

Management of nontraditional security for Vietnam's sustainable development: an integrated approach

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, nontraditional security (NTS) studies have been the focus of growing interest in the security literature. However, this work only focuses on conceptualization and associated risks and makes only limited connections between nontraditional security and sustainability. Furthermore, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been threatened by NTS concerns such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this article is to contribute to the current debate about NTS and to formulate an integrated approach with sustainable development. We devote attention to sustainability and security studies to understand the challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainable outcomes. To highlight the role of the management of NTS in achieving the SDGs, we review the literature and analyze the main threats of NTS in Vietnam. This article shows that sustainability studies should not be separated from nontraditional issues. By analyzing case studies of NTS threats in Vietnam, we find that the economic, social, and environmental pillars of Vietnam's sustainable development are threatened despite the country's great success in economic growth in recent decades. We conclude by noting that the lack of integrated linkages between NTS and sustainability creates obstacles for Vietnam's sustainable development and nontraditional sources of insecurity pose a serious threat to the development prospects of the country. Therefore, in the context of an integrated approach, countries should incorporate certain aspects of the human-security agenda as nontraditional matters into their national development policies.

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Introduction

In September 2015, member countries of the United Nations agreed to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which demonstrate commitment to implement strategies for sustainable development in social, economic, and environmental dimensions (United Nations 2015). The endorsement of the SDGs has attracted considerable academic attention, with numerous studies focusing on the relationships and tradeoffs between the goals (Spaiser et al. 2017) and the measurement of the SDGs in a broader context (Reyers et al. 2017; Allen et al. 2017). However, the SDGs are being threatened by global nontraditional security (NTS) challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change-related events. There are indications that many countries are falling behind in meeting the SDGs (Sachs et al. 2019).

Traditionally, security threats have been viewed through the prism of state survival and conceived mainly in terms of *inter*-state military conflicts. More recently, however, security has been associated

with a wide range of nontraditional, mostly transnational and human security, issues including terrorism, environmental degradation, climate change, disease vectors, transnational crime, and illegal migration (UNDP 2004; Buzan and Hansen 2009; Floyd and Croft 2011; World Bank 2011; United Nations 2015; Yunling 2006; Caballero-Anthony 2016; WHO 2021). NTS refers to the safety, stability, and sustainability of the referent objects such as states, humans, enterprises, and the environment (Hoang et al. 2019). With the emergence of various such global insecurity threats, it is becoming increasingly apparent that NTS challenges pose serious risks to the developmental prospects of developing countries, positioning the SDGs at center stage. This situation implies the need for an integrated approach for NTS and sustainable development to address the immense challenges of the SDGs and to accentuate NTS issues.

To achieve the SDGs, countries need to integrate them into their national sustainable development plans and NTS agenda, which is typically deemed to

comprise “human security” factors (Dalby 2009; Prescott-Allen 2001; Gasper and Gómez 2015; Martel 2017). The object of security is no longer for the state but also people’s survival, well-being, and dignity (Caballero-Anthony 2006). A focus on securitization and national security encourages stronger political commitments in promoting coordination between stakeholders (Buzan and Hansen 2009). While there is growing interest in the need for broader understanding of NTS challenges (Smythe 2013; Sygna, O’Brien, and Wolf 2013; Ghiselli 2018; Caballero-Anthony 2020), we argue that their management plays a vital role in achieving sustainable development through stronger political and resource commitments. Increasing the negative costs of effective and efficient management of NTS threats causes the loss of human lives and physical assets, threatening the developmental prospects of countries (Hoang et al. 2019).

Like many other developing countries in Asia, Vietnam’s economic growth is being jeopardized by NTS threats that will negatively affect its national sustainable development. The country is facing several nontraditional insecurity threats in several areas and sectors. For example, economic security and human security are challenged by corruption, environmental disruptions, pollution, and natural disasters such as the floods and landslides that occurred in Central Vietnam in 2020 as well as the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment 2019; Government of Vietnam 2020). Thus, despite limited discussion on Vietnam’s NTS policy in the academic literature, NTS threats have attracted greater attention among policy makers in the country since the first official mention of the NTS approach in 2011

Some commentators have argued that current NTS studies usually devote more attention to describing risks, conceptualizing the term “non-traditional security,” and suggesting policies to address NTS threats (Caballero-Anthony 2016). Although these aspects help describe many distinct characteristics of NTS issues, they tend not to involve integrated analyses using sustainable development issues or to highlight the implications of NTS management that shape the country’s responses to NTS challenges and the implementation of the SDGs. Thus, this study discusses the conceptualization of NTS and analyzes an integrated approach to the management of NTS threats in the SDGs. We include sustainable development and security studies in our discussion to better understand the challenges and opportunities for achieving development outcomes. We analyze economic, environmental, and health insecurity in Vietnam with the aim of providing insights into the country’s motivations toward both

the management of NTS threats and sustainable development strategy.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section discusses the concept of NTS and the integrated approach with sustainable development to provide a theoretical foundation for NTS management. The section entitled “Vietnam’s sustainable development and SDG performance” then summarizes the country’s performance regarding sustainable development, including the lack of an integrated approach toward NTS threats. The following section analyzes cases of corruption, environmental issues, and health insecurity as the main threats to Vietnam’s sustainable development. The conclusion outlines our conclusions and discusses their various implications.

NTS lens and the integrated approach with sustainable development

The term NTS balances the relationship between individual-centered and state-centered security interpretations (Martel 2017). Therefore, a voluminous literature on NTS indicates the complexity and difficulty in combining theories and empirical studies. NTS can be used as part of a political agenda because of its flexible meaning in terms of both national security and human-security agendas. The best-known analytical approach that differentiates NTS from traditional security is the Copenhagen School’s approach to securitization (Rita and Croft 2011). Buzan and Hansen (2009) describe “securitization” as a concept that explains the risks that can be characterized as NTS threats. This approach describes how states “securitize” various issues not previously considered security matters and converts them to threats from NTS. Securitization is simply the construction of security discourse to include a certain agenda in the realm of security. According to the Copenhagen School, any challenge can be “securitized” by political stakeholders into different categories: military, environmental, economic, societal, and political. To be securitized, the problem must achieve a consensus among various political actors, but the most important part of the process is the act of persuasion by stakeholders to enable emergency measures in particular contexts.

The concept of securitization advanced by members of the Copenhagen School has been used by certain governments to examine the security concept and to explore new approaches to the study of NTS (Huysmans 1998; Buzan and Hansen 2009; Stritzel 2014; Vuori 2016). We can consider the securitization process by referring to the addresses of powerful policy makers stating that “a problem would be

a security concern.” Official resolutions and statements by influential politicians on the threats that exist, with what impact, and how to engage with them can shed light on certain securitization trends and their relationship to the security strategy of nations. Although most studies have applied securitization theory to developed countries, it can also be usefully applied to developing nations. For instance, Vuori (2008) analyzed China’s securitization process by explaining the illocutionary logic to statements made by Chinese government officials. The “speech act” is also the main approach of the Copenhagen School for identifying security issues. Thus, securitization shows that NTS can be a political tool for turning certain issues into national security challenges.

In addition, NTS researchers consider the government to be a powerful player that can respond to major disruptions to human well-being; such disruptions also imply the government’s political instability (Caballero-Anthony 2016). The notion of NTS gives priority to people-centered challenges based on human survival and well-being as described by their everyday lives. Although NTS issues are theoretically described as non-military in nature (Caballero-Anthony 2016), they can be divided between ostensibly environmental forces (climate change, infectious diseases, natural disasters, environmental pollution) and those that may at some point involve the use of force (people smuggling, drug trafficking, and crime) (Martel 2017). The categorization of NTS threats also emphasizes homeland-security issues such as the environment, terrorism, armed insurgencies, public health, pandemics, and transnational crime (Shambaugh 2007; Smythe 2013).

A new approach developed by Hoang et al. (2019) studies the components of NTS management instead of conceptualizing and classifying NTS challenges. The management of NTS is regarded as an essential and indispensable steering tool for coping with threats and ensuring sustainable development because sustainability and security are synonymous. The concept of security is always structured around the safety and sustainability of political actors and referent objects such as state, human, health, intellectual property, and assets (Hoang et al. 2019). The state develops mechanisms and tools to enable it to respond appropriately to the NTS challenges that thus arise. To ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of NTS management and to exploit potential synergies, it is crucial to coordinate measures at different levels of government and between interacting policies. Regarding complex and interrelated human-security goals, policy coherence can contribute to a reduction of tradeoffs between different sectoral

policies and lead to more effective implementation. Coordinated measures should be regularly assessed in terms of effectiveness and, if necessary, adjusted according to a changing environment. Such adaptive management arrangements can be decisive when dealing with highly dynamic and long-term problems.

Hoang et al.’s (2019) new approach to the management of NTS proposes a novel theoretical framework for the analysis and/or combined qualitative and quantitative assessment of NTS management at the national, subnational, and corporate level, and in most areas of NTS. NTS management is the process through which responsible organizations and/or authorized people make decisions to ensure the safety, stability, and sustainable development of subjects/actors and/or referent objects. It can be explained by choosing six suitable dimensions: safety (S1), stability (S2), sustainability (S3), risk management (C1), crisis management (C2), and crisis recovery (C3). For each dimension, a 5-point Likert scale can be applied to evaluate the level at any period from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). This approach can show the linkage between sustainability and NTS.

Regarding an integrated approach for NTS and sustainable development, so far there has been no research on this link in the literature. Recent studies show that NTS threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the efforts of developing countries to meet the SDGs by 2030 (Sachs et al. 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to integrate NTS issues into national sustainable development strategies. This integrated approach to sustainability and NTS in the development discourse in Table 1 is typically made via the concept of human security, including (1) economic security (e.g., freedom from poverty), (2) food security (e.g., access to food), (3) health security (e.g., access to health care and protection from diseases), (4) environmental security (e.g., protection and prevention of environmental pollution and depletion), (5) personal security (e.g., physical safety from traffic accidents, domestic violence), (6) community security (e.g., physical security of the community), and (7) political security (e.g., civil and political rights) (UNDP 1994). These features are prominent in the SDGs. As expressed by UNDP (1994), human security usually means freedom from fear and desire, or more specifically “protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental hazards.” This approach has become increasingly influential in conventional security research.

Human-security issues have become a key factor in assessing the stability of governments and of the

Table 1. Linkage between NTS and sustainable development.

Link	Description
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	The NTS policy emphasizes the need to protect the security of people and people's assets crucial to any SDG. It has important implications for priorities and action plans to reduce adverse impacts of nontraditional insecurity on a country's development outcomes.
New approach to the standard of living	The NTS approach emphasizes a "sustainable livelihoods" framework that emphasizes certain freedoms, the absence of which may not lead to an "identifiable diminution in the overall standard of living" (Sen 2002).
Human Security (UNDP 1994)	The human-security approach prioritizes the achievement of freedom from wants and freedom from urgent fear. It focuses on the insufficient attention paid to intergenerational equity in the past, but some versions ignore intragenerational equity altogether.

Source: UNDP (1994); Sen (2002); and the approach of the authors.

state itself. They also refer to the power of stakeholders to navigate the entire political system that influences people's lives (McCormack 2008). The human-security approach demonstrates the importance of community and individual engagement with the power to achieve development outcomes (Sygna, O'Brien, and Wolf 2013). Thus, human security challenges the traditional state-based approach to maintaining the inviolability of state security from conventional threats and puts individuals, as well as human well-being, at the center of security concerns. Notably, sustainable development is a security imperative. Poverty, environmental degradation, and diseases are destroyers of people, societies, and nations that can destabilize countries (Prescott-Allen 2001). Threats to human security are far more numerous, diverse in type, and complex than threats to state security (United Nations 2004; Matthew et al. 2010).

An interesting idea is the "house model for analysis of sustainable development." Based on the three key pillars of sustainable development (economy, society, and environment; Purvis, Mao, and Robinson 2019), it points out that the stability and growth of this model depend on the management capabilities of all the actors and players (Figure 1). If one pillar is weakened or shaken, sustainable development will become difficult to achieve. An integrated analysis shows that NTS threats, if not managed properly, can lead to a weakening of these pillars and may affect sustainability. For example, human-insecurity risks such as air and water pollution and other threats will undermine the social and environmental pillars, which may cause the collapse of the "House Model" despite the fruits of economic growth.

The role of management for sustainable development has been extensively studied in the literature (Bevir 2012; Boas, Biermann, and Kanie 2016; Bowen et al. 2017; United Nations 2015). Mitigating the impact of disasters and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic on development requires an integrated approach to sustainable development and NTS management that includes stronger political commitments, securitization of NTS challenges in

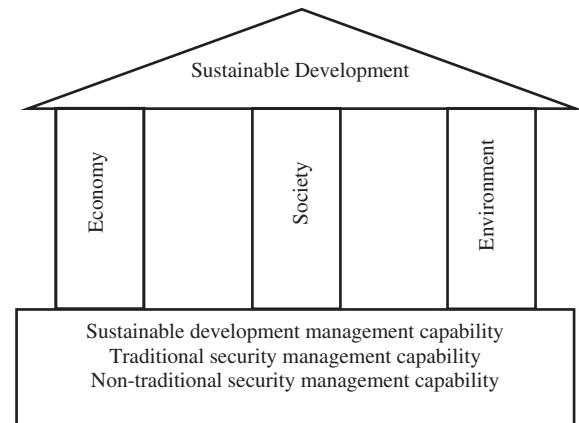


Figure 1. The "House Model" for the analysis of national sustainable development. Source: The model has been developed by the authors and has been adapted from the SDG and NS approaches.

designing the national security strategy, global governance mechanisms, and transnational cooperation (Buzan and Hansen 2009; Smythe 2013; Ghiselli 2018; Sachs et al. 2019; Hongyi 2021). The management objectives of NTS emphasize coordinated or joint-response mechanisms in dealing with NTS threats and developing the national security agenda, including the SDGs (World Bank 2011; UNDP 2012; Hoang et al. 2019). In addition, early interventions through collaborative governance can minimize the negative impacts of NTS threats on sustainable development (Chaffin, Gosnell, and Cosens 2014; Stafford-Smith et al. 2017; Monkelbaan 2019).

With NTS management, Table 2 introduces the framework for examining the management subject's response to any NTS threat and ensuring sustainable development. NTS is defined as the safety, stability, and sustainability of the referent objects such as states, humans, enterprises, and the environment. Therefore, three key pillars of sustainable development are categorized by different pillars of the NTS definition. Furthermore, the NTS pillars are described as the process of moving the understanding of security in a country from one centered on the survival of the state to one that is more people-focused. Stakeholder analysis can demonstrate different levels of cooperative behavior in the absence of strong institutional frameworks despite the

Table 2. Basic framework of NTS management for sustainable development.

Three pillars of sustainable development and SDGs	Main pillars of NTS	Description of management objectives
Economic pillar	Economic security	Stability of the economy (national level) Equitable distribution (societal level) Livelihood and income stability
	Financial security	National financial stability and sustainability Corporate financial stability, safety, and sustainability
	Cybersecurity	Prevention of cybersecurity risks in e-commerce, cybercrime, and online payments
Social pillar	Food security	Protection of trade secrets, patents and copyrights, and trademarks Food stability (supply), safety (quality), and food accessibility (affordable food)
	Health security	Safety from infectious diseases Access to adequate medical services
	Personal security	Freedom from crimes, disease, accidents, natural disasters, and terror threats
	Community security	Safety, stability, and development of the community itself Maintenance of cultural diversity and protection of cultural heritage A general safe social moral/ethical atmosphere to allow each person to develop their potential
Environmental pillar	Environment security	Safety of living environment (soil, air, water, and noise) Preparedness and readiness to respond to natural disasters Prevention of environmental destruction and its adverse effects on people Protection of biodiversity Biosecurity

The approach developed by the authors

government's flexible commitments to sustainability. This work does not seek to conclude that all inconsistent cooperative behavior and fragmentation result from the way countries manage NTS challenges. It only aims to explain that the implications of NTS management have a significant influence on whether the state and its agencies conduct themselves in either a cooperative or an uncooperative way in dealing with the SDGs.

To achieve sustainable development, we argue that the most appropriate response for integrating NTS and sustainability is a coordinated mechanism to mitigate the risks of disruptions to human well-being. Under such circumstances, states can incorporate certain aspects of the human-security agenda as NTS matters into their national security policies. The state can then use the term "NTS" to justify the state's involvement in addressing various issues (Buzan and Hansen 2009; Caballero-Anthony 2016; Ghiselli 2018). This is possible because NTS can incorporate the value of national security into the issues. Because of the broadened conceptualization of NTS, states have gradually changed how they deal with security challenges to incorporate more concern about human survival and well-being.

Vietnam's sustainable development and SDG performance

Overview of Vietnam's sustainable development performance

In line with its economic growth, Vietnam has achieved impressive progress in the SDGs over the past several decades (Baum 2020). Table 3 highlights the country's sustainable development performance using the SDG index, which measures national

progress toward achieving the SDGs (Sachs et al. 2020). Vietnam embarked on its current path of economic reforms in 1986 and has transformed itself from a poor to a middle-income country (World Bank 2019a). Economic growth has brought about great achievements in poverty reduction and rising incomes. According to the World Bank (2019a), Vietnam's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was nearly US\$2,800 in 2019 compared to US\$430 in 1986. The proportion of people living below the poverty line fell from 58% in 1992 to less than 6% in 2019.

Lack of an integrated approach with NTS in Vietnam's sustainable development policies

To implement the SDGs, Vietnam has issued important policies and strategies since 1991 such as the country's Sustainable Development Strategy and a National Action Plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (Table 4). These policies state that economic growth must be coupled with the implementation of social progress and equity and environmental protection, ensuring harmony between the human-made environment and the natural environment, and preserving biodiversity. In 2020, given the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing adverse climate change-related events, the government issued Resolution Number 136 on sustainable development to clarify responsibilities and tasks among ministries and central authorities to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs.

Several actors from policy processes in the country participate in working toward sustainable development. In practice, however, most attention has

Table 3. Vietnam's sustainable development performance.

Indicator	SDG	2000	2018 (or latest available)	2030
Poverty-headcount ratio at US\$1.90 per day (2011 PPP) (% of population)	Goal 1: No poverty	38% (2002)	2% (2016)	0%
Prevalence of undernourishment (% of population)	Goal 2: Zero hunger	24%	9% (2017)	0%
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	Goal 3: Good health and well-being	73	75 (2017)	80
Adult-literacy rate, population 15+ years, all genders (%)	Goal 4: Quality education	90%	95%	100%
Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (%)	Goal 5: Gender equality	26%	27%	50%
Improved water source (% of population with access)	Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation	65%	88% (2015)	100%
Renewable as % of total primary energy supply (TPES) (excluding hydropower)	Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy	0%	0.1% (2016)	10%
Access to electricity (% of population)	Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy	86%	100% (2017)	100%
Wage and salaried workers, total (% of total employment)	Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth	19%	43%	85%
Researchers in R&D (per million people)	Goal 9: Industry innovation and infrastructure	114 (2002)	701 (2017)	3,241
PM2.5 air pollution, mean annual exposure (micrograms per cubic meter)	Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities	36.2	29.6 (2017)	14.5
Population living in slums, (% of urban population)	Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities	48.80%	27.2% (2014)	0%
CO ₂ emissions (kilograms per 2010 US\$ of GDP)	Goal 13: Climate action	0.9	1.2 (2014)	0.3
Marine protected areas (% of territorial waters)	Goal 14: Life below water	–	0.6	24.5
Terrestrial protected areas (% of total land area)	Goal 15: Life on land	–	7.6	15.1
Intentional homicides (per 100,000 people)	Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions	1.2	1.5 (2011)	1
Confidence in judiciary (% of respondents)	Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions	78 (2006)	66 (2013)	72
Corruption-perception index	Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions	N/A	33	68

Source: Sachs et al. (2020).

Table 4. Key strategies in dealing with sustainable development in Vietnam.

2004	Strategic orientation for Sustainable Development in Vietnam (Vietnam Agenda 21) (Decision No 153/2004/QĐ-TTg on July 17, 2004); National Strategy on environmental protection until 2010 and Orientation until 2020; Law on forest protection and development (amended); Resolution No. 41 on environmental protection in the period of national industrialization and modernization
2006	National Strategy on water resources until 2020; National Target Program on clean water and rural environmental hygiene 2006–2010; Vietnamese strategy on forestry development 2006–2020
2009	Strategy for cleaner industrial production until 2020; Vietnam strategic orientation for water-resources development; Law on natural resources tax; Scheme on environmental industries development
2012	Vietnam sustainable development strategy 2011–2020 (Decision 432/QĐ-TTg on April 12, 2012); Vietnam green-growth strategy 2011–2020 and vision until 2050; Strategy on clean technologies development
2015	The National Assembly's Resolution No. 98/2015/QH13 dated November 10, 2015 on the 2016 Socio-Economic Development Plan
2017	National Action Plan for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Vietnam (Decision No 622/QĐ-TTg on May 10, 2017)
2019	Roadmap to Implement Vietnam's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Decision 681/QĐ-TTg on June 4, 2019)
2020	The Government's Resolution No 136/NQ-CP on Sustainable Development (Main tasks and solution to areas under management of ministries and central authorities)

Source: Collected from the Government of Vietnam

gone to those organizations able to support and mobilize local communities and to monitor and assess the implementation of national sustainable development (Kissinger, Brockhaus, and Bush 2021). The Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam coordinates with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and other relevant ministries to carry out the national sustainable development strategy. However, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Defence oversee the national security agenda. The lack of coordination between these ministries results in challenges integrating the NTS agenda with the sustainable

development agenda. Furthermore, the strategic guidance remains procedural in scope and limited to a review of budget allocation and integration of implementation plans of the National Target Program on Climate Change, Environment Protection, and Human Security related to sustainable development (Government of Vietnam 2020).

However, Vietnam's sustainable development strategy lacks an integrated approach with NTS management such as the early warning of risks and disasters, so an appropriate response strategy can be developed. It is associated with intervention activities conducted before, during, and after an NTS

disaster to minimize damage. Sachs et al. (2020) showed that the adverse impact of COVID-19 on key SDG indicators is a setback for sustainable development in many countries. The failure of early identification and warning has contributed to the spread of the virus worldwide. Moreover, the emergence of cooperative efforts and responsive strategies in dealing with NTS threats plays an important role in meeting the SDGs (Sachs et al. 2020; FAO 2021).

In practice, the substantive integration of national sustainable development into the plans of different sectors depends on the hierarchical planning structure of the Vietnamese government. However, this process provides little opportunity to examine trade-offs and compromises between sectors, which is critical for implementing cross-sectoral integration of sustainable development with NTS. For example, a conflict between energy security and environmental security may arise in Vietnam (Nguyen 2015). The effects of policies to ensure environmental security can be undermined by the energy-development strategies implemented by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. In addition, the strategy also directs the Provincial People's Committees to develop provincial action plans to implement national sustainable development at the local level. However, the scope of integration intended through this locally coordinated action is limited (Kissinger, Brockhaus, and Bush 2021).

Vietnam is facing challenges that ultimately will negatively affect its sustainable development. Typical environmental problems include air, soil, and water pollution due to industrial activities, habitat fragmentation, degradation due to deforestation, rapid development of agriculture and aquaculture, and urbanization (World Bank 2020). Human security is under increasing pressure, facing ever more uncertainties due to ecosystem disruption. Vietnam's NTS issues threaten the survival and well-being of people, which weakens the social and environmental pillars of national sustainable development. Despite the issuance of many policies and strategies, the country's action plan for achieving the SDGs is still insufficient. This article thus seizes the opportunity to highlight the impact of NTS threats on sustainable development in Vietnam by selecting three types of NTS challenges as case studies that affect the three key pillars of sustainability. It argues that the country's SDGs will be difficult to achieve if the government does not focus on NTS management. As the NTS context shifted in 2011,¹ threats can be broadly categorized into the following areas: economic insecurity, environmental insecurity, and personal insecurity.

The Resolution of the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 2020 focused on ensuring human security as one of the most important duties of the government (Communist Party of Vietnam 2020). With the increase of various global insecurity threats, we point out that NTS challenges have detrimental and enduring impacts on people's security and development. Therefore, we recommend a broader approach to security that recognizes the significance of NTS threats and legitimizes its firm integration within Vietnam's development-policy agenda by highlighting the role of corruption, environmental, and health insecurity as major threats to NTS and the key to Vietnam's own survival described by the government (Communist Party of Vietnam 2020). These case studies can show that it is necessary to integrate the sustainable development strategy with the NTS agenda.

Nontraditional security threats in key pillars of Vietnam's sustainable development

Corruption as economic insecurity

Sustainability can be a cumulative process to ensure economic, social, and environmental sustainability (World Bank 2011) but these objectives can only be achieved if NTS management is effective in fighting complex corruption activities, and thus ensuring the stability and growth of the economic pillar of sustainable development. According to the United Nations (2018), the annual costs of global corruption are estimated to be US\$3.6 trillion, equivalent to over 5% of global GDP. Furthermore, estimates are that US\$16 billion could end world hunger, US\$8.5 billion could help eliminate malaria, and US\$26 billion would be an adequate amount for providing basic education for all children globally. Rising corruption causes an increase in inequality and poverty, which affects efforts toward achieving the SDGs and hinders development drives (Gupta, Davoodi, and Alonso-Terme 2002; Reinikka and Smith 2004; Rothstein 2011; Dridi 2014; Murshed and Ahmed 2018). These comparisons demonstrate how the amount of money lost through corruption could contribute to sustainable development.

In Vietnam, corruption has been a significant risk to NTS. In recent years, because of its negative impact on the country's sustainable social and economic development, the government has made numerous efforts to consolidate measures to combat corruption, but there are still opportunities for improvement considering that Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2020 (CPI) has placed Vietnam at 104 (highly corrupted) out of 180 countries (Transparency International 2020). As seen in Figure 2, the country has seen a

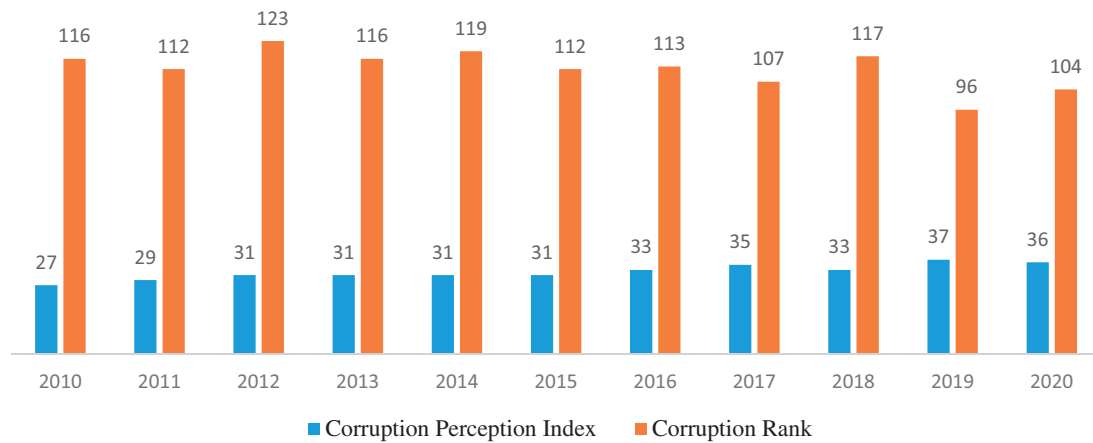


Figure 2. Corruption-perception index and corruption rank of Vietnam, 2010–2020. *Source:* Transparency International (2020), <https://towardstransparency.vn/en>.

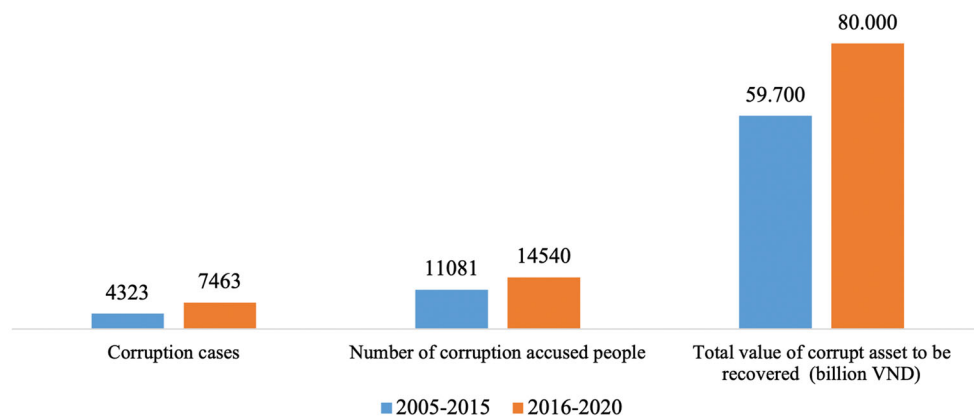


Figure 3. Cases and costs of corruption in Vietnam. *Source:* Supreme People's Procuracy of Vietnam (2020) (1 US\$ = 22,000 VND by the State Bank of Vietnam, 2020).

positive trend in CPI scores, especially in enhancing the investigation, prosecution, and trial of several grand corruption cases. However, the CPI 2020 score shows that Vietnam needs to step up its anti-corruption efforts more drastically to ensure substantial changes and reduce the prevalence of corruption.

According to the anti-corruption legal framework, investigations since 2017 have led to an unprecedented number of large-scale corruption cases in Vietnam. Figure 3 shows the increasing number of corruption cases and the number of government officials prosecuted in two periods, 2005–2015 and 2016–2020. The later period witnessed many high-ranking officials on trial for corruption. The cost of corruption to the economy increased from an estimated US\$2.72 billion between 2005 and 2015 to US\$3.48 billion between 2016 and 2020 (Supreme People's Procuracy of Vietnam 2020). Consequently, corruption has had destructive effects on economic growth and the economic pillar of Vietnam's sustainable development. It is considered one of the major NTS threats hindering Vietnam's achievement of the SDGs by 2030. Thus, addressing corruption has long been a top priority of Vietnam's NTS strategy (Communist Party of Vietnam 2020) and improvement in anti-corruption measures will reduce

economic insecurity threats and enhance capacity for sustainable development.

Pollution and ecological degradation as environmental insecurity

Sustainable development and environmental security have long been recognized as interrelated with each other and ineffectual management of environmental security is likely to cause an adverse impact on the SDGs. In Vietnam, economic reform since 1986 has brought relatively rapid economic growth, but it has come at a high environmental cost. Thus, Vietnam is currently coping with several serious environmental security challenges (Huong and Pathirana 2011; Hoang, Chu, and Tran 2017; World Bank 2019b; Bangalore et al. 2019; World Bank 2020). Although the government has issued many policies over the past nearly forty years, environmental problems, as detailed below, are widespread and are getting worse, threatening Vietnam's sustainable development.

Unsafety and insecurity because of deforestation, flood, and landslides

The most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes with very

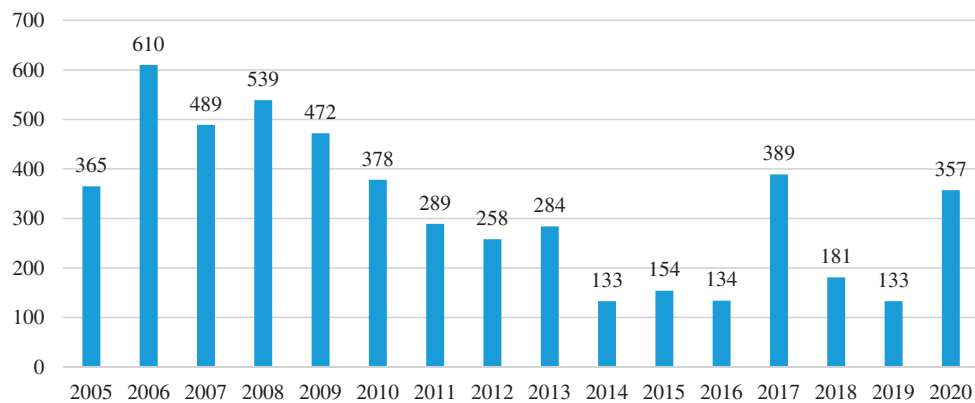


Figure 4. Total dead and missing due to flash floods and landslides in Vietnam, 2005–2020. Sources: Luu and von Meding (2019) and national disaster databases available at <http://www.desinventar.net/DesInventar/index.jsp>; rapid flood damage needs assessments (2016–2020) (<http://www.reliefweb.int/disaster>); Central Steering Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control.

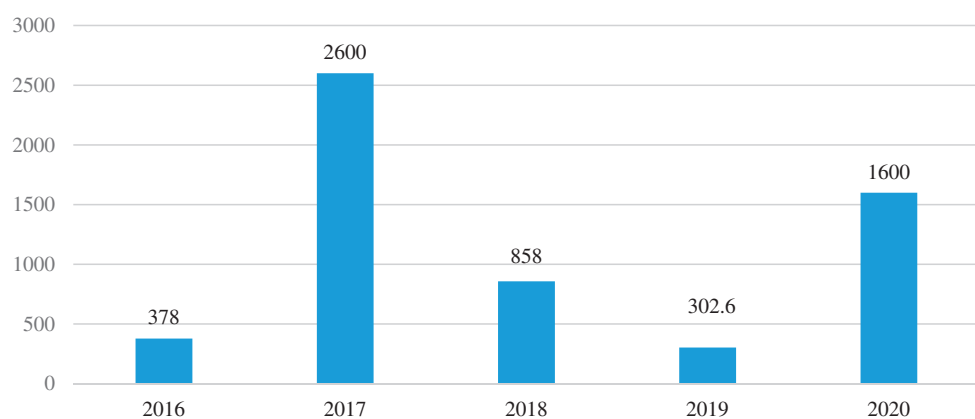


Figure 5. Cost of natural disasters (millions of US\$), 2016–2020. Source: Luu and von Meding (2019) and national disaster databases available at <http://www.desinventar.net/DesInventar/index.jsp>; rapid flood damage needs assessments (2016–2020) (<http://www.reliefweb.int/disaster>); Central Steering Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control.

high confidence that “risk related to sea-level rise (including erosion, flooding, and salinization) is expected to increase notably by the end of this century along all low-lying coasts in the absence of major additional adaptation efforts” (Syvitski et al. 2009; IPCC 2019). In addition, human activities, including deforestation, road construction, and an increasing number of small hydroelectric power plants for ensuring energy security, have destabilized the terrain, creating steeper slopes and fueling the risk of erosion and landslides. Deforestation has been a serious environmental threat in Vietnam over the last 60 years, making the country vulnerable to floods and other natural disasters. Over 27,260 cases of deforestation were reported annually in the country between 2011 and 2015 with approximately 2,640 hectares of forest destroyed each year.² This has had severe consequences for the Vietnamese people, especially in terms of an unacceptably high death toll and extensive damage (Figures 4 and 5). With over 70% of the population at risk from water-related natural disasters, it is one of the most hazard-prone countries in the East Asia and Pacific region (World Bank 2019b). To some extent, the high level of vulnerability is related to a lack of

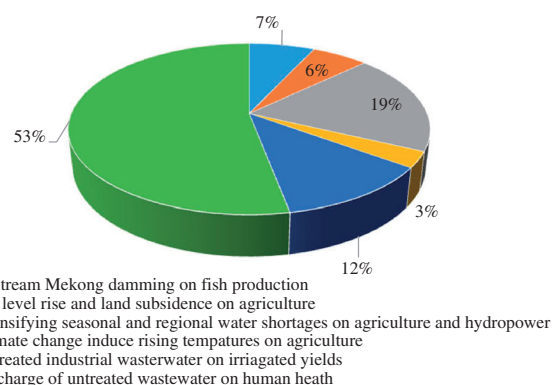


Figure 6. Potential economic impact of water insecurity threats. Source: World Bank (2019).

capacity to cope with natural hazards, as is common in developing countries. The number of fatalities is the most important indicator in risk assessment (Hoang et al. 2019).

Water pollution

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, rapid socio-economic growth in Vietnam since 1986 has caused water pollution across the country and the quality of water

resources appears to be declining (Hoang, Chu, and Tran 2017). Water pollution could reduce Vietnam's annual GDP by 6% (World Bank 2019b). The combination of flooding, worsening pollution, competition among sectors for water in the dry season, and other similar threats could cut the country's annual GDP by a further estimated 6% annually by the middle of the next decade (Figure 6). The impact of polluted water on human health alone could reduce annual GDP by 3.5% by impairing labor productivity and increasing spending on health. Furthermore, if this pollution is not addressed by 2030, the financial costs will be staggering for Vietnam – US\$12.4–18.6 million per day. Urban wastewater is expected to account for most effluents (60%) in the next 15 years, while industrial wastewater could follow with 25–28%, and rural wastewater with 12–15% (World Bank 2019b). Vietnam currently treats only 13% of its urban wastewater (ISETI 2016). Moreover, only 60% of households are connected to public water systems (World Bank 2019b). Consequently, water pollution tops the list of concerns among the Vietnamese public.

Air pollution

In Vietnam, air pollution is recognized as another major health risk. As seen in Table 5, exposure to air pollution, both ambient and household, increases the risk of contracting a severe disease such as lung cancer, stroke, heart disease, and chronic bronchitis, resulting in 60,000 premature deaths in the country each year (WHO 2020). Consequently, air pollution poses a significant health risk for the Vietnamese development process. Finer particles are particularly harmful to human health as they can penetrate the lungs and cardiovascular system, increasing the likelihood of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, and respiratory infections. Major sources of air pollution include

Table 5. Environment insecurity over 2010–2019.

Number of deaths and illnesses related to air pollution per year	60,000
Cost of air pollution in Vietnam (billions of US\$)	10.82–13.63
Cost of air pollution as % of Vietnam's GDP	4.45–5.64%

Source: WHO (2020).

Table 6. Leading causes of deaths in Vietnam during 1990–2019.

Ranking	1990	2017	2019
1	Lower respiratory infections	Stroke	Stroke
2	Hemorrhagic and other non-ischemic disease	Ischemic heart disease	Ischemic heart disease
3	Preterm-birth complications	Lung cancer	Diabetes
4	Congenital anomalies	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	COPD
5	Childhood diseases preventable by vaccine	Alzheimer's disease	Lung cancer
6	Tuberculosis	Diabetes	Road injuries
7	Diarrhea	Liver cirrhosis	Cirrhosis
8	Drowning	Road injuries	Chronic kidney disease
9	Iron-deficiency anemia	Lower respiratory infections	Lower respiratory infections
10	Unipolar depressive disorders	Tuberculosis	Alzheimer's disease

Source: Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation. Available: <http://healthdata.org/vietnam>.

transportation, industrial production, and thermal electricity generation through coal-fired plants. Tradeoffs between energy security based on thermal electricity and environmental security constitute a great concern for policy makers in Vietnam, as they result in challenges related to human safety and health (Hoang, Chu, and Tran 2017).

Health insecurity in Vietnam's social pillar

Health insecurity comprises threats to life and health and inadequate access to health services (UNDP 1994). There are different types of health threat including diseases, outbreaks, and accidents. The COVID-19 pandemic has become one of the biggest challenges facing countries in the 21st century (WHO 2021) and it has threatened the political stability and security of countries that are vulnerable to NTS (Caballero-Anthony 2016, 2020). In Vietnam, there have been as of mid-2022 over 10 million COVID-19 cases with over 43,000 deaths (Ministry of Health 2022). Table 6 shows the leading causes of death in Vietnam between 1990 and 2019, including cancer and heart-related diseases. Besides these illnesses, road injuries represent another leading cause of death and disability in Vietnam. The average annual death rate from road-traffic accidents has been approximately 18 per 100,000 population over the past five years (World Bank 2021).

Thus, non-communicable diseases, the COVID-19 pandemic, and traffic accidents constitute major threats to Vietnam's NTS and can undermine the developmental achievements of the country (Pham et al. 2018). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), Vietnam ranks 92 out of 185 nations internationally, 16 out of 46 nations in Asia, and 6 out of 11 nations in South East Asia in the number of cancer cases. The country ranks 50th worldwide (106 out of 100,000 people) in mortality rate for cancer. Serious environmental security challenges such as air and water pollution are among the primary reasons for the increasing cancer incidence in Vietnam in recent years (WHO 2020). Air pollution has been linked, among many other

diseases to lung disease and cancer and acute lower respiratory infection in children. The current trends in these risk factors are unfavorable and an NTS approach should be embraced by individuals and communities that includes legislative action and coordination among stakeholders as a key strategy in dealing with environmental and health NTS threats. These NTS threats can be securitized in the national security agenda through better commitments and coordination by political actors.

Conclusion

Rapid increases in the interconnectedness of people and places combined with a wide range of non-military NTS threats are changing the conditions in which people live and the way states operate. This is the first study to summarize NTS from different perspectives and to analyze an integrated approach for NTS management and sustainable development. It uses Vietnam as a case study to illustrate the effects of NTS threats on the three pillars of sustainability. The Vietnamese government has emphasized the importance of NTS management for sustainable development. The country's development success has been predicated on broad-based economic reforms and an inclusive growth agenda which has contributed to commendable achievements on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Nonetheless, Vietnam's ability to make progress on the remaining SDGs will be a challenge, particularly considering circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent years, the Vietnamese government has attached considerable importance to NTS studies and an increasing number of scholars are choosing this field as the focus for their research. For example, many important government documents have reiterated that NTS has become a serious issue for Vietnam. The Resolution of the 13th Party Congress in 2021 discusses that focusing on security and safety is a key factor in people's lives. Therefore, protecting national security is protecting human lives. Vietnam has finally realized that, under certain conditions, the threats raised by some NTS issues could be even more dangerous to society than those caused by traditional security concerns such as small and medium wars or regional conflicts. Therefore, to face these situations, researchers and policy makers should consider novel approaches. In this context, the management of NTS at the national, subnational, and corporate levels is an important and decisive factor in reconciling NTS risks. Although the tendency has been for NTS and sustainability to be treated separately in the literature, this work highlights implications for an

integrated management approach to ensure ongoing progress achieving the SDGs in Vietnam.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. Vietnam's first official mention of NTS was in the Communist Party's resolution of Congress XI in 2011.
2. See <https://vietnamnews.vn/environment/717394/deforestation-continues-to-rage-in-viet-nam.html>

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