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Date 7/21/2005
Time 11:31:25 AM
Login Name Upasana Youn



CF-RAI-USAA-DB01-HS-2005-00138

Expanded Number **CF-RAI-USAA-DB01-HS-2005-00138**

External ID **HST-1975-VIETNAM-SEP**

Title

**A History of UNICEF in Viet Nam. B & W version, Part 3 of 3. .By
Christian Salazar Volkmann, Officer in Charge, UNICEF Viet Nam. July
2005. Incorporates reseach from UNICEF NY Records and Archives.
See also Colour versions**

Date Created
7/21/2005 at 11:27 AM

Date Registered
7/21/2005 at 11:27 AM

Date Closed

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Record & Archive Manage Related Functions=80669443

CF-RAF-USAA-DB01-2004-02502 (In Container)

At Home Location: CF-RAF-USAA-DB01-2004-02502: Upasana Youn

F12: Status Certain?

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F13: Record Copy?

No

01: In, Out, Internal Rec or Rec Copy

Contained Records

Container

CF/RA/BX/ED/X/1975/T053: Administrative and Working files - Indoc

Number 3

Field 1

Field 2

Full Classification Number

Date Published

=d3: Doc Type - Forma

1:Date First Publish:

Priority

Record Type **A02 HIST CORR ITEM**

Source Document

Document Details **Record has no document attached.**

Alt Bar code = RAMP-TRIM Record Number: **CF-RAI-USAA-DB01-HS-2005-00138**

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Chapter IV

Towards a Rights-based Approach (1990-2000)

More Credit to the Poles

Out of all the countries that have participated in the positive development of Viet Nam's history, Poland should be recognized for the immeasurable amount of good that has come directly from the concerns raised on behalf of children by its UN board members. As noted, it was the Poles that first voiced the issue of aid to the children in the North in the late 1960s, and it was again Poland which attempted to create a universal standard for children at the end of the 1970s. This latter effort, a text based on the United Nations' 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child listing ten child welfare and protection principles, became the point of reference for the final version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989.

On February 20, 1990, Viet Nam became the first country in Asia and the second country in the world to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC sets out what governments and individuals should do to promote and protect the indivisible human rights of all children. Issues span a range as basic as the right to a name and a nationality, to protection from exploitation and harm, to the right to health, education and play. Perhaps no other country has such a strong relationship to the innovations of the Convention as Viet Nam, which found a common ideological value in its spirit and aims.

Le Hong Loan, Child Protection Section (1989 - Present): *'One thing that I think should be kept in mind is the impact of the Doi Moi process on the country and what this meant for the leadership with regard to the principles of the CRC. Doi Moi brought positive change, particularly on a macro scale, but some socialist principles should not have been forgotten. The socialist ideologies of human development, equity, and government support in the social sector partly overlapped with the principles of the CRC. The CRC reminds people of the importance of children – a sentiment that was in Viet Nam a long time ago and evident in the values expressed by (Chairman) Ho Chi Minh. So after Doi Moi came along, there was this call for Viet Nam to be a combination of change and basic social principles, which I think reminded the Government of where it came from.'*

You must remember that the CRC was proposed by the former socialist bloc; it was and is a material advocacy that emphasizes much of what the old government was used to seeing. So it is understandable that there was such a quick decision to adopt it.'

By the following year, both UNICEF and the Government had produced documents that testified to a significant change in the basis of their orientations. According to Christian Salazar, documents from the 7th Party Congress of the Communist Party of Viet Nam showed an increased acknowledgement of child-related issues. They included specific references to 'protection of children' as well as to 'lifestyles, work and education' of young people and adolescents. Also notable was the first reference to the issue of HIV/AIDS in official party documents. This was progress. But it should also be noted that the term 'children's rights' would have to wait until the 9th Party Congress ten years later for its introduction into official Party language.

From this surge in awareness came the signing of two major laws on Universal Primary Education and on the Protection and Care of Children by the end of 1991. At the same time, the former Vietnamese National Committee for Children was renamed and significantly upgraded in staff, budget and legal basis. It was now called the Committee for the Protection and Care of Children (CPCC).

Christian Salazar: *'The new Committee for the Protection and Care of Children (CPCC) became the major advocate for children's rights in Vietnam with impressive results in advocacy vis-à-vis the Communist Party, the National Assembly and other government agencies. This institution was set up to advise the Government on all matters relating to children, to co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the CRC and is a concrete expression of the commitment of the Vietnamese Government towards children's rights.'*

Madame Tran Thi Thanh Thanh, Chairwoman of the CPCC (1992-2002): *'This was a memorable time. At first the CPCC only had ten members, but we soon expanded to thirty five. We worked very closely together with UNICEF, and I recall Mr. Farooqui offering advice, equipment, even a car, as well as expertise in capacity building. Our early goals were to work on implementing the National Plan of Action, for which we worked with UNICEF on setting up policy for children and the family, and a provincial programme of action, where we could help clarify responsibilities of the provinces for children during this time.'*

On a Clear Day You Can See the Mountains

Stephen Woodhouse followed Farooqui as Representative in 1992. He arrived to find a dynamic country riding a wave of investor and donor attention and a government that was increasingly accessible. Viet Nam's international favor continued to climb over the next five years, spanning Woodhouse's time in Hanoi and part of Rima Salah's, his successor. With the signing of the Paris Peace Accord late in 1991, the Vietnamese removed their last troops from Cambodia and subsequently returned to the international community. This resulted in the lifting of embargoes against Viet Nam – though the United States would wait until 1994 before lifting the embargo it had put in place for Viet Nam's actions in Cambodia. Once lifted, however, it took less than 12 months for each country to open liaison offices in their respective capitals. Thus, the benefits that had been apparent from the early stages of Doi Moi were now set for further expansion.

Stephen Woodhouse: *'The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was very smart with appealing to the West and getting attention with the global situation – the fall of COMECON and the 1991 Paris Peace Accords. It positioned itself very well with its establishment of a free market and the drive to not experience any social disintegration, and one could see the global attention, as Viet Nam became the 'flavor of the month' – or rather, the 'flavor of the half-decade'. I was able to piggy-back on Viet Nam's positive international recognition, in terms of donor support, which improved significantly. It was a country on the move, and there was an overall dynamism, both in the country and in the office.'*

New Players in the Old Neighborhood

By the time Stephen Woodhouse arrived, massive Official Development Assistance (ODA) had begun to flow as international agencies and NGOs began to settle in. Suddenly the donor landscape was filling up. UNICEF now had a score of potential contacts that saw the organization as a point of first reference, and a new role as an authoritative voice for social development. At the same time, it also began to have competition for the donor dollar.

Helen Argyriades: *'By 1990, the situation had changed. NGOs working in a variety of fields were openly welcomed by the Government. The needs were so vast and in so many sectors that it would seem that no number of organizations would suffice. I never felt this increase in NGO*

presence lessened the impact of UNICEF. It became gradually evident that there were areas where joint methodology and coordination were necessary if we were to be useful to the country where we all worked. [UNICEF took] the lead in calling a meeting of all interested agencies.

Soon we identified the need to have some uniformity in the instruments we used - for example to collect information on child health - so that it could be useful to the Government and others at the national level and by all involved in this field. By 1992, these gatherings had some regularity, were democratically run and recognized as necessary.'

This collaboration with development partners had its own United Nations (UN) version, with monthly meetings for the seven different UN agency heads. Cooperation had been slowly increasing, but in 1992 it took on a greater degree of importance simply because six of the seven heads were new to Viet Nam. UNICEF, owing to its seniority, acted as secretariat and facilitated the information sharing during the meetings. Two notable outcomes that year were the creation of an interagency task force on HIV/AIDS and a National Workshop on Aids held under UN auspices. The time had come to acknowledge HIV/AIDS and other pressing social problems that had been spreading throughout the region under various degrees of silence.

A House in Order

Relations between UNICEF and its counterparts had grown stronger, with each side more comfortable in its understanding of the others' methods and intentions.

Stephen Woodhouse: *'UNICEF's relationship with the Government was extremely positive and supportive. Shortly after I arrived, I met with the Deputy Prime Minister at the Hanoi 'White House'. He gave me a positive endorsement, saying, 'Do what you need to do'. And he continued to take a personal interest and keep personal contact through phone calls every nine months or so, even though his position was not the official contact.'*

At the outset of his term, Woodhouse appraised the situation of the UNICEF office. Whereas Farooqui had reorganized the internal structure and staff, Woodhouse initially tightened the focus of the programmes while streamlining office efficiency. The point was to concentrate on UNICEF's established areas of expertise, identify the

most disadvantaged segments of the population, and shift programming in the direction of child rights issues.

Stephen Woodhouse: *'There was great optimism, though there were signs of disparities, particularly between urban and rural areas. UNICEF came in to fill the gap, to be the 'voice of the dispossessed', so to speak. We could see the problem of the widening income disparities indirectly created as a by-product of the free-market. I spoke with the Ministers, trying to tell them not to throw away the positives of socialism – in other words, not to throw away the social benefits, which for UNICEF meant child rights.'*

Madame Tran Thi Thanh Thanh: *'Mr. Woodhouse brought us to the world – he put our children in the international spotlight. He was a very good fund raiser. At the time, UNICEF financial support to East Asia had been declining, but Woodhouse worked hard to raise UNICEF funds to Viet Nam.'*

Stephen Woodhouse: *'We had a solid operations team, our national officers were tip-top. My Senior Programme Officer Bertie Mendis was very detail oriented, which made for a great team, as I was able to focus more on donor support, speech making, and general programme direction and strategy.'*

However, the country programme seemed to be losing its focus. We needed to tighten things up, put the attention back on the poorer, which led us to concentrate on the people living in the mountainous areas in the North and Central Highlands. We also paid attention to the Mekong Delta, particularly in the areas of clean water and the growing interest in proper sanitation, and we were fortunate to depend upon very capable people in the HCMC office. But our prime area of focus was going to be the ethnic minorities in the mountain villages; the Vietnamese Government was also recognizing these groups as emerging areas of need and attention.'

Group Diversity

Viet Nam's population can be divided into two main categories: The Kinh majority, which makes up 85% of the 80 million population, and the 53 ethnic minority groups that comprise the remaining 15%. But such a summary masks significant differences. Ethnic minorities have been grouped together for ease of identification and recognition – a practice

that has created as many issues as it has attempted to solve – though each has its own history, culture, and at least one language or dialect (recent National Linguistic Institute studies have revealed about 100 different spoken languages in Viet Nam, with only 30 having scripts). This cultural individuality has a downside on the road to development, as the groups and those helping them must often tread the fine line on issues of cultural sensitivity and economic viability and investment.

Christian Salazar: *'From an economic standpoint, this [was] easy to understand. A poor, developing country has to invest in its people in a way that their dollar will go as far and as fast as possible. It is a weighing of alternatives, and the reality is that difficult areas are just that: difficult. They are difficult to reach, cost more money in reaching, and take more time, effort and investment. But the more progress Viet Nam [achieved], the less acceptable this weighing of alternatives [became].'*

A direct result of this shift in priority was the start of close relations with the Committee for Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Area Affairs (CEMMA) in 1993. Ethnic minorities, at the time, were overwhelmingly entrenched in poverty: By 1992, 79% of all minorities were categorized as poor, as compared with only 21% of the Kinh majority. UNICEF sought to address this disparity partly through revamping its Education programme.

Stephen Woodhouse: *'With Education, UNICEF wanted to target the poorest, but we were focusing on secondary levels. The reality showed that the poorest children were finding it hard to even finish primary schooling, and those who were able to finish secondary schooling had been comparatively better off from the start. So we switched our focus [back] to primary.'*

Back to the Blackboard

In the same way that the Water programme was able to incorporate the benefits of other UNICEF programmes in its community projects, the Education programme built in health and nutrition lessons as well as a new programme called Environment Education, which introduced clean drinking water and latrines in primary schools.

Under the 1991-1995 Country Programme, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and Training on improving the quality of education to the bottom 10% of the population – with new attempts to reach those children who had dropped out or never previously attended school. The most critical part of the plan was the development of multi-grade teaching in 20 schools in four remote provinces.

Hoang Van Sit, Education Programme Officer (1990-present): *'Multi-grade teaching has a long history in Viet Nam, and in 1991 UNICEF started a 5 year programme of cooperation on 'Multi-grade Teaching'...We designed multi-grade teaching techniques to help the teachers, particularly those in the ethnic minority regions, to know how to handle two or three different grade levels of students in the same classroom at the same time...It became the Multi-grade Bilingual Education project for ethnic minority children. The bilingual component was not as we expected, due to the sensitivity of the issue of local languages...However the biggest success was that we organized a writing competition and developed 21 bilingual big books (H'mong-, Bahnar-, Cham-, and Khmer-Vietnamese). They were highly appreciated by everyone – the local authorities, teachers, and children – because it was the first time that bilingual books were printed and distributed for school use. They...focused on the cultural heritage of the ethnic minorities.'*

Madame Nguyen Thi Binh: *'We have made great efforts to improve the education in remote and mountainous areas, and we have substantial investment for education in these areas, but much more still must be done. For example, during my time as Minister, we had built a system of boarding schools in the ethnic areas, fully subsidized by the Government. These primary school boarding schools were at the district level. The lower secondary boarding schools were at the provincial level, and were focused on training local students to become teachers to serve their own areas. At the village and hamlet level, it was difficult to build boarding schools. The teachers were provided by the*

Government but the food and administration was paid for by the local people, so it was a joint effort to bring the children to school in a remote area. We built these schools in a cluster, so that children from all around could come.'

Water Works

As Education expanded its work into the more remote areas, UNICEF's Water programme shifted its orientation. Under the 1991-1995 Country Programme Plan of Cooperation, it sought to attain National Plan of Action goals and the International Decade of Water and Sanitation aim of universal access to safe water and sanitation facilities by the year 2000.

At this point, Water and Sanitation began to blend its traditional work of well construction and latrines with broad educational and communication activities, advocacy and social mobilization. It also emphasized further integration with other UNICEF programmes especially health, nutrition and education.

By the time Rima Salah replaced Woodhouse in 1995, more than 170,000 new water supply facilities such as tube wells and dug wells with hand pumps had been constructed throughout the country, providing safe water to about 24 million people in the rural areas. During the same period, more than 120,000 household latrines were built and 2,900 primary schools were provided with water and sanitation facilities. More than 100,000 managers, technical staff, masons, health workers, Women's Union members and teachers were trained in issues related to water and sanitation, along with thousands of reading material products distributed during campaigns and training sessions.

Despite these achievements, the programme was not able to shake the discrepancy in priority for clean water over the need for proper sanitation.

Chander Badloe, Chief UNCEP WES Section (2001-present):

'Sanitation did not get the attention that the clean water programmes did in the beginning. Water supply has always been a high priority – for example, the international water decade declaration – while sanitation has been more a case of periodic voices coming out. And unlike water, sanitation was not specifically included in the Millennium Development Goals. The Country Programme for 1988-1991 was the beginning of a

greater focus on hygiene and sanitation for our programme; UNICEF wanted to deliver a package for the maximum impact of health and living conditions. It was, naturally, water first, then sanitation – as it still is. But as the water programmes began to have success and began reaching greater parts of the country, support for sanitation grew stronger.'

A Matter of Timing

Rima Salah arrived in 1995, the first female Representative for UNICEF in Viet Nam.

Rima Salah: *'I was the first Representative to live from the start in a villa outside of the Ly Thuong Kiet office. I came at a time when Viet Nam was opening up to the world and Hanoi was going through its own visible changes. Hotels were opening up, the Opera House was refurbished and people started going to the cultural performances there. Events like the Asian financial crisis did little to affect the sense of optimism in the street.'*

I could also see, though, how development was creating problems for the fabric of society. With development, there is sometimes the case that women and children are put aside. So we needed to be very active in reinforcing the place of the family at the center of community development, in helping to empower women while also ensuring they had more time with their families, and in increasing the importance of child protection and social work.'

Up until around 1995, UNICEF had emphasized quantitative achievements. The thrust was in getting more children into schools, extending the health care network and services, expanding delivery. The 1994 Situation Analysis, with its revelations of different types of problems like HIV/AIDS, geographical and gender disparities, and children living in especially difficult circumstances, introduced a new direction. UNICEF was going to devote more programming effort towards these emerging issues.

For the first time, a separate project for Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances, consisting of two subprojects entitled 'Ethnic Minority Development and Urban Poor' was incorporated in the 1996-2000 Country Programme. These projects were parcels of UNICEF's main goals of promoting 'the survival, development, protection and

participation of children and women', stipulated in the programme text and another expression for the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Viet Nam's leaders showed similar priorities. In 1996, the 8th Party Congress produced an agenda explicitly mentioning hunger eradication, poverty alleviation, family planning, and introduced a public policy combating 'social evils' - a new term that linked drug abuse and prostitution to contracting HIV. This label was meant to curb high-risk behaviour, but over time it led to discrimination and stigma of people living with HIV/AIDS. These issues, as well as the goal to reduce child malnutrition from 33% to 20-25% and universal lower secondary education, became the main tenets of Viet Nam's socio-economic development strategy for the first decade of the 21st century.

Furthermore, the Government began a more active role in United Nations affairs. For 1996-1998, Viet Nam served as Vice Chair of UNICEF's Executive Board, and followed this with a position on the UN Economic and Social Council for 1998-2000, and to the UNDP/UNFPA for 2000-2002.

Backslide

But just as Viet Nam was poised to become a major player in Southeast Asia – with its accession to ASEAN, its newly normalized relations with the United States, and its economy averaging around 8% annual growth, the wheels began slowly to come off. In 1997, most of South East Asia was wrecked by a currency crisis. Talk of the country being the next Asian tiger began to taper off. It was not long before foreign investment had lost its faith and interest, and by the third quarter of 1997, Viet Nam was moving into recession. Foreign investment approvals were down 75% from 1996 but even more telling was the fact that only a quarter of the \$32.5 billion in pledged investment since 1988 had actually been disbursed.

The Government's renovation policies, which had been in place for a decade, began to show a mix of great progress alongside evidence of emerging disparities. The good news was that poverty rates had declined significantly, and people's overall living conditions were on the rise. The under five mortality rates and malnutrition rates for children had dropped, and access to primary education was becoming a possibility for almost all Vietnamese children.

On the other hand, disparities were now evident and growing. Furthermore, the rapid adoption of a freer market system meant that the Government expected families and individuals to take on a more direct responsibility for their own social welfare. User fees for health care and day-care centers were introduced. Poorer people, in particular, began to practice self-health care, but with a lack of basic health knowledge, this quickly threatened more serious health problems. These were signs of a widening disparity among different population groups: rural and urban areas, ethnic majority and minority groups, and males and females.

As subsidies disappeared and service costs rose, the poor, especially poor women, were hit hard. Stress registered in different ways, further aggravated by nutritional deficiencies, chronic under-nutrition and, for many, a lack of education that would prevent any chance of empowerment and improvement. Those who lived at near poverty levels were most vulnerable, as any small shock like a poor harvest, natural disaster or loss of an income earner could push them back far below the poverty line.

Morten Giersing, Representative (1998-2002): *'[T]he country seemed in rapid change – but also somehow stalled due to the economic slowdown across Asia. The financial crisis hit Vietnam badly: many safety nets had been removed, the cost of living was rising, and the new economic opportunities disappeared with the dramatic drop in foreign investment. The crisis also raised questions about how solid the willingness to economic reform had really been established: Would the downturn also mean a turn away from the market economy?'*

Similar disparities appeared in education. Primary enrolments in the difficult to reach areas decreased for a variety of reasons: labor demands on the family, (especially for girls), language differences, increasing school costs, lower teacher salaries and the subsequent draining of teachers into the emerging labor market. 84% of primary aged children (6-14 years) were enrolled in school, in 1991. However, enrolment figures in mountainous areas were reportedly much lower - some reportedly as low as 50%. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the primary school completion rate by the early 1990s was only 46%. Resources and equipment were cut and poor hygiene facilities also contributed to the negative impact. Government increases in public spending in education, from below 5% in 1989 to nearly 17% ten years later were an improvement but still ultimately inadequate.

Madame Nguyen Thi Binh: *'Due to the difficulties of the economy in these areas, despite our building a good network of schools, it has not reached our expectations. We could not always do exactly what we wanted, and that is why the plan suffered at times. So we are quite concerned about the quality of education in remote and rural areas. The main problem, in general, is that Viet Nam is still very poor but the demand is so great – greater than what we can afford.'*

Vietnamese Traffic and the Start of Injury Prevention

Morten Giersing, the eighth UNICEF Representative, arrived in Viet Nam in 1998. He arrived to a vastly different Hanoi than his early predecessors. Gone was the relative quiet of thousands of bicycles as a primary source of transportation. Gone was the ability to hear the sound of the wooden gong above the din of the traffic. Instead, Giersing's Hanoi streets were swollen with tens of thousands of motorbikes – but very few helmeted drivers. Traffic accidents, and fatalities, were steadily rising – to the point it could not be ignored. And what was happening in Hanoi was being repeated all over the country.

Morten Giersing: *'While our new country programme 2001-2005 had a strong geographic focus and sought to mainstream programmes involving the ethnic minorities, it was another issue, with national scope, which in many ways became a priority...the issue of child injury.'*

Progress in Primary Health Care and preventive medicine had removed disease and illness from the top of the causes of death for children one month and older. In place of these came an easily preventable, and therefore a more exasperating leading cause: almost 75% of all children's deaths in Viet Nam today are caused by injury and accident. The good work done to make infants healthier is being undone by neglect and carelessness.

Isabelle Sévédé-Bardem, UNICEF Childhood Injury Prevention Section (2003-present): *'Injury Prevention grew out of a concern expressed by the then American Ambassador to Viet Nam, Pete Peterson, to Morten Giersing about the startlingly high number of children in the hospitals in and around Hanoi who had suffered from serious injuries. He had wanted America to do something humanitarian for Viet Nam, and had intended to help build capacity in the Vietnamese healthcare delivery system. During his visits to hospitals and clinics around the country, he found that the healthcare system was generally*

adequate, but discovered that the children needed help to prevent them from being needlessly injured. He discussed the issue with Morten and a common interest arose and soon a multi-sectoral injury survey on mortality and morbidity was conducted nationwide. It confirmed that injury was the leading cause of death for children one year and above.'

Morten Giersing: *The issue was brought to light by different circumstances. One was a doubt I had about the child mortality data we were using: the absolute numbers did not seem to match the (much lower) numbers we were getting from various health information systems, broken down by specific diseases. Another was the obvious hazards in the streets of Hanoi: thousands of motorcycles with whole families on a single bike – and no helmets. The realization that drowning, for children over 1 year of age, was the dominating killer of children, rather than traffic accidents, only came later, as we started actual surveys.'*

Around 70% of Viet Nam lives in flood prone areas. The Red River Delta, in the north of the country, is smaller but more developed and densely populated than its counterpart, the Mekong Delta, in the south. Each river experiences annual flooding that can affect great percentages of the population. The Mekong River Delta consistently registers the highest rate of drowning in the country, while the Red River Delta, with a smaller tributary network, has far fewer instances of near-drowning than the Mekong, and fewer fatal drownings than the Central Coast, where a large part of the population are open sea fishermen and vulnerable to storms at sea.

Viet Nam's weather patterns, its long and exposed coastline, its large rivers and mountainous terrain, make it one of the ten most natural disaster-prone countries in the world. The country not only plays host to typhoons, flash floods, and monsoon rains, but droughts as well. These calamities, spread unevenly throughout the country, are a key reason for forced migration of those living just above the poverty line. Often, the percentage of children drowning out of the total is overwhelming, as was the case in 2000, when floods in the Mekong Delta claimed 481 lives, of which 335, or 70%, were children - most of whom were under four years of age. Sadly, drowning is not always due directly to flooding or natural disasters. Many children drown in flooded paddy fields or fall into open wells.

As research began to confirm that injury was the leading cause of death for children in Viet Nam over one year of age, Giersing's next task was to convince UNICEF Headquarters to recognize the new priority area.

Morten Giersing: *'UNICEF HQ was – initially – concerned for rather different reasons: 'We do not need any new issue; the agenda is already overbooked.' However, it was soon realized that this was not a 'new issue'; it was rather UNICEF's core issue in new dressing: child survival. The boss herself was quite pragmatic: 'If it is a problem in Viet Nam, then we shall obviously do something about it.' New funding also meant a 'stand alone' proposal to the Executive Board and HQ provided full support in this process.'*

By the next Country Programme (2001-2005), Childhood Injury Prevention was a stand alone project, for the Country Programme (2006-2010) it will become a full-fledged UNICEF programme.

Morten Giersing: *'When I left...the economic crisis had been left behind and the country's determination to move forward had been clearly formulated in its new 5 year plan (2001-2005) and in the ambitious 10 year development strategy up to 2010. A bilateral trade agreement had been signed with the USA, President Clinton had been warmly welcomed in Viet Nam – and had launched a new UNICEF-supported programme to protect children, not from disease but from the millions of new motorcycles.'*

TOWARDS A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH (1990 - 2000)



Two H'mong women attend a UNICEF training session on gender and development issues, using the publication "Facts for life"



UNICEF Representative, Stephen Woodhouse (1992-1995) gives a young boy, a Vitamin A tablet



*Ms. Rima Salah, UNICEF Representative (1995-1998) with
Pham DuyTrong, UNICEF interpreter/translator, Mme Muoi and Mme Tien,
long-serving UNICEF employees*



Morten Giersing (2nd from left) - UNICEF Representative (1998 - 2002)

Chapter V:

The Present Case (2001 and Beyond)

The new millennium saw a breakthrough in human rights-based programming for UNICEF in Vietnam in conjunction with the overall progress of Doi Moi. The 9th Party Congress used the term 'children's rights' for the first time in official Party Documents. The UNICEF situation analysis from 2000 was titled 'An Overview of Vietnam's Progress in Realizing the Rights (sic!) of Children and Women', and the country programme 2001-2002 was named 'A Programme to Advance Child Rights in Vietnam'. Similarly, the country programme document for 2006-2010 explicitly stated that the future programmes of cooperation will be human-rights-based.

This shift in programming had several implications. It intensified UNICEF's work in areas such as child protection, child participation, and juvenile justice. It pushed the organization further into advocacy for child rights in areas such as HIV/AIDS and the protection of children from exploitation, violence and neglect. And it also propelled UNICEF into becoming involved in law making, policy making, monitoring of child rights and handling of child rights violations. This direction was already imminent in the 1990s but gained significant strength in 2001.

Christian Salazar: *'The human rights-based approach to programming is a new way of doing business. Our programmes now go beyond fulfillment of basic needs through the provision of basic social services. We now aim to create a child-friendly society. In other words, we are giving more attention to the legal and policy environment for children in the attempt to foster sustainable social change for children in line with the principles and articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments.'*

'Social Evils' in the New Century: HIV/AIDS

Since 1992, when the first case of AIDS was reported in Viet Nam, there was one standard answer to the question of how Viet Nam responded to the growing threat of HIV/AIDS: Attention was focused elsewhere.

Stephen Woodhouse (1992-1995): *'[HIV/AIDS] was just beginning to be an issue. It was not difficult to see its potential, as there were vulnerabilities with the increase in prostitution and drug abuse. But we were not able to do much, to my continued disappointment, as the Vietnamese authorities did not want to focus attention on this problem.'*

Rima Salah: (1995-1998): *'It was difficult to make them understand the urgency of the problem. HIV/AIDS is something that touches the core of the family and in Viet Nam, with the strong sense of traditional values and closed society, it was necessary to explain and try to convince them of the need to act. At that point, there was the view that there were social ills but not social problems.'*

Morten Giersing(1998-2002): *'The first big new issue in my period was HIV/AIDS, and it became a focus for the office to help develop a programmatic response, and to advocate for the recognition of this new risk to Viet Nam's development.'*

Anthony Bloomberg Representative (2002-2005): *'Viet Nam was slow to acknowledge and act on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The types of key interventions that are required at the beginning of an epidemic are indeed concentrated on the high-risk population groups of infection which are intravenous drug injectors and sex workers. Because these are considered socially undesirable phenomena, there is a natural tendency to stigmatize these activities and the people engaged in them – this led to the Vietnamese government including HIV/AIDS as a social evil.'*

Explanations of HIV/AIDS being a foreigner's disease or only affecting the undesirable elements of society were paper-thin but unfortunately preferred over more outright information. The choice was somewhat understandable in light of Viet Nam's traditional values and reluctance to speak about personal matters. But it also effectively limited broader understanding of the disease and the ways it could be contracted, including those not linked to high-risk behaviour. Discrimination and stigma were soon widespread.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'In Viet Nam today, we are at the point where HIV/AIDS is spreading to the general population, and it is a very unhealthy thing to continue that stigmatized approach because you are talking about women who are infected from their husbands who have visited sex workers, children infected by their mothers – and these*

people have not done anything socially reprehensible and they should not be stigmatized. It is important to positively influence the public away from the 'social evils' stigma and discrimination approach.'

In 2004, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam signaled a major change in the 'social evils' approach to HIV/AIDS. He signed the National Strategy on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control (2004-2010), which seeks to control the prevalence of HIV among the general population to less than 0.3%; moves away from communication messages condemning HIV as a 'social evil'; and identifies nine key areas for programme implementation, including the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT). The Prime Minister followed this up with the important high-profile act of visiting AIDS patients in hospitals. Current estimates show more than 220,000 people living with HIV in Viet Nam. The majority of these are young people, with women and children increasingly infected and affected.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'There is now huge money coming into Viet Nam for HIV/AIDS from the World Bank, the US President's Fund, the ADB, and other ODA sources, so in the next few years HIV/AIDS will get a lot of attention. The strategy that has now come out has eliminated the social evils approach and has introduced the harm reduction approach.'*

A Loss of Innocence: Child Protection

Much of the brunt of Viet Nam's transitions is borne on the backs of the young. This comes as sobering but unsurprising when one considers that young people make up the largest percentage of the population, at 36%, but have only relatively recently been afforded the right to their own individual expression and collective representation. Unfortunately, the family unit that was resuscitated after years of fighting now increasingly struggles to maintain cohesion in the face of new pressures. Such stress has provoked new social problems. By-products of Viet Nam's economic progress and growing urbanisation include an increase in child labor, exploitation, abuse, family separation, trafficking, violence, homelessness, and suicide. The bulk of these cases are found in urban areas – though child labor, exploitation and trafficking are less easily confined.

While still predominantly a rural country, urban migration is on the rise in Viet Nam. Viet Nam shows a 3.6% annual urban population expansion, which accounts for about half of the annual increase in the

population. The countryside began to inundate the city with migrants, students, and seasonal laborers once the pressures from and lure of the market became impossible to ignore. Cities became seen as centers of opportunity, and unregistered thousands entered urban areas in the hope of a better life. In Hanoi, estimates now place over 1 million unregistered people living amongst a city of 2.5 million – and over half of these have no stable residence.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'UNICEF has for many years had activities in the area of child protection. What we can see and foresee is that these social issues of children will become increasingly of concern in Viet Nam in the future. This will likely be one of the unintended consequences of the socio-economic development of Viet Nam. Parents will have to work longer – and have less time for their children. There will be more pressure on families to succeed economically and provide for their children with adverse effects on family cohesion and more intra-family violence. We expect these factors will lead to increased pressures on families and an increase in Child Protection problems in Viet Nam.'*

According to the Country Programme Document (2006-2010), Viet Nam now has over 2.5 million children in need of special protection (CNSP), including over 150,000 orphans, 1.2 million children with disabilities, 23,000 child laborers, 13,000 children in conflict with the law and 263,000 children living with HIV positive parents. Estimates place around 16,000 children now living on the streets of Viet Nam – most of whom come from poor farming communities and end up under bridges or on benches in cities. Most can look forward to hawking postcards, maps or lottery tickets, if not shining shoes or other menial tasks; those younger than seven or eight usually beg. It is a problem of overflow: the cities cannot meaningfully or gainfully absorb the constant flow of migrants in from the countryside, and so, in the city without registration or access to basic services, they essentially become illegal migrants in their own country.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'The UNICEF Viet Nam Child Protection team has been taking stock of our strategies and interventions in Child Protection. Previously our approach has been directed towards categories of children – street children, orphans, sexually exploited children, and so on. The new approach...is more targeted towards the protective systems that need to be developed that can safeguard children with difficult social vulnerabilities. For example, we have*

persuaded the Government to change its policy on institutional care for children – where possible children should stay with their families or alternative community-based care.'

Le Hong Loan: *'In the area of child protection, the fact is that individual programmes come before putting in broad structures. At this point, we are working with the Government to put in a national child protection strategy – looking at programming perspectives and links. It is a big workload, but satisfying because UNICEF is the leader among all NGO and UN agencies on this issue. It is an important investment; it is still in the conception phase, but there are good opportunities for influence and advocacy. The Government is receptive and willing to cooperate.'*

Of Human Bondage

The majority of the negative consequences that have emerged from Viet Nam's modernization do not discriminate on the basis of gender. But there is one issue that overwhelmingly claims females as its primary targets. Viet Nam now has thousands of women and girls trafficked outside the country. Most of those trafficked are headed to China and Cambodia for work, arranged marriages, or prostitution. Estimates are grossly inexact, and count as trafficked only those that come to the attention of border police, but according to UNICEF China and the Chinese Women's Federation, there were approximately 10-12,000 Vietnamese women and children trafficked into China alone in 2003.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'I have always felt that the interventions against trafficking of women and children are highly strategic. This is because the phenomenon touches upon so many social issues, whether the attitudes towards girls and sexual exploitation amongst the population, or whether towards coping mechanisms of poor families who send or tolerate that their girls put themselves at risk to help the family economically. It is for this reason that I have taken a personal interest in this issue during my time in Viet Nam.'*

In June 2003, UNICEF China and Viet Nam participated in a landmark initiative to halt cross-border trafficking. For the first time, Chinese and Vietnamese authorities, supported by UNICEF, began a major communication campaign to raise awareness of the danger of trafficking with the aim of stopping Vietnamese women and girls crossing the border for forced marriages and prostitution.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'A cross-border visit was organized jointly by UNICEF Viet Nam and UNICEF China, with the Government delegations on either side – and I personally participated in it. The governments had not been able to deal properly bilaterally on this issue because of other complicating factors – such as illegal immigration and historic questions like the exodus of boat people to China in 1979/80. It was only through UNICEF's programme relationships in both countries that the cross-border visits took place.'*

During this visit a lot of contentious issues were aired by both sides, and at some points it looked as if no agreement would be possible. But I think that UNICEF's impartial insistence to deal with the humanitarian aspects of trafficking in women and children helped China and Viet Nam agree on seven joint actions that would be implemented within the context of the UNICEF programmes in the two countries. Now there are annual bilateral meetings to review progress against the agreed joint actions and this is all very positive.'

Be More Social

Up until recently, there was no such thing as social work and social workers in Viet Nam. With the growing number of children in jeopardy, or at risk of abuse, or becoming involved in crime, the country needed to both recognize the value of professionals who could support these young people and alleviate the strains they and their families were suffering. UNICEF has long attempted to bring the social worker to Viet Nam and have the idea of social work accepted. It has pushed for the training of community volunteers and has encouraged the study of social work at university level.

Madame Tran Thi Thanh Thanh: *'I believe the role of the social worker in Viet Nam is very necessary. UNICEF has helped our country understand the benefits that social workers can have on the community and done much to promote new policies and a disbursement of responsibility for the children to provincial levels.'*

Rima Salah: *'I am a great believer in social work. It is crucial for development. During my time in Viet Nam, I brought in professionals from France and America to endorse what social work was all about. We had meetings in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City – I remember one meeting where workers from the South came up to speak with Madame Thanh Thanh in order to work on a dialogue and empower social workers.'*

Anthony Bloomberg: *'UNICEF has been championing the importance of social work and the need to build a national capacity of social workers and the network within which they can function effectively. I like to argue that just as we have medical personnel for health problems, the country needs social workers who are the equivalent of doctors and nurses for social problems. Just recently, the Vietnamese government has recognized social work as an official field of study. This has been the result of about ten years of UNICEF advocacy and exposing Government officials to the subject of social work.'*

Le Hong Loan: *'In Viet Nam, there is no title for social worker. It is not in the vocabulary, and so there are no designated social worker positions. But it is an academic discipline. Interestingly, there is the realization of the need for social work training, but as yet no actual social worker. In the future, we hope to see social workers in hospitals, schools and other places.'*

The Human Rights-Based Approach

The human rights-based approach to programming meant that UNICEF put increased attention into monitoring the rights of the child. This included improved collection and data analysis on children and women as well as capacity building for those Vietnamese institutions involved in monitoring rights progress and corresponding abuses and complaints. Key actors in this area are the state inspectorates and CPFC. At the same time, the National Assembly (the National Parliament in Viet Nam), is increasingly playing closer attention to these issues.

Christian Salazar: *'Governments must be accountable. I find there is a great sense of duty from Government, not just in Vietnam but in Asian countries in general. But there are also inefficiencies and corruption. As Vietnam leaves day-to-day business more and more to the people, it becomes urgent that the Vietnamese State put more mechanisms and institutions in place that monitor, as close a possible, how children are doing within the process of social change and that raise the voice on behalf of children, parents and care takers if things are not going well. We are seeing the strengthening of accountability through, for example, the prominence of the National Assembly and their action in the past two years. We have therefore engaged closely with the National Assembly and supported their work on monitoring and law making in cases such as the revised law on protection and education for children, the youth law and the law on education.'*

But despite these proclamations and the efforts of the Government, UNICEF, the INGOs and the international donor community, Viet Nam is a country where an estimated 17 million children do not have access to safe water and where 75% of all children lack proper sanitation. Each year, nearly 38,000 children die before their fifth birthday, mostly from preventable causes. Two million children under five years of age are underweight. 200,000 primary aged children are still not enrolled in primary school, the majority of these being ethnic minority children, especially girls. And despite the impressive achievement of halving poverty rates over the last fifteen years, over 20 million people are still described as poor and living below the poverty line.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'We have to follow the children and we have to follow the development of the country. In a country that has very high under 5 mortality rates, survival has to be the chief focus of the programme. But when you get to a country like Viet Nam, where on aggregate the under 5 mortality rate has been doing very well, do we lose interest in survival? No, but we must focus in on those populations not doing well.'*

And what do we say about the rest of the population? Does Unicef have nothing to say? We still have the Child Protection issues. We still have issues as to the quality of education. We still have children who are graduating from primary school but not enrolled in secondary, especially in ethnic minority areas. Basic primary, in fact, primary education is not enough. They talk about primary education and lower secondary, and now I think we should talk about after graduation from a quality primary school, we want the children to be enrolled in secondary school.'

The other issue is young adolescence. This is an age where it is still possible to influence and prepare them for what will happen in older adolescence, and this we have been working on in one of our education projects and we will be strengthening the youth programming. In Viet Nam this is particularly important, because demographically, there is a bulge in the population, where you have the largest cohort of the population is now the young teenagers. This makes it very appropriate for UNICEF to pay attention to this age group, which I think we are beginning to do, in terms of life skills, attitudes, participation in issues that will affect them.'

A Crowded Stage

Long gone are the days when UNICEF could arrange for all concerned to meet in a single restaurant to streamline activities. By 2005, according to the INGO Directory, there were an estimated 500 INGO and other development agencies operating in Viet Nam, mostly from Western Europe, North America and the Asia Pacific. At the beginning of the century, INGOs in Viet Nam acted on 1,458 projects with a monetary value of \$ 81 million. By 2005, the level of ODA had been raised to \$3.4 billion in pledges.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'Over the last ten years, almost all the international overseas assistance actors in Viet Nam had increased their flow of funds to Viet Nam. The bilateral government cooperation to Viet Nam has also greatly increased. These factors have led to the UN as a whole and UNICEF in particular having an increasingly smaller share of ODA in Viet Nam: UNICEF's share is now about 0.5%. But of course it is not the money that is the key input that we have to give.'*

The changing nature of Viet Nam, the evolution and influence of the donor landscape on UNICEF's position in Viet Nam, the harmonization of UN agencies, and the upcoming changes in modality transfers have all pushed the organization to review its strategies and structure. The past seems to be fading faster in Viet Nam than elsewhere. Even UNICEF's physical premises is not immune: the Government served notice at the end of 2004 that it is now prepared to demolish the 'leaning villa' at 72 Ly Thuong Kiet, and scheduled the job to take place in 2005. UNICEF's next residence - an expanded United Nations compound - is currently in the planning stages.

Dr. Cao Viet Hoa: *'The situation has changed over the past ten years in nearly every aspect of UNICEF's business. In general, it was a simpler situation before: there were no emerging sectors, there was not such economic disparity, and there was a smaller Government and smaller group of aid organizations. There was less UN, less of the other groups, and it was easier to find good, professional local staff. Now, as the job market in Viet Nam becomes more attractive, locals are finding well-paid jobs that may be less demanding than at UNICEF. And though the indicators for women and children overall look much better, the reality is that life is still very difficult when you look at certain places more carefully.'*

Le Hong Loan: *'There is a heavier, more intense workload than working for an NGO, but a professional satisfaction that comes from knowing your work is influencing national and sub-national policies. This is particularly the case in the protection sector, as protection services have not yet been firmly established and there is a lot of work to be done in changing values, in laying down the infrastructure and having it all accepted by the Government. The same can be said for trafficking issues and injury prevention.'*

'At the same time, the process of UNICEF's evolution in Hanoi from supply to policy and advocacy requires a change in the profile of the staff and the nature of the work. So there has been a greater turnover over the past six years or so. You can feel the effects of this evolution.'

Christian Salazar: *'The state no longer needs UNICEF for service delivery. It needs us to create a protective environment for children, and we need our staff to work on social policies in different sectors. One such example is the Comprehensive Poverty Growth Reduction Strategy. We want to bring these poverty reduction strategies to the provinces, as the provinces now have much greater capacity and autonomy than before. We will move into the provincial level with child-friendly programming and we will sign and transfer funds directly with the provinces. This is how we prove our continued relevance, and this is how we will stay the top advocate for children in Viet Nam.'*

Le Hong Loan: *'You can also see the effects of change and development on the other side of the table. There is a much stronger level of technical expertise now in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MOFIN, MPI and others. Also, our regular partners like the CPFC, MOET have shown a lot of growth; what you have now are Vietnamese who have gone abroad for training, knowledge and observation and returned to make meaningful contributions.'*

How Soon Is Now?

Success is a term that must be qualified. The attainment of targeted goals can mask gaps in treatments that will not disappear on their own. On closer inspection, Viet Nam, with its difficult terrain, hard to reach populations, and inadequate treatment/storage infrastructure, puts up a difficult fight against complete eradication of a disease or illness, or the ability to get transport enough clean water to everyone, or truly achieve a universal standard of primary and lower secondary education.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'It is more and more difficult to reach those last remaining percentages and it takes more effort. This is our intention for the next Country Programme: to identify and make a dent in those unreached populations.'*

On Health and Nutrition

Viet Nam has achieved impressive results in health over the last three decades. Nowhere is its success more evident than in its immunization coverage. Polio was eradicated in 2000, measles is close to being eradicated and there has been virtual elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus. However, closer inspection shows that certain groups of people are still missing out on life-saving immunization. Furthermore, the impact of government health reforms that have introduced user fees and legalized private medical practice and the pharmaceutical sector are pointing towards growing inequity.

Dr. Cao Viet Hoa: *'Even with the success of the EPI programme, the reality is that today there are still areas only 70% fully immunized. What this shows is that there is a great deal of effort still to be made in order to be able to truly prevent these illnesses and diseases. There needs to be mobile teams for better access to administer the new vaccines like Hepatitis B. Viet Nam also needs more and better storage facilities, but the budgets at the commune level essentially disallow for this possibility. There also needs to be training to ensure injections are made safely and monitoring for adverse effects after immunization. Progress will come if the Government and other donors increase their support. UNICEF is no longer needed for direct support or supply.'*

Anthony Bloomberg: *'On the whole, Viet Nam is doing very well on many child indicators – immunization is over 90%, and when you look at the Kinh majority, they are close to, and maybe even ahead of national and international goals. However, for certain populations, the figures are not so good and we need to focus on them. But even for the majority Kinh population, there are still concerns. Even amongst the majority that has enough food to eat, there is still relatively high malnutrition due to many complex factors, including the low incidence of exclusive breastfeeding for the recommended period of time, and the lack of potable water and sanitation coverage.'*

Malnutrition

Malnutrition was and remains a stubborn problem, much more complex in scope than EPI immunization or CDD oral rehydration solutions. There is no quick cure and though the conditions that cause it, lack of adequate food, health, care - have been addressed, they are not yet all under control.

Dr. Pham Ngoc Len: *'Malnutrition is a multi-cause problem; it is not only related to education or well-being. What we can see is that there is a high rate in low income areas and areas where there are few resources – like in the central and mountain sections. But the problem also exists in areas where there are good, nutritious resources. In these places, we see care-takers selling nutritious foods in the market and then buying food without any nutritional value to feed their children. So there is a lack of knowledge, a lack of the understanding of nutritional value that keeps malnutrition high even in resource-rich areas.'*

In the 1996-2000 Programme of Cooperation, UNICEF focused on five projects in its nutrition programme. These were preventing malnutrition in young children; preventing vitamin A and iron deficiencies; preventing iodine deficiency and encouraging breastfeeding. The goal was to reduce from 42% to 30% malnutrition and Vitamin A deficiency in pregnant women and infants, so that new mothers in the targeted areas would be able to breastfeed exclusively during the first six months. Success was mixed. Distribution of Vitamin A capsules was initially hampered by a supply shortage when the decision was made to cut costs by purchasing only locally produced capsules. But gains were made when distribution and training was shared between the National Institute of Nutrition, the Pasteur Institute, and the Dien Bien Phu Hospital. Iron tablet supplements were even more constrained and could only reach around 6% of the estimated pregnant women nationally. It was also unfortunate that no early attempts were made to integrate the Vitamin A and iron supplements into the EPI programme. For all health and nutrition projects, UNICEF sought to strengthen planning and monitoring at national and local levels. These programmes, it should be noted, continued to gain noteworthy results despite a background of shrinking Government financial contribution to healthcare – by the year 2000, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, government spending on healthcare amounted to just 0.7% of GDP, and four-fifths of healthcare spending came from private pockets.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'The ways of improving nutrition are subtle – not just a question of food but also of parasites, exclusive breastfeeding, health status of the mother. Even though there are quantity issues involved, there are quality issues in terms of understanding all the reasons why children are not as well nourished as they should be, and then attacking all the different aspects.'*

It is very important that mothers and children receive sufficient Vitamin A, iodine, and other micro-nutrients needed to ensure good nutrition. We learned recently that the Mekong Delta is the region with the lowest consumption of iodised salt, and this is because the population there take their salt in the form of fish sauce – so now UNICEF has to work with the Government on how to introduce iodine into the fish sauce.'

Food poverty fell sharply during the 1990s, but pockets of severe hunger and food insecurity still exist. A UN FAO study estimated slightly under one-quarter of the population live with a high risk of not being able to feed themselves – most of whom are small farmers in northern and delta areas. Contrast this with obesity, which has become the new nutrition problem emerging in the wealthier, usually urban areas. Officials now estimate as much as 12% of children in HCMC and slightly less in Hanoi are obese – the product of a rise in income and lack of nutritional awareness.

Dr. Cao Viet Hoa: *'With Health and Nutrition, we began with hardware amounting to around 50% of the budget. Now, with the reductions and an increase in other donors, we need to spend our time and money on advocacy and sustainability of interventions, strategies and modalities. Once we come up with a feasible plan, we should leave it for the Government to expand.'*

Water Environment and Sanitation (WES)

Access to safe water and proper sanitation continues to show mixed coverage throughout Viet Nam. Urban areas consistently show higher coverage for both water and sanitation; roughly half of all rural areas have clean water coverage, and only 35-40% have adequate sanitation. Hygiene education, particularly in schools, is an increasing focus, especially since most schools have limited access to clean water and sanitation and facilities for washing hands, using soap and disposing of toilet waste.

Chander Badloe (2001 - present): *'While WES has always been linked to health, and the communes have always showed this as a priority, the link now is being set on poverty reduction. Now, with the cross-cutting measures within UNICEF, WES is strongly linked to health indicators. The emphasis is on ensuring available quality and adequate consumption, and the argument is that when these are provided, then there are clear and direct benefits for the community: less money is spent on medicine, productivity rises from greater health as well as less time spent accessing sources of clean water, and so on. When this is clear, then you see people wanting to work together, you see communities building not just for community resources, but for individual housing access, and you see services becoming more equitable. This link is targeting every single household, even the poorest.'*

In the rural areas, quality, quantity and convenience are hard obstacles to conquer. Then there are the problems associated with human behaviour, such as when villages pollute their clean water access. There are other regional problems, such as arsenic levels in the dug wells, or the feasibility of gravity-fed water systems in the mountains.'

Education: Face the Music

Since 1975, The Government of Viet Nam has accorded education as one of its highest priorities. Universal primary education has been achieved and the government has now set new targets for all children to enroll in lower secondary school by 2010 as well as reaching a pre-school (kindergarten) enrolment rate of 95%. However, these impressive education statistics hide disparities particularly for children living in rural and remote areas, as well as for children affected by HIV/AIDS, ethnic minority children and children with disabilities, who are all frequently denied their right to education.

Hoang Van Sit: *'UNICEF is trying to promote equality among the children. That is why we ask the question: Disparity or Majority? We now go for disparity, which means we go to the remote areas, to the areas where we are needed the most.'*

UNICEF is trying to support the raising of awareness among the ethnic minority people to educate their children, and in particular their daughters. The ethnic minority culture does not want to send girls to school because they say that investing in girls is investing in other families – not in your own. But we are saying that when you educate the

son, you are providing for one person, but when you educate a girl or woman, you are providing education for the whole family and community, and the nation as well.

We do not want to promote the old 'chalk and talk' methods, but rather an activity-based teaching which pushes the students and has them working together for themselves, even so far as the students teaching each other...It takes time for new ideas and concepts to take shape, but we are happy that the Government understands UNICEF's added value more and more.'

Where do the Children Play

Childhood Injury Prevention has expanded quickly working with the other UNICEF sections, initially, and then beginning a stand alone project in 2003, with the aim of increasing family and community awareness about what can easily be done to increase safety in a child's environment. The initial research that helped clarify why injury rates were so high has also helped shed light on the variety and prevalence of types of injuries Vietnamese children suffer. Each section has worked on issues relevant to their programmes, such as Education pushing for safety awareness in the curriculum; Health and Nutrition training volunteers to help communities create 'child safe homes'; and WES working to construct safety barriers for children around dug-out wells and other water access areas.

Isabelle Sévédé-Bardem, Chief, Childhood Injury Prevention: *'Our ability to provide supplies like helmets and other safety gear was never going to be a feasible solution, so we worked on prevention through active measures like knowledge and awareness and adult supervision, and measures like getting barriers put up around potentially dangerous areas.'*

The Childhood Injury Prevention (CIP) project has supplemented these initiatives by supporting the Government of Viet Nam's launching of the first comprehensive injury prevention project in the developing world in 2003, and now attempts to expand its message and impact by targeting three critical areas for prevention and protection: the education system, law enforcement, and environmental engineering. In six provinces, children, parents and care-givers have all been trained on prevention of childhood injuries. The issue of drowning has been addressed through the practical development of rural swimming pools, where UNICEF supports swimming lessons and training water safety instructors. UNICEF has also sought to improve road safety through installation of speed bumps,

crosswalks, traffic lights and speed limits. Furthermore, CIP has shown that it is not just prevention and protection that is integral to reducing harm; there must be places and spaces provided for children to play without worry. It is not enough to tell children not to play near traffic - or even worse, in areas still unsafe from landmines and unexploded ordnances left over from the wars; it is much better to lead them to a playground.

UNICEF in Viet Nam: From Here to the Horizon

Christian Salazar: *'The past fifteen years in Viet Nam has seen this country overhauled, but I expect to see an even stronger jump in the next five years. Viet Nam wants to double its per capita income, to move from a developing country to a middle-income country. This means tensions, risks, and opportunities for all, and especially for children. The next five years will see a lot of growth and improvement, and this should spark trickle-down effects to the poor. But it also will be very tough on social change. A more market-oriented system may mean less time for children and less social solidarity. The WTO accession, for one, is something we all want, that will nevertheless create problems for children. The 10th Party Congress must show that the Government clearly sees the five-year stampede at its door. And this demands social reform policies that must be equally – if not more strongly – accelerated as economic and investment reforms. There has been progress in social reform, but there is much more to be done.'*

Anthony Bloomberg: *We have to deal with the emerging issues. Because UNICEF is for children, and here in Viet Nam the great majority of children survive and we should be interested in their development. UNICEF defines children as under 18 years of age [Viet Nam defines children as under 16]. So we should not lose interest when they graduate from primary school, or secondary school. I think that we have to follow the children in the process of development and in relation to the development of the country.*

UNICEF needs to address the challenge of reaching those remaining vulnerable undeserved populations, including certain ethnic minorities. But we also need to address emerging social issues in the rest of the population. UNICEF is the world's premier child agency. Who else will help Viet Nam's Government address increasing Child Protection issues?

Another issue is young adolescence. Demographically, young adolescents are the largest cohort of the population of Viet Nam; the

time is now to support this important group of children to gain life skills in areas that are socially important to them.

So I think UNICEF in Viet Nam needs to look at the full life-cycle of children and continue to develop relevant interventions for all ages of children.'

The Go-Between

Given UNICEF's relatively small share of overall external aid, it will have to shift the weight of its focus in the near term to technical assistance for law and policy development, national standards setting, and international partnerships for women and children. While UNICEF will continue to have its own programmes of cooperation, it must dedicate effort to influencing how and where the State and other development actors spend their resources. Joint programmes with other UN agencies will become more important, as will collaboration with key donors and development banks. Related initiatives such as the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS), Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPS) and even discussions on direct budget support for government policies and programmes will all be critical components. In addition, collaboration with and through NGOs and civil society should increase. At the same time, UNICEF will continue to push for programme innovations and expand projects where children face new challenges and the organization has a comparative advantage to address them - as is the case with childhood injury prevention, family policies, ethnic minority policies, lower secondary education and adolescent participation.

Christian Salazar: *'Nowadays, the Government of Vietnam is raising its own income and, in addition, receives large amounts of development assistance. We are not needed anymore in our traditional role as supporters and providers of basic social services for children. Our added value lies much more in bringing international knowledge and experience to Vietnam, particularly related to the new emerging issues for children where Vietnam does not have experiences or expertise.'*

Beyond the Horizon

Anthony Bloomberg: *'We are describing the next UNICEF Viet Nam Country Programme 2006-2010 as one of transition – a combination of working on unfinished previous agendas such as malnutrition and WES, and also working on new emerging social issues such as Child*

Protection, Child Injury Prevention and HIV/AIDS...From a quantity point of view, we are still interested in the human rights approach of the United Nations - that no child should be left behind. With our work on policies and laws, we will try to make sure that there is a focus on child poverty.'

Even though everyone expects Viet Nam to make good socio-economic progress over the next five years, I expect that UNICEF will need to be fully engaged in Viet Nam for at least another programme after that. As Viet Nam progresses in its development, I expect that the UNICEF programme will be smaller and more focused on emerging social issues and our interventions will be more related to advocacy and technical assistance than giving materials and money.

In the future, as UNICEF's material programme role in Viet Nam diminishes, I hope we will increase private sector fundraising and general advocacy about children in Viet Nam. In this way, I believe UNICEF will still have a long, positive engagement with the Vietnamese people.'

Epilogue

UNICEF, in every mission and every programme in any country, is an endeavour to provide tangible and intangible improvement to the quality of life. The tangible product becomes the brand image, and many stories in Viet Nam recount the goodwill value of the UNICEF logo or UNICEF name on the side of a school, day-care center or storage facility, on a box of medical supplies, on a hand-pump or well, or on the side of a package delivery or 4WD automobile. The intangible product, however, is built-up over time, through expertise and relationships gained from time shared on projects, on-location, in negotiation. It takes much longer to establish but has a greater sense of endurance.

Ambassador Ngo Quang Xuan and Mrs. Le Thi Hoa: *'Most Vietnamese people know UNICEF not only for the organization having public health programmes, safe water projects and support for education in possibly all parts of the country, but also for sustainable impacts such as the results of safe Water and Sanitation activities in combination with Education, Communication and the Expanded Programme of Immunization.'*

These programmes have helped to change a tradition in exploiting and using safe water from coastal plains to remote and mountainous areas. The most significant impact is that people have understood the sources of diseases like diarrhoea, malnutrition, trachoma, gynecological infections and others. Using water sources initiated by UNICEF has been strongly promoted and become a common need. The Vietnamese mothers highly appreciate UNICEF for initiating and successfully implementing the EPI, which has helped to significantly reduce child mortality.

Thus, it is possible to say that the methodology of the UNICEF assistance programme is correct and creates notable influences. With proper understanding, efficient cooperation between the Government of Viet Nam and UNICEF, together with communication to raise awareness, financial and technical tools, term reviews and lessons learned, the Viet Nam-UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation has been successfully implemented and duly recognized the world over. Viet Nam has had the singular opportunity to have been selected to report at the UNICEF Executive Board in New York the achievements made in implementation of the Viet Nam-UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation.'

Prof. Pham Minh Hac: *'Paul Audat and I visited project sites together. There were many projects to build schools, to supply water to schools with a hand pump. To the people in the villages and schools, this was UNICEF water, these were UNICEF schools. I also made field trips with Steven Woodhouse, and others. With Mr. Woodhouse I recall one trip in particular to Tra Vinh province, south of Ho Chi Minh City. The roads were terrible, and we had to go by ferry, then by boat. But Mr. Woodhouse, Mr. Audat, all the UNICEF Representatives understood Viet Nam very well because they made these difficult travels, ate the food at some roadside stall in the middle of nowhere with the locals, or had lunch in some bamboo hut that even for Vietnamese was not up to hygiene standards. These were moments that strongly promoted a relationship between UNICEF and Viet Nam. As a result, 'UNICEF' became a Vietnamese word. Everyone knew it as a symbol, because everyone had seen it in the hard to reach areas and elsewhere. It was 'Vietnamized'. And the Representatives and other UNICEF people, became known as Mr. UNICEF, or the UNICEF gentleman. They became a bridge between people, and Government, and education, for Viet Nam to the world.*

The Government and Vietnamese people appreciate and thank UNICEF for a number of projects over the past thirty years. UNICEF's projects and support, however, were not just tangible – more importantly, these UNICEF projects helped to change the mentality in child care, helped push policy and advocate for more government resource allocation. This is more important than the physical contributions.'

Vice Minister of Education Madame Dang Hyunh Mai: *'The UNICEF name has a strong hold in Viet Nam – something that the other organizations do not have. It has weight because it was the first agency to come in and help with the very basic areas. The other organizations have followed and expanded, but UNICEF should maintain its strong name through continued programme support.'*

A Tale of Two Cities

To have heard it retold by those who played a part, life as part of the UNICEF team in Viet Nam was far more often than not a career highlight and a source of fondest memories. The testimonies, particularly from those who were around from the start at the Hotel Hoa Binh, and the first years at the leaning villa, were thick with requests to forward regards and best wishes to former staff and counterparts – so much so, that the discrepancy between first-hand UNICEF accounts and statistical descriptions of post-war Viet Nam brought to mind the opening line: *'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'* from the novel, *'A Tale of Two Cities'*.

Morten Giersing: *'I can recall Madame Tien calling to the highest placed officials, in the most informal way, to prepare for my most formal meetings with the same officials – or my excellent interpreter Trong always being greeted before me by all Ministers, as he had been their 'older brother' who had taught them English – or driver Dai, who would simply walk into any kitchen, look at the available materials, inspect the cleanliness, and then take over and prepare the meal – with some assistance from the surprised staff. I also recall Madame Muoi in her tiny office, stocking 30 old dot matrix printers, in the case that they again could be needed, and reminding me of a time where everything was scarce in Hanoi...'*

And indeed, if it were possible to borrow this title, it could be made to fit appropriately, for the story of UNICEF in Viet Nam over the past thirty years and more is really about UNICEF in Hanoi and Saigon/Ho Chi

Minh City, the two great focal points on the map of Viet Nam, and the programmes that were launched and expanded from these offices that have evolved over time to cover the entire country.

The UNICEF story in Viet Nam is a testament to the amount of positive change that will occur when all involved focus on a best possible solution and accept that cooperation may best ensure the likelihood of success. In this regard, UNICEF and the Vietnamese authorities were well-suited to one another. Both have operated with clear ideas about what needed to be done and took their authority seriously, and both were in agreement as to the inherent value of a child and the desire to improve its well being.

Anthony Bloomberg: *'A difference, in Viet Nam as compared with elsewhere, is in how one deals with the government. The relationship and the goodwill is always there. Here in Viet Nam, you go to the government with ideas and suggestions, and they listen, and they go away and think about it, internalize it, combine it with their own ideas. And after a period of time they may come back with something like what was first suggested but in a different form. They may have decided, 'We'll do that, but we'll do it this way.'*

...This reflects the fact that the Vietnamese Government is a strong government; it believes seriously in sovereignty, not just in token but they take responsibility for their decisions, which means they will decide things their way. And that is how it is supposed to be.'

Thirty years on, UNICEF and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam can trace a path of rising standards in the country's health, education, and development. There is pride in these accomplishments, but there is also more to be done. There are old threats that have not been wiped out, and new threats to the health and survival of the country's women, mothers and children. UNICEF's role in Viet Nam has been molded to fit the scope of demand, and its present strengths are considerably different than when it first arrived. But while its role has changed, its mandate has remained constant, and the question of what UNICEF can do is still as valid as it was when first voiced by the Poles and Swedes on the Board at Headquarters over thirty years ago.

* * *

'I believe that this 'living history' of the basic policy of UNICEF - Children first, wherever they are - is a fundamental part of what makes UNICEF an audacious, sometimes trouble-shouting and efficient part of the UN system. It is present in many other situations and can help today and tomorrow. A tradition is not to be confined to the library but is to be passed on as a kind of living reference helping us today.'

- Jacques Beaumont -

The End

THE PRESENT CASE (2001 AND BEYOND)



Young Vietnamese girls wearing motor bike helmets. Injury is now the biggest killer in Viet Nam for children 1 year and older. Viet Nam was the first country in the world to have a Childhood Injury Prevention project.



UNICEF Viet Nam staff with UNICEF Representative, Mr. Anthony Bloomberg (2002-2005)



One of the outcomes of Viet Nam's rapid social and economic changes, is the increasing numbers of young people that are at risk of labour and sexual exploitation, HIV/AIDS and coming into conflict with the law



Viet Nam has achieved impressive primary enrolment rates. The next challenge is for children to continue onto secondary education as well as develop bi-lingual teaching for ethnic minority groups

Glossary

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCG (tuberculosis)	Vaccine against the Bacillus of Calme
CDC	Center for Disease Control
CDD	Control of Diarrhea Disease
CEMMA Areas	Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous
CNSP	Children in Need of Special Protection
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPCC	Committee for Protection and Care of Children
CPD	Country Programme Document
CPFC	Committee on Population, Family and Children
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DPT	Diphtheria Pertussis Tetanus
DRVN	Democratic Republic of Viet Nam
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
HIV/Aids	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
IPLG	Indochina Peninsula Liaison Group
IOD	International Organization Department
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOFIN	Ministry of Finance
MOH	Ministry of Health

MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NEZ	New Economic Zones
NIHE	National Institute of Health and Epidemiology
NGO	Non-Government Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PHC	Primary Health Care
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government
RVN	Republic of Viet Nam
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SRVN	Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
TT	Tetanus Toxoid
UCI	Universal Childhood Immunization
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International
Development	
VACVINA	Vietnamese Organization for the technology for Farming, Fishery and Animal Husbandry (Vietnamese Acronym)
VND	Vietnamese Dong (currency)
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union
WATSAN	Water and Sanitation Programme
WES	Water, Environment and Sanitation
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

List of Participants

Executive Directors (UNICEF)

- Henry Labouisse (1965-1979)

Indochina Peninsula Liaison Group (1973-1975)

- Martin Sandberg
- Jacques Beaumont
- Dr. Charles Egger

Representatives (Hanoi)

- Dr. François Rémy (1975-1977)
- Bertram Collins (1977-1980)
- Fouad Kronfol (1980-1983)
- Paul Louis Audat (1983-1987)
- Tarique Farooqui (1987-1992)
- Stephen Woodhouse (1992-1995)
- Rima Salah (1995-1998)
- Morton Giersing (1998-2002)
- Anthony Bloomberg (2002-2005)

UNICEF Staff

- Helen Argyriades, Programme Officer (1979-1982);
Senior Programme Officer: Health, Planning and Coordination
(1990-1992)
- Christian Salazar, Senior Programme Officer (2001-present)

Programmes (Viet Nam)

- Ian Hopwood, Programme Officer (1975-1977)
- Rudolph Hoffmann, Programme Officer (1977-1980)

Child Injury and Prevention:

- Isabelle Sévédé-Bardem, Section Chief (2003-present)

Child Protection:

- Le Hong Loan, Section Chief (1989-present)

Education:

- Hoan Van Sit, Programme Officer (1990-present)

Health and Nutrition:

- Dr. Pham Ngoc Len, Programme Officer (1993-present)
- Dr. Cao Viet Hoa, Programme Officer (1996-present)

Water, Environment and Sanitation:

- Leo Goulet, Project Officer (1980-85)
- Bernard Gilbert, Senior Project Officer (1986-1991)
- Chander Badloe, Section Chief (2001-present)

Vietnamese Dignitaries:

- Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, former Vice President and first Minister of Education in re-united Viet Nam
- Madame Tran Thi Thanh Thanh, former Head of CPFC
- Prof. Pham Minh Hac, former Minister of Education and Training
- Madame Dang Huynh Mai Vice-Minister, MOET
- Ambassador Ngo Quang Xuan and Mrs. Le Thi Hoa, former Head of UN Operational System Agencies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and former UNICEF desk officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, respectively

Also Contributing:

- Jacques Danois, UNICEF filmmaker and photographer (1963-)
- Mrs. Elise Spivac, widow of Simon Spivac, Programme Officer (1976-78)
- Mrs. Ho Thi Tuyet, Feeding Programme Officer, UNICEF Saigon
- Ms. Tran Thi Thuy Lan, former Secretary, UNICEF Saigon
- Mr. Vu Hoa, former Administrative Assistant, UNICEF Saigon
- Luong Huynh Sam, Chief, Liaison Office, Programme & Supply Officer UNICEF South Viet Nam and Cambodia (1958-73)
- Per Engebak, Consultant for Water and Sanitation Programme (1979, 1980)

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Conducted by Jack Charnow

26 October 1983

CF/HST/INT/EGG-006/M

Interview with Dr. Charles Egger

Conducted by John Charnow

30 October and 2 November 1984

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Interview with Dr. Charles Egger

Conducted by Jack Charnow

8 November 1984

CF/HST/INT/EGG-008/M

Interview with Harry Labouisse

Conducted by Baquer Namazi and John Charnow

8 May 1985

Interview with Jacques Beaumont

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5 March 1985

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Print-run of 500 copies of the size of 15,5x23,5cm. Printed at the Printing
and Cultural Product Company
Under the Publication license No 52-720/XB-QLXB, issued on 17-5-2005.
Copyright deposit completed in 6 - 2005.

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