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Ã¢â?¬Å?The Vietnam Institute is set to play a key role in fostering regional collaborations by acting as a hub for knowledge exchange and partnershipsÃ¢â?¬Â•

October 31, 2024 | Opinion | By Ayesha Siddiqui

The University of Sydney Vietnam Institute, officially launched in June 2024, aims to enhance Vietnam's scientific capacity and contribute to the country's economic and social development. The Institute will foster multidisciplinary research across fields such as health, agriculture, arts, social sciences, business, and Net Zero initiatives. Australian researchers will collaborate closely with Vietnamese counterparts on vital projects, including advancing public health efforts, combating tuberculosis, developing technologies for breast cancer diagnosis, and exploring Vietnam's potential as a media innovation hub. In an exclusive interview, Institute Director Professor Thu-Anh Nguyen, a renowned infectious diseases and public health researcher, shares insights into how the Vietnam Institute will elevate the country's research landscape and drive impactful collaborations.



What was the rationale behind choosing Vietnam as the location for this institute, and how does the country’s academic and research landscape complement the University of Sydney’s goals?

Vietnam was chosen as the location for the Sydney Vietnam Institute (SVI) because of the strong, long-standing relationship between the University of Sydney and Vietnam. Since the 1990s, over 240 University of Sydney academics have visited Vietnam to work on important shared issues like climate change, health, food security, agricultural technology transformation, ageing populations, urban development and regional economic growth. This history of collaboration made Vietnam an ideal place to deepen academic ties.

The SVI's multidisciplinary research focuses on improving the well-being of communities in Vietnam and beyond through multidisciplinary collaboration. By fostering partnerships between Australian and Vietnamese researchers, the Institute promotes sustainable and mutually beneficial cooperation across all levels of higher education and research engagement.

How does the institute plan to address Vietnam's unique challenges in public health, such as the ongoing battle against tuberculosis and other infectious diseases?

Ten years ago, while conducting research at a tuberculosis hospital, I encountered a heartbreaking case: a two-year-old girl, the daughter of a patient with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (TB). This devastating diagnosis meant that conventional treatments were ineffective, and the patient would require a lengthy 24-month course of antibiotics with severe side effects. Despite Vietnam's high success rate in treating multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, only two out of three patients recover fully. The young girl's prognosis was particularly grim, as she had contracted the disease from her mother at a tender age. I could not bear to look into her innocent eyes.

At that time, we collaborated with the Vietnam National TB Program to conduct the V-QUIN trial, which investigated a preventive treatment regimen for individuals exposed to the potentially deadly multidrug-resistant tuberculosis bacteria. Today, the research has been completed, leading to new WHO guidelines on preventive treatment for TB household contacts, with an impact extending beyond Vietnam and Australia.

This is one of many examples of how our research could bring about impact and change people's lives. We have successfully developed interventions to prevent antimicrobial resistance at grassroots health facilities, enhanced the capacity to use evidence in decision-making for vaccination programmes, and improved the quality of care for people suffering from chronic lung diseases. Through partnerships with local researchers and healthcare providers, the SVI is helping to develop innovative solutions for public health challenges in Vietnam. We provide training programmes for Vietnamese healthcare workers and involve affected communities, like TB survivors, in designing health interventions. By working together, we aim to reduce the burden of TB and other infectious diseases, improving the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

What opportunities will the institute provide for Vietnamese students and researchers to engage in cutting-edge research and academic exchange?

The University of Sydney Vietnam Institute offers several opportunities for Vietnamese students and researchers. Vietnamese students and researchers can team up with Australian counterparts on joint research projects. For example, we have recently launched the SAPPHIRE project (Sydney Asia-Pacific Partnership for Health Innovations and Resilient Ecosystems), funded by DFAT. This project provides a platform for researchers from both countries to work together to tackle shared challenges in the region, such as the high burden of infectious diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and inadequate quality of care for chronic lung diseases.

We also organise conferences and workshops. These events give Vietnamese students and researchers a platform to present their work, network with peers, and learn from experts. For example, the annual Sydney Vietnam Innovation Symposium brings together researchers from both countries to share their latest findings in fields like healthcare, agriculture, and business.

SVI facilitates exchange programmes that allow Vietnamese students and researchers to visit Australian universities and research institutions. These programmes offer valuable experiences in different research environments and cultures. An example is the Australia Awards Fellowship programme on Health Security, which helps Vietnam tackle health challenges like antibiotic-resistant infections and food safety.

In what ways will the Vietnam Institute foster knowledge exchange between Australian and Vietnamese researchers to promote long-term benefits for both nations?

The University of Sydney Vietnam Institute prioritises joint research projects that address pressing needs on the ground, promote long-term impacts on health and well-being, and yield practical, scalable solutions applicable in real-world settings. Academic exchanges and fellowships promote researchers to share expertise and foster a collaborative environment. Additionally, we host international conferences and workshops that bring together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to discuss findings and share best practices. Our specialised training programmes will build capacity for

Vietnamese researchers and research institutions, equipping them with the latest skills and knowledge. By fostering a culture of research and innovation within the community, we encourage ongoing exploration and problem-solving beyond the initial project.

What role do you foresee the Vietnam Institute playing in shaping Vietnam's long-term educational or technological growth, especially in STEM fields?

Vietnam's Strategy for Science, Technology, and Innovation Development to 2030 emphasises the critical role of science and technology in driving economic growth, bolstering national competitiveness, and improving the quality of life. Within this context, the University of Sydney Vietnam Institute (SVI), with its established strengths and promising potential, is poised to be a key catalyst in shaping the future of education and technology in Vietnam. By partnering with international academic and research institutions, SVI will serve as a collaborative research hub, tackling global challenges through multidisciplinary research. It will facilitate the transfer of technology and knowledge, boosting the skills and capabilities of Vietnamese researchers. SVI will also attract and nurture scientific talent, contributing to Vietnam's advancement in science and technology. Additionally, it will provide expert advice on policy and system development, fostering an environment conducive to innovation.

What role do you see the Vietnam Institute playing in fostering regional collaborations across Southeast Asia, beyond Vietnam itself?

The Vietnam Institute is set to play a key role in fostering regional collaborations across Southeast Asia by acting as a hub for knowledge exchange and partnerships. By working with universities and research institutions throughout the region, the Institute can lead joint research projects, conferences, and workshops that tackle shared challenges like climate change, health issues, and economic development. For example, the SAPPHIRE project promotes regional collaboration on health innovations and resilient ecosystems in Vietnam, Cambodia, Fiji, and Kiribati. In September 2024, the Vietnamese and Cambodian components of this research were officially launched, bringing together leading collaborators from the two countries to begin the next phase of work and develop research plans for the coming three years (2024-2027).

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