



**REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE IN  
THREE VIETNAMESE NEWSPAPERS  
(INVESTMENT REVIEW, THANH NIEN  
AND LAO DONG) IN 2010**

**SUMMARY**



## 1. OBJECTIVES

Two objectives of the study:

- To determine the current situations and trends of environmental news in three national newspapers: the Thanh Nien, the Lao Dong, and the Investment Review in 2010.
- To provide information to be used to develop a training course to enhance the role of the media in raising public awareness and understanding of environmental issues.

## 2. METHODS

The study used a combination of analysis of environmental articles over a 12-month period and interviews with journalists and editors. Total of 988 articles from 886 issues published January 1-December 31, 2010 were reviewed:

Name	Frequency	No. of issues	No. of articles	No. of copies
The Thanh Nien	Daily	365	343	400,000
The Lao Dong	Daily, weekly	365	549	Daily: 80,000; Weekly: 50,000
The Investment Review	Weekly	156	96	40,000

These three newspapers were chosen because they are:

- Popular nation-wide newspapers.
- Large circulations with wide range of readership.
- Considered leaders in social and environmental reporting.

One editor and one journalist from the Investment Review, one journalist from the Thanh Nien, and two journalists from the Lao Dong were interviewed.

This study also incorporates results from the analysis of 146 articles in the Viet Nam News, an English language daily published in January-July 2010.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Environmental coverage

Environmental news has been recognized as a key topic to attract readers.

None of the three newspapers had a special environmental page or issue.

In all three newspapers, environmental articles are not printed in a fixed position so readers are unable to search for environmental news on particular pages.

### 3.2 Roles of journalists and editors

Newspapers with journalists who specialize in the environment have more and more diverse environmental news.

Editors play a decisive role in deciding what are published and what messages are transmitted. Improving the quality of environmental reporting therefore requires working with editors.

### 3.3 Geographic coverage

The distribution of journalists affects geographic coverage. With a nation-wide network of journalists, the Thanh Nien and the Lao Dong have the broadest coverage. By contrast, the Vietnam News has a heavy bias toward The Southern of Vietnam with 71% of articles from this region.

### 3.4 Content and reporting style

Most of the environmental news can be described as issue raising. There are little in-depth coverage, commentary, or opinion pieces about broader conditions and trends (Chart 1).

Newspapers tend to focus on specific environmental events and problems. Broader policy or governance issues and implications are not addressed. Journalists generally confine themselves to detecting problems; little effort is made to anticipate problems or highlight the links between broader socio-economic trends and environmental conditions.

### **3.5 Environmental themes**

Articles on urban and industrial pollution are more common than on forestry, biodiversity conservation, and other green issues. Unsurprisingly, this bias is particularly strong in the case of the Investment Review (Chart 2). This probably reflects high levels of public interest in issues with significant aesthetic, economic, and health impacts. The analysis of Vietnam News articles shows a similar pattern.

### **3.6 Information sources**

Generally speaking, newspapers report the information that the government provides them. This tendency is particularly marked for the Investment Review (73%) and the Lao Dong (67%) (Chart 3). There is no evidence of independent investigation or use of non-government information (e.g., NGOs).

## **4. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

### **4.1 Strengths**

- The Thanh Nien and the Investment Review recognize that environmental news attracts readers and that public interest in the environment is growing.
- All three newspapers have specialized journalists in charge of environmental news; the Investment Review and the Lao Dong plan to train journalists through participation in workshops and training events.
- Newspapers are considering introducing special payments to encourage journalists to uncover and report on environmental problems; the Thanh Nien has a dedicated budget for environmental stories.
- All three newspapers have special letter pages or “boxes” to encourage feedback and comments from readers to the editor.
- Journalists can access environmental information from MONRE/VEA press conferences and via a regular email.

### **4.2 Weaknesses**

- None of the newspapers has a special section or page dedicated to environmental issues.
- There are few stories based on site visits; most depend exclusively on information that government provides.
- Journalists have limited English language skills, which limits their ability to access non-Vietnamese information sources.
- Since environmental management is the responsibility of different ministries/agencies, there is no single comprehensive government information source.
- Limited coverage of environmental problems, notably marine and biodiversity, of relatively low public interest.
- There is competition for space and since it is hard to sell advertising for environmental news, there is little news coverage; banking and finance attract much more advertising.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

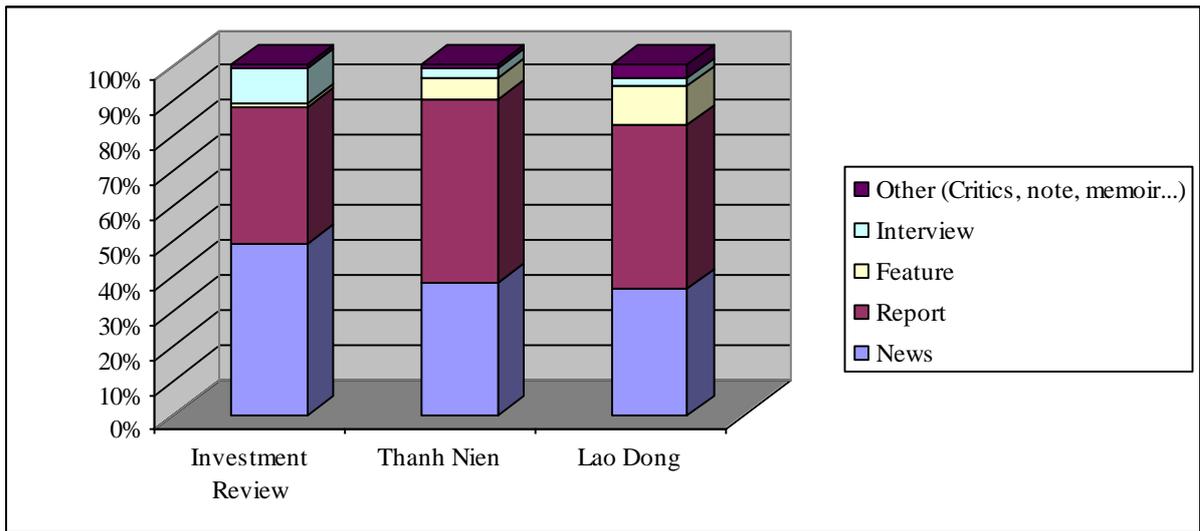
### **5.1 For newspapers**

- Establish an incentive system to encourage journalist to research and investigate environmental issues (rather than depend on what government tells them).
- Consider a specialized environmental news page to encourage environmental reporting and raise public interest.
- Organize short training courses to expose journalists and editors to new ideas, methods, data and information sources, etc.
- Dedicate more time to editing text, improving quality of photos and illustrations, formatting articles, etc. to make environmental stories more visually interesting.

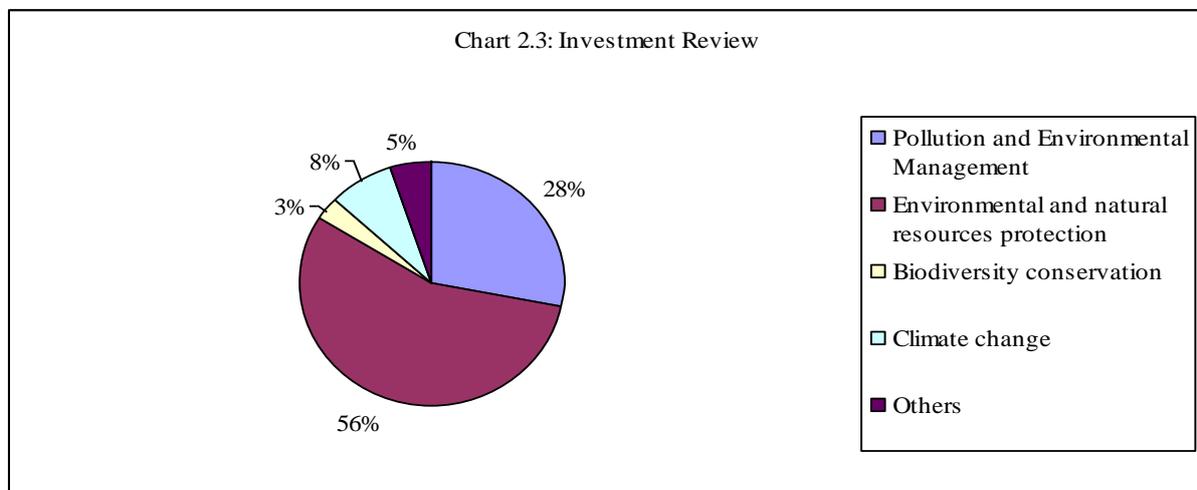
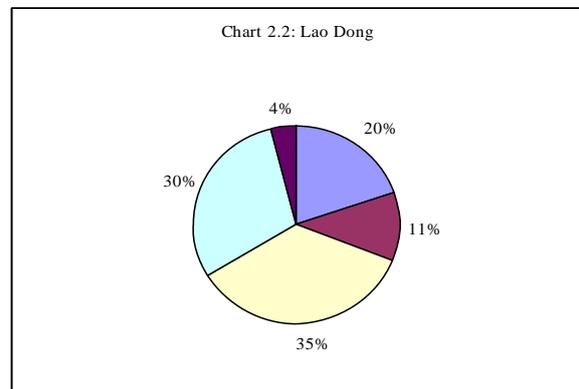
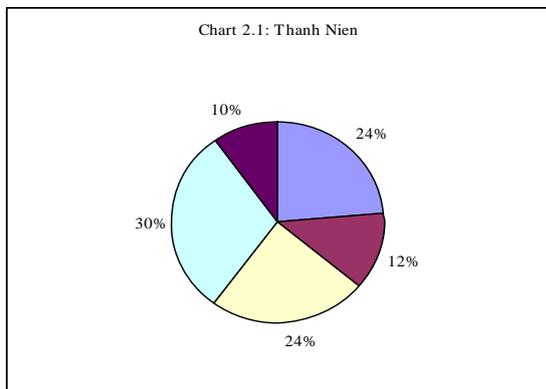
## 5.2 For government

- Improve procedures for providing information to the press. Specifically,
  - Provide background information to the press when asked to do so at very least by email or on web site; public list of contact people for further inquires;
  - Proactively share information with journalists on new and emerging issues;
  - Hold press conferences when there are politically sensitive environmental problems such as an oil spill or large-scale industrial pollution.
- Cooperate with newspapers to organize short training courses for journalists and editors to improve reporting capacity and build relationships between journalists and government staff;
- Promote problems, such as biodiversity loss, that receive relatively little coverage and encourage journalists to highlight weakness with state management;
- Encourage the establishment of existing networks of environmental journalists and links between journalists, scientists, managers, etc.

**Chart 1: Categories of reporting style**



**Chart 2: The environmental fields reported**



### Chart 3: Sources of information

