

**GREEN DAYS, HANOI  
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Water pollution and water scarcity are probably Vietnam's greatest environmental problems. They have serious impacts on human health, economic growth, and freshwater biodiversity. Here is a paragraph from a forthcoming World Bank report:

*Vietnam is not rich in water: more than 60 percent of water flow comes from other countries and dry season shortages now occur in many rivers. Yet in the short wet season, many people are killed and enormous damage inflicted. Pollution continues to get more severe, while environmental and social concerns increase. In the face of the economic boom, Vietnam has struggled to implement sustainable approaches, and when measures are taken, it fails to enforce its regulatory frameworks. but very little has changed on the ground.*

*In developed countries, it was only when NGOs got involved that government took effective action on the environment. In the 1970s, many rivers in the US and Europe were so polluted that they caught fire. Now you can drink the water and the fish have returned. International experience suggests that greater public participation is required before governments take the difficult decisions needed to improve water resources management.*

*Why are these decisions so difficult? One*

reason is that they require ministries to give up some of their power. In Vietnam, ministries are like little countries that struggle for power and resources. That makes coordinating and optimizing water use very hard because, for example, the ministry responsible for power generation wants to maximize electricity output whereas the ministry responsible for irrigation wants to maximize rice production.

Another reason is that Vietnam is pursuing a