



# Quarterly Bulletin Programs in Vietnam & Cambodia Period 1-3/2006

(For partners & friends)

### Contact in Vietnam

Bernard Kervyn  
19/30 Tran Binh Trong  
P5 Binh Thanh  
Ho Chi Minh Ville  
Tel : +84 (0)9-13.10.51.89  
[bkervyn@hcm.vnn.vn](mailto:bkervyn@hcm.vnn.vn)

Tôt Trần Văn  
*Thiên Chí*  
317 Bui Thi Xuân, Xuân An  
Phan Thiết, Bình Thuận  
Tel : +84 (0)9-03.98.95.01

### Contact in France

Robert Eberhardt  
26 Allée des Erables  
77310 Boissise-le-Roi  
Tel : +33 (0)1-60.65.73.66  
[info@vietnamplus.org](mailto:info@vietnamplus.org)  
[www.vietnamplus.org](http://www.vietnamplus.org)

### Contact in Belgium

Claire Thibaut  
avenue des 4 Bonniers, 6  
B – 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve  
Tel : +32 (0)10-45.23.02  
Fax : +32 (0)10-68.13.76  
[claire.thibaut@mekongplus.org](mailto:claire.thibaut@mekongplus.org)  
[www.mekongplus.org](http://www.mekongplus.org)

### Highlights

#### Vietnam

- Patchwork: still more
- Failure for the cassava leaves harvest
- First order for incense sticks

#### Cambodia

- Rade: improving governance



2 countries, 2 partners:



**In Vietnam with *Thiên Chí***: NGO set up by our local team, it takes over all the programs. We contribute with part of its funding, *Thiên Chí* finds the rest to become independent. We also provide technical support. Page 2



**In Cambodia with *Rade*** a Cambodian NGO which was set up 10 years ago by dynamic social workers, willing to rebuild the country after the Khmer Rouges. Page 10

## 1 Vietnam



# Thiên Chí

Vietnamese NGO :  
Community development and training

This report only covers the most important and recent developments. For a global view see: <http://www.vietnamplus.org/en/documents.html>.

Summary of the situation : *Thiên Chí* has been set up by the Vietnamese team of Việt Nam Plus - Mékong Plus. First as a non profit private company, and now as an NGO. It takes progressively over all programs and becomes independent.

Summary of the on-going programs:

Dúc Linh : the program was started in August 1999 and has expanded upon the suggestion of the authorities, from 2 to 5 communes and subsequently to 13. The region is inhabited mostly by immigrants from the North and the Center. The cooperation with the authorities is pretty good; new activities are added and the contract is extended.

Tánh Linh : In March 2001, following the success of Dúc Linh, the province has proposed an expansion to the neighboring district of Tánh Linh, which is poorer.

Long Mỹ: new program, in the Mekong delta, started in October 2004.

*Thiên Chí* has invited Mr.Quang, director and founder of RDSC, a well known local NGO, for an external evaluation. The emphasis has been put on the development of *Thiên Chí* and the transfer of the programs from Việt Nam Plus. The report is available [in Vietnamese](#) and [English](#) from the website.

### 1.1. **Savings-credit (Managed by Hùng)**

Summary of the program: difficult access to credit with a reasonable interest rate was at the centre of our strategy until 2004. The priority was put on solidarity and savings, more than on credit. The recovery rate was excellent and the savings rate is one of the highest in the country. Since then the dumping of easy cheap credit by the agriculture bank has convinced *Thiên Chí* to progressively reduce the program or to transfer it to the Women's Union, with our support. *Thiên Chí* has launched a micro credit program for the extremely poor households.

In Tánh Linh the authorities of several communes hardly cooperate at all so that *Thiên Chí* has decided to suspend all activities in those (5 out of 14) until further notice. In Dúc Linh, except 2 communes (out of 13) where we have stopped

working for the last years, for the same reason, the authorities try their best to have all loans repaid, at least from all households who have the money to pay.

In Long Mỹ the head of the Women's Union has misappropriated 3000 euros, which has provoked the furor of the provincial and district authorities. A reimbursement has been promised and in the meantime several activities and the expansion of the program are kept pending. Besides this problem the collaboration is excellent and it is sad that just one person can spoil the atmosphere.

The micro credit for the extremely poor (yearly income of 80 euros/person) works very well and several households have lifted themselves out of poverty for good. The case of Toàn is remarkable: maybe because he felt his situation was desperate, he drank a lot and beat his wife and children. Thanks first to a rabbit farm, then good advice to increase the yields of his mango and pepper trees, his farm is now a model. Today *Thiên Chí* works with 359 such households.



Toàn and his wife show their new house. They are proud of the desk of their children!

## 1.2. Agriculture (program managed by Thân)

Summary of the program: all programs are located in agricultural regions and the peasants are eager to improve their techniques, obtain better seeds etc. The government services do not fulfill the needs of all and their training is not easily understood by the poorest. *Thiên Chí* sets up farmers' groups: the best to provide advice to the others; as they have more credibility than agronomists with a salary. Technicians have been trained in each commune.



The farmers' groups have become less active except in Long Mỹ: these groups were established long ago by the Party and they also save and lend between the members. Such groups do not exist in Đức Linh and Tân Linh, so the team meets the village heads and the commune leaders, to penetrate all villages.

Thanh, who is a Khmer<sup>1</sup>, based in Long Mỹ, lacks punch and the peasants hesitate to ask him for training! Trung on the contrary, has a lot of prestige and is requested all the time. But Thanh did successful demonstration plots of pumpkins: the peasants who did them earned a healthy 46 euros profit for only 1000 m<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Vietnam has a large Khmer minority in the Mekong delta. They are less daring than the Viets.

against generally 26 euros for paddy. The germination rate was 95% against 60-70% for the local seeds, and the yield was 2-3 tons, double the norm. This should help Thanh's aura with the villagers.

The attempts to obtain a better price for the cashew planters should succeed<sup>2</sup> at long last. The Fairtrade Label Organization insists to certify only official organizations, but the people are quite reluctant to set up cooperatives as in the past they were forced into government ones which delivered small benefits for them. About 50 farmers are ready however, convinced by a fair trade price 40% higher than the one they get today! To set up a new cooperative it takes between 6 and 12 months! Luckily, Tuu, one of *Thiên Chí's* agronomists, has identified one cooperative which is still running and interested to join. It is amending its bylaws and will ask certification from FLO...

Serious failure this year for the cassava leaves. The harvest looked promising but quarrels erupted between the 3 people who grind the leaves into powder. These mills require 3-phase electricity which very few people have. They take advantage of their situation to put maximum pressure on the others. To obtain 3-phase electricity it costs 1000 euros and one must be the owner of the land!

As a result, instead of 300-380 tons like in previous years, only 60 could be sold in Đức Linh. In Tánh Linh the harvest was as usual as they have a separate mill.

*Thiên Chí* is determined never to be in such a ridiculous situation again. Even though smaller mills are more expensive to run (1,5 extra euro/ton), at least they can be put almost anywhere, with a current stabilizer (especially in the evening when the people put their TV on). The leaves sold at 85 euros/ton this year, thus a good margin for the millers. But using diesel on the contrary would be much too expensive.



*Thiên Chí* has helped the farmers to increase their yield, now one must get better prices for their harvest



The mill...last year

---

<sup>2</sup> See [the video from the website](#)

*Thiên Chí* will thus acquire 2 small mills for next year and will better prepare a contract with the people who have access to 3-phase electricity.

### 1.3. Livestock (managed by Thân)

Summary of the program: before the *Thiên Chí* program, in the remote villages about 1/3 of the animals used to die from various diseases. The program has trained “para-vets” with emphasis on practical and real cases; that have originated from the villages nearby and they are paid, after the training, by the peasants themselves for the services provided. To train one such “para-vet” costs 170 €, but once trained, the savings in the community are an estimated 200 € per month. It is then easier to mobilize the farmers for better prevention and for improving the breed of their livestock. The farms develop and multiply.



Para vets in action. Without the sound

The bird flu epidemic gets media coverage and the farmers enrage because they cannot transport the few chicken they continue to raise; in spite of the fact not a single chicken died in their region. Worse: another epidemic has killed many rabbits (now under control) and now it is the turn of the pigs.

A visit by a farmers' group to the University of Agronomy of Thu Duc (Hồ Chí Minh City) has motivated a few to raise worms. On a small scale it is just enough to feed their fish and chicken, but on a larger scale (several thousands square meters) it is a good source of income and the University is willing to buy all the production, as well as prawn farms. The farmers prefer to start on a small scale first.

### 1.4. Program for the very poor

Summary of the program: deep poverty (4-6 euros/month) has receded in Vietnam, from 30-40% to approximately 10% in our districts. *Thiên Chí* puts the priority on the poorest 2%: scholarships, medical assistance, housing, and whenever possible, economic assistance. In every case help is provided only when the community participates. Mobilize local solidarity is the team's main task.

Almost 2000 households are followed regularly and 1073 children have received assistance to continue their education. Many of these households have little capacity to raise their income, as they are afflicted by so many impossible problems. Still 359 have a project today assisted by *Thiên Chí*. The results are almost always very impressive compared to their income:

1. *Thiên Chí* spends on the average, besides its own internal costs, approximately 73 euros/household: technical support and follow-up, with weekly visits, plus micro credit.
2. On the basis of a per capita income of 80 euros/year, and with an increase often observed of 20%/year for 5 people: 80 euros x 20% x 5 people= 80euros.
3. Thus more than the 73 euros spent only once by *Thiên Chí*. The increased income is maintained for years after however, and often increases further.



### 1.5. Community libraries

Summary of the program: to reduce the risk of illiteracy because the people do not read enough and to better disseminate technical information, small libraries have been set up. About 30 people, often women, form a group, each pays a fee of 0.65 €. *Thiên Chí* doubles this amount and buys books in Saigon and lends the group a small cupboard (12 €).

### 1.6. Theatre

Summary of the program: *Thiên Chí* provides a lot of training, in various forms. Sometimes the training must be fun and reach larger numbers. Two theatre groups have been set up and they produce 4 shows a week each. This is theatre for education which encourages people to participate by getting on stage! The themes are: the importance of hygiene, alcoholism, Aids. About 200 people attend every show.

The theatre program is now pretty well known beyond the borders of the program areas. *Thiên Chí* sells its services and training to other organizations, thus generating an income to cover part of its budget. *Thiên Chí* has 2 such contracts for the coming months.

To quote one: “Action Aid wants to thank you very much for having helped us to change the attitudes of the people in Gò Vấp. I wish you may continue to develop yourself while also allowing the public to have good fun!”

A new [short video can be downloaded from the website](#): about alcohol and domestic violence; the public intervenes –the best way to increase impact on attitudes.

## 1.7. Health

Summary of the program: *Thiên Chí* does not provide curative services but prevention and training. Generally, the public services are good: vaccinations, anti-malaria programs etc. but often the information is insufficient. Thanks to the many groups who meet every week the program has a fantastic network to provide training and disseminate information. Incentives are made available to help the people to build latrines, wells, or to buy a water filter. Deworming tablets are sold at cost price. Mosquito nets are impregnated with insecticide.

In primary schools, *Thiên Chí* has trained the teachers in new pedagogy: no more top-down learning, but practice, group work and teeth brushing together on the school playground.

A brainstorming of all the teams together to find new ways to promote hygienic latrines et clean water sources has produced a list of ideas which are now being tried. The first one is to target the village and commune cadres whose houses are often not equipped! Their credibility is thus not high. This suggestion came in fact from the director of the Health Center of Long Mỹ where the lack of hygiene is a major problem. Mobilize the population on a number of issues and reward the best with a few latrines for the poorest in those villages. But in every case the beneficiary must contribute, the project will only provide the bottom part & slab. We are now awaiting the results.



## 1.8. Education

Summary of the program: since 2002 scholarships of 2 x 8 euros/year are given to very poor families. They have committed themselves not to drop out from school. Computer training centers have been equipped with second hand computers, which allow the students to improve their qualifications and hopefully reach university.

The health education program is monitored closely by a committee of the best teachers, together with one member of *Thiên Chí*. Every 6 months, it generates a lot of detailed data to monitor progress. A number of schools and then in each, a number of classes are chosen at random. It is in Dúc Linh that the results are the best of course because this is where the program was first started (1999). The cadres and teachers are also really motivated. But also in Tánh Linh –where the program started in 2001, the results are very significant:

Years <sup>3</sup>	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06 <sup>4</sup>
<b>plaque index<sup>5</sup></b>				
4th	1,9	1,5	1,2	1,1
2nd			1,4	1,3
<b>oral hygiene (%good)</b>				
4th	56,0	75,0	87,6	92,1
2nd			74,0	81,3
<b>Teeth brushing with fluor rinsing (%good)</b>				
4th	69,0	77,0	84,0	92,9
2nd			77,0	84,9
<b>clean hands &amp; feet (%good)</b>				
4th	83,0	87,0	90,0	96,3
2nd			85,0	93,2
<b>drinking water at school (%good)</b>				
4th	86,0	73,0	92,0	95,0
2nd			79,8	95,3
<b>clean school (%good)</b>				
4th	58,0	68,0	86,0	91,0
2nd			70,6	87,2
<b>knowledge tests (%good)</b>				
4th	53,0	64,0	69,3	80,5
2nd			56,3	74,5
<b>Teaching method (%good)</b>				
4th	65,0	69,0	74,6	84,3
2nd			69,0	86,0



Drawing by pupil: deforestation

In January an independent team of 2 experts visited both the Dúc Linh and Tánh Linh programs to evaluate... the evaluators. 2 external experts visited the program in both districts, in January. They followed the local monitoring committees and compared their results with theirs. The local monitors –no surprise, are slightly optimistic, but the difference is minimal<sup>6</sup>. However one observes a deviation from the objectives in several schools. For instance sometimes the school is cleaned by staff employed for this purpose, but the teachers like the children continue to throw waste and papers around. The schools which have a teacher in the monitoring committee seem to be more

<sup>3</sup> Certain schools have been covered for 4 years, others 2 only

<sup>4</sup> 1st semester

<sup>5</sup> The lower the better

<sup>6</sup> The evaluation report is online, [in English](#) & in [Vietnamese](#)

aware of the program and generally achieve better results. Decision: rotate the members of the monitoring committee more frequently. In Dúc Linh the programs functions literally without *Thiên Chí*, the latter only provides minimal technical and financial support.

## 1.9. Employment

Summary of the program: agricultural prices fall regularly and the peasants, who cannot diversify their production and sources of income, are losing out. To help them, *Thiên Chí* endeavors to promote handicrafts. Temporary jobs are also created by repairing roads and small bridges, by planting trees, by building dykes etc.

Where will they stop? The Vietnam-quilts program has reached new records and in March it went beyond the 10.000 euros in sales. Sue, an Australian volunteer, does miracles. If before the shop was a good place to chat, today Sue is just running everywhere selling to 2 clients at a time. Production must follow! New producers must be trained and organized, into new groups not too difficult to manage by the women themselves. Hiêu, in charge of quality control, is overloaded! Not easy to manage such a fast growth. The plan for the shop is to provide *Thiên Chí* with 7000 euros this year, but it may well do better than this.



Challenge : try not buy anything after meeting with Sue !

(...) I have worked in this wonderful project for nearly a year now and it is some of the most rewarding work I have done to date. It is wonderful to know that your effort is making a difference to the women in Duc Linh, who make the quilts.

(...) There is a big potential to expand the market for the quilts which, will result in more women being employed. These activities would include marketing to local companies (Coke Cola, Addias etc), the Asian communities in HCMC, expanding to Hanoi and securing small manageable export orders.

(...) I love this project and all the people involved in it. Thanh is an inspirational lady and the group leaders are like a family. I would not swap my life for anything at the moment.

[Sue writing to a volunteer for the shop]

Incense sticks: first order of 1000 kilos from [Terre d'Oc \(France\)](#), the first batch has flown to France. The producers worked till late at night to deliver on time and

to meet the best quality criteria. Terre d'Oc has accepted to pay the producers a fair price, well above the market rate, but also to improve the working conditions:

masks and a shelter against the rains. It will help *Thiên Chí* to plant trees. The profits collected by *Thiên Chí* from this cooperation will be reinvested in the same villages of Dúc Linh.

### 1.10. Waste recycling (managed by Hùng)

Summary of the program: invited by the authorities to help resolve the growing problem of waste, *Thiên Chí* proposes to recycle 80% of it, thus creating new jobs. This proposal has been chosen amongst the most innovative in a competition organized by the World Bank.

The local authorities believe there are still administrative problems but *Thiên Chí* refuses corruption, and the program has been delayed. The promised piece of land is yet to be made available. In the meantime the team is determined and has carried 1 ton of market waste through its Dúc Linh office, to process it as a pilot on the land behind. This is done in cooperation with the University of Thu Dúc, in view of producing quality compost.

On top of this the market price of recycled plastic has gone down probably because of cheaper imports from China. For the time being *Thiên Chí* has limited its operations to collecting plastic on a large scale, selling to the highest bidder. Success however on another side: the province has launched the program on a wider scale, taking the pretext of the Earth Day celebration (22/4). An excellent multiplication effect indeed.

## 2 Cambodia



The team was puzzled because of the sudden and unannounced departure of the director and founder. It has since strengthened its board, the bylaws have been updated, a budget discussed.

These were the conditions set by Mekong Plus to continue its support.

Most land in Cambodia only produces 1 crop a year and yields are low, around 1 ton/ha (compared to 4 to 6 in Vietnam). A small pump co-funded by Mekong Plus -190 euros, can irrigate 2 hectares and allows 1 more crop. 90 families more benefit from this program this year. The cow bank reaches 57 households and the pilot goat bank 5.



When RADE helps for 1 pump, the fields turn green