



*Orange County, CA ♦ August & December 2001*

This is an overall account of how the relief effort was implemented during the last 4 assignments in November and December 2000, and January and December 2001, thus reinforcing the wonderful collaborating relationship between Lua Viet Youth Association and Social Assistance Program for Viet Nam (SAP-VN), a non-profit humanitarian organization based in southern California. All monies reported are in US Dollars unless otherwise noted.

## Report

By the end of September 2000 we received devastating news from the flood-ravaged Mekong Delta. We could not ignore the situation if we wanted to—generous donors struck a pre-emptive donation for the relief effort—so we were off to the delta once more. This time, we focused on the most flood-damaged Dong Thap and An Giang provinces—2 places most likely and repeatedly to be hit by flooding “due to their geometric, topographic, and hydrologic conditions. From Cambodia, most of the floodwater flowed into Vietnam in the Tien and Hau Rivers and then discharged into the East Sea in a northwest-southeast direction. During the average and large floods, the floodwater in the Tien River upstream of Cao Lanh (Dong Thap province) and the Hau River upstream of Long Xuyen (An Giang province) may overflow their banks to flow into and inundate the Plain of Reeds...”<sup>1</sup>

We raised \$152,031.33 for the Mekong Delta Flood Relief fund in 5 months. Lua Viet contributed a significant \$15,000 to this fund. From November 2000 through January 2001 volunteers from the U.S. made 3 consecutive trips to Dong Thap and An Giang:

❶ The purpose of the first November trip was to make preliminary needs assessment, provide urgent flood relief to the victims, and distribute school texts and supplies to poor students in Dong Thap and An Giang. We disbursed \$23,955 to 696 families and 600 students.

- ♦ Lua Viet’s initial \$5,000 contribution was used to provide urgent relief assistance during this trip.
- ♦ We observed that many families were still living in temporary shelters or half-standing houses. In addition, many children might have to drop out of school because education would lose out to more immediate concerns such as shelter and food.

❷ The purpose of the second trip in December was to continue urgent flood relief, distribute school texts/supplies to poor students, experiment with the construction of 25 huts/nhà tình thương at \$173 (VN\$ 2,500,000) per hut for 25 families in Dong Thap’s flooded area. We disbursed \$54,934 to 2, 369 families and 76 students.

- ♦ After on-site evaluation and verification of this experimental project, we voted to rebuild 225 huts/nhà tình thương for the poorest families across 39 villages/11 districts in Dong Thap’s flooded area.

By this time, all remaining relief funds, including Lua Viet’s additional \$10,000 contribution, was allocated to the hut reconstruction project. The following operating protocol was used:

- ♦ Local village staff prepared 225 family files containing general family information, proof of hungry and/or poor circumstance, and a picture of the current house or living condition.
- ♦ SAP-VN’s local associate and staff made random/unannounced visits to families to verify validity of the claims.
- ♦ If confirmed, fund would be disbursed for the purchase of construction materials.
- ♦ Allocated budget is \$173 (VN\$ 2,500,000)/ hut.

***As the purse is emptied,  
the heart is filled.***

*~ Victor Hugo ~*



- ◆ SAP-VN volunteers from the U.S. to arrive 1/01 for final on-site assessment of all 225 huts.

③ The purpose of the final trip in January 2001 was to make on-site assessments of all 225 newly reconstructed huts across 39 villages/11 districts, and continue school texts/supplies distribution to poor students in Dong Thap. We disbursed \$58,141 to 225 families and 1,501 students.

The average profile was a family of 5, with 2 working adults, ususally day laborer/làm thuê at US\$ 1 per day per person. The average hut was 4 meter wide by 8 meter long, with a tin/tôle roof, thatched walls, and a wooden frame on bare clay flooring. Out of 225 huts, 40 were completely built (17.7%), 175 were 80% constructed (77.7%), and 10 sites had frames up (4.4%). At \$173 per hut, Lua Viet's \$10,000 contribution provided new huts to about 57 families.

Total expense for relief activities during the 3 trips:

Local transportation:	US\$ 1,500
Accommodations:	US\$ 1,028
Film, envelopes, others:	US\$ 788
<b>Total:</b>	<b>US\$ 3,266</b>

**Summary**

Total flood relief donations	US\$ 152,031
Relief disbursement	US\$ 137,030
Expenses for relief activities	US\$ 3,266
Total funding	US\$ 140,296
Remaining/reserved relief fund	US\$ 11,735
Total recipients	5,368 families
Assistance	cash, school supplies, huts

Selection criteria in decreasing priority:

- 1) Poor families with handicapped children

- 2) Poor families with children who are at risk of dropping out of school to help out their families
- 3) Poor, alone and/or handicapped elderlyies
- 4) Poor families with very damaged shelters

**December 2001**

With the preparation and participation of Drs. Mai-Khanh Tran and Thai-Van Pham, we returned to An Giang and Dong Thap, 2 provinces most affected by yearly flood. From our collective experience, we divided the project into 2 sub-programs: to provide urgent relief to flood victims as needed; and to initiate a more sustainable child protection program to minimize casualty during flood season.

We worked with the local Children Protection Committee (CPC) and Department of Education (DOE) in both provinces to assess 2001 damage and future needs. Our main goals were to visit temporary daycare shelters, proposed shelter sites and structures, and to make further planning as needed.

The first 2 working days we visited O Long Vi (Chau Phu district, An Giang province), a remote, isolated village only accessible by boat. Most land is at river level amd most people live in huts built above the water. There is a proposal to build a daycare shelter so we wanted to check out the site as well as verify the budget. An Giang CPC is dedicated to making progress in terms of communication and program preparation; its drive for a flood shelter in this part of the country is an encouraging effort. We reviewed their proposal and requested they revise the shelter's blueprint and budget to make them more affordable to our donors' allowance.

The next 2 working days were spent in Tan Cuong hamlet (Phu Cuong village, Tam Nong district, Dong Thap province) visiting a temporary daycare shelter in action. There were 30 pre-school-aged children looked after by 2 volunteer caretakers who were trained and assigned by the DOE. The house is practically wrapped in fishing nets—a creative invention to prevent the children from accidentally falling into the



**Before**



**After**



surrounding water. We checked out the site, water level, the children's families, and their caretakers' experience and found no irregularity, only enthusiasm and hope.

We also checked out the construction contractor/manufacturer's warehouse to learn more about the new flood-resistant building design and materials called the Be Tong Du Ung Luc Lap Ghep design (Steel Reinforced Concrete Assembly). The structure is supported by reinforced concrete posts that are specifically designed to withstand rusting and damaging water current force. Their shelter's blueprint and budget are within reasonable limits (\$5,000 for a daycare shelter with the housing capacity of 50 children; kitchen and restrooms included). In fact, the budget is so reasonable that we are considering setting this blueprint and budget as the standard for all future daycare shelter facilities.

We then researched the situation in Phu Yen province (coastal region of central Viet Nam), which was also hit by torrential flooding in November 2001. Due to lack of time, we were not able to visit Phu Yen directly but relied on SAP-VN's local associates, Mr. Do Khac Hoanh and Mr. Huynh Phuoc Em, who reported the 2 most flood damaged sites were An Hiep village, Tuy An district, and Xuan Thinh village, Song Cau district.

## Preparation Process

As I write this report, there is news of more flooding in the Mekong delta and its damages in terms of human casualty and property loss in this region. Somehow, the news has been expected and the seasoned volunteers are prepared to make their next yearly relief trip. I would like to briefly describe this preparation process. Every year since we started the flood disaster relief, our members ponder the following criteria before embarking on the trip:

### 1) How bad is the disaster situation this year?

Unfortunately, any natural disaster is bad for the soil and the soul. And annually recurring ones must be the worst since the victims barely have enough time to recover from the last strike. This is when we start collecting damage data and our email system is inundated with incoming information, rumors, and requests.

***You cannot do a kindness too soon,  
for you never know how soon it will  
be too late.***

*~ Ralph Waldo Emerson ~*

### 2) Is the relief effort justified?

This can be a loaded question. We are not here to stir up controversies and exhausting but inconclusive debates. It is a personal decision as to what work is and is not acceptable in Vietnam. We, as a group, focus on the result of our efforts and not on the proper justification.

### 3) Does the relief effort receive enough support?

Fortunately, there is tremendous support for this effort, otherwise I would not need to finish writing this report. We receive either financial donation, or in-kind donations of personal supplies and medicine. Our team members are gifted solicitors and hoarders; and our donors are consistent with their yearly contribution for the victims. Support has grown so that we usually can make multiple relief trips within a few months to disburse all assistance. We learned to pool all our human and financial resources with other organizations (such as Lua Viet) to carry out the relief project. *On no one's behalf but on everyone's behalf.* We fondly acknowledge and appreciate each partner's dedication and support to the effort through the years. In fact, we have always managed to advance most relief assistance knowing that we can always count on Lua Viet and other partners for backup in time of need.

### 4) Are we tired of doing relief work yet?

Apparently not. First of all, our supporters are still with us. In fact, from October through December, donation checks usually arrive with "flood relief" in the designated memo field; a gentle reminder that it is that time of year again. Secondly, our volunteers are still with us. We seem a little older, walk a little slower, eat a little less (?) but work just as hard as ever. The fundraisers continue to ruthlessly beg their families, friends, and loved ones to support the relief cause; and the hoarders continue to relentlessly stock supplies and medicines. There is no sign of early retirement afoot.

