



Developing and Implementing a National Action Plan for Child Helmet Use in Vietnam



Southern provincial representatives of the Department of Education and Training sign an agreement with the Ministry of Education and Training in Ho Chi Minh City

The Problem

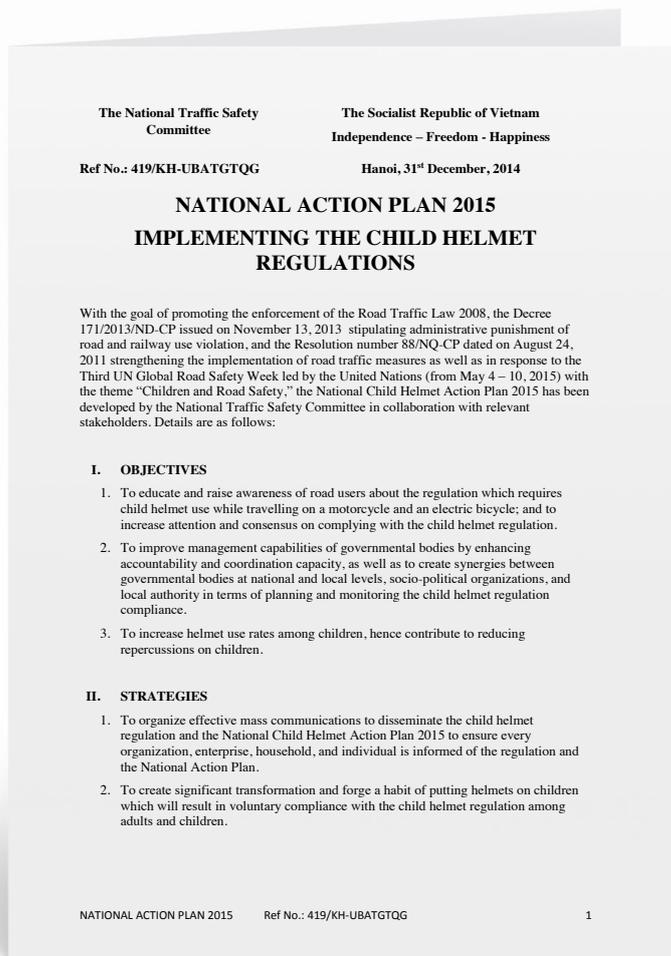
In Vietnam road crashes is the second leading cause of death among children aged 5 to 14. In a country where more than 80 percent of the population is younger than 50, loss of young lives not only means disaster for families and communities, but also places a significant economic burden on society. According to the WHO's most recent global road safety report, Vietnam loses 2.9 percent of its GDP annually to traffic crashes.

Not wearing helmets has historically been a major risk factor for motorcycle road users in Vietnam. Indeed, motorcycles account for 95% of registered vehicles in Vietnam and their users account for 75% of Vietnam's road traffic fatalities. Despite the fact that wearing a helmet has been shown to decrease the risk of death by 42 percent and injury by 69 percent, in the past helmet use rates by children and young people on motorcycles in Vietnam has been dangerously low.

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The Vietnamese government has issued a helmet safety law. Decree 34 requires children aged six and older to wear helmets. However, minimal compliance and lack of enforcement has meant that children continued to suffer from preventable fatalities and injuries as a result of road crashes. The AIP Foundation, a GRSP grantee with 16 years of experience in Vietnam, believed that they could help to increase child helmet use by working with the government to support better enforcement of, and compliance with, the law.

The Policy Challenge

In Vietnam, low rates of helmet use among children are attributable to several factors, including low enforcement and lack of public awareness about the law. The National Traffic Safety Committee (NTSC) is the agency in charge of enforcing road traffic laws in Vietnam. However, the NTSC faced a number of challenges, including lack of adequate resources and technical capacity in certain areas, such as media campaigns to build public awareness.

CHECKLIST: Developing and Implementing an Action Plan

1. **Decide whether an action plan is the best method to achieve your advocacy objectives.** An action plan is usually most effective when legislation is present but needs to be enforced or implemented, and a number of partners (governmental or non-governmental) must come to consensus about how to move forward with that policy.
2. **Conduct strategic planning prior to drafting, and ensure the plan includes a clear framework with contingencies, roles and responsibilities.** In addition to objectives and activities, the action plan should include a risk management strategy and anticipation of adjustments that might be needed during implementation. It should also lay out clearly areas of responsibility for various actors, agencies and groups.
3. **In both development and implementation, balance both persistence and flexibility.** The process requires and rewards determination, but don't be afraid to adjust the plans and messages to meet the needs of different stakeholders and target audiences.
4. **Identify and engage key champions at all stages of the process.** Spokespeople and champions are important during both development and implementation of the action plan to gain buy in and help meet the goals laid out in the plan. Ensure that you provide the champions with all the assistance, advice, and assurance that they need in a timely manner.
5. **Give it time.** A coordinated process takes time, so build into your schedule the opportunity to revise, incorporate, and shift direction when needed. Ensure that capable staff are available to negotiate, advise, and facilitate important discussions

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A workshop in An Giang to engage stakeholders on the National Action Plan

The barriers to child helmet use and enforce the law. Once complete, the plan set an ambitious goal to increase child helmet wearing to 80 percent nationally by the end of 2016 and laid out a framework of objectives and activities to achieve that goal.

In early 2014, the NTSC requested AIP Foundation to provide support for its efforts to lead the development and implementation of Vietnam's first-ever National Child Helmet Action Plan (NCHAP). The action plan would be a coordinated effort to guide enforcement of the law and increase public awareness about its requirements. AIP Foundation was well positioned to support the government. For three years, with support from various partners, they had carried out an integrated campaign on child helmets that included evidence-based public awareness communications, school-based helmet donation and discount vouchers, police enforcement, and capacity building for media and provincial governments that were developing individual action plans for helmet use. Despite success in this campaign, AIP Foundation's experience led them to conclude that a national initiative with centralized support and leadership would be required to stimulate widespread change.

However, AIP Foundation knew that developing and implementing the action plan would not be easy. It would require coordination of numerous partners from both government and civil society. Consensus could be complicated and take time. In addition, AIP Foundation would also need to respect and facilitate leadership by the NTSC, while at the same time promoting creativity and new approaches towards meeting objectives.

The Tactic

Despite these challenges, AIP Foundation viewed the action plan as a critical window of opportunity to provide input into a policy that would guide resource planning and set implementation priorities for the country's entire administrative system. Under the NTSC's leadership, they began to help form the necessary coalition and draft a plan that could effectively address the barriers to child helmet use and enforce the law. Once complete, the plan set an ambitious goal to achieve a transformational increase in the child helmet wearing rate nationally and laid out a framework of objectives and activities to achieve that goal.



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Global Road Safety Partnership secretariat

c/o International Federation
of Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies
P.O. Box 372
17, chemin des Crêts
CH-1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0) 22 730 42 49
Fax: +41 (0) 22 733 03 95

E-mail: grsp@ifrc.org
Website: www.grsproadsafety.org

However, drafting the plan was only the first step. To reach its goals, the coalition began to implement a range of activities across the country. AIP Foundation's work was focused on four key areas. First, they assisted the NTSC to launch a public awareness campaign, including development of the key message, visuals, media and communication plans – all shared with provinces – and seed funds to run the campaign in cities. Secondly, they developed a school manual issued to all primary schools across the country that consisted of best practices for promoting helmet use in schools. Thirdly, the group provided the National Traffic Police with assistance in engaging media, guiding and supervising implementation of enforcement activities in provinces. Fourth, AIP Foundation provided capacity building and resources for some provinces to implement their provincial action plans.

In addition to these key activities, AIP Foundation assisted the NTSC to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the action plan by measuring child helmet use in target provinces, evaluating the effectiveness of communications campaigns, and promoting knowledge exchange among the provinces.

The Wrap-Up

As an advocacy organization working in close cooperation with the government, AIP Foundation has been able to greatly improve the quality of the NCHAP and its subsequent implementation. Only one year later, results began to emerge. By April 2015, observed child helmet rates in major cities had risen significantly compared to March 2014, with Hanoi's rate rising from 23 percent to 69 percent, Da Nang's rate rising from 37% to 75%, and the rate in Ho Chi Minh City rising from 48 percent to 67 percent. AIP Foundation plans to continue its advocacy work by following up to ensure child helmet use is integrated into the NTSC annual plan and that further activities are continued, until all children on Vietnam's roads are wearing helmets.