

# Interchange



Fostering Cooperation with Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Cuba

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## Forum Conference Convenes in Vientiane

by Susan Hammond

The 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Forum on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, "Improving Partnership for Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development", was held at the National Cultural Hall in Vientiane, Laos from June 19 – 21, 2001.

Nearly 600 representatives of government, local and international non-governmental organizations, mass organizations, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, universities and business attended the conference. In addition to the three country plenaries and twelve panel discussions, participants joined one of twenty sectoral focus groups to discuss ways to address topics such as trafficking of women and children, integrated rural development, HIV/Aids, education, and microfinance.

The conference closed with a cultural program highlighting the diversity of talent in Laos including traditional Lao dances performed by the National Dance Company, acrobatics performed by the award winning Lao Acrobatic Troupe and spirited modern dances choreographed and performed by a group from the Lao Youth Center.

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Vietnam's Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung with Asia Society President Nicholas Platt at a December 12 luncheon in New York cosponsored with AIG and Credit Suisse First Boston. Minister Dung visited Washington, New York and San Francisco in December with a large delegation of high ranking officials and leaders of Vietnamese state and private businesses. Dung took the last official step to implement the Bilateral Trade Agreement on December 10, 2001, at a signing ceremony in Washington with US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick. (For the delegation list, visit [www.usvtc.com](http://www.usvtc.com))

## Destructive Hurricane Enables Food Sales to Cuba

by Stephen Sokol

Hurricane Michelle has apparently done what no political lobby, no Administration, and no Congress has been able to in 42 years. In the wake of the November 4 storm, one of the worst in fifty years to pound the island, the United States Commerce and State Departments approved an historic sale of food and medicine to Cuba, the first instance of such commerce since the economic embargo put in place by President Kennedy over forty years ago.

*Reuters* reported that in an emotional speech, President Fidel Castro stated over 700,000 Cubans were evacuated, with over 100,000 homes damaged, 10,000 being destroyed. Mr. Castro went on to cite that about 50 % of the population was affected, with 6 million people receiving aid. There was also extensive damage to agriculture and other sectors of the economy. The hurricane ruined up to one million acres of sugar cane and as much as 20 percent of the citrus crop. Fatalities were limited to five people thanks to a well organized evacuation, according to *The New York Times*.

Employing an export licensing mechanism set up last year by Congress, the Cuban government is purchasing from \$3 million to \$50 million worth of American relief exports, according to *Reuters*. Goods are to be exported on United States flagged ships. Cuba offered to pay cash for the purchases, eliminating the need for American financing. The Congress has restricted such financing.

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## A Message to Our Readers..

The Fund for Reconciliation and Development enters 2002 recognizing a new era is upon us with implications just beginning to be understood for our daily lives and for our work. (For more on that see page 38.)

We are happily settling into a new office for the long term. It's far more convenient to the diplomatic and corporate energies of mid-town Manhattan, but we already miss the proximity to religiously affiliated and university colleagues on the Upper West Side (not to mention the trees and grass).

And, at last we have been able to achieve our aspiration to have a Washington representative. He will provide a full time presence in the center of national policy for the American NGO community active in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. His efforts will complement the existing Indochina work of business and veterans' organizations. (See page 3.)

Finally in 2002 we want to define more clearly our relationship with you. Hopefully, for the several hundred other organizations working with Indochina, our publications, web site, meetings and conferences offer a useful resource no one else provides. For individuals who just

want to stay in touch with Indochina, and with the groups working there, a subscription to the Interchange may provide enough contact with no commitment implied.

We do know there is another category: people who want a deeper personal involvement with the still unfinished story of US-Indochina relations, including responsibility for the enduring human consequences of the war. No doubt some also identify with our broader mission of reconciliation and development with other countries that have a history of conflict with the US, in particular Cuba. Accordingly we want to open a conversation about whether FRD should become a membership organization.

In the meantime, we offer the opportunity to be an individual member of the informal network that FRD seeks to sustain. Concretely that means with a donation of at least \$25 annually and provision of an e-mail address you will receive a monthly policy update from Washington and invitations to occasional meetings there and in New York.

Whichever way fits, we hope we will hear from you soon, at least via return of the form on the inside back cover.

## Interchange

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#### Mission Statement:

The Fund for Reconciliation and Development (FRD) began in 1985 as the US-Indochina Reconciliation Project. It devolved from a program of the American Friends Service Committee established in 1972. FRD was the first American non-governmental organization (NGO) devoted solely to normal diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with Indochina and expanded its work to include Cuba in 1999. FRD carries out its own programs of cultural and educational exchange and humanitarian assistance. It also facilitates communication and cooperation between private business, NGOs, foundations and educational institutions interested in the region by publishing the quarterly newsletter *Interchange* and by organizing national and international meetings. FRD funding comes from foundations, US and European government agencies, international organizations, and private donations.





# Washington Report: Fall 2001

by Andrew Wells-Dang



Although the September 11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent US response have overshadowed all other topics in Washington this fall, there has still been plenty of movement in Congress on issues of importance to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. And despite the veneer of bipartisanship on display in Washington, the underlying divisions on US policy towards Southeast Asia have been as apparent as ever. The region has been next to invisible in the US media, but the quiet work of building closer US ties with Indochina continues behind the scenes. With a new full-time presence in Washington, the Fund for Reconciliation and Development will continue to advocate for normal diplomatic, educational, cultural and economic relations with the region.

Opening a new chapter in relations with Vietnam, the **US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement** (BTA) was ratified by both sides this fall. The House of Representatives passed the BTA (as part of H.J. Res. 51) on September 6 by voice vote. The Senate followed suit on October 3 by a vote of 88-12. President Bush signed the agreement into law on October 16. On November 28, during its biannual session, the National Assembly of Vietnam ratified the agreement by a vote of 278-85. In Hanoi, Trade Minister Vu Khoan told a press conference: "With this event, the relations between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the United States of America have come closer to full normalization."

From December 9-14, Vietnam sent its largest official delegation to the US since the end of the war in order to inaugurate the trade agreement. The group was led by Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and included the Ministers of Trade (Vu Khoan) and Planning & Investment (Tran Xuan Gia), 14 other senior trade officials and diplomats, and 62 Vietnamese business leaders. The delegation met with US Trade Representative Bob Zoellick, Commerce Secretary Don Evans, and World Bank officials in Washington, as well as promoted trade opportunities in Vietnam during visits to New York and San Francisco.

Both Vietnamese and US officials recognize that while the trade agreement is a significant step, other important issues are yet to be resolved in bilateral relations. War legacies, including landmines/UXO and Agent Orange, remain on the table. The question of Vietnam's debt payments to the US has been partly addressed by the creation of the Vietnam Education Foundation in January 2001, though many of the foundation's programs have yet to be implemented. Finally, the trade agreement itself creates new areas of potential conflict, as this fall's dispute over basa catfish imports to the US illustrates. FRD will continue to include these issues in our education agenda.

Ratification of the Vietnam BTA leaves Laos as the only country in Southeast Asia without normal trading relations with the US. Although the **US-Lao trade agreement** was completed in December 1998 and is far simpler than the Vietnam BTA, it has yet to be considered by the House or Senate. The State Department

and US Trade Representative also have backed off from previous support of the agreement. President Bush listed the agreement as part of his overall trade agenda in June, and key members of Congress such as Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) and Rep. Phil Crane (R-IL) planned to bundle the agreement together with other trade issues, including the controversial Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) or "fast-track".

Following the September 11 attacks, however, the Administration decided to focus solely on TPA, leaving the Lao agreement out. According to State Department officials, the unresolved Ly-Vang disappearance cases (from April 1999) and issues of religious freedom in Laos are viewed as stumbling blocks to passage of the BTA, even though similar issues have not impeded other trade agreements in the past.

Both BTAs face opposition from extreme segments of the Vietnamese and Lao/Hmong-American communities, as well as from conservative politicians in Congress. In both cases, objections have solidified around **human rights** concerns, particularly regarding alleged violations of **religious freedom** in Vietnam and Laos. (In the human rights discourse of many opposition groups, religion appears to take first place above all other rights, followed by other civil and political freedoms, with economic and social rights far down the scale.) Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ) and his chief aide, Joseph Rees, adopted a list of these concerns together with a serving of anti-government rhetoric into the so-called "**Viet Nam Human Rights Act**" (HR 2833), which passed the House after an hour of debate on September 6 by a 410-1 margin.

In the Senate, sponsors Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Bob Smith (R-NH) invoked an emergency rule to bypass the Foreign Relations Committee and to try to bring the human rights bill directly to the floor. This maneuver backfired when Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) put a hold on the bill. After initial hesitation, the State Department and Bush Administration also came out against its passage. With the Senate's Democratic leadership unwilling to bring the act to a vote, it has been effectively tabled for this legislative session. The many strong voices of NGOs and individuals in the US and Vietnam who mobilized against the bill deserve credit for this result. However, supporters of sanctions against Vietnam will certainly reintroduce another version next year.

Next to the waves created by the Vietnam human rights bill, **opponents of US-Lao relations** took a lower profile. On November 20-21, the "US Congressional Forum on Laos" held the ninth in its series of secretive, closed-door meetings on US policy towards Laos. The Forum, which has no official ties to Congress, is coordinated by Philip Smith, Washington lobbyist for the Lao Veterans of America and former Gen. Vang Pao. Smith's unreconstructed Cold War agenda likens the Lao government to "terrorists," a label that might be more accurately

applied to the Hmong insurgency, which Vang Pao supports and funds.

Both Vietnamese- and Hmong-American human rights groups worked closely with the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom** (USCIRF), an independent body created by act of Congress in 1998. The Commission's statements carry no formal policy weight, but often coordinate closely with the views of certain members of Congress. Former USCIRF chair Elliott Abrams described the Commission's purpose as being "to come up with creative policy solutions that the U.S. government can implement to promote religious freedom abroad." On the basis of the Commission's findings, the members issue opinions on political questions such as the US-Vietnam BTA, the status of ethnic minority groups, or other topics with no direct connection to religion. Statements are frequently released for greatest political impact, such as in advance of the House vote on the Viet Nam Human Rights Act.

In September, the USCIRF recommended that the State Department include Laos on its list of "**countries of particular concern**" that are "engaging in or tolerating particularly severe violations of religious freedom." (In 2000 and 2001, State selected Afghanistan, Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, and Sudan as "countries of particular concern".) In a letter to Secretary Powell, the Commission also targeted Vietnam for "grave violations of religious freedom" that did not yet meet "particular concern" status but deserved further monitoring.

The State Department's October 26 Report on International Religious Freedom did not accept any of the Commission's additional recommendations. Cambodia is judged to be a country where religious rights are "generally respected." In the Lao PDR, the situation is said to have "deteriorated in some aspects" during the past year; although the number of religious detainees decreased by half to around 20, more than 65 churches were closed. In Vietnam, "the status of respect for religious freedom did not change during the period covered by this report, but remains improved from conditions of the early 1990's."

At the same time as the debates on trade and human rights (not to mention anthrax and terrorism), the Senate considered amendments to the **Foreign Operations Appropriations Act** for fiscal year 2002. This bill provides funding for the State Department, USAID, and related projects. In the Senate, the bill was the subject of a Republican filibuster and finally passed on October 24 with a number of amendments added. One section of the Senate version (Sec. 560) conditions assistance to the Cambodian government on "significant progress" in investigation of two 1994 and 1997 grenade attacks, that the **Cambodian communal elections** scheduled for February 2002 are judged "free and fair", and that Cambodia's record of environmental protection is improving. An exception is made for assistance to combat human trafficking through the Cambodian Department of Women's and Veterans Affairs. Sens. Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Mitch McConnell (R-KY) introduced an amendment (SA 1955)

prohibiting "any form of assistance to any tribunal established by the Government of Cambodia" unless the President determines that a **Khmer Rouge tribunal** "is capable of delivering justice for crimes against humanity and genocide in an impartial and credible manner." However, Sen. McConnell also joined with Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in sponsoring an amendment (SA 1945) to provide \$250,000 in funding to the Documentation Center of Cambodia. And in a **small break for Laos**, Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) introduced an amendment (SA 1931) allocating \$5 million in child survival and development assistance to Laos, with the proviso that this money must be channeled through nongovernmental organizations.

On the diplomatic front, personnel rotated at several of the embassies in Washington and the region. New **US Ambassador to Laos Douglas Hartwick** arrived in Vientiane in July, ending nearly two years of obstruction in Washington from Sens. Smith and Helms. At Vietnam's embassy in Washington, **Nguyen Tam Chien** replaced outgoing Ambassador Le Van Bang, who moved up to the position of deputy foreign minister. **Emmy Yamaguchi** took Charles Ray's place as US consul in Ho Chi Minh City. And President Bush's nominee to replace Pete Peterson as ambassador in Hanoi, **Raymond Burghardt**, arrived in Vietnam in December. A career Foreign Service officer with years of experience in Asia, Burghardt faced no significant opposition.

In a November 30 meeting in New York arranged by the Fund for Reconciliation and Development, Burghardt outlined his priorities as ambassador. He told the audience of US educational, development, and business organizations working in Vietnam, "I expect Vietnam will emerge as an important middle-rank power in Asia, and it's in America's interest to help make that happen." On human rights, the new ambassador termed the Viet Nam Human Rights Act "a lousy piece of legislation" and noted that while human rights issues have worsened Vietnam's reputation, they are best dealt with in the context of developing a more open and transparent society, economy and legal system.

*Andrew Wells-Dang has been appointed as the Washington Representative of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development. He brings a background of work with Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam Hong Kong and CET Academic Programs in Vietnam, experience in Cambodia and Laos, and engagement with Indochina issues in Washington as program director at the Asia Pacific Center for Justice and Peace (1998-2001). Andrew will carry out an active program of dialogue with government officials, Congressional staff, foreign policy think tanks, NGOs, advocacy organizations and embassies. In addition to articles for Interchange, he will write a monthly e-mail Washington Update which is available at no cost to not-for-profit organizations working with Indochina and to individual members of the FRD network who donate at least \$25 annually. His office is located at the Friends Committee on National Legislation, 245 Second St. NE, Washington DC 20002. Phone 202-547-6000, ext. 109, e-mail washington@ffrd.org.*

### *conference from p.1*

The success of the Forum, the first international conference of this breadth and focus held in the Lao PDR, owed much to the support of the Government of Laos and the hard work of the staff of the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of International Organizations.

Grants from Oxfam America, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Asia Development Bank, Swedish International Development Agency, Asia Foundation, American Friends Service Committee and contributions from numerous NGOs and bilateral agencies enabled the Fund for Reconciliation and Development to organize the Forum and to support more than 300 government officials and representatives of mass organizations, universities and local NGOs from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam to attend the three day meeting.

Based on the evaluation forms and the personal comments received since the conference we believe that it was successful in meeting many of its aims. The evaluations of the Forum also provided some valuable constructive criticism that will be weighed as the future of the Forum is determined.

Perhaps the main success of the Forum was that it enabled a large and very diverse group of non-governmental organizations, including local NGOs from Vietnam and Cambodia to meet in Vientiane with government counterparts and donor agencies for the first time. People and organizations that would not normally

meet in one location had the opportunity to share their viewpoints and approaches to solving some of the issues impacting the region.

An analysis of the conference registration list shows that participants in the Forum conference traveled from the following countries: Australia 7, Bangladesh 1, Cambodia 117, Canada 1, China 1, Denmark 2, France 1, Hong Kong 3, Hungary 1, India 1, Japan 1, Lao PDR 320, Myanmar 1, Netherlands 1, New Zealand 1, Philippines 3, Thailand 16, USA 45, Vietnam 77.

Though nearly half of the participants were Lao nationals, citizens of least 22 other nations took part: Australian 14, Bangladeshi 1, British 9, Cambodian 82, Canadian 6, Danish 2, Finnish 1, French 6, Indonesian 1, Indian 1, Italian 4, Japanese 3, Lao 268, Nepali 2, Dutch 6, New Zealander 3, Filipino 3, Swedish 3, Swiss 1, Thai 6, American 82, Vietnamese 61, Unknown 34.

The participants also represented a wide cross section of government and non-governmental organizations: International NGOs 195, Local NGOs 60, Mass/Peoples Organizations 25, Foreign Government (other than Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) 9, Host Government (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) 226, University 38, Foundations 3, Bilateral and Multilateral Donors 13, International Organizations 21, Business 6.

The diversity within the not-for-profit sector was also great. It included local human rights organizations from Cambodia, local environmental groups from Vietnam, large international NGOs with a presence in all three countries, small international NGOs focusing on particular issues such as trafficking of women and domestic violence, multilateral aid agencies and academics.

The most common comment from participants was that the Forum provided an excellent opportunity to network with a diverse group of people working on development issues in the region. The majority of participants thought that there should be similar Forums held in the region in the future, although there were differences in opinion on the format and content of future gatherings. Fund for Reconciliation and Development staff will be meeting with conference participants, government officials, NGOs and development agencies in Indochina to obtain in person feedback on the Vientiane conference and to make an assessment about the Forum's future.

*Susan Hammond is FRD Deputy Director and Forum Conference Organizer*

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*Full conference report available at [www.ffrd.org](http://www.ffrd.org)*

*Conference reports by Amanda B. Hickman.*

*Newsletter summaries of reports by Tara McAuliff.*

*Sectoral groups met on a wide variety of topics throughout the Forum. Summaries and recommendations from the sectoral groups are available online at [www.ffrd.org](http://www.ffrd.org).*

## Opening Address by HE Somsavat Lengsavad, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR

**Minister Lengsavad** opened the conference by welcoming the delegates, noting the conference would provide delegates with the opportunity to “have a first hand impression of the actual situation in different aspects of the Lao PDR”. He went on to explain that the Lao government was happy to cosponsor the conference because “it reflects continued support from international non-governmental organizations to the struggle for national independence of the peoples of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia in the past.” In addition, the theme of the conference coincides with the development plans of the Lao PDR to lift Laos out of the group of least developed countries by 2020.

“Another important aspect, which international non-governmental organizations have the capacity to undertake, is the promotion of bilateral relations and cooperation between the Lao PDR and their respective countries. The international non-governmental organizations can play an important role in increasing government-to-government relations by promoting understanding in the field of politics, culture and tourism.”

Minister Lengsavad noted that the gap between the developed and developing world has further widened over the past century. However, there have been achievements in the developing world, for Laos in particular, the most important one has been the capacity of rice self-sufficiency for the first time in history, which was reached last year. The government of the Lao PDR is committed to reducing poverty in the

country, and aims to reduce the number of poor families by more than half by 2005. They will accomplish this through concentrated public investment in rural development combined with decentralization that will see the provinces assuming the role of strategic development units, districts assuming the role of planning and budgeting and villages the role of implementation units. Looking outward, Laos plans to capitalize on its geographic location to become a sub-regional hub for its Southeast Asian neighbors.

The Lao government recognizes the important role played by the more than 100 International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in achieving Laos’ poverty alleviation targets. They have assisted in training local officials to upgrade their management skills and have

introduced appropriate technologies at the local level. Internationally, INGOs have also assisted in building regional and global networks, as well as promoting bilateral and multilateral ties between their home countries and the Lao PDR, including government-to-government ties.

### Lao Plenary

*David Elder, American Friends Service Committee; Khemphet Pholsena, Lao Women’s Union; Phongsavath Boupha, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and head of Lao delegation; Soukaseum Bodhisane, Vice Governor of Savanaket Province*

Conference Convener **David Elder** (of the American Friends Service Committee) began by noting that this was the first time the Forum met in the Lao PDR, which shows how far the partnership between the Lao Government and International NGOs has come. Twenty five years ago, when the Lao PDR was founded, there were only two INGOs in Laos, and today a thick directory is needed to list them all. The number and diversity of concerns have grown in all three countries. Economic growth has been dramatic, and INGOs are fortunate to do their best to contribute to making it as positive as possible. Because of this growth, it is now possible to identify those in danger of being left behind and who need development attention most. The panels and sectoral groups of the Forum reflect those priorities. Only when there is development does there have to be a focus on making it sustainable and equitable. Every aspect of society is effected by and must be engaged in development. While the three countries have different histories, they face parallel challenges. Since the Forum began twelve years ago, changes in political relations of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam with the US have been profound, and we like to think we have played, and continue to play, a role in those changes.

**Vice Minister Boupha** stated that poverty reduction in the Lao PDR is a priority of the government and that it is closely linked with several major issues that need to be addressed in parallel, such as the stabilization of shifting cultivation, eradication of opium cultivation, preservation of the environment, the removal of unexploded ordinance, and decentralization of authorities to the local, provincial and district levels.

The Vice Minister noted that the Lao Government is proud to see that cooperation with non-governmental organizations has gradually developed in qualitative and quantitative terms. At the present time, NGOs providing assistance to Laos have increased to over 100 agencies from Europe, the United States and Asia. He noted that assistance should concentrate on priority sectors identified by the Government, namely in food production, health and human resource development.

He went on to say that the Lao Government gives importance to the contribution made by NGOs to the development process and poverty eradication in remote areas. To ensure that projects run smoothly and are affective the Government has improved the process by issuing guidelines for the administration of NGOs operating in the Lao PDR.

He went on to note that there are still some difficulties that need improvement. Namely, that the capacity to absorb and make efficient use of assistance at the grassroots level is still limited and needs to be more focused on tangible benefits for the population; that local participation in administration, management and implementation of projects needs to be improved; and that steps in establishing assistance projects need to be improved so as to respond to the actual needs of the people.

He concluded his remarks by noting that cooperation based on mutual understanding and carrying out activities by strictly observing the existing regulatory framework would lead to the real improvement and development of cooperation in the future.

**Vice Governor Bodhisane** spoke of some of the problems hampering development in rural Laos. They include limited funding, lack of infrastructure, too short of a time frame, UXO and Agent Orange.

Questions followed. The first asked about the role of the Lao Women's Union (LWU) in poverty alleviation, gender equality and gender development. **Mdm. Khemphet Pholsena**, Vice President, LWU, gave some background on the role the LWU has played during its 46-year history. A recent encouraging step has been the 1998 plan the government passed to promote economic development for women. The plan incorporates projects aimed at reducing poverty and increasing women's knowledge and skill through vocational training, courses in family economics, and help establishing and maintaining small businesses. While the Lao constitution stipulates equal rights for women, Laos is currently implementing the Convention on the Equal Rights of Women. In addition, the LWU is working to implement the Beijing Plan of Action as well as taking the first steps to establish a National Commission for the Advancement of Lao women. There are also projects to improve the education of rural women, which will boost literacy among poor women.

The next set of questions focused on the issue of food self-sufficiency in Laos, particularly what policies and structures the Lao government has found most useful in this area. Vice Minister Boupha responded, mentioning the government's focus on irrigation, which has allowed two rice crops; the emphasis on openness, which allows the people to understand what the govern-

ment is doing and how policies are structured and implemented. The Lao government is strengthening the rule of law in the country. The use of law to express policy is a new approach in line with this initiative. Vice Governor Bodhisane added that the combination of intensification and diversification had also assisted in improved food security, as had improved training and guidance, combined with improved credit and changes to import laws.

Next answered were questions on the role that bilateral and other external aid played in poverty alleviation. Vice Minister Boupha discussed the fact that the donor community has been willing to work with Laos' five and ten year strategies, and are collaborating with the Lao to work with their plans for long term development, rather than imposing their own (the banks') expectations on the country.

Vice Governor Bodhisane noted that poverty means something different in every country. Poverty alleviation means meeting basic human needs for food, shelter and health care. However, good morals are equally necessary for poverty alleviation, people have to cooperate and work together, see themselves as part of a community. The most important tool for poverty alleviation, though, is human resource development. Vice Minister Boupha added to this noting that implementing programs is once piece, but changing people's attitudes is harder.

The last set of questions focused on Laos' landlocked position and diverse ethnic population and how they affect development, and on the legal structures that encourage foreign investment. Vice Minister Boupha emphasized Laos' focus on being "land-linked" rather than landlocked, as export corridors mean that Laos is now able to play an important role in promoting trade and investment in the region. He also said that the government is proud of its policy with respect to minority groups. They are all represented with the country's power structure, enjoy the full rights of Lao citizenship and contribute fully to the economy in turn. While foreign investment in Laos has fallen since 1997, due to the Asian Economic Crisis, after increasing since policy changes in 1988, the changes in foreign investment laws have been the nation's most important policy initiatives. The challenge now is to make those laws as clear as possible to assure the international community that Laos is a good county in which to invest.



(left to right) Mdm. Khemphet Pholsena, Vice Minister Phongasavath Boupha and Vice Governor Soukaseum Bodhisane during the Lao Country Plenary

## Panel A: Implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child at the Provincial and Local Levels.

*David Claussenius, Save the Children - USA; Chea Sam Nang, Ministry of Rural Development, Cambodia; Steve Gourley, Licadho (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights), Cambodia; Kham Houng Sacklokham, National Commission for Mother and Child, Laos; Amanda Bissex, UNICEF, Laos; Pham Thi Nga, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam; Ta Thuy Hanh, Radda Barnen, Vietnam.*

**Ta Thuy Hanh** discussed Radda Barnen's work in Vietnam, and provided a brief history of children's rights in the country, noting that Vietnam had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990. Radda Barnen works with children with disabilities, focusing on community based rehabilitation. In Vietnam, children are seen as having obligations rather than rights. Within this context, working with disabled children poses a unique challenge as it is unusual for them to attend school.

There have been some noticeable impacts of Radda Barnen's work, including the Ministry of Education's new attention to inclusive education, and a stated goal to more than double the enrollment of children with disabilities in mainstream schools in the coming decade.

**Khamhoung Sacklokham** noted that Laos had ratified the CRC in 1991, and established a National Program of Action for Children the following year. The strategy of the program of action includes establishing a commission on mothers and children, strengthening the capacity of agencies charged with implementing the convention and intensifying advocacy and social mobilization efforts to ensure that available resources are allocated to benefit Lao children. He went on to say that the last five years have seen solid advances in survival and development programs for children though new protection issues are emerging. Despite these gains, other tenets of the convention remain unmet, Mr. Sacklokham continued. Maternal mortality remains high, as does protein energy malnutrition. Many children lack access to sanitary latrines and quality basic education. Also, the gender gap in literacy and

education persists, as do urban/rural and ethnic disparities in access to social services. The goals for the coming years, he said, include universal elementary education by 2015 and reduction in infant, mother and child mortality rates.

**Chea Samnang** spoke of Cambodia's plans for a better future for children. In the next five years, the government will be implementing the second stage of a Community Action for Social Development Program that they established with the assistance of UNICEF in 1996. This next stage will focus on a program called "Seth Koma" which means child rights in Khmer. The program, which builds on lessons learned from the previous stage, will be implemented in six provinces and will measure success by increased survival rates for mothers and children, improved health statistics and expanded access to education. The

"The survey showed that children are generally positive about their future, but many are unprepared to deal with challenges they will face as they enter adulthood. HIV, AIDS, and drug abuse stood out across the region."

two primary projects of the program are decentralized community empowerment and village plans for basic services, which will be carried out through Village Action Plans. The program will ensure that participating villages have access to basic health, education, water, sanitation and credit services.

**Amanda Bissex** discussed UNICEF's work in Laos and globally. One example she gave of UNICEF's work to incorporate children into the process of the implementation of the CRC was a youth survey UNICEF carried out in Latin America, which has served as a model for a similar survey of children in East Asia and the Pacific. The survey showed that children are generally positive about their future, but many are unprepared to deal with challenges they will face as they enter adulthood. Children in Laos were aware of some of their rights, but over half did not know they had rights just as adults do. In addition, many Lao youth knew little or nothing about drugs, drug abuse or HIV and AIDS. The survey showed that Lao youth often feel that they are treated differently from their peers and that their opinions are not important.



*(l-r) Ta Thuy Hanh, Kham Houng Sacklockham, David Claussenius, Chea Sam Nang, Amanda Bissex and Steve Gourley during the Rights of the Child Panel*

**Steve Gourley** discussed how to promote the best interests of working children in Cambodia. He quoted article 32 of the CRC, which states that a child has the right to be protected from work that “threatens his or her health, education or development”. Mr. Gourley insisted that this article uniquely impacts the economic and survival needs of the families, and must be balanced with articles 3 and 6 of the convention, which respectively address the importance of taking the child’s best interests into account in actions concerning the child, and the state’s obligation to ensure every child’s survival and development. Is it always in the best interest of children to protect them from work that they and their families depend on for survival? Mr. Gourley clarified that he did not think this should be seen as a defense of the extreme cases of child labor in Cambodia. Ultimately, the goal must be to eliminate and improve work situations that truly endanger children without needlessly preventing them from engaging in work that is beneficial to them and their families. To this end, Lichadho has developed a “Child Labor Matrix” which categorizes work into levels ranging from household chores to the worst forms of child labor. The matrix is designed so that labor inspectors, child rights advocates and employers can assess thirty distinct indicators and both record a clear picture of child labor as it occurs and compare circumstances of children working in various situations.

**Pham Thi Nga** noted that Vietnam was the first country in Asia and the second country in the world to ratify the CRC. In conjunction with this, Vietnam established the Committee for the Protection and Care of Children in 1991. With assistance from UNICEF, the entire convention has been translated into Vietnamese and a number of ethnic minority languages for further dissemination. In addition, Vietnam has adopted both a national law on the protection, care and education of children, and a national program of action for the survival, protection and development of children. By 2000, Vietnam had achieved most of its decade end goals for improving the lives of children and made great progress in providing for their basic needs. Ms. Nga concluded by noting that major challenges to improving the lives of children persist, which include rural malnutrition, lack of access to sanitation and safe water, low rates of primary school completion and secondary school enrollment.

Questions touched on the role multi-national corporations play in exploiting child labor; the integration of child rights work into broader development projects at the community level and into national planning; the lack of quality health care and professionals in rural areas and how that affects child labor; and what the role of the private sector was in meeting the needs of the CRC.

*right: (l-r) HE Man Boun Heng, VM Phongsavath Boupoua and Mr. Vu Xuan Hong, country delegation heads during the welcome reception and dinner*



*below left: Lao Cultural Hall, location of the 10th Forum Conference*

*below right: a participant peruses conference materials*



## Panel B: Building Effective Cooperation Between Humanitarian and Development Organizations and Government Structures

*Dominique Van der Borgh, Oxfam Solidarity - Belgium, Laos; Pen Dareth, NGO Affairs and Human Rights, Council of Ministers, Cambodia; Bert Bosch, ZOA Refugee Services, Cambodia; Dr. Bountheuang Mounlasy, International Economic Cooperation Department, State Planning Commission, Laos; Jacquelyn Chagnon, International Consultant, Laos; Nguyen Van Kien, PACCOM, Vietnam; Paul Kelly, PKA, Vietnam*

**Pen Dareth** noted the crucial role NGOs have played in building civil society in Cambodia. He said the involvement of civil society contributes to the promotion of good governance, transparency in financial affairs and support of the reforms initiated by the Royal Government. The state and civil society are partners in development with the same goals in mind - to work together for the common good of the people and society. Therefore, in order to mobilize the wisdom from all walks of life and backgrounds in nation building, the Cambodian government widely supports the role of civil society and NGOs in development of the country. Mr. Dareth concluded by saying the government hopes to establish a legal framework for NGOs, in order to support their programs and activities.

**Bert Bosch** gave a brief history of ZOA's activities in Cambodia, noting that as a humanitarian organization focusing on refugees, their projects tended to bridge the gap between long-term and short-term development. He then went on to discuss the different forms of partnerships shaped by NGOs, asserting that true partnerships are characterized by equality, mutual benefit and shared respect and support. Development projects that do not have the support and partnership of the government are not sustainable. Humanitarian development organizations, by nature, build partnerships with governments, often those partnerships are the most difficult to build but are ultimately more lasting. Long-term development cannot proceed without these partnerships. Some of the most valuable lessons in ZOA's experiences are that humanitarian assistance needs to be linked to long-term development from the beginning, and that governments need to be proactive in developing partnerships.

**Dr. Bountheuang Mounlasy** discussed the importance of cooperation to minimize redundancy of efforts. In the area of humanitarian aid, he said, where humanitarian aid organizations are involved, coordination by all relevant actors, especially government functionaries, is even more urgently needed than elsewhere. Dr. Mounlasy highlighted six general points essential to the building up of an effective cooperation between humanitarian development organizations and government structures. They are 1) Understanding of partner institutions; 2) Commitment to work with appropriate government structures; 3) Comprehension of policies and priorities; 4) Exchange of information; 5) Mutual trust; 6) Availability of capacity.

**Jacquelyn Chagnon** started her presentation by asserting that mistakes are our best lessons: we can learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. She went on to say partnerships and cooperation do not have to be formal, sometimes informal relationships are stronger, paving the way to formal partnerships. Partnership and cooperation require mutual respect, dialogue and trust, but that trust is evolving in Laos. NGOs have a unique role in developing countries, they have the flexibility to test new ground and new methods in ways that governments and multilateral agencies cannot. There are countless examples of NGOs clearing the way for larger developments in integrated rural development, irrigation, and micro-credit projects that began as small NGO endeavors and grew into international models. Multilateral agencies, however, need to learn to involve NGOs and government counterparts in their planning from the very beginning. Ms. Chagnon closed by saying that every institution needs to learn from others. This is the lesson that needs the most work still.

**Nguyen Van Kien** said that by 1995, there were 250 INGOs working in Vietnam, with assistance levels of \$70 million and 5 years later that number was up to 500 INGOs and \$83 million in aid. He continued saying that while INGO assistance is not as substantial as that of other Overseas Development Assistance sources, NGO aid responds directly to people's needs. Their contribution to development goes far beyond the transfer of funds, to provide innovation, ideas, international linkages and solidarity. INGOs in Vietnam are asked to provide input on government affairs, and sit on the consultative group of donors to share their ideas and experiences with the gathered donors and government officials. Every six months, VUFO organizes an idea sharing meeting for NGO representatives, as well as smaller monthly meetings and active working groups. Mr. Kien then briefly described the legal requirements for NGOs working in Vietnam, saying that the prerequisites to effective cooperation are commitment, dialogue, trust and respect. INGOs have a legal obligation to register with the government, which is the first step towards opening communication. For the government to create conditions that facilitate NGO contributions to the country, they have to take an active role in coordinating the work of NGOs.

**Phan Van Ngoc** spoke on some of the opportunities and constraints that development organizations may confront in their work in poverty reduction in Vietnam. The People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM) has responsibility over day-to-day work and provides INGOs with advice and guidance on a wide variety of issues related to their programs. Advocacy can occur at the local as well as the central level. Working with local government partners also provides opportunities for replicating, or scaling up, program activities. In recent years, many policy reforms have emphasized, among other areas, the move towards

a more decentralized decision-making process. However, planning methodology at the local level has not yet adapted to take advantage of this changing policy environment. INGOs are well placed through Participatory Planning and Assessment exercises, workshops and training programs to facilitate this process and improve the understanding of service-providers at local government levels.

**Paula Kelly** spoke of her experience working with multilateral organizations, NGOs and grassroots groups. She said that effective cooperation in development programs results from excellent planning, strong commitment, respectful relationships, and sufficient and well-developed skills. She also asserted that the key ingredient missing from development programs is cultural, and thus operational synergies. Too much is assumed in developing

partnerships. The following method has proven to be effective in creating synergies at a large NGO in Vietnam: 1) Defining values; 2) Developing the principles of practice/procedure; 3) Discussing goals of program and organizational relationships; 4) Understanding the legal aspects of the program; 5) Developing a common culture of the program.

Questions touched on the process of decentralization; the differences between working for and working with partners, transparency with INGOs; the place of local NGOs in relation to mass organizations in Laos and Vietnam; the role of government to coordinate between NGOs; and what the priority issues for Cambodia are in working with NGOs.



*left: Dave Elder*

*right: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs Somsavat Lengsavad*



## Panel C: The Role of Women and Their Challenges in Social and Economic Development

*Ann Helm, City University of New York; HE Ing Kantha Phavy, Secretary of State, Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs, Cambodia; Ros Sopheak, Gender and Development for Cambodia; Bandit Pathoumavanh, Central Lao Women's Union; Somsisouk Inthavong, Basic Education for Girls Project, Laos; Nguyen Thi Thuy, Vietnam Women's Union; Chantal Oltramare, UNDP, Vietnam.*

**Bandit Pathoumavanh** discussed the regionally unique role of women in Laos. Women in Laos are afforded a degree of economic security by old traditions of matrilineal inheritance, which means that women do own property, though they are not traditionally heads of households. Because of this second point, reaching out to women in remote areas is difficult, and often rural women are not accustomed to dealing with officials and outsiders. They tend to defer to men in community decision-making. This leads to men benefiting inordinately from agricultural training that spreads new information and technologies. Development programs too often take the easy path of dealing only with men. The Women's Union works to encourage women to step forward and participate in community decisions and continuing education. Gender Resource Centers offer training for development workers and other teams to help them understand how to better incorporate women into their rural work.

**Somsisouk Inthavong** discussed Laos' National Education for Girls Project, which aims to reduce the disparity between male and female educational achievements. In urban areas, women and girls are far more likely to complete their education and enjoy a broader range of social and economic opportunities, but in rural areas, there are more pressures on girls to leave school early. Even where women do have access to higher education, that education has not translated into participation in decision-making. Gender division of household labor means that girls are far more likely to be asked to stay home from school to help with household chores while boys tend to finish school. The Basic Education for

Girls Project began in 1999, and works at the Ministry level to implement a nationwide program to educate ethnic girls in remote areas.

**Nguyen Thi Thuy** spoke of the disparity between women's national and local level leadership roles in Vietnam. While women play an active role in national politics, at lower levels women's participation in leadership roles is low compared to their participation in the labor force. While Vietnam is a patriarchal society, women do participate actively in family decision making, and in community work and campaigns. The two primary barriers to women's equality are the rise of prostitution in Vietnam, and government policies that view the household as the basic economic unit. Most policies to improve economic opportunities are geared at families, and when men are the heads of households, programs tend to benefit men (i.e. men are more likely to have access to credit). Another disadvantage for women in Vietnam is that even when women are working as many hours as men in the workforce, men do not pick up the slack at home. Women's own biases compound the situation. The Vietnamese Women's Union conducts workshops for Party and government officials to help them understand gender issues, and training courses to prepare women for elections and leadership roles. In addition, they hope to advance the role of women through household based income generation projects and training on micro-enterprises geared toward women.

**Chantal Oltramare** discussed UNDP's programs in Vietnam geared towards women, focusing on a project on Capacity Development for the Implementation of the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. Among other things it collected reliable data on the social and economic circumstances of women in Vietnam. She said that all stakeholders are affected by gender issues and should be incorporated into policy development processes. She stressed that policy makers need to



*(l-r) HE Kantha Phavy, Ros Sopheak, Bandit Pathoumavanh, Ann Helm, Somsisouk Inthavong, Nguyen Thi Thuy and Chantal Oltramare during the Role of Women Panel*

recognize that while poverty tends to intensify gender inequalities, gender inequality can also increase poverty. They also need to understand intra-household dynamics and decision-making patterns. From the data collection, several interesting discoveries were made, such as that gender stereotyping is persistent in textbooks, that stereotypes influence teachers' expectations and advice for students, and that the rate of women seeking higher education in technical fields has actually declined. As in Laos, men have better access to credit than women and receive most of the agriculture extension training, despite the fact that women take on 92% of new agricultural jobs. In addition, capital-intensive mechanization of agriculture tends to displace women, as men are preferred for operating heavy machinery. Another area of inequality appears in the area of reproduction. Women are not able to negotiate safe sex, even with partners who know that they are HIV positive. Domestic violence is prevalent in most regions, and not recognized as an issue in the courts. In conclusion, Ms. Oltramare said that sound, gender-sensitive policies can mitigate the negative impacts of globalization and contribute to gender equality as well as to poverty reduction.

**HE Ing Kantha Phavy** noted that due to Cambodia's history, women head 20% of households. Reconstruction presents the country with a unique opportunity to protect and promote the rights of women. Parties competing in the upcoming commune elections have promised to present ballot slates that include at least 30% female candidates. Women make up more than half of the workforce in agriculture and fisheries, in manufacturing and in wholesale and retail trade. However, women are less likely than men to be literate or to complete elementary education. And, as in

Laos and Vietnam, women are left out of training programs that could prepare them for participation in the economy. Young mothers don't have access to early childhood services and childcare. 41% of pregnant women are underweight and 1 in 30 pregnant women are HIV positive. 36% of households live below the poverty line. Women tend to have fewer resources and assets than men do, and less influence in economic decisions.

**Ros Sopheap** noted that although according to law Cambodia protects the rights of women as in Laos and Vietnam, there is a gender gap in the participation of women in the Cambodian economy relative to the economic benefit they gain from that participation. Gender disparities, she continued, will not automatically improve with economic development. Young women and children are brought to Phnom Penh from the countryside and forced to work in the sex industry, where HIV rates range from 70% - 80%. While girls perform as well as or better than boys do in school, they are more likely to drop out. Men and women alike equate leadership ability with educational attainment, and so women are less willing to stand for election where they believe they are not qualified. Women do not have access to capital or credit. Low prices for rice and agricultural products mean that men, who once migrated seasonally to urban areas to find work, stay year round, and so rural women, the majority of Cambodia's women, are isolated in a declining sector.

Questions touched on improving women's access to higher education; what was being done to help girls working in garment factories; how awareness of gender issues in policy making and planning is measured; and the role of local NGOs in Cambodia.



*(l-r) Steve Sherlock, HE Sok Siphana, Home Vong Xay, Peter Fodge, Peter Evans, Nguyen Xuan Thin and David Hill during the Social Responsibility Panel (p.14)*

## Panel D: Social Responsibility of Business in Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development

*Steve Sherlock, Aid to Southeast Asia; HE Sok Siphanna, Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia; Home Vongxay, State Planning Committee, Laos; David Hill, AESOP Business Volunteers, Cambodia; Peter Fodge, Burapha Group, Laos; Peter Evans, Planet Computers, Laos; Nguyen Xuan Thin, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Vietnam*

**Home Vongxay** gave a basic overview of Laos' economic situation. Agriculture accounts for 52% of GDP and employs over 80% of the workforce. In remote areas, people operate in a non-monetized economy. Since Laos began implementing plans to move towards a market oriented economic system in 1986, the business sector has contributed to national development through capacity building, employment creation, foreign exchange earnings, service, and tax revenues which allow the government to pay for social development programs. Contributions of private sector education and health care facilities have improved literacy and reduced infant mortality in the Lao PDR. The private sector does not work in the neediest rural areas, and the primary contribution of the private sector is job creation. Mr. Vongxay suggested that the business community look towards diversification of investments and improve capacity building activities linked to diversification. The business sector can also engage in careful, sustainable business involvement, building new ventures that improve the social conditions of the population, and encourage employment and income growth.

**HE Sok Siphanna** spoke of the new concept in economic development that Cambodia is implementing: Maintaining Trade Strategy for Poverty Alleviation. In the last few years, economic trends show decreases in the agriculture sector and increases in services and industry sectors as a percentage of GDP. Real GDP is beginning to grow again, and inflation has stabilized since the economic crisis. Exports form the bulk of economic growth in Cambodia, in the form of goods shipped abroad, remittances from workers abroad and value added by tourists. Trade strategy in Cambodia must be a pro-poverty alleviation strategy. Not all trade sectors work for the poor. Meeting these and other challenges will require improvements in agricultural output, employment growth in manufacturing, service and export sectors while developing new export sectors, and new markets for exports. A pro-poor trade sector strategy emphasizes competitive advantage over comparative advantage, and views competitiveness as an enterprise issue and a sectoral issue. Regionalization and decentralization are vital to a pro-poor strategy because manufacturing and industrial growth in Cambodia has been limited to specific isolated regions, which means that some regions continue to starve while others flourish.

**David Hill** noted that in Cambodia, close to half of the population is under 20 years old, putting immense stress on the labor market. The government can help alleviate this situation by fa-

ilitating a good environment for investment. What groups like AESOP can offer is capacity building and marketing skills, by helping farmers and NGOs develop business sensibilities. NGOs and groups like AESOP can facilitate skills transfer and capacity building in areas where people do not have business skills.

**Peter Fodge** discussed the situation in Laos. The Burapha Group is a foreign investor, building on Swedish traditions of developing commerce and social services hand in hand. Projects of the Burapha Group provide technical consultants in forestry, agriculture, rural development and civil engineering. The goal of development must be to promote access to social services for all citizens. The most important businessman to support in Laos is not the urban office worker, but the rural agricultural worker. The government must increase tax revenues and decrease dependence on foreign aid, which can only be done through increasing the commercial sector. Businesses and the commercial sector can work with the government to bring income and work to the poorest Lao.

**Peter Evans** also spoke of the Lao economy. He first came to Laos to work for a multi-national corporation. One observation he made while working there was that while, structurally, the development sector was working with the private sector, culturally the two sectors do not socialize together. Mr. Evans then discussed an example of corporate citizenship in the Maldives, working with the UNDP. He closed saying that these partnerships can work, and everyone should look for the places where they can take place. There is a real need for leadership in developing working and effective partnerships.

**Nguyen Xuan Thin** covered the Vietnamese experience. He said poverty cannot be reduced through economic growth alone because poverty is a social phenomenon. The idea that basic social services can promote economic development is not new to Vietnam. Hunger and illiteracy are prime enemies to economic development. The government has established a plan for the poor which includes providing small loans to poor households. How can businesses contribute to these efforts? In Vietnam, national and international businesses understand that they have a responsibility to the communities they operate in, and the business sector is directly and indirectly involved in poverty alleviation activities. Direct involvement includes funding to support infrastructure development, social programs, and emergency relief.

Questions touched on what social responsibility meant to the businesses represented; Cambodian export processing zones on the Thai border and whether this threatens sustainability; why business isn't in rural areas; why contributions from the private sector for poverty alleviation are limited in Laos; what is the of social responsibility of businesses engaged in poverty alleviation and who are their partners; and if there is any NGO involvement for finding markets for local products in Laos and Vietnam.

## Vietnam Country Plenary

**Vu Xuan Hong** discussed where Vietnam is headed in the future. New attention is being paid to the rural poor, new jobs are being created which means that people have new access to social services such as schools and hospitals. Some remaining points of weakness include weak economic competitiveness, irrational investment policies and a decline in foreign direct investment (FDI). While other policy changes have improved life for urban Vietnamese, poverty remains acute in rural areas, and underemployment is one of the biggest issues faced by the government. Poverty alleviation objectives include raising the GDP level to twice its 2000 level, increasing domestic savings to 30% of GDP and establishing universal Junior High School. International NGOs can play a role in areas such as poverty alleviation in remote areas, education, health care, mine and UXO clearance and education and efforts to combat social problems such as HIV and drug use. Vietnam still has no written law on local NGOs, but the rules have been drafted and are waiting for legislative approval. When you assess the number of local NGOs in Vietnam, it is important to take local traditions into consideration and keep in mind that NGOs are not part of Vietnamese tradition. Also, those organizations that work closely with the government are most likely to achieve their own goals. On the environmental front, at present forest covers only 30% of the country. The nation's current goal is to increase that number to 40% in the coming decade.

A PACCOM representative added that currently, there are 350 international NGOs active in Vietnam. The legal framework in Vietnam gives foreign NGOs an official role and provides them with permit assistance and other logistical aid that allows them to integrate their work with government policy.

The first question asked was how the government facilitates INGO work in remote areas. The Committee for Foreign NGO Affairs and PACCOM coordinate and oversee INGO work. Government mechanisms at the central, provincial, and local level help as well. The next question was how foreign investment was structured and facilitated. Implementing a concrete investment law creates

a better environment for foreign direct investment, and at present companies from at least 30 countries invest in Vietnam in a wide range of sectors. The next several questions focused on policies dealing with the disabled poor. There are about 7 million people in Vietnam with serious disabilities. Injuries are very often the result of war or traffic accidents, and 80% of those living with disabilities are poor, many of them in rural areas. The Ministry of Health collaborates with INGOs to provide prosthetics, and also operates hospitals and provides orthotics. They are also concerned with the evolution of medical insurance. The Ministry of Education works to make it possible for children with disabilities to attend school.

Next came questions about employment. Only 20% of young people entering the work force have vocational skills. 63% of the population lives in rural areas, which provides the government the opportunity to reduce unemployment in rural areas and prevent larger urban migrations. In particular, efforts at establishing food-processing enterprises in rural areas so that work is completed near the farms where food is grown are being pursued. The contribution of INGOs extends beyond financial contributions: INGO solidarity and support is vital to government functioning, and INGOs regularly consult with government agencies and have a say in legislation that will affect their work.

The final question asked was if salary disparities caused conflict for government officials who see INGO staffers paid better than their own colleagues. Mr. Hong answered first with a joke, saying that since these staffers pay income tax, no one minds. He then went on to say that opening up of the government and state enterprises means that pay will be diverse in Vietnam, a fact of life that the government accepts. Mr. Hong closed by saying that bilateral cooperation and mutual respect are the only way to build relationships across the borders between the three countries (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam).



*Mr. Vu Xuan Hong (standing) and other delegation members during the Vietnam Country Plenary*

## Panel E: Cooperative Assistance to Communities Affected by Landmines, UXOs and Agent Orange

*Richard Walden, Operation USA; Chan Ratha, Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority, Cambodia; Sok Eng, Jesuit Relief Service, Cambodia; Thongdeng Singharath, National UXO Program, Laos; Le Cao Dai, Fund for Victims of Agent Orange, Vietnam Red Cross; Le Van Son, People's Aid Coordinating Committee, Vietnam; Maj-Gen Nguyen Don Tu, Vietnam Handicapped Children Relief Association*

**Thongdeng Singthirath** spoke about the massive amount of unexploded ordinance (UXO) still left in Laos from American bombing. More than two million tons of bombs and millions of antipersonnel bomblets were dropped over half of Laos. To this day, accidents involving UXO average one every other day. Land rendered unusable by UXO is a major cause of food insecurity and poverty in Laos. The National UXO Program works to identify those areas most affected by UXO and train workers. The goals of UXO Laos are twofold: to reduce the number of civilian UXO casualties and to increase the amount of safe land available for food production and development activities. UXO Laos trains teams who can then train more de-miners, surveys the impact and level of contamination, educates the community about the ongoing risks of UXO and directly undertakes clearance. Funding for the UXO Laos program is primarily short term, emergency funding, but the problem is a long term one, and ongoing donor support is necessary.

**Chan Ratha** then spoke on the parallel situation Cambodia faces due to American bombing and the protracted civil war. The Cambodia Mine Action Center (CMAC) works on mine awareness, aimed at educating people about the dangers of mines, towards a zero victim policy. CMAC also undertakes mapping and land marking projects and manual mine clearance. Within Cambodia, land mines account for sixty percent of incidents, UXO for forty percent. CMAC has a calculated plan to control the mine situation within five to ten years, meaning that within five years, mined areas will be surveyed and marked, with significant reduction in accidents; and within ten years the majority of significant mined regions will have been cleared. The Cambodia Mine Action Au-

thority (CMAA) coordinates the efforts of all groups involved in mine action and all interested donors. CMAA is also responsible for regulating the efforts of mine action operations to prevent careless or uncontrolled mine clearance.

**Sok Eng** discussed the economic toll landmines are having in Cambodia. For example, while land along the roads has been cleared of mines, nearby fields have not, so landless farmers must resist the temptation to try to plant in these areas. Mine victims asked to reflect on what they want generated a list of basic needs, from water tight roofs to education opportunities for their children, as well as health care and prosthetics or aids appropriate to their injuries. While Jesuit Relief Services is not a de-mining agency, it works with disabled people and campaigns globally for a ban on landmines. Ms. Eng emphasized that de-mining agencies and development agencies must work together in communities, as de-mining is only the first step in resettlement. These agencies must be mindful of what happens after minefields are cleared. Land use planning is in its early stages in Cambodia and land titling is not entirely resolved.

**Le Van Son** discussed the situation in Vietnam in relation to UXO, of which 800,000 tons remain, wounding 2000 Vietnamese a year. The government must spend hundreds of billions of dong each year on mine clearance efforts and mine awareness programs. As of 1999, less than 10% of mined land had been cleared. The Vietnamese government works closely with a range of NGOs on clearance, prevention, and rehabilitation issues. Projects in all provinces are diverse, in approach and funding level. In addition to NGO work, bilateral assistance, including aid from the United States, provides money for de-mining. US aid for de-mining efforts is particularly important, as the US must recognize its moral and material responsibility for the mine situation in Vietnam. Vietnam is still working to define a clear structure for coordinating cooperative assistance in humanitarian de-mining efforts. These projects are categorized as sensitive or security related. The Vietnam Union of Friendship



*(l-r) Dr. Le Cao Dai, Major General Nguyen Don Tu, Richard Walden, Le Van Son, Sok Eng, Chan Ratha and Thongdeng Singharath during the Landmines, UXO and Agent Orange Panel*

Organizations (VUFO) will form the focal point of a master plan to be developed by the Landmines/UXO working group. The government very much prefers equipment donations and technical assistance in de-mining, so that the actual implementation of fieldwork is by Vietnamese.

**Le Cao Dai** talked about the ongoing effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam. Between 1961 and 1971, more than 3 million “ha” were sprayed with chemical defoliants, of which one million show no sign of recovery. Forest destruction led to severe wet season flooding and dry season forest fires. While most herbicides degrade within a matter of months, dioxin, a by-product of Agent Orange, lingers in the environment. Foodstuffs and agricultural soil in highly sprayed areas have dioxin levels similar to that of industrialized countries. However, in areas immediately surrounding former American air bases, soil tests continue to show high levels of dioxin in the soil, and blood tests continue to show populations near those bases have high levels of dioxin. The priorities for dealing with the legacy of Agent Orange include cleaning up hot spots where dioxins linger in the soil, international collaboration of scientific research to understand how dioxins continue to afflict the population exposed to Agent Orange, and humanitarian aid to those people suffering birth defects and health effects of dioxin contamination.

**Maj-Gen Nguyen Don Tu** discussed his personal experience with the affects of Agent Orange. Maj-Gen Tu’s youngest daughter was born in 1973, after he marched through the defoliated area near the demilitarized zone. She was born an invalid, with severe cerebral palsy and mental deficiencies. His companions from that visit to the 17th parallel all died of liver cancer by 1980. Foreign physicians credit Agent Orange dioxins left in his own tissues with his youngest daughter’s birth defects. As many as one million Vietnamese have been affected by Agent Orange, including 150,000 handicapped children. Maj-Gen Tu said that the American government must take responsibility for cleaning up former air bases in Vietnam. Internationally Agent Orange must be banned for all forms of combat. The time has come to form an International Association of Agent Orange Victims that could unite people from the region and in the United States who continue to be victims of Agent Orange.

Questions touched on where the landmines in Cambodia come from; what programs work best for education and victim assistance; about Agent Orange and a discussion of the Peace Villages build in Vietnam to serve children and adults disabled by birth defects linked to dioxins; and what money is most needed for to address the effects of Agent Orange.



*above and right: traditional Lao dancers perform for the Forum*

## Panel F: Patterns of Development at the Local Level: Strengthening Traditional Rural Economic Life While Connecting to the New Market Economy

*Jacquelyn Chagnon, International Consultant, Laos; Ann Thomas, International Cooperation for Cambodia; Houmpheng Boubphakham, Central Lending Committee for Rural Development, Laos; Eric Deflos, United Nations Credit Development Project, Laos; Nguyen Quoc Dat, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam; Michael Zeiss, CIDSE, Vietnam; Winona Dorschle, PACT, Laos*

**Eric Deflos** began by discussing a 1996 survey on the demand for micro-finance in Laos. The survey pointed out that financial services available did not meet demand in Laos, and that in rural areas only 12% of people had access to credit, and only 1% of people deposited their savings in banks. The government of Laos responded to these findings by executing a micro finance project through the Ministry of Finance. The national component of the project is charged with establishing a regulatory and legislative environment conducive to developing micro-finance in Laos. A Micro-Finance Training Center educated a bilingual micro-finance training team and more than 290 practitioners and policy makers in micro-finance, and was able to recover 71% of its costs after 2 1/2 years.

**Winona Dorschle** discussed PACT's aim to provide sustainable micro-finance services to the poor in Laos. PACT works with local credit unions and other partners in various villages, with women making up 95% of their clients. The basic solidarity group lending methodology used by PACT involves self-formed groups of five to ten members who guarantee one another's individual loans. Loans start small, and after perfect repayment of prior loans, individuals have access to larger loans. The project uses a

village approach that starts with meetings with leaders and the village as a whole followed by formation of the solidarity groups and savings and credit training. The village and group leaders form a team out of which they build a Village Savings and Credit Organization. The repayment rate so far has been 99%. Careful micro-finance strengthens the market economy by increasing production and trade, and contributes to poverty reduction through social and economic improvements at the household level.

**Ann Thomas** spoke with Meng Thoen and Savang La, who are from Ratanakiri Province, where International Cooperation for Cambodia runs a Bi-Lingual Non-Formal Education Program. It is the first such program in Cambodia, and focuses on non-formal, functional literacy. This program also is the first time that some indigenous languages have been written. Teachers receive no pay: a volunteer village development committee may ask students to volunteer a few hours in exchange for the teacher's work. Trainers come in for half days during the week and are paid only a per diem. The program starts by teaching literacy in the indigenous mother tongue. By year two, the split is 50-50, and by the final year students are taught entirely in Khmer. Volunteer teachers are trained regularly, so that they are only one to two months ahead of their students. Villagers are responsible for all construction and labor and for other upkeep requirements. A high percentage of women participate, and their participation in decision making was facilitated by a process through which women would meet together to discuss issues before sitting down with men in the whole group. One of the products of the program is a series of storybooks and math textbooks in Khmer and in indigenous languages.



*(l-r) Winona Dorschle, Houmpheng Boubphakham, Jacquelyn Chagnon, Eric Deflos, Nguyen Quoc Dat, Michael Zeiss, Ann Thomas and delegates from Ratanakiri Province during the Patterns of Development panel*



*above, left and right:  
modern Lao dancers  
perform for the Forum*



**Houmpheng Boubphakham** noted that long and medium range plans in a village should be submitted to appropriate government agencies. If not, plans cannot be implemented smoothly. Otherwise, the government cannot be helpful to those villages in realizing their local goals. Efficient use of government resources requires local groups to work with the government.

**Michael Zeiss** began by saying that a farmer's benefit from the market economy can include greater food security, and income can meet other family needs. But there are going to be risks: income will fluctuate with prices, and there is always a risk of over-exploitation of resources. Mr. Zeiss quoted a sustainable agricultural expert, who said "What is sustainable is not any given technology, but rather innovativeness. Innovativeness is what lasts and makes agriculture a profitable business in the long term." CIDSE has been working in Vietnam since 1978, and currently is training farmers to grow clean teas, and has formed a group of farmers growing organic vegetables. Crops were chosen which are already major crops in those areas but were being grown with heavy pesticide use. Crops were not chosen based on market considerations. The first lesson learned was that you cannot wait until later to study consumer preferences or educate consumers or you won't have a market when you need it. The teas faced different challenges: certification is required to sell in Europe, and farmers were not organized enough to provide uniform

volume. Some best practices built on from these lessons include looking at the customer first and using market analysis and development methodology. From a list of promising products, the group must select the most marketable product and develop a detailed business plan and financial projections. While the final step might seem the most important, it is vital for farmer cooperatives to go through each phase themselves, so that they come out of the process with a clear understanding of how to market their products, not just sell them.

Questions touched on the most appropriate methodology for micro-finance in Laos; how you work non-formal education links into the micro-credit sector, and have micro-finance projects ever been tried in non-Lao speaking villages; what are the hours of bilingual education courses; health, women and agriculture; if bilingual non-formal education projects could be undertaken in Laos or Vietnam, where ethnic diversity is greater than in Cambodia; what policies had allowed Vietnam to move from rice deficiency to rice surplus; what the guidelines of the poverty alleviation program of the government [not clear which country] were; what the link was between urban based consumer organizations and rural based producer organizations - can poor consumers benefit poor producers; obstacles to micro-credit in Laos; and what kind of policies should be practiced to encourage teachers to work in remote areas.

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## Panel G: Addressing the Social and Economic Impact of HIV/AIDS

*Nina McCoy, Australian Red Cross, Vietnam; Dr. Seng Sut Wantha; Pok Panhavichet, Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance, Cambodia; Dr. Chansy Pimmichanh, National Committee for the Control of AIDS, Laos; Tran Trong Hai, Ministry of Health, Vietnam; Yvan Thebaud, Medicine du Monde, Vietnam; Oun Kom, UNAIDS, Laos*

**Dr. Chansy Pimmichanh** began the discussion with an overview of the HIV/AIDS situation in Laos. Laos has a low prevalence of AIDS but is surrounded on all sides by high prevalence countries. The objectives of the AIDS program in Laos include preventing transmission, improving surveillance and counseling systems, improving the capacity to combat AIDS of both central and provincial staff, and mitigating the impact of AIDS on infected persons. The earliest achievements of the National Committee for the Control of AIDS include incorporation of AIDS in the formal curriculum, establishment of a national surveillance system, and condom marketing programs. Young people in their twenties form the bulk of infected people. Most cases are not recorded until a patient enters the hospital. The primary challenges in the coming years are to strengthen the committee's coordinating capacity and to educate high-risk groups on prevention.

**Oun Kom** noted that there are only ten INGOs working to address HIV and AIDS in Laos. NGOs work on peer education programs, condom marketing, capacity building for counselors and educators, direct training on sexually transmitted diseases, direct health care services, negotiating safe sex, and the unique challenges of HIV prevention and intervention among minority groups. Young truck drivers are statistically a high-risk group. Peer education is one of the most popular forms of intervention, followed by focus group based services.

**Tran Trong Hai** began by giving a brief history of HIV/AIDS work in Vietnam. The organizational machinery for prevention and control started in 1990, under the direction of the Ministry of Health. By 1994, a intrasectoral national committee was formed to address AIDS, addiction and prostitution, as these three issues are closely related. By 1998, all provinces of Vietnam had found HIV infections. In May of this year, there were 36,500 known cases of HIV in Vietnam, though by some estimates that figure is only a tenth of the true infection rate. 85% of known infected persons are men. More than half are intravenous drug users, followed closely by commercial sex workers. The highest infection rates are among people in their twenties. While infection is high among IV drug users, infection is not high in some other risk groups, which suggests that some early intervention efforts have been effective.

"AIDS is more than a health problem, it is an economic problem. AIDS mortality is highest among young people who should contribute the most to the economy." Dr. Seng Sut Wantha

**Yvan Thebaud** said that Medicine du Monde had been doing HIV/AIDS work in Vietnam since 1995. Their primary projects include development of HIV/AIDS education curricula and training for home care, and they have been very involved in Vietnam's new condom cafes. They estimate that there are 200,000 - 400,000 cases of HIV infection in 2001. Infection rates are still low among army recruits and pregnant women. The highest risk activity is still drug use. Condom coffee shops help meet the need for broader sex education that can reach past those taboos and address sexual health as well as relationships with partners and their own family. Partnership with the government is mandatory for NGOs. The Vietnamese Ministry of Health began to address AIDS before the first case was discovered. HIV policies in Vietnam conform to international standards, but social evils policies towards sex workers are in conflict with those forward thinking HIV policies: repressive policies towards sex workers and drug users make HIV prevention work more difficult.



*(l-r) Nina McCoy, Dr. Chansy Pimmichanh, Oun Kom, Tran Trong Hai and Yvan Thebaud during the HIV/AIDS panel*

**Dr. Seng Sut Wantha** said the AIDS epidemic in Cambodia is the most serious in Southeast Asia. The first cases were detected in 1991, the first AIDS patient diagnosed in 1993. In 2000, Cambodia saw 533 reported deaths from AIDS, 3,684 reported cases of AIDS, and an estimated 169,000 HIV infections. AIDS is more than a health problem, it is an economic problem. Hundreds of thousands of children are orphaned by AIDS. AIDS mortality is highest among young people who should contribute the most to the economy. Borrowing from moneylenders is common in families treating AIDS - far more common than in rural areas of neighboring countries. Over the next ten years, estimates suggest Cambodia will have to spend nearly \$30 million on AIDS treatment.

**Pok Pongvichetr** said that Khana is a national NGO founded in 1996 to provide capacity building, technical support, and small grants to local NGOs working on HIV and AIDS issues. 3.2% of sexually active adults in Cambodia are infected with HIV. Men serve as a bridge from sex workers to married women who then often pass the virus on to their children. Families are further fragmented and isolated by burdens of guilt and shame. Women with HIV are stigmatized by social service providers and their community and tend to receive substandard care and are often

pushed out of their communities. Economic impacts multiply when participants in micro-finance fall ill and cannot pay their debts or otherwise cannot meet their financial obligations in their community. Work is slowed by the lack of concrete data about the impact of AIDS. People working on AIDS issues need to do more advocacy and lobbying work. Funders also recognize the need to address HIV and AIDS in the context of seemingly unrelated projects.

Questions touched on how to address HIV in sex workers and cross border coordination; how to address problems like pregnant women denied care when they are HIV positive; how to make peer educators comfortable talking about HIV and Sexually Transmitted Diseases issues; whether condom coffee shops were financially self-sufficient; what strategies can reduce mother to child transmission of HIV; if you can monitor Sexually Transmitted Infections through pharmacist reporting; Laos' need for NGOs help to deal with HIV/AIDS; who is infected in Laos; how to address the situation of orphans in Cambodia; how to provide HIV and AIDS education to young people in remote and rural areas or who work in risky situations; whether Buddhist monks play any role in prevention campaigns; voluntary testing; and condom use.



*Much of the work of the Conference went on between the sessions*



## Panel H: Innovative Agricultural Techniques

Hans Luther, NOSPA, Laos; HE Tao Seng Hour, Council for Agriculture and Rural Development, Cambodia; Dr. Yang Saing Koma, CEDAC, Cambodia; Dr. Bounthong Bouahom, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Laos; Don Tuan Phong, PACCOM, Vietnam; Ly Don Son, NEDCEN, Vietnam

**Dr. Bounthong Bouahom** spoke in Lao, and the simultaneous translation was not recorded.

**Ly Don Son** discussed the programs of the Capacity Building Center for the Sustainable Development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Vietnam (NEDCEN). Programs support SMEs and household businesses and teach them how to protect natural resources in their business projects, through green production and reduced energy consumption, which reduces pollution and emissions. Development of organic and eco-products is an effective means of sustainable rural development and poverty alleviation. The challenge is that organics are a new concept worldwide, rural poor do not have the education, support or connections to compete in the market as a whole, let alone an understanding of the potential value of organic production. An important component of their methodology is that NEDCEN does not do the work for anyone, but rather guides the process, which forces the community to learn from each step.

**Dr. Tao Seng Hour** noted that agriculture accounts for just over 45% of GDP and employs over 80% of Cambodians. Cambodia's strategy focuses on integrating new techniques into family agriculture, to give farmers control over their own production

resources and environment. The private sector must deal directly with farmers, and public capital must be invested in research and technology transfer. Research must go beyond rice crops and include maize, beans, soy, fruits and vegetables.

**Yang Saing Koma** discussed Cambodia's experience with the System of Rice Intensification, which was developed in Madagascar to help small farmers increase rice yields without depending on hybrid seeds, or chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The basic idea is that high yielding rice can develop in good soil and field conditions. Traditional rice growing is in flooded paddies, but in fact you can grow stronger rice in aerated soil. Rice is grown in small plots, which reduces the amount of land available to cultivation, but dramatically improves yield from the land that is used. This system significantly reduces the amount of seed you use. Farmers were hesitant to take on the risks of new technology and started by giving over small plots to the intensification process, but they were satisfied with the results and say they will use this method in the future. The process of technology transfer begins by working with farmers who are interested in testing the technology and willing to commit to applying the whole methodology, not applying select principles.

Questions touched on vegetable consumption; livestock and fisheries; what can be done to encourage youth to be proud of farming; where the pesticides used in the three countries are coming from; and what the emerging trends in agricultural extension are.



*HE Dr. Tao Seng Hour and Hans Luther during the Agriculture Panel*

FRD would like to thank Tran Thanh Sang and Zoe Murphy for the photographs of the Forum which appear in this *Interchange*

## Cambodia Country Plenary

*HE Tao Seng Hour, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; HE Mam Bun Heng, Ministry of Health; HE Pok Than, Ministry of Education; HE To Gary, Ministry of the Environment; HE Sok Siphanna, Ministry of Commerce; HE Keth Sam Ath, Ministry of Women and Veterans Affairs; HE Son Koun Thor, Rural Development Bank of Cambodia; HE Peou Samy, National Committee for Disaster Management; HE Pen Sareth, Council of Ministers; Dr. Chea Samnang, Ministry of Rural Development; Pum Chantini, Cambodian Red Cross; Pok Nanda, Women for Prosperity; Thun Saray, Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association; Prok Vanny, KHEMERA; Oung Chanthol, Cambodian Women Crisis Center; Dr. Ping Chutema, Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia; Dr. Nette Motus, International Organization for Migration; Pia Hammar, Forum Syd; Mike Bird, Oxfam GB; Paul Luchtenburg, World Relief; Larrie Warren, Veterans International*

**HE Tao Seng Hour** reported that some areas of the country continue to face low rainfall and drought conditions, which means that food insecurity persists in Cambodia. The reasons that agricultural growth remains low include inadequate technology transfer, inadequate rural infrastructure, lack of access to cultivable land and credit, and lack of markets or access to markets. Women are key to food security. Agricultural labor is divided along gender lines. Civil war and increased seasonal migration have reduced available male labor, and women head 20% of rural households. Land entitlement is key: you cannot address food security without addressing land security. The government's policy for sustainable and just economic development gives priority to agricultural and rural development, and to education. Meeting any of these goals calls for capacity development at all levels in those ministries that work together on rural development. The first step in this strategy is to diversify and intensify agriculture and irrigation. The second step is to focus money and resources on securing farmland for the rural poor.

Malnutrition is most common in rural areas. Half of Cambodian children are malnourished and mother and child malnutrition is

on the rise. Every Cambodian needs economic and nutritional security, and access to adequate healthcare, and the government has established an economic structure to increase GDP, promote irrigation systems, expand farmland and organize micro-credit. The National Poverty Targeting Program will implement the new social agenda, and the government has increased the budget for priority social service sectors.

**Dr. Mam Bun Heng** began by saying that 4 out of 10 Cambodians do not have reliable access to safe water, schools, healthcare, or sanitation. The maternal mortality rate in 1998 was 473 per 100,000 live births. The Ministry of Health's strategy to promote individual health and enable all Cambodians to participate in socioeconomic development began with a process of organizational and financial reform that started in 1996, focusing on decentralization of control. Cambodia's national healthcare infrastructure has been reorganized to establish regional hospitals that work with local health centers to provide basic primary care. User fees have improved the quality of healthcare. Financing of care is one of the biggest constraints to improvement. Cambodia still needs to address the shortage of health managers with real capacity for managing funds. The Ministry of Health is now preparing to develop a long-term health master plan. Today's goals are to increase access to quality, affordable health services for the entire population, reduce morbidity and mortality among mothers and children, stem the spread of deadly and debilitating communicable diseases, promote health seeking behavior and contribute to economic development and poverty alleviation.

**HE Pok Than** spoke of the needs for equitable access to education for all Cambodians. Only the wealthiest 20% of the country send their children to high school. To make education available to all, the country must build some 10,000 schools over the next five years, mainly in remote areas, and deploy teachers with incentives to teach in rural areas. There must also be an elimination or reduction of required parental contributions to schools as well as illegal fees charged independently by teachers. In addi-



*Members of the Cambodian Country Plenary*



*HE Pok Than, HE Sok Siphana and HE To Gary during the Cambodia Plenary*

tion, curriculum and textbook revision is needed. Planned decentralization will give schools more leeway in decision making, planning and spending. Finally, the problem of students, especially girls, who drop out early must be addressed.

**HE To Gary** reminded the audience that in Cambodia, people once called their country the golden village. It was a fertile and heavily forested land thirty years ago. Today, the Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, Water, and Land Management all work together to implement sustainable environmental strategies. More than 80% of the population depends on natural resources for their basic livelihood. In 1993, Cambodia developed a national action plan on the environment. 23 wildlife sanctuaries and other protected areas were established. Cambodia joined the Convention on Biodiversity in 1995 and the Climate Change Convention in 1996.

**HE Sok Siphanna** asserted that trade must be part of national development policy. On this front, Cambodia is participating in a pilot framework called the Integrated Trade Framework for Least Developed Countries. It will take careful planning for

Cambodia to avoid being marginalized by global trends. Cambodia's macro-economic situation is stable: GDP growth has been steady at 4% - 5% for several years, inflation and the exchange rate are reasonably stable, and foreign trade has grown exponentially in recent years and can be expected to reach a surplus within several years. Still, garments make up

more than 80% of trade exports, which is too narrow. Cambodia must create 150,000 jobs a year to meet the demand of new entrants to the job market. Since 1996, Cambodia has had Normal Trade Relations with the US. The goal is accession to the WTO. In the meantime, Cambodia must develop and improve the agriculture sector and continue to use trade to combat poverty. The next challenge is to regionalize the growth of trade. Most growth to date is isolated in Siem Reap, Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville. Special Economic Zones along the border will allow Thai companies to bring in their skills and market knowledge and use Cambodia labor. Not only will this bring skills and capacity that Cambodia still lacks, but it will also open up jobs in areas that have been left out of economic development so far.

**HE Son Koun Thor** wrapped up, noting that in 1991 Cambodians owed \$100,000 in outstanding loans. By 2000 that figure was \$13 million, and micro-credit reaches 25% of families in rural areas. However, without micro-finance institutions, moneylenders charge interest rates of 10% and 20% per month. With the presence of organized micro-finance, interest rates closer to 5% are now available.



*Forum attendees outside of the conference hall*



## Panel I: Best Practices in Building the Capacities of Partners

*Jenny Pearson, VBNK, Cambodia; Sao Chivoan, Ministry of Rural Development, Cambodia; Chan Sophal, Cambodian Development Research Institute (CDRI), Cambodia; Sivixay Xayxavongphet, State Planning Committee, Laos; John Connelley, Care International, Laos; Margarit Schlosser, NGO Resource Center, Vietnam; Dr. Dang Ngoc Quang, Rural Development Services Center, Vietnam*

**Margarit Schlosser** spoke first, discussing the role of INGOs in Vietnam. INGOs have made a considerable contribution to development in Vietnam. While their financial assistance may not represent a large percentage of total Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), the primary value of INGO efforts may now be their ability to innovate, to experiment with new approaches, to do essential research, to provide high-quality training, and to assist in providing policy makers with good ideas. In 2000, the Steering Committee of the VUFO-NGO Resource Center commissioned a study on the lessons learned from a decade of working experience and cooperation in Vietnam; "Lessons Learned from a Decade of Experience. A Strategic Analysis of INGO Methods and Activities in Vietnam 1990 - 1999." Ms. Schlosser noted that INGOs speak of partnership, yet their partners sometimes feel that they underestimate them, that INGOs look down on them. INGOs speak of capacity building, yet their staff, their collaborators, their partners, and eventually even the concerned populations feel that they do not really want to let go. One trainer noted that the high interest in capacity

"One trainer noted that the high interest in capacity building maaeffectiveness. Can INGOs - as NGOs, as donors, as governmental extension services - honestly claim to have achieved that much capacity in their organizations?"

building may signal nothing more than the INGOs' frustration with their own ineffectiveness. Can INGOs - as NGOs, as donors, as governmental extension services - honestly claim to have achieved that much capacity in their organizations?

**Dang Ngoc Quang** noted that a local survey of development organizations in Vietnam found that local organizations are engaged in diverse areas of development. Local organizations often say they feel they are weak in organizational and financial management. Best practices in Vietnam are learned by doing research and work with other organizations, and by looking at lessons and failures to develop curriculum for training courses that allow staff to train communities directly. Nationally, Vietnam is looking towards a project that would review the last decade of experience with

INGOs and mass organizations, in the hope of developing a capacity building curriculum that can be more formally incorporated. The aim is to develop a Vietnamese-designed and inspired management development program based on national experience.

**Sao Chivoan** spoke of the rebuilding of social capital and local institutions in Cambodia. Development in Cambodia is structured around Village Development Committees (VDC). A focus on developing the capacity of local institutions is a major component of the government's rural development strategy. VDCs are democratically elected and directly involve rural households in all stages of development projects. INGOs have increasingly



*(l-r) Jenny Pearson, Sao Chivon, John Connelley and Margarit Schlosser during the Capacity Building Panel*

been organizing other mutual aid groups in communities, and have been instrumental in building the capacity of village and commune level development committees and in facilitating a participatory rural development process.

**Chan Sophal** spoke of the massive amount of aid that has come into Cambodia since the peace agreement. The scale of aid in Cambodia is of such a magnitude that it distorts the country's economy. Donors and NGOs have taken over the funding of most social services, while the government focuses its own spending on defense and security. These drawbacks are well known, what we don't understand is how foreign aid impacts capacity development, the ability to perform functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably. The Cambodia Development Resource Institute undertook an in-depth study, "Technical Assistance and Capacity Development in an Aid Dependent Economy", which looked at individual capacity, institutional capacity and financial ability of counterparts to continue similar work once outside funds have been withdrawn. What they found was that the extent of the success of technical assistance projects depends upon the importance attached to capacity development in the project's purpose. Often, governments take shortcuts like asking TA experts to do tasks that local counterparts should be trained to do, which gets a job done faster but ignores the importance of capacity development. Often, agencies circumvent government authorities, which can make a project easier, but means that projects are not structurally well placed for capacity development. Less than half the projects studied had convincing plans for long-term continued funding. The biggest threat to sustainability of capacity was that government salaries are too low, and counterparts who have been through capacity development leave to find other jobs.

**Sivixay Xayxanavongphet** asserted that efficient cooperation is the key to a productive working relationship between partners in development. Meaningful capacity building has five characteristics: information and knowledge; planning; participation; duration; and monitoring and evaluation.

**John Connelley** spoke of CARE's work in Laos. Within CARE's work, capacity development partners are government staff at the district and provincial level, rather than institutions or organizations. Even when those agencies lack both technical capacity and planning or project development skills, working with district staff is a real opportunity to make your work sustainable. Effective capacity building means asking what you want district staff to be able to do at the end of your program that they weren't able to do at the outset. Project staff work under a district monitoring committee and a provincial advisory committee, and part of CARE's capacity building work emphasizes developing the skills of these administrators as well. Part of the shift from working with to working through begins with training these administrators so that over time NGO involvement can be dramatically reduced.

Questions touched on how Cambodia expects to go about establishing VDCs in 69% of all villages; is there a sector in which the government of Laos particularly welcomes the support of INGOs; will people carry through with a holistic process; how can you encourage governments to prioritize capacity development; what the RDSC does for follow-up for people who have completed training courses; and what happens when funds are set aside for capacity building but not project implementation.



*Dave Elder shares a toast with conference participants during the closing dinner*

## Panel J: Addressing the Emerging Youth Problem

*Keo Samnang, Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation, Cambodia; Sebastian Marot, FRIENDS, Cambodia; Phoxay Khamphoumy, Lao Youth Union; Phetlamphanh Yadanegi, Bahai Development Agency, Laos; Pham Thi Phuong Chi, Vietnam Youth Federation; Tran Thi Van, UNFPA, Vietnam*

**Keo Samnang** was the first speaker of the panel, noting that Cambodia's population is unusually young, as fully half of the population is under the age of 18. Estimates suggest that as many as 20,000 children live on the streets of Phnom Penh. Drug use is on the rise, and young people are increasingly involved in more serious crimes like armed robberies and vandalism and the country does not have a separate juvenile justice system – anyone over 13 can be detained with adult prisoners. The Ministry of Social Affairs works with NGOs on a number of projects that address the continuing problem of children being trafficked for labor or prostitution, both by reintegrating those children with their own communities and by working to prevent trafficking in the first place.

**Sebastian Marot** noted that street children are a broad group of youths, including children who live and work on the streets alone, children who work on the streets but have homes that they return to at night, and children who live with their families on the streets. In Phnom Penh, it is estimated there are 1,000 street living children, 10,000 street working children, and 500 children in street families. In truth, street children are not so much more likely to be drug addicted or promiscuous, but they are more visible than other children. Gangs are usually blamed on street children when a closer inspection shows that the kids organizing and managing gangs often have homes and go to school, but street children are their most visible recruits. Experience shows that reintegrated street children are very successful, and many of them work hard as advocates and role models for other vulnerable groups in society, and so promote development in Cambodia. Work with street children can be a strategy for development if that work promotes sustainable reintegration of street children instead of offering welfare and care. Working with street children is an on-going investment in society and in sustainable development, but the work will never be donor free.

**Phetlamphanh Yadanegi** discussed the Bahai principle that spiritual and moral education is an essential part of children's character and personality development. Their vision is to develop a

moral education framework in Laos. The primary values of trustworthiness and truthfulness form the basis of their curriculum. While parents bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children and youth, teachers, leaders and civil servants are charged with molding the nation, and promoting and defending humanitarian law, rights and values. Their actions set the example that children will follow. Trustworthy moral leadership and institutions must form the foundation of a just and equitable society where collective action and decision making is possible.

**Phoxay Khamphoumy** said that as the Lao economy opens its foreign economic relations, young people need the vocational skills and knowledge that will allow them to join in economic development as business leaders, managers and technicians. Young people today find they lack the skills they need to find permanent employment, or that permanent employment simply is not available. Other problems facing Lao youth include increased amphetamine use, lack of self-confidence or trust in society, and lack of access to education, health care or basic food and clothing.

**Pham Thi Phuong Chi** noted that some of the primary areas of concern for Vietnamese youth are education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (youth account for 60% of under-employed people). Vietnam lacks youth specific health policies to address the impact of HIV/AIDS and substance abuse in young people. Quality sexuality education is also scarce. The Program of Self-Assertion, Self-Establishment and Contribution to Building a Prosperous Country has launched two campaigns, "Economicize and Accumulate" and "Building New Countryside", which help young adults find capital for production and business endeavors, especially self-employment, income generation and participation in economic development.

**Tran Thi Van** said that while not as overwhelmingly young as Cambodia, Vietnam also has a large population of school-aged children. Today they place a real burden on the school system that must meet the demand for teachers. Over the coming decade, Vietnam must come up with just over 12 million new jobs. While statistics show that infant and maternal mortality are declining with the birth rate, and more Vietnamese are using contraception, the overall quality of reproductive health remains low.

Questions touched on approaches to moral education in the three countries.



Members of the Emerging Youth Panel

## Panel K: Roles of Community in Environment Protection

Peter Riggs, Rockefeller Brothers Foundation; HE To Gary, Ministry of Environment, Cambodia; Toeur Veasna, Mlup Baitang, Cambodia; Thongsoune Bounphaxaysonh, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Laos; Michael Hedemark, World Conservation Society, Laos; Vo Dinh Thanh, SIDA, Vietnam; Vu Thi Quyen, Education for Nature, Vietnam

**HE To Gary** said that the rural poor in Cambodia survive through a seasonal rotation of farming, fishing and foraging in forested lands. Restricting public access to any of these domains could end this diversified, range-dependent survival strategy with devastating consequences for rural people. Where traditional use of natural resources is threatened by competition for those resources through poaching and exploitative uses, local residents often abandon traditional use guidelines in an effort to benefit from the resources before they are taken by outsiders. The goal of community based natural resource management is to give local communities a central role in identifying resources, defining development priorities and implementing management practices. For example, although almost all of the Tonle Sap's fisheries have been sold as lots to commercial fishers, the government sub-decree on community fisheries opened up a significant portion of those lots to community management.

**Thongsoune Bounphaxaysonh** asserted that the primary environmental concerns of Laos include deforestation, soil erosion and sedimentation, loss of watershed function, loss of biodiversity, and industrial and infrastructure related pollution. He then discussed the particular case of upland farmers – the poorest segment of the population – saying that so long as upland dwellers

rely on shifting cultivation, poverty and environmental degradation cannot be solved. With more than 150,000 families practicing shifting cultivation today, the goal of the government is to stop shifting cultivation altogether by 2010. The Ministry of Environment recognizes that the people are the custodians of environmental resources. The first step of government policy is to decentralize environmental management, placing final implementation of policy in the hands of local communities.

**Vo Dinh Thanh** said that in the last 10 years, the Vietnamese government has paid particular attention to the importance of environmental protection, has developed laws on environmental protection, and sustainable development strategies. If the community is not involved, however, environmental issues cannot be controlled. At the local level, there is no history of attention to environmental preservation. Also, local communities do not have the knowledge or information that they need to use the

resources sustainably, and they lack the power to promote policies or implement national strategies. Environmental projects, especially small scale ones, do not outlast the NGO presence, because there is not enough skills transfer to the community to keep it going.

**Vu Thi Quyen** discussed Vietnam's first National Park, Cuc Phuong, founded in 1962. The Cuc Phuong environmental education program works to raise awareness among both locals and park visitors about nature, environmental conservation, and the need to be involved in protecting the park. This program is the longest running community based environmental education program in the country and is widely recognized as a model.

Continued on page 32

"Where traditional use of natural resources is threatened by competition for those resources through poaching and exploitative uses, local residents often abandon traditional use guidelines in an effort to benefit from the resources before they are taken by outsiders."



(l-r) Peter Riggs, Toeur Veasna, HE To Gary, Michael Hedemark, Vo Dinh Thanh, Thongsoune Bounphaxaysonh and Vu Thi Quyen during the Environment Panel

## Panel L: Strengthening Higher Education and Vocational Training to Address Social and Economic Development

*Everett Kleinjans, Royal Academy of Cambodia; HE Pok Than, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Cambodia; David Ford, Australian Volunteers International, Cambodia; Phonphet Boupcha, Ministry of Education, Laos; Hans Luther, National Organization for Study of Policy and Administration, Laos; Nguyen Tien Hung, National Institute for Educational Development, Vietnam; Jack Bailey, Institute of International Education, Vietnam*

**HE Pok Than** said that Cambodia recognizes that poverty is a significant factor in access to all levels of education. This point particularly applies to post-secondary education. Therefore, a top priority for Cambodia is to increase access to higher education and technical vocational education and training for the poorest as part of the Government's overall poverty reduction strategic plan. The Government is also conscious of the need to address significant urban/rural and gender disparities in current enrollment patterns. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) will formulate policies that enable both public and private institutions to respond to education/market needs. MEYS is confident that over the next 5 – 10 years post-secondary provision can be repositioned to improve quality and market relevance.

**David Ford** noted that the majority of Cambodia's teaching staff passed through the shattered and dysfunctional remains of the education system after the Khmer Rouge era. They can in no way be considered as merely a group of ordinary teachers. They now have an understandable reluctance to share or collaborate and their attitude to political leadership is not surprisingly a mixture of distrust and fear. They are geared towards individual survival rather than institutional success. There is increasing pressure of the system to expand. Even in its present weakened state, Cambodian higher education continues to serve a vital function. Political stability and economic growth are creating an expectation and momentum for change. But finally, these reforms and strengthening strategies will have little effect unless the government shows its commitment to education by paying teachers a livable wage based on competence and performance.

**Phonphet Boupcha** asserted one of the goals of the Lao government is to develop human resources equipped with suitable knowledge and ability. Educational development will focus on access to and quality improvement of human resource development to meet the needs of the country's socio-economic objectives. In particular, education represents a major form of intervention in poverty alleviation. Mr. Boupcha was somewhat critical of the post-secondary education system in Laos from 1975 to 1986, citing poor management, inadequate or irrelevant programs, dilapidated facilities, under-qualified teaching staff and low external efficiency. Currently, higher educational institutions in Laos only number ten, four of which are privately run. During the period 1991 – 2000, the overall enrollment in bachelor degree program increased by 166%.

**Hans Luther** said that strengthening higher education will require developing the links, methods and content of higher education. While the "hardware" (roads and buildings) has been supplied, the "software" (education and participation) has not. People on all educational levels have to learn to learn. The curricula should be less abstract and more connected to real life experiences. Reforms are often misunderstood as a goal in and of themselves. Finally, if primary education fails in its task, not much can be expected from higher education.

**Nguyen Tien Hung** noted that Vietnam sees the role of education as a determining factor for its success of transforming into an industrialized country by 2020. However, a critical gap exists between the quantity and quality of lecturers and technical teachers, especially at the university level. Investment in education on a per capita basis remains relatively low. In educational management, developing strategic directions and macro policies has been slow. To overcome these difficulties, the educational system in Vietnam must: consistently improve the curriculum, training and educational methodology; develop teaching and lecturing staff; improve the national educational system; develop the network of educational institutions; increase financial resources for education, and; improve educational management.



*(l-r) Everett Kleinjans, HE Pok Than, David Ford, Phonphet Boupcha, Hans Luther, Nguyen Tien Hung and Jack Bailey during the Higher Education Panel*

**Jack Bailey** said that IIE sees higher education as crucial to economic development. The 1990s saw the creation of the first large national universities in Vietnam. The hope is that at larger universities, scholars and students can begin to make linkages across fields and find synergy of information. A frequent concern in Vietnam is that graduating students should have skills that are actually needed by the economy and match the available jobs. International exchange partnerships are emerging in new forms to meet some of these challenges. In addition to such programs, Vietnamese students continue to pursue education abroad, and those numbers will grow, which presents yet another challenge, as the country should try to get the most out of the skills these students bring home.

Questions touched on how higher education impacts poverty alleviation; how you can assist self-funded students who want to study abroad; what incentives will sustain the intellectual capacity of developing countries; and how higher education can be made accessible to the poor, especially in rural areas.

**Toeur Veasna** noted that Mlup Baitang had just begun working on community based natural resource management in early 2000. They organize environmental awareness events and lead participatory rural appraisals. Environmental protection and natural resource management, through the participation and empowerment of communities, is an effective approach, but the will of the community must be taken into account, and teaching materials should be suitable to the community's education level. Projects need sufficient resources to implement work and must cooperate with other NGOs, similar projects, and government offices to protect the environment without compromising the priorities of local communities.

**Michael Hedemark** said that in Laos, 80% of protein comes from the forest. Natural resources are also insurance against natural disasters, and provide up to half of rural income, often in quantities double the value of the forest as logs. While communities are able to establish sustainable harvesting and consumption rules, they cannot enforce these rules when it comes to people from outside the village or people of higher status. Communities are able to make plans for local resources, and have had some notable success in this regard, but communities are not capable of making plans for non-local resources like migratory animals or of responding to threats to resources that come from outside the boundaries of their communities.

Questions touched on eco-tourism in Laos; the role minority peoples play in the management of national parks; if national parks are open for the use of natural resources; how much forest is cut down in Laos by highland people and whether concessions are provided; what the implications of administrative decentralization are on environmental policies and practices in the three countries; and if efforts are being made to raise environmental awareness among ministries.



*HE Pok Than, Vice Minister Phongsavath Boupha, Mr. Vu Xuan Hong and Mr. David Elder during the Closing Plenary*

## Closing Ceremeony

Conference Convener **David Elder** (of the American Friends Service Committee) noted how impressed he was by how much is going on in all three countries. He asserted that poverty alleviation can not be done by one or two simple formulas, all aspects of life are affected by poverty, and that is where this conference comes in. Furthermore, the sectors represented here interact with each other on the ground, and the conference provides them the chance to make the contacts they need to make their work have more impact.

Forum Coordinator **John McAuliff** (of FRD) began by saying that when this process began twelve years ago, there weren't normal relations between the US and the three countries of Indochina. While the US had an Embassy in Laos, it was at a very low level, and there was no Embassy in Cambodia or Vietnam. The goal when the Forum began meeting as a basically American organization was very focused on the question of how to bring about a full and normal relationship with Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Our fates were tied together by the terrible history of the war; by the population of Khmer, Lao and Vietnamese now living in the US; and by a deep psychological bond. Today, the US has three Ambassadors, a functioning trade agreement with Cambodia, and trade agreements with Laos and Vietnam waiting to be approved by the US Congress. Once that happens, relations will essentially be normalized.

When the ninth Forum conference was held in Phnom Penh, it changed dramatically, and became a conference of the region, with the predominant participation by nationals of, or international staff working in, the three countries. This year, we have had such extraordinary assistance and partnership by the Lao PDR (both at the national and provincial levels), that even if nothing

else happened (and much did) this alone made the conference worthwhile. We are now at a new stage. We don't know whether there will be another conference, and if so, what form it will take.

**Mr. Vu Xuan Hong** spoke of the history of the Forum on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, noting that during the years of the embargo, the conference was one of the few channels of communication, one of the few outlets for promoting normalization and US NGO involvement in the three countries. In this respect, he continued, the Forum's mandate has been accomplished.

**HE Pok Than** thanked the Lao PDR for extending a warm welcome to the conference participants, and the conference's organizing committee for providing a platform to share ideas, accomplishments and needs.

**Vice Minister Phongsavath Boupha** closed the conference, saying that throughout its evolution, the conferences of the Forum have brought direct and indirect benefits to all three countries, and allowed friendly countries and NGOs to continue to formulate effective assistance projects. He also affirmed that the NGOs operating in Laos know the country's condition and are in the best position to convey that knowledge to their own governments. He continued, saying that as the conference comes to a successful completion, the challenge ahead is how to translate the outcomes of these discussions, an exchange of views, experiences and mutual understanding into tangible results for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. He concluded by saying that cooperation, based on better understanding of one another's realities, observance of regulations, and sincere work together for the benefit of the poor without any hidden agenda will ensure a true and efficient partnership for development.

The Fund for Reconciliation and Development would like to thank the following for their assistance in coordinating the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Forum on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam

Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR  
Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations - People's Aid Coordinating Committee  
Council of Ministers, Royal Government of Cambodia  
Vientiane International Consultants  
Shelley Preece, Cambodia Forum Assistant  
Kate Follington, Vietnam Forum Assistant

FRD would also like to than the following organizations whose financial contributions or direct sponsorship of host-country counterparts made the Forum possible.

American Friends Service Committee  
Asian Development Bank  
Asia Foundation  
Australian Red Cross  
Care International  
Community Aid Abroad  
Center for Educational Exchange with Vietnam  
CIDSE  
Concern Worldwide  
French Pays du Mekong  
Health Frontiers  
Institute of International Education  
KPMG

Lao-Luxembourg Project  
Mennonite Central Committee  
Norwegian Church Aid  
Open Society Institute  
Oxfam America  
Oxfam Belgium  
Rockefeller Brothers' Fund  
Save the Children Australia  
Swedish Int'l Dev. Agency - Cambodia  
Swedish Int'l Dev. Agency - Lao PDR  
Swedish Int'l Dev. Agency - Vietnam  
US Aid for International Development  
US Embassy - Vientiane, Lao PDR  
World University Service of Canada



# CUBA



## *Hurricane and Food continued from front cover*

Dagoberto Rodríguez, head of Cuba's Interest Section in the United States, specified the products that his government sought include lumber, corn, wheat, chicken, rice, soybeans, pork lard, and flour, according to *The New York Times*. *The Associated Press* reported that Cuba also may be in the market for baby food, powdered milk, cooking oil, beans, antibiotics, and vaccines. Materials to manufacture medicines and animal feed were sought as well, said *Reuters*.

Last year, Congress approved the sale of food and agricultural products to Cuba under heavy pressure from farm producers who were seeking new markets. But there have been no sales because lawmakers hostile to President Fidel Castro barred United States government or private financing, and Mr. Castro objected to the discriminatory terms. After the hurricane Washington offered to provide Cuba with aid, with the proviso that it not be distributed by the government. Havana responded politely, saying it would not require the cooperation "kindly offered" but would instead like to buy food, medicine and other materials to restock its reserves.

Cuban officials have presented a list of goods for examination by United States officials and also have contacted 15 agricultural companies and 15 companies that produce either pharmaceuticals or medical supplies. The State Department said it would expedite the sale, calling it an humanitarian gesture. The Bureau of Western Hemispheric Affairs will work with other government offices to speed up the authorization and shipment process. The Senate Agriculture Committee agreed to allow private United States financing of food sales to Cuba, which would put a significant dent in the embargo.

The favorable political possibilities gained by Cuba through this commerce are great. The Cuban request has stirred a flurry of activity among American farm groups, noted *The New York Times*. Exporters of wheat, dairy, rice and other products are circulating a draft letter to President Bush urging him to "take whatever action is necessary" to expedite licenses and work with Congress to ease trade restrictions.

A collective letter to President Bush addressing these historic food sales was written by the Latin American Working Group and the Washington Office on Latin America, two Washington-based public policy groups working closely on Cuban issues. There have been more than twenty signers, including: Reverend Bob Edgar, Secretary General, National Council of Churches; Canice Connors, President, Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men; John McCullough, Executive Director, Church World Service; and Reverend Elenora Giddings-Ivory, Director,

Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and John McAuliff, Executive Director of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development. The letter applauds the steps taken by the administration thus far to work with the Cuban government on the sale of humanitarian goods to the island and urges rapid action in the approval of these sales: "We believe that humanitarian sales would benefit the Cuban people in a time of crisis, and help American farmers in a difficult economic moment. We hope these sales begin an ongoing and productive process of contact between Cuba and the United States." The complete text of the statement and the list of signatories can be found at [www.lawg.org](http://www.lawg.org) and [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org).

Many in Congress will attempt to seize the moment and ride the new dynamic to expand the space for legal commerce. Cuba currently buys between \$700 million and \$1 billion in foodstuffs from United States competitors each year, primarily Vietnam, France, and Argentina. Import numbers could increase once United States travel restrictions are ended, and American tourists demand familiar food products.

Cuban officials wanted to transport the goods in Cuban vessels. "They said it would be easiest and least expensive" to do it that way, an American official informed *The Miami Herald*. "We told them that in the interest of expediting the purchases and the relief, it would be easier to facilitate the shipment via either planes or ships which were not Cuban vessels." *The Journal of Commerce* reported that the first ship transporting 24,000 tons of Archer Daniels Midland corn was expected to depart by the end the second week of December, sailing from Ama, Louisiana, just north of New Orleans, to Havana. As well, Crowley Liner Services contracted with Cuba to carry frozen chicken and dry foodstuffs.

"The contracts being signed with Cuba should not be seen as a start of an ongoing commercial relationship with Cuba. They are taking place under a humanitarian umbrella after Hurricane Michelle as the Cubans have made clear they don't expect to continue with these purchase," John Kavulich said to *Reuters*. Mr. Kavulich is President of the New York-based United States-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, whose organization provides nonpartisan commercial information, advising companies interested in Cuba.

Some analysts, however, interpret the move as opening an important crack in the embargo, which is opposed by a significant farm and business lobby in the United States. "The potential significance is vast," said one aide to a Republican member of the House of Representatives when asked by *Reuters* about the possible food sale to Cuba. While the dollar value of the initial shipment may not be "enormous," he said, it nonetheless has great symbolic value.

Bob Cummings, Vice President for International Policy at the USA Rice Federation, said Cuba is seeking quick shipment of 20,000 tons of American rice. Cummings said Cuba currently imports about 400,000 tons of rice, mostly from Asia, and its needs could grow to 600,000 tons in future years. "The United States, given its location, is poised to capture a good share of Cuba's global purchases," Cummings said to *Reuters*. "The hurricane seems to have broken the logjam," Phil Peters, Vice President of the conservative Washington-based Lexington Institute and a former State Department official who has traveled extensively in Cuba, observed to *Reuters*. The situation has not only brought a symbolic first sale to Cuba since the embargo, but it has also quietly played into both sides' hands.

Sally Grooms Cowal, President of the anti-embargo Cuba Policy Foundation, stated to *The Associated Press* that the Cuban initiative "is a breaking of the logjam that enables us to move forward." Pamela Falk, a City University of New York law professor and consultant to several grain and producer groups, agreed with Ambassador Cowal: "This is a toe in the door". She predicted that sales could reach \$1 billion a year if political conditions improve, wrote *The Associated Press*.

"Once this door is open, it's going to be hard to close," said Alfredo Duran, President of the Cuban Committee for Democracy, which supports normalization of Cuba-United States relations. "Of course the posture right now is that it is a humanitarian thing due to the hurricane but there is no question that it is a considerable concession and a significant step toward normalcy," Duran said. "This type of stuff has a tendency to acquire it's own dynamics. There are many, many sectors in the United States pursuing this," Duran told *Reuters*. Joe Garcia, the Executive Director of the anti-Castro Cuban-American National Foundation, supports the sale, as long as Cuba complies with the agreement to pay cash, *Reuters* also reports.

The United States concerns contacted by Cuba about sales include Archer Daniels Midland, Riceland Foods and Cargill Inc. As well, representatives from Gold Kist, Tyson Foods, Perdue Farms, and ConAgra Foods Inc., among others, have been in Cuba for talks with state food importer Alimport. They were likely to win some remaining Cuban contracts for other food products including poultry. Contracts have been signed to purchase wheat, corn, rice, soy, and vegetable oil.

Agriculture Secretary Anne Veneman said that the proposed purchases were worth about \$30 million. The Commerce Department must still give final approval to the sales. The State Department said to *Reuters* it would support them because of their humanitarian nature.

Nevertheless some Western diplomats viewed the sales as a watershed event. "I'm telling my government this could be the beginning of the end of the embargo and they had better start considering other products than food to sell to Cuba," a European diplomat said to *Reuters*. President Castro called humanitarian

aid offered by the United States in the wake of the destruction of Hurricane Michelle "a good gesture", broadcast *Radio Habana Cuba*. In an emotional speech transcribed by *Reuters*, he declared: "We are continuing negotiations and we appreciate the gesture."

*Based on reports from The Associated Press, Reuters Limited, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Miami Herald, Radio Habana Cuba, South Florida Sun-Sentinel, and The Journal of Commerce.*

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## Cuban Green Revolution

In their work, *Going Against the Grain: Agricultural Crisis and Transformation in Cuba*, Minor Sinclair and Martha Thompson analyze food vulnerability and food security in contemporary Cuba. They show that by going against the grain, Cuba has transformed its agricultural sector and turned a severe food crisis into a sustained recovery, despite the United States embargo of the island. New practices, such as ecological agriculture and ecological gardens, have made farming more sustainable. New policies, such as agricultural markets and decentralization, have made farming more profitable. Although problems remain, small farmers have led the way in producing more food for Cuban consumers. This Oxfam report looks at the lessons learned from Cuban agriculture and what policies and practices may be appropriate for other developing countries.

Sinclair states, "[F]arm interests have led the fight in Washington, D.C., to ease U.S. sanctions against Cuba. The day is nearing for renewed trade between Cuba and the United States. More developing countries should pay attention to Cuban agriculture," adds Sinclair. "Cuba's countryside has changed dramatically over the past five years [...] Farmers markets are filled with produce and bustling with vendors. Few other countries have been able to restructure their agricultural economy and still leave small farmers in a better position."

Cuban farmers are also doing more with less, the report finds. Imports of pesticides and herbicides actually dropped from 1995 to 1998, yet food production rose over the same period. Animal traction has replaced tractors in many farms and organic fertilizers and pest controls are used instead of expensive chemical-based inputs.

The report's authors served as Oxfam Canada's Field Co-Representatives for the Caribbean, based in Havana, from 1995 to 1999, and Minor Sinclair has served as Oxfam America's Cuba Program Officer, based in Boston, from 1999 to the present

The report was funded with the support of the Ford Foundation. The full text and a Spanish-language executive summary, in addition to other papers, are available at Oxfam America, [www.oxfamamerica.org/cuba](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/cuba), [info@oxfamamerica.org](mailto:info@oxfamamerica.org), 617-728-2438.

## Washington Cuba Legislative Update

by Mavis Anderson and Jordan Press,  
Latin American Working Group

### Travel

On October 25 lawmakers abandoned efforts to repeal the ban on Americans traveling to Cuba in 2001. Congressional negotiators omitted language to lift the 40-year-old travel restrictions from the Treasury/Postal Appropriations bill. Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) said that, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, “the Senate agreed not to attach anything controversial to its bill. The timing wasn’t good.” Rep. Flake had led the effort in July to pass the travel ban repeal in the House. In addition, President Bush had threatened to veto the entire Treasury/Postal spending bill if the Cuba travel language were retained. Leaders of the Republican-controlled House also opposed lifting the travel ban, despite July’s 240 to 186 House vote in favor of denying funding for the enforcement of the US restrictions on travel to Cuba. In fact, members of Congress have voted for two consecutive years to abolish the travel restrictions. Last year, language lifting the travel restrictions was also stricken from a House-approved bill.

Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) made a strong statement on the Senate floor expressing his “great heartburn” about the actions of the Treasury Department and the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) in levying fines against people who travel to Cuba. He said he had intended to offer an amendment to end the travel ban on the Senate version of the Treasury/Postal bill. But in order not to slow the passage of the bill after September 11, he did not offer his amendment. Both Senator Dorgan and Rep. Flake are likely to take the issue up again in 2002 to either de-fund or repeal United States restrictions on travel to Cuba. Support is expected to remain strong in both the Senate and the House.

### Cuban Student Visa Restriction

Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) have presented a bill, S. 1627, to bar students from seven countries, including Cuba, that “sponsor terrorism” from studying in the United States. Cuba is specifically listed as one of the countries from which no students could be admitted. Co-sponsors of the bill are: Sen. Christopher Bond (R-MO), Sen. Michael DeWine (R-OH), Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), Sen. Herb Kohl (D-WI), Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL), Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC). Senators Feinstein and Kyl do not appear to be concerned specifically with Cubans; yet the bill would affect Cuban students who want to study in the United States.

For further Washington news, please contact the Latin American Working Group, [www.lawg.org](http://www.lawg.org), and the Washington Office on Latin America, [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org).

## Cuba and Terrorism

On September 17th an ad hoc coalition met on Capitol Hill to discuss the State Department’s classification of Cuba as a “terrorist state,” along with Iraq, Libya, Sudan, North Korea and Iran. The new group developed an analytical policy statement, “Cuba Policy Should Be Reviewed in the New International Context,” which was endorsed by the representatives of sixteen organizations.

The document “strongly condemn[s] the terrorist attacks on the United States ... and express[es] support for international efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice and, beyond that, to defeat terrorism.”, but insisted, “accuracy is required in defining the ‘terrorist nations’ the President has said the US will punish....As combating international terrorism now moves to the forefront of the US foreign policy agenda, it is critical to our ability to deal with it effectively that the US have clear and objective criteria for designating countries as terrorist states...as we move to develop such criteria,... it is time to raise the question of whether Cuba belongs on the list”. The US “can no longer afford to confuse and divert our struggle against real terrorist threats because of domestic political considerations.”

The statement cited a September 22 talk by President Castro that, “described terrorism as ‘a dangerous and ethically indefensible phenomenon, which must be eradicated’...[Cuba will] “cooperate with all countries in the total eradication of terrorism.” Castro’s offer was seen as “a possibility that should be explored. In this new world context dominated by the struggle against terrorism, Cuba clearly will not be an unquestioning ally, but it need not be an enemy.”

The full text and list of signers can be viewed at [www.ciponline.org](http://www.ciponline.org) For more information on Cuba and terrorism, also read the well documented report released by CIP, “Keeping things in perspective: Cuba and the question of international terrorism”

### Freedom to Travel

FRD believes that current Treasury Department regulations hindering American travel to Cuba are both unconstitutional and counter productive. FRD Cuba resources are being focused on a sustained effort to end all travel restrictions. During the first week of November, Cuba Program Officer Stephen Sokol participated in the annual national convention of the American Society of Travel Agents. He will assist the development of a grassroots network of travel agents favoring freedom of travel to Cuba and creation of an industry coalition comparable to that which has influenced US policy on food and medicine sales. FRD is preparing a substantial report on the impact of ending travel restrictions. For further information, visit [www.fprd.org/cuba](http://www.fprd.org/cuba) or e-mail [cuba@fprd.org](mailto:cuba@fprd.org) **Mr. Vu Xuan Hong** spoke



## From the Editor...

It has been the year that no one ever expected.

We were especially pleased that eighteen months of intense preparation produced the extraordinary success of the tenth Forum conference in Vientiane in June—thanks to the support of the Deputy Prime Minister and the extraordinary engagement and hard work of staff of the International Organizations Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of Vientiane International Consultants, and by the conference coordinator.

This issue of Interchange is largely devoted to summary accounts of the conference plenaries and panels. More detailed reports of each session and of sectoral group meetings can be found on our renamed web site [www.ffrd.org](http://www.ffrd.org). However, at least as important as the substantive presentations in the public sessions were the personal encounters among the great diversity of regional and international participants. For some, experiencing this kind of open registration international conference was itself a concentrated capacity building project.

And then came September 11th. We were personally fortunate that no one at FRD lost friends or colleagues to the horrendous attacks in New York and Washington. Colleagues at American Express, Chase and Citibank were so close to the tragedy that their offices had to relocate but all escaped unharmed.

The most direct impact on FRD was that the third annual dinner with Foreign Ministers from Indochina had to be postponed until next September.\* Psychologically, politically, and organizationally our lives, like yours, have been changed by in ways we still do not fully comprehend by September 11th, and by our government's international and domestic response. Suffice to say, we have been thrown off stride, and with this much delayed publication of Interchange we are endeavoring to get back to "normal".

"Normal" in 2002 will entail following up on the Forum conference with evaluation meetings in each host country. "Normal" will also include sending observers to Cambodia's communal elections; organizing networking and educational meetings in New York and Washington; raising funds for new rounds of training and exchange for university based educational advisers and NGO counterparts; and a campaign for assistance to the victims of Agent Orange.

Our new Washington representative will give special attention to the lack of action on the bilateral trade agreement with Laos and to anachronistic impediments to US bilateral assistance to Cambodia and Vietnam. He will also address the problems created in US relations with all three countries by legislators and the militant minority of former refugees who exploit human rights and religious freedom issues for political purposes.

While there is sentiment that the next Forum conference should be held in Vietnam, there needs to be substantial discussion of the need for and character of another such international gathering, or whether new mechanisms should be developed to foster deeper and wider cooperation within and with Indochina. Some favor returning to the US for a conference. My own inclination is that a US venue only makes sense if we tackle frankly the hard issues of the current American relationship with Indochina, for example:



*John McAulff speaks at the 10th Forum Conference*

- 1) US responsibility for enduring war caused damage (land mines, UXO, Agent Orange)
- 2) Conflicting concepts of democracy, human rights, religious freedom and missionaries
- 3) US government response to former refugees who support insurgencies and terrorism in their homelands
- 4) Means to assure good conditions and adequate income for workers producing for the US market
- 5) The relationship of environmental protection and economic development

Given the lead time required to organize a serious conference, we should decide the when, where and what in about six months if there is a consensus to have some kind of gathering in June of 2003.

And then, Afghanistan...

We were very moved by the immediate expressions of official and personal sympathy which came from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Cuba after September 11th. Each condemned the unconscionable assault on innocent civilians and pledged support against terrorism. While the Cubans noted the prolonged problems they have faced from US based terrorists, the Cambodians, Lao and Vietnamese did not raise their analogous but much lower key problems. Subsequently, representatives of all four countries have expressed concern about the path of military response chosen by the Bush Administration.

The US war in Afghanistan has received overwhelming support from Congress, the media and public opinion at home. Sentiment in most other countries, including among our allies in Europe, ranges from far more divided to largely opposed. Primary criticisms include the incongruity of the richest and most powerful nation using its highly sophisticated destructive technology against one of the world's poorest and most isolated countries, the "collateral damage" of civilian victims of bombs and anti-personnel weapons, the refusal to present full evidence on bin Laden's direct responsibility, the ambiguous US stance on its role in post-war reconstruction, and the essentially unilateral character of the US war against terrorism.

Many countries feel that despite a rhetoric of coalition, the Bush Administration has not moved very far from its earlier unilateralist tendencies, either in the actual conduct of the war or with the intended disposition of al Qaida and Taliban leaders. They are also dismayed by continued American opposition to the International Criminal Court, the Global Warming Treaty, and arms control measures. The US is seen as unwilling to recognize or address underlying causes of terrorism and anti-American sentiment, including delayed and unbalanced involvement in the Israel-Palestine crisis and total disregard of established international goals for development assistance from wealthy countries.

FRD's role as an organization is to address the consequences of conflict rather than ending those that are still underway. But as American citizens, we struggle to understand what is going on and where it will end. We welcome hearing from you about the impact of September 11 on your work and on your life. Regardless of views on these painful new issues, I hope and trust that our common concern for US relations with Indochina, and Cuba as well, will provide a strong basis for continued cooperation.

Regarding Cuba, FRD's attention will be focused on restoring to all Americans the freedom to travel to a fascinating country only 90 miles from home. Allowing more open access will contribute dramatically to dissolving the fearsome bureaucratic obstacles to NGO cooperation, humanitarian assistance, educational exchange and investment. We remain interested in organizing a visit for American NGOs with experience in Indochina that wish to initiate programs and find counterparts in Cuba.

—John McAuliff

\*Postponement of the dinner means that gourmet Highland Coffee donated by David Thai as a gift for participants will instead be available as a thank you to donors to FRD (see page 21).

## RESOURCES

## STUDY PROGRAMS

### **Advanced Study of Khmer Language Program**

application due: February 28, 2002

prerequisites: 2 yrs or equiv. formal Khmer training, be US citizen, national, or permanent resident, and be student or faculty at an institution of higher education working with modern foreign languages or area studies.

consists of: intensive six week advanced Khmer training at Royal University in Penom Penh

contact: Chhany Sak-Humphrey, Coordinator, Khmer Language Program, Hawaiian and Indo-Pacific Languages, 2540 Maile Way, Spalding Hall 255, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI, 96822. phone(808)956-3552, fax(808)956-5978.

### **Vietnamese Advanced Study Institute in Hanoi**

application due: January 28, 2002

prerequisites: two years of Vietnamese or equivalent, must be enrolled in a degree program (sophomore level or above), or employed as teachers or education administrators.

contact: Center for Southeast Asia Studies 1890 East-West Road, Moore 416, University of Hawaii, Manoa Honolulu, HI 96822. phone(808)956-2688, fax(808)956-2682, vasi@hawaii.edu.

## CONFERENCE

### **Gender and Development in Southeast Asia**

Women's Action and Resource Center's (WARI) 2nd int'l training workshop on gender and development, and the 3rd int'l conference on Gender and Southeast Asia (Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar): Developing Human and Natural Resources

workshop: February 18 – 28, Course fee US\$1500

conference: March 1-3, Registration Fee US\$160

Events coordinated by (WARI) in Bangkok, Thailand. visit [www.geocities.com/wari9](http://www.geocities.com/wari9), or email [concourse02@yahoo.com](mailto:concourse02@yahoo.com)

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