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CF-RAI-USAA-DB01-HS-2005-00146

Expanded Number **CF-RAI-USAA-DB01-HS-2005-00146**

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

Title

A History of UNICEF in Viet Nam. Colour version, Part 1 of 3. By Christian Salazar Volkmann, Officer in Charge, UNICEF Viet Nam. July 2005. Incorporates reseach from UNICEF NY Records and Archives. See also black and white versions

Date Created
 7/21/2005 at 11:20 AM

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 7/21/2005 at 11:20 AM

Date Closed

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FI2: Status Certain?

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FI3: Record Copy?

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d01: 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-2005-00146**

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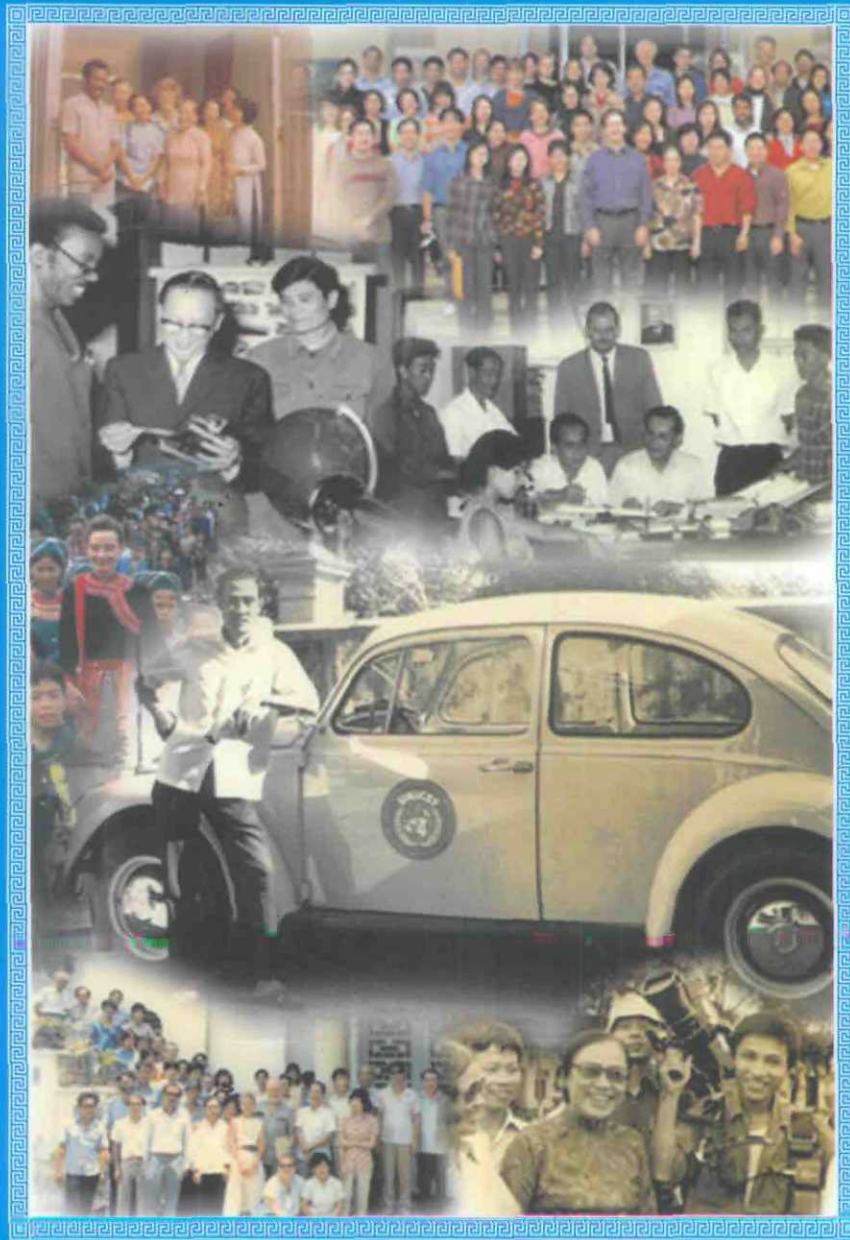
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A HISTORY OF UNICEF IN VIET NAM



For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY

unicef 

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A HISTORY OF UNICEF IN VIET NAM

2005

Dear friends of UNICEF,

You hold a fascinating book in your hands – a book that tells the history of UNICEF in Viet Nam through the testimonies of several generations of professionals who worked for and with UNICEF in Vietnam with only one aim: to improve the life of Vietnamese children and women.

Over more than three decades, UNICEF has faithfully pursued its mandate to support the fulfillment of child rights and women's rights in Viet Nam. Reading through the lines of this book you will see how the political neutrality of UNICEF and its aim to put children at the heart of social development built up trust, credibility and a very special relationship with the people of Vietnam. At the same time, the history of our cooperation with Viet Nam reveals the difficulties in navigating UNICEF through the political sensitivities during and after what came to be known in Viet Nam as the American war. It also illustrates how the credibility and integrity of UNICEF staff enabled the organization to constantly develop innovative programming for children and thus fruitfully contribute to the outstanding social progress for Vietnamese children and women since the 'doi moi' period.

This book is not only about the past – it is also about the future. Viet Nam now stands on the threshold of becoming a developed country and faces challenges that are as great as the challenges of the past. The country must continue to reduce the number of children living in poverty, while at the same time addressing new social pressures on children and families resulting from rapid social change and modernization. But even though the new challenges are tremendous, we in UNICEF remain optimistic that Viet Nam will master them. And we will do everything we can to support the people and Government in this endeavour in the years to come.

Past, present or future - any achievement of UNICEF would not be possible without thousands of dedicated people from all over the world who join hands with the people of Viet Nam in order to improve the lives of its children. It is to these committed professionals and volunteers and to the children of Viet Nam that we dedicate this book.

Christian Salazar Volkmann
Officer in Charge
UNICEF Viet Nam

Acknowledgements

Fact alone is a poor storyteller. While this is intended to be a memoir on the past thirty years of UNICEF in Viet Nam, it must be admitted that it is by no means a definitive account. Information has been sourced from the New York Headquarters archives, from the Hanoi and Bangkok offices, from Annual Reports and other country-specific publications, and from UNICEF's in-house publications, ranging from Jack Charnow's and Baquer Namazi's interviews with Executive Director Henri Labouisse, Dr. Charles Egger, and Jacques Beaumont, to personal memoirs like Dr. Francois Remy's, '40,000 Enfants par Jour – Vivre la Cause de L'UNICEF' and Jacques Danois' films, 'A Good Start', 'Rice, the Pen, and the Anvil', 'Pilgrims of Goodwill' and 'To Win the Peace'. Much information has also been sourced from the sections on Viet Nam and Kampuchea/Cambodia* in Margaret Black's two historical accounts of UNICEF, 'Children and the Nations – The Story of UNICEF' and 'Children First'. A more detailed list of sources can be found at the end of the memoir.

But most importantly, a large part of the information presented here has come directly from those who were involved at the time. These personal accounts have added great substance and flavor to the previously published facts and statistics. It is through these accounts that this becomes a memoir, a narrative, and a more or less cohesive story. Some parts of the history are better remembered than others, both in terms of clarity and the number of people who shared their accounts. It is therefore also necessary to point out that other parts of the story have received less mention, if only because personal accounts were harder to come by. Thirty years of memories in an organization that is transient by design, both in general and in terms of the duration of postings, presents great logistical challenges for its archivists.

These personal accounts have been given overall precedence. They may not be the expressed opinions of UNICEF, nor may they represent unanimous consent on any particular event. But that is exactly the point: There are always at least two sides to every story, and so as much space as possible has been given to those who have been willing to recall parts of a common history. Therefore, whenever possible, this memoir yields its structure in the interests of personal account.

* * *

Great thanks must be given to all those who generously contributed their memories, photographs, and editing skills. Their contributions were the high point in putting this project together. Special mention must be made for the efforts Jacques Beaumont, Dr. Charles Egger, Fouad Kronful, Tarique Farooqui, Jacques Danois, Leo Goulet, Elise Spivac, and especially Helen Argyriades made to help clarify and lend perspective to their times in Hanoi and the region. Trong Nguyen Quang in the sub-office in Ho Chi Minh City should be recognized for his work in bringing UNICEF Saigon's former employees, Ho Thi Tuyet, Nguyen Kim Thang, Tran Thi Thuy Lan, and Vu Hoa together for a valuable group interview. Martine Deletraz, Adhiratha Keefe, Upashana Young, and the HQ archive team were all instrumental in answering requests and tracking down materials. Hoang Van Sit generously arranged the Education Section interviews and Trinh Anh Tuan acted as translator and advisor during all interviews made in Hanoi. Isabelle Sévédé-Bardem and Mahfoud Bouhembel provided timely translations of French texts and phone calls. Sue Spencer, UNICEF Viet Nam's Communications Section Chief, guided the project and edited the text into cohesion. Many current UNICEF Viet Nam staff were asked to comment on and help edit the material. Thank you all.

Patrick Carpenter (Ha Noi)
Marina Komarecki (New York)

NOTE: *While most of the quotes included in the memoir are answers to questions raised specifically for this project, there are a number of quotes that have been sourced from earlier UNICEF HQ interviews – most notably the interviews with Henry Labouisse and Dr. Charles Egger. These quotes are marked with an asterisk (*) in the text.*

*The present State of Cambodia was called Democratic Kampuchea by the Khmer Rouge in 1976. Reflecting political and military events, the name was then changed in 1979 to the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and then changed again in 1982 to the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea. It became the State of Cambodia in 1989.

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Preface

“It is a long story and it begins with the Poles and the Swedes saying, ‘What about the children and the bombing in North Viet Nam?’

- Jacques Beaumont -

On July 7, 1973, Martin Sandberg and Jacques Beaumont flew out of Hanoi to Laos and then back to New York and UNICEF headquarters. The two men were principals in UNICEF's Indochina Peninsula Liaison Group (IPLG), a task force created by the Executive Director, Henry Labouisse, specifically to create a plan of intervention in a region racked by poverty and a country suffering from a globally divisive war. It was an extracurricular arrangement for a unique state of affairs, and Sandberg and Beaumont had been appointed as representatives of Labouisse to travel to the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN).

Their seven day visit was the product of seven years of diplomatic effort and displays of resolve, patience and goodwill. It was also, indirectly, an opportunity opened by events on the ground, including a fragile Paris Peace Agreement that had been signed less than six months before. Sandberg and Beaumont were in the North for exactly one week, and had seen the capital, the port city of Hai Phong and rural areas that had been affected by the war. The two had established contacts at a senior level with both the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and its southern counterpart, the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG). They wanted to shape negotiations around participation in an immediate relief effort. Also on the table was future direction for further cooperation.

But the North Viet Nam government had its own agenda. It wanted UNICEF to agree to deliver a list of medicines and medical items. Health care services for children and education were priorities, with equipment for ear-nose-throat examinations and dental care requested, as were warehouses for storage. If UNICEF was going to proceed any further into North Viet Nam, it was first going to have to preface its goodwill in earnest by providing tangible, critical materials.

Sandberg and Beaumont flew back to New York with this list. The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam's aid requests were estimated at \$1 to

2 million; the Provisional Revolutionary Government's estimate was between \$400,000 and \$500,000. Just as important for headquarters was a report of their impressions of what they had seen, and what they felt was needed to address the most urgent areas of need. But most importantly, Sandberg and Beaumont returned to UNICEF headquarters with an agreement from the government of North Vietnam to open a direct line of communication. This alone was huge. It was the breakthrough UNICEF had been seeking all along.

But it was still not everything. UNICEF had to persevere with further proof of its integrity for another twenty months before the DRVN and UNICEF could reach an agreement. Finally, in April 1975, it happened. UNICEF became the first UN agency to have an official, physical presence in the new Viet Nam. Again, it was Jacques Beaumont who had been sent back to Hanoi to act as chief negotiator with the DRVN Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nguyen Duy Trinh. According to the agreement, UNICEF was to be established in the Hoa Binh Hotel, room 105, at a cost of twenty-four Vietnamese Dong per day for the room, with further stipulated costs of a local interpreter and driver for their respective 300 and 200 Dong per month. But though there was now a physical presence and direct communication, it was still not the final piece UNICEF was hoping for. Owing to several disputed clauses, the actual agreement that elevated UNICEF's temporary mission to a status of permanent delegation was not signed until February 12, 1979.

And so it all began.

Or to be more accurate, so it all began again. For the story of UNICEF in Viet Nam does not begin with Beaumont and Sandberg and the IPLG, or the end of the war, or even the beginning of the war. The fact is, UNICEF and Vietnam have a relationship that predates the roughly thirty years of fighting against foreign occupiers that this country endured in its quest for independence, and begins at a time when Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia/Kampuchea were one territory under French colonial administration.

Chapter I

The Road to Hanoi (1958-1975)

To get to Hanoi, it was necessary for UNICEF to go through Poland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Moscow, Paris, New York, and what was then called French Indochina, through Containment and Domino theories, through the Cold War, and through various separate Vietnamese governments. The journey arguably started in Bangkok within a regional programme, but since this is a history of UNICEF in Viet Nam, it would be accurate for our purposes to point out that UNICEF first established a physical presence in this country on 185 Hien Vuong (now Vo Thi Sau) street in Saigon in 1958. To pull things into an even sharper focus, it should be noted that the first UNICEF official to visit Viet Nam and Indochina was Spurgeone (Sam) Keeny from Bangkok in 1950, and the first Basic Agreement between the government of South Viet Nam and UNICEF was signed on August 29, 1952. Furthermore, Executive Director files indicate that the first allocations of the Executive Board to Indochina amounted to \$457,900, between July 1948 and March 1949, to be split equitably between Viet Nam, Kampuchea and Laos - with UNICEF showing wider interest in assisting those parts of Viet Nam and Indochina that were categorized at that time as not under direct French administrative control. There was also a first contribution of \$30,800 in 1948 that evidently was not implemented 'in view of the complexity of the situation', though allocations for hospital drugs were made two years later and again in 1954.

The evolution of the UNICEF mission in Viet Nam and all its protracted efforts must also testify to the single-mindedness of a number of determined people. Great names seem to frame the history of the great efforts made to bring this all about. There were, for a start, Spurgeone Milton Keeny and Margaret Gaan, Sir Ralph Richardson, Dr. Arthur E. Brown, Newton Bowles, Maurice Pate, Henry Labouisse, Henrik Beer, Dr. Boguslav Kozusznik, Edward Iwaskiewicz, Brian Jones and James P. Grant. There was the Indochina Peninsula Liaison Group, with Martin Sandberg, Jacques Beaumont, Dr. Charles Egger and Hasse Gaegner. There were their Vietnamese colleagues and counterparts, including Nguyen Co Thach, Pham Van Dong, Nguyen Tinh, Vo Van Sung, Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, Pham Minh Hac and Vu Van Mau. And there

were various organizations, including the highly regarded Mother and Child Protection Committee, and titles such as the Republic of Viet Nam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam that have passed into the history they helped create.

The point being that one key factor in the success of UNICEF is the quality of the individuals in the organization. UNICEF's brightest chapters have been the result of its strongest personalities, leaders and their collective efforts. But the base of the foundation rests on something definitive that endures beyond the individual.

The Cornerstone

The greatest strength of UNICEF is its mandate. The desire to distribute aid to women and children 'without discrimination because of race, creed, nationality status or political belief' and the integrity to bear this out has kept UNICEF alive.

Fouad Kronfol (Representative 1980-1983): *'Unequivocally, this coda was capital to our relations with the Vietnamese. The late Henry Labouisse, as Executive Director, involved this to initiate support to North Viet Nam despite tremendous negative pressure from his own [American] government – a fact the Vietnamese never forgot.'*

Henry Labouisse (Executive Director, UNICEF 1965-1979): *'I think one of UNICEF's greatest strengths is its non-political stance, its integrity, which I think countries have accepted. They don't think we're trying to play politics or get involved in politics. We have a clean record and I think it is a very valuable thing not to get mixed up in politics. UNICEF has been a good and very effective agency because it has been a practical agency and if we start getting into ideologies and theories, then I think you're going to lose a lot of the importance UNICEF can have. Part of its success has been because the mandate is so flexible, that we are able to operate [without the constraints that prevent other agencies from doing so].'*

The fact that UNICEF can operate in any country accepting its assistance, whether internationally or UN recognized or not, lends further credence to its political impartiality, as well as valuable flexibility for negotiation and intervention. Prior to its attempts to reach North Viet Nam, UNICEF had already achieved a record of working on both sides

of conflicts. This was critical in a divided Viet Nam, not only for the reassurance of the North Vietnamese representatives, but for the ability of the Executive Board in New York, itself divided, to remain level-headed and at least outwardly impartial during what became a protracted decision making process.

Dr. Charles Egger (IPLG 1973-75)*: *'The Board has always been led by a few delegates with vision and commitment who knew how to raise questions diplomatically. What you had with Viet Nam was a UN agency that was prepared to...discuss what aid could be provided with a government that was not a member of the UN, was at war with the government recognized by the UN and many other countries and a powerful ally of the U.S. It was the feeling of many Board members as well as of the Director and his staff that UNICEF had to address itself to this problem of helping Vietnamese children not only in the South but also the North, irrespective of whether it pleased other governments.'*

Jacques Beaumont (IPLG 1973-75)*: *'There was the thinking that 'if you work on both sides, you were approving both sides'. By refusing to take a stand, for or against, we automatically were in the wrong with governments on this side or that side. It always was this way, and we said, 'No, it was not the role of UNICEF to pass a political judgment on one side or the other.' The job of UNICEF was to bring colleagues and services to children irrespective of the side. Children transcend all of this, so we try to deal with the children as best we can.'*

Country Dynamics

In order to better understand the dynamics of UNICEF's mission in Viet Nam, it is important to first understand the setting and aspects of its history.

Viet Nam is a winding, S-shaped country that hugs the South China Sea coast, sharing borders with China, Laos and Cambodia. Its ports and mineral and agricultural wealth have always made it an attractive territory and have resulted in a history steeped with foreign invasion and occupation. Though Viet Nam acquired its independence in 1945 under Ho Chi Minh, and then again in 1975, the country is layered with traces of bygone foreign influence.

In the modern era, a centenary of French colonial rule divided Viet Nam for economic reasons long before the 1954 Geneva Accords established

the end of France's occupation. The Accords cut the country along the 17th Parallel, an act that left the North with industrial and mineral wealth and the South with agriculture and related industries. It was an ex post facto confirmation of the French vision of Viet Nam as two separate regions. This expedited the country's evolution into two significantly dissimilar economic zones, which were then further turned away from each other through the political divide.

By the time America increased its military presence in South Viet Nam to 500,000 troops in 1968, Viet Nam was no more united than the two Koreas, with its own deadly no-man's land, the demilitarized zone which hugged the 17th Parallel. American policy promulgated the ideological divide while attempting to redesign the under-developed infrastructure of the South. Internationally, recognition - or the lack of it - of the respective governments in North Vietnam and South Vietnam corresponded to greater Cold War politics. These ideological and economic complexities were to have significant consequences for UNICEF in its attempts to establish a presence in the North and then a subsequent national programme of assistance.

War

The story of UNICEF Viet Nam cannot be separated from what in Viet Nam is called the American War.

In February 1965, North Viet Nam was exposed to the start of intense and sustained bombing campaigns, while the North Vietnamese Communist forces were penetrating deeper into Southern territory. As the war intensified and the 17th parallel that marked the politically-created border was overrun, the divide in international opinion grew more angrily polarized. By 1967, there was no greater global controversy than the war in Viet Nam. And the divisions that existed in global opinion were also evident deep in the UN, and within UNICEF's Executive Board.

The fact that UNICEF's Executive Director, Henry Labouisse, possessed a French surname but an American passport meant that his actions would be under the microscopes of both sides for signs of partiality. This alone strained an already delicate situation. To further complicate matters, UNICEF could not actively get involved in the North without first receiving the legally required invitation, and the North Vietnamese were hesitant towards early attempts to set up a dialogue.

But the problem was not how to get a programme established in Viet Nam, for UNICEF had been on the ground in Viet Nam and in operation for decades. The problem was that the programme was located in Saigon - the capital of the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN).

Saigon

The UNICEF Saigon office, since its opening in 1958, had been busy with its agenda of the Maternal and Child Health Programme, communicable disease control, health education, applied nutrition, building classrooms and training teachers. It had been set up as a liaison office at the behest of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East to cover both South Viet Nam and Cambodia. According to Mr. Luong Huynh Sam, the first Chief of the UNICEF Liaison Office for South Viet Nam and Cambodia, it had been the insistence of the American government that Saigon become full-fledged representative office.

Luong Huynh Sam (UNICEF Chief, Liaison Office, Programme & Supply Officer 1958-73)*: *'[After] the coup d'etat that resulted in the 1963 assassination of the Brothers Ngo, the United States began to press UNICEF Headquarters in New York to convert the Saigon liaison office into a representative office with an international staff as UNICEF Representative. The proposal would enable the United States to make greater contributions to UNICEF's resources. The proposal was accepted the second time by the Ministry of Social Action. On the basis of this reply, Headquarters began to look for a candidate for the post.'*

Dr. Egger: *'The change was largely semantic, as the budget for the programme remained essentially the same. More important was the job that Bernhard Klausener was doing. He made a brave attempt to keep the programme and the office running, to the satisfaction of both sides, despite the fact that it was all but inevitable that it would be shut down.'*

Bernhard Klausener, a Swiss national and newcomer to UNICEF, became the first official Representative of the first fully-fledged UNICEF office in Viet Nam in September, 1966. He expanded the office to a staff of fifteen, and maintained the status quo of the programme, with the notable addition of an Emergency Feeding Programme for the growing number of refugee camps. Klausener and Ho Thi Tuyet, the Feeding Programme Officer, often traveled to the 'border' areas by helicopter (as guerilla patrols rendered roads and night travel unsafe), checking on programmes.

Ho Thi Tuyet, Feeding Programme Officer, UNICEF Saigon: *'We would often travel to the central areas, which were very poor, with very rudimentary houses, surrounded by hot sand and therefore very difficult to get anything to grow. The people there spoke with very strong accents, very difficult to understand. We would ask them questions like, 'Did you get the rice?' but their answers were almost incomprehensible. We just stood there with blank faces, trying to understand what they were saying. On the one hand, it was amusing – being separated by a common language, but on the other, it was truly frustrating.'*

We had a milk programme, which was Klausener's idea. It was for the poor in the government schools and set up to make sure the children were getting enough protein and nutrients. This programme was referred to as 'the milk drop programme', and when we first went to the schools with it, the teachers said, 'But why just one drop of milk for each child? Why so little?' We laughed and said that it was a cup, not a

drop. Even so, there were many children that did not want the milk and would spill it rather than drink it. We tried to get them all to drink a cup, but in the end, in order not to waste any, we had to give very little to those children who wasted it and save the rest for the ones who cooperated.'

While UNICEF's work and travel in Cambodia was unrestricted, the confines of the Geneva Accord all but dictated the office's jurisdiction in Viet Nam to the provinces below the 17th Parallel. Security in the southern provinces began to decrease around 1961, forcing the liaison office into a programme of emergency aid and relief intervention. Programmes including UNICEF water supply assistance to southern Viet Nam had to be shut down and UNICEF maintained the emergency stature in Saigon for the duration of the war, until the office closed up on April 28, 1975.

Ho Thi Tuyet: *'Mr. Klausener wanted to go to difficult places, and we often went by helicopter. One time we had to visit a programme for the Quang Tri province, near the border area with the North. It was necessary to fly. This was during the hostilities and you could feel it close by. We were supposed to head back to Saigon at 4pm, after our visit, but the helicopter had a technical problem, and so we were delayed. We had to have our dinner there while the helicopter was being repaired, but there was nothing to eat. We were given duck soup, but the ducks were so underfed that there was no meat on the bones. They were actually too thin to eat. All of this was going while the loudspeakers were broadcasting their messages across the border. Finally, we were very happy to leave around 8pm, when the problem had been fixed. But it was very nerve-wracking, as the helicopter came from the United States...and we could only fly very low. I was very happy to get home that time. But we would go up to the border every few months to check up on things.'*

Meanwhile, back at HQ

In New York in 1967, the UNICEF Executive Board was having an increasingly difficult time approving monies spent in Saigon for two reasons: a) much of the progress paid for was soon and repeatedly damaged by the escalation of the war, and; b) no aid was going through to the North. These factors had political implications. To continue to fund the programmes in Saigon without equal efforts made in the North would be to court criticism that UNICEF was less than impartial. The

fact that a large portion of UNICEF's resources (in general and for Viet Nam) came from America made the political tripwires all the more sensitive. The US delegation did not oppose the idea of assistance, but it was acting very cautiously. Nevertheless, steps had to be taken, both to avoid confrontation and to clarify future activity. Lobbying efforts by the Polish, Swedish and Swiss delegations, among others, to push for relief for the North, and a proposal by the French delegation to find a way to help the children on both sides were pushing UNICEF into action.

Dr. Charles Egger*: *'It started with the UNICEF Executive Board, in a number of meetings, expressing concern with the need situation in Viet Nam, where children were suffering. [Members] repeatedly stated that UNICEF should be prepared to explore every possibility, to raise and explore the question of humanitarian aid with the two sides at war...[This] was important because their declarations were carefully noted by all sides and helped to pave the way. Mr. Labouisse was particularly concerned himself about exploring every possibility to see if UNICEF could assist children in Viet Nam suffering from such an extraordinarily terrible situation.'*

There were cruel ironies in all of this. Now that the hostilities had escalated and expanded (Hanoi itself was a target of 'limited' bombing), hardship was evident throughout the entire Viet Nam. Children on both sides of the parallel were suffering, and the argument for humanitarian aid could be made universally. This evidence may have helped to build a consensus in New York, but it did not automatically translate into intervention in Viet Nam. Now that Labouisse had the green light from the Board to develop a plan, UNICEF needed a response from the North Vietnamese authorities. To expedite matters, Labouisse pursued negotiations through diplomatic back channels in Paris and Moscow, and used contacts in Cambodia and Bangkok. But ultimately, it all came down to the ball being completely in Hanoi's court.

Permission Granted

However broad UNICEF's mandate may be, it must respect sovereignty of countries. UNICEF cannot actually distribute aid unless permitted by the government of that particular country. To do otherwise would not only violate international standards of law, but - more importantly for the ultimate success of the mission - to deliver goods where they are not accepted or recognized may actually be throwing them away or into

unintended hands. Though there was great need for emergency assistance – particularly in basic medical supplies – North Viet Nam was not asking. Even despite these realities, there was still pressure on Labouisse from the Board to push UNICEF to send supplies.

Ian Hopwood, first Programme Manager for UNICEF Hanoi (1975-77): *'I believe the North Vietnamese were a bit suspicious about UNICEF – that's why negotiations took so long. The initiative only intensified after the Paris talks in January, 1973. Then, as you slowly built confidence with them, you would get access to all party and technical people.'*

Dr. Charles Egger*: *'...[It] required a great deal of diplomacy to convey what UNICEF was about: that it wasn't a capitalist organization, that it was not under the thumb of the US, that it was supported by all political denominations. It took some talking. If we didn't have success initially, then we would continue talking. It was a long process to demonstrate that this is what we were doing and in what spirit.'*

Jacques Beaumont: *'You must remember that the Vietnamese certainly had to open up to discussion with international agencies, with the UN agencies, and it took some time to become fully aware of what it meant. It is not something that happens overnight.'*

In December of 1967, the silence was broken. Apparently an earlier letter indicating UNICEF's desire to help the children struck the proper chord. In roundabout fashion, this letter was passed to the Cambodian Foreign Minister in Phnom Penh, who then forwarded it on to Hanoi. North Viet Nam then sent their answer in an invitation for a UNICEF representative to make direct contact through the Polish Committee of UNICEF. The invitation was made with the stipulation that all aid be delivered through the Vietnamese Red Cross. This was clear progress and hopes were high. But in early 1968, the war escalated, and UNICEF's efforts to send an emissary to Hanoi were delayed a further eighteen months until June of 1969.

A Pole to Explore the North

Dr. Boguslav Kozusznik, a member of the Polish Committee and passionately concerned with the situation in Viet Nam, was chosen to travel to Hanoi to act as Henry Labouisse's personal representative. His was an exploratory mission, with the aim to open the path for further

talks. He was instructed to inform the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam of the terms of cooperation and UNICEF's policies, and return with a list of the urgent needs of children. It was made clear that he did not have the authority to negotiate any formal agreement. What apparently should have also been made absolutely clear to Dr. Kozusznik was that he was not to have the freedom to express private opinions on potentially combustible topics, including America's recent bombing activities in the North.

Dr. Charles Egger: *'Professor Kozusznik [was] a man entirely devoted to the idea of UNICEF and its humanitarian mission. As a representative of the Board, he went to Hanoi to transmit a message, namely that the UNICEF Executive Board had agreed to provide some assistance through the channel of the Alliance of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. If this first aid got to North Vietnam and would be properly utilized, then other assistance could be forthcoming. It was, of course, only a gesture, but it had an important connection.*

Before he left Viet Nam, he was quoted as having officially condemned American bombing, and this created with some delegates a very bad impression...What he actually said and to what extent he was misguided, how much of this was inadequate interpretation is not clear.'

In any case, upon his return, Labouisse had to reconcile Dr. Kozusznik's statements that could appear to have been his own, with the further disappointment that Kozusznik had only met with members of the North Vietnamese Red Cross Society and not with any Government officials. Labouisse also had to hold back Kozusznik's report from distribution, out of concern that it would harm proceedings. It was, in short, not nearly the start that Headquarters had hoped for.

They Can't Take That Away From Me

Given the passage of time and the advantage of hindsight, Dr. Kozusznik's mission has gone through favorable revision. The reality is that he took the first concrete step towards opening negotiations between the DRVN and UNICEF. That the mission required a representative from the Eastern Bloc was no accident, as Cold War polarities essentially disqualified any Western representative. That the representative came from Poland was also no accident; it was the Polish Committee's concern that had helped instigate the proceedings.

Jacques Beaumont attests*: *'It is true that the Poles were really the people who wanted to be sure the children would be helped.'*

Henry Labouisse*: *'It did open a way for us to send two representatives to Hanoi and we started our programme from that...It [was] a very delicate situation...[and] we'd skated on thin ice... but it turned out all right.'*

Dr. Charles Egger*: *'The mission of Dr. Kozusznik had a far greater positive impact than he was given credit for upon his return...His report was not on actual needs but rather a political report [and] what he proposed had nothing to do with what UNICEF could do as an organization. His visit was seen as political, and Labouisse could not accept that. Although he did not focus on the factual analysis, he indirectly established the contact...and loosened the situation so that it would be more acceptable.'*

In any case, in retrospect, Boguslav Kozusznik was the man both sides needed to start it all. He was, as Beaumont describes him, 'the key to the confidence of the North', and it was his recommendation that emergency assistance in the form of cloth for children's clothing be sent through Red Cross channels that ultimately came to be the first shipment of aid by UNICEF to North Viet Nam.

The Gesture that Lasted Three Years

Kozusznik's cloth had its own adventure. In April of 1970, the Executive Board approved \$200,000 to be spent on 429 bales of cloth. This was in spite of the growing objections from the United States Government to UNICEF's attempts to help the North.

Henry Labouisse*: *'Some governments, including my own, didn't think we should have assisted because of the war...We did it nevertheless. We finally got the Board to approve because in the first instance we managed to get some money from the Dutch government and also from the Swiss government which they said was to be used for the North. In other words, it wasn't using any money of people who objected to it. There were objections from the South, objections from several governments, but we did it anyhow.'*

The fact that the first shipment of this cloth finally arrived in Hanoi in June of 1973, with the second and final shipment arriving one month later, takes some of the pomp away from the circumstance. It was what some would call another gesture, to show that things were moving on the humanitarian front, even when peace negotiations in Paris seemed to be stalled. But in the end, the parties in Paris reached an agreement months before the cloth reached its destination. The cloth, which came from the Russian Red Cross, experienced great delays in Moscow, a closed Hai Phong port, a re-routing through Chinese ports and then transportation into Hanoi by Vietnamese trains.

Upon its long overdue arrival, the navy-blue cloth was designated for children attending day-care centers run by the Central Committee for the Protection of Mothers and Children and distributed through Red Cross channels.

The Indochina Peninsula Liaison Group

It took close to four years for the shipment of cloth to go from a recommendation to a reality. It took eighteen days to create a working document that was to be the basis for UNICEF assistance and cooperation in Viet Nam and Indochina.

The thinking in New York was to create a regional plan of action that would reach the children not just of Viet Nam but of the entire Indochina. Henry Labouisse assembled a group in New York who were to produce a draft. They met over a span of eighteen days and called their meetings 'Sunday school' – for the purposes of UNICEF, it was called the 'Indochina Peninsula Liaison Group', and was led by Martin Sandberg, with Jacques Beaumont, Charles Egger, Dick Heyward, Hasse Gaegner.

Dr. Charles Egger*: *'In order for UNICEF to operate effectively both in North Viet Nam and South Viet Nam, and carry out a rather large relief programme, UNICEF had to organize itself for the first time in a novel manner. A special task force was set up...that prepared its members thoughtfully for their new tasks. This training included knowledge about the country, its policies and the philosophy, studying different writers, French, etc., who had written about the history, political system. The group reviewed experiences in emergency situations in which UNICEF had previously been involved.'*

Jacques Beaumont: *'Labouisse wanted to prepare us for working for the reconstruction of the whole of Viet Nam. At the time, they did not conceive two years or more of work, 1973-1975. And when I was sent to Hanoi in June of 1973, in fact it was to ascertain the possibility of working for children in all parts of Indochina – in the three parts, as Indochina was divided into three political parts – and then to reconstruct Viet Nam. But the main concern of Labouisse was to be able to work for all children irrespective of the political condition – North and South.'*

In 1973, there may have been a Peace Agreement, but it was to prove illusory at best. Between January 1973 and January 1974, approximately 25,000 Vietnamese were killed. In such an atmosphere, UNICEF could hardly be expected to create a programme around anything other than emergency relief. Furthermore, subsequent events in Indochina - particularly the genocide in Kampuchea - resulted in aid emergencies that would greatly exceed the parameters of the IPLG's regional strategy, as far-reaching changes in ideology and alliances in South East Asia were developing just beyond the foreseeable future. But that is getting ahead of the story.

Location, Location, Location

The question was then where best to base this plan. The option of using the regional office in Bangkok was unacceptable to the IPLG, not only because Thailand was American leaning and this would infringe upon the desire to operate as an agency that worked with all political denominations, but because of the desire to build relationships openly and without the proximity and influence of a regional authority.

While the US-backed South Viet Nam government was falling to the North Vietnamese forces, UNICEF found it would be negotiating with the Provisional Revolutionary Government in the South, and the DRVN

in the North. The PRG was essentially a southern branch of the DRVN, and thus the conclusion was that any organization wanting to operate effectively in Viet Nam had to be based in Hanoi.

Margaret Black (author, 'Children First'): *'The...victory of the Communist forces...meant a rearrangement of UNICEF's activities. Previously there had been 'the Indo-Chinese emergency' in which ad hoc arrangements, mostly for emergency relief, were made from day-to-day with whomsoever was in control in a given area. Given the decisive political reorientation, the critical theatre of operation was now in North Vietnam.'*

Furthermore, the fact that UNICEF's charter also allowed it to deal with the North - a government not recognized by the UN - greatly facilitated the Board's plans for Indochina in general, and Viet Nam in particular.

Hanoi, Revisited

Jacques Beaumont: *'The [IPLG] document was about cooperation, and it had to be formulated as such, as the Communists did not like assistance, and they were right in that...The document dealt with education, health, nutrition, water, rehabilitation...In my view, it was a modern document written for people who had no experience in dealing with the West.'*

The IPLG document was then forwarded to the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Paris, with the hope of setting up a meeting. It ultimately resulted in the seven days worth of ground-breaking meetings in Hanoi Sandberg and Beaumont made in July, 1973.

Dr. Charles Egger*: *'UNICEF did not necessarily go by invitation. We took the initiative. We tried to explain what we do, and we wanted to make sure they understood and agreed to the visit. The UNICEF approach was to take the initiative and not stand back just because Viet Nam was not a UN member. We wanted to provoke action that could be later worked out in great detail.'*

It was certainly not easy, and a rather unprecedented situation. It was difficult to operate in a country that had lived through a most crucifying war begun already at the time of the French occupation of Indochina followed by a more heavy-handed American involvement. One had to cooperate with a government that was sure about its rightfulness of its

own stand, had a clear political doctrine, and its own views on how to conduct international negotiations. It was only prepared to collaborate with an international organization on its own terms.

It is certainly due to both the vision of the Executive Director, the operating stubbornness of Dick Heyward, and the skill and practical experience of people like Martin Sandberg, the diplomatic ability and basic philosophical belief in people of Jacques Beaumont and others, that UNICEF was able to conclude and start an assistance programme.'

After waiting for their DRVN visas in Laos, Beaumont and Sanberg flew to North Viet Nam. Essentially, their goal was to expand, with specific results, on Dr. Kozusznik's earlier mission: To meet with the relevant ministries, the Central Committee for the Protection of Mother and Children, and establish contacts at senior levels. They were also to follow up Kozusznik's work with the Vietnamese Red Cross.

The talks were in two phases.

Jacques Beaumont: *'During the first phase, you didn't agree on anything. The meetings were extremely official. Co Thach, [our] counterpart, was extremely polite and intelligent. We knew in advance of subjects and what the outcome would be. What was more important was the dinner afterwards. Many of the questions raised at the meeting were brought up over dinner. They argued your points and you responded. You had to be responsive to them, and careful, and courteous – that is the tactic that I had to get accustomed to and I enjoyed it. Co Thach spoke French during the dinner and you could quickly go on to the problem with no interpreter. What they were concerned with UNICEF was more the child at large. The child suffering from hunger or the children who needed to be nutritionally rehabilitated. They wanted schools and they wanted medical supplies.'*

The other critical element was funding.

Funding the Fund

Jacques Beaumont*: *'The group worked effectively – also from the point of view of fundraising. UNICEF was the only UN agency in Viet Nam and many countries wanted to contribute. We were very effective in raising large sums of money; that had to be done quickly and directly. Sandberg was an effective operator. He personalized the situation in*

Viet Nam and jointly worked with the governments. Viet Nam was funded mainly from the special funds.'

The 1973 Executive Board agreed to expenditures of up to \$30 million over two years for the expanded Indochina programme (which now included North Viet Nam and was expanded to \$44 million a year later to cover to the end of 1975), with an approval of \$3 million from its general resources to be used as immediate assistance to children and mothers anywhere in the Indochina Peninsula. The \$3 million should be noted as a quiet triumph for Labouisse, who was adamant - against considerable opposition - that such monies be made available to any administration that would use it to help children.

Where It All Went

The first period of cooperation and assistance was initiated in September of 1973. For the next six years, everything would be within a framework of emergency relief. As it was, anything beyond the short-term would also have been premature, since UNICEF was still operating without formal recognition from the DRVN administration. Nevertheless, UNICEF was able to contribute to some of its already proven areas of emergency expertise, as well as respond to newly emerging needs like refugee population and orphans.

UNICEF provided emergency assistance in the following:

Health: Upgrading training facilities for midwives; Basic equipment for rural maternity; clothing; Midwife kits; Kerosene stoves

Rehabilitation of Handicapped Children: Equipment for operating rooms in Da Nang and Qui Nhon; Beds and a bus for the National Rehabilitation Institute; Training grants for the National Institute of Public Health

Education: Construction of 1,000 primary school classrooms; School kits and exercise books; Blackboards

Water Supply and Sanitation: Equipment for the installation of a water supply in 350 rural primary schools, maternities and provincial hospitals as well as for ethnic minority villages; Equipment for women's centers, primary schools in the Central Highlands

Child Welfare: Training of day care center staff; Basic medicine kits for orphanages; Bicycles for provincial social services

Nutrition: Rural development projects focusing on production of rice, corn, fruit, vegetables

Beaumont in Hanoi

So UNICEF was in North Viet Nam with a programme that confirmed its goodwill and expertise. It was clear that its services would be required over the foreseeable future. But in order to move the intervention operation to the next level, it needed a physical presence of its own. For Viet Nam and Indochina, for the greater part of a year, UNICEF was essentially a mission waiting for a home, and this was beginning to drag. Its desire for a base in Hanoi was beginning to seem overdue.

Jacques Beaumont had been sent over to investigate greater Indochina and then stationed in Hanoi to expedite the proceedings. But there wasn't much he or anyone could do. Part of the problem was that the Paris Peace Agreement ended the war with South Viet Nam still under the control of the American-backed Republic of Viet Nam – a stipulation that was reversed almost immediately when the North began its drive towards Saigon. And once Saigon's future was all but decided, it was clear for UNICEF that there could only be one, all-inclusive country programme, and for UNICEF's purposes, it would have to be based in Hanoi. So Beaumont and UNICEF were forced to play the waiting game while the political picture cleared.

For the DRVN, the picture had been clear for quite some time. They also, for their own reasons, wanted UNICEF's presence to only be in Hanoi. But unlike UNICEF, they saw no impediments to finalizing an agreement while the war was winding down. So they sent a car to the Hoa Binh Hotel to Beaumont to get his signature.

Jacques Beaumont: *'In 1975, an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a round of talks arrived with the driver. At the Ministry, there were twelve people sitting around the table, with the Vietnamese in the middle. There were flowers, fruits, cookies and tea. They said: 'We are here to sign the agreement'*

I said I would like to see the agreement.

What they showed was a full agreement, all in Vietnamese.

I said: 'This is not the way we proceed'.

They said: 'We will translate it. We are ready to proceed.'

I said: 'In the name of whom?'

The agreement was in the name of the DRVN.

I said it was not logical to expect there to be a normal succession. 'We can begin the cooperation with a provisional agreement until Viet Nam becomes a country again.'

They said they had no time to make it right immediately.

And they never agreed on the working terms about local staff and who should be responsible for them. Hence the four year delay for permanent delegation status.'

And so, despite similar intentions and the necessary momentum, cooperation between UNICEF and the DRVN remained unofficial. But from every angle, it was clear that both sides were grateful that UNICEF was going to remain in Viet Nam and operate out of Hanoi.

Day of Days

In early May, 1975, only a few days after the world watched the last of the American presence in Saigon being airlifted out of the country, the DRVN arranged a ceremony to officially recognize UNICEF. At 6:00am on May 2, a government car with two Vietnamese-made UN flags delivered Jacques Beaumont to a stadium in Hanoi. The entire diplomatic corps was present, and Beaumont was introduced as the Representative of the UN system.

Jacques Beaumont: *'There were no other UN agencies there. We were the first. From the first day of a united country, the Vietnamese showed the intention to recognize the mission of UNICEF officially. In the afternoon, we had an official drink at a government reception where I was again introduced. This was in line with the declaration of Co Thach, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, who said that as soon as the war was over, Viet Nam would assume its right place in the UN system.'*

In point of fact, the actual official Agreement of Cooperation between UNICEF and the DRVN - which had changed its name in the meantime to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (SRVN) - was signed four years later, on February 12, 1979. Nguyen Co Thach's declaration also took more time; Viet Nam only became a member of the UN on July 20, 1977. But these details do not change the fact that 1975 marked the start of a new phase in UNICEF development assistance to the newly reunited Viet Nam.

Post War

Estimates of the results of the war vary widely, but generally place up to 2 million Vietnamese military and civilian deaths, 362,000 invalids, 1 million widows, and 800,000 orphans. According to documents from the U.S. Library of Congress, North Viet Nam saw all six industrial cities, all but two of thirty provincial towns, ninety-six out of 116 district towns and 4,000 out of 5,788 communes either severely damaged or destroyed. All power stations, 1,600 hydraulics works, six railway lines, most roads, bridges, and sea and inland ports were also either severely damaged or destroyed. In addition, estimates of 400,000 cattle were killed and several hundred thousand hectares of farmland were damaged.

Hanoi claimed that in the South, 9,000 out of 15,000 hamlets were damaged or destroyed, 10 million hectares of farmland and 5 million hectares of forest lands were devastated, and 1.5 million cattle were killed.

There was great need for both humanitarian and economic aid, and it was all played out against the backdrop of a newly unified country. The war had stripped and devastated Viet Nam, and the immediate postwar would see a further UNHCR estimated 1 million citizens form a mass exodus. These were the 'Vietnamese boat people', refugees during the post-war reconstruction and reunification efforts, and among their numbers were tens of thousands of skilled workers, professionals and former leaders in their respective fields.

There was tremendous social scarring. During the protracted war years, family life had been torn apart. In both the French and American wars, the fight, or at least active resistance, reached down to the children on both sides. This meant that war was ever-present as a part of life. And while family structures were devastated, the cities, particularly in the South, saw their populations explode. Unemployment was high even after most of the rural refugees had returned to their villages and the government had conducted resettlement and redistribution of the population along economic grounds. By the early 1970s, as many as 12 million persons, or 63% of the entire southern population, were estimated to have been displaced; some were located to government-protected rural hamlets, others in congested urban centers.

The (Apparent) End of UNICEF Saigon

The closure of the Saigon office may, in hindsight, have appeared a foregone conclusion. But it was not necessarily so. Even with the controversy that surrounded it from UNICEF's Executive Board in New York during the war, and the growing reality that all administrative control would emanate from Hanoi once a post-war structure could be established, there was still significant effort being made to keep the Saigon office up and running. In fact, plans for UNICEF Saigon were actually expanding its responsibilities when it received word from the PRG to shut its doors. Information surveys were being carried out by UNICEF to streamline Saigon's operations with greater accountability and monitoring procedures. And even when the PRG had commandeered UNICEF property, there was the expectation that the closure would not be permanent, and that soon UNICEF would re-open in the newly re-named Ho Chi Minh City.

Tran Thi Thuy Lan, former Secretary, UNICEF Saigon: *'Towards the end of the war, we would go to the office just to show up. There was nothing to do, but still we would go. Then, on April 28, 1975, the officials came and shut us down. Some of us continued to work until May, finalizing things.'*

After the closure of the Saigon office, UNICEF found itself in a delicate financial situation. There was a significant amount of money for the southern programme that now had to be justified and defended both in Viet Nam and to Headquarters. The remains of the allotment to the PRG were easily transferred. However, transferring the money from the former South Vietnamese Government, and integrating the existing projects into a new plan was much more difficult. According to available data, \$6 million out of the total \$11 million budget originated from the US government. Labouisse lobbied intensively and successfully to get that money, which had been exclusively dedicated to the former South Viet Nam, to be used for the entire unified country. Kudos should be given both to Labouisse as well as the US delegates for seeing beyond political differences and post-war sensitivities.

Jacques Beaumont: *'Rémy [the first Hanoi Representative] had to deal with the integration of the so-called remnants of the southern programme. It must be underlined that he accomplished the integration not only of the financial aspects but succeeded in building a totally national programme – bringing the southern programme into the*

national. The Vietnamese policy was clear: one programme for all the children of Viet Nam. So all the committed funds for the southern programme were to go to the children first, and as far as I can vouch for it, it was so.'

Not everything was as clearly or quickly resolved, however. It is interesting to note that UNICEF had two separate funds for the North and South throughout 1976 - past the date by which the country had become officially reunited. On a more personal note, none of UNICEF's Saigon original employees ever returned to work for UNICEF when the office re-opened nearly five years later. Their post-war accounts give some idea of how things were at the beginning of post-war reconstruction.

Tran Thi ThuyLan: *'After the liberation, I was asked to join the local worker committee. They asked about my past and I told them I had worked for UNICEF. Sometimes there was confusion between the UN and the US. I had to explain the difference between the two, as many confused the UN with the US.'*

Ho Thi Tuyet: *'After 1975, when UNICEF closed, I had to go back to work in the hospital as a nurse. There were many children in the hospitals, and the mothers did not have enough rice and so we had to make rice soup or soup from cassavas. But there was not enough nourishment with these meals, so they all became malnourished.*

Some children were brought to the hospital and given milk to drink. One doctor, in charge of the small children, was named Mr. Loc. And so it happened that the mothers wanting milk for their children just started asking for Mr. Loc, who would bring it to them. The women used to joke about how much milk could come from a man.

But it was difficult...[And] it was even more difficult for families in the new economic zones.'

There were bright spots. Despite a greatly reduced presence, UNICEF's earlier efforts and products had lasting repercussions. In 1975, the current Vice Minister of Education and Training, Madame Dang Huynh Mai, was in South Viet Nam and studying to be a teacher. She had recently given birth to her first child and was given a UNICEF growth chart, which traced expectations from infancy to the eighteenth year and included a calendar for vaccinations.

Madame Dang Huynh Mai Vice-Minister, Ministry of Education and Training: *'The programme was run from a hospital room, and many women had access – particularly those that were teachers and well-informed. There were better facilities for maternity, and I had seen the UNICEF sign when I was pregnant and I signed a form and got a copy of their book on antenatal care and some breast milk substitute powder. Actually, I was given so much of this milk that I drank some, gave some to my mother, and sold some to buy the condensed milk that I loved so much.*

After reunification, I made it home and showed the doctor the growth chart and immunization chart. My child was one of the first in the South to be immunized, and it was due in part to UNICEF's products and programmes.'

THE ROAD TO HANOI (1958 -1975)



UNICEF and WHO Saigon Office Bernhard Klausener is in the back row



UNICEF vehicle used by Saigon office



UNICEF Saigon staff with Bernhard Klausener standing in back row



UNICEF delivering food supplies to flood victims

Chapter II

Reconstruction (1975-1980)

Emergency strategies, well thought out, turn into good long-term plans.

- Jacques Beaumont -

A little over two months after UNICEF was asked to close down its Saigon operation, Dr. François Rémy, a Frenchman who had extensive experience in childhood medicine in North Africa, arrived to initiate operations in Hanoi. He was called upon to add stability to an unofficial mission in a physically devastated country. Remy arrived at the end of July, 1975, and was actually preceded by a few weeks by Ian Hopwood, his first Programme Officer. UNICEF opened its door, or rather, the door to Dr. Remy's room 105 in the Hotel Hoa Binh (meaning 'peace' in Vietnamese) at 27 Ly Thuong Kiet Street. Remy's room had to double as the office until the procedure for a proper office could be completed.

Hanoi in July 1975 was threadbare but relatively intact. Recollections of hardship in the city and Viet Nam in those early days for UNICEF staff vary, but the gratitude in participating in an extraordinary mission is nearly unanimous:

Dr. François Remy: *'What I first remember about Viet Nam may be the image of a rudimentary nation, yet a nation overwhelmed with culture whose happiness and friendliness are revealed as deeply as their cautiousness and discretion.'*

Jacques Danois, UNICEF Senior Information Officer (1969-1983): *'Hanoi in the 1970s was a beige-colored city, with no advertisements or things like that. A very poor city, but clean. I like to say, 'the dirt was very clean'.'*

Fouad Kronfol: *'When I arrived, most certainly what stood out was abject poverty, the almost complete lack of material well-being, the impossible grind of daily subsistence and survival, the drabness of the whole country and the terrible state of disrepair in which everything stood.'*

Hoa Binh for Peace and Quiet

It would be difficult in any capital to pack various embassies, technical missions, journalists and other foreign delegates into around 300 available rooms in three dilapidated hotels. That was the situation facing Hanoi, and it quickly turned into a supply problem. There was no available space for those arriving, which meant those already here had great difficulty expanding their missions through importing expertise. The only option was to grin and bear it and assume a greater load of the responsibility.

Dr. Charles Egger: *'All the staff of the first years in Hanoi lived in cramped conditions where the one hotel room was the living room, bedroom, office, and also the room where you received the visitor. They accepted it with fair grace. I think the dedication and the capability of our first groups of staff were quite remarkable.'*

For Remy, UNICEF rented a triangular room, a suite with a terrace, dining room, bedroom, and the office all combined. Slowly Remy and his successor in 1977, Bertram Collins extended the facility to a real office.

Helen Agriades, Programme Officer (1979-1982; 1990-1992):

'During the early years, the UNICEF office was housed in four large rooms on the first floor of the Hoa Binh. On the same floor, [first Dr. Remy, then] Bertam and Claire Collins occupied the corner suite with the UNICEF flag on the balcony. Our three Vietnamese colleagues shared our offices: Mr. Kha and Mr. Tri, our interpreters for English and French, who had rare linguistic skills, and Mr. Tinh in Administration. It should be noted that Mr. Kha had been the interpreter for Madame Nguyen Thi Binh at the Paris Peace talks. He was highly respected – and it could be said that his working for UNICEF was the true measure of the importance the authorities attributed to their relations with UNICEF and the UN in general.'

By 1978, UNICEF's presence in the hotel had expanded to a total of thirteen employees, six of whom were local staff. By then, most diplomats and other foreign staff lived in housing complexes and villas allotted by the government. UNICEF was offered a villa but refused it and continued to live and work at the hotel. The Trung Tu housing complex was an option also offered by the Government that a few UNICEF officers and others opted to try but many quickly vacated and returned to the Hoa Binh hotel.

Dr. François Remy: *'At the hotel, each delegation had its own table. The Swedes, the East Germans, the Soviets, and the Chinese. On my first day at the Hoa Binh, when I entered the dining room, all the tables stopped their actions and stared at me like I was the new kid in school.'*

Mrs. Elise Spivac, widow of Simon Spivac, Programme Officer (1975-1977): *'It was hard living in the hotel. It was very cold, with air drafting everywhere, no air conditioning and no electricity nor water several times a day. The bathroom was full of cockroaches; we all learned to make fun of them. Maya, my daughter, would say: 'Maman, quel beau cafard!'*

We cooked on a gas stove we kept in the bathroom. In the restaurant at the Hoa Binh, there were about six or seven meals on the menu, and one Vietnamese dish. They tried to make Western-type dishes for us. I can remember the tablecloths were always wet from the humidity. At noon we would eat at the restaurant at the hotel up the road that was for journalists and the embassies. We used to joke that the chicken they served had run all around Hanoi; the meat was so tough! But the people were always wonderful and they tried their best. There was no material comfort, but mentally we were at peace...Usually when you go to a country, you give and receive. Here it was two ways, but we thought we received much more than we gave. The Vietnamese as a people really showed such kindness and attention to the other.'

Helen Argyriades: *'The most important hardship was the great paucity in communication facilities and contacts with our families. There was no direct or easy contact with western Europe or Asia; we could only send cables. I spoke to my mother for the first time since coming to Viet Nam in 1979 half an hour before I left Hanoi in 1982. I asked Mr. Kha from our office to see if he could get a line at the post office. I don't know what he did, but he made it possible.'*

Understandably, these factors contributed to a feeling of isolation as one tried to keep up with events. The radio was a lifeline. However, it was the country itself which suffered most from this isolation.'

Rudolph Hoffmann, Programme Officer (1977-1980): *'Once a week a pouch would come. But sometimes the pouch would skip a week and then you would have fourteen issues of the Le Monde, all at the same time. We could, however, travel every three months to Bangkok or Hong Kong and it helped our supply line. I can recall one Christmas Eve, I*

returned from R&R from Bangkok with 150kg of frozen food for approximately twenty foreigners in Hanoi. I had a large, logistical problem on my hands, as they were all out at individual Christmas parties, and I had to go looking for them all the entire night. What else could I do with so much frozen meat?’

Electricity and water supply were constant problems and affected our performance. I slept on a mattress on the floor, as there was no furniture. I remember one very unpleasant job of cutting a rat out of the hair of a young Norwegian girl who worked for NORAD and lived in the hotel. I can still remember her cries next door before we could intervene and kill the entangled animal and cut the hair.’

Fouad Kronfol: *‘There is no doubt that all international staff who came to Viet Nam did so because they wanted to serve the children and women of a country that had endured the most devastating series of conflicts. Despite the material difficulties, the suffocating ‘fish-bowl’ atmosphere, the inclement climate, etc. we all had an incredible ‘esprit de corps’ and managed to give the best of our abilities because the challenges were monumental.’*

From Here to Emergency

Much of UNICEF's and the Vietnamese government's agenda in the post-war years of 1975-1979 was focused on achieving equanimity between the North and South. It was not purely a repair and rebuild emergency; since the South had never adequately established a network of social services or infrastructure, there was just as great a need for creation as there was for construction.

Fouad Kronfol: *The condition of women and children was catastrophic in most of the country – abject poverty, years of conflict, poor management, lack of technology and new approaches all contributed to making it one of the most under-developed countries. And yet, the mood of the population was optimistic, determined and willing to sacrifice for the betterment of their future generations. A proud people, hard working and diligent, but faced with apparently insurmountable problems.’*

The Twain Shall Meet

Hanoi's answer to all of this was to stress the inherent if dormant

similarities between the two regions. These similarities were then to be grafted together through reconstruction and reorganization, lifting the South to performance levels on par with the North. The Vietnamese government wanted to extend countrywide the administrative framework of social services for women and children that had already been established to an advanced degree in the North.

Helen Argyriades: *'They made an effort to unify the country so that standards would be the same, but in 1975 when they were reunited, they realized that the political decision to unite was not in itself sufficient to accomplish this goal... The South and North had different priorities. The North had an extensively damaged, vast network of health centers and primary schools; the South had big hospitals and roads and no primary health network.'*

Jacques Danois, Senior Information Officer (1969-83): *'Even during the war, and without the UNICEF presence, the North seemed to be more active. In the South, very little was done; there were 300,000 needy children in Saigon, milling around, scavenging like sparrows on the sidewalk. There were some programmes: the milk drop, teacher training, vaccination at the orphanages, but other than that, not much. Part of that was political, to be sure, and a lot of what was being done after the war and before the reunification was through different charities. After reunification things changed. All programmes, all progress came from the North. It was better organized, and in five years, by 1980, the Vietnamese had made considerable progress, both by themselves and under UNICEF auspices.'*

Why It Worked

UNICEF was then in the unique position of working in depth on problems that spanned the country – important for an open balance of interest and assistance for all concerned. Externally, Viet Nam was beginning to generate international acclaim for what it had endured in order to gain independence. The sympathy it was receiving paid off not only in positive publicity but in the facilitation of aid.

Fouad Kronfol: *'After unification in 1976, there was tremendous positive impetus to aiding the war-stricken country among major donors. It was a typical relief/emergency programme but with a major slant: The conventional wisdom being that the country needed to develop its infrastructure, social and economic, and that UNICEF – and others –*

should assist with massive quantities of goods which Viet Nam did not have access to. Large sums were spent on bulk supply of food, cement, drugs and equipment for the rebuilding effort, as well as for the provision of local manufacturing capacity for a variety of social programmes. The underlying credo was that the Vietnamese knew what to do and what they needed to do it with. As someone aptly noted, 'it was Big Money, but small programming!'

Critical for Viet Nam and for UNICEF was the earnest display by the Vietnamese officials that, above all, the children should be saved – should be nourished, educated, and protected. The Vietnamese, in both public and private life, have always been 'child-friendly' and committed to giving children as good a start as possible, a priority very much in line with the writings of Ho Chi Minh. It is an inherent value that defines the Vietnamese character and thus could conceivably be nominated as a cornerstone for re-establishing a united country.

Dr. François Remy: *'...[What] I saw with my own eyes and lived through those two years absolutely convinced me – whether communist or not, that the model being applied in Viet Nam, in terms of health care and policies for children, was indeed a good one.'*

Such a model... has contributed a crucial part in the battle against under-development in the world. In the years following my departure from Viet Nam, when I was working in the Near East and encountered particular issues...I always tried to seek solutions from the lessons I learned in Viet Nam.'

Helen Argyriades: *'Working in Viet Nam, UNICEF did not experience difficulty in arguing about policy with the Government. The principle was not in doubt. The priority was the children – that was a given, not like in other countries – and so on this point we were received with open arms.'*

Getting to Know You

After a cautious start, strong professional working relations between UNICEF and the Vietnamese government began to develop. This went against the commonly held belief that access to policy makers or leaders in centrally planned economies was rare for external or foreign agencies. From the beginning, UNICEF dealt with Viet Nam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Committee for the Reception of Aid

(AIDRECEIPT), the Central Committee for the Protection of Mothers and Children, and Ministries of Health and Education. Later, relations would expand to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Women's Union, and the State Planning Commission.

Fouad Kronfol: *'It was very difficult in the beginning. Whatever I did, whatever I said, did not pass for at least three months. It just didn't work...Then one day one of my interpreters took me aside after a frustrating meeting and told me, 'I understand you are frustrated, but let me tell you the reason: They are studying you – where your sympathies lie, and whether you are honest in your intentions. Once they are satisfied, it will change.' And the change was really like a stroke of lightning. Suddenly I got access to everyone.'*

There were excellent contacts and a sense of respect and admiration right from the start for Nguyen Co Thach, the Foreign Minister, and close professional contact with other senior ministers. The same largely positive atmosphere prevailed in relations with authorities in the South and at provincial and other levels. Conversely, during the early stages, apart from formal or official occasions, personal contacts were frowned upon by the government.

Ambassador Ngo Quang Xuan and Mrs. Le Thi Hoa: *'At the time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was designated to carry out all foreign assistances and our International Organization Department [IOD], where I worked, was the focal point for contacts and cooperation with all partners, including UNICEF. My husband (Ambassador Xuan) was head of the IOD section of UN Operational System Agencies and worked with all UNICEF Representatives from 1975-1993. We have many good memories of them all. They and most of their colleagues had an expertise in the areas of education and maternal and child health. They understood UNICEF's policies and its unique purpose. But most importantly, we both feel that they had a special feeling for Viet Nam – a sympathy and understanding of the country and people after the wars. We believe this was and remains the most important condition for the successful implementation of UNICEF programmes in our country.'*

Necessity, the Mother of Invention

The Vietnamese brought many valuable qualities to the challenge of rebuilding the country. The comparative advantages in social services and

infrastructure in the North were created in part from three decades of living under extremely restricted means; such conditions did not allow for inefficiency and imbued the North Vietnamese with endurance, resilience and ingenuity. For example, it was necessary to create their own pharmaceutical industry after imports ran out during the war. Results were deeply impressive and highlighted in the initial report made by Sandberg and Beaumont in 1973 for Headquarters:

Jacques Beaumont/Martin Sandberg: *'Instruments were made from railway tracks; hairpins and umbrella spikes were transformed into surgical needles; scales were produced from bamboo; anti-malaria drugs from certain leaves, barks and lianas. A good deal of emphasis was placed on the use of raw materials from local plants and animals, and the production of traditional medicines developed alongside with plants producing modern medicines.'*

Much was made and invented at the level of jungle handicraft workshops. Particularly notable (in fact it made the 1980 UNICEF Viet Nam country survey) was the necessary improvisation of infusing coconut milk that was sterilized and compatible with the human serum in a wound in place of blood plasma.

A country facing severe deprivation on an emergency footing must rely on the resilience and ingenuity of its communities. UNICEF programmes, particularly those in Primary Health Care, depend upon shared responsibility and group involvement. It was a potential perfect match. What Remy saw in his initial observations, published in his book, '40,000 Enfants par Jour' confirmed a reassuring inherent willingness for participation and sacrifice:

Dr. François Remy: *'The North Vietnamese people had been successful in existing through deprivation. In the North, the pyramid of personal health care was working. The child mortality figure was very low... cholera epidemics were easily contained; and there was approximately one latrine for every 2.5 families. In general, there was a good health system, and even in the most remote village, the slightest fever was urgently care for, thus helping to explain the lower than expected infant mortality rates.'*

For medicine, more than 80% of what the North Vietnamese were using was traditional, homeopathic methods. This translates into low costs. And because these primary disease concerns were well under control, North Viet Nam, unlike the South, was able to focus on secondary diseases.'

Proof of the North's collective potential was evident later in the rapid construction of the Primary Health Care (PHC) network and the success in implementing immunization programmes. But this is not to suggest that these qualities and a common desire to help the children automatically streamlined operations between UNICEF and Hanoi. The factors that made the Vietnamese so resourceful have also been credited in fueling a post-war drive for self-sufficiency. Improvisation and ingenuity had positive long-term practical and economic consequences, but the long years of foreign occupation also colored these characteristics with a certain reserve. The first step for UNICEF therefore was to instill trust. Labouisse considered Remy's mission more diplomatic than anything else – an attempt to open the door for the UN.

Ian Hopwood (1975-1977): *'Bureaucracy impeded our negotiations and development in general. Remy spent a lot of time negotiating. The Vietnamese were looking for people who would talk straight and be consistent in their behaviour and promises. As you slowly built confidence with them, you would get access to all party and technical people.'*

The field of action up until around 1980 was limited to specific advice and suggestions on particular problems that could be integrated into the Vietnamese conceptual model and the supply of equipment. No long-term expertise was sought out. As it was pointed out in one of Dr. Remy's reports, the country was willing to absorb foreign aid to the extent it could be controlled and 'Vietnamised'; the role of foreign experts was therefore more of advisor than project manager.

Lingering in the background was the reality that UNICEF and Hanoi still had not finalized the agreement to recognize UNICEF as a permanent mission. This fact did not necessarily hamper day to day activities, nor did it prevent building partnerships, but it did hamper longer-term plans.

Top Priorities

Reconstruction of classrooms, meeting emergency health needs, and upgrading the rural health services were early priorities. Hanoi desired that UNICEF make a substantial contribution to Viet Nam's schools so that future generations would be able to develop the country.

Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, former Vice President and first Minister of Education in re-united Viet Nam: *'My task as Minister of Education was to help develop the education system in the South, so that it could*

catch up to the North, and then we would build a unified system of education countrywide. One thing I did was to send thousands of teachers from the North to the remote and poor areas in the South to develop the system. And in parallel to the need to have a pool of teachers, it was obvious we needed to build schools.'

Dr. François Remy: *'The policies of Vietnam matched the objectives of UNICEF. First and foremost was to ensure the existence, education and development of children. The childhood, for them, is what they care about the most - hence their special attention to the UNICEF assistance in building schools in cooperation with Vietnamese architects...And UNICEF supplied Vietnam with large amounts of materials...Similar things happened to the construction of nursery centers, manufacturing facilities for school equipment, and factories for children's toys.'*

Dr. Charles Egger: *'Since the Vietnamese did not have woods due to deforestation, UNICEF was able to quickly set up schools from Switzerland. They were very strongly taken by the Vietnamese. We were surprised but open-minded about it; these were barrack-type schools to be erected in a tropical setting. They were not to last, but the Vietnamese did not mind. They wanted something done in this completely destroyed country, and also something that could be implemented in a couple of months. The schools were accompanied by a program to educate teachers. UNICEF got a lot of support, accepted the idea and carried it out as effectively as possible under the circumstances. It was important that we were open-minded, and that we did not go by the idea that we have to do this and that.'*

Though the pre-fabricated schools may have been popular, for UNICEF they were too great an expense for the programme's budget. Remy, and later Collins, needed to persuade the Vietnamese Government that a better solution could be found in programmes that made the most of local resources and capacities. If UNICEF was going to achieve their classroom targets, it had to convince Viet Nam of the need to take advantage of the materials at hand, particularly because they were better suited to the climate and obviously easier to come by. The same argument had to be made regarding construction of the day-care centers. While it had been necessary to show UNICEF's strength of capacity with pre-fab units, it was crucial for the larger agenda to put reasonable programming over bold displays of action.

Ian Hopwood: *'The second round of schools was built with steel frames*

from Japan. That was negotiated in November, 1976. What I used to tell them was: 'You don't want to bother about two storey buildings. We can provide the cement and steel, and you can do it yourself. You don't need an expensive solution like prefabricated schools.' I was quite proud of that.'

In addition to building schools, UNICEF assisted in upgrading ten teacher training colleges, thirty-one primary level teacher training schools, and established two educational equipment production workshops. UNICEF also provided basic school materials, including paper for textbooks and notebooks.

Madame Nguyen Thi Binh: *'At that time, schools that were built with UNICEF help were mainly in the poor and rural areas, which is why the image of UNICEF became well-known and remembered throughout the countryside, as it was very visible: you saw these nice schools in poor and remote areas. I myself, as Minister of Education, went to visit some of these schools built with UNICEF support, so I personally am grateful for the support UNICEF gave to us.'*

To Build a Creche

In a country that from 1975 onward became a large construction site, women represented 53% of the work-force. Nearly all had to work to support the family, and in Viet Nam women were an equal partner in their socialist society. The government therefore had to meet the need of caring for the children of working parents by building and staffing day-centers for children six months to three years old.

During the war, the child care service was improvised and the shortage of furniture and supplies was acute. UNICEF, together with the Committee for the Protection of Mother and Child, agreed to build fifty-seven centers by 1980, beginning in the North. UNICEF also agreed to provide supplies like washing machines which were not available on the local market. The Committee controlled the standards and was responsible for the training of staff. According to Dr. Remy's reports, in 1976, around 28% of pre-school age children were enrolled in day-care centers in the Northern provinces. In 1977, the number had climbed to around 32%, or approximately 700,000, and projections for 1980 targeted one million eligible children, primarily in the North.

There were multiple benefits to be derived from the day-care centers.

They significantly improved the ability of the family to meet their children's nutrition, health, education and well-being requirements. At the time, the family rations were still inadequate, so the special food allocations helped reduce the levels of child malnutrition (that being said, the prevalence of child malnutrition was a problem that, though reduced, did not go away). Most of the cooperative efforts in nutrition during UNICEF's first decade were with the objective of ensuring proper food access for the whole family. In short, the most direct way to ensure more healthy children was to focus on adequately provisioning the day-care centers.

Hunger

While food disbursement is not one of UNICEF's traditional activities (usually carried out by the World Food Programme (WFP)), UNICEF nevertheless found itself playing a substantial if indirect role in easing the emergency.

Rudolph Hoffmann: *'Food shipments were a large component of our supplies in 1977 and 1978. This included food ingredients like butteroil, oats and cereals. I went twice per month to Hai Phong to look after arrivals and distribution. Bakeries, day-care centers, hospitals and so on were the beneficiaries. It was a big logistical undertaking, and cost \$22 million, including freight. It was by far the largest project in dollar terms – a large contribution but not paid with UNICEF money - but we had little to follow up or prepare; we just monitored these donations in kind. All food shipments came from Europe and they asked for outturn reports. We had to be correct. It became a routine but we knew it was extremely important.'*

Health and Happiness

The other factor in the food equation was health and disease. Viet Nam's first phase of post-war reunification saw both a severe food shortage and a significant increase in food-related and water-borne diseases.

Dr. Pham Ngoc Len (1993-present): *'In the 1970's, the Ministry of Health monitored for cholera and other diseases related to food sanitation in both the North and South. The Government prioritized the prevention of diarrhoeal diseases, trachoma, the endemic malaria that was everywhere except for Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, as well as the plague that was evident in the Central Highlands. All were linked to*