



## WORKING TOGETHER WITH YOUTH TO BUILD A CULTURE OF INTEGRITY: THE VIETNAM INTEGRITY SCHOOL 2017

Transparency International's national contact in Vietnam, Towards Transparency (TT)'s mission is to reduce corruption in Vietnam by increasing demand and promoting measures for transparency, accountability and integrity in government, business and civil society at large. For that change to take place it is essential to engage citizens, especially young people who make up more than half of the Vietnamese population. For the past 8 years, the Transparency International Vietnam Programme and TT have developed and implemented youth initiatives and projects in Vietnam.

### Engaging youth in anti-corruption remains a challenge in Vietnam

Our experience in working with young people in Vietnam has shown that there is a gap in knowledge on corruption and integrity amongst youth. The majority of Vietnamese youth interviewed in the TI/TT 2014 Youth Integrity Survey (85%) considered the lack of integrity harmful to their country, family and themselves, and 87% said that they have a role to play in fighting corruption. However, 74% of Vietnamese youth said they have no or very little knowledge about corruption, anti-corruption and integrity. Only 18% of the youth received anti-corruption education through the official government program (Project 137) that started in 2009. The effectiveness and outreach of the official anti-corruption education was limited.

### Filling the gap with an innovative Vietnam Integrity School

Our answer to this challenge was to create a space where Vietnamese young people could learn about and discuss integrity, transparency and anti-corruption. Drawing on the model of previous TI Integrity Schools, TT developed the

Vietnam Integrity School (VIS). The goal of VIS was to create a space for young people to learn about, practice and promote integrity by developing and working on their own ideas and projects.

Participating students were chosen through a competitive process with selection criteria including geographical representation, gender, motivation and, very importantly, their outreach potential of at least 20 people/friends they committed to reach out to share "integrity" and knowledge learned from VIS.

A total of 43 students were selected to participate in a three and a half days school training in Hanoi in mid-August 2017. Ten different lectures and the corresponding materials were delivered by TT experts and other Hanoi-based anti-corruption and governance experts from national and international institutions (e.g. United Nations Development Programme and the Hanoi Law School) as well as from the private sector. Lectures focused on three key themes: a) integrity, corruption and anti-corruption; b) corruption and integrity challenges in the public and private sectors; and c) all against corruption - the role of media and youth in promoting integrity.

### Results exceeded expectations

Consistent with our Youth Integrity Survey results, students agreed that corruption was a big problem facing Vietnam. However, many students believed corruption only existed in public sector. After learning about and discussing corruption and bribery cases in business, students began to understand the seriousness of corruption in the private sector. Students showed especially high levels of interest and engagement during lectures and role play on corruption and integrity in the education sector and in public service delivery. There was also particular interest in the role of media in disclosing corruption and promoting integrity.

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*"The VIS training course has gone beyond my own expectations. After VIS, I have the important knowledge on why integrity is important and what key corruption challenges face Vietnam.*

VIS student evaluation form

### **"Promoting integrity starts with me!"**

VIS participants were also exposed to other youth initiatives in an "Integrity Café" session that featured select experiences from three community initiatives supported and led by young people in Vietnam. The session and discussions increased the awareness of participants that youth can do something to promote integrity, and that "it has to start with me". They learned that integrity is not something abstract and removed from their daily lives, but rather something that can help them be better students, young professionals and citizens.

*"I enjoyed very much the discussion on integrity in education. I liked it because it resonated so much with me. It also helped me to realize that in many instances I did wrong things; I acted without integrity in my studies. This lecture motivated me to change myself on how I will deal with my studies, and it also motivates me to push for a more integrity in a broader education sector"*

Lan Nguyen, participant of VIS 2017

### **From awareness to behavior changes to action**

Within a few weeks after the completion of VIS, a number of spin-off initiatives took place. In the southern province of Đồng Nai, Trinh Lê Anh had three "Integrity" café talks with a total of 50 young people. In Hanoi, another VIS participant, Hâu, held a mini talk on "Why to do business with integrity" with 10 young professionals working in business, media, communications and legal firms. The talk made use of documents from VIS teaching materials on business integrity. Participants were eager to continue to learn and engage, with many students requesting additional hand-outs and written materials on TI/TT anti-corruption activities, noting that these would also be shared with their friends.

*"I was very happy that all participants asked for documents as well as showed their interest in getting to understand and to know more about TT/TI right after the talk. Thank you both Ms. Viễn and Ms. Huyền for lighting up in me the value of integrity so that I can practice it in my daily life"*

Email from Hâu to TT's Executive Director, 29.08.2017

Furthermore, four group-based projects were developed during VIS and students are now exploring ways to bring these projects to life:

- Organization of mini-VIS in localities;
- Traffic Integrity (e.g. reducing corruption in traffic police starts with me);
- Promoting integrity amongst students in primary schools; and
- For a Cleaner Community Health Service.

### **VIS national and international outreach**

The first public announcement of VIS posted on TT's Facebook page received an impressive 12,062 views - the highest number recorded on TT's Facebook page to date. Amongst the social media tools used for the VIS promotion, TT's Facebook page and website proved to be the most successful channel to increase visibility of VIS 2017 and promote awareness of integrity issues.

VIS 2017 also received international interest and recognition. TT was invited in November 2017 to share its experiences in promoting youth integrity using the innovative VIS initiative at the Asian Development Bank/OECD Regional conference: "Nurturing an Anti-corruption Culture in the Asia-Pacific Region". The story of VIS contributed to the success of the panel discussion on "Mainstreaming a Culture of Integrity for Youth: How can we influence the attitude and behavior of the Next Generation?" This regional recognition of VIS came as a reward for the efforts.

### **What's next?**

*"I found the VIS content and training modules very interesting and useful. However, integrity is still a new concept in Vietnam. After attending VIS, I started talking about integrity with colleagues at my company, where I noticed that they did not know about [the topic of] integrity; they said they never heard about it!"*

The first VIS 2017 successes and impacts constitute a valuable experience for TI and TT, but these positive results should not be overestimated. It is still very challenging to engage youth in a concerted way on anti-corruption in Vietnam. Only recently have civil society organisations been recognised by the government as an important player in fighting corruption.

Raising youth awareness on the importance of integrity in preventing corruption is a remarkable achievement. Actions developed by Vietnamese young people following VIS need to be nurtured. VIS needs to continue to grow and become not only a light house but also an institution instrumental to raising awareness and mobilizing youth to take action to promote greater integrity and a culture of anti-corruption in Vietnam. TI and TT thanks Irish Aid for their generous support of the VIS 2017 and looks forward to the continued collaboration in this endeavor.