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Social Sustainability Dimension of Vietnam's Green Transformation Policies

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Abstract: With the introduction of the National Strategy for Climate Change until 2050 and the National Action Plan on Green Growth for Period 2021-2030 in July 2022, Vietnam has demonstrated its commitment to undertake a holistic green transformation to achieve sustainable development, economic prosperity, and net zero emissions. However, it can be observed from the recent flurry of 'green' media and commercial activities that economic and environmental goals have received far more attention compared to social ones. If true, this can significantly complicate the success of the green transformation, since social sustainability helps to ensure a just transition, secure broad popular acceptance, and improve resilience. This paper attempts to verify this observation by assessing the embeddedness of social sustainability principles in Vietnam's major green transformation policies. Employing a widely referenced analytical framework, four principles are used to assess social sustainability integration: equity, awareness, participation, and social cohesion. The outcome shows strong fluctuations with some principles being particularly strong and others underrepresented. This reflects the fast-changing policy landscape, the complexity of harmonising new strategies with sectoral policies, and a general lack of attention to the social dimension. Future research should explore written social sustainability commitments and various forms of policy integration.

Keywords: Green transformation, social sustainability, policy integration, green growth, climate change.

Subject classification: Politics

1. Introduction

Since the *Đổi mới* (renovation) reforms in the late 1980s, Vietnam has registered one of the highest growth rates in the world and lifted tens of millions of people out of poverty. However, rapid development has also led to environmental degradation, a steep increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emission, and a low-skilled, ageing workforce that threaten to lock

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the country into the middle-income trap (Yale University, 2020; World Bank, 2021). Recognising these challenges, in the mid-2010s, Vietnam's government approved a series of policies to ensure sustained growth, protect the environment, and fulfil climate change mitigation obligations. In October 2021, the National Green Growth Strategy (GGS) for Period 2021-2030 and Vision towards 2050 was approved, followed by its Action Plan in July 2022, stipulating a low-carbon development pathway. At the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in November 2021, Vietnam pledged to become carbon neutral by 2050. To achieve this ambitious goal, the National Climate Change Strategy (CCS) until 2050 was released in July 2022, while the Action Plan for achieving the COP26 pledge is being drawn up.

Studying documents of Vietnamese government and in academic literature, this paper refers to this collection of policies and the process being promoted as *green transformation policies*. The GSS (along with its Action Plan) and the CCS cover two distinct closely connected areas that have been identified as major components of Vietnam's green transformation. These are: green growth and climate change, both striving to achieve sustainable development, and leverage climate change response to transition to a more efficient economic model, and improve social resilience (Urban et al., 2018).

In the months since making the net zero pledge at COP26, Vietnam witnessed rapid policy development, intense media coverage, attention from international stakeholders, as well as a large number of conferences, training programmes, and grassroots activities held in relation to the green transformation. While this suggests a strong degree of political determination and broad acceptance from various segments of society, the *social sustainability dimension* (or pillar –used interchangeably in this paper) of the green transformation process is often missing in official and popular discourse. While this does not imply that major principles of the social sustainability dimension are not covered in green transformation policies, it suggests they are, at the very least, latent concepts whose potentials are not yet fully exploited. While synergies between economic growth and environmental protection are inherent in the green growth paradigm and the decarbonisation process, the social dimension is not readily visible and must be actively incorporated into the existing economic-environmental nexus.

The social pillar is one of the three pillars of sustainable development, along with the economic and environmental pillars. The basic principles of each must always be in harmony with one another for a policy to be considered 'sustainable'. As such, the social pillar differs from social welfare policies in its attempt to achieve sustainable development, i.e., according to the classic definition of the Brundtland Report, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.39). Due to its status as the most ill-understood pillar of sustainable development (Boyer et al.,

2016), it is argued the social pillar encompasses a wide range of overlapping thematic issues, including social equity, welfare provision, social cohesion, climate justice, energy justice, and popular participation, among others. For this paper, the author employs Murphy's (2012) social-environmental integration framework, which identifies four of the most common general principles of the social pillar from a diverse range of academic literature and intergovernmental documents. These are: equity, awareness, participation, and social cohesion.

While the separate pillars are no longer present in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations, their basic notions are deeply integrated in the formulation of the 17 goals (Boyer, 2016). Sustainable development also inspires the green growth paradigm and international climate change negotiations, which were designed to achieve sustainable development (Urban et al., 2018; OECD, 2022). As such, these components of the green transformation also contain a social aspect, which is explicitly recognised in major documents including the Paris Agreement and OECD's original Green Growth Strategy. Therefore, Murphy's framework, originally designed to analyse the social dimension of sustainable development, can also be applied to green transformation policies.

Previous studies on specific sectors and policies in Vietnam's green transformation have concluded that the country's approach is strongly technocratic, seeking to leverage technological and planning instruments to deliver growth and solve environmental ills in a top-down manner without giving much weight to the role of local communities and disadvantaged groups (Schirmbeck, 2017; Lederer et al., 2020). While such a top-heavy approach is often successful in delivering quantifiable targets, it will be highly challenging for Vietnam to fulfill its green transformation objectives without considering social equity and justice principles (Siciliano et al., 2021). This is because a strong social sustainability dimension reinforces the legitimacy of the green transformation process, ensures widespread compliance of controversial policy measures, and unlocks potential synergies to achieve other socio-ecological objectives (Fankhauser et al., 2022).

While there exists a growing body of literature on the social dimension of climate change, environmental, and green growth policies in Vietnam, these studies limit their thematic focus to a single principle of the social pillar - such as energy justice, popular participation, or indigenous knowledge. They also restrict their case study to a certain aspect of the green transformation process - most commonly climate change adaptation and energy transition (Siciliano et al., 2021; Dao, 2022; Du, 2022; McElwee, 2022). No study has attempted a holistic analysis of the general principles of the social sustainability dimension of the most important green transformation policies.

This can be attributed to the highly complicated, overlapping nature of Vietnam's existing environmental policies (Ortmann, 2017) and the rapid development of new strategies in recent years. This paper attempts to address shortcomings in the literature by

determining whether the social sustainability dimension is well-represented in Vietnam's green transformation policies. The findings will shed light on this underexplored area and open up new avenues of facilitating this process.

The second part of the paper elaborates on the role of the GSS and CCS in enabling Vietnam's green transformation. The third section introduces the *socio-environmental framework* developed by Murphy (2012) to assess the social pillar of sustainable development policies. As this was designed for developed countries, the paper has made modifications to suit Vietnam's position as a developing economy. The fourth section presents and discusses the results of the application of the revised socio-environmental framework on Vietnam's green transformation policies. Finally, the conclusion reiterates the findings, puts forward some solutions to rectify the lack of social sustainability integration, discusses shortcomings of the paper, and outlines potential areas of future research.

2. Green transformation policies in Vietnam

The two most important policy documents in Vietnam's green transformation are the GSS - including its Action Plan - and the CCS (Australian Aid, 2012, p.8; Asian Development Bank, 2017, p.xvi; Urban et al., 2018). While there were earlier versions of both strategies in the 2010s, for the purpose of this paper, the terms GSS and CCS refer exclusively to the new versions. They cover the concepts of green growth and climate change respectively, both striving towards the ultimate goals of achieving sustainable development, transitioning to a new growth model, addressing climate and environmental problems, and strengthening resilience of vulnerable sectors of society (Prime Minister of Government, 2021, p.1; Prime Minister of Government, 2022b, p.1). Although other relevant strategies exist in Vietnam - such as the Socio-Economic Development Strategy, Power Development Plan, and other sectoral policies - only the GSS and CCS fulfil a multi-sectoral role explicitly focusing on transforming the environmental-economic nexus, which makes them representative of the country's green transformation policy framework.

The GSS is drafted by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), the foremost implementing body. The GSS's first version for the period 2012-2020 was released in 2012. Its three primary objectives were to mitigate GHG emission; promote greening of economic activities; and promote green lifestyle and sustainable consumption. After eight years, the original GSS fulfilled many of its objectives, most notably reducing energy-related GHG emissions by 12.9% compared to the 'business as usual' scenario, and reducing energy intensity per unit of GDP by 1.8% annually. However, many green growth concepts were ill defined, while objectives and tasks lacked focus and often overlapped with related strategies (e.g., those on sustainable development and climate change), leading to difficulties in implementation and assessment (MPI, 2022).

In 2021, the new GSS was approved for the period 2021-2030 with a vision towards 2050. In addition to the original objectives, a fourth was added, seeking to make the transformation sustainable by promoting the principles of equity, inclusivity, and resilience. Each of the four objectives has concrete targets for 2030 and 2050. The strategy also stipulates the general direction of implementation and assigns ministries to take charge of the objectives. In July 2022, the GSS Action Plan was released, containing details on implementation timelines, responsible and supporting government agencies, and sources of funding. These are grouped into 18 themes, 57 task clusters, and 134 specific tasks. The Action Plan does not set quantifiable targets for the specific tasks; rather, the assigned agencies are responsible for ensuring that sectoral targets are consistent with those of the GSS.

The CCS is formulated and overseen by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE). This is not to be confused with the *National Plan on Climate Change Adaptation for Period 2021-2030, Vision towards 2050,* released in 2020 and only covers adaptation activities. The CCS was originally released in December 2011, followed by its Action Plan in 2012. This version prioritised adaptation over mitigation; by the end of its mandate it had become outdated due to the rapid progression of events, such as a revamped international climate change regime established by the Paris Agreement at COP21, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (both in 2015), and Vietnam's COP26 (2021) net zero pledge. The new CCS, released in July 2022, is a step towards bringing Vietnam's climate change policy framework in line with a new international environment and stronger domestic ambitions. The CCS sets forth three general objectives: adapting to and minimising damages caused by climate change; mitigating GHG emissions to reach net zero emissions by 2050; leveraging opportunities from climate change responses to transform the growth model and increase the economy's resilience and competitiveness. To achieve these objectives, the CCS outlines mitigation tasks in the energy, industry, construction, agriculture, and transport sectors, in addition to adaptation, institutional reforms, and resilience building tasks. Although not specified in the CCS, it is likely an action plan will be released during 2023 to clarify task assignment to specific ministries, as was done with the 2011 version.

3. Social-environmental integration framework

The article employs Murphy's social-environmental integration framework (Murphy, 2012) to assess the degree to which the social sustainability dimension is represented in Vietnam's green transformation policies. As previously discussed, although the framework was designed for sustainable development policies, it is applicable to the green transformation since this is essentially a continuation of, and a means to, achieve the former. The subject of analysis of this framework is not social policies *per se* but cross-

sectoral green transformation policies. Therefore, it does not attempt to determine the extent to which traditional social welfare goals are achieved, but rather how fundamental principles of social sustainability are reflected in the predominantly environmental-economic objectives of green transformation.

Table 1: Operationalisation of Social-environmental Integration Framework

Organising principles	Policy area		Indicator
Equity	Intragenerational equity	Adaptation	Commitment to supporting vulnerable groups in adapting to the effect of climate change
		Mitigation	Commitment to shielding vulnerable groups from economically disadvantageous climate change mitigation policies
	Intergenerational equity	Intergenerational equity	Commitment to decarbonising current welfare provisions
		Consumption	Commitment to switching to green consumption or reducing absolute consumption
Awareness for sustainability	Sustainability awareness education programmes		Commitment to implementing sustainability education programmes
	Content of sustainability awareness education programs		Commitment to promoting alternative lifestyles and consumption patterns in sustainability education programmes
Participation	Broadening the participative base of green transformation policy development and implementation		Commitment to allowing diverse social groups, particularly the disadvantaged, to contribute to the development green transformation policies
Social Cohesion	Embedding and promoting social sustainability goals in predominantly environmental and economic tasks/solutions		Commitment to developing green infrastructure which promotes social integration; empowering local communities to devise/implement their own green transformation programs; and addressing sources of civil strife

Source: Murphy (2012), with modifications by the author.

The framework consists of four major social sustainability principles: equity, awareness for sustainability, participation, and social cohesion. These are the most common recurring themes of the social dimension of sustainable development that were condensed from a wide range of United Nations and European Union sustainability policies and literature on green social policy, environmental economics, and environmental policy integration. Climate justice, a very popular theme in contemporary research, is not included as a standalone principle although some of its components are incorporated into the participation and organising principles. This is because climate justice literature predominantly categorises justice in terms of rights and benefits of individuals and communities (Bulkeley et al., 2014). As shown in this section, a just climate solution must also recognise the responsibility of individuals and communities to reduce their own carbon footprint and adopt a more environmentally conscious lifestyle.

Each organising principle is reflected in one or more policy areas, which in turn is operationalised into concrete indicators. These rely on formal, written commitments to assess the extent of social sustainability, since the unit of analysis is the green transformation policy framework, rather than actual policy implementation. Based on the results of textual analysis, each organising principle (and policy areas, if a principle contains more than one) of the two strategies will be given an ordinal, qualitative rank. These ranks are in ascending order of social sustainability integration: low, medium-low, medium, medium-high, and high. This paper does not attempt to convert these ranks to continuous data to measure social sustainability of an entire strategy, as there is no objective method to weigh the relative importance of each principle.

The four organising principles and their policy areas (see Table 1) are operationalised as follows:

3.1. Equity

Equity refers to the principle of fairness in the distribution of welfare, public services, and opportunities for all individuals and groups in a country, regardless of financial status, social standing, race, gender, and other attributes. This principle has the two dimensions of intragenerational and intergenerational equity. The former addresses how all social actors are given fair treatment in climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, while intergenerational equity concerns the extent to which contemporary welfare provision and consumption patterns affect future generations. While Murphy's original framework includes the third dimension of international equity, it was based on support developed countries give to developing ones in climate change and environmental matters, making it incompatible for an analysis of a developing country like Vietnam.

Intragenerational equity

Intragenerational equity refers to the equitable distribution of costs and benefits from environmental and development activities within the same generation. Increasingly adverse weather conditions place severe financial burden on low-income households, which already spend a disproportionate amount of their income on basic needs such as food, utilities, and transport. Therefore, a socially sustainable green transformation policy must facilitate climate change adaptation and provide additional support to the vulnerable. This includes measures to proactively improve the resilience of a country's economic and ecological system and lessen the impact of natural disasters.

In addition, green transformation policies seeking to fulfil GHG mitigation goals and achieve a breakthrough in economic development can jeopardise the interests of disadvantaged groups. For instance, an environmental protection tax on petrol will decrease the mobility of people in remote areas who have poor access to public transport, while the closure of coal-fired jeopardise power plants and coal mines will take away low-skilled jobs. Therefore, a socially sustainable green transformation must ensure a just transition for everyone, especially when it comes to employment opportunities.

Intergenerational equity

Intergenerational equity in the green transformation refers to the balance between the interests of current and future generations. While welfare provision for the disadvantaged is necessary in climate change adaptation and mitigation as part of intragenerational equity, this should not lock in environmentally harmful practices that can degrade living spaces inherited by future generations. For example, ageing public transportation should be upgraded to electric vehicles, using low-carbon materials and which improve energy efficiency, while subsidised health insurance should internalise the cost of medical waste treatment. Likewise, efforts to mitigate GHG emissions and transition to a new economic paradigm should not drastically reduce current living standards.

Finally, intergenerational equity can also be achieved by changing consumption patterns, advocating consumption of goods and services with a low-carbon footprint and be as separated from resource use as possible. A conventional understanding, known as the *Ecological Modernisation* approach, argues that consumption is not a negative issue for the planet as long as it is on a carbon neutral basis. This approach advocates the consumption of goods that are as detached from resource use as possible, including locally produced organic foods, eco-labelled clothing, and industrial commodities where their climate change impact are offset by carbon credits. However, a more radical approach known as *Limits to Growth* calls for reducing consumption altogether and finding alternative, non-material definitions of satisfaction. This is because, according to the precautionary principle, there should be no overreliance on technical solutions if it is not entirely certain they deliver positive environmental outcomes. Either way, a socially sustainable green transformation must move away from the rampant consumerism that leaves behind vast amounts of waste and high GHG emissions.

3.2. Awareness

The promotion of public awareness is a key principle of social sustainability in green transformation policies. It should attempt to educate the public about key environmental problems and the resultant need for a comprehensive restructuring of the economy. This can be achieved through training programmes, inclusion in the school curriculum, and in media campaigns. Moreover, not only should the public be informed of existing issues but they should also be encouraged to play their own part by making sustainable life choices. Regarding these choices, there are two distinct traditions - already introduced in the section on the equity principle: 'Limits to Growth' and 'Ecological Modernisation'. To be considered as having a strong awareness component in the social sustainability dimension, green transformation policies must offer not only educational programmes but also orientate citizens towards a climate and environmentally friendly lifestyle.

3.3. Participation

Participation refers to the inclusion of diverse private sector groups in decision-making processes of the green transformation. However, as private sector companies often have an advantage in the social consultation process, the participation principle is always more strongly focused on the involvement of less influential private sectors, most notably local communities and vulnerable groups. The involvement of less powerful social groups will reinforce the legitimacy of government policies, especially those that aim to dramatically alter traditional modes of production and the environmental landscape. There are different forms of participation, ranging from passive ones such as opinion collection and feedback mechanisms to more active ones such as allowing local groups themselves to approve or reject an environmental initiative. Input from affected communities and other concerned parties (such as academia and the media) also provides a valuable contextual perspective and expert knowledge, helping the government formulate more efficient policies.

3.4. Social cohesion

Social cohesion is achieved when a policy helps to achieve synergy between environmental, developmental, and social objectives. In this regard, it overlaps to some extent with the concept of environmental policy integration. Social cohesion is a broad concept, but it often refers to trust, frequent interaction, cultural tolerance in a local community, and the lack of civil strife over basic needs such as food and water. Murphy (2012) lists some key indicators of social cohesion in green transformation policies. *Firstly*, the planning of green infrastructure can address social concerns. For instance,

electric charging stations and electric bus stops should be placed near densely populated areas in order to reduce commuting time and alleviate health problems caused by air pollution. This also frees up people's time and creates a healthier environment for social interaction. *Secondly*, social cohesion also refers to strong trust established and frequent interaction within a local community. For example, this can be reflected in green transformation policies that allow local citizens to meet, discuss, and devise their own rubbish collection and tree-planting programmes. *Thirdly*, green transformation policies can improve social cohesion if they lead to preventing common factors that cause social unrest such as hunger, water shortage, and natural disasters. For instance, a green agricultural initiative that seeks to improve crop yield (economic) while reducing the nitrogen content in fertilizers (environmental) will help achieve food security and ensure social stability, despite not having such an explicitly social focus.

4. Results and discussions

This section presents and discusses the outcome of assessing the social sustainability dimension in the GSS and CCS using Murphy's revised social-environment framework.

Table 2: Extent of Social Sustainability Dimension in GGS and CCS

Organising principle	Policy area		Green Growth Strategy	National Climate Change Strategy
Equity	Intragenerational equity	Adaptation	High	High
		Mitigation	Average	Low
	Intergenerational equity	Welfare provision	Below average	Low
		Consumption	Below average	Above average
Awareness	Sustainability education programmes		High	High
	Content of sustainability education programmes		Above average	High
Participation	Inclusivity in green transformation policy planning and implementation		Below average	Average
Social cohesion	Integration of social sustainability goals in green transformation policies		Below average	Average

Source: Author's own research.

4.1. Green Growth Strategy

4.1.1. Equity

Intragenerational equity

The GGS scores highly in the adaptation policy area of the equity principle. In task cluster 11, the GGS Action Plan prescribes a low-carbon model of development, including waste management and construction measures, that allows densely populated urban areas to become resilient to climate change. Task cluster 15 gives instructions on how to bring running water to remote, mountainous areas and to make the country's hydraulic system more resilient to climate change and natural disasters. Task cluster 17 on healthcare also stipulates measures to improve disease monitoring and the provision of clean drinking water to regions that are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Two task clusters of the GGS Action Plan seek to address the threat to job security posed by the green transformation. Task cluster 3 on green employment stipulates the development of a green occupation database and market research, as well as capacity-building measures to prepare the workforce for green jobs. Task cluster 7 zooms in on ensuring equal access to employment opportunities for vulnerable groups in the green transformation. The Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs will inspect and develop new policies to support vulnerable groups whose jobs are threatened during the green transformation. Meanwhile, the three major existing policies to support the vulnerable will integrate with the GGS, namely the Sustainable Poverty Reduction Programme, the New Rural Development Programme, and the Ethnic Minority Socio-economic Development Programme. Every sector will also have to consider employment assistance for vulnerable groups in their own green growth implementation plans. Despite this, task cluster 7 is the shortest and least detailed of all 18 clusters. Rather than prescribing general principles and targets, the GGS Action Plan assigns responsible government agencies of the three major existing social policies and other sectors to encourage support for vulnerable communities, leading to potential issues with policy lag and the lack of policy integration. While acknowledging that the green transformation will adversely affect the livelihoods of some groups, both task clusters 3 and 17 do not elaborate on the mechanisms of such trade-offs nor how such impact can be neutralised. Consequently, efforts to shield the vulnerable from climate change mitigation and environmental protection measures are given an average social sustainability dimension.

Intergenerational equity

The GGS Action Plan includes measures to promote green, sustainable healthcare. Special attention is given to vulnerable groups in task cluster 17; task 17.1.3 focuses on promoting the development of 'green' domestic medical products; and task 17.1.4 relates to using clean and green energy in medical waste treatment being directly related to the

decarbonisation of welfare provision. While less commonly viewed as a form of welfare, task cluster 10 on transport includes measures to both decarbonise public transport and facilitate the phase-out of private vehicles. However, it is unclear whether restricting the latter in a country where motorbikes and scooters are the primary mode of transport will improve the quality of life. Moreover, the extent of a fare subsidy for electric public transport remains unspecified. These concerns make transport a sector where the mobility needs of the current generation may be jeopardized in favor of future decarbonisation goals. As for other forms of welfare such as education and housing, the GGS Action Plan does not contain relevant provisions. This gives the GGS a below-average score on welfare decarbonisation.

The green consumption and lifestyle concepts are defined only in the terminology appendix of the GGS (Prime Minister of Government, 2021, p.94) rather than in the objective and solution sections of the GGS and its Action Plan. Hence, this leaves room for subjective interpretation by implementing agencies. While a green lifestyle does rule out rampant consumerism that in turn leads to environmental destruction, it does not carry the connotation of reducing consumption and finding alternative forms of happiness/satisfaction. The GGS Action Plan reserves task clusters 2 and 16 to address sustainable consumption issues. Task cluster 2, which deals with educational activities, stipulates a wide range of programmes to promote the green growth paradigm, which includes concepts such as green lifestyle and green consumption. This new lifestyle must also be compatible with 'traditional values', which are left undefined and can easily be coopted to fit an anthropocentric, pro-growth discourse. Meanwhile, task cluster 16 on green consumption and procurement delves into support measures for various forms of eco-labelling, implicitly arguing that more consumption is beneficial as long as the products score highly in such labeling schemes. The 'consumption' policy area is therefore rated as having a below-average social sustainability dimension.

4.1.2. Awareness

Commitment to raise sustainability awareness

The Green Growth Strategy and its Action Plan stipulate many educational and media activities to spread awareness of the green growth paradigm, sustainable lifestyle, and green consumption at different levels of government and society. In particular, task cluster 2 of the Action Plan calls for a national information campaign on green growth; and a media campaign on aspects of the green economy such as circular economy, blue sea economy, climate change resilience, energy efficiency, and waste recycling. Numerous concepts to be included in sustainable development educational campaigns and the clear division of labour among ministries and local authorities therefore helps to rate the 'Education Programme' policy area as high.

Content of sustainability awareness programs

Task cluster 2 of the GGS Action Plan includes many concepts that broadly belong to the spectrum of sustainable development. These include the circular economy, the blue economy, recycling, and climate change resilience in its awareness-raising mandate. As understanding of sustainable development, green growth and related ideas remain fragmented even among Vietnamese government officials (Siciliano, 2020), the promotion of so many abstract concepts to ordinary citizens can be highly challenging. In addition, as discussed earlier, the activities of task cluster 2 subscribe to the traditional view of growth as being unquestionably beneficial. On the plus side, task cluster 3 on green employment also covers academic and professional training programmes on green knowledge and vocational skills. Thus, their content is rated as having an above-average social sustainability dimension.

4.1.3. Participation

While the participation principle is not directly mentioned in any of the GGS Action Plan's task clusters, it is implicitly reflected in task clusters 12 on agriculture and 13 waste management. In particular, task 12.5.2 stipulates efforts to develop a green growth-oriented countryside which respects the environmental conditions, the traditional customs and lifestyles of each region and ethnic group, while task 13.1.3 provides policy measures that incentivise at-source solid waste management initiatives with the participation of stakeholders and the community. While these examples do integrate traditional lifestyles and reward the participation of local people, they only enable citizens to shape grassroots issues that directly impact most on their daily lives. On the other hand, sectors that are strongly linked to climate change and macroeconomic development, such as energy and transport, explicitly involve government and private businesses. Therefore, the social dimension of this organising principle is rated as below average.

4.1.4. Social cohesion

While the GGS and its Action Plan consistently promotes the achievement of the environmental-economic nexus, only a very small number of tasks combine green growth and social objectives. Task 12.5 calls for the development of a new countryside that satisfies the criteria of sustainability, civility, and cleanliness, while task cluster 18 on tourism favours alternative forms of travel such as ecological, rural, and community-based tourism over mass tourism. Sectors that directly affect the quality of life, such as energy, transport, construction, and industry, appear to have placed stronger emphasis on helping companies in the transition. However, the GGS Action Plan does contain many provisions on ensuring food security, energy, employment and improving climate change resilience,

which can lessen the intensity of environmentally-induced social upheaval. Therefore, the GGS scores below average in the social cohesion policy issue.

4.2. National Climate Change Strategy (2022)

4.2.1. Equity

Intragenerational equity

Adaptation is one of the key objectives of the CCS, along with mitigation and institutional reforms. The CCS seeks to improve the country's long-term resilience and minimise the direct impact of adverse climate change events. The first purpose includes improving ecosystem resilience, ensuring food security, forestry preservation, climate-proofed infrastructure, improving healthcare, and ensuring social welfare and gender equality. The second purpose involves enhancing early warning capacity, constructing disaster prevention infrastructure, and preserving lives of those affected. The social dimension of this policy area is thus rated high.

Although the CCS devotes an entire section to climate change mitigation measures, it is silent on how a comprehensive restructuring of the energy, agricultural, forestry, waste management, and industrial sectors towards a low-carbon model of production will impact the livelihoods of Vietnamese citizens, in particular vulnerable communities. Difficulties in the green transformation is implicitly recognised only once in a task on leveraging state-of-the-art technologies such as big data and blockchain to 'turn challenges into opportunities' (Prime Minister of Government, 2022b, p.10). However, it is unclear what the challenges are and how such technologies could make a difference. In its single task on employment, the CCS only stipulates obligations to forecast and provide information on climate change-related jobs, without elaborating on the prospect of unemployment due to decarbonisation of economic sectors and rectification measures. Therefore, the CCS has a low social dimension in the mitigation policy area.

Intergenerational equity

While the CCS addresses healthcare and livelihoods for the vulnerable in adapting to climate change, it does not elaborate on the decarbonisation of such social services. This creates the risk of locking in emission-intensive forms of social support for the underprivileged while not preparing them for transitioning to a low-carbon future. The CCS also does not address how public utilities such as social housing and public transport can satisfy the needs of the current generations during a decarbonisation process. This aspect of intergenerational equity is therefore rated as weak.

The CCS is rated as having stronger than average integration of sustainable consumption ideas. While it also encourages a green lifestyle and preference for environmentally sustainable products, the CCS goes further than the GGS by defining the green lifestyle as being climate-friendly and 'civilised', putting nature rather than man at

the heart of this lifestyle, and creating a narrative that sustainable living is objectively better than 'normal' living. Additionally, the CCS engages in name-and-shame tactics by explicitly identifying fossil fuel-intensive products and services as environmentally unfriendly. However, there has been no direct attempt to challenge the classic notion of materialistic satisfaction and reduce consumption altogether.

4.2.2. Awareness

Commitment to raise sustainability awareness and content of such programmes

The CCS stipulates climate change adaptation and mitigation education programmes for different levels of government, social organisations, and communities, employing a wide range of media formats. It also provides for climate change education to be integrated into the secondary school curriculum, it promotes a climate-friendly lifestyle, and the consumption of low-carbon products. While the GSS also champions sustainable lifestyles and consumption, the CCS goes further by placing conservation of the planet as the heart of such practices, which are characterised as being 'civilised' (Prime Minister of Government, 2022b, p.10). This gives the CCS a high score in both areas of the awareness principle.

4.2.3. Participation

The CCS calls for increased participation of women and young people and the application of traditional knowledge in climate change adaptation and disaster management, in addition to community participation in sustainable forestry and community-based livelihood models (Prime Minister of Government, 2022b, pp.5 & 9-10). However, these provisions only concern participation in adaptation efforts rather than enabling citizens to shape the green transformation that will occur across different economic sectors and consequently affect their employment prospects. Moreover, people's involvement is only mentioned in a few issue areas, suggesting that popular participation is a perk given by the government rather than a natural right. The participation principle in the CCS is consequently rated as having an average social sustainability dimension.

4.2.4. Social cohesion

The CCS stipulates ambitious community-based models of climate change adaptation, mitigation, and livelihood (CCS, 2022, pp.9-10). However, these concepts are not operationalised, preventing a comprehensive assessment of their impact on social cohesion. A rare example of a concrete initiative is the construction of community centres that double as disaster evacuation hubs (Prime Minister of Government, 2022b, p.6). Like the GGS, the CCS does not address environmental aspects of urban planning and transport that

could have a ripple effect on local communities, such as public spaces and public transport. On the other hand, the CCS contains numerous provisions on climate change adaptation and resilience, which seek to prevent energy, food, and medicine shortages that could spark civil unrest. Consequently, the CCS social cohesion principle is rated as having an average social sustainability dimension.

5. Conclusion

The GGS has a stronger equity principle than the CCS, while the reverse is true regarding participation and social cohesion. The two strategies robustly promote awareness of sustainability in terms of both quantity and content.

Intragenerational equity in both documents includes a strong adaptation component, reflecting the Vietnam's long and successful experience in this area. However, when it comes to protecting vulnerable citizens from the loss of opportunities caused by green economic activities, the GGS is sufficiently prepared, while the CCS has comparatively few relevant provisions. While this may suggest the fulfilment of MONRE's basic mandate in environmental issues, it is not commensurate with CCS's self-proclaimed goal of leveraging climate change response to transition to a new growth model and improve resilience (Prime Minister of Government, 2022b, p.2). At the same time, the GGS should update its specific tasks to make them congruent with existing social policies of other sectors, clearly explain how the green transformation impacts on vulnerable communities, and offer clear resolution mechanisms.

Regarding intergenerational equity, welfare decarbonisation is fairly weak in both strategies, while CCS is much stronger in promoting sustainable consumption. While these strategies assigned mitigation tasks to various sectors, there was no attempt at linkage with reducing emissions in the provision of social welfare. Although each sector is tasked with developing their own mitigation plan, based on their expertise and legislative momentum, MONRE and MPI should actively engage with other ministries to address the decarbonisation of welfare provisions. This is especially important for the CCS, which is likely to issue an action plan in 2023. Commitment to sustainable consumption in the CCS is quite strong, while the GGS lacks conceptual clarity and has a limited range of implementing mechanisms.

Both the GGS and CCS strongly prioritise awareness-raising for sustainability issues, with the latter going further in advocating an alternative, civilised lifestyle that puts the planet rather than people at the core. Meanwhile, the participation and social cohesion principles are fairly underrepresented in the GGS and sufficiently reflected in the CCS. Both strategies allow for people to take part in some policy processes, but predominantly in a consultative role. Participation is also selectively granted to some areas and not others, suggesting that it is considered a privilege rather than a natural right. While the CSS lays

the groundwork for extensive participation from diverse groups, this only affects adaptation activities. A way to strengthen inclusivity would be for the CSS to expand this foundation to the mitigation component, for instance in the planning of decentralised renewable energy systems. Despite being a multi-sector policy that delegates tasks to many economic sectors, the GGS has not attempted to take advantage of transition activities to accomplish social goals. However, the CCS has more ambitious provisions to involve local communities in creating and implementing new livelihood models, but one must wait until it releases its action plan to see how these models will be operationalised.

There are still some limitations of the research. *Firstly*, as the CCS does not yet have an action plan, the analysis has had to rely on the strategy itself, which only provides a broad orientation rather than clearly defined tasks with concrete targets. Such interpretation is somewhat subjective because of CCS failure to submit a comprehensive action plan. *Secondly*, due to the very recent introduction of the GGS Action Plan and the CCS, the study can only assess social sustainability as formal, written commitments rather than how they are implemented in practice. *Thirdly*, due to conceptual stretching, it is challenging to provide a comprehensive definition of the social pillar of sustainable development/green transformation and the principles it represents. *Fourthly*, Murphy's analytical framework, while very useful, is generically named as the 'socio-environmental framework.' This can be confusing as the framework does not only assess how social and environmental goals are linked, but more concretely how social sustainability principles are reflected in economic-environmental policies i.e. in the green transformation. *Lastly*, due to the multi-sectoral nature of the green transformation, there is a degree of overlap between the principles, for example in the equity and awareness principles regarding promotion of sustainable consumption.

Many future directions of research could build on the outcome of this paper. One of these is to study the actual implementation of a social sustainability principle, assess its (in)consistency with formal commitments, and determine the underlying causes. In addition, while numerous studies have concluded that the GGS and CCS are indeed closely connected in their mission to facilitate Vietnam's green transformation, they remain distinct policy documents, overseen by two different ministries. This situation makes comparison of the social sustainability dimension difficult, but more importantly it poses obstacles to Vietnam's green ambitions. Accordingly, further research could focus on comprehensively mapping out areas where the two strategies complement and impede each other, explain their causes, and suggest solutions to maximise synergy in implementing the green transformation. Finally, the issue of policy integration also affects the relationship between the two green transformation strategies and other sectoral policies. As the section on the GGS has shown, attempts to soften negative trade-offs caused by mitigation activities are hindered by the need to harmonise the GGS with three welfare programmes for the underprivileged, which are overseen by three government ministries and equivalent agencies. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate not only the interaction between the GGS and CCS but also between these two documents and other relevant sectoral policies.

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