



Bulletin Programs in Vietnam & Cambodia Period April-September 2009

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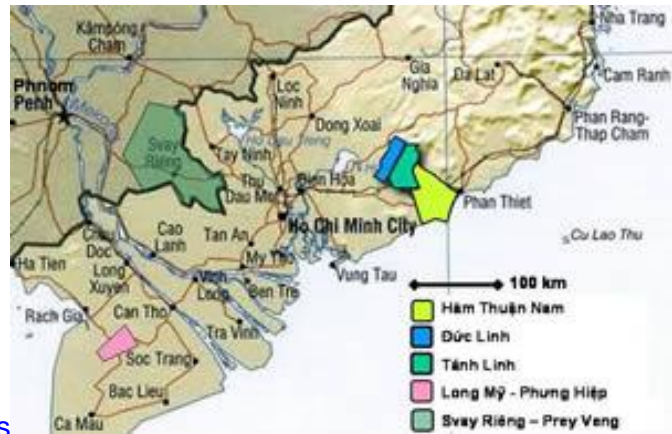
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Contents

1 Highlights	2
2 Vietnam.....	2
1.1. Savings-credit.....	2
1.2. Agriculture.....	2
1.3. Programme pour les très pauvres.....	3
1.4. Theater	4
1.5. Health.....	4
1.6. Education.....	5
1.7. Employment	6
1.8. Waste recycling.....	9
1.9. Renforcement des partenaires.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3 Cambodia.....	9

This report covers the most important and recent developments. For a global view see: <http://mekongplus.eu/lang-en/quarterly-bulletins>



[bulletins](#)

1 Highlights

Vietnam

- Funding has become critical and our fair trade programs play an increasing role
- New techniques in agriculture
- Highest participation ever in our solidarity day, for supporting scholarships

Cambodia

- A new shop of Mekong-Quilts in Siem Reap
- Training in Rumdoul

2 Vietnam

Summary of the situation : *Thiên Chí* –www.thienchi.org (“Good will”) and Anh Dương -www.anhduonghg.org (“Sun ray”) are 2 Vietnamese NGOs been set up by the Vietnamese team of Việt Nam Plus - Mekong Plus. Thiên Chí takes progressively over all programs in Bình Thuận. Anh Dương takes over the Long My and Phung Hiệp programs. We contribute for part of their funding, they find the complement independently. We also provide technical support.



1.1. **Savings-credit**

Summary of the program: difficult access to credit with a reasonable interest rate was at the centre of our strategy until 2004. Since then access to bank loans has improved for almost everybody. 3 programs: women’s groups for saving and credit. Microcredit to extremely poor households. Microcredit for small entrepreneurs who generate significant employment locally.

1.2. **Agriculture**

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. TC-AD set 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 heavy rains have devastated a number of paddy fields: some farmers had to replant. Fortunately the provinces where we work have been saved, they are almost never touched by the storms and cyclones (the Center of Vietnam is hit

by them very often.



Mister Lân, in Luong Nghia (Long Mỹ, in the Mekong delta) has a passion for raising chicken. With the technical support from the team and a microcredit of 75 €, he has multiplied his capital : it has grown from the initial 18 breeding hens to 80. His technique is very simple and low cost. The success rate is 90%. He uses a large concrete basin, rice husk, a lamp... He is extremely meticulous, replaces the husk every day, controls the temperature....



Yet his monthly profit amounts to almost 95 €, enough to cover the studies of his 2 children at the university of Cần Thơ.

Saving water and labor time to optimize profits from vegetable gardens : this is the goal of a new watering system. It allows also to give the appropriate quantity of water all over. The different techniques to improve the vegetable gardens, which are so much more profitable per square meter, are adopted by more and more farmers. One remembers the nets which filter

the rains and allow gardening the whole year round, and reduce the risks of diseases.

1.3. Program for the very poor

Summary of the program: deep poverty (4-6 euros/month as per capita income) has receded in Vietnam, from 30-40% to approximately 10% in our districts. *Thiên Chí* and Anh Dương put the priority on the poorest 2-5%: scholarships, medical assistance, housing, and whenever possible, economic assistance. In every case help is provided only when the community participates.

This is a very successful program which covers close to 4000 households (about 20.000 people), not counting the follow-up provided to the 1026 households which have graduated out of poverty. On average they have doubled their income –they now have almost 0,4 €/person/day, equivalent to less than 10 €/day in Europe (taking into account the difference in purchasing power) ; their children are all at school, housing is basic but sufficient, no major health problem which remains unresolved or which could not be reduced...

Even better: many of the formerly very poor households who are now out of our list have in fact become models for others, they have many visitors who want to see for themselves what they have achieved. They are invited as “trainers” in various seminars

organized by the teams because they are so convincing –if they could do it, then who could not? Everybody knows they did this mainly by themselves and with the support of the community, with very little money from the project. See for instance the latest story, The snakes of Mr.Thi : http://www.mekongplus.org/doc/2009-09-16_the_snakes_of_mister_thi.html .

On average, every week 10 more households graduate out of the extreme poverty list, and they are immediately replaced by new very poor households.

Today the total volume of micro credits amounts to 165.000 €, and the number of scholarships to 3100. Unfortunately, because we could not yet find the necessary funding to cover all priority programs (our human capital, the teams, who have been trained during the last 16 years), the number of scholarships has been reduced by 30%, and the micro credits might well follow as well.

1.4. Theater

Summary of the program: The team provides a lot of training, in various forms. Sometimes the training must be fun and reach larger numbers. Theatre groups have been set up and they produce 4 shows a week each. This is action theatre which encourages people to participate by getting on stage! The themes are: the importance of hygiene, alcoholism, Aids. About 60.000 people watch the shows in one year.

During the rainy season the actors train themselves for new shows. The shows are all outside and the frequent rains disrupt too many evenings which have to be cancelled at the last minute. This would also be expensive for the project. Only a few shows are presented indoors as part of women's groups meetings, or seminars for extremely poor households etc. Instead the 2 theatre teams study new shows in coordination with the project teams, to support the community development programs.



There are 13 actors in total, with a huge experience as they have presented about a thousand shows each team! Yet, when the Executive Committee had to set priorities in the context of reduced funding, it has decided the theater program could be suspended. We hope that if indeed the program must be put into parenthesis for a while, we will still be able to maintain contact with the best actors, and not lose them forever.

1.5. Health

Summary of the program: The team 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, The team has trained the teachers in new pedagogy: no more top-down learning, but practice, group work and teeth brushing together on the school playground.



As we had observed that in the rural areas there were virtually no children with glasses, we organized a screening program for several thousands of children. Initially only less than 4% were declared as having insufficient sight and in need of glasses. The doctors had sometimes very surprising reasons for such a low score –in the better off areas of Hô Chí Minh City about 20% children wear glasses. We thus had to provide additional training to the examiners first so that more accurate results could be obtained. The new screening shows that about 15% children need glasses. The screening has resumed with the new school year. The impact of the program is very significant for a minimal cost. It is estimated we will help 3000 children to finally see clearly what is written on the blackboard! Cost per beneficiary child: about 7 €

(but we will examine 50.000 children). See the new video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6iSC6MIOwY&feature=youtube_gdata !

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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 big solidarity events, now organized every year by our teams, have attracted record numbers of participants. In total 88.208 people joined, mostly children but also adults, including teachers, parents and government cadres. Even though most people just walk and do not run, yet the solidarity is visible, proven by the 6.194 € collected by the

participants. This is equivalent to about 70.000 € in Europe, indeed a huge amount (to take into account the difference in purchasing power between Vietnam and Europe)!

We have analyzed when the largest numbers of children would drop out of school. It is mainly during grade 9 and grade 10. Schooling is very expensive in Vietnam, from kindergarten till university. Drop outs till grade 9 are minimal; the Vietnamese deserve their reputation of a people who value education (relatively speaking of course, few people read much, most watch TV many hours every day). But high schools are less in number; they are far away for many children, so there are transport costs involved. The school fees are much higher also. In total the monthly expenses for one child are equivalent to several times the family budget of a poor household.

Yet many parents accept the extra financial burden by selling assets, or other children stop their studies to support their brothers and sisters. One other reason is the poor quality of the rural schools: the students are not well prepared for the more demanding high school studies, become discouraged and stop.

We have thus decided it would be best to concentrate on grade 9 and grade 10. About 7700 are concerned in the program areas. Vietnam develops and modernizes itself, so that a high school certificate becomes more essential to get out of the poverty cycle.

Disappointment in Đức Linh for the computer classes. Several school directors seem to have lost their motivation and forget to mobilize sufficient support from the parents who are to pay a contribution to cover electricity and computer maintenance expenses, compensation for the teachers etc. Unless there is a change in attitudes in the coming weeks, we envisage to withdraw the equipment we provided (as stipulated in the contract) to put them in other districts where the program runs well.

1.7. 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, The team endeavors to promote handicrafts. Temporary jobs are also created by repairing roads and small bridges, by planting trees, by building dykes etc.





Training in Rumdoul



The "pochons" for Terre d'Oc



[Mekong-Quilts](#) has opened a 4th shop in Siem Reap, after the immediate success of the shop in Phnom Penh. But the economic crisis has reduced the number of tourists, and Siem Reap is severely hit as its whole economy is based on this industry. Restaurants are empty, the hotels the same. Our new shop hardly covers its expenses, for September like in August. However the real touristic season begins in October till March and many people want to reassure us. Preliminary surveys had indicated Siem Reap would be more successful than Phnom Penh, this is yet to be seen!

To sell in Cambodia one must produce at least part of the products in Cambodia, and offer a range of products reflecting Khmer culture.

A first training has been given to 17 Cambodian quilters: very enthusiastic and good surprise, they learn more quickly than expected, in fact some may be more skilled than their Vietnamese counterparts! After just a few days the cushions they had made were inspected by Cúc, the trainer sent by Mekong-Quilts, who had come especially from Vietnam.

Our many disappointments with various funders –they confirm their support but must reduce or postpone their funding because they have less than before, put our budget at risk. Much time has been spent to prepare more applications, yet the success rate is less than 2 years ago¹. Mekong Plus has thus speeded up the development of Mekong-Quilts which not only

employs 200 women full time, who have doubled their income, but also has become by far the largest single funder of all its programs.

¹ In one case the 3rd installment of an agreed program and budget was first postponed "sine die" for 15 months, then many questions were asked, complementary documents had to be prepared... a huge amount of time has been wasted, then... nothing. When called the funder admitted the decision had been negative to a shortage of information!, and had forgotten to inform us.

The best card of Mekong-Quilts is no doubt the quality of its products and their uniqueness. They are also very reasonable in price, about 20% their market price in the United States or Australia. This policy has been followed because Mekong-Quilts does not only have one goal of making profit, but also wants to make a maximum volume to create many jobs.

An expansion plan has been proposed: one must invest 57 697 € with the hope to increase sales by 50%, and thus create another 100 jobs and augment the profits by another 80.000 €. This truly looks like a dream investment!

Terre d'Oc remains a fantastic partner. Very much aware of the importance of creating more jobs, and of the necessary funding for the development programs, the French company innovates in all directions.

« I have received this week the first 600 « pochons ». They are superb. This is a new skill which has been learned in such a short time. The reaction of the staff of Nature et Découvertes is excellent... »

In a few weeks the Tánh Linh team had to produce 12.000 « pochons » (small style bags of woven bamboo and cotton)! Well done, and quickly done. Now we work on tea boxes. The range of rattan products is diversified... All together there are half a dozen different products and more than 200 people are employed, their income has doubled. Besides this direct support, Terre d'Oc also promotes the programs on its website. And



Terre d'Oc

LE COMMERCE ÉQUITABLE / L'ENCENS AU VIETNAM

Việt Nam plus

Le partenariat avec terre d'Oc

Enthousiasmés par l'idée de développer un nouveau projet créateur d'emploi dans le district de Đức Linh, région très pauvre et rurale, où autrefois il existait un véritable savoir-faire pour l'encens pratiquement disparu aujourd'hui, l'équipe de Việt Nam Plus et Thiên Chí ont en quelques mois relevé le challenge et monté de toutes pièces ce projet d'encens. Il fallait identifier et trouver des matières premières de grande qualité, rechercher les artisans compétents et détenteurs du savoir-faire, construire un atelier, organiser la production, lancer le projet de reboisement ...

Aujourd'hui 20 personnes travaillent à plein temps avec une juste rémunération et un véritable projet de développement durable (l'amélioration des conditions de travail un important projet de reboisement : les matières premières végétales utilisées lors de la production sont replantées, l'utilisation de matières premières naturelles uniquement, la gestion des déchets, la valorisation des ressources naturelles du Vietnam, etc).

Un véritable partenariat équitable et durable conclu entre terre d'Oc et le Vietnam permet aujourd'hui de proposer en exclusivité des encens de très grande qualité avec la mention "Commerce Solidaire - Développement Durable".



on the packaging of its products! See <http://www.terredoc.com/french/default.aspx#> .

1.8. Waste recycling

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 but since then fresh funding has been difficult to obtain.

The capacity of the Lac Ha center has been doubled and a second site is under construction, 25 km away in the same district of Tân Linh. But the grinding machine has been under repair and the workforce is unstable. They have asked to be paid a substantial compensation because of the shame to work on a garbage site. The road leading to the dumping site has been damaged by the heavy rains, and the trucks have had no access to the site for weeks! This is the price to be paid when the local authorities find no better location for the waste recycling program.



Compost delivery!

Thus a true accumulation of problems and challenges but the overall picture of the program is still encouraging in spite of a poor economic climate for the farmers, who thus hesitate to buy compost, a mid-long term investment.

1.9. Capacity building for the local partners

2 local NGO partners in Vietnam : Thiên Chí (which takes over the programs in Bình Thuận) and more recently Anh Dương (which will take over the programs in Hậu Giang).

3 Cambodia

Mekong Plus has 2 partners its own community development program in Rumdoul, and continues to support its 2 local partners, all in the province of Svay Riêng :
CFED : agriculture extension through farmers groups
PTEA : community organization to protect the forests.

Sokheng, Veachy, Narin, and Borin : our new team in Rumdoul. The first 3 are trilingual (Khmer, English, Vietnamese), so they can have frequent and stimulating exchanges with the Vietnamese teams (who speak good... Vietnamese, but few speak English).



Borin has a long field experience with women's groups for forest protection, while the 3 male staff have had several months training in the Mekong Plus community development program in Long Mỹ (Mekong delta).



But where to start from? One is overwhelmed by the many tasks and serious needs of this very poor population (less than 100 €/year/person) which counts for close to 40% of the people of Rumdoul (against less than 10% in Vietnam). Many children do not go to school although it is free (it is not free and in fact rather expensive in Vietnam); many children are naked and are infested by worms... Only about 5% households have a latrine. Yields for paddy are around 700 kilos per hectare, against 4-7 tons in Vietnam. Only one harvest against 2-3 in Vietnam. No skilled veterinary in the villages and pigs are raised for 6-8 months to reach 70 kilos (against 4-5 months to reach 100 kilos in Vietnam) and 30-40% die of diseases.

We hope to set up a training program para vets (we have trained a hundred para vets in Vietnam). Not too many of them and not only for a few days. The « pet sot phum » (village vets) are probably too many and do not have enough training. Being too many they do not have much work to do, there are maybe an average of 100 pigs in their village, not enough to develop their skills. The best para vets trained by Mekong Plus in Vietnam are busy full time, they move from farm to farm, they have their mobile phone and their motorcycle, they cover 3-4000 pigs each! Obviously their experience grows fast, and they devote all their time to this activity which gives an income of up to 200\$/month for the best. Thanks to their good job mortality has

dropped to about 5% only, a real win-win solution.

Bernard KERVYN, 05/10/2009



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Contents

1 Highlights	2
2 Vietnam.....	2
1.1. Savings-credit.....	2
1.2. Agriculture.....	2
1.3. Program for the very poor.....	3
1.4. Theater	4
1.5. Health.....	4
1.6. Education.....	5
1.7. Employment	6
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Our many disappointments with various funders –they confirm their support but must reduce or postpone their funding because they have less than before, put our budget at risk. Much time has been spent to prepare more applications, yet the success rate is less than 2 years ago¹. Mekong Plus has thus speeded up the development of Mekong-Quilts which not only

employs 200 women full time, who have doubled their income, but also has become by far the largest single funder of all its programs.

¹ In one case the 3rd installment of an agreed program and budget was first postponed "sine die" for 15 months, then many questions were asked, complementary documents had to be prepared... a huge amount of time has been wasted, then... nothing. When called the funder admitted the decision had been negative to a shortage of information!, and had forgotten to inform us.

The best card of Mekong-Quilts is no doubt the quality of its products and their uniqueness. They are also very reasonable in price, about 20% their market price in the United States or Australia. This policy has been followed because Mekong-Quilts does not only have one goal of making profit, but also wants to make a maximum volume to create many jobs.

An expansion plan has been proposed: one must invest 57 697 € with the hope to increase sales by 50%, and thus create another 100 jobs and augment the profits by another 80.000 €. This truly looks like a dream investment!

Terre d'Oc remains a fantastic partner. Very much aware of the importance of creating more jobs, and of the necessary funding for the development programs, the French company innovates in all directions.

« I have received this week the first 600 « pochons ». They are superb. This is a new skill which has been learned in such a short time. The reaction of the staff of Nature et Découvertes is excellent... »

In a few weeks the Tánh Linh team had to produce 12.000 « pochons » (small style bags of woven bamboo and cotton)! Well done, and quickly done. Now we work on tea boxes. The range of rattan products is diversified... All together there are half a dozen different products and more than 200 people are employed, their income has doubled. Besides this direct support, Terre d'Oc also promotes the programs on its website. And



Terre d'Oc

LE COMMERCE ÉQUITABLE / L'ENCENS AU VIETNAM

Việt Nam plus

Le partenariat avec terre d'Oc

Enthousiasmés par l'idée de développer un nouveau projet créateur d'emploi dans le district de Đức Linh, région très pauvre et rurale, où autrefois il existait un véritable savoir-faire pour l'encens pratiquement disparu aujourd'hui, l'équipe de Việt Nam Plus et Thiên Chí ont en quelques mois relevé le challenge et monté de toutes pièces ce projet d'encens. Il fallait identifier et trouver des matières premières de grande qualité, rechercher les artisans compétents et détenteurs du savoir-faire, construire un atelier, organiser la production, lancer le projet de reboisement ...

Aujourd'hui 20 personnes travaillent à plein temps avec une juste rémunération et un véritable projet de développement durable (l'amélioration des conditions de travail un important projet de reboisement : les matières premières végétales utilisées lors de la production sont replantées, l'utilisation de matières premières naturelles uniquement, la gestion des déchets, la valorisation des ressources naturelles du Vietnam, etc).

Un véritable partenariat équitable et durable conclu entre terre d'Oc et le Vietnam permet aujourd'hui de proposer en exclusivité des encens de très grande qualité avec la mention "Commerce Solidaire - Développement Durable".



on the packaging of its products! See <http://www.terredoc.com/french/default.aspx#> .

1.8. Waste recycling

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 but since then fresh funding has been difficult to obtain.

The capacity of the Lac Ha center has been doubled and a second site is under construction, 25 km away in the same district of Tân Linh. But the grinding machine has been under repair and the workforce is unstable. They have asked to be paid a substantial compensation because of the shame to work on a garbage site. The road leading to the dumping site has been damaged by the heavy rains, and the trucks have had no access to the site for weeks! This is the price to be paid when the local authorities find no better location for the waste recycling program.



Compost delivery!

Thus a true accumulation of problems and challenges but the overall picture of the program is still encouraging in spite of a poor economic climate for the farmers, who thus hesitate to buy compost, a mid-long term investment.

1.9. Capacity building for the local partners

2 local NGO partners in Vietnam : *Thiên Chí* (which takes over the programs in Bình Thuận) and more recently *Anh Dương* (which will take over the programs in Hậu Giang).

3 Cambodia

Mekong Plus has 2 partners its own community development program in Rumdoul, and continues to support its 2 local partners, all in the province of Svay Riêng :
CFED : agriculture extension through farmers groups
PTEA : community organization to protect the forests.

Sokheng, Veachy, Narin, and Borin : our new team in Rumdoul. The first 3 are trilingual (Khmer, English, Vietnamese), so they can have frequent and stimulating exchanges with the Vietnamese teams (who speak good... Vietnamese, but few speak English).



Borin has a long field experience with women's groups for forest protection, while the 3 male staff have had several months training in the Mekong Plus community development program in Long Mỹ (Mekong delta).



But where to start from? One is overwhelmed by the many tasks and serious needs of this very poor population (less than 100 €/year/person) which counts for close to 40% of the people of Rumdoul (against less than 10% in Vietnam). Many children do not go to school although it is free (it is not free and in fact rather expensive in Vietnam); many children are naked and are infested by worms... Only about 5% households have a latrine. Yields for paddy are around 700 kilos per hectare, against 4-7 tons in Vietnam. Only one harvest against 2-3 in Vietnam. No skilled veterinary in the villages and pigs are raised for 6-8 months to reach 70 kilos (against 4-5 months to reach 100 kilos in Vietnam) and 30-40% die of diseases.

We hope to set up a training program para vets (we have trained a hundred para vets in Vietnam). Not too many of them and not only for a few days. The « pet sot phum » (village vets) are probably too many and do not have enough training. Being too many they do not have much work to do, there are maybe an average of 100 pigs in their village, not enough to develop their skills. The best para vets trained by Mekong Plus in Vietnam are busy full time, they move from farm to farm, they have their mobile phone and their motorcycle, they cover 3-4000 pigs each! Obviously their experience grows fast, and they devote all their time to this activity which gives an income of up to 200\$/month for the best. Thanks to their good job mortality has

dropped to about 5% only, a real win-win solution.

Bernard KERVYN, 05/10/2009