapted\(^2\) down participatory approach research design to fit the resources and time available. The research team consisted of Canadian and Vietnamese consultants who jointly undertook research design, a stakeholder mapping exercise, primary and secondary Canadian and Vietnamese document reviews and data collection using interviews, focus groups, mini-surveys, household visits, story collection, extensive community field work, data analysis and validation and production of a report.

The Study found that the TVET system operates within a unique overall national social, economic, cultural and governance context that defines how the country operates. It is the framework that delineates what change is appropriate to propose and how it can be encouraged and managed. The Barriers Study and its recommendations have been influenced and in some measure defined by this big picture. That environment includes changing labour market conditions, a changing economy, a demographic shift, a strong preference for a university education, a centralized government, key societal factors including pockets of poverty, a multi-ethnic, rural and youthful population and increasing participation of women in the economy.

As a rapidly developing country, Vietnam is transforming itself from an agricultural society into a modern economy and the speed of its development has left certain populations more disadvantaged than others. In the context of the TVET system, it has meant that specific groups have identifiable accessibility issues. The challenges faced by marginalized groups are numerous and are often interrelated as the findings of this study show. They vary in importance depending upon the different situations of each group. They are not new, nor are they

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\(^1\) Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW: “On Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of the Education and Training Sector In Response to the Requirements of Industrialization and Modernization in the Context of a Socialism-Oriented Market Economy and International Integration”

\(^2\) Refer to page 5, 2nd paragraph under the heading, “Limitations” for additional information.
surprising, but they need to be addressed if the disadvantaged groups are to benefit from the growing economy and the country not held back by skilled labour shortages.

The Study draws upon extensive focus group discussions, key person interviews and secondary research. It considers the barriers to college access as taking place before (to apply and get accepted), during (to both select the right avenue of study and to stay the course up to and after graduation) and after when students are expected to find employment in their chosen field. It also draws on some of the relevant experiences of the Canadian community college system with particular attention paid to issues of access to TVET/Advanced Skills by marginalized populations in Canada. In the course of the research on the Barriers Study, it became evident that the TVET system in Vietnam clearly has multiple barriers in the area of access for marginalized populations. It shares this reality with many other countries. However, it also became clear that barriers are in fact challenges that require targeted efforts to overcome. In that respect, these challenges can be looked at from a positive perspective because they also delineate areas of opportunity to innovate and take initiative – to show leadership.

The Study concludes that improving access for marginalized groups into the TVET system is a complex, multi-dimensional and multi-level challenge due to the fact that VSEP takes place in a complex and rapidly evolving development environment with multiple national, provincial and local stakeholders. It is also framed by conditions of poverty that particularly affect the rural poor, remote communities and the ethnic groups. As a consequence, a range of responses to the barrier challenges will be needed at every level. It also suggests that a key challenge is where to begin to speed up the change process and it observes that a start has already been made on reducing some of the barriers in the new vocational education law and within the TVET system, but there is a need for even more adaptation, innovation and resourcing in the future.

The Barriers Study identifies a number of key themes to keep in mind when planning for the future of TVET and it recommends that the Colleges:

- build on success and promising initiatives – develop incentives & become competitive;
- create a comprehensive, clear educational path – simplify the process;
- stress innovation and leadership – take proactive action.

Specifically, the Barriers Study recommends to the Colleges the following in order to obtain demonstrated good employment outcomes and access for marginalized groups:

1. Establish a Proactive Recruitment Capacity
2. Create Satellite College Campuses
3. Strengthen Student Support Services
4. Improve the Quality of Student Life and the College Facilities
5. Enhance Financial Support
6. Update Education and Teaching Skills
7. Invest in College–Industry Linkages
8. Establish Employment Support Programs
9. Develop and Simplify Educational Pathways
10. Develop an ACTION PLAN.

In summary, it is clear that many of the challenges and difficulties related to improving access for the rural and remote communities, poor women, youth and ethnic groups, involve issues well beyond the mandate of the Barriers Study. The Study recognizes that other student populations
would likely benefit from the suggested changes in the College practices, but that priority should be placed upon the marginalized groups who experience greater disadvantage.

The Study recommendations focus to the extent possible on what changes could be recommended for the Colleges to undertake within their areas of responsibility. It assumes that even within the current TVET policy and program frameworks, that there is room for the Colleges to take the initiative, to demonstrate their capacity to innovate – to exercise leadership.
1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid economic growth in Vietnam in recent years has led to higher employment rates and higher wages and salaries and concurrent reductions in levels of poverty. However, to continue its economic growth and to maximize the benefits to local populations from this development, Vietnam has recognized that it needs a growing, well-trained workforce that is qualified to meet the evolving demands of private sector firms. Its increasing demands for skilled labour in the industrial and services sectors, has led Vietnam to plan for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system to fill the gap between labour supply and labour demand. It seeks to reform the TVET system to make it more responsive to market demand.

Specifically, the Government of Vietnam emphasized the need for improved human resource management, including TVET leadership training, more practice-oriented content, improved professional capacities of TVET administrators and greater participation of industry in the planning, design, development and delivery of TVET.

The Vietnam Skills for Employment Project (VSEP) was launched to address this issue. TVET is a multi-year (2014-2020) initiative of the Government of Vietnam with Canadian support. The project was launched after an extensive consultation and planning process. The project is designed in part to support reform at the institutional and sub-national levels, due to overlapping mandates of national and sub-national authorities, and it is aimed at strengthening the community college network and the TVET system in Vietnam. Within its goal of supporting a process of innovation, priority has been placed upon working with three designated Community Colleges in the Mekong Delta: Hau Giang, Vinh Long and Binh Thuan.

Concurrently, the Government of Vietnam has committed itself to increase the access and inclusion of marginalized groups and minorities in the opportunities created by economic growth and development. Within this context, as part of the VSEP Project, a Barriers Study has been put in place to identify barriers to access, and inclusion of women, youth, ethnic people and rural populations. In addition, the terms of reference call for the inclusion of some general practical suggestions to address the barriers, and suggest changes that colleges could make that are well within their current mandates.

As indicated in the initial study proposal, it has been understood from the outset that “inclusion is a multi-dimensional and complex issue” and thus the issue of access is one, not just of “access to,” but also “access throughout,” the learning process that needs to be addressed. So the marginalized groups, while being the primary focus of the study, are not alone in terms of being considered as part of the challenge of overcoming the difficulties, and improving the opportunities for access.

2 METHODOLOGY AND ENGAGEMENT

The terms of reference for the Barrier Study called for a design involving Participatory Action Research (PAR) to ensure greater understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized groups’ access to programs within the TVET system. Based on the understanding that a full PAR approach would likely not be possible, the New Economy Development Group (New

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Economy) adopted an adapted participatory approach research design to fit the resources and time available. New Economy was fortunate to be able to partner with a local research organization, the Social Development and Research Consultancy (SDRC) group\(^5\) based in Ho Chi Minh City. SDRC already had a substantial track record in participatory research work within the country, and was able to provide considerable insight, support and local adaptation (plus interpretation). SDRC undertook the field research while New Economy focussed on the design and oversight.

**Research Planning**

Several months prior to arrival in Vietnam, New Economy and SDRC communicated (via skype) once a week to lay the groundwork for the *research design*. The team took a fairly standard research approach of first clarifying what needed to be researched (the WHAT); mapping the various stakeholders who would be involved (the WHO) and finally determining the best methods to reach each stakeholder (the HOW).

SDRC supported New Economy in compiling and analyzing the *secondary data*. Secondary data included: documents on education and TVET system in Vietnam; statistical data for the three provinces being studied; material on ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups and government policy documents. Refer to Appendix D.

Similarly, a *stakeholder mapping exercise* undertaken by New Economy and SDRC served to identify the key groups (stakeholders) at all levels – marginalized groups\(^6\) were the primary focus, but others such as employers, public servants, college staff, as well as policy players were included in assessing the barriers to accessing training and the lack of employment opportunities (see stakeholder mapping in Appendix C).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>Local Industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Vice Rector and Rector</td>
<td>Vice-Chair PPC</td>
<td>- Commune leader</td>
<td>- Employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Men and women</td>
<td>- Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(student services;</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Youth (male &amp; female)</td>
<td>Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student union etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Students (male &amp; female)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teachers (male &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Households</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students (male &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questionnaires were prepared (and translated by SDRC) for each stakeholder group and were sent to the provinces for review.

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\(^5\) SDRC was started in HCMC in 1989 to provide refresher training to social workers who were trained before 1975, and other practitioners in the field of social work and community development and to promote the reestablishment of social work as a separate field of study in colleges and universities. SDRC has carried out a series of participatory research projects since its inception.

\(^6\) These included ethnic minorities; women; youth, and those living in rural areas.
Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection took place over a three-week period between September 22 and October 17, 2015. The New Economy team first met with the SDRC Team (and the VSEP Gender Advisor) for a preliminary two-day workshop to go over data collection protocols and to determine collection methods and methodologies. This “getting to know each other” moment was important. SDRC advised New Economy on cultural boundaries while together the team worked out various methodologies designed to engage interviewees effectively within the time available.

Field-testing took place in the first province visited, Hau Giang. The research team consisted of New Economy consultants (2); the SDRC Team (3), the VSEP Canadian Technical and Vocational expert and the VSEP Gender Advisor. One SDRC team member led each interview while one other person (either from SDRC or the Gender Advisor) took notes. Frequently, a college-based interpreter assisted the research teams. Canadian team members, assisted by “whispering” interpretation were able to follow the interviews and subsequently ask questions.

Given that access to TVET in Vietnam is restricted to youth (adults would be eligible for “Continuing Education” programs), the team focused on students (youth) both male and female from ethnic minorities and rural populations in the three designated provinces. Gender issues were addressed throughout the data collection process (all data sex disaggregated) and are written up in a separate section below. Access issues confronting ethnic populations and the rural poor are often the same and have been written up accordingly. Differences have been acknowledged and written about separately.

Primary Data Collection Tools

Field data collection consisted of a mix of participatory approaches and individual interviews.

*Interviews*: Key Person interviews were carried out with college officials, government personnel, employers (in the workplace), industrial commissioners, and business associations.

*Focus groups*: Focus group discussions were facilitated by SDRC using warm up exercises to break the ice and help participants to get involve in the discussion. Drawings and post-it cards were used to collect and organize responses. Focus groups were held with male and female college students and officials, secondary and high school students, teachers and commune men and women.

*Mini-surveys*: A brief questionnaire was handed out to students and teachers (and a few selected men and

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8 The Access/Gender Advisor was on the Team to ensure that the study was in line with the overall gender strategy of VSEP and to insure that the results could be integrated into the overall project.
9 SDRC used singing, humor, games, physical movement, drawing and stories to build awareness, energize the groups and connect to emotions.
women groups in communes) at the end of most of the sessions, so that participants could fill it out on the spot and SDRC could collect the feedback for future analysis.

*Household Visits:* In each commune, small teams (usually one SDRC person, one New Economy consultant and an interpreter) visited individual households (ethnic or poor ones) to listen to stories from men and women who had struggled with providing education for their children.

*Story collection:* All team members were encouraged to listen for and collect individual stories from interviewees that would provide a good illustration of experiences with barriers to college access and methodologies for overcoming them.

**Data Collection Summary**

In total, approximately 470 people in the three provinces were involved through face-to-face interviews, focus groups and, home visits. The visits were captured and recorded by the VSEP team provincial coordinator.

**Participation Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FC = Focus Group</th>
<th>Inv = Individual</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES</th>
<th>LOCAL PARTNERS (Supporters from gov’t, community and college)</th>
<th>GRAND TOTAL (at each Province)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WBS 1121.1 Barriers Study in Hau Giang Province</td>
<td>57 (M/F) 29 (M/F)</td>
<td>3 (Male) 2 (Female) 5 (Total)</td>
<td>89 (Male) 87 (Female) 176 (Total)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBS 1121.1 Barriers Study in Vinh Long Province</td>
<td>43 (M/F) 22 (M/F)</td>
<td>2 (Male) 3 (Female) 5 (Total)</td>
<td>67 (Male) 69 (Female) 136 (Total)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBS 1121.1 Barriers Study in Binh Thuan Province</td>
<td>43 (M/F) 18 (M/F)</td>
<td>0 (Male) 7 (Female) 7 (Total)</td>
<td>62 (Male) 94 (Female) 156 (Total)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL (all 3 Provinces together):</strong></td>
<td>143 (M/F) 69 (M/F)</td>
<td>5 (Male) 12 (Female) 17 (Total)</td>
<td>217 (Male) 253 (Female) 470 (Total)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research**

In parallel with the first mission to Vietnam, the New Economy Canadian Community College Advisor conducted research on the Canadian experience. An overview of the Canadian Community College model, experience and lessons learned was prepared as a background Working Paper for the study.

**Data Validation and Analysis**

In December 2015, the New Economy team travelled back to Ho Chi Minh City to work with SDRC to undertake a joint data analysis. Prior to this step, both New Economy and SDRC teams had prepared templates to organize the notes from all the interviews and focus group discussions. These templates were used to identify patterns and analyse the findings. Analysis of barriers focused on several aspects: assessment of barriers experienced by marginalized

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10 Matrix prepared by Pham Phi Anh, VSEP Provincial Coordinator.
11 Edited Matrix based upon Phi Anh Matrix.
groups at the group, institutional and systemic levels. In addition, promising initiatives and opportunities were identified and draft recommendations discussed.

**Report Writing**

The New Economy Team led the drafting of the final report with the assistance of the SDRC Team. A joint validation process was used to review the final drafts prior to its submission.

**Limitations**

It is inevitable that there is seldom enough time to complete a research initiative to the full extent possible. This study is no exception. New Economy realized early on that a full Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach would not be possible within the time frame and resources available. Nor was it within the capabilities (or mandate) of New Economy and SDRC without devoting more time to on the ground training and a full PAR exercise.\(^{12}\)

In essence, PAR requires a more open-ended approach to the research process with the expectation that much will change as the research progresses and involves the participants (the researched) in its implementation. In this case, the time frame and the practicalities of the situation, along with the cultural, political and social practices of Vietnam meant that much had to be decided prior to the field data collection. Questionnaires had to be completed and translated and taken to the provinces, colleges and communes for prior approval. This type of planning and control renders a more open-ended PAR approach impossible.

Another limitation that may spring from the pre-planning required opening the door to the possibility that some respondents may have been handpicked rather than randomly selected. This response is often inevitable the more a research project is planned in advance and the more control the planners need to take to select interviewees. Nevertheless, while this may have happened in all three provinces, the team collected enough evidence from enough respondents to mitigate any bias.

Finally, the focus on marginalized groups and in particular ethnic peoples was not always possible. In particular, the team was not able to visit a Cham commune in Binh Thuan. The head of the commune was away attending a Party meeting and asked that no one visit the commune without his presence. This was a disappointment given that the Cham community is fairly large in this province. The ethnic group most prominent in the other two provinces, the Khmer was more prominent in Hau Giang than in Vinh Long nevertheless the team visited a commune in each province where there were predominantly Khmer people. Visits were also made to ethnic boarding schools in each province.

### 3 STUDY CONTEXT

#### 3.1 The Meta Environment in Vietnam

The TVET system operates within a unique overall national social, economic, cultural and governance context that defines how the country operates. It is the framework that delineates what change is appropriate to propose and how it can be encouraged and managed. The

\(^{12}\) A full PAR approach would mean that those who are the subject of the research (the marginalized groups) would be engaged in the research process itself both in data collection and in final analysis. This process would have required the outside researchers to spend enough time in the communities to gain the trust and confidence of the community members to allow for their full participation in the process. PAR also means that the subjects of the research are fully engaged in finding solutions to the problem addressed.
Barriers Study and its recommendations have been influenced and in some measure defined by this big picture. While the characteristics of this environment may be quite self-evident, they need to be identified explicitly as they have and do influence what exists, what may be feasible in the short term and what is considered desirable in the longer term. Thus, the Study is clearly focussed on access, broadly defined and it identifies the key contextual themes that have emerged from the discussions and the research.

**Key Conditions Relevant to TVET**

As a rapidly developing country, Vietnam is transforming itself from an agricultural society into a multi-dimensional modern economy that is increasingly affected by global economic forces. As in the case of other developing countries, the speed of its development has left certain populations more disadvantaged than others and as a result they have been less able or ready to benefit from the economic progress. In the context of the TVET system, it has meant that specific groups have identifiable access issues and challenges that the government has indicated it wishes to face. There are a number of conditions that are clearly affecting all the disadvantaged groups (the subjects of this Study) and although they go well beyond the TVET system, they came up consistently, indirectly or directly during the Study process.

**Poverty**

First and foremost is clearly the issue of poverty that by its very nature creates barriers for most, if not all, disadvantaged groups. Its implications need to be understood, as they are far-reaching and difficult to face. In terms of improving access to TVET, ways need to be found to mitigate the effects of poverty if real progress is to be made in improving access. It is pervasive in its implications which can include: low income, ill health, low expectations, limited education and social capital, exclusion from the mainstream society, cultural alienation, day labour, as well as capacity to afford TVET in terms of travel, accommodations, living costs and tuition. All these characteristics are relevant to the access of disadvantaged groups to TVET.

**Labour Market Conditions**

Another key factor that affects access directly is the labour market skills mismatch and deficit. As the society moves from a subsistence economy characterized by a low skilled, uneducated and an immobile labour force towards a post-modern, industrial, market-oriented environment, its human resource requirements are changing.

Related to the above factor is also the current global economic downturn and uncertainty which has resulted in a disconnect between labour demand and supply in Vietnam – basically growing unemployment. The private sector growth has slowed down and budgetary constraints have caused governments to hire fewer people. Consequently, there are serious implications for disadvantaged groups when it comes to investing in education.

**A Changing Economy**

Economic development is being redefined within Vietnam and increasingly the (big) business sector is being relied upon to generate the jobs and to exercise its social responsibilities such as by taking on unproductive interns and being open to new partnerships and collaborations. Industrial Commissions are being formed to monitor private sector behaviour for governments while encouraging businesses to create jobs.

**The Demographic Shift**

To complicate matters at the national and local levels, there is a significant demographic shift in the population – a movement away from farming and the rural areas into the growing cities.
This change has some obvious and some less obvious implications for the education system and its accessibility objectives.

**Attitudes to Education**

This shift to the cities is further compounded by the firmly held belief that university is the only sure path to success and that **colleges are second best**.\(^{13}\) In fact, the study found that people believe that you “fail into college” because you cannot meet the university academic standards or you are unable to afford the cost. Disadvantaged families will put themselves into great debt or may mortgage or sell their land to afford a university education for their children. The financial risk to families is even greater when there is a shortage of jobs\(^{14}\) and graduates fail to earn an income to service their debt, or to feed their families. Thus, poverty has placed disadvantaged groups in a position of inequitable access to the education system, and TVET in particular.\(^{15}\)

**Governance Factors**

The **structure of governance** in Vietnam poses both opportunities and challenges when it comes to tackling the need for change in order to improve the situation of the disadvantaged peoples within the TVET system. Key TVET related policies in education, labour market planning and poverty are usually communicated downwards by the central government and there can be a noticeable lag time in their development and implementation. Additionally, there is an overlapping and fragmented division of education, training and vocational responsibilities and mandates of key education-related Ministries (MOET and MOLISA, as well as Continuing Education and other training programs organized by line ministries).

**Key Societal Factors**

There are also **important societal factors** in Vietnam that stem from the conditions of its multi-ethnic, rural and youthful population, as well as the increasing participation of women in the growing economy. Poverty defines much of their environment and the Barriers Study identifies some of its implications for the difficulties these groups experience in accessing the TVET system. Complicating matters is the difficulty of learning a second language for ethnic groups, and more recently, the challenge of having to acquire a third language ability in order to graduate from high school. Differing cultural practices along with familial expectations and limited resources further complicate open communication.

**Geographic Challenges**

The current Barriers Study is focused on three provinces, each presenting a particular geographic challenge affecting the delivery of TVET. **They are all located in the Mekong Delta**,\(^{16}\) an area characterized by rural, remote, riverine and coastal conditions and suffer from weaker infrastructure, less economic development, a lower standard of education and a reliance on traditional farming and fishing livelihoods. This environment has real implications for access to higher education and opportunity as the Barrier Study indicates.

4 **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The Terms of Reference for the Barrier Study call for an assessment of barriers to participation in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs experienced by marginalized groups: women, youth, ethnic minorities and rural populations.

\(^{13}\) Ibid, LMNA Report, page 2.


\(^{16}\) Technically, Binh Thuan is not located in the Mekong Delta, but is nearby.
The challenges faced by marginalized groups are numerous, and are often interrelated, as the findings of this study show. They vary in importance depending upon the different situations of each group. They are not new, nor are they surprising, as other studies such as the 2015 ADB report on Vietnam Education Sector, the UNICEF & MOET Country Study,¹⁷ and the Labour Market Needs Analysis¹⁸ reports have shown.

This current study draws from extensive focus group discussions, key person interviews and secondary research. It considers the barriers to college access as taking place before (to apply and get accepted), during (to both select the right avenue of study and to stay the course up to and after graduation), and after, when students are expected to find employment in their chosen field.

4.1 Common Challenges in Getting Access to College

Poverty

Ethnic and rural poor populations in the Mekong Delta tend to live in relatively isolated and poorly serviced areas with small landholdings and dependence on near subsistence agriculture. As a result, a family’s struggle with finances to meet basic needs lies at the root of a string of other problems confronting the majority of marginalized people. Poverty impacts their decision making for all aspects of living including the education of their children.

The husband in one poor household finished his 8th grade and works as a freelance carpenter specialized in making civil goods. His wife is illiterate and not well. She has a tumour so she has to go to HCMC for treatment that puts another burden on expenses.

He works on average 15 days per month and earns 250,000 VND/workday (3,750,000 VND/month). His wife sells lottery tickets and earns 50,000-100,000 per day (75,000 x 30 days = 2,250,000 VND).

He has 4 children who are still at school. Tuition fee for each semester is 6,800,000 VND. The living cost for the oldest child is 3,000,000 VND and for the youngest child is 700,000 VND/month. So the cost for schooling has caused a problem for him.

When his sons entered the school, because they couldn’t get a loan from the VBSP, the parents had to borrow from another place, 10 million VND to afford their sons’ tuition fee with a very high interest rate (1.3 million/month x 12 months = 15.6 million, about 50%/year). They spent all the money in the first three months.

Despite being poor, he is determined to afford to send his children to university. Last year, the first child got into college but refused, in order to study for university this year. He said if he had to, he would even sell the house to get money for his children’s education.

Attitudes to Education

Parents and their college-age children who do seek higher education think mainly in terms of how investment in this education will contribute to future earning ability. They think about jobs, and consider higher education mainly as a route to a better job. To this end, there is an almost universal desire on the part of parents and their children to reach for university, and not

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People believe that university will lead to a better job and better pay.\textsuperscript{20} The majority of students who do enrol in college are those who couldn’t get into university, or are not able to afford it. The result is that many of the classes are filled with students with low academic standards.

There is also a status aspect to the choice of university over college. Despite the fact that the goal of university may be unrealistic, even the poorest families persist in believing in the university graduation dream. Families are often willing to sacrifice a great deal in order to help their children enter university. It was, we were told, a point of family honour that a student must try for university.\textsuperscript{21}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The couple below have four children. The first two went to a Khmer boarding school before entrance to university. The father wanted them to study medicine but they failed to get accepted into the program, so now one studies economics and the other is in nursing in Tra Vinh. The family can get some support from the government (school fees are reduced by 50%) and they get credit from the Bank for Social Policies to help with the costs of the two children at university.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The family has only 0.2 hectares of land to cultivate so to pay for everything, the mother gets up very early in the morning to prepare banh (a rice cake) to sell in the market. She says she only sleeps two hours a night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their children didn’t want to go to College even though the expenses were less. They preferred to take on small jobs to help cover their expenses for university, but their parents told them to focus on their studies. At first the eldest child wanted to study pedagogy where there would be free tuition and lodging but she heard on the radio that there were no jobs so she switched to economics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parents hope that their children will get jobs immediately after they graduate but if not, they will have to continue to work hard to pay off the loans. The father is now taking on an extra job as a motorcycle taxi driver.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The corollary to this overriding concern about employability is that in most cases neither parents nor students think about what it means to “get an education,” other than to get a job. Then, when they don’t get one, as is more and more the case, the college system is believed to have failed them. The implications of this belief are far reaching and damage college credibility. Similarly, the employment motivation means that students select their area of study based on the perceived availability of jobs (e.g. police, teacher, soldier, health care), rather than their interest in the subject. Such an attitude to selecting an area of study is not conducive to best results.

\textsuperscript{19} LMNA Report, page 2.  
\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, we were told that employers will first hire a university graduate and he/she will receive higher pay.  
\textsuperscript{21} High school students in Long My.
Moreover, this narrow vision of the value of education may shut the door to future pathways for further study.

Ethnic and rural students worry a great deal about job availability, but they also worry about their “learning capacity” and their ability to actually complete the studies and graduate. There is a high drop-out rate in many of the colleges, often as a result of poor career choices, lack of motivation, family economic conditions, or through lack of preparedness to study at the higher grades. In addition, the requirement to pass both an English and IT exam in order to graduate presents a further substantial barrier to students from disadvantaged communities.

Boys in Long My high school felt that their learning capacity was not good enough; they felt they had to learn on their own because their high school was inadequate. There were no computers and no lab, and only four students had computers in their homes. The students felt the instructors were not committed, so they tried to learn through the outside internet (if they could); their parents are poor and this means that they have to study far from home. The hardest classes in the boys’ view were English, mathematics and literature.

Access to Adequate Primary, Secondary and High Schools

Many Ethnic peoples and other rural populations live in the poor and hard to reach, or mountainous regions where there is an overall lack of access to good services (e.g. roads, clean water, health centres etc.) and to good schools (primary, secondary and high school) and adequate teaching. Lengthy travel times, and the cost of food and accommodation were reported to be a serious impediment to high school completion. The rivers often divide communities in the Mekong Delta and infrastructure is lacking. Travel by boat to school is sometimes the only option. Community isolation can also mean a loss of outside stimulation and influence, poor Internet and computer services, and limited exposure to the English language (English is a requirement for college graduation). Ethnic students tended to be far less computer savvy then their Kinh counterparts.

Lack of Outreach from Colleges

As noted above, it is the rare student (or parent) who talked about ambitions for going on to college (instead of university). By and large, the poor level of outreach from colleges contributed to this lack of knowledge or enthusiasm. Students often spoke of hearing about college from a sibling or ended up “failing down” from university into college. They also spoke of the local universities’ active role in recruiting at high schools, offering an open day for potential students to come and visit the campus, or other forms of outreach. College outreach programs are few and far between and the little that has been done rarely seem to have made an impression on local students.

The reality is that universities (apart from having a reputation as being a better route to employment) also spend time and money on recruitment. University representatives reportedly visited many local high schools to discuss career options, hold information sessions on a yearly basis, and advertise within the provinces.

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22 BT, focus group.
23 Many were ethnic but it was not an ethnic boarding school.
24 Policy 135 is addressing this issue.
25 People from Can Tho University come to the schools to talk about careers an students can take a tour of the university – there are special dormitories there for Khmer students; they can have health insurance and free tuition.
Colleges were reported to be quite passive in their recruitment efforts. Their absence of outreach to, and communication with, communes and within secondary and high schools misses the opportunity to reach students and their parents to explain the potential of a college education. There are exceptions. Vinh Long Community College (VLCC) has partnered with the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) to develop an e-learning and social marketing platform to enhance its outreach program. It currently recruits (communicates) through its website (under reconstruction), goes to district and commune heads with information about the college, and advertises through radio and television. Despite this limited support from WUSC, the college still relies on its website to offer further information.

**Ethnic Specific Barriers**

Despite best efforts by government and society in general, there remains a stigma linked to being part of an ethnic minority. In many cases, the Vietnamese language is a second language for ethnic students, and although the Vietnamese language is the medium of study in primary, secondary and high school, many ethnic students still do experience language difficulties in accessing a college education.

This overall sense of “otherness” is reflected in their way of life. The Khmer (in Hau Giang and Vinh Long)\(^\text{26}\) and the Cham in Binh Thuan form the largest ethnic groups in those provinces. They often live in ethnically distinctive communes and follow their own customs and way of life.

The comments and attitudes of Kinh people found throughout this study reflected this sense of “otherness.”

- “Ethnic minorities are not very sociable and don’t mix with Kinh people, it is harder for them to adjust and they are not popular.”
- They don’t like to work, and if they do work, they only do it for money so they can then go back and spend the money for their many festivals.
- Khmer students are said to be slow learners in scientific and technological matters, –and do not have the same exposure to computer technology, so have more difficulty in learning
- Study capacity is average and they do not communicate well with instructors.
- They have many days of celebration.
- They are shy and do not mingle and most quit school at 15 or 16 and become cooks or labourers.
- Khmer are less interested in education for their children – so they end up being labourers with no interest in long-term jobs.

\(^{26}\) The Khmer are the largest ethnic minority group and reside in the Mekong Delta. There are fewer groups in Vinh Long and larger communities in Hau Giang. The Cham form the largest Ethnic group in Binh Thuan but there are several much smaller communities of different groups such as the Khor, the Raglay and the Rai.

\(^{27}\) The Khmer practice a unique form of Buddhism. Their communes are centred on the pagoda where a great deal of study and learning on topics important to the Khmer take place. The monk, or head of the pagoda plays an important role in Khmer society. The Cham too have separate communities and practice a form of Brahmanism in some communities while others (a minority within a minority) are Moslem.
Barriers to Participation of Marginalized Groups in the Technical Vocational Education and Training Programs in Vietnam

The father in this Khmer family always supports his children’s education, according to their capacities. He never sets (profession) goals for them, but he said he found that Khmer students are slower in their studies than Kinh students due to:

a. (Khmer) habitat location is far from rivers/waterways, isolated from markets: Khmer people prefer to live on elevated land so they could not make wider contacts and do other jobs than farming.

b. (Kinh) teachers’ communication is more verbal than demonstrative with concrete examples – therefore the lesson is not easy to understand by the Khmer students.

Concerning the government policy for Ethnic Minorities (EM) education, the man in the picture above confirmed these matters related to his children education:

- Learning at the boarding school reserved to Khmer people: one child
- Reduction of tuition fees: the one who studied health care intermediate level
- Credit for University students: the family made an application form, attached the letter of university acceptance, and submitted it to the women’s union credit group at village level. The application was transferred to Commune people’s committee for attestation before sending it to the Bank for Social policies. Then two days later, the family receives the loan.

He did not make any wish/suggestion. But he said that “Kinh people are big brothers, they are the hosts “người Kinh là đàn anh, họ là chủ nhà”.

Gender Specific Barriers (Challenges)

The New Economy and SDRC teams paid due diligence to assessing gender differences in terms of access amongst the marginalized groups, particularly since women in general are categorized as belonging to a marginalized community. With the exception of interviews with College teachers, and with some of the older men and women groups in communes, all interviews with students at colleges, ethnic boarding schools and high schools, were done in gender separated groups.

While the team did find nuanced differences between male and female access experience, most were not significant and were often balanced by quite varied respondent experiences. In essence, parental concern for female children slightly differed from their concerns for males, while the students themselves showed different ambitions, concerns and attitudes to higher education and the search for employment.

Parents (families in general) believed it to be the female’s role to look after the household, but if they did hope for higher education, considered that professions such as teaching or medical assistants (sometimes accountants) might make it easier for women to work and care for their children. Parent also characterized teaching as a more “gentle” profession, hence suitable for women. Some felt that their daughters needed to get married earlier than the sons. This attitude was not that prevalent, although most worried more about their daughters being far from home than for their male children. They certainly worried about the boys, but more in terms of them getting into trouble and going out with their friends instead of studying. The girls, they feared, might fall into the wrong social crowd and tarnish their reputations or worse.28

28 Be sold into marriage with foreigners.
The female students themselves mentioned a range of fears particularly around safety in student housing at night. They more openly talked about not wanting to be so far from home, mentioned health concerns and in general appeared to be slightly more fearful of the risks than the boys (or more willing to admit it).

Overall, the teams did not find the barriers to access between male and female to be very significant. Parents and their daughters were positive about the value of education and, as one girl put it, “Getting an education allows girls to take part in the decision-making process.”

While an earlier report noted the continuing discrepancy in work opportunities for men and women with women getting lower pay, the change in attitude within a generation toward the education of girls was made the more palpable when interviewing groups of older women in the communes. There were few women here who had gone beyond secondary school talking enthusiastically about their desire for their daughters to go to university.

These are the parents of two daughters. One is 18 and the other 9. The husband is a farmer of rice and fruit trees and the mother does tailoring at home. Their incomes are not stable.

Their daughters love to draw. The eldest has been drawing since she was in grade 10. Her parents wanted her to be a teacher but she insisted on drawing and now she is at a private school in Ho Chi Minh City studying Design and Graphics. Her course is spread over 2.5 years. The National University recognizes the diploma and, in fact the daughter was accepted into Van Lang University in HCMC, but she saw it would take four years and cost more than the private school. Besides, the school promises a job at the end of the course. The daughter did all the research on the various schools and in the end the parents conceded. Now she needs a laptop and a professional camera. The mother worries for the daughter living so far from home, however, for her daughter’s future she feels she has to bear it.

4.2 Staying the Course – Institutional/College Specific Challenges

The difficulties that ethnic minorities and the rural poor face in access to college are not necessarily over once they are in college. There are systemic problems within all three colleges that affect many of the students. However, each of the three colleges visited had its own unique challenges that have particular impacts on the wellbeing of ethnic and poor students.

The following challenges were identified specific to the colleges:

Student services and career counseling

All three colleges have a student service representative (or in the case of Vinh Long, the head of the Student Union doubles as the head of Student Services). All three colleges hold a student orientation week to help new students learn about life in the college. These programs are largely focused on college rules and regulations (including how to dress); moral issues and, an

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29 Focus group in Bin Thuan.
30 Ibid, LMNA page 58.
31 Interview, BTCC.
introduction to the college programs. There is, however a marked absence of social activities designed to set the students at ease. In most colleges, students can change their career selection within this orientation week (some only select it at this time), but there is a lack of career counselling at this point and throughout the entire program. Students also spoke of the lack of psychological counselling, which is particularly needed by those rural and ethnic students living far from home and without parental supervision and support. The contradiction between the perceptions of the students regarding the availability of these services and what the Colleges reported, was striking. In many cases, the Colleges were under the impression that they were responding adequately, while many students did not seem to know about the services.

Some services identified by the Colleges included: Hau Giang College offers a reproductive health support program for female students and offers a drop box for anonymous questions concerning health; Binh Thuan Community College (BTCC) offers some career counselling to help students who have taken the wrong major and want to change and have recently established a Student Counselling Center providing psychological counselling for students in a new study environment.

Financial worries

Even when the government (national and provincial) or the college provides tuition support, the high cost of travel and/or room and board, textbooks and stationary, mobile phone and other expenses make it imperative that some students find part time work to be able to afford to stay in school. This added burden, on top of already existing difficulties in keeping up with the heavy curriculum (Section 2), increases the stress on the students and their chances of dropping out or failure to graduate.

Geographic issues

The students from ethnic and rural poor communities who do make it to college, also experience difficulties in both access and costs related to transportation due to being far from the major hubs where many colleges are located. Government (Section 3 below) subsidies for tuition (and sometimes monthly allowances) don’t always take transportation costs into account, thus presenting a further financial burden. Parents are also reluctant to send their children so far from home. Accommodation offered by colleges is often seen as substandard (see section on colleges below) and most female students prefer to live in boarding houses close to the college. This arrangement can present a further threat to safety and wellbeing and can be more expensive than the boarding option.

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32 Hau Giang produces a student handbook.
33 Binh Thuan College has recently instituted a service with psychological counseling.
34 They claim to have about 50 cases per month.
Accommodation and food

Second-rate accommodation within the colleges is of particular concern to poor and ethnic students who usually live too far from any college to be able to live at home. Ethnic students (particularly girls) tend to live in the school dormitories both for cost and safety reasons. Because fees for accommodation are set according to space per square foot per student, colleges that have considerable space (and empty rooms) cram students in, often 8 to a room, to allow students to pay the lower rate. In general, the upkeep of the student dormitories is abysmal. Students spoke of burned light bulbs that took months to be replaced, damp and damaged walls that were not fixed and very few amenities to keep their belongings within the room itself. Hau Giang Community College presented a particular problem since students were not allowed to cook in the dormitories and there were no canteen facilities on the campus, forcing the students to eat at roadside cafes.

Students who want to avoid dormitory living are able to rent rooms in boarding houses close to the college. There are security issues attached to this option particularly for girls. The student service representative at Hau Giang College does visit the landlords of the houses to ensure safety for the students. But several female students expressed fear at going out at night. Hau Giang faces a further problem given that its campus is far from the town and the college offers no transportation even though there is no public transportation available.

Access to library, computer/common rooms and extra-curricular activities

All the colleges have a library and a few computers in the library for research and information. The problem is that libraries are not readily accessible for student use after school hours (libraries only open 9–5). Similarly, classrooms containing computers are locked after school hours. None of the colleges had common rooms for students to meet and chat or study together after school hours (or even during school hours). Options for extra-curricular activities (sports, hobbies, clubs) that offer opportunities for socialization and allow students to interact outside of the formal classroom setting were not in evidence although in some colleges the Youth Union did involve students in preparation for festivals and community service.

Poor teaching skills

Colleges must adhere to a curriculum put together at the national level by MOET. The MOET curriculum covers 70% of a program allowing the college only 30% for adaptation to local circumstances. The MOET schedule is demanding and teachers claim that it doesn’t allow time for discussion and group work. Some pointed out that even the physical lay out of the classroom makes group work hard to manage. Classes take place in large rooms where the teacher often resorts to using a microphone to lecture the students – there is little emphasis on group discussion or use of learning materials. Teachers have to make use of their own knowledge and experience to improvise when they can, but their training has not equipped them to do so.

College teachers must have a Master’s Degree from university and a MOET developed three-month pedagogy course certificate. Teachers reported a tremendous push to cover the

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35 The pedagogy course is focused on how to give a lecture.
demanding course content leaving neither time for learner-centred teaching approaches nor time to support students who may be floundering.

**No teaching of soft and practical skills**

Linked to the lack of time to cover the MOET curriculum is the lack of courses in the teaching of soft skills such as communication, presentation skills, time management, teamwork, leadership, work ethics, motivation and so on. These are the skills (along with practical knowledge) that industry claims to require from college graduates particularly if they are looking for their potential to fill slots in junior and middle management. In addition, many students will need to know how to operate a small business when they return home if they unable to obtain salaried employment.

“Knowledge learned in college is different from what happens in real work”

**Theory rather than practice**

The need to cover the MOET curriculum combined with very limited availability of practical equipment to offer “hands-on” learning and practice greatly contributes to the college inability to properly prepare students for a future role in the private or public sectors. Industry reports that when students do come to work (either as interns or employees), they are not able to use any of the machines through lack of exposure to and practice with the specialized equipment. Also, some students have poor professional behaviour and ethics and are quite ill prepared for the business milieu. Many businesses professed a preference to hire people “off the street” and train them according to their own industry needs rather than hire a college graduate.

**Colleges and articulation**

There is a sense that colleges, not being confident in their ability to train students for employment, look instead to prepare them for further study at university. This finding is not necessarily a negative one given the fact that it is important for students to always have an open door (pathway) to future study. However, this response could be a disguised admission of defeat partly due to the fact that colleges are now facing considerable competition. First, there is the competition with the universal desire to go to university rather than college. In Hau Giang, the brightest students prefer to go to Can Tho and it is the same for Vinh Long while in Binh Thuan, the clever students go to Ho Chi Minh City or Phan Thiet University. Competition can also come from other colleges. Hau Giang competes with a DOLISA Vocational training college next door. VLCC has lost 50% of its enrolment due to a MOLISA decision to upgrade a nearby college to university status and to lower its entrance requirements. BTC has also lost 50% of its intake through uncertainty generated by the anticipated approval of the new Law on Education (see below).

### 4.3 After graduation – Problems with Access to the Labour Market

There is now a skills mismatch in Vietnam between the available labour force and the skills needed for growth. Workers with lower education levels find themselves left behind, unable to acquire the new skills required and if they come from marginalized groups, they are often doubly disadvantaged – they are even less able to respond to the rapidly changing labour market conditions for reasons which will be identified in this study.

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36 Focus group discussion, Binh Thuan.
37 A point covered in the LMNA Study.
Interviewees talk about the labour market and their desire that their area of study match the labour market needs. Unfortunately, labour market information tends to be at least a year out of date so that people wishing to study the career with current job potential, pedagogy for example or health, find that by the time they graduate there is a glut of graduates on the market and they can’t find jobs.

There is also the issue of readiness of the institutions. In Hau Giang, for example the college has been asked to focus on post harvest production when there is yet to be a market demand. At present, there are few companies engaged in post harvest production (a few fish plants) and the farmers with small land holdings are reluctant to increase their production when food might go to waste. As a result, there are few jobs – so, little demand for graduates – and little reason to go to the college to take this course.

The sample of industry that was visited in the Hau Giang area indicated little interest in hiring college graduates. The labour force demand was for unskilled workers. They showed some interest in college graduates who showed promise in middle management-leadership skills, time management and above all, English. These job openings were not numerous. In Binh Thuan students spoke about courses that taught students how to make a bed, or serve at one table but never mentioned the need to clean toilets, wait on 50 tables in one sitting or stand on your feet all day or have “knife skills”.

**Linkages with Local Industry**

There was little evidence to indicate a strong relationship between the colleges and local industry. The Study team visited several industries in each province (some randomly selected and others, arranged by the Colleges – firms that had been previously visited by the Labour Market Study teams). While the College and industry representatives expressed an interest in linkages, it was very apparent that there was limited ongoing communications and relationship building. It was therefore not surprising that up-to-date information on the practical needs of local businesses was lacking and that the Colleges were often unable to shape their course offerings to meet those requirements. The key point is that the colleges have such weak connection to the local businesses and in poor provinces the employment prospects are so dim, that there is little encouragement for students to take a college program.

**Internships**

One opportunity to link College and business communities is the presence of an intern program allowing final year students a chance to apprentice within a local industry. Ideally this type of program offers students a chance to learn the realities of industry (business) and through this obtain “hands-on” learning opportunities. Businesses will often take on interns to respond to government expectations regarding their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). All three of the colleges within this study have internship programs. The length of the programs is short (no more than 1.5 months) in the opinion of many businesses and in most cases report to be not well regulated. Focus groups with students revealed that they had no real idea of the purpose of the internship (nor did some of the teachers). They knew they had to complete an internship to graduate from college so they just wanted to get it over with to make the grade. The

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39 Post–harvest production has now been changed to a focus on Functional Foods.
40 LMNA Report, page 37.
41 This timing is stipulated by MOET.
42 Sometimes the internships involved little or no hands on experience, only a report on what was observed.
implementation of the internships is weak and represents a lost opportunity for the Colleges, the students and the firms involved.\textsuperscript{43}

Colleges do not usually identify the intern positions for the students, but leave it to the students to do so themselves. This hands-off approach can present problems for students from marginalized groups if they don’t have a relative or any other connection with industry. Colleges do indicate that if a student really can’t find a placement they will step in and help, but this is not usually the case. Some students have complained of the costs involved since some have had to rent room closer to the place of work in order to make it to the job on time. Industry complains that the students show a poor work ethic, are not always punctual and can’t really contribute due to their lack of practical experience and absence of soft skills. Businesses see limited value-added from their perspective and the students complain that they are not assigned meaningful work.

\subsection*{4.4 Systemic Issues Relevant to All Colleges}

In general, there is an overall sense that the colleges lack the autonomy to take initiative and make real changes or innovations within the existing framework for universities and colleges. As well, the leaders have little delegated responsibility and they often don’t know any other system of education that is market driven and responsive (being university grads themselves). They operate in a highly academic environment that encourages and rewards rote learning.

Two difficulties related to this situation are the current shared management systems for post-high school education as stipulated in the Law of Vocational Training\textsuperscript{44} and the impending changes to that law.\textsuperscript{45} The Vietnamese TVET system presents a number of challenges, the multiplicity of players with overlapping, unclear and sometimes conflicting mandates being one of the greatest. Management and responsibility for post-secondary TVET education is shared by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). MOLISA is responsible for vocational training while MOET is responsible for professional and technical education. Of the total number of colleges and universities in Vietnam, MOET manages 14.5%, whereas other ministries including MOLISA manage 31%. Provincial People’s Committees (PPCs) and local authorities manage 33% while 21.5% are private.

The new law changes the relationship between MOLISA and MOET and stipulates that there will be a common recognition of educational levels (vocational, college and university) to make way for easier articulation from one level to the other, easier access to employment and easier salary remuneration.

Right now, it is MOET that manages the professional training, yet it is MOLISA who is responsible for the bridge between college and university and onto industry. Without this distinction between the two Ministries, it will be easier to move from high school to college to University. In addition, the Government has changed the rules for articulation making it easier to enter university.\textsuperscript{46} In the old system, students had to work for 36 months before taking the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid, ADB Study, page 15.
\item \textsuperscript{44} The Law of Vocational Training (76) (Luat Day nghe) remains in effect, but there is a new law that will change many of these practices.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid, ADB Study, page 33.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Based on Circular No. 08 /2015/TT-BGDĐT, updated 21/4/2015 (from Circular 55), the new regulations on articulation is that all graduates from colleges and vocational colleges can articulate to university level without 36 months of working experience.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
articulation exam, whereas the new rule allows entry immediately after leaving college. However, students still have to have completed high school before going on to university and college. The law also stipulates a wider recognition of college degrees, for example, a graduate in engineering from college will be considered to be a fully-fledged engineer at the same level as a person who graduated from university in the same field.

The knowledge of the impending changes has already caused difficulties to colleges particularly with enrolment. Up to now, MOET has been responsible for Vocational and College training while MOLISA has handled the universities. The knowledge that Vocational and College education will soon fall under MOLISA has already paved the way for the lowering of entrance requirements to university. In 2015, more students made their way directly to university than ever before. This shift has cut the enrolment figures for BTCC down by almost 50% for this academic year. The loss has definitely impacted the college’s ability to innovate or experiment. Similarly, in Vinh Long, MOLISA went ahead and designated a local college as having university status allowing many more students originally headed for college access to this newly established university.

The current uncertainty makes it difficult to institute new ways of operating the colleges with reduced student numbers, and consequently reduced resources.

4.5 Government Responses to Assist the Ethnic and the Rural Poor

The Vietnamese governments at both the national and the provincial levels have taken steps to assist ethnic and rural poor people to mitigate the difficulties brought about by poverty, isolation, language and attitudes.

Poverty Alleviation: Policy 135 and 134: The National Program 135, is focused on upgrading social services for ethnic minority (EM) households in health, education and cultural preservation. National Program 134 (from 2004) supports landless ethnic minority households to get back their plot of land for housing, agricultural production and access to clean water. In relation to TVET, these programs are addressing the problem of access to schools and schooling through infrastructure support for schools, health services and clean water facilities.

Pedagogy and Health: The construction of schools and health facilities create the demand for trained teachers and health providers to manage the facilities. The government addressed this human resource deficit by offering free tuition and living costs to students to study pedagogy at a community college. Students had to prove that they were permanent residents of the designated poor communes and had been so for the past five years. Unfortunately, by the time many of the students were ready to graduate,

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48 Basing on the Joint Circular 20/2014, Chapter 2, Article 3. Beneficiaries for non-tuition fees:
1. Pupils at public primary school.
2. Pedagogy students in the formal system of the government education at professional institutions and public university, based on the quotas of the government, funded by the government budget.
there was a glut of graduates on the market and few jobs were available. Subsequently, the Government shifted its priority to encouraging students to study early childhood education where graduates are still required.

**Ethnic Boarding Schools:** Boarding schools for ethnic minority students have been constructed in provinces where there is a significant ethnic population and enough students to make it feasible. Places are also available in those schools for 5% Kinh students from the poor designated communes. The government covers tuition and living expenses.

The schools are well constructed, have good classrooms and facilities for extra-curricular activities, plus relatively high standard accommodations. Here students have access to good quality teaching, individual attention and safe food. Some students receive a modicum of guidance counselling. Students at these schools tend to have dreams and expectations. In one school, the young male students talked about travel and sports, the desire to eat different foods and visit other countries. This enthusiasm was a contrast to non-boarding school students who talked only of job security and a stable income.

While the boarding schools used to be available to all ethnic minority students, a rise in student numbers ready to enter high school has led to the institution of an entrance exam so as to make performance an entrance requirement. The result is that there are ethnic students who end up being left out.

**College and university entrance requirements:** While the government does not actually lower the entrance requirements for ethnic and poor students, there is a designated list of groups that are eligible to have marks “added” to their exam results, thus allowing easier access to the college or the university. “Considering the importance of high marks, more concern and attention needs to be given to equalizing the opportunity to achieve high marks. Free tutoring is a necessary start.” There is a possibility that this advantage in entering college turns into a disadvantage when the students encounter the stiffer standards within the colleges and find themselves unable to manage the load.

**Tuition fees and living allowances:** Up until recently, ethnic students were offered free tuition and a living allowance to attend college and university. Now, only those ethnic students who live in designated poor communes (along with their Kinh commune members) and are designated poor or near poor (Decree 66, 2013) can obtain this support.

**Easy access to student loans:** ethnic and poor students are eligible to receive student loans. The Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) makes available a credit support program where parents can access credit for their children for undergraduate studies which is to be paid back

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49 Article 9. Conditions for opening ethnic boarding school include:
1. Have stable number of applicants to ensure sustainable development of the school and compliance with scope of training.
2. Have sufficient management personnel, staff to ensure teaching objectives and plan of the school.
3. Have necessary facilities to implement educational activities, teaching and ensure life for teachers, staff and students.
4. Have land reserve at the centre of the locality to build the school.

after graduation with their earnings from employment. The Study team frequently heard that the challenge is that parents need to invest as much as 200 million VND for the college education while an average salary in these provinces is often only about 3-4 million per month. The loan limit was recently raised from 1.1 million VND per student per month ($48) to 1.25 million ($54). Students do not have to start to pay back the loan pending employment. This leeway is only available for the first 12 months after graduation. Children who graduate may have to travel far from home to find a job to help pay back the loans, in some cases with limited earned income.

Nomination by communes to fill quota for local jobs: Every year the leaders of the communes are sent a quota for jobs that can be filled within the communes. These positions are government paid jobs and highly coveted by commune members. The commune can nominate ethnic students who reach a high standing to go to University in order to prepare for taking over one of these jobs on graduation. 15% of the nominees can come from locally resident Kinh families provided that both the Kinh nominee and the ethnic ones have attended an ethnic boarding school. University tuition is free and students are given a living allowance by this program. However, the time lag between qualifying as part of the annual quota and their actual graduation can mean the job availability at time of their graduation has changed.

5 CANADIAN TVET EXPERIENCES

The Government of Vietnam believes that the Canadian Community College model is highly relevant to Vietnam. An important element in the VSEP project is to learn from selected best practices of the Canadian college system and to relate them to the realities of Vietnam. Vietnamese education leaders have been particularly interested in the innovative practices of Canadian colleges aimed at involving industry. In addition, the experiences of the Community Colleges focused on improving access to the TVET system for marginalized groups and populations, in particular Aboriginal populations, are also of interest and are of specific relevance to the Barriers Study.

The following are some key lessons regarding accessibility to Community Colleges in Canada that appear relevant to the main research findings of this study. The intention in reporting on these experiences is not to be prescriptive and present solutions, but rather to identify some experiences that Vietnamese education leaders can take into account when planning the future of their TVET system. It is however essential to keep in mind that the Canadian education context and societal conditions are markedly different from those in Vietnam.

Context

The Canadian “model” is reputed to be a highly accessible public education system and has one of the highest post-secondary participation rates in the world. The irony is that there isn’t really a “model” of post-secondary education and training in Canada “writ large” given that in each of the provinces the systems have evolved differently. As a recent report by Glen Jones has explained, Canada has:

“No national ‘system’, no national ministry of higher education, no national higher education policy and no national quality assessment or accreditation mechanisms for institutions of higher education. Higher education policy is highly decentralized.” ¹⁵²

Nevertheless, in spite of the differences in governance of education, the barriers to access to TVET in Canada and Vietnam share some common challenges with regards to the experiences of marginalized groups. In a recent report on under-represented groups in Post-Secondary Education (PSE),⁵³ the key barriers were summarized as follows:

**Key Barriers to Access in Canada – In Priority**

- **Family factors**: Parental influences (and lack of education) are considered the most important factor influencing access to post-secondary education re: youthful attitude and preparation towards PSE.
- **Financial factors**: including income level and costs related to tuition and other expenses, as well as other subsidies and financial assistance are important barriers, (but are secondary to parental influences). Tuition is a less important factor – instead, lack of resources for tutoring, technology and the need to work part-time are the factors that hold back marginalized students. Clearly, students from lower income families are less likely to attend PSE, unless positive parental influence is exerted.
- **Geographic Factors**: rural and remote living factors are a barrier given the additional distances and consequent (economic and social) costs of moving away.
- **Academic factors**: also rank high – accounting for the biggest gap in access to PSE and can often be attributed to weaker junior and secondary education resulting in lower high school completion rates.

**Ethnic Groups** – specifically have lower participation rates in PSE due to social, cultural, financial and geographic barriers that include the impacts of poverty, discrimination, lower high school completion and relocation to distant educational facilities.⁵⁴

**Women** – the magnitude of the above noted barriers is greater for females in under-represented groups, especially in under-represented groups where family income levels and other financial factors come into play.⁵⁵

**Current Drivers of Change in Canada**⁵⁶

A key driver in technical and vocational education continues to be government recognition of current and future labour market needs, and the desire to increase participation rates (which has led to a greater emphasis on access). Critical factors include:

- Demographic changes within local communities necessitating different programs and approaches as local communities became more multi-cultural and require targeted programming for special populations;
- A recognition that disadvantaged groups would require more active intervention (those living in poverty, single parents, individuals with disabilities, and Aboriginal Peoples);

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⁵³ Under-Represented Groups in Post-Secondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transitions Survey.


• The implementation of Government (labour market and access) priorities accomplished through educational policy.

**Current Directions**

The change that is taking place now in technical and vocational education in Canada, leads to a greater emphasis being placed on:

- Increased student mobility through ease of credit transfers (from secondary, skilled trades, to college, to university) so that there will be no dead ends – and instead open pathways.
- Blending the mandates of the institutions, as Colleges are increasingly looking to offer degrees or applied degrees.
- Greater competition across all institutions for a shrinking pool of prospective learners due to the changing demographic in Canada. This shift has also led to new programs and approaches to recognize the growing needs of multi-cultural populations in communities.
- Some provinces have developed policy frameworks to increase access and completion rates for PSE for Aboriginal peoples – they generally include social, cultural, financial and geographic factors. These policies include: culturally appropriate information about PSE education, programs, and services to support transition to, and success in PSE.

**Policy Changes to Improve Access**

In dealing with the challenges of access to PSE, it is important to highlight both the policy and program dimensions of the Canadian efforts. The following useful categories of government policy that the federal and provincial levels of government in Canada have utilized are:

- **Government funding tools**: Including the direct support of system expansion, the use of student financial assistance mechanisms to support participation, regulating tuition, targeted funding for special groups, and performance-based funding.
- **Involving community**: Including initiatives by government to support community-based access initiatives, such as supporting organizations working with disadvantaged populations, outreach initiatives, and expanding geographic access.
- **Rethinking system design**: Including K-12 initiatives, revisiting the roles of institutions (and the creation of hybrid institutional types), and modifying governance and coordination structures.
- **Measuring success**: Including the clarification of objectives of access policies, and the role of data systems and policy research in monitoring and evaluating system outcomes.

**Specific Programs, Services, Interventions and/or Approaches to Mitigate Barriers**

There is fairly widespread agreement in Canada that a “one-size fits all” definition of, and response to, under-representation of marginalized groups is not workable. In fact, a report focused on the Ontario PSE system concluded that what is required is a “holistic strategy, with financial, academic, and personal supports to address the multi-faceted, overlapping and interacting barriers that under-represented groups face in accessing and succeeding in post-secondary education.” The nature of this comprehensive approach would likely be region and/or community specific – not national in nature given the decentralized system in Canada.

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57 Ibid, Jones & Field.
**Access Programs**

In Ontario for example, *college preparatory programs* provide students with an opportunity to upgrade their academic skills and abilities. These programs are offered within the college sector (as well as at other levels) and are designed to assist individuals who have not completed secondary school or lack other requirements but aspire to enroll in a postsecondary program. There are also examples in Canada of preparatory law and medicine graduate level courses, specifically designed to assist Aboriginal students to take up to an extra year to ready themselves for higher levels of education (e.g., in Saskatchewan). At the entry level, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Women in Trade training is made available by colleges in order to help students upgrade their basic language, math and other skills.

The graphic below illustrates the interconnectedness of the issues and helps to put into context the *array of programs, services, and interventions that are part of the process of removing barriers*. It recognizes that programs/interventions to increase access and reduce barriers that span the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels.

![Diagram illustrating interconnectedness of programs, services, and interventions](image)

Canadian experience indicates that the objectives of access policies cannot stop at the entrance to post-secondary. Rather, the accountability of institutions is in retaining and supporting these students, many of whom represent high-risk for failure to complete the program. For a variety of reasons, these high-risk groups need to be considered and supported throughout their academic careers if “access” is to make any kind of meaningful difference. These types of students not only face greater barriers to access, they are also potentially more likely, for academic, financial or cultural reasons, to abandon their studies before graduation. In the case of marginalized groups, the definition of access has increasingly been extended beyond the education system with the definition of “success” to include access to and retention of stable employment.

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Targeted Programs, Services, Interventions

The following initiatives are a sample of Canadian multi-level College efforts:

1. **Recruitment**: Colleges Ontario Ad Campaign to Change Parental Attitudes Towards Technical and Vocational Education: This campaign was focused on changing the attitudes of parents, who believe that university, not college or skilled trades programs, are the key to success.

2. **Retention**: Pathways to Education: A charitable foundation established in 2001. Focus is on low-income youth in a specific area of Toronto, Regent Park, which is characterized by a high rate of poverty and unemployment, and is home to an immigrant and marginalized population. “Pathways to Education” helps youth in low-income communities graduate from high school and successfully transition into post-secondary education. Pathways does this by addressing systemic barriers to education by providing leadership, expertise and a community-based program already proven to lower dropout rates. The Pathways program provides a comprehensive set of academic, financial, and social supports to youth. The results of this unique program have been ground breaking, reducing high school dropout rates by as much as 70%, and increasing the rate at which youth go on to college or university by up to 300%. It includes: academic tutoring, social supports, advocacy and financial assistance.

3. **Adult Education**: Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, Second Career Strategy: The focus is on individuals who have been laid off, are employed less than 20 hours per week, or interested in training for a new career. Although the focus is not on youth, it did attract women and the financial support enabled them to consider PSE as an option.

4. **Orientation**: Pre-Semester Start Welcome Days: Typically held during summer time (for fall/winter intakes). Focussed on: students who are the first in their family to attend PSE; mature students who may be returning to PSE after many years; students with disabilities, who need to take care of logistics well in advance.

5. **Preparatory**: Summer Residential Programs Targeting High School Students: Students in elementary and/or secondary school are invited to attend a specially designed program at a campus to expose them to life on campus, to living in residence, to lectures, to field work. These programs are designed to pique the interest of students at a young age.

6. **Mentoring**: (Pre-Semester and Throughout the academic year): Student advisors are generally assigned to any first semester learner. Other mentoring programs may be demographic specific – e.g. Aboriginal students, students who have registered with the Centre for Students with Disabilities, students who are the first in their family to attend PSE (first generation). It involves: e-mentoring, student advising and peer mentoring.

7. **Financial Support**: First Generation Bursary (Ontario): Aboriginal Student Bursary – Financial assistance targeted to specific demographics of students – and a Mature Student Bursary.

8. **Mature Student Orientation**: includes Mature Student Lounge Space typically focussed on students who are: more mature and have been away from PSE for many years, often women, often financially disadvantaged and have left employment (or are under-employed) to attend PSE. Also it includes separate meeting spaces and events where students of similar circumstances can gather and connect with each other for support. These types of support are more and more available to the growing Aboriginal student populations in many Colleges and Universities and are tailored to their needs. They frequently have a strong cultural dimension with designated staff who themselves are members of the same group.
Early Intervention Initiatives

A Canadian research report looking at promising early intervention initiatives designed to increase PSE access among under-represented youth found a number of common program components. It found that a number of program components were common across the initiatives, which may occur alone or in combination. The six most common program components were described as follows:

- **Counseling** – College and/or financial advising, career advising, assistance with form and college application, personal support;
- **Academic Enrichment** – Tutoring, summer programs, college-based or college level courses/programs, high school or after-school academic preparation programs, assessment, test preparation;
- **Parental Involvement** – Orientation program for parents, parents as volunteers, programs for parents, parents as program designers, developers, staff;
- **Personal Enrichment and Social Integration** – Leadership, arts and cultural activities, field trips, speakers, peer component;
- **Mentoring** – Peer-based, university and/or high school staff and/or faculty, volunteers, corporate/professional;
- **Scholarships** – University, private/corporate, government (federal/state).

Outreach and Distance Education

An additional interesting aspect of the Canadian Community College experience is its history of reaching out to marginalized communities located at great distances from the institutions, or isolated due to their accessibility only by boat or plane. The geography of Canada is such that many communities are distant from the main campuses of the PSE system.

Initially institutions preferred to try to convince prospective students to relocate, but in the case of many marginalized or distant communities or groups (such as with many Aboriginal communities), this strategy was largely unsuccessful. Subsequent attempts were made to bring short, certificate level courses to the communities for several weeks or more at a time. These initiatives had more promising results, but were limited in terms of their ability to provide higher certification or degrees.

Currently, many Community Colleges in Canada have established satellite campuses that deliver short certificate and longer degree granting courses. Some campuses are located in rented local premises and others have their own buildings. What these initiatives have in common is the tailoring of their course offerings to meet local labour market requirements. Examples of such outreach include the College of the North Atlantic in Newfoundland on the east coast with 17 campus locations, 100 full time programs, more than 300 part-time programs and approximately 25,000 students. A west coast example would be North Island College in British Columbia, with five locations and over 900 courses with 70 credit and co-op programs, including university transfer. Of the 2014/2015 student body of 4,452, almost one quarter (1,124) were self-identified Aboriginal students.

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66 Web site, North Island College, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, 2015. [https://www.nic.bc.ca/](https://www.nic.bc.ca/)
Continuing Challenges in PSE and Training

The Canadian Community College system(s) continues to evolve, to change the way it is perceived, and to improve access for the general population, and for marginalized as well as isolated groups and communities.

There continue to be challenges to improving the effectiveness of the education offered by the Colleges (generally, and with regards to improving accessibility) and the following areas are receiving attention:

- **Tracking** – there is an absence of Pan-Canadian quality assessment mechanisms, policies, standards, and comprehensive, integrated national data systems.
- **Mobility** – it is still a challenge in spite of the progress made toward student mobility and transferability of credits from colleges to universities to ensure that there are pathways to education. Increased flexibility would allow students to pursue a technical or vocational program locally that would then transition into a university program, which may or may not exist locally.
- **Evaluation is a challenge** – there is a need for additional evidence-based documentation to demonstrate effectiveness of programs, services and interventions that have demonstrated a positive impact on removing/reducing barriers to under-represented groups.

Additional Documentation

The development and expansion of the Canadian Community College system spans a number of recent decades and is difficult to summarize. The points noted above were selected for their relevance to the challenges and opportunities faced by policy and program leaders both in Canada and in Vietnam when focusing on improving access for marginalized or isolated populations – the subject of the Barriers Study. Additional documentation can be found in the Barriers Study Working Papers.

6 CONCLUSIONS

**The Challenges**

In the course of the field research on the Barriers Study, it became evident that the TVET system in Vietnam clearly has multiple barriers in the area of access for marginalized populations. It shares this reality with many other countries. However, it also became clear that barriers are in fact challenges or difficulties that require targeted efforts to overcome. In that respect, these challenges can be looked at from a positive perspective because they also delineate areas of opportunity to innovate and take initiative – to show leadership.

The current Barriers Study has identified many challenges. In the process of doing so, it is anticipated that this study will contribute to facilitating a wider discussion on the access issues between the Vietnamese and Canadian partners in VSEP.

The findings have reconfirmed the importance of the understanding that the objectives of access policies (for marginalized populations) cannot stop at the entrance to post-secondary institutions. These high-risk groups need to be “considered and supported throughout their academic careers if ‘access’ is to make any kind of difference.” In fact, it can be argued that in

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67 Ibid, Jones & Field, page 21. These types of students not only face greater barriers to access but potentially are also more likely, for academic, financial or cultural reasons, to abandon their studies before graduation.
order to do this, “access” must include the objective of facilitating the transition from education into meaningful employment in a student’s area of study.

Improving access for marginalized groups into the TVET system is a complex, multi-dimensional and multi-level challenge due to the fact that VSEP takes place in a complex and rapidly evolving development environment with multiple national, provincial and local stakeholders. It is also framed by conditions of poverty that particularly affect the rural poor, remote communities and the ethnic groups. As a consequence, a range of responses to the barrier challenges will be needed at every level.

So a key challenge is where to begin to place more emphasis upon changing the present situation and speeding up the process. A start has already been made on reducing some of the barriers in the new vocational education law, but there is a need for even more adaptation, innovation and resourcing in the future.

**An Enabling Environment**

Economic issues are high on the list of the barriers which students (and their parents) from disadvantaged groups face when considering investing in higher education. In spite of the efforts made by the various governments, poverty still constitutes the greatest barrier to educational accessibility. The groups encountering the greatest challenges accessing TVET are clearly those suffering from poverty, particularly rural and remote populations, as well as ethnic groups. Within those categories, youth and women find themselves doubly disadvantaged. And that poverty extends beyond economic factors and includes poverty of opportunity due to weak schooling, limited parental education and absence of self-confidence in the students themselves who feel that they suffer from an inability to learn.

In recognition, the Government of Vietnam Poverty Alleviation Strategy has made some inroads towards addressing this larger issue. The Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) was established by the government to widen possibilities of lending to the poor and disadvantaged and offers low interest loans to parents to help cover their children’s education costs.

Finally, as noted in Section 5 above, the new vocational education law that was approved in 2015 has already set the stage for reconciling the complications caused by having two entities; MOET and MOLISA both hold responsibility for managing parts of the post-secondary education sector. When the law does obtain ratification, the conflict between the competing departments may well be resolved. If this is the case and the law is approved, the environment is expected to become far more conducive to tackling the more systemic challenges concerning access for marginalized groups. Meanwhile, there are a variety of inroads being made to address some of the barrier issues. These could be seen as platforms for further action and represent areas of opportunity where colleges could move forward and address some of the issues.

**Areas of Opportunity**

There are opportunities that are within the ability of the Colleges to improve in the following areas:

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a. Recruitment
A much more detailed and comprehensive recruitment and communication program to reach high schools, communes and families should be developed. It could outline what a college can and does do; it could disseminate student success stories by bringing into the classrooms students who have graduated from the college, and now have a job; it could organize commune meetings, as well as offer tours of the college and preparatory seminars & visits for students and parents.69

Recruitment opportunities to build on:
- **In Vinh Long,** the College has initiated an alumni tracking process with the goal of involving former students in the recruitment of students, as well as outreach to possible employers, using alumni to communicate with communities which share similar backgrounds, but no organized statistics are yet available.70
- **Some universities** *(e.g. Can Tho)* are actively reaching out to high school students by giving presentations in communities and in classrooms to communicate with both students and their parents, as well as providing curriculum and course information and advice
- **Job fairs** have been held at BTCC, but need to be timed better to attract more students.71

b. Outreach
A much more proactive outreach initiative is warranted if the colleges want to effectively reach rural, remote and ethnic communities, and it needs to go well beyond delivering short-term courses in, and information to, those places. It means going farther by moving satellite campuses to where the services are needed most in order to make TVET more accessible to targeted marginalized populations.

Outreach opportunities to build on:
- **Continuing education centres** are already delivering short college agricultural courses to farmers in their rural and remote communities
- There is also policy *(chu truong)* already in place to bring vocational education to students at their place of residence in Vinh Long province.72 Some educational institutions are using distance and mobile learning approaches to extend their reach.

c. Student Support Services
Much stronger student counselling services are needed that include career help, psychological support and academic assistance. Staff should be trained to be proactive, rather than reactive in serving the needs of students.

Student Support initiatives to build on:
- **Hau Giang College** offers a reproductive health support program for female students and offers a drop box for anonymous questions concerning health;
- **Bin Thuan Community College (BTCC)** offers some career counselling to help students who have taken the wrong major and want to change it. The college has also recently established a Student Counselling Center providing psychological counselling for students.

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69 HG individual interview.
70 VL individual interview.
71 BT individual interview.
72 VL ID03.
d. Quality of Student Life and Facilities

Educational conditions for students in college should be improved by opening the libraries and computer labs in the evenings and on weekends, as well as by providing study rooms where students can work during and after classes.

Student health and capacity to study is affected by the absence of adequate college-provided food services and cooking facilities located within the campuses. The absence of inexpensive and adequate nutritional food and conveniently located cooking and eating arrangements acts as a considerable disincentive to attracting and retaining students in college.

Accommodation for students needs to be upgraded by increasing the allocation of space to deal with overcrowding, and by providing improvements in the conditions and availability of the on-site college housing at reasonable cost. Maintenance and repair of the facilities on a timely basis is also needed.

The IT equipment is often old and not working and the access to computer facilities is limited and constitutes a significant handicap, especially for disadvantaged students who have limited financial means.

Recreational facilities are very limited or non-existent at the colleges, as they often lack sports fields and equipment, as well as ongoing (not just occasional) organized athletic programs supported by dedicated staff. Providing inviting athletic programs could help make the college experience more inviting to prospective students, and could increase the appeal of a college education and improve retention rates.

Facilities initiatives to build on:
- At Vinh Long CC, there is an impressive new library building that is unequipped and not open at present, but represents the type of facility students need at each college.
- The Boarding Schools for ethnic students are a positive example of the kind of accommodations and cafeteria facilities that could be a model for the colleges.\(^73\)
- The ethnic Boarding schools also provide a model of staff support to students that the colleges could emulate.\(^74\)
- Both Vinh Long CC and Bin Thuan CC had some courts available for sports, and in some cases, staff have made staff available to referee and supervise the games. More could be made of this type of interaction to improve the college atmosphere and make it conducive to staying the course.

e. Financial Support

In spite of the efforts by the governments to reduce the financial burdens on disadvantaged groups, there is still a considerable difference in terms of accessibility due to their situation of poverty. This condition limited the capacity of poor families who are in survival mode, to bear the additional costs of loans made for education purposes. Thus, while progress is being made the direct and indirect financial demands of providing an education still constitute a significant barrier for many poor rural and remote families, youth, women and ethnic groups.

\(^{73}\) HG, focus group.
\(^{74}\) HG, focus group.
Financial Support Initiatives to build on:
- The Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) makes available a credit support program for undergraduate studies, but it does not cover the full cost and needs to be enhanced to fully cover direct and indirect college costs for students from disadvantaged communities.

f. Education and Teaching
Teaching skills need to be updated (initially within the 70-30% curriculum ratio allowed by MOET), to include more time for individual attention, tutoring, interactive group work and soft skills such as communications and leadership. Current staff may not be equipped at present to deliver these materials both in terms of content and style.

More emphasis should be placed on practical teaching to create a better balance between theory and practice in the curriculum, so as to better equip students for the workplace. Educational options should be made more flexible, with a goal of turning articulation into a pathway to further learning, not just to university.

Education initiatives to build on:
- The new Vocational Education Law\(^\text{75}\) is intended to improve the quality and the style of teaching, with its emphasis upon greater autonomy for the teacher to innovate, to team teach, to promote group work and study, as well as to provide easier articulation, easier access to employment and a change to salaries.\(^\text{76}\)
- Colleges need to take greater advantage of the limited flexibility (30/70% of curriculum) that is already available within the current national curriculum guidelines. Some of the colleges are taking the initiative to explore ways of encouraging their staff to change their teaching styles and methods, as well as to upgrade their skills in anticipation to the new needs.
- At Vinh Long CC, new and old students have formed working groups to study together, as well as to collectively arrange for access to the library after regular hours.

g. College-industry Linkages
Much stronger, ongoing college-industry relationships need to be developed\(^\text{77}\) which go well beyond the ad hoc personal contacts that now characterize many of the linkages. Dedicated college-industry liaison staff with appropriate marketing and private sector skills\(^\text{78}\) are needed to develop much stronger ties that benefit both parties. Stronger relationships with local industry could lead to input into course preparation and teaching; tours of factories, loan of facilities\(^\text{79}\) and the establishment of apprenticeships, as well as “employment ready” students.\(^\text{80}\)

The current usefulness of internships is very limited\(^\text{81}\) and is a lost opportunity. Internships could be a vehicle for developing ongoing relationships with local industries to create useful, supervised assignments.\(^\text{82}\) Colleges need to assist students to find internships; as well as to increase the flexibility of internships to facilitate longer assignments and alternatives in terms of timing of the placements to maximize the benefits to both the students and the companies.

\(^{75}\) Law on Vocational Education, July 2015 (Luat Giao duc nghe nghiep).
\(^{76}\) Vinh Long, Individual Interview.
\(^{78}\) Ibid, Labour Market Study, page 35.
\(^{79}\) Ibid, LMNA Study, page 37.
\(^{80}\) Ibid, LMNA Study, page 34.
\(^{82}\) Ibid, LMNA Study, page 38.
Linkage Initiatives to build on:

- **Vinh Long CC** has met, as needed, with the enterprise owners/employers – especially those from rice polishing and processing enterprises. The result was the approval of a request to change the curriculum to better meet the skill needs of the enterprises, and the students found jobs more easily and did not need retraining. 83
- **In Hau Giang**, the companies are reported to be hiring through networks and relationships with teachers, but with no official links with the schools. 84
- The **Binh Thuan Tourism Association** has recently proposed a joint industry-led training course to the college, which meets industry needs and which the industry plans to deliver on its premises, using its up-to-date equipment. 85
- **VLCC** does offer some practical training in school (in workshops at the end of each training module) and has a six-to-eight-week internship option – college instructors visit the students at the industry (approximately 60% are hired after their internship). 86

h. **Employment**

The colleges need a job search and support program in order to adequately overcome the employment challenges which confront students, especially those from marginalized groups or communities. Students would be more inclined to enter colleges (rather than universities) if they believed that the colleges would make special efforts to help them find meaningful employment.

**On-going industry**: college linkages could be utilized to identify upcoming industry job opportunities and their exact skill requirements to which the curriculum could be adapted. It is also conceivable that such linkages could serve to identify the potential for joint industry-college training courses, including industry-led initiatives.

Many of the community college students will return to their communities to find employment and will find themselves establishing small businesses to earn a living. The colleges do not currently provide small business training to meet the likely needs of their students. 87

**Employment initiatives** to build on:

- An impressive example of a comprehensive education, training and support program in Vietnam (admittedly outside the colleges) reaching marginalized young men and women, and more recently ethnic recruits, is **KOTO**. 88 Its education model is integrated and adapted to the reality of its students. As such, it combines life skills training, language and vocational training, personal development activities, accommodation and food, health services, training materials and hands-on experience. Its graduates obtain jobs.

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83 Vinh Long, Individual Interview.
84 Ibid, LMNA Study, page 56.
85 Subsequent to the meeting with the Association, it was learnt that the College had decided to compete with the Association, rather than co-operate by developing its own in-house course. It appears that both groups may proceed independently.
86 Industry is generally satisfied with their performance, but sometimes finds their attitude and punctuality not satisfactory. Students are evaluated by an industry report (observation sheet made by enterprise supervisor) and must prepare their own paper reporting on their assignment to submit to their teacher for grading and approval.
87 BT individual interview and HG individual interview.
88 KOTO was started by a Vietnamese Australian who started a hospitality school for street children and now includes ethnic and poor students. The model focuses on teaching moral and ethical issues, life skills as well as gives students top training to work in the tourist industry.
i. Educational Pathways and Access Programs

The new Vocational Education Law\(^{89}\) is expected to clarify the role and responsibilities of the key education departments with a common recognition of education levels and other improvements, but is currently awaiting its implementation decree and guidelines.\(^{90}\) This change in itself has the potential to lessen the confusion felt by students as they choose which educational institutions to attend and increases the flexibility of the system to respond to students needs.

The fact that the government is also focusing on streamlining articulation to make it easier for students to move from secondary school to Vocational Training, back to high school to enter College and on to university can also be seen as a positive move towards making the entire education experience more open to everyone. If nothing is seen as a ‘dead end’, it is more encouraging for a student to study at his/her current level with the understanding that other opportunities remain open.

In addition, colleges could also include “Access Programs” such as special measures that improve the success of marginalized persons. These initiatives could include modified programs such as an extra semester or up to a year added to an existing course so students could strengthen their basic skills and readiness for pre-tech or college programs that give students a chance to meet entrance standards.\(^{91}\) This help is especially vital for marginalized people to enable them to succeed as they advance through the education system.

**Educational Initiatives to build on**:

- VLCC offers long-term training (college degree and professional intermediate degree) plus agricultural short-term courses to farmers between 18–60 and articulates College training to university through-connection with some Can Tho University.

j. Implementation of Change

In tackling the barriers to access experienced by disadvantaged populations, it will not be enough to hand the issues back to the same personnel who have been unable to bring about the needed changes. What will be required will the development of an Action Plan that is driven by one or more change management teams. The role of these teams would be to support and facilitate innovation and those leaders within the education sector who are trying to improve access. The teams could be made up of a mix of stakeholders who have shown leadership and initiative, possibly even on loan (part-time or full-time) from both public and private sector organizations interested in TVET.

**Summary**

In order to change the perceptions of students and their parents as to the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of colleges as an alternative to universities, the colleges must make their courses, their services and their premises more appealing. In short, the colleges must be made ready to compete more effectively for business (for students) – right now their products are seen to be of marginal practical utility, lack educational appeal and appear to be a poor investment for students and their parents. Students from poor, rural, ethnic and marginalized communities who

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\(^{89}\) Law on Vocational Education, July 2015 (Luat Giao duc nghe nghiep).

\(^{90}\) VL individual interview.

\(^{91}\) Canadian examples include Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Women in Trades courses, as well as pre-law and pre-med preparatory years for marginalized groups.
face additional educational, cultural and economic disincentives are hardly likely to find colleges inviting, accessible or leading to their ultimate goal: meaningful employment.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed recommendations are driven by a number of key themes that have emerged from the fieldwork and research. They focus on provoking institutional attitude change, as well as actions that are doable by the colleges themselves. They are premised on the belief that the colleges must become more responsive to demand and more competitive in the new environment.

It is recommended that the Colleges:
- build on success and promising initiatives – develop incentives & become competitive;
- create a comprehensive clear educational path – simplify the process;
- stress innovation and leadership – take proactive action.

Opportunities

While the Study identified many challenges, it also came across a number of interesting, relevant initiatives in Vietnam, and elsewhere, which can be considered promising opportunities upon which change can be built. The advantage of building on such efforts is clear: they have shown promise; they are underway in some of the areas within which VSEP is working; they have engaged or served marginalized groups; and they are at work within the current TVET system.

1. Establish a Proactive Recruitment Capacity

A College recruitment capacity with designated staff needs to be established with a year-round mandate to actively reach out to junior and high-school students and their parents within the communities and communes. It should include counselling for prospective applicants to help them chose a relevant educational path, and should support them throughout the applications process. It must go well beyond setting up occasional meetings, circulating bulletins, hanging posters and providing web sites. Its staff need to be marketing people with communications and outreach experience. It also needs to become culturally appropriate.

2. Create Satellite College Campuses

It is recommended that the Colleges (where possible) consider establishing satellite campuses nearer those marginalized communities where improved TVET access is a priority. Curricula should be delivered by resident local staff (as long as they meet MOET requirements) and are adapted to meet the employment needs and interests of the communities.

3. Strengthen Student Support Services

It is essential that student counseling and academic support services be strengthened to become proactive – reaching out actively to help students seen to be in difficulty. Waiting for students to come for help is insufficient and uninviting, especially for students from marginalized groups who often face financial and other difficulties.

Academic support needs to extend beyond making entry requirements lower to helping students from disadvantaged groups to obtain free tutoring as a necessary support, to enable them to manage the academic challenges that they currently face.
4. **Improve the Quality of Student Life & the College Facilities**

In order to become competitive and to attract students to the colleges, the colleges need to improve the following:

- College libraries and study rooms need to be opened during class hours, in the evenings, and also on the weekends, to help students study effectively.
- College cafeterias and cooking facilities need to be conveniently located, and food provided at reasonable cost for nutritional meals, to meet the needs of the student population, especially for those marginalized students.
- Dormitories at the colleges need to allocate each student additional living and studying space to make the facilities more interesting than off-site boarding houses, and care needs to be taken to keep the dormitories well maintained and in good repair.
- Recreational programs and sports fields/facilities are needed to enhance the health and wellbeing of the student populations.

5. **Enhance Financial Support**

In order to improve access to colleges for disadvantaged populations, ways must be found to reduce the direct and indirect costs of attending college (e.g. travel, accommodations, food, books) so that performance rather than financial capacity become the primary consideration. The Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) loans to students from disadvantaged communities need to be enhanced to fully cover direct and indirect college costs for disadvantaged populations with access challenges.

6. **Update Education and Teaching Skills**

The quality and relevance of the teaching is ultimately most important to students (and their parents) in order to equip them for the workplace. Implementing change in the current methods and practices must become an urgent educational priority. Teachers should move beyond lecturing students towards coaching and mentoring them to learn. The curriculum should also include soft skills such as interactive learning, life skills, group learning and leadership.

7. **Invest in College–Industry Linkages**

The Colleges niche market should be meeting the demand by industry for trained employees, and they must take this sector more seriously. They should appoint liaison staff with industry, rather than teaching expertise to carry out regular communications, consultations and meetings. The college-business relationships need to be extended to include input into curriculum development, delivery of courses, as well as internship planning, supervision and evaluation. In addition, industry leaders can provide valuable advice on college governance, labour market demand, and job placement.

8. **Establish Employment Support Programs**

Internships need to be given much greater importance as part of the College’s responsibility to help students get ready for, and obtain employment. Staff with business experience should be appointed to build and maintain the industry-college relationship.

A job search and employment support program should be created to assist students to: plan their courses; help identify job opportunities; equip them for interviews; and fill in job applications. Priority assistance from such programs needs to be offered to students from marginalized populations who face greater difficulties in finding employment.
9. **Simplify Educational Pathways and Strengthen Access**

The colleges should reshape the roles of their student services units from a focus on serving primarily college needs (i.e. planning exams, student discipline and performance, etc.) towards responding to student needs. Assistance in the applications process, course selection, transfer and articulation advice, career planning and job search activities are a few examples of how to simplify the system.

Strengthening access supports for students from marginalized groups means making extra course time and specialized training available for students to better ready and equip themselves for success entering and staying in college. Preparatory courses are especially needed.

10. **Develop an ACTION PLAN**

It is recommended that the colleges, along with other key stakeholders in the TVET system establish an ACTION PLAN within and amongst the colleges, to plan for the implementation of a change process which has as its goal improving access for disadvantaged rural, remote and ethnic populations – including their youth and women as a priority.

An ACTION PLAN and ACTION TEAM(S) can facilitate the implementation of a process which takes the acceptable sections of this Barriers Study beyond a simple notation in this report. Lacking the establishment of an accessibility initiative will mean that most likely this report will have little real effect in improving the access situation within the TVET system. An ACTION PLAN with committed leadership could create an opportunity for real progress on this issue in Vietnam.

**Summary**

Many of the challenges and difficulties related to improving access for the rural and remote communities, poor women, youth and ethnic groups, involve issues well beyond the mandate of the Barriers Study. They include poverty, educational policies, educational resource constraints to name a few of the issues. Thus, the Study recommendations have focused on what changes would be feasible for the Colleges to undertake within their areas of responsibility, based on their interest in taking the initiative and demonstrating their capacity to innovate.
APPENDICES:

(Appendices are provided in a separate document)

Appendix A: Mission Schedule of Meetings & Timetable
Appendix B: List of Documents Reviewed
Appendix C: Relevant Charts & Tables
Appendix D: Working Papers – unedited in English or Vietnamese
  Working Paper # 1 – Canadian Experience by Karen Sjolin
  (English & Vietnamese versions)