



THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

Stories of
Twin Transition



As a federal enterprise, GIZ supports the German Government in achieving its goals in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development.

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Regina Ecker

Country Director

GIZ Vietnam

Preface

Twin Transition: Paving the way for innovation, equal opportunities and sustainable development

The threads of the tapestry of Vietnamese history have often been woven by the tireless hands of the country's women. From ancient heroines to modern trailblazers, Vietnamese women have proven time and again that their resilience, intellect, and determination know no limits. In *The Future is Female: Stories of Twin Transition*, we celebrate and honour twenty modern female pioneers who are shaping both the process of greening information and communications technology and the development of new green technology/ ICT4Green, known as Twin Transition. Hence, the women featured in this book are leading the way to a more sustainable and tech-savvy Vietnam.

Their stories showcase the remarkable potential for progress of women in all spheres of society. Coming from diverse backgrounds, they contribute their unique perspectives and talents to Vietnam's Twin Transition as policymakers, business leaders, educators, researchers, innovators, engineers, and digital experts. You will meet amazing women like Ms. Le Kim Hue, who is leading a team of all-female digital experts to leverage their expertise to pioneer innovations that are propelling Vietnam's digital transformation. And you will be impressed by Ms. Tran Kieu Anh, whose tireless advocacy for sustainable fashion is shaping an industry rooted in responsibility and creativity. All portrayed women have shattered ceilings, defied stereotypes, and forged new paths. What unites them beyond their professional success is their endeavour to achieve a meaningful social and ecological impact through their work.

This book is a product of female creativity. From the project staff who launched the initiative, to the authors who tell the stories, to the illustrator who brought them to life, only women were involved. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supported this work along with other measures through the Digital Transformation Centre Vietnam project, implemented by GIZ.

The Future is Female: Stories of Twin Transition is a testimony to the incredible power of women to effect change. By celebrating the achievements of Vietnamese women in green and digital transformation, the initiative seeks to encourage greater female participation in male-dominated fields such as tech. This is in line with Germany's feminist development

policy, which is advocating for gender equity, gender equality and striving for equal participation of women in political, economic, and social life. GIZ Vietnam, as an implementing agency, is committed to promoting this policy, for example, by supporting our Vietnamese partners in creating an environment that enables women to participate and succeed in innovation and technology development.

The selected stories are examples and proof that it is worthwhile for society to overcome barriers that hinder women's progress and to recognize and value any untapped female potential. They call on all of us to join the journey towards a better and fairer future in Vietnam and elsewhere.

Wishing you an enjoyable and inspiring read,
Yours,

Regina Ecker

**Country Director
GIZ Vietnam**

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



Tarek Hassan

Head of the Digital
Transformation Centre
Vietnam

Empowering women to power the Twin Transition

Across the world, women bear a disproportionate brunt of the economic impacts of climate change, given their involvement in roles more susceptible to its effects. Similarly, women are unduly affected by the digital divide, with 259 million more men than women using the Internet in 2022.¹

Even at the forefront of the green and digital job markets, inequality persists. In the tech sectors, women have historically been underrepresented. Meanwhile, in the green industries, the transition to green jobs poses a challenge for women, with only 62 women per 100 men considered as 'green talent' in 2021². In this light, it is not only imperative to bridge the digital divide and address climate change with a gender-transformative approach, but also to encourage further women's participation in the endeavour towards sustainable development.

At the core of the Twin Transition movement, the Digital Transformation Centre Vietnam embraces the challenge of integrating gender equity as a central theme in all our programmes. We have launched initiatives covering a range of topics, from green technology and Industry 4.0 to tech policies, with the aim of supporting Vietnamese SMEs in their journey towards sustainability and digitalization. Simultaneously, all our activities revolve around women and other marginalized communities, as we steadfastly adhere to the "Leave No One Behind" approach. From incubator to accelerator programmes, from awareness workshops to capacity-building trainings, we consistently maintain a commitment to achieving at least 50% women participation. Throughout the implementation of these activities, we have had the privilege of partnering with numerous female leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators, and experts who are spearheading the Twin Transition in Vietnam. The stories of many of these women are showcased in this book, awaiting your exploration.

We hope that *The Future is Female: Stories of Twin Transition* will inspire countless more women in Vietnam and worldwide to share their stories. Alongside other initiatives supported by the German Government and implemented via GIZ, we aim to encourage young girls to start scripting their own narratives and become the next wave of changemakers.

Discover more about DTC Vietnam on our website: Digital Transformation Center Vietnam | BMZ Digital.Global (bmz-digital.global)

Yours,

Tarek Hassan
Head of the Digital Transformation Centre Vietnam



¹ International Telecommunication Union. (2022). Measuring digital development: Facts and Figures 2022. ITU Publication.

² Yang, X., Sabyroza, L., & Karimova, Z. (2023, November 22). *Empowering Women as Central Asia Builds a Green Economy*. Asian Development Blog (adb.org). <https://blogs.adb.org/blog/empowering-women-central-asia-builds-green-economy>



VU THI THAI AN

CO-FOUNDER AND CEO OF TUBUDD

What would happen if everyone on Earth spoke the same language?

“The vision of a world where people communicate with each other from the heart, without any language barriers or geographical and cultural differences is a primordial natural wish.” How can we quickly integrate into a new life in an unfamiliar place? How can expatriates understand the culture and customs, and even live or work with local people naturally?

Tubudd is a platform connecting international tourists with local friends founded in 2017 in the UK by Vu Thi Thai An (Annie Vu) to help people from all over the world address these questions. Tubudd, inspired by the words Tour and Buddy, is not simply a platform providing travel services, but also a trusted companion when one sets foot in a strange foreign land.

Having gone through at least 4 start-ups, Annie considers Tubudd everything but a temporary and spontaneous idea. The seed for the start-up was silently sown when Annie was a 7-year-old girl, during her first trip to Hong Kong with her mother and other people from all over Vietnam. For the first time in her life, 7-year-old Annie heard so many regional dialects, met so many people and experienced so many cultural differences. That was the first culture shock that pushed Annie to step outside her own boundaries. Then, this seed began to sprout when Annie arrived in England to complete her master's degree programme.

With two empty hands and a tenacious entrepreneurial vision for Tubudd, Annie joined free start-up consulting sessions organised by the British Government to connect with experts in the same field. Throughout these sessions, she received a plethora of valuable advice that has remained with her until this day. **“What's to stop you from starting a business with just 1 Pound?”**

With this mindset, Annie started sharing and persuading her friends to each donate £1 to the

Tubudd project, and conducted a crowdfunding campaign from her own list of 5,000 Facebook friends. She persistently “knocked doors to doors” and came to chat with all potential patrons to discuss the Tubudd project.

“Be daring and fearless in the face of hardships; these are the necessities for venturing into the tourism industry because this is not a leisurely occupation.”

Returning to Vietnam to commence Tubudd was particularly difficult, as everything related to the start-up ecosystem was completely new to Annie. This was the period when Tubudd's “sapling” began to face the rigours of a start-up ecosystem that was still in its formative stage. Then, the COVID-19 epidemic hit, freezing the tourism industry for more than 2 years. The entire Tubudd team had to downsize and redefine their business orientation as the market had changed and would continue to change rapidly. Thanks to the methodical strategy of establishing the company's internal resources, as soon as the market reopened after the COVID-19 epidemic, Tubudd successfully raised capital and secured a seed investment from a Korean investment fund, The Ventures. This is Tubudd's 4th investor after 2 angel investors and Vietnam Silicon Valley when Tubudd first returned to Vietnam in 2018.

As a female entrepreneur, Annie understands that overtly or covertly, women are always under pressure to succeed in all aspects, both career and family-wise. The backbreaking pressure forces them to work more and later regret the best times of their youth given up in exchange for their career.

“I will choose the path I want to take. It doesn't have to be the one with everything. If you make a choice and are sure about it, then you should be 100% determined with that choice. Do not look back!”



DINH NGUYEN THIEN AN

CAREER SERVICES SPECIALIST, VIETNAMESE – GERMAN UNIVERSITY

Every new experience brings its own maturity and a greater clarity."

- Indira Gandhi

Dinh Nguyen Thien An, the student with the best thesis in the entire Faculty of Biotechnology, once planned to change majors when she discovered that beyond studying bacteria, her heart was drawn to fields related to human development. Shifting from biotechnology laboratory research, she decided to branch out to business management skills training, then switched to non-profit organisations, and is now involved in tertiary education. Sudden but intentional, these continuous turns all directed An to a role in connecting and serving the community. For example, the Digi Me project that An coordinated has connected hundreds of students majoring in information technology, communications and digital advertising to carry out sub-projects to support social organisations in Ho Chi Minh City and its neighbouring provinces.

After many twists and turns, An decided to return to the university environment to continue her contributions, as she had always remembered the time when she took the first steps on the journey of self-discovery and career exploration. This work also motivated An to seek approaches that would allow learners to not only be confident with the knowledge they had learned, but also be beneficial to others. Thanks to these approaches, students would be able to bridge the gap between theory and practice, helping them develop expertise and virtues to serve the community and society in the future. This, in turn, would foster the students' confidence in themselves and reveal the meaning of their time in school.

Choosing to relocate to Ben Cat, Binh Duong for the clean and green space here, every day at 7 AM, An boards the bus to the Vietnamese-German University to start a new day. Her working day begins with exchanging emails with business partners and students and providing career counselling sessions to students. In addition, An also provides support for student activities and projects, and organises meetings to plan activities to improve students' vocational

skills. The pedagogical spirit that An pursues and wishes to instil in her students is Community Engaged Learning. This is a learning model aimed at mastering and applying academic knowledge and skills in real-life scenarios in order to meet the needs of the community. In the broader context of Vietnam, small and medium-sized enterprises are in need of resources for development.

Serving the community has been a family tradition passed down through generations by her grandparents on both sides. Her maternal grandparents are well-known, beloved and respected throughout the whole region for their kindness and lifelong service to the community. Talking about her paternal grandfather, An ruminates: although he only stayed in school until the second grade, he still managed to research and figure out how to breed new varieties of rice and share them with local farmers in the area.

"Community work, for my grandparents' generation, is something very ordinary. They don't need anyone to remind them that they're doing good deeds. It is something as natural as breathing. What is left behind when they pass away will not be their business career or achievements, but their kindness and service to the community in the work they do every day."

It is now An's turn to continue the family tradition and the path of the teachers who supported her when she first came to the city to attend university. Through her work in career services, she aspires to offer support and guidance for younger generations, just as she received. Once wishing for a straightforward career path, An now values the bumps on her path toward maturity. She believes that, with the companionship of an experienced mentor who provides knowledge and mental support, young people can embark on their own journey to maturity and, along that journey, contribute their essence and competence to serving the community.



dòng
dòng

TRAN KIEU ANH

CO-FOUNDER – CEO OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION BRAND DONG DONG

“However bad life may seem, there is always something you can do, and succeed at. While there’s life, there is hope.”

- Stephen Hawking

The ability to transform seemingly useless objects into multifunctional, durable and chic products presents itself as an exciting challenge, as well as a crucial turning point in the UX design career of Tran Kieu Anh. At the age of 35, on a casual coffee date with two friends in the midst of her career crisis, she noticed countless plastic tarpaulins discarded hastily in piles of trash. Thinking about how several square metres of hiflex are disposed of after any events, Kieu Anh rolled up her sleeves, drafted the initial design and created the very first recycled bag made from used tarps. After hundreds and hundreds of adjustments and experimentations ever since, Dong Dong has become a sustainable fashion name that has successfully cultivated the interest and support from large brands such as Muji and Pizza 4P’s.

“Dong Dong around – Waste not an ounce”

Dong Dong is the pronunciation of “to go around” in a Southern Vietnamese accent. Instead of ending up buried and obsolete in landfills, used and scrap tarps are purchased by the Dong Dong team, cleansed with unharmed substances, designed and hand-sewed into creative and unique fashion products. The challenge for Dong Dong is that the designer cannot freely select their preferred material as they would when buying new raw fabrics. Depending on the canvas of tarp collected, Dong Dong will design spontaneously. On the other hand, tarpaulin is among the most tenacious and weatherproof materials, gracing the final products with sturdy functionality, water- and moisture-resistance, and high durability against weathering.

The business model of Dong Dong demonstrates the immense potential of circular fashion, especially from agricultural waste. According to GIZ, in 2022, the total acreage of nationwide shrimp farms

reached 737,000 hectares, of which the acreage in the Mekong Delta constituted 92.4%. Every year, each hectare of shrimp farm expends 1.7 – 2.6 metric tons of tarpaulin for pond lining. However, pond lining tarps have to be replaced after only a few years of use. As such, a huge quantity of tarps is discarded or, occasionally, repurposed for fishpond lining or rice drying; this means tarps have a short lifespan and insignificant value. With the support from GIZ, Dong Dong secured access to vast tarp sources for collection and recycling, and then successfully launched a collection in June 2023 after months of hard work.

Currently, to expand business and cater to the growing needs of young environmental enthusiasts, Dong Dong has relocated one of its workshops to a quiet alley on Bui Dinh Tuy Street in Ho Chi Minh City. Despite possessing a unique business concept with brimming potential for growth, Kieu Anh emphasizes that having an idea is not everything.

“Drawing up a business idea isn’t hard, and neither is realizing it. Having the perseverance and tenacity to relentlessly follow your dream, even through your worst and darkest days - that’s the hardest part of all.”

For Kieu Anh, the main challenge in her entrepreneurship is dealing with the expectation of rapid expansion. Sometimes, her satisfaction with the modest but steady pace of growth, especially given the unpredictable economic outlook, can attract harsh criticism: “That’s because I’m “just” a woman”. Nevertheless, Kieu Anh wishes for Dong Dong to be the place where she can do what she loves and takes pride in, where work-life balance exists and no employees have to work overtime. As a young mother, Kieu Anh believes that her entrepreneurial journey will be all the more memorable if she can watch her daughter grow up alongside Dong Dong.



NGUYEN THI NGOC DUNG

EXPERT IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM,
NATIONAL INNOVATION CENTRE

“When will the benefits for businesses align with the virtues in society?”

- Shibusawa Eiichi

When the word “Policy” is mentioned, what is your immediate reaction? Do you envision a daunting pile of jargonistic documents that leave you confused, not sure where to even begin and what actions to take? Developing policies is challenging, but quickly adopting these policies into daily life to resolve practical problems is an even greater challenge. This has been an exciting journey in Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Dung’s 30-year policy research career. Raised and educated in a family of Confucian traditions, she inherited from her father an innate sense of curiosity, a desire for discovery, and a knack for sharp and witty critical thinking.

Over 10 years ago, the concepts of startups, venture capital funds etc. were completely new to a country like Vietnam. At that time, the Government dispatched a group of experts, including Dung, to work, research and study in Silicon Valley, USA. Their mission was to identify a suitable model of an innovation ecosystem that would accelerate the policy-making process in Vietnam. On a business trip with high-ranking officials, with only a few hours to discuss en route, she delivered a concise explanation of the foundational concepts for entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation to senior decision-makers. During this time, the Government was searching for development directions to promote innovation in the business sector. Thanks to Dung’s advocacy, which gathered the understanding and support of leaderships, Project 844 (Supporting National Innovative Start-up Ecosystem to 2025) was born. The project laid a major foundation for developing an ecosystem for innovative startups in Vietnam. Ever since, numerous private and public innovation centres and start-up incubators have been established and have experienced rapid growth in recent years. These platforms incubate start-ups and contribute substantially to job creation and promotion of economic growth.

During Dung’s mission in the United States, a friend recommended to her the book “Tales of Rainy Night” by Shibusawa Eiichi, a Japanese

industrialist and one of the great founders of Japan during the Meiji Era. Shibusawa Eiichi’s life embodied a combination of culture, business ethics, patriotism, and commitment to social betterment. This book left a deep and long-lasting impact on her; perhaps it has instilled in her a sense of social responsibility, urging her to contribute more to the community. At the same time, she came to realize that Silicon Valley was home to vast human resources of young Vietnamese talents. If these exceptional individuals with valuable knowledge could be connected and incentivized to enter Vietnam’s labour market, they would become the driving force for the country’s innovation and technological development.

One of the most memorable achievements in Dung’s science diplomacy career was her conversation with senior Vietnamese leaders during their visit to Silicon Valley. Dung shared insights about the abundance of passionate human resources within the Vietnamese intellectual community in the United States, as well as their aspiration to serve their home country. Merely 4 months after this conversation, the Vietnamese Government invited 100 technology experts to Vietnam, from professionals from world-renowned technology corporations such as Google, Facebook, Tesla, Hitachi and Alcatel, to scientists and professors from prestigious universities worldwide, such as Stanford, Yale and Sorbonne; these experts are role models in the fields of science, technology and innovation. On this occasion, the Vietnam Innovation Network was established.

As a woman ahead of her time who has been studying informatics, programming, database management, and network administration since the 1990s, perhaps Dung’s most joyful epiphany was her discovery that: **“Oh, I don’t need to feel guilty when my husband shares housework with me.”** Letting go of outdated stereotypes about women’s roles is a true innovation, empowering women to confidently venture into and contribute more to activities traditionally dominated by men, such as Science and Policymaking.



PHAM LE GIANG

CEO OF NORSTAR SOLUTIONS

“When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it!”

- Paulo Coelho

“By 2025, there will be an estimated 250 million metric tons of plastic in the oceans. By 2040, it could rise to almost 700 million metric tons, equal to the total estimated weight of all fish in the ocean. Every year, the world receives 13 million metric tons of plastic waste. According to estimation, the quantities of plastic present in oceans are due to double in 10 years, triple in 20 years, and exceed the weight of all fish in every ocean on Earth in 30 years. Plastic is found in the deepest reaches of the oceans and it can take from 400 to 1,000 years to decompose”¹.

These pieces of information, published by the UK-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), might startle you. This was the reason that brought Pham Le Giang and other veteran experts in the field of aquaculture and wastewater treatment to Vietnam. They arrived in the country with a mission to transfer a land-based aquaculture model that utilizes the return-activated sludge (RAS) system and other modern technologies in the world, including AI, cloud solutions, automation, robotics, in which Norway is one of the leading countries.

Pham Le Giang, born in 1984 and an alumna of Hanoi – Amsterdam High School for the Gifted, currently serves as the CEO of the Norway-based company Norstar Solutions. Giang had the honour to be the only female Vietnamese leader to speak at a conference that brought together over 100 companies, top executives from across provinces and veteran experts in wastewater treatment from Norway and Europe. Despite her relatively young age, Giang’s presentation on her vision and application of modern technology in developing innovative solutions to waste management issues in the Oslo Fjord left a profound impression on her male counterparts. Giang shares:

“The age of AI and robotics is arriving, and I have been working with world leading experts in this field. My company will utilize these technologies to untie the tightest knots in aquaculture and wastewater management.”

6 years ago, to her own surprise, Giang was tasked with leading a project to build a land-based salmon farm in Vietnam. This project brought her back to

her homeland after many years residing in Norway. Witnessing the local farmers losing everything to climate change and noticing an enormous technological gap in aquaculture between Vietnam and Norway, Giang felt the urge to return and contribute her part to her motherland. Giang still recalls her first meeting with Dr. Le Thanh Luu, a renowned aquaculture professor in Vietnam, who exclaimed: “A young woman cannot possibly pull this off!” Yet, seeing the young woman’s determination and steadfastness as she roamed from the Southern seas to the Northern moorlands, to reach fish farms in the most remote and treacherous mountains, the professor was convinced to accompany her. The professor, along with a team of veteran aquaculture experts with 50-60 years of experience from Norway, laid the groundwork for training on technology transfer for the first 100 fish farms in Vietnam. Even though this was undeniably a risky and challenging journey, especially for a woman, it was also a testament to her strength and determination.

In the eyes of colleagues and partners, Giang is prominently characterized by her willingness to take risks, courage to face challenges, and an energetic and zealous attitude towards everything she does. During her late teens and early twenties, Giang was the “mastermind” behind several charity events. The young woman once journeyed to the distant highlands of Lung Cu, Dong Van, Quan Ba, and Meo Vac with truckloads of clothes, books and magazines, so that she herself could bring the gifts from generous patrons to the doorstep of every local resident. Giang’s vibrant youth entailed countless fundraising activities for Central Vietnam flood victims every monsoon season. Although years have passed and the young girl has reached an admirable position, Giang still stays true to the fervent heart of the 20-year-old girl that dared to dream, because dreaming is the first step to the realization of any ideal.

“It’s never too late to share and talk about your dream of shaping and changing the world. It’s never too silly and never too late, and don’t worry if you can’t realize that dream just yet. Remember that there are countless unforeseeable factors working in your favour to help make your dream come true!”

¹ Environmental Investigation Agency UK. (2022). *Connecting the Dots: Plastic pollution and the planetary emergency*. EIA UK. 2022-EIA-Report-Connecting-the-Dots-SPREADS.pdf (eia-international.org)



PHUNG THI THU HA

FOUNDER OF CIRCULAR FASHION STORES URBAN CIRCULAR SPACE
PROJECT COORDINATOR – UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

“The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough
for everyone’s greed.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Action against climate change has become a conundrum for many countries and businesses in many sectors. For Phung Thi Thu Ha, founder of the circular fashion stores Urban Circular Space, environmental protection actions can start from a daily place of visit: the wardrobe.

Fashion is a passion of all times for women. To meet the beauty needs of women on the planet, uncountable fashion companies were founded, turning fashion into one of the largest industries with an enormous workforce that is worth approximately 3 trillion dollars, constituting 2% of world’s GDP. Yet only few are aware that to create and deliver a piece of clothing to consumers, the amount of resources consumed is much greater than the amount of money spent to “cop” that outfit. According to the World Economic Forum, it takes about 2,700 litres of water to produce one shirt¹. This amount of water is enough for a person to drink at least 8 glasses of water every day for 3 and a half years.

As the project coordinator of the “Global Business and Human Rights Project” by UNDP, Ha shares:

“The fashion industry can be considered one of the industries that consume the most natural resources and labour. Therefore, a shirt forgotten in the closet is not only an unworn piece of clothing, but also a wastage of resources from the entire value chain that went into the creation of that shirt: from natural resources such as land and water, to the labour of those who grew cotton, weaved the fabrics, sewed the garment and brought it to us.”

Seeing the reality of so many beautiful clothes forgotten in wardrobes and the massive waste of resources, she created a space to receive and swap used clothes, and experiment with recycling to increase the lifespan of fashion products. Ha herself has also visited countries like Singapore, Japan, and Australia, and seen several sustainable and circular business models in the fashion industry, such as thrift shop, consignment, swap, rental, sustainable fashion using eco-friendly materials, or redesign. These products are just as attractive and satisfactory for customers as new fashion products. In fact, “circular fashion” is being enthusiastically embraced by a number of major fashion brands around the world in an effort to make fashion an industry that brings net benefits to people and the planet. Until August 2020, 86 fashion brands and retailers that represent 12.5% of the global fashion industry, including household brands such as ASOS, H&M, Nike, Inditex, Kering and Target, as well as renowned retailers such as Nudie Jeans, Reformation, Ganni – have signed the 2020 Circular Fashion System Commitment by Global Fashion Agenda.²

As a drop of water in the “circular” ocean, Urban Circular Space hopes that people will feel refreshed when standing in front of their wardrobe, and appreciate the invisible resources and the labour of skilful hands that were put into a piece of fabric before it was transformed into a fashionable outfit. Two small fashion stores on Ton That Tung Street, Hanoi and Pham Viet Chanh Apartment, Ho Chi Minh City are the realization of circular fashion and social responsibility in Ha’s very own way. Why can’t we start being “sustainable” right from our own wardrobe?

¹ Leurent, H., & Abbosh, O. (2018). Driving the sustainability of production systems with fourth industrial revolution innovation. In World Econ. Forum (p. 58).

² Agenda, G. F. (2020). Circular Fashion System Commitment.



NGUYEN THI THUY HANG

DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL, PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AGENCY, MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND INVESTMENT

"Strength is for service, not status."

- Israel Houghton

Human civilization is founded on negotiation. Negotiations at all scales help keep society functioning efficiently and with strength. Skilful negotiations help bring families together, bring profits to corporations, and help nations succeed on the global stage. Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang is known as the first person to participate in negotiations that opened Vietnam's public procurement market in trade agreements. The most memorable part of her career is participating in the negotiation team for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which paved the way for Vietnam to become the 7th official member of the CPTPP on January 14, 2019.

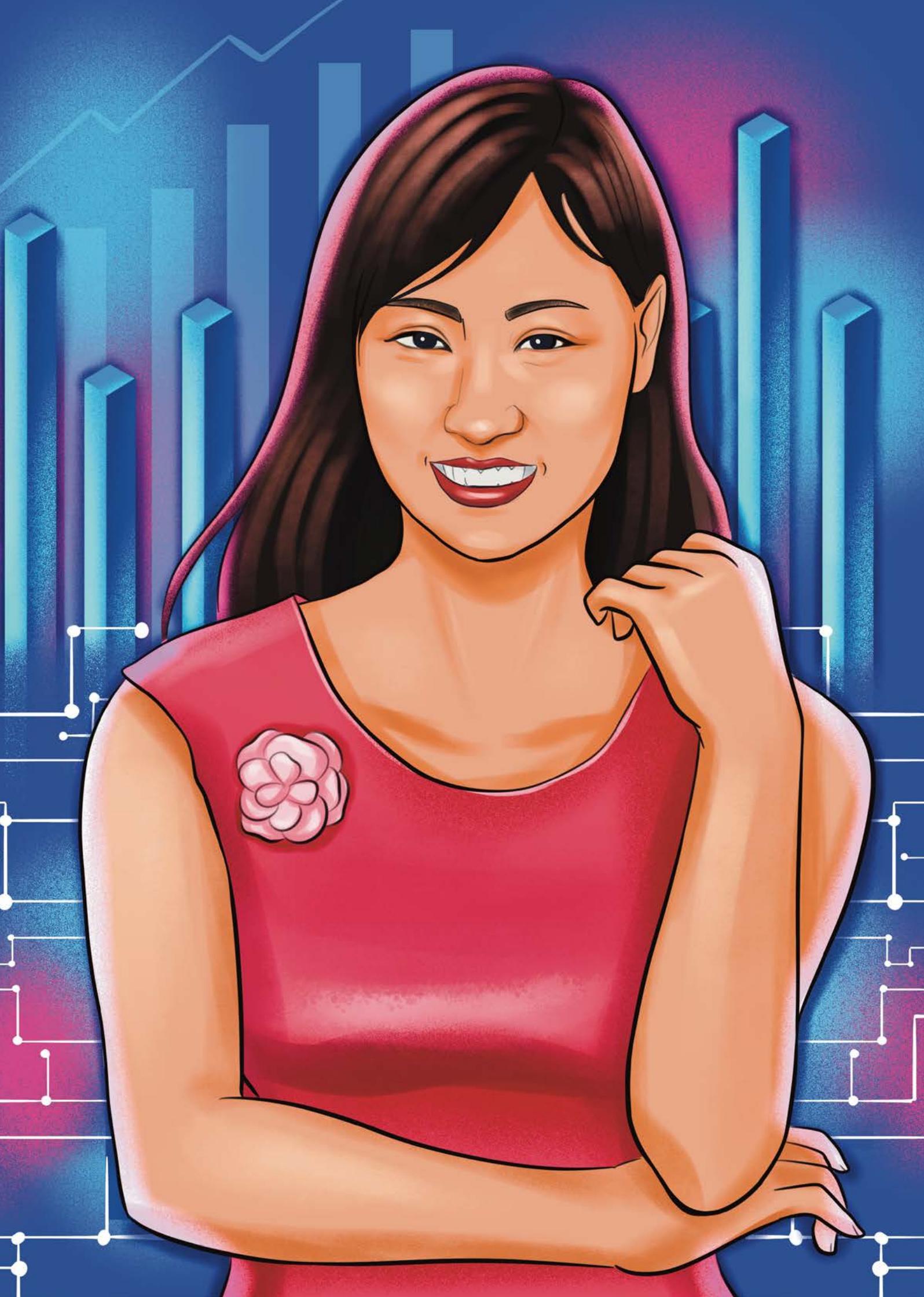
In a world of constant challenges, it is easy to underestimate our own abilities. When facing obstacles in life, we often wonder whether we have what it takes to overcome these challenges. Graduating from Hanoi Foreign Trade University, Hang could only imagine herself working in foreign trade-related roles such as those in import-export. Her leadership and negotiation abilities began to flourish after she was recruited and assigned to the Public Procurement Agency under the Ministry of Planning and Investment. At 25 years old, she found herself surrounded by talented leaders, who guided her with great enthusiasm and trust. She was given the opportunity to participate in drafting Vietnam's very first Bidding Law, which allowed her to learn and grow. Nearly 20 years later, she became one of the key members in drafting the Bidding Law of 2023. Twenty years of experience in both policy making and policy implementation, as well as

being a member of the Government's negotiation team, have refined her into a negotiator with improvisational ability, experience and knowledge, who is "unintimidated" by any partner at the negotiating table.

Not only did Hang successfully negotiate for the removal of regional trade barriers, she also directly managed the National Bidding Network System Project. This was an extraordinary effort to convert nearly 2,000 pages of policies into an online platform, which provided investors and contractors with a free, competitive, fair, open, efficient, comprehensive and rule-based bidding environment. Thanks to this platform, the process of completing bidding dossiers is now digitalised, making it more professional, convenient and time-efficient for all parties involved. In particular, statistics show that for a bidding package, contractors can now save on average 5 million VND in travel costs, documents purchase, per diem, photocopying, and authentication fees.

Accumulated over many years on the negotiating table, the ability to learn from the perspective of partners and opposing parties has helped Hang develop a bidding network system that is highly supportive and responsive to the needs of bidders. She has utilized her position and leadership capacity to bring great benefits to many people. Her admirable achievements come from one strength: the strength of service. She imparts her wisdom through the proverb:

"Your best effort reveals your true fate. Put your heart and soul into it, and the rest is destiny."



LE KIM HUE

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY – VIETNAM DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION (VDCA)

Slowing down doesn't mean losing opportunities; sometimes slowing down means you are better prepared to go further with a greater goal.

For 5 years (from 2017 to 2022), the Vietnam Digital Communications Association (VDCA) has witnessed and accompanied a special transformation journey of Vietnam: The Journey towards Digital Transformation. Le Kim Hue - one of three female leaders in the Standing Committee of VDCA – has led 10 female colleagues to jointly venture into this arduous journey since the very first day of digital transformation in Vietnam.

This group of "explorers" was fearless in the face of adversities and challenges, and was wholeheartedly committed to finding appropriate approaches and solutions to digital transformation. Thereby, they have helped several large telecommunications corporations, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises, find success on their path to digital transformation. Hue reveals:

"The inspiration behind my passion for science started with the movie Hidden Figures, directed by Theodore Melfi, based on a true event. The film documents the journey of women who overcame all barriers of racism and gender discrimination to become heroines in the space industry. Inspirational women like Katherine G. Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer) and Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe) have always motivated me on this uphill journey."

Despite being one of the first contributors to the digital transformation process in Vietnam in the past decade, Hue believes this is just the beginning. Instead of encouraging businesses to invest in the latest technology updates and implement digital transformation in the chase after global trends, Hue advised organisations to adopt an extensive, strategic and comprehensive approach to digital transformation. This serves as the foundation on which they can succeed, achieve green transformation, and develop sustainably.

This is not simply a technology battle or race, but rather a journey to transform the awareness and habits of entire organisations.

VDCA's strategic approach to widespread impact is by accompanying and influencing prominent corporations in the industry, thereby creating a vertical wave effect in the industry that inspires other businesses to jointly transform. Hue also plays a vital role in connecting and mobilising resources between large businesses and small businesses with limited financial and human resources. Digital transformation is critical for not only technology corporations and companies, but also companies operating in other industries. For example, with Blusaigon, a high-end lacquerware company using mother-of-pearl inlay, Hue has been a guiding presence and a source of inspiration to the company through sharing the meaningfulness of the work she pursues. Digital transformation presents an opportunity for national brands to reach beyond borders and share the essence of the Vietnamese people with the world.

Moving forward or settling down - this has always been a concern for many female entrepreneurs. At 25, Hue once wrestled with this dilemma when her mother advised her to call it quits and start a family instead of pursuing her Ph.D. studies in Switzerland. She got married at 31 and saw her decision to stay in Vietnam as just a temporary pause on her long journey. At the age of 38, when thinking about her cherished dream of studying in Switzerland, Hue is more than ready for this educational opportunity now that she has acquired a wealth of valuable experience and has unwavering support and encouragement from her husband.

"I believe that when women are true to themselves, love themselves, and appreciate their feminine elegance, they will attain all the good things in life: happy families, meaningful work, and opportunities to contribute to greater purposes."



LY THI THUY HUONG

GREEN BUILDING AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY EXPERT AT VILANDCO

"Whatever good things we build end up building us."

- Jim Rohn

As a habit, every Saturday afternoon, Ly Thi Thuy Huong returns to her parents' house - a small apartment in the teachers' dormitory of Nong Lam University in Thu Duc district - where she grew up and matured in the love of her family.

With a background in Interior Architecture, after a decade of practice, Huong has gained extensive experience with buildings of different types and scales, in both design and construction phases. In 2010, recognizing that the field of Green Building and Energy-Efficient Building would be the trend of the future, Huong decided to challenge herself by transitioning to energy efficiency consulting, which raised eyebrows among her friends and colleagues. Even her teacher, a renowned Architect with whom she had had the opportunity to collaborate on multiple projects, expressed reservations and doubts about her decision. However, after encountering Huong at the Green Building seminars that she organised with other architects, and witnessing the positive changes in his former student, the teacher acknowledged her decision with encouragement: **"You made the right choice. Green Building will become an inevitable trend."**

Since her starting point was not in electromechanical engineering, Huong faced her biggest challenge in the field of energy efficiency consulting. With her main profession as an Energy Audit for the construction sector, she had to learn everything about electromechanics from scratch. From books, research papers and colleagues, she gradually uncovered the principles of operating electromechanical equipment and systems in buildings. Being naturally passionate about her profession, Huong unhesitatingly identifies herself as a woman of work. Her typical workday

spans from early morning until late at night. Beyond her professional commitments, she always strives to make time for her family and maintain a reasonable work-life balance.

"When handling difficult and slightly unusual projects, I find them rather interesting and challenging and always strive to solve them to the best of my ability. Others can only see what I do if I do it well. So I have to go all out and spare no effort."

Green building consulting, according to Huong, if implemented early from the design phase, will maximize cost efficiency, save energy and water, and increase operational efficiency for the entire project. In Vietnam, popular types of Green Building certifications are: LEED (USA), LOTUS (Vietnam), EDGE (IFC - World Bank Group), of which LEED is the most prevalent. With Green Building certification, businesses acquire numerous leverages in reducing operational costs, improving users' well-being and comfort, increasing export opportunities (in the case of manufacturers), as well as enhancing brand reputation for sustainable development.

According to the Ministry of Construction, as of June 2023, the number of green buildings in Vietnam only stands around 300, covering a gross floor area of over 7.2 million square metres¹. This figure is modest compared to the total number of construction projects and their potential for environmental sustainability. The presence of experts like Huong plays a central role in promoting the transition to green buildings and energy-efficient buildings. This is a challenge that Huong always confronts head-on with eagerness and enthusiasm.

¹ Thang, T. (2023, September 29). Việt Nam có khoảng 7.2 triệu m² sàn xây dựng công trình xanh. *Government News*. <https://baoc-hinhphu.vn/viet-nam-co-khoang-72-trieu-m2-san-xay-dung-cong-trinh-xanh-10223092909214763.htm>



LE KIM

FOUNDER AND CEO OF CL2B (CLOSED LOOP TO BALANCE)

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

- Thomas Edison

Developing a circular economy has become a global trend, especially when considering the world's limited resources. The linear economic model has imprinted an outdated economic mindset in resource exploitation, production, and post-consumer waste disposal, which led to the creation of an overwhelming amount of waste; Circular economy emphasizes the management and regeneration of resources in a closed loop, to avoid creating excessive waste. CL2B, short for Closed loop to balance, founded by Le Kim at the end of 2019, is one of the strategic and management consulting companies to support Southeast Asian businesses in the transition towards circular business models. The letter "B" in CL2B stands for Balance:

"An economy, much like a person, has its own characteristics. This "person" will live sustainably when an equilibrium is reached. In this equilibrium, everyone lives happily in harmony, and the environment meets no harm in its coexistence with mankind."

Despite being just under 5 years old, CL2B has been selected to partner with multiple big names, such as H&M, TAL Apparel, IKEA, GIZ and IDH, in their sustainable development activities. CL2B chose to focus on two industries: packaging and textiles, due to their relatively short product life cycle. These products also expend a significant amount of natural resources to produce, bringing about substantial environmental impact and pressure on the largely underdeveloped waste management systems in Southeast Asian countries. In the realm of textiles, CL2B accompanies textile brands and manufacturers to develop strategies for solid waste reduction and transition towards zero waste. Particularly, CL2B supports the development of a closed supply chain for fabric scraps - a major waste stream of the Vietnamese textile industry. For the packaging industry, taking on the challenge of plastic packaging, CL2B adopts an impact minimization approach right from the design and material selection stage. This approach helps

reduce EPR costs¹ and design a post-consumer waste recovery system for brands.

From the ages of 18 to 20, Kim switched between many different schools. During this period, Kim always wondered what she truly aspired to learn, and what the intrinsic value of education was.

"Upon my graduation from university, I realized I hadn't accumulated much knowledge, and wondered if it was because I lacked the capacity to fully comprehend that body of knowledge. This motivated me to enrol in a small course at Oxford - a prestigious university in England - and study under leading professors in Psychology and Behavioral Economics. After those classes, for which I had to wake up early and head out at 5 AM in London to attend in Oxford, I was overcome with joy upon the realization that the value of education lay in the companionship of the educator and the resolve of the learner."

Originating from a working-class family in Vinh (Nghe An), Kim considers the person who had the deepest influence on her personality to be her father. He is always steadfast in his life with principles of willingness to give, honesty, kindness and altruism. The way he conscientiously treats his family, relatives and business partners had a great impact on Kim's personal development:

"You can do anything. But never let someone else's actions decide who you are. Always keep in mind the benefits for others, whether they anticipate it or not."

For Kim, although success is important, she also helps her customers understand and overcome the pressure of success. Kim wants others to realize that the transition to a circular economy model is an ongoing journey of learning and experimentation. In the field of innovation, perhaps "failures" should be encouraged as an inevitable step towards success. Bold and decisive experiments are critical for businesses to discover the breakthroughs that propel them to new heights. And perhaps more kindness and tolerance of each other should be fostered as we work and cooperate towards a sustainable future.

¹ EPR is short for Extended Producers Responsibility.



DUONG THI KIM LIEN

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS INNOVATION ACCELERATOR

"A loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge."

- Thomas Carlyle

Growing up in a family where both parents were forestry officials, Lien's childhood was filled with days of "wandering" across provinces. Following her parents' footsteps to plant forests in Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Phu Tho... since she was a child, Lien has witnessed and experienced a lot. Particularly, after seeing the lives of ethnic minority women, she was filled with insurmountable empathy. Lien recalls: "Women in the mountainous countryside live lives full of adversities. While they do everything, their husbands only come home to drink. Everything falls on the woman's back, from farm work to child rearing."

Claiming that she is predestined to female support work, ever since 2019, Lien has worked as a coordinator of a nationwide project to support the advancement of women's entrepreneurship under the Ministry of Planning and Investment, titled "Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship: Creating a Gender-Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (CWE)". In addition, she is also the Head Advisor of 10 local consultants from 10 ASEAN countries in a project to enhance digital economy participation of ASEAN women, implemented by the Asia-Pacific Women's Information Network Centre (APWINC). The network currently has more than 230 experts from 10 ASEAN countries.

"I focus on women because I believe that in each family, the woman plays the main role in caregiving and child rearing. When our support influences one woman, we indirectly impact at least 3 people (the woman, the husband, and the child). That's why I choose to support women."

Lien still remembers the year 1988 when she dropped out of University of Hanoi to begin working. Her career took off, and after only a few months of working, she bought her first bicycle and then her first scooter - things that, at the time, were considered a luxury. After 4 years, Lien considered herself a successful entrepreneur. However, following her mother's advice, she still returned to work in the public sector, all the while

carrying the mindset of an entrepreneur within her. Thanks to that mindset, she continuously took progressive initiatives and relentlessly strived to become one of the 29 officials involved in the pilot administrative reforms of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development from 2003 to 2005. Many years later, this same dynamic and innovative entrepreneurial mindset prompted her to leave the Ministry, with the ambition to make a more significant contribution elsewhere.

Lien takes immense pride in always being a pioneer in project design. In 2011, she boldly pursued a doctorate in Business Administration with the research topic "Innovation practices in small and medium-sized enterprises in Vietnam". After successfully defending her thesis, Lien could be considered the first Ph.D. with in-depth research on innovation in Vietnam at that time. She believes that innovation entails the collective efforts of many stakeholders, in addition to a robust innovation support ecosystem of like-minded people.

Despite challenging periods of strenuous work up to 20 hours a day, Lien still portioned from 5 minutes to 1 hour to study every day; Just 5 minutes to learn one new thing a day has helped change her life from a college dropout to the Ph.D. she is today. These days, she has been devoting herself to designing and implementing an online training system on e-commerce skills for 20,000 women from now until the end of 2026. The concept consists of short video modules lasting 3 to 5 minutes, promising to help women, especially those in rural areas and traditional craft villages that have limited exposure to e-commerce, to study anytime, anywhere with ease.

"First, women should learn to love themselves. When you love yourself, you will respect yourself, and in turn create new values for yourself and become motivated to lead meaningful lives. I am always cheerful and positive, and I truly believe that this energy will extend to those around me, making them happy and filling their lives with positive energy."



TRAN THI HONG MINH

PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT (CIEM)

"Society lives by faith, and develops by science."

- Henri-Frédéric Amiel, Swiss philosopher and poet

The process of Twin Transition – digital transformation and green transformation – has been underway around the world. Ph.D. Tran Thi Hong Minh, President of the Central Institute of Economic Management (CIEM), considers this process a journey towards restoring faith among fellow humans, as well as between humanity and nature. Faith not only helps nurture innovations, but also connect everyone together to jointly preserve values for a brighter future, including the environment. Dr. Hong Minh refers to this as "social capital."

"Social capital means the solidarity and connection between people. With faith, people will become closer to one another and join hands in greater unity, thus giving rise to social capital. Thanks to social capital, we can achieve results faster, with more substance and with broader impact."

Dr. Hong Minh's personality and career entwine at the intersection of two worlds: a life in harmony with nature, and an aspiration for scientific progress. Becoming a mother at the age of 21 and having a pair of twins 7 years later, the female researcher had to relentlessly exert herself within the first years of her career to cultivate and practice her research skills while simultaneously being a full-time caretaker of her family. Commencing her work at CIEM in 1992, Dr. Hong Minh has continuously made all-out efforts ever since. For 9 years, she had held different positions at the Ministry of Planning and Investment (Director-General and Chairman of the Ministry's Trade Union; Director-General of the Business Registration Agency; Director of the National Centre for Socio-Economic Information and Forecast) before becoming President of CIEM in 2019. She also experienced the joy and pride of seeing her children grow into wonderful people. She has passed on to her children the

family traditions and values that she inherited from her own parents: the ability to have faith and share everything possible with everyone.

Many people will feel satisfied when they have made their career and raised their children. For Dr. Hong Minh, this "twin" achievement motivated her to strive further for innovation and contribution to the work of the Government and the Ministry of Planning and Investment. Assuming the leading role of CIEM when the Institute was already well-known for its works on international economic integration, market reform, and enterprise development, the female President still built her own reputation for concrete policy proposals to develop new economic models. Under the leadership of Dr. Hong Minh, CIEM has identified a new economic space that encompasses "unconventional" resources such as time, data etc., organised production activities on digital platforms, and designed circular business activity. As a firm believer of green transition to preserve the environment for future generations, she has diligently advocated circular economy-oriented development to motivate both businesses and workers to transform together.

"With their creative, ingenious and entrepreneurial advantages, women have ample opportunities from circular economy and creative economy. We often call for women empowerment. In my opinion, however, women themselves must have faith in their own ideas, in their actions, and in the prospect of success!"

Dr. Hong Minh's faith lies in "the heart". Having donated blood 6 times, she trusts that every little action plays its own part in spreading goodness in society. Every organisation she has worked for possesses the DNA of Faith that binds its members together to share and serve greater purposes.



DINH THUY PHUONG

CO-FOUNDER OF MANA.ST - REED-BASED BIO CIRCULAR GREEN ECOSYSTEM

"The forgiving state of mind is a magnetic power for attracting good."

- Catherine Ponder

The day that forever changed Dinh Thuy Phuong's life was the day Phuong accepted an invitation to attend a special graduation ceremony at a rehabilitation centre. The expression of a wife when embracing her husband, who was revitalized from the verge of death after years of addiction, along with the joyous tears of children who regained a father, left a profound impression on her. The sight of families being freed from endless suffering when the father escaped from drug dependence, recovered his health and his motivation to live, awakened in Phuong a sincere desire: perhaps her contribution is needed here.

Mana.st was conceived from the intention of building a free vocational training and cultural enrichment programme for recovering addicts in the process of restoring their health and mental capacity at rehabilitation centres; these individuals are then recruited into the production chain to make environmentally friendly products from the core material of reed. Reeds have always been considered an agricultural waste welcomed by none. People often say to each other: "In the past, if reeds grew, we wouldn't have known what to use them for. Even when cut, uprooted, dug up, or bored into, they would still grow, especially after just one rain. There was no other way than cutting down and burning the reeds to protect crops."

In addition to improving land resources, reeds also have the ability to reduce carbon and methane in both the air and water. From roots to tips, there is no part of the reed that is worthless. Its roots provide both herbal reed tea and macrobiotic reed milk tea; its stem produces reed straws; its leaves are used to make reed jelly, reed yoghurt, reed flan, reed ice cream and reed pho noodles; its flowers are made into reed brooms and fine art decorations. Even unused waste products from reeds can be processed into bioenergy pellets. Thanks to the ability to research and apply a variety of inventive services and products from reeds, Mana.st received Outstanding Best Community Project of the Year at the International Excellence Awards 2022. Moreover, the Reed-based Bio Circular Green Ecosystem has also been recognized by UNDP - Vietnam Circular Economy as one of the prominent circular economy models in Vietnam.

With an unwavering belief in the power of education and altruism, Phuong realized that those with a history of substance abuse all have great hidden vitality. Their lives may have been full of misfortunes, but with proper reorientation, they will lead useful and financially independent lives as the fruits of their honest labour. The working environment at Mana.st affords them the opportunity to rebuild their lives and find peace of mind. They will become open and brimmed with positive energy and will move on from their troubled past and into the future with replenished confidence. This innovative and humane business model, based on the power of altruism, not only won major scientific awards in the region but also won Phuong the title "Woman of Global Influence" in August 2023 in the Global Excellence Assembly system.

Phuong personally loves a bird described in the Bible: the phoenix. The phoenix rises from the ashes and with each resurrection, it always becomes more beautiful than ever before. Similar to the phoenix, the success achieved with Mana.st has been tested and nurtured throughout several periods of Phuong's life when everything seemed on the brink of collapse, especially in 2017 when she went bankrupt for the second time. Within that very same year, her father was diagnosed with terminal cancer and passed away. Phuong accompanied her mother through the difficult period after her father passed away. To this day, she has received many commendable rewards for her tireless efforts, in the same way that reeds from the wastelands of the Red River and Tich River have found their way into the global market.

To Phuong, to overcome any hardships, flexibility is of utmost importance.

"Learn to mimic the reed, like how it yields to the wind. The reed can move and bend with such suppleness and agility, and the strength of the reed does not lie in the "muscles". Rather, its strength takes root in tenderness and flexibility. For a female entrepreneur, countless adversities await, so take advantage of your femininity."



NGUYEN KIEU LAN PHUONG

PH.D., LECTURER AT NGUYEN TAT THANH UNIVERSITY
CIRCULAR ECONOMY EXPERT, INSTITUTE FOR CIRCULAR ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT,
HCMC NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

“People are influenced most by those they trust,
admire and believe care for them.”

- Brendon Burchard

Upon her return to Vietnam in 2021 after graduating in Taiwan with a Ph.D. in environmental management, Nguyen Kieu Lan Phuong felt completely in her element as the momentum of circular economy research began to build. For the first time, this concept was introduced in the 2020 Environmental Protection Law. To present, numerous circular economy models have been simultaneously integrated into programs and projects at both central to local levels. Although businesses are still taking cautious steps while waiting for official government support mechanisms, in terms of awareness, everyone seems prepared for collective changes.

Phuong believes that data is a crucial element that needs to be constructed, utilized and analyzed in the transition towards a circular economy. This was also Phuong's Ph.D. research topic during her time residing and studying in Taiwan. In her 4 years in Taiwan, she drew inspiration from the nation's transformation from a Garbage Island into a place with clean and beautiful environment, thanks to the recycling system widely deployed across the territory. However, Phuong also experienced many challenges during her time studying abroad, especially language barriers. To overcome this obstacle, Phuong devoted her first year to studying Chinese to improve her daily communication and understanding of the local lives. Simultaneously, in the research field, with the enthusiastic support of her Taiwanese friends in the research team and fellow Vietnamese students, Phuong successfully completed her thesis on Open Government Data with a score of 92/100.

An environmental expert not only exhibits profound passion for and knowledge of the environment but, in Phuong's case, also possesses the acumen of a chess player. In her childhood, it is said that Phuong could figure out the rules

of the game just by observing others playing the game. A teacher quickly recognized Phuong's talent and recruited her on a competitive chess team that participated in tournaments across provinces and cities every summer. Spending hours contemplating the chessboard and pondering the moves of the queen and rooks, Phuong quickly learned to anticipate, predict and preemptively plan for every unexpected circumstance. Chess stands as Phuong's second passion beyond her academic pursuit at the university.

“There will be moments when one's profession or business reaches a point of saturation or encounters setbacks. If I have another passion and dream, it will help calm me down to pinpoint the problem and then plan my following course of action. These passions and dreams help me lead a happy life in a more sustainable way.”

Learning critical thinking later brought out in Phuong great interests during her time researching and teaching at university, especially in the course Scientific Research Methods. For Phuong, her fascination in this course stems from the fact that its knowledge and skills would provide valuable insights to solve a wide range of problems. The content of the course is not reserved solely to the scope of academic research but can also be of great help to learners in their daily lives. Having been inspired by many educators, colleagues and even her “well-rounded” mother, Phuong wishes to pass on the flame of inspiration to future generations. For Phuong, the most successful thing now is that she knows who she is and what she wants in life.

“I will slowly but surely take one step at a time. It might take a while to take each step but once the decision is final, you have to be assertive and self-assured.”



NGUYEN THI LE QUYEN

PRINCIPAL OFFICIAL, INFORMATION SUPPORT & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION DIVISION,
AGENCY FOR ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

"If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself."

- Henry Ford

In the era of rapid digital technology development, a period filled with significant transformations, the guidance and support of governmental agencies has become crucial to bringing impact to hundreds and thousands of enterprises. With absolute resolve and confidence in the new generations of staff, the Ministry of Planning and Investment has implemented many activities via the programme "Supporting Enterprises' Digital Transformation from 2021 to 2025", which have not only created positive impacts but also brought about acknowledgement for the Ministry from the business community.

Among key participants in the design and implementation process of this Programme is Nguyen Thi Le Quyen, the Principal Officer at the Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment. Distinct from a simple participant, Quyen focuses on designing and proposing Programme activities, while also playing the role of coordinating, connecting, and leading partners and members of the Digital Transformation Office to participate in and contribute their best to the common goal.

Born and raised in a traditional craft village in Thanh Tri District, Hanoi, Quyen was deeply impressed by the dynamic business lives of small traders, and by the flexibility and resourcefulness of small and medium-sized enterprises, including her own family. Witnessing the relentless hard work of her parents and townsfolk, and personally experiencing the ups and downs of her family's business and its recovery from the brink of bankruptcy, she has since nurtured an aspiration to support small and medium-sized businesses like that of her parents.

With over 97% of businesses classified as small and medium-sized enterprises, the extremely diverse needs of each enterprise present a complex challenge. The process of supporting enterprises,

especially in the context of digital transformation, requires insurmountable effort. Implementing Programme activities is an ongoing endeavour that requires innovation and flexibility in design, as well as seamless coordination between all members of the implementation team and with other stakeholders. The pressure to accommodate the diverse and occasionally conflicting needs of multiple stakeholders poses a significant challenge for Quyen's team. The questions of "how to best promote digital transformation for traditional businesses", and "how to align between implementing agencies, technology businesses, and other ecosystem stakeholders to achieve common goals, establish a common ground and mutually benefit from the Programme, all in a context of limited resources" have always resonated with the implementation team of the Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment.

The source of motivation driving the implementation team's unwavering morale, for Quyen, comes from the simple yet inspiring daily words of encouragement from leaderships at the Ministry and Agency. Seemingly ordinary statements from leaders, like **"Looks good, let's roll with it!"**, have provided her and the implementation team with immense confidence from the support and companionship of leaders at all levels.

Naturally, there is no perfect one-size-fits-all policy or programme for every stakeholder. Continuous innovation and adjustment in the implementation process are essential factors to success, especially when addressing matters concerning the business community. Acknowledging the diverse needs, showing sympathy, embracing learning opportunities, fostering innovation, and mobilising resources towards common goals - this is how officials in the public sector of this new era are expressing their commitment to effective policies and programs for the enterprise community.



ASSOC. PROF. TRUONG THI NAM THANG

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR - CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
NATIONAL ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY

"The best teachers are the unsung heroes and heroines of any society."

- Alex Ferguson

As the founder and director of the Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, National Economics University, Associate Professor, Dr. Truong Thi Nam Thang used to work as the manager and executive officer of many foreign businesses, and also a senior lecturer of many corporations and banks in Vietnam.

As the youngest of three daughters, Truong Thi Nam Thang feels grateful that she was afforded all the conditions to dream big since she was young. She was loved and often taken to meetings by her parents to observe many public speeches by her father, a veteran revolutionist of the Quang region who migrated to North Vietnam - the leader of a long-standing textile and garment corporation in Nam Dinh province; before long, Dr. Thang gradually became accustomed to the style and vision of a leader. Although Dr. Thang was born and raised in the North, her family is a "migrant" family; as such, the legacy passed on to the three daughters is independence and utmost determination in both thought and action. Such personality has helped her to unhesitatingly pioneer in researching, teaching and practicing her most passionate topics: "Business Ethics", "Social Impact Businesses", etc. throughout her teaching career.

"Some people may think of those who teach Ethics as silly loose screws. I find this subject to be very pragmatic because my method is teaching-and-learning through experience. I myself will come up with scenarios and students will solve the problems themselves. A business professor needs to have actual business experience so that their advice is practical and applicable, and not purely theoretical."

Being practical and capable of putting the theories she teaches into practice, Dr. Thang found Kym Viet Social Enterprise to be the most impressive among all the businesses she had advised. Established in December 2013, Kym Viet produces handicrafts made primarily from fabrics by craftsmen with

disabilities. She stepped in to support Kym Viet at a challenging time when the business was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. Initially, she only played the role of a consultant, simply offering advice. However, she later realized that in order to be able to apply the theories of Organisational Management that she was teaching, she had to be a part of Kym Viet. Every Saturday, she would visit the workshop to work alongside the staff, join the Board of Directors, and invest in the first stuffing machine for the craftsmen. All theories about finance and management were put into action. Today, Kym Viet has gained enough confidence to operate on its own. Kym Viet's handmade gift products have been selected as gifts for guests of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Despite holding a senior advisory role in many social impact businesses as well as international organisations and networks, when asked what she does, Dr. Thang answers without hesitation: **"My main profession is teaching!"** Throughout her teaching career, Dr. Thang has contributed to developing an ecosystem comprising 500 lecturers from 100 universities teaching about Social Enterprises. Research is also a serious professional pursuit for her, as evident through the series of annual national reports on social enterprises that she and her team publish. The most notable achievement is the creation and widespread promotion of the concept of social impact business in collaboration with UNDP.

For Dr. Thang, business ethics is not a foreign and far-fetched concept. It is not only incorporated in business but also a general standard that one commits to practice in all aspects of life: family, business, and even spiritual life. Business ethics is present in each of the countless decisions one faces every day. It is a covert piece of jewellery for righteous and courageous leaders to shine in the marketplace, just like how it has brought admirable honours to Dr. Thang in her teaching, research and management work.



NGUYEN PHUOC XUAN THANH

FOUNDER OF PROJECT MERCULUM – DATA PLATFORM FOR PLASTIC

“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.
Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”

- Marie Curie

“Come sell recyclables!” The echoing call of scrap-collecting ladies in conical hats in narrow alleys is a core childhood memory for many Vietnamese people. In the past, students often kept old bottles and jars at home and resold them as recyclables for pocket money as part of the *Small Project*¹. Today, in the midst of urban streets, although the collectors' voices have quieted down, the process of collecting and recycling scraps, especially plastic scraps, has made a modern comeback with the application of Blockchain technology. Founded by Nguyen Phuoc Xuan Thanh and two other female partners, Mericulum is a green business initiative, combining the power of an advanced Blockchain database and circular economy to solve the challenge of plastic waste management.

Thanks to its considerable convenience, plastic is present everywhere, especially in products such as bags, straws and bottles. However, most plastic is only used once and promptly discarded while taking hundreds of years to decompose. Therefore, developing a system that monitors and tracks production sources, as well as managing and recycling single-use disposable plastic, presents a huge challenge to many countries around the world. With Mericulum, plastic bottles are no longer scraps, but rather a type of digital “currency”. Through this platform, environmentalists can help collect, sort and exchange plastic for tokens to trade through Meerkat marketplaces or create NFT tokens. Mericulum hopes that plastic will no longer evoke fear but rather become an interesting common challenge for all, from manufacturers, distributors, scientific experts to consumers within the recycling life cycle.

Despite her love for computer science, Thanh used to think that technology would seal off the elegance of traditional women; it took 10 years until her arrival in Europe did Thanh finally decide to pursue her unfulfilled dream. The opportunity to access training programs for career changers on Blockchain, artificial intelligence and web development unlocked a new chapter in Thanh's life. Founded in August 2022 and named after the inspiring female scientist Marie Curie, Mericulum is still on the path of finding the right direction towards common benefits and efficiency for the community.

In Thanh's case, she had gone through countless applications to various companies and industries before finally landing an opportunity to venture into the technology industry that she had always dreamed of. Should this dream fall apart, what counts is the tireless effort that she has put into every step of the journey.

Every task, no matter how repetitive or boring it may seem, contributes to enriching one's learning process and career advancement.

Her first job, although outside the field of data analysis and programming, was a launching pad that introduced Thanh to admirable colleagues and an inspiring manager who imparted on her the art of rectifying errors.

“I believe that both women and men have the same potential to excel in the technology industry. Therefore, when embarking on your chosen career path, what matters most is to have faith in one's ability to overcome challenges.”

¹ The Small Project (Kế hoạch nhỏ): a nationwide initiative in Vietnamese primary schools, in which students collect scrap paper, aluminium or plastic from their homes and bring them to school for mass recycling or resell them to recyclers for pocket money.



NGUYEN THI THU THAO

VIETNAM COUNTRY MANAGER OF EARTH VENTURE CAPITAL

"In the end, investing is helping good people build great companies."

- Legendary investor Arthur Rock

Within the framework of COP26, Vietnam - one of the countries most heavily affected by climate change - has expressed its eagerness to strengthen cooperation with international partners in pursuit of sustainable development. Simultaneously, a United Nations report¹ highlighted the urgency of restoring nature back to its equilibrium, citing that humanity has less than 12 years to make this shift. Under this time pressure, venture capital funds take on the vital mission of mobilising financial resources to support breakthrough technological solutions and innovative business models that will help solve sustainable development challenges.

Born in 1993, from Hanoi, Thao was the Vietnam regional manager of Earth Venture Capital (EVC), a venture capital fund established with the mission to support start-ups that provide solutions towards a green global economy. Prior to her tenure at EVC, Thao had worked in many different types of organisations, ranging from technology companies and non-profit organisations to social impact businesses. This enriching experience has allowed her to see the world through diverse lenses. Profoundly influenced by the legendary investor Arthur Rock, Thao values the central role of people in all forms of organisations, be it a start-up or a well-established enterprise with a solid foundation.

"Business is not purely about transactions. To me, business is a space to nurture people, bringing values to both the customers and society."

During her time at EVC, Thao was inspired by the operational model of venture capital funds. To establish an investment fund, a fund manager must build their investment philosophy and strategy, and use these principles to mobilise capital from individuals and organisations with available resources. Subsequently, the fund manager and their team utilize these resources to identify and invest in start-ups that aspire to make groundbreaking changes. Moreover, the fund also proactively creates added values in various forms over an extended period. If the fund's mission is closely aligned with sustainable development, this model holds the potential to create major systemic changes.

In August 2023, Thao left Earth VC to study "Strategic Leadership in Sustainable Development" in Sweden. For Thao, sustainable development transcends the simple incorporation of environmental and human factors into economic and social activities. Sustainable development is a paradigm of system design thinking, built on an understanding of the fundamental laws of nature and the universe.

"Vietnam is standing at a crossroad in its development, where many economic opportunities and sustainable challenges, both existing and emerging, lie in wait. For other investors, Vietnam might just be another market. For me, Vietnam is home. And I am committed to the mission of building a happy home for all Vietnamese people, and for those who believe in the concept of compassionate capitalism."

¹ United Nations. (2019, March 28). Only 11 Years Left to Prevent Irreversible Damage from Climate Change, Speakers Warn during General Assembly High-Level Meeting [Press release]. <https://press.un.org/en/2019/ga12131.doc.htm>



TRAN HA UYEN THI

EXPERT AND LECTURER AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS, HUE UNIVERSITY

"Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching."

- C. S. Lewis

The wave of Twin Transition is not only roaring in large cities but also awakening ancient cities that have long been dormant like the Ancient Capital of Hue. As a senior lecturer at Hue University with practical on-site experience, Tran Ha Uyen Thi recognizes that several potential local brands, especially women-owned businesses, wish to participate in the transition. However, most of them are faced with barriers in capital, human resources and execution skills on e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, and Tiktok Shop.

On the one hand, she coordinates with the university and a network of experts to develop a training curriculum for practical e-commerce skills for students. On the other hand, she involves the students in providing direct support to businesses in need of promptly implementing digital transformation. Thanks to her perseverance, meticulousness and tenacity, over the past 2 years, Thi has successfully supported 90 businesses with 150 stakeholders from the provinces of Thua Thien Hue, Da Nang, Quang Nam, Quang Tri and Kontum under the Aus4Skills programme funded by the Australian Government. As a coordinator and recipient of funding from foreign partners, she commits herself to effort and integrity in order to maintain the trust of partners. With this spirit, she was honoured by the Australian Government for her positive contributions to the 50-year diplomatic relationship between Vietnam and Australia.

"No dishonesty or non-compliance with requirements from the sponsor. Commit and contribute with no expectation of self-interests. Then one will reap the rewards of one's efforts..."

One of the businesses successfully supported by Thi and her students in Hue is Moc Truly Hue's, one of the pioneers in restoring and developing the ancient white lotus variety native to Hue and preserving traditional cakes and candied fruits of

the Ancient Capital. By keeping up with the wave of digital transformation, since its establishment until now (2021), Moc Truly Hue's has continuously expanded and increased its production scale, thus becoming one of the owners of the largest lotus material areas in the province. As a pioneer in projects to restore, preserve and leverage the values of Hue Lotus, Moc's products have found its way into both domestic and foreign markets, positioned itself in these markets and established connections with domestic distributors.

Her predestined relationship with the e-commerce industry brought her back to Hue after her university graduation in Ho Chi Minh City. She fondly recalled the moment she went to check the lecturer recruitment announcement, and how the recruitment notice posted on the department's door was fluttering and falling off. Until then, she had twice refused the Dean's invitation to teach the university's E-commerce course, hesitant that she might not be able to keep up with changes in technology, especially after having a family and young children. However, upon graduating in Australia with a Ph.D. in Supply chain and Logistics, Thi still chose to return to Hue and continue her endeavour in e-commerce training for students and local businesses.

Behind Thi's success in the field of Twin Transition are her mother and husband, the two persons that she can always count on. During Thi's years of studying for her doctorate far from home, her husband, with sympathy for her challenges, remained in Vietnam to take care of their two small children and elderly parents. This has enabled her to focus on her educational pursuit in a foreign land without worries. His support helped her overcome the fear of studying for a Ph.D., from which she returned to continue contributing to her homeland. Today, her family still resides happily in an old Hue-style "ruong" house adorned with patterned engraved columns and a worship painting of her ancestor.



NGUYEN THI THUY TRANG

ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEER, WATER SOLUTIONS SOUTHEAST ASIA CO. LTD. & PLANETZERO.EARTH

"This is our lovely Earth
Black or White, we are all friends
My dear friends, we are all flowers
Full of scent, the sun brightens us."

Composed by: Truong Quang Luc

Located on a quiet street in An Phu neighbourhood, Thu Duc City is a white house, home to a cluster of companies specialized in innovative technology solutions for water environment. By the main entrance of this serene house shelters a small bush of crane flowers. During the day, one can clearly hear the burbling sound of water from an underground water treatment system. In the kitchen lies a simple wooden table covered with a lovely patterned cloth, where the environmental experts convene to relax and discuss their work. Born in 1995, Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang is the youngest female engineer in a team of veteran experts in the field of water environment from Germany and Vietnam.

Within this refreshing and tranquil space, the team of seven from Water Solutions Southeast Asia has been working on a series of highly innovative and fascinating environmental projects across Vietnam. With an immense passion for learning and teaching, Trang can turn "Climate Change" into an engaging and novel topic. Solving environmental problems is no longer considered a pressure, but rather approached with enthusiasm and joy. People, nature, and technology can harmonize with one another to develop effective environmental solutions based on the power of nature. The natural and sustainable approach not only harnesses the power of nature to reabsorb carbon and clean the aquatic environment, but also regenerates valuable resources such as clean water, biochar, and sustainable green forests.

10 years have come and gone since Trang first moved into the city to study Environmental Technology at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, despite her family's initial preference

for her to pursue a career in Medicine. This path in the field of environment has allowed Trang to visit remote areas and touch the lives of local residents. Witnessing positive transformations in people's lives, the "Engineer" title on Trang's business card suddenly evoked within her profound affection. Out of all her past visits, Trang was most impressed with the Chenh Venh village forest project. This was the first community forest managed by members of the Bru – Van Kieu ethnic group to be granted the FSC Forest Management Certification. Taking pride as one of the ecosystem services forests in the world that absorb and store CO₂, Chenh Venh village forest, like other projects initiated by experts at Water Solutions Southeast Asia, demonstrates a nature-based approach with an emphasis on fostering local communities. In August 2023, Trang officially moved from the water sector to join the carbon solutions team at a new company, Planetzero.earth, which had parted from Water Solutions Southeast Asia.

Perhaps we are at a historical moment, where all of us must assemble to rebuild and revitalize our planet. Not only Vietnam but also billions of people around the world share a home – the Pale Blue Dot, where smogs are lifted, songbirds sing and clean water courses through every corner. This moment can lead us towards a greener and cleaner future, should we be wise enough to seize it. An excerpt from the famous poem about climate change by Tom Rivett-Carnac, "What happened when we all stopped", once recited by Dr. Jane Goodall, makes the perfect ending to this story.

**"There's no chance we can rest.
We must do our best.
This moment can lead us back home,
that's our test."**

THE FUTURE IS FEMALE
STORY OF TWIN TRANSITION

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