

# Interchange



Fostering Cooperation with Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Cuba

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## Agent Orange Conference

### Held in Hanoi

By Susan Hammond

In early March one of the most significant conferences addressing a major legacy of the American war in Vietnam took place in Hanoi and it went by virtually unnoticed by the US press. The US-Vietnam scientific conference on Human Health and Environmental Effects of Agent Orange/Dioxin was held in Hanoi from March 3-6. Though there are several wire stories that can be found on the internet (<http://www.vietnamglobe.com>) information about the results and the impact of the conference is hard to obtain.

The conference was jointly coordinated by the US National Institute of Environmental Health Studies and the Vietnam Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment. According to the statement released by the Joint Coordinating Committee two hundred and eighty scientists from Viet Nam and 120 scientists from the U.S., Australia, Canada, the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Laos, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, Sweden and Taiwan participated in the conference.

US Ambassador Raymond Burghardt addressed the opening session of the conference stating that “the one significant ghost remaining that we seek to confront is the issue of Agent Orange and dioxin,” and noted that the issue has been “filled with controversy and emotion.” Ambassador Burghardt said that the conference represents “one of the last tasks remaining to our countries” and that the conference represents a new start. “Today, we start with the free association of scientists, freely exchanging information, data and samples.”

The US position throughout the conference was that more research needed to be done. As William Farland of the US Environmental Protection Agency notes in a Reuters story “The truth lies somewhere between that dioxin causes everything and dioxin doesn’t cause anything.” He went on to say that “Where it is we don’t know. The more research we do around the world, the closer we’ll get to finding that ground”. Though he also cautioned that “As the levels get lower and lower, our ability to determine who was exposed and who was not exposed becomes more difficult.” Vietnam however, has many ‘hotspots’ where high-levels of dioxin have been found opening the door to future research possibilities.

*continued p.6*

## Growing Debate in Washington on Cuba Travel

by Stephen Sokol

On March 14 Secretary of the Treasury Paul O’Neill stated that he would like to divert efforts from the enforcement of restrictions on travel to Cuba to the new global crisis of combating terrorism. Provided the opportunity to criticize Fidel Castro while defending the Bush Administration’s policy of tracking down and fining Americans who visit Cuba, Secretary O’Neill instead appeared to support the views of travel ban critic Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that oversees the Treasury Department: “If I had the discretion for applying the resources, I would agree with you completely.” His position was directly at odds with the Bush Administration’s position.

Senator Bob Graham (D-FL), a longtime critic of President Castro, took issue with O’Neill’s stance and implied it equaled a shortened tenure for O’Neill: “I don’t think he’s expressing the policy of the Bush administration”. Senator Graham stated that O’Neill realize “what happens when people go before Congress and begin expressing opinions that are not part of the head coach’s game plan,” said Graham, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The Associated Press reported that the White House subsequently “issued a statement attributed to O’Neill saying the Secretary fully supports the administration’s travel ban.” The retraction the White House claimed he made was, “I am not seeking any change in the law or our enforcement of it... If any of my comments indicated otherwise that was not my intention.”

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## In Memory of James E Pechin 1947 - 2002

Jim Pechin was a Vietnam Veteran, a peace activist, an advocate for veterans issues, and a longtime friend of Vietnam. In the late 1960s Jim left his home in Lafayette, Indiana to become a helicopter door gunner in Vietnam. He served his tour of duty with honor and distinction, but returned home with the conviction that the US war in Vietnam was wrong. He spent the next several years working with fellow Vietnam Veteran's Against the War to bring the war to an end.

Jim completed a bachelor's degree in business in the early 1970s and moved to the San Francisco Bay area where he worked with the Flower of the Dragon, a veteran's drug treatment program, and was a co-founder of Swords into Plowshares, a veteran's employment and housing program.

From the mid-1980s to 90s, Jim lived in Washington, DC and worked as business manager for both Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and Vietnam Veterans of America. He was among the first Vietnam vets to return to Vietnam during the 1980s, and among the first to call for normalization of relations and reconciliation between the US and Vietnam. Jim was also a member of the founding board of directors of Aid to Southeast Asia, a humanitarian organization that has provided assistance to Vietnam since 1989.

Since the mid-1990s Jim resided in York, Pennsylvania where he operated a thrift store. He died early on February 26, 2002, the end of a long battle with hepatitis.

--Steve Sherlock, Aid to Southeast Asia

## *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

By Andrew Wells-Dang, FRD Washington Representative

As President Bush's State of the Union address made clear, the war on terrorism continues to dominate foreign policy discussions in Washington. This focus has affected US relations with Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, all three Indochina countries are viewed as supportive of the international coalition against terrorism. Admiral Dennis Blair, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command (CINCPAC), had what he called a "very productive" visit to Hanoi in early February. "It was quite clear from my meetings," Blair said afterwards, "that the Vietnamese leadership shares our commitment to eliminate international terrorism and the threat it poses to our citizens." US officials have expressed similar confidence in the governments of Cambodia and Laos.

More worrisome has been the strengthening of arrogant and unilateralist tendencies in some areas of US discourse post-September 11. Opponents of US ties with countries that are still considered "communist" have seized on President Bush's "axis of evil" remark as ammunition for their efforts to turn back the clock to the days of war and instability in Southeast Asia. In this context, the Fund for Reconciliation and Development seeks both to accentuate and promote positive developments in US relations with Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, as well as to counter malicious and poorly-informed attacks on constructive relations.

## Relations with Laos

*One major focus of the Fund's work in Washington continues to be improved US-Lao relations. While Cambodia and Vietnam now possess both normal trading relations and strong advocates for increased engagement within the US Government, Laos has neither. Passage of the US-Lao Bilateral Trade Agreement is a crucially needed step towards correcting this historical imbalance, as well as helping the struggling Lao economy and removing barriers for Laotian-Americans to contribute to development in Laos. The Fund is cooperating with a coalition of US NGOs with programs in Laos, moderate Laotian-Americans, business and veterans' organizations to raise the profile of these issues in Washington. During the first half of the year, we are hosting with the Mennonite Central Committee a public forum on US-Lao cooperation on Capitol Hill, a showing of the documentary film "Bombies" that played nationally on PBS in January and February, and a national gathering of Laotian-Americans who support reconciliation with Laos.*

US Ambassador to Laos Douglas Hartwick visited Washington in February, marking his first return to the US since taking his post in Vientiane in September 2001. At an Asia Society lecture, Hartwick expressed his support for improved US-Lao ties and his belief that greater cooperation is possible in a number of areas, including counter-narcotics, recovery of MIA remains, UXO removal, and trade status. "The US needs to do a lot more" on building a relationship of trust, he explained, in spite of the Lao

government's perceived shortcomings. The bilateral trade agreement is "desperately needed...When Congressmen say they won't have trade until we find [missing Hmong insurgency fighters] Ly and Vang, I think that's wrong-headed. It's an anomaly from the past that can't continue."

*Ambassador Hartwick also plans to reach out to the Lao- and Hmong-American communities, which have "too long been dominated by one single voice." With 500,000 Lao and Hmong in the US compared with a population of 5 million people in Laos, he emphasized that Americans of Laotian descent have a particular role to play in building relations and opening the Lao economy and society.*

## Religious and Human Rights

*US relations with both Laos and Vietnam continue to be hampered by the intersection of two particularly sensitive issues: religious freedom and the treatment of ethnic minorities. Discussions of both issues in Washington are typically carried out in an extremely restricted fashion with little historical context: the US is assumed to be an impartial defender of religious and ethnic rights, while Laos and Vietnam are cast as violators of these rights, to a more or less extreme degree depending on the observer. In certain cases, human rights language serves as a screen for anti-government agendas that may or may not include support for insurgent or separatist movements.*

The most extreme denunciations, printed in the conservative *Washington Times* as well as in *Christianity Today*, accuse Vietnam of "state terrorism" in a transparent attempt to link the government to the ongoing war on terrorism and the so-called "axis of evil." A February hearing in the House conducted by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) also spread these false accusations. Regarding Laos, the "T-word" is a mainstay of right-wing Laotian-American groups who oppose US ties with that country.

While Laos and Vietnam have continued to harass and, in some cases, imprison those held responsible for ethnic and religious unrest, there is no evidence of any action that approaches "terrorism," by any definition. In fact, the label might be more accurately applied to US-based groups that illegally fund acts of violence in Southeast Asia, such as the Cambodian Freedom Fighters, Lao Veterans of America, or "Government of Free Vietnam."

*From a more impartial point of view, gradual progress is occurring on both religious and ethnic issues. Vietnam and Laos both gave permission for a delegation from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom to visit in February. A Vietnamese delegation of religious leaders is expected to travel to the US. Meanwhile, the space available for recognized religious groups to operate in both countries is slowly expanding. Religious practice of all kinds—from Buddhism to Christianity to traditional fortune-telling—is undergoing an unprecedented re-*

*vival in Vietnam. A surprising number of young people and Communist Party members are involved. The government's restrictions on the activities of religious bodies in society are gradually being lifted as well, as previously unrecognized groups attain legal status.*

In the strife-torn Vietnamese Central Highlands, asylum-seekers who fled to Cambodia last year are beginning to return under a controversial agreement between Cambodia, Vietnam and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The State Department and Ambassador Kent Wiedemann in Phnom Penh have become involved in the repatriation effort, raising the political stakes in the conflict.

### **Cambodian Elections**

Finally, the first months of 2002 have also been eventful times in domestic Cambodian politics, with US involvement and repercussions. Cambodian commune elections, held on February 3, resulted in a strong victory for Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP). US-funded organizations, including the International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and The Asia Foundation, contributed to voter education and political party development in substantial ways. Election observers agreed that election day itself went smoothly, but expressed concern about a climate of violence and intimidation that preceded the elections. IRI's President George Folsom told a press conference in Phnom Penh that despite these problems, this election was an improvement over national elections in 1993 and 1998.

FRD Executive Director John McAuliff was in Cambodia during the elections along with Deputy Director Susan Hammond. McAuliff returned to a fishing village where he observed the 1998 election and noted that there was much less tension this time. He gave the election high marks as another important step forward in the ability of former civil war enemies to work together.

On February 11, the Fund organized an off-the-record briefing on the Cambodian elections in Washington, co-sponsored by Johns Hopkins University-SAIS and the Asia Society. Presenters included representatives from the Royal Embassy of Cambodia, US State Department, IRI, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and FRD.

Meanwhile, the February 7 decision by the United Nations Legal Affairs Department to end its involvement in preparations for a Khmer Rouge tribunal was met with shock and disappointment in Washington. Ambassador Wiedemann said he saw "no real basis" for the decision: "they could have discussed [more] with the Cambodians." Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen also called for the UN to reconsider.

UN Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Hans Corell, who has spearheaded the UN's involvement, responded that "the organization cannot be bound by a national law," in this case Cambodia's tribunal law passed in August 2001. Tribunal specialist Craig Etcheson notes that the gaps between the UN and Cambodia have been growing for some time and that US support for the trial had grown more muted since the Bush Administration gained power. Over the next several months, the Fund plans to host additional events in New York and Washington to discuss remaining possibilities for bringing the Khmer Rouge to justice.

*A monthly update on US policy towards Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam is sent free by e-mail to not-for-profit organizations with programs in Indochina and to offices and individuals requesting it who contribute at least \$25 annually to FRD. For further information, visit [www.ffrd.org](http://www.ffrd.org) or send e-mail to [info@ffrd.org](mailto:info@ffrd.org).*

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*John McAuliff and Susan Hammond observed the Cambodian communal elections in Stuong Hau, a fishing village in Kampong Som province.*



*inking finger after voting*



*preparing to count the votes*



*outside one of the polling stations*

# United Nations Nixes KR Tribunal Negotiations; What Now?

by Craig Etcheson

On February 8, the United Nations surprised many observers by terminating a four-and-a-half year long negotiating process with the Cambodian government over the establishment of a tribunal to judge Khmer Rouge leaders accused of war crimes, genocide and other crimes against humanity. UN Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Hans Corell said “the United Nations has concluded that as currently envisaged, the Cambodian court would not guarantee independence, impartiality and objectivity, which are required by the United Nations for it to cooperate with such a court.” He added that the UN “is especially concerned at the lack of urgency shown” by the Cambodian government, and that “this lack of urgency could continue and affect the work of the Extraordinary Chambers, which would be vulnerable to delay.”

Some months ago, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen expressed frustration with the tribunal negotiations, saying “I want only one answer from the United Nations. I only want to hear yes or no.” When the UN delivered an unequivocal “no,” the Prime Minister responded by saying that he would wait “two or three more months” for the UN to reverse its decision, perhaps inadvertently underscoring UN concerns about a “lack of urgency” on the Cambodian side. The need for urgency was highlighted six days after the UN announcement by the death of Khmer Rouge General Ke Pauk, one of the prime suspects in the genocide. Time favors impunity.

Cambodian officials have stressed that they hope the UN will return to the negotiations, though Hun Sen has said that if the UN does not relent, Cambodia will organize the genocide tribunal independently. Sok An, Chair of the Task Force on the Tribunal, defended Cambodia’s stance in the negotiations, arguing that the Cambodian side had addressed all of the concerns raised by the UN and was willing to continue discussing any additional issues the UN might have. Several government, including the US, Japan, Australia, Britain and France have urged the UN to resume negotiations, but UN officials appear firm in their position that the Cambodian tribunal law promulgated by King Sihanouk on August 10 does not meet “international standards.”

The UN decision initially opened a gulf between domestic Cambodian and international human rights groups. Youk Chhang, Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, decried the UN withdrawal, saying “I think a real trial with genuine justice will not be possible if the United Nations stays with its decision not to participate.” The normally taciturn Kao Kim Hourn, Director of the Center of International Cooperation and Peace, angrily asserted that “This is a victory for Pol Pot and the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime,” adding “This is the end of the possibility of bringing to justice the people who were responsible for crimes against humanity in Cambodia... now the United Nations is just washing its hands of Cambodia... So from now on, Ieng Sary and the other top [KR] leaders can live out their lives safely and happily.”

By contrast, both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch praised the UN decision. Amnesty repeated its long-standing criticism of the proposed tribunal, saying that “Participating in trial procedures which are not fair would serve only to undermine UN human rights standards, and sell the Cambodian people short.” Similarly, Mike Jendrzeczyk of Human Rights Watch said that “Given the failure of the Cambodian government to address the concerns about the tribunal raised more than a year ago, we feel the U.N. acted appropriately.” However, HRW also “urged the Cambodian government to take the necessary measures to bring the proposed tribunal up to international standards so that the U.N. could participate.” On February 21, the Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee, a coalition of leading domestic human rights organizations, issued a statement voicing support for the UN decision, but imploring the UN not leave Cambodia “without recourse to law and justice.”

When then-CoPrime Ministers Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen originally requested UN assistance to set up a Khmer Rouge tribunal in 1997, they explicitly acknowledged that the Cambodian judiciary was not up to the task of conducting a trial of this magnitude and importance. Since then, little has changed in terms of the professionalism and degree of independence of the Cambodian judiciary; only the politics has changed. Reacting to the UN decision, Prince Ranariddh, now President of the National Assembly, conceded that without UN participation, a first-rate tribunal would be impossible: “I think what we would do would not meet international standards.” He should know; only four years ago, Ranariddh himself was subjected to a highly irregular Cambodian political trial involving accusations of collusion with the Khmer Rouge.

Widespread skepticism about the capability of the Cambodian judiciary to carry out a fair genocide trial has thus spawned a torrent of speculation about how best to achieve some measure of accountability for the crimes of the Khmer rouge, thought by experts to be the key to achieving reconciliation among Cambodia’s still-divided people. Many argue that a repeat of the 1979 People’s Revolutionary Tribunal would not satisfy the Cambodian people. But there are other possible options. Attorney Jaya Ramji has argued that

Only a truth commission can address the long-term needs for education and social reconciliation. It is widely accepted that the Cambodian judiciary has neither the impartiality nor independence needed for a fair trial of the Khmer Rouge... A truth commission is necessary to paint a larger picture of Cambodian history, which is vital to heal Cambodian society. Over twenty years after the tragedy, it is time that Cambodians are granted recognition and redress of the heinous crimes that they suffered at the hands of the Khmer Rouge.

*continued p.8*

## *Agent Orange Conference from cover*

The Vietnamese view throughout the conference was that although research is important, more needs to be done to address immediate humanitarian needs. In his closing statements Vietnam's Vice Minister of Health Le Ngoc Trong stated "the actual situations of Agent Orange/Dioxin on human health and environment of Vietnam has been real, and its heavy affects need to be solved thoroughly and wholly by our efforts in order to rehabilitate human health and to return a clean ecosystem."

Prior to the conference in an interview with Reuters Professor Nguyen Trong Nhan, chairman of Vietnam's Red Cross, said victims needed US help now and could not wait years for more research to be conducted into the effects of the Vietnam War defoliant. He noted it would be better to spend money on aiding victims than on expensive tests to determine dioxin contamination. One blood test to determine the level of dioxin is approximately \$1000.00. [*The Vietnam Red Cross has established an "Agent Orange Victim's Fund" which distributes aid to victims and their families. Tax deductible contributions to this fund can be sent care of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development*]

The Joint Conference Committee seemed to be satisfied with the results stating in their press release that "the major goals of the conference (information exchange, scientific contact and open discussion of key scientific differences) have been achieved and even exceeded the expectations of the Organizing Committee. We look forward to a fruitful continuing dialogue with results expected by both sides." They also noted that "the next steps for the joint government cooperation will be to build on the foundation provided by this conference to set priorities for future joint research projects in Viet Nam and for funding of relevant research in each country."

At the conclusion of the conference the US and Vietnam signed a Memorandum of Understanding to continue joint-research on the health outcomes from exposure to dioxin and on the environmental and ecological effects of dioxin and Agent Orange. Both sides agreed to the development of long-term collaborations between scientists of both countries. However, the MOU stipulates that no 'additional proposals or research will be conducted under this MOU until the following is completed:'

- The establishment of a Vietnam-US Joint Advisory Committee
- Development of regulations governing the organization and implementation of the collaborative research, (as well as a long list of formal agreements on other related research issues)
- Funding resources and funding mechanisms are established...These include sufficient funding for the core research effort, for human resource development and for laboratory facilities and equipment.

The full MOU can be found at <http://usembassy.state.gov/posts/vn1/www020310ii.html>.

NGO participants at the meetings were somewhat disappointed in the outcome. One noted that "the conference was of no benefit whatsoever to Viet Nam - no new findings were presented, no forums were available for facilitating real discussions about the issues, moral/humanitarian concerns were marginalized." He went on to say that the conference was a public relations success for the US government as it can now say that it is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to facilitate information sharing on Agent Orange, and hundreds of thousands more on research in Vietnam. He was also disturbed that in private conversations some members of the US delegation known for their adamant opposition to assistance to the Vietnamese insist there's no proof that Agent Orange is harmful and that US veterans only get benefits for political reasons, not due to any scientific findings. Another NGO participant in agreement noted that there were some positive results "around the edges" through informal discussions between visitors and the Vietnamese.

Most NGOs working in Vietnam agree with the Vietnamese that there needs to be more focus now on addressing the humanitarian needs of Agent Orange victims. Paul Sutton, head of Vietnam Veteran's of America Agent Orange/Dioxin committee - which was instrumental in the fact that the conference took place at all - told Reuters that the US government and makers of the defoliant shared a responsibility to compensate the victims. "We, in our organization certainly think that there should be a fair and equitable compensation and/or ability to solve the health problems in this population in this country," adding that compensation for victims is a "very thorny issue that has to be worked out."

A statement released by the US Embassy made it clear that the US would not consider compensation. "US-Vietnam relations were normalized in 1995 after Vietnam dropped claims of war reparations/compensations". It went on to say that "At the time of normalization, neither compensation nor reparations were granted or contemplated for the future."

*Compiled from Reuters, AP and Vietnam News Agency reports.*

### International Conference on the Long-Term Environmental Consequences of the Vietnam War

Stockholm, Sweden 26-28 July 2002

The primary focus of the conference will be on the long-term environmental consequences of the Vietnam War in terms of their interrelated effects on ecosystems, public health and economic activity in the region. .

For more information see the website: <http://www.nnn.se/vietnam/environ.htm>

# Agent Orange in Vietnam—An Overview

by *Chuck Searcy*

Between 1962 and 1970, the United States sprayed nearly 20 million gallons of herbicides, including 11.2 million gallons of the defoliant Agent Orange, on some 1.5 million hectares (approximately 10-14%) of South Vietnam, particularly in the Mekong Delta, Central Highlands and DMZ regions. The herbicides contained TCDD, the most toxic form of dioxin. One third of the sprayed areas were covered more than once, and 52,000 hectares were sprayed more than four times. The spraying was finally stopped in 1971 after scientists disclosed that Agent Orange caused birth defects in laboratory animals.

There is little argument that the spraying of Agent Orange had a devastating effect on Vietnam's environment. In place of vast green forests are swaths of barren countryside that support almost no vegetation, save a weed locally known as 'American grass' that is useless for feeding livestock. When it comes to effects on human health, however, controversy still reigns.

## The Science and Politics of Agent Orange

A large body of scientific evidence strongly indicates that the TCDD found in the herbicide negatively affects human health. Studies conducted by the World Health Organization, National Academy of Sciences, and the Environmental Protection Agency have proven that TCDD dioxin is a human carcinogen. Dioxin exposure is associated with a variety of cancers such as Hodgkin's disease, soft tissue sarcoma, lung cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, digestive tract cancers, oral cavity cancer, renal (kidney) cancer, leukemia and breast cancer in women. Exposure to TCDD is also associated with a range of other ailments, including altered liver function, weakening of the immune system, impairment of the developing nervous system and endocrine system, reproductive problems including spinal bifida and miscarriage, and increased prevalence of heart disease and diabetes.

Fetuses, infants and children are particularly sensitive to TCDD dioxin exposure, which can negatively affect neurodevelopment and behavior, and is associated with an increased prevalence of developmental delays, lower IQ, low birth weight, behavior disorders, decreased height in girls at adolescence, hearing loss, and a reduced immune response.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) presently pays compensation to US veterans of the Vietnam war for nine cancers, a nerve disorder and Type-II diabetes, based on veterans' presumed exposure to Agent Orange. The VA also pays compensation for children of Vietnam War veterans born with the debilitating birth defect spina bifida. The VA's decision to pay compensation is based on findings issued by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM), which has also recently reported a possible association between parents' exposure to Agent Orange and children's chances of developing leukemia.

Despite the large body of scientific evidence and the fact that numerous US government entities have acknowledged links between TCDD exposure and a variety of ailments, other US government officials continue to question whether there is any solid proof that Agent Orange adversely affects human health in any significant way. While it cannot be ascertained whether this position is political or based on an honest scientific disagreement, a State Department official, speaking on background, has admitted that if the US Government thoroughly researches the effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam, it would likely be exposing itself to legal liability.

Some Vietnamese government officials are also reluctant to publicly address the problem, perhaps concerned that widespread publicity concerning the issue could severely damage fish and beef exports. The controversy surrounding Agent Orange is compounded by conflicting estimates put forth by Vietnamese authorities regarding the number of Agent Orange victims in Vietnam, which range from 70,000 to 1,000,000. In a comprehensive and reputedly objective two-year nation-wide survey that was concluded last year, Vietnamese health specialists could actually identify just 30,000 victims of Agent Orange nation-wide. It is against this backdrop that the United States and Vietnamese governments agreed last year to conduct joint research on Agent Orange.

## International Studies on the Effects of Agent Orange

While the joint US-Vietnam Agent Orange study has yet to commence, other international-standard studies have already been conducted in Vietnam. Between 1994 and 1998, Hatfield Consultants Ltd., a Canadian environmental consulting company comprised of environmental biologists and chemists, conducted an in-depth study on the environmental and physical effects of Agent Orange exposure/contamination in and around an old US airbase located in the A Loui Valley (Thua Thien-Hue Province).

The Hatfield study is widely considered to be one of the most thorough studies ever conducted on Agent Orange to date. Among the study's significant findings are that many residents of A Loui born after the war have high levels of dioxin in their blood, indicating that dioxin contaminants from Agent Orange are still present in the environment, and are being taken up by humans through the food chain. This could be happening through the consumption of animal flesh, especially from fish, which are cultivated in ponds. Another possibility is through direct contact with contaminated soil.

According to the Hatfield report, if the soil contamination levels found in A So commune were discovered in a western jurisdiction, this would result in the area being declared a "contaminated site". Dioxin levels found in fish would trigger a consumption advisory process, and possibly prohibitions against consumption.

Given these high contamination levels, it is no surprise that the blood of A Loui Valley residents has elevated levels of dioxin

## *Agent Orange from previous page*

compared to persons from most other areas of the world. Dioxin levels in breast milk of young nursing mothers is also elevated when compared to world levels. There is also a much higher prevalence of physical birth defects in the valley compared to similar communities that were never exposed to Agent Orange.

The fact that there are numerous old airstrips and fire bases littered across southern Vietnam, bases where herbicides were once stored, dumped, and heavily sprayed, make it logical to conclude, as the Hatfield report states, that “the existence of other ‘hot spots’ is likely.”

Other studies have already proven this fact out. At the old Bien Hoa air base outside of Ho Chi Minh City, where 7,500 gallons of Agent Orange were spilled during the war, blood samples from 19 of 20 residents tested in 1999 revealed dioxin levels up to 135 times higher than from Vietnamese persons not exposed to Agent Orange. It is thought that these heightened dioxin levels are first and foremost due to the consumption of contaminated fish. Even residents who did not live in Bien Hoa during the war have elevated levels of dioxin in their blood, further indicating that dioxin is likely still being taken up through the food chain.

Other international studies have also found high levels of dioxin contamination persisting in the blood, tissue, and breast milk of Vietnamese living in sprayed areas. Researchers examining levels of TCDD in fatty tissues have found a mean of 14.7 parts per trillion (ppt) among southern Vietnamese, as compared to 0.6 ppt among people living in unsprayed areas of the north. In the village of Cam Nghia, which was heavily sprayed with Agent Orange on two separate occasions during the war, one of every ten children suffers from a serious birth defect. Dr. Arnold Schecter, Professor of Environmental Sciences at the University of Texas-Southwestern and author of the Bien Hoa study, has found dioxin levels in the breast milk of Vietnamese mothers up to 450 times the average of levels found in the milk and blood of Americans.

## The Need for Action

According to Dr. Schecter, the situation in Bien Hoa (and by implication, other areas of Vietnam), “would be considered a public health emergency in the US and immediate action taken.”

The Hatfield Group scientists concur. When the group revealed its findings in A Loui, researcher Mark Hatfield noted that, “[a]ny place in the West or Japan that had such high dioxin readings would immediately be evacuated and a huge chemical cleanup launched.” Researcher David Levy recommended that families at the site be immediately evacuated, and local officials did eventually move one dozen families away from the site.

Nevertheless, children and their families in A Luoi and other hotspots continue to be exposed to Agent Orange, which, according to the vast weight of scientific evidence, is likely imperiling their health. This problem is not likely to go away. Once dioxins reach the environment, they are highly persistent and accumulate in the tissues of animals. Human exposure is maintained through the ingestion of contaminated foods, and breast milk can also be a significant source of dioxin for infants. Since dioxin exposure can be significantly reduced through inexpensive changes to diets, the Hatfield Group recommends that people living in or near potential ‘hot spots’ be educated about the importance of avoiding the consumption of animal products, particularly fat and organ meat.

Without effective mitigation, more children living in ‘hot spot’ areas will continue to fall victim to the ravages of Agent Orange. While millions will be invested in conducting further studies of this problem, children and others being exposed to and negatively affected by dioxin will not receive any benefits from this expensive undertaking.

*Chuck Searcy is a Vietnam veteran living in Hanoi. He can be contacted at [chucksearcy@yahoo.com](mailto:chucksearcy@yahoo.com).*

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## *KR Tribunals from p.5*

Fund for Reconciliation and Development Director John McAuliff agrees, commenting that “I renew my belief that some version of a truth and reconciliation commission may be the best way to go, separating the issue of criminal penalties which have obvious problems in terms of unraveling the deals that shut down the KR and the status of Cambodian jurisprudence from an essential effort to publicly and officially document what took place and who was responsible.”

While the government insists that it is determined to proceed with a domestic tribunal for the Khmer Rouge, it seems foreordained that such a proceeding will be accorded little legitimacy, either by the Cambodian people or in the international community. Thus, even with a trial, more work will be needed to help Cambodia

recover from the grievous wounds of the genocide. The international community should not abandon its efforts toward this end, even if it can no longer in good conscience participate in the Khmer Rouge tribunal as currently envisioned. A truth commission is one option, though by the same token, if the Cambodian government refuses to permit a central international role in finding genocide justice, it may not welcome a similarly robust international role in searching for the truth about the Cambodian genocide. A satisfactory solution will require patience and determination from all of Cambodia’s friends.

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# The Secret Spraying of Herbicides in Laos & Cambodia

by Andrew Wells-Dang, Roger Rumpf and Jacqui Chagnon

During the same time of the Agent Orange defoliation in Viet Nam, the US also was also secretly spraying toxic herbicides in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia. Until recently the US has kept data about these defoliation actions closed and unavailable.

During the US Secret War in Laos (1960-1975) and the Secret Bombing of Cambodia (1970-72), the CIA and secret US military units sprayed millions of gallons of Agent Orange, Agent White, and Agent Blue on North Vietnamese supply lines (the "Ho Chi Minh Trail"). Although linked to the Vietnam War, the Lao and Cambodia wars also had their own characteristics. Covert spraying also occurred in other areas far from the Ho Chi Minh Trail to weaken the strength of the leftist revolutionary Pathet Lao forces and deny them food sources. Hand -spraying also occurred around top secret encampments of the CIA-US military forces.

The secret nature of US intervention in Laos and Cambodia meant that spraying was officially denied during and after the war. The sprayed areas were under the control of local leftist revolutionary forces.

According to a document revealed by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine in 1997, "Military documents report the use of herbicides over areas of Laos, particularly near the Vietnam border and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The purpose of the operation in Laos was to expose foot trails, roads and other lines of communication that led into Vietnam. Herbicide operations began in December 1965 (sic); within a 6-month period, more than 200,000 gallons of herbicide had been sprayed over approximately 1500 km of roads and trails in Laos."

Air Force historian William Buckingham, author of the 1982 report "Operation Ranch Hand", had access to Laos and Cambodia data but was not allowed to disclose it. Maps of spraying missions released for Vietnam research show many flights extending to the borders of Laos and Cambodia where the lines abruptly stop. Records on the herbicide sprayings in these countries were classified top secret. Military personnel who flew on the Lao and Cambodia spraying (and bombing) missions are still restricted from speaking about those incidents.

In the 1980's the American Friends Service Committee's field office in the Lao PDR made several requests for defoliation records, but was told by the US Embassy that the records were

"unavailable." In 1999, the Department of Defense turned over the first set of decoded, declassified herbicide flight records to the Lao Government's Unexploded Ordnance Program (UXO Lao), which mapped out the locations of the herbicide spraying.

The UXO-held data set has many gaps, including air spraying during the heaviest warfare years (1968 -71), pre-1966 air spraying and hand spraying around base perimeters. There is no public repository of this data in the US as of February 2002. Most importantly, no records on defoliation have yet come from the CIA, which played a major role in the Lao and Cambodia wars.

The first on-the-ground soil and blood tests in Laos were conducted in July 2001 by dioxin specialist Dr. Arnold Schecter and Roger Rumpf. After an initial visit to one site in Laos (Sepone District, Savannakhet Province), Dr. Schecter stresses the need for sufficient funds to complete a thorough sampling study in both Laos and Cambodia. Since Agent Orange contaminated with dioxin was sprayed in at least seven provinces in Laos, an extensive study is necessary to determine dioxin levels in people, food and the environment and the health and development consequences on people living in these areas.

Along the southeastern part of the Lao panhandle and northeastern Cambodia live indigenous ethnic groups who remain among the poorest, least educated, and most sickly peoples of the region. As these ethnic groups live in under-served regions, have marginal advocacy capabilities, and lack scientific knowledge of dioxin contamination, problems with health and environmental conditions can remain unknown for decades. The US Government and the corporations who profited from Agent Orange have a responsibility to assist affected communities in Southeast Asia, just as they have spent millions to clean up contamination inside the US. Both the spraying itself and the subsequent denial of information to exposed peoples constitute human rights violations that need to be corrected.

It is time for full accountability on the secret spraying of herbicides in Laos and Cambodia. Two years ago, Congress appropriated \$850,000 for collaborative Agent Orange research with Vietnam. Last year, this amount was renewed and extended to include all countries in Southeast Asia. Thirty years after herbicide spraying ceased, there is finally an opportunity to cooperate with Laos and Cambodia to discover the truth about the environmental effects of the Secret War.

One such research effort, Project LAOS (Lao Agent Orange Survey) has received official approval from the Lao Government and will be working with Lao environmental and medical specialists. As the first Agent Orange program in Laos, the project arranged for four Lao to attend the March 2002 international symposium on Agent Orange in Hanoi. For more information, please contact Roger Rumpf (rojacmir@earthlink.net).

## Corporate Award to SELCO

The US State Department in January presented its 2001 Award for Corporate Excellence for small and medium enterprises to the Solar Electric Light Company for "outstanding corporate citizenship, innovation and exemplary international business practices in Vietnam." SELCO has installed over 15,000 solar home lighting systems in India, Sri Lanka and Vietnam since 1997.

# Opinion: Sovereignty and Democracy, People Who Like Lecturing Others

by *Dominique Van der Borgh*

On Wednesday the 26<sup>th</sup> of October in Vientiane, the Capital of Laos, five Members of the Radical Trans-national Party (RTP) (three Italians, one Belgian, and one Russian) were arrested by the local police. The five militants were distributing pamphlets about "Freedom, Democracy and Reconciliation in Laos". Their action was reported to be aimed at commemorating the anniversary of a demonstration organised by students and teaching staff from the University of Laos in 1999. They were sentenced to two and a half years in prison and a \$200 fine. After the trial and because they had already spent two weeks in jail, they were expelled from the country. The presence of a Belgian Member of European Parliament, Olivier Dupuis, within the group gave this action more publicity than was expected, especially outside of Laos. It explains also why the European Parliament voted on a resolution on these arrests and the political situation in Laos in November 2001.

The first surprising thing about this event, was the total absence of Lao themselves, the lack of any significant organisation or movement behind this group of foreign activists. The students to whom they refer do not represent a large part of the population. Laos is not Burma, and therefore in Laos we do not have an opposition movement to the regime, which finds solid support from within the country itself.

Maybe, these activists forgot to find out what was really happening in Laos? Maybe they should understand that democracy is intimately linked to the safeguarding of the sovereignty of a country? Such attacks on one of the world's last communist countries seems at times to be a delayed (cold) war. Multi-Party democratic systems provide no guarantee that human rights will be respected, as is shown by the situations in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand or Colombia.

Living and working here in Laos, one thing you learn is that the vast majority of the Lao people do not feel the need to question the political system which has brought them twenty-five years of peace. We should not forget that Laos was the victim of an undeclared, and "secret", war for more than ten years. This allowed democratic countries such as the United States to bomb this country without any consideration for international conventions or legitimacy. Still today, more than 200 people die every year from unexploded ordnance.

This respect for a political system does not stop the Lao people from criticising certain measures taken by their government. Neither do they desist from worrying about problems of corruption and the lack of any palpable economic upsurge following the Asian crisis. These different subjects are echoed in village conversations, mass organisations and sometimes even in the press, which is nevertheless controlled. We often sit in on meetings where villagers and the district and provincial authorities talk together about their development plans. They evaluate and criticise the results of certain measures, such as agricultural techniques proposed by the Minister or the campaign of prevention against

malaria run by the health service. Even if the situation is far from being perfect, it can be said that freedom, democracy, and reconciliation exist in daily life, in ways and forms that are not always those which at first we recognise.

In 1986, following many years of isolation, Laos set about a long process of opening itself up to the world. This was not without difficulties. This integration into the international community is being recognised more and more and has led to numerous changes in economic life, political openness and the adaptation of Lao institutions to the needs of a globalized world. Even though Laos remains one of the least-developed countries in the world, the government has set the ambitious target of climbing out of this "sinister group" by the year 2020. This aim requires reform in all areas, including the political system. The international community, under the auspices of the United Nations pledged its support to the government and population of Laos in this massive undertaking during the Round Table of Donors, who met in December 2000 in Vientiane. In October 2001, the UNDP program in Laos published a brochure detailing the participation of Laos in the different international treaties of the United Nations. It underlined the real effort being made by the county to sign and realise a growing number of treaties and conventions.

It is these efforts being made by the government and population of Laos which we, westerners, should support so that they can define their own future, rather than distributing leaflets in a country that we barely know. Moreover, taking into account the not so inspiring realities of multi-party systems in many non-western countries of the world, we should contribute positively to the reflection on how to better integrate respect of human rights, democracy and development in whatever political system that a nation wants to adopt.

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*Guests at the FRD office opening party.  
See story p. 36.*

# Home Grown Terrorism?

## Immigrant Groups Support Insurgencies in Indochina

Following the end of the American War in Indochina in 1975, many South Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians who had worked with the US emigrated here or fled as refugees. Others remained behind, and a few continued a guerrilla struggle from the mountains. In the US, the majority of immigrants no longer took a political interest in their countries of origin. Growing numbers of former refugees have made visits to their country of origin for family and business reasons. Whether they approve or disapprove of the new political, social and economic order, they have come to terms with its existence.

However, public political discourse in the US is still dominated by exile groups flying their former flag and giving speeches about returning one day as victors. Among them is a radical core of true believers still seeking to reverse the results of the Indochina War. Reminiscent of the darkest days of the Cold War, the publications and websites of these groups are filled with passionate denunciations of the current governments in Phnom Penh, Vientiane and Hanoi. Since they also employ the language of human rights, democracy, and freedom, their statements may resonate with many Americans, but the actions of the most extreme groups prove otherwise. A selection of the most colorful and dangerous:

**Cambodian Freedom Fighters** ([www.cffighters.org](http://www.cffighters.org)): This Long Beach, CA-based group organized an armed attack on Phnom Penh in November, 2000 in which unwitting conscripts were given weapons and brought into the capital by train. The CFF immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, after which many of its leaders were captured along the Thai-Cambodian border. Close to sixty members were convicted and given prison sentences in Cambodia last year. An additional 14 were sentenced to terms of five years to life on February 28, 2002.

CFF's president, Chhun Yasith, who was convicted in absentia, continues to prepare tax returns in Long Beach and maintains, "We're not terrorists; we have a website!" The US Ambassador to Cambodia, Kent Wiedemann, has confirmed that the FBI is investigating Chhun for activities that might violate the Neutrality Act, which prohibits U.S. citizens from attempting to overthrow another country's government.

All political parties in Cambodia have disavowed links with the CFF. Cambodian requests to extradite Chhun have gone unheeded by the US, though the FBI presumably keeps a close watch on his activities. The CFF appears to be unsophisticated in terms of public relations and has no presence in Washington.

**Lao Veterans of America** ([www.laoveterans.com](http://www.laoveterans.com)): The Lao Veterans, headquartered in Fresno with nationwide chapters, are the latest in a series of front groups organized by former Hmong general and CIA client Vang Pao. Sources close to the LVA suggest that it has a dual objective: securing citizenship and veterans' benefits for Hmong and other Lao-American veterans, and raising funds for their own benefit and for the Hmong insurgency in Laos. An associated organization, the **Lao Human Rights**

**Council** in Eau Claire, WI ([www.laohumrights.org](http://www.laohumrights.org)) uses human rights issues (often wildly exaggerated) to attempt to build anti-Lao Government sentiment in the US.

Through their clandestine contacts inside Laos, the Lao Veterans may be implicated in some of the bombings that hit Laos in 2000. Two members, Houa Ly and Michael Vang (nephew of the general) disappeared around the Thai-Lao border in April 1999 carrying an estimated \$84,000 in cash for the insurgency. The Lao Veterans and affiliated groups have used the Ly-Vang case to argue for a more antagonistic US policy towards Laos.

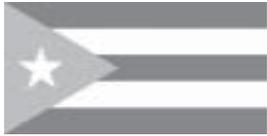
The so-called "Hmong lobby" is well-organized and effective at lobbying. Philip Smith, who identifies himself with the fictitious **Center for Public Policy Analysis** and the misnamed **Congressional Forum on Laos**, served as a paid Washington lobbyist for the Lao Veterans from 1996-2001, but now is reportedly operating on his own.

**The Montagnard Foundation** ([www.montagnard-foundation.org](http://www.montagnard-foundation.org)): This association of ethnic minority peoples aims to establish an independent state of "Dega" in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. It is identified as the remnant or successor of FULRO, a CIA-funded group that continued guerrilla activities in Cambodia and Vietnam through at least the 1980's. The Foundation is based in Spartanburg, SC, though the majority of former FULRO members and other highlanders live in North Carolina. The foundation's activities are supported by a group of US Special Forces veterans, **Save the Montagnard People, Inc.** ([www.montagnards.org](http://www.montagnards.org)).

The Montagnard Foundation claims to be nonviolent, and there is no public evidence of their current involvement in armed activities. However, the organization was involved in inciting the February 2001 unrest in the Central Highlands, which the group's website refers to as "our peaceful demonstration." The foundation has also reportedly encouraged disaffected highlanders to flee to Cambodia as refugees, in hopes of bringing them to resettle in the US.

**Government of Free Vietnam** (Chinh Phu Cach Mang Viet Nam Tu Do; [www.vntd.org/eindex.htm](http://www.vntd.org/eindex.htm)). This overseas Vietnamese group, led by Nguyen Huu Chanh, is responsible for bomb attacks on Vietnamese embassies and attempts to disrupt festivals and public events inside Vietnam. One well-publicized stunt involved a pilot dropping leaflets over Saigon during President Clinton's visit in November 2000; the pilot was later captured.

In connection with a bomb planted at the Vietnamese Embassy in Bangkok in June 2001, the FBI arrested Free Vietnam member Vo Van Duc in California (October 2001). This is believed to be the first-ever such arrest made in the US. The Free Vietnam website describes the formation of the group in detail and claimed that in 1990 it had the "active support of the AFL-CIO", as well as front organizations and businesses operating in Vietnam and neighboring countries.



## Americans Call for End to Travel Restrictions

**W**e the undersigned urge the United States Congress to enact legislation to remove all controls on travel to Cuba. Under our democratic system, Americans have a constitutional right to travel where they wish. Not only is it their right, but it is also an article of faith that their travel helps to carry abroad American values and spread the message of our democracy. In the case of Cuba, however, the U.S. Government puts all that aside and opts instead for the kind of travel controls usually imposed by authoritarian governments. These controls ignore international standards of freedom of movement (exactly what we accuse the Cuban government of doing). They violate Article 12 of the United Nation’s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And even under U.S. law, the legal bases for the controls strain credulity.

These controls are also entirely counterproductive in terms of legitimate U.S. foreign policy objectives toward Cuba. We wish to encourage Cuba to move toward a more open society, yes, but preventing American citizens from traveling there in no way advances that goal. On the contrary, as Elizardo Sanchez, Cuba’s leading human rights activist, has often put it: “The more American citizens in the streets of Cuban cities, the better for the cause of a more open society. So why does the U.S. maintain travel controls?”

The logic behind Sanchez’s statement is unassailable. Travel controls are not only inconsistent with basic American values, they serve no legitimate purpose. Polls indicate that the overwhelming majority of American citizens understand that and wish to see these controls removed. Congress, in response to the will of the American people, should take action immediately to end them

Tessie Aral  
Vice President  
ABC Charters Inc.  
Miami, FL

Hilda Diaz  
President  
Marazul Charters, Inc.

Sandra Levinson  
Executive Director  
Center for Cuban Studies  
New York, NY

Xiomara Almaguer  
Executive Director  
XAEL Charter, Inc.

Alfredo Duran  
President  
Cuban Committee for Democracy  
Miami, FL

Dr. Juan Reardon  
USA/Cuba Infomed

The American Society of Travel Agents  
Alexandria, VA

Albert A. Fox, Jr.  
President  
Alliance for Responsible Cuba Policy

Wayne S. Smith  
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Francisco Aruca  
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Elena Freyre  
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Geoff Thale  
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Washington Office on Latin  
America Washington, DC

Peter Bourne  
Vice Chancellor  
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John McAulliff  
Fund for Reconciliation and Development  
New York, NY

Lissa Weinmann  
World Policy Institute, Cuba Education  
Project  
New York, NY

Nancy Chang  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
New York, NY

George McGovern  
Former U.S. Senator from South Dakota

Silvia Wilhelm  
Puentes Cubanos, Inc.  
Miami, FL

Tom Cooper  
President  
Gulfstream International Airlines  
Dania, FL

Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo  
Cambio Cubano  
Miami, FL

Plus an additional 32 signatures. This joint letter was coordinated by the Center for International Policy to coincide with and to support the February 11 Senate hearing on OFAC conducted by Senator Byron Dorgan. It illustrates that the ending of all travel restrictions enjoys growing support of a large segment of American public policy groups and corporations. For a complete list of signers, please go to [www.ffrd.org/cuba](http://www.ffrd.org/cuba) or [www.ciponline.org/cuba](http://www.ciponline.org/cuba).

### *Cuba Debate in Washington continued from cover*

Secretary O'Neill had asked for a review of laws "that tell us what we must do" and suggested changing them to "provide sensible discretion". These revisions would allow the Department to "get much more value for the American people". Secretary O'Neill continued: "I'm very much inclined to want to be where you are and it would be very helpful if we could work together...so that we do not put ourselves in violation of the law because we exercise what seems like common-sense discretion."

The Senator replied that much like police officers, the Treasury already retains discretion: "If jaywalking is occurring at the same time a bank robbery is occurring, law enforcement officers deal with the bank robbery. That discretion exists all over." Senator Dorgan hoped the Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) "would understand that there is a greater need to deal with the terrorist threat these days than the threat of a retired teacher bicycling through Cuba".

Dorgan is one of many increasingly powerful voices in Congress who want to end food, medicine, and travel restrictions, arguing it would increase farm and pharmaceutical exports while also giving visiting Americans the chance to promote democratic values among ordinary Cubans.

He held a landmark Senate hearing February 11, pointing critically to a more rigorous boost in enforcement of the travel ban, with the number of fines levied increasing from 188 in 2000, the Clinton Administration's final year, to 766 in 2001, the Bush Administration's first year. OFAC restrictions actually bar American citizens from spending money in Cuba, which is why they are enforced by the Treasury (for hearing text, please go to [www.ffrd.org/cuba](http://www.ffrd.org/cuba)).

In marked contrast to Secretary O'Neill's appearance, Cuban-born Otto Reich, the recess-appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, recently claimed that any policy reform would be "throwing a lifeline to a failed, corrupt, dictatorial, murderous regime." He has spoken strongly against American travel to and commerce with his homeland.

In direct opposition to the White House, a bipartisan Congressional group that favors easing the embargo on Cuba was launched on March 22. The Cuba Working Group includes 17 Republicans and 17 Democrats, and is headed by Arizona Republican Jeff Flake and Massachusetts Democrat William Delahunt. The new Congressional group wants to eliminate the ban on travel to Cuba, lift financing restrictions on sales of food to the island and generally foster closer bilateral ties. The group plans to issue a report in late April, at the same time as the White House announces the results of its policy review.

"This is a significant gathering here", Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) said at the Working Groups news conference announcing the formation of the group. "When you look at the people who are at the podium here- Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives- we represent the mainstream."

The new group is taking shape as years of business and NGO advocacy against the embargo are having an effect. In the past few months, the Cuban government has taken advantage of a 2000 law allowing direct sales of U.S.-grown food. Since November, Cuba has purchased or arranged to purchase \$73 million of food from at least 14 American companies, according to the United States-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. The commodities are from 23 states, which could influence members of Congress from agricultural areas. Forty-seven percent of House and Senate members are from those states. But Cuba is not allowed to obtain US financing, forcing it to pay cash. Legislation allowing private financing is in an agricultural bill that passed the Senate, but it is facing stiff resistance from Bush-backed Republicans in the House.

Despite restrictions, United States citizens have been traveling to Cuba in large numbers, with legal and illegal visitors estimated at 176,000 last year. The Treasury Department's efforts to crack down do not appear to have stemmed the tide of visitors. "The policy as it's currently being enforced is untenable", said Representative Jeff Flake (R-AZ) and a leader of the new group. Representative Flake said his group will try a third time to win House approval of language that would prohibit the use of funds to enforce restrictions on travel to Cuba. A similar amendment to the fiscal 2002 Treasury-Postal spending law (HR 2590 - PL 107-67) offered by Flake was adopted last year on a 240-186 vote but was dropped in conference with the Senate.

The working group also plans to issue recommendations about the controversial Radio and Television Martí, the questionable inclusion of Cuba on the State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism, the four-decade-old embargo, and cooperation on drug interdiction and illegal immigration.

While the working group is pushing hard for opening doors, the White House is moving swiftly to tighten any loopholes or spaces in the embargo. In its policy review, the Bush Administration is expected to offer ways to better enforce the travel ban and tighten economic and political restrictions on Cuba.

Based on reports by *Associated Press*, *Congressional Quarterly*, *The South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, and the United States Department of State.

### **The Wrong Way to Help Cuban NGOs**

Under Congressional mandate, the United States Agency for International Development funds a variety of US NGOs to "Promote a Peaceful Transition to Democracy in Cuba". Not surprisingly, the Cuban government regards this as arrogant intervention in its domestic affairs and refuses to allow any organization to work in Cuba which accepts these USAID funds. USAID's most recent report of this program, including a list of grantees, can be found at [www.usaid.gov/regions/lac/cu/upd-cub.htm](http://www.usaid.gov/regions/lac/cu/upd-cub.htm).

# Norwegian Popular Aid: Steps to Success in Cuba

by Cindy Huang

Norwegian Popular Aid (NPA) is an international non-governmental organization (INGO) that has achieved a high degree of success in Cuba. NPA's experience carries many important lessons for international non-governmental organizations operating or hoping to operate in Cuba. It demonstrates that transparency and genuine dedication to help the Cuban people can result in productive partnerships and successful projects.

Since 1994, NPA has worked in Cuba as a grant-making and partner organization that focuses on grassroots innovation and participatory methods. Its philosophy is to demonstrate new methods that can possibly be adopted by the government on a larger scale. NPA cooperates with many organizations, including Habitat-Cuba and the Centro Martin Luther King (Martin Luther King Center), to jointly fund community projects. In addition, NPA finances a yearly event called "My Relevant Experience," a conference for sharing best practices and analyzing community work organized by the Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital (Group for Integral Development of the Capital). Afterwards, NPA publishes and disseminates the conference reports. Approximately 75% of NPA funding comes from NORAD (the aid agency of the Norwegian government), with the remaining 25% from other funds raised by NPA from foundations and individuals.

Although many international NGOs fund projects and provide technical and other assistance, few have permanent representation in Cuba. In part, this stems from the difficulty of building strong enough ties and confidence with the Cuban government, which oversees all non-governmental activity. NPA has an official Regional representation based in Nicaragua. From 1996 NPA in Cuba has relied on Mercedes Arce, the only employee, to slowly build relationships and trust that now serve as the foundation of NPA's projects. Dr. Arce emphasizes three key principles to developing a strong working relationship in Cuba:

1. *Walk, don't run.* Cultivate relationships with the appropriate government agencies and consult Cuban and international associations with experience in Cuba. Don't start an extensive project with large expenditures until you have enough confidence in the project and with the partner. Start with small cooperative efforts that demonstrate your organization's commitment to Cuba's people and its NGOs.
2. *Transparency, transparency, transparency!* Clearly document and check every penny of funding and be aware of Cuba's policy against accepting money from specific organizations and governments. Also, widely publicize meetings and projects. Spend conservatively, especially on administrative overhead, such as offices and vehicles.
3. *Careful project planning.* Choose well-established organizations as partners to facilitate initial programs.

Projects should focus on tangible results and have clear impact on people's wellbeing.

International and especially American NGOs face serious challenges and must adapt to a unique working environment if they want to operate successfully in Cuba. For example, INGOs currently must send all funds through MINVEC (Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation), which in turn disburses funds and salaries after a process of review. Moreover, research projects that may be routine in other countries, such as economic surveys, may be seen as threatening in the Cuban context. Despite these challenges, hundreds of projects by INGOs have been completed with transparency and success that meet international standards. Increasingly, INGOs have learned how to adapt to different working environments without compromising their principles or mission statements. The success of NPA demonstrates that a productive partnership requires long-term commitment to work in Cuba and a deep understanding of the political and social system.

When the anachronistic United States policy toward Cuba ends, there will be a flood of American NGOs interested in establishing projects and offices in Cuba: they should pay close attention to the experience of other international NGOs to ensure that engagement is respectful and productive.

*The information for this article was collected on 27 June 2001 during an interview with Dr. Mercedes Arce at the Cuba office of Norwegian Popular Aid. NPA can be contacted at marapan@mail.infocom.etcusa.cu, fax (537) 66-9333, telephone (537) 23-5766, Avenida Camagüey #11234 apt. 38, Cerro, Ciudad Habana.*

*Cindy Huang is a candidate for Master of Public Affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University to be graduated May, 2002. She is compiling a lengthy study of NGO work in Cuba as part of FRD's ongoing commitment to foster communication between Cuban and American NGOs.*

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## Two-thirds of Americans Favor Freedom of Travel to Cuba

Congress but not the Administration reflects the sentiment of the overwhelming majority of Americans who believe they should be able to travel freely to Cuba. A nationwide poll released last year by the Cuba Policy Foundation showed that by 67% to 24% Americans favored an end to the travel ban. In the state of Florida the percentage against the ban rose to 70%. A Florida International University Poll in 2000 revealed that a complete end of travel restrictions was favored by 53% of Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County.

Americans feel even more strongly that US policy should change to allow sales of food (71%) and medicine (76%) and a majority want to lift the whole embargo (52% to 32%). [www.cubapolicyfoundation.org](http://www.cubapolicyfoundation.org).

# Impressions: Non-governmental Organizations in Cuba

by Cindy Huang

Thanks to the generous support of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development (FRD) and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs of Princeton University, I had the opportunity to research non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Cuba for two months in the Summer of 2001. Although a fair amount has been written on the topic, I wanted to engage people to get a “lay of the land” and to explore how United States NGOs might effectively build ties and projects in Cuba. Through more than fifteen formal interviews and many more informal conversations, I explored the successes, frustrations, and challenges of NGO life in Cuba.

From the beginning, I realized that strict categorizations would hinder understanding, that the Cuban context requires special sensitivity to historical and political reasons for policies and practices. Although there is no clear demarcation between governmental and non-governmental sectors, especially given the important oversight role of NGOs by the Ministry of Investment and Cooperation (MINVEC), there is space for international NGOs, even American NGOs, in which to operate. Several interviewees mentioned the need to view foreign NGOs as facilitators, rather than implementers. As is well known, Cubans have the human capital necessary to design and implement projects if given materials and technical training not available in Cuba.

Due to the sensitive relationship between the United States and Cuba, further constrained by legal and bureaucratic restrictions on both sides, current American NGO involvement in Cuba is extremely limited. There are, however, successful collaborations and exchanges that began on a small scale through determination and commitment from a few United States NGOs and their Cuban counterparts. Again, it bears repeating that projects are generally most effective when the foreign/American NGO takes a backseat role, networking, training, and donating, allowing for unique Cuban solutions to local problems. Respect, understanding and patience are perhaps even more important than good programming, elegant deliverables or first-world funding.

INGOs hoping to operate in Cuba also need to be extremely flexible about navigating the changes in regulations and especially enforcement. For example, earlier it was possible to attend conferences with a tourist visa, but recently the Cuban government has been more vigorous, requiring specific relevant permission.

A major conference for European and Cuban NGO cooperation in 1999 brought together 50 Cuban organizations with 74 European, and 17 Latin American and the Caribbean groups, plus two each from Canada and the United States. This meeting was critical for building ties and agreeing on principles for cooperation. While a similar meeting with United States NGOs is likely to be at least a few years away, it will mark a significant step forward in United States-Cuba relations. Bi-national communication at many levels is opening due to the increasing number of NGO-driven programs with and delegations to Cuba. Any genuine

engagement now about NGO cooperation would be a tremendous educational and networking opportunity for both the Cuban and American peoples.

In this respect, United States NGOs should take the lead from several European NGOs, as well as undertaking cooperation by way of the existing avenues afforded by the United Nations. For example, through small-scale projects and cooperation with the Havana office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), organizations can begin to establish a base level of trust with their natural Cuban counterparts, as well as with officials who regulate NGO activity.

Cuba is an extremely delicate place to work, and INGOs are often operating on the margins of policy. A professional practice or cultural habit normal in New York, Washington or San Francisco can be an unknowing yet harmful faux pas in Havana, Santiago or Cárdenas. This, however, should not deter groups from seeking means of cooperation; in fact, only through this intensive, long process can there be any transformation which will bridge the Florida Straits. As one program officer put it, book donations and travel are helpful to increasing contact between America and Cuba, but they do not have the same transformative potential as strong civil society connections. NGOs of both countries are rapidly building these.

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## Don't Take the Yacht to Cuba!

The Bush administration recently announced it intends to block the travel of Americans to Cuba in private yachts by means of a Clinton-era decree called the Cuba National Emergency Notice. Originally the Notice was enacted as a personal safety issue after the downing of planes by the Cuban military. Now it is being used to enforce the US embargo of Cuba. In an era when the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is responsible for blocking assets to real terrorists, critics wonder why the Bush Administration is so determined to stop a few Americans from cruising into Cuban ports.



*This boat, photographed in the Hemingway Marina in Havana, is emblazoned with a US flag and the phrase: “None of Your Business.”*

## Cuba Working Group

Following are the founding members of the Cuba Working Group. If your Representative is listed, he or she certainly merits a call or fax of appreciation. If not, contact their office or try to see him or her while in the District and encourage affiliation.

### Members of the Cuba Working Group

Republicans:	Democrats:
John Boozman	Neil Abercrombie
Kevin Brady	Howard Berman
Jo Ann Emerson	Marion Berry
Jeff Flake	William Lacy Clay
Wally Herger	Peter DeFazio
Ray LaHood	William Delahunt
Jim Leach	Sam Farr
Jerry Moran	Nick Lampson
George Nethercutt	Stephen Lynch
Tom Osborne	Jim McGovern
Butch Otter	Collin Peterson
Ron Paul	Charles Rangel
Jim Ramstad	Tim Rowmer
Dennis Rehberg	Vic Snyder
Chris Shays	Hilda Solis
Nick Smith	Charlie Stenholm
John Thune	Mike Thompson

## FRD OFAC Survey

A survey of organizations seeking licenses for travel to Cuba suggests that the Bush Administration is making it harder again for Americans to find legal avenues for visits, quietly reversing a significant reform of the Clinton Administration.

Twenty-one organizations that applied for licenses in 2001 responded to the survey. Ten had held licenses before, while 11 had not. They reported 25 license denials and 7 approvals. Two groups that applied 3 and 5 months ago have yet to receive a decision.

The survey was conducted by the Fund for Reconciliation and Development in preparation for hearings on February 11, 2002, before the Senate Subcommittee on Treasury Appropriations led by Senator Byron Dorgan (D, ND) on enforcement by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the Cuba travel ban.

FRD Executive Director John McAuliff warned that, "the survey cannot be considered exhaustive or definitive, but does suggest a disturbing trend. It was conducted informally over the internet through networks of organizations known to have programs with Cuba. To accurately assess the situation, OFAC must be asked by Senator Dorgan to produce a complete record of applications received, the time required for processing each application, the decision made on each application, and the legal justification for the decision to issue or deny each license."

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## Travel Opportunities

### International Congress on Traditional and Natural Medicine and Bio-Energetic Medicine

Rachel Bruhnke/Natural Medicine Conference, Global Exchange, 2017 Mission Street, Suite 303, San Francisco, CA 94708, 415-255-7296, ext. 354, [rachel@globalexchange.org](mailto:rachel@globalexchange.org)

At the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Holguín, National Reference Center for the Development of Traditional and Natural Medicine in Cuba, Holguín, June 24 - 30, 2002. Discussions will range from homeopathy to kinesiology to magnetotherapy. Programmed activities to include an exchange of scientific papers and discussions among experts, open debates with participation of researchers and practitioners, and visits to research centers, universities, hospitals, and clinics.

### Island Travel and Tours

2111 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Suite 319, Washington, DC 20007, 202-342-3171, fax 202-342-3308, [www.islandtraveltours.com](http://www.islandtraveltours.com)

Provides a one-stop shop for all your travel service needs to and within Cuba. They are licensed by the Treasury Department to make all travel related arrangements, including airlines, hotels, meals, ground transportation, including air-conditioned cars, vans, and buses, and event bookings for individuals and group of from two to a hundred.

### American Museum of Natural History

Central Park West at 79<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10024-5192, 800-462-8687 or 212-769-5700, fax 212-769-5755, <http://www.amnh.org/programs/discotours/land/cuba.html>

"Cuba: A World in Transition," April 15-26, 2002

Specially designed to provide an in-depth understanding of and appreciation for life in Cuba today. The program stresses understanding of present-day Cuba and its past by meeting and talking with members of Cuban communities and discovering their unique and proud traditions of music, art, and culture.

# 10th Forum Conference Sectoral Group Reports

The nuts and bolts core of the 10th Conference of the Forum on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam held from June 19 - 22, 2001 in Lao PDR were the twenty - one sectoral working groups that met each day for several hours. Groups ranged from ten to fifty people. Participants working in and with the three countries discussed key issues impacting their sector.

Like the conference as a whole, sectoral working groups included a cross section of representatives of government agencies, mass organizations, international and local NGOs, professional associations, foundations, universities, multilateral development agencies, bilateral donors, and business.

Participants received an opportunity to profit from each other's practical experience, develop means of ongoing communication and consider cooperative projects and exchanges.

The discussion groups were led by volunteer coordinators, many of whom represented local NGOs from Cambodia and Vietnam for whom this was the first time facilitating a discussion group at an international conference. Each group was asked to produce a summary of their discussions and recommendations. Seventeen of the sectoral group reports are summarized on the following pages. Summaries of plenaries and longer versions of the sectoral reports are available at the FRD website [www.ffrd.org](http://www.ffrd.org). The four missing sectoral reports will also be posted on the website when they are available.

FRD Executive Director John McAuliff and Forum Conference Coordinator Susan Hammond will travel to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in June 2002 to hold a series of national meetings with participants of the 10th Forum conference. The purpose of these meetings is to reflect on the impact of the 10th Conference; to learn what follow-up activities have resulted from the sectoral groups, panels and informal discussions; and to obtain advice on whether the Forum conference should continue to be held in one form or another and what the role of FRD should be.

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*The following sectoral reports were  
unavailable as of print time:*

Disaster Preparedness & Relief  
Education: Secondary, Vocational  
Environment, Ecology Restoration  
Social and Economic Development in Remote Areas

*Sectoral reports edited by  
Amanda B. Hickman & Tara McAuliff*

# Agriculture, Fisheries and Irrigation

## 1. Transferring technologies to farmers, strengthening the farmer movement.

The group discovered that there are some main things that need to be done for transfer of technologies to farmers and strengthening the farmers' movement. They are:

- a. Selecting the target area
- b. Field study
- c. Selection of target people
- d. Peoples participation to discover their needs and ways of implementation
- e. Training/visiting
- f. Pilot project
- g. Sustainable ways of using natural resources and reproduction of seeds for our needs, such as managing slope areas and reproducing crop's seeds. Also, expanding activities including self production of seeds.
- h. Extension work
- i. Irrigation management
- j. Fisheries and livestock

How to transfer technologies:

- a. Field studies
- b. Participation approach
- c. Training on the job
- d. Pilot project

What kind of techniques should we supply to the farmers:

- a. Appropriate and simple techniques
- b. Field school training and meetings

For strengthening and directing the farmers' movement, we focused on:

- a. Farmer Cooperatives
- b. Linkage of the private sector to farmers
- c. Alternative ways of slash and burn, through new technologies and the sustainable use of natural resources.

State/Ministries and supporting agencies should be encouraged to work with the farmers' movement in the fields mentioned.

## 2. Impact of Cross sectors

We focused on the consequences of one sector having an adverse effect on other sectors during implementation. Those sectors include irrigation, deforestation, fisheries, etc. We

*AIDS/HIV group*

should develop a policy of alternative strategies for avoiding the impact of one sector to another sector. Cross sector roles of the state farmers, NGO's, and private sectors need to be addressed. Relationships between all sectors, impacts of one sector on another, innovative ways to solve problems, and projects should respect the people's needs and conserve the environment.

## 3. Market Promotion

Food markets should be developed at local levels for local needs and food security programs implemented. The market policy price should prevent exploitation of the poor from traders. Agricultural co-operative markets, food producer promotion, competitive quality and costs, and information for farmers should be made available. We should develop tax policies and

exemptions for food export and agricultural equipment imports. The governments should buy products from the farmers and sell with proper policies in place. Beside the government, the farmers themselves should form co-operatives in order to buy the agricultural products of the members, store them, and then sell them at the best price to the consumer.

## 4. Recommendations

Improving partnerships for poverty alleviation and sustainable development by developing the policy of partnership between:

- a. Farmers-farmers
- b. NGO-NGO
- c. NGO-government
- d. Government-government
- e. Sector-sector.

This should be done at all levels and at all places to solve common problems and the needs of the regions.

*Facilitator: Mr. Sil Vineth, P.O.Box 472, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, sedoc@forum.org.kh.*

*Representatives for discussion from Lao: Mr Anonh Khamloun and Viet Nam: Mr. Dat Quoc Nguyen.*

*Recorder: Ann Howden, Lao P.D.R. ann\_howden@hotmail.com*



# AIDS/HIV/STD

The objectives of the HIV/AIDS/STD Sectoral Group were:

1. To learn from one another's experiences and insights,
2. To discuss in depth one or more issues, such as:
  - i. Integrating HIV/AIDS/STD into development
  - ii. Prevention beyond awareness raising
  - iii. Care and support (including orphans)
  - iv. Gender & HIV/AIDS/STD, and
3. To develop concrete examples of partnership.

After discussing the theme and objectives of the group, the participants then spent the first session introducing themselves and their organizations, and indicating which issue/s they wished to discuss in depth. At the end of the session, the group decided to focus on "Integrating HIV/AIDS/STD into Development," and to invite some group members to give more detailed descriptions of their work on this.

At the second session, *Medicins du Monde* (Viet Nam) presented a video on the Condom Café at the Ho Chi Minh City Youth Cultural Hall. The work of the Condom Café focuses on HIV/AIDS/STD prevention and condom promotion among young people. One of the points made was that HIV/AIDS/STD needs to be presented as integrated in the lives of the young people.

*Friends* (Cambodia) and *Maryknoll* (Cambodia) then described their work with children infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS. This work focuses both on prevention as well as care and support. It was made clear that poverty makes the challenges of HIV/AIDS/STD harder, and that HIV/AIDS/STD itself worsens poverty, and this impacts on national social and economic development.

The last presentation was from the *Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance* (KHANA, Cambodia). KHANA pointed out that HIV/AIDS/STD programs are often only implemented by specialized agencies and mobilization of other resources is still limited. It was also pointed out that donors still have a limited sectoral perspective on HIV/AIDS/STD, not considering how it interacts with other development issues, such as health, education, and law enforcement. The discussion then went on to what a multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS/STD means, and how such a response should be developed.

At the third and last session, the facilitators asked each participant to write responses on cards to the following questions:

What works best in integrating HIV/AIDS/STD into

development?

What should we avoid?

What are our recommendations?

This process was designed to move the group from detailed discussions about only a few organizations towards a more inclusive approach, where each person could participate. The group came up with the following recommendations:

1. Top-level commitment, policy development reflecting the integration of HIV/AIDS/STD into

development at the national level, and ensuring adequate resources for HIV/AIDS/STD programs;

2. Donor commitment and maintaining support for NGOs and others involved in the response, also recognizing the need to integrate HIV/AIDS/STD into development;

3. Strengthening multi-sectoral responses to HIV/AIDS/STD through sharing information, collaboration in planning and implementation, among organizations and between NGOs and government.

Furthermore, there should be no need to wait for top-level commitment or national policy – activities integrating HIV/AIDS/STD into development should simply be started to begin a quick response.

There should be clear objectives about integrating HIV/AIDS/STD into development - what should programs do, how and to what extent?

4. Maximizing private sector involvement in HIV/AIDS/STD responses

5. Building capacity of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) groups.

At the end of the session, the group agreed to disseminate the participant list and this report among the group participants by e-mail.

*Recorder: Mr. Choub Chamreun (Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance, Cambodia) [khanapt@bigpond.com.kh](mailto:khanapt@bigpond.com.kh)*

*Co-facilitators: Mr. Ted Nierras (Australian Red Cross, Lao PDR)*

*Dr. Niramonh Chanlivong (Macfarlane Burnet Centre, Lao PDR)*

# Community Development - Rural

Rural Community Development focused on how to build trust and solidarity in a stable population.

Technical aspects discussed: Partnership in community development; trust; capacity building (training, project planning and implementation) methodologies

Resource base issues: How to improve quality of and access to education, protect the environment and improve food security.

Social problems discussed: rural exodus, youth, drugs, recruitment of young women into the sex industry; health in particular sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention,

## Food security

A. The lack of it is a major problem in rural areas, particularly in isolated areas. There are many contributing factors; insufficient land available, UXOs left over from the war; land is not productive, irrigation problems; and ownership is often unclear and limited to usufructus, so wealthy people can grab the land (Cambodia).

There are not enough skills to diversify and increase production. In addition, all this is compounded by a lack of support and trust within the community.

B. Proven strategies

Encourage the community to find the root of the problem; Seek and promote alternative sources of income; Group farming; Credit and revolving funds; Promotion of private sector and NGO involvement; Provide seeds, fertilizer, manuals, technical assistance; Land allocation for limited time based on production (solution proposed for Laos).

## Education

A. There is a lack of awareness of the value of education. Ethnic minority children come to school and do not speak the language of instruction. There are problems with the variety of languages which need interpreters. A high number of dropouts to seek employment or help at home. Girls are not encouraged to continue their schooling. In addition, facilities are poor, there is a lack of qualified teachers, there are long distances between homes and schools for small children, and it is difficult to maintain schools in every village.

B. Strategies:

Train people from ethnic minority communities to be teachers; Youth Union programs where members go to remote areas during the school holidays to teach children in isolated areas;

Teaching street children (in the rural areas??);

Informal education (Cambodia) provided in the evenings by local NGOs, flexible hours, TOT, encourage girls to go to school;

NGOs working with the government (in Viet Nam) to increase access for small children, supplying facilities;

NGOs in Laos: help to build schools, teacher training, teacher support, after school activities (dancing/sports);

Government (Laos) provide training courses and teaching aids.

## General

From discussing major issues such as health, education and food security it became clear that successfully addressing any of them depends essentially on building trusting relationships of mutual understanding and that a vision of what is to be achieved is shared by all the stakeholders.

The case of Cambodia: After twenty years of civil war, although the war ended twenty years ago, the distrust remains. Many people are reticent to trust others and to work together in communities. There is, for that reason, a lack of interest in contributing to public works in their own communities. Without trust, however, there will be no genuine local contributions to projects, there will be no sense of ownership and the project will not be sustainable.

The case of Laos: A divisive strategy of a number of INGOs is that they pay for local in kind and in labor contributions. The Lao government cannot afford this luxury hence the practice leads to confusion about the true motivations of the community for their contributions.

The case of Viet Nam: The village people often perceive NGOs as funders, not partners. Furthermore, the funding is perceived as a charity, not as a prop for technical co-operation in a sphere of partnership. INGOs also differ greatly from one another in working style and approach. Information sharing is far from optimal. In certain regions a number of NGOs are working simultaneously, yet it is difficult to get information from local people about similar projects that are ongoing in the region.

## Recommendations for building trust in rural community development

More government openness to information sharing to encourage a culture of trust;

Improve the coordinating role of the government in working with NGOs in project areas;

Increase solidarity among local civil society organizations;

In order to work effectively towards common goals, make use of all available expertise: the government should create more favorable conditions for international staff, so that they can be used at all level;

Forums should be established where organizations and government representatives communicate about activities in a specific location;

Encourage and increase community participation wherever possible;

Make sure communities and government authorities understand that NGOs are not working FOR but WITH communities;

More communication is needed about policies for interaction with communities amongst governments and NGOs, i.e. whether or not local contributions will be paid for, or whether incentives will be given;

Base program on the recognition of a common agenda, where NGO goals fit in with government policies.

*Rural development section prepared by Katie Walker. Transcribed and edited by Laetitia van Haren, laeticiavanharen@yahoo.com.*

# Community Development - Urban

## Why urban community development?

- 1) To help people who live in the same slum or otherwise disadvantaged neighborhood develop a sense of community and join forces to overcome collectively encountered problems - legal, social, environmental or with their resource base.
- 2) To combat such problems as drug addiction and alcohol, prostitution and other forms of violence and abuse, through strengthening the community and its basic values, and to help develop more edifying alternatives.
- 3) To empower poor urban communities through access to health and education, saving schemes and informal education for adults.
- 4) To show the government and local authorities how poor urban neighborhoods can be stabilized and living conditions improved.

## Obstacles to urban community development

- 1) Insecurity of tenure, people can get evicted from one day to the other; this is both an obstacle to UCD and the reason why it is necessary.
- 2) Different ethnic and regional origins of the population, varying dates of arrival, and also different types of legal status: residence status, job seeker, temporary visitor: all these make the building of trust and solidarity very difficult.
- 3) In some instances, the local authorities are too overbearing and it shies the people away from active involvement, (risk of population's withdrawal);
- 4) In other cases, the local authorities see the UCD as an excuse not to help, because an NGO is already taking care of it, so the problem is solved (Risk of Govt's withdrawal).
- 5) Very often, the continuity is at stake because after the three years that the project was kick-started with money from outside, the local authorities do not take over the project - even if there are funds for urban poverty alleviation, because it never fits in.

## Observations on methodology

Urban Community Participatory Development is a very slow process. You have to be very patient. Many steps have to be taken and conditions fulfilled:

- 1) First assess the neighborhood, to determine if they need a UCD intervention, and what kind is feasible from the project or NGO's point of view (staff available, and funds) as well as what the local authorities accept.
- 2) Assess, with participation of the community, (and with local authorities in the case of Viet Nam and Laos) what the problems are: environmental sanitation, peddling/use of drugs, prostitution, violence, alcohol, unemployment, disease, children out working instead of attending school.
- 3a) Sit down with the community and the government (in Laos and Viet Nam), to discuss needs and possibilities for solutions.
- 3b) Sit down with the community (in Cambodia), then approach the authorities in a later stage to discuss needs and possibilities for solutions.

4) Encourage the people to designate/choose/vote a leader and spokesman. In Laos and Viet Nam, this is always someone who is also accepted by the government, and has already some formal or informal authority. In Cambodia, it is better the community leader has no political party connections. In all three countries, the person designated is usually older and commands respect, because he has a position of local influence, he is wealthy or educated, such as a teacher. Often a man is chosen as the all-round leader (Confucian heritage?). Women can be chosen, depending on the specific purpose of the group formed.

5) A special challenge is the forming of groups for savings and loan schemes. Though diversity of ethnic and geographical origin is seldom a source of conflict in most urban neighborhoods, when something is set up that demands a lot of trust, such as a savings scheme and loan fund, people will prefer to work with close relatives or people they have known for a long time, and/or originate from same ethnic background, village or region. This makes it very hard to let newcomers participate in such projects.

6) The success of urban development groups depends to a large extent on the care with which the process was set in motion. This applies especially to savings and loan schemes.

7) Informing the urban poor about their rights, and helping them obtain what they are entitled to, is an important aspect of UCD. There are funds to help poor urban communities, but they are not always used in the right way, and the government lacks manpower for good implementation. The public needs to be informed about laws and development plans and decrees that may affect them.

## Success depends on officials' capacity and goodwill

For example, in Cambodia, the Government set up a compensation scheme for slum dwellers who live on grounds the government needs for development. Slum dwellers who are to be evicted will get compensatory land, if they can prove they are residents of such an area. But it is easy to buy an identity card of the right area from a corrupt official and then receive a plot of land. That will then be used for speculation by the buyers. In Viet Nam, the NGOs work hand in hand with the local authorities, and therefore the success of projects depends also to a great extent on the cooperation and good-will of the local authorities. In Cambodia, the NGOs are more like middlemen brokering between the communities and the authorities and get into a form of collaboration or consultation in a later stage.

## The differences between urban and rural community development stem from differences in conditions

- 1) In rural communities, traditional groupings exist, you have to mobilize them: in urban neighborhoods, the sense of community is often minimal and has to be built from scratch through the project intervention, with great patience.
- 2) The problem of access to basic services is different from that encountered in rural communities. In the rural areas, there may be no clinic and no school, and no money to go to a district hospital or school away from the village. In the slums, it is possible to send the children to school, if you can afford to keep them out of

work and it is possible to get medical help, often for free for the poor, but you have to know where and how.

3) In urban neighborhoods, families live individually but the problems are collective. In the villages, they live in communities but problems require individual betterment (agricultural productivity, for instance).

#### **The Link Between Urban-Rural Development:**

The real underlying issue is growing population pressure on the rural areas. The rural exodus in all three countries is alarming. In Cambodia there is no land shortage, though, whereas in Viet Nam there is. In Laos, there is a shortage of arable land, but to a lesser degree than in Viet Nam. The problem starts with population growth, leading to pressure on the farmland, therefore fragmentation of the farms.

#### **Population growth triggers the process:**

A man has to divide up his land as his sons marry. Then the plots are so small that they can't feed the family anymore. Also the smaller plots can be farmed by the women alone. Then the men go to the towns and cities to seek work. This they sometimes find, but sometimes not. They have little idea about the cash economy, so they can be easily cheated. They can be easily lured into drinking alcohol and buying sex from prostitutes. Then the cycle has started, and no UCPDP can ever stop it.

#### **Conclusion and recommendations:**

1) UCD is not a panacea. It has its limits, it reaches only 10% of the slum population at the most, so it must be a model, an encouragement. It is not what pulls peasants to the city. They are pushed out by farm fragmentation, and absence of alternatives to

supplement insufficient self-produced food. Comprehensive rural development is a must. Tax incentives for investors who build their factory in the countryside instead of the city can also help.

2) To build up sustainable urban community action, we have to make sure we develop a trusting partnership between the community, the local authorities and the NGOs. This depends on regular assessment and monitoring, clear understanding of each partner's responsibilities and the UCD agents doing their homework about the destination plans and legal status of the slum or neighborhood they are working with.

3) Though all UCDs encountered the same comparable challenges in all countries reviewed, there are noticeable variations according to the form of government and type of economy:

In Cambodia, the main concern at present is to assist the slum dwellers against threatening evictions;

In Viet Nam, the fight against eviction and social evils.

4) In all countries the ultimate purpose is always the overall improvement of the slum dwellers' individual and collective living conditions.

5) In all countries it is a long slow process that requires a lot of patience: Between the day of the data collection and the identification of problems with the slum dwellers, and then the whole evolution towards a chosen committee and action, many days, months and even years will come to pass.

6) But urban community development interventions work. There is pressure on the government not to let the poor down, and as openness grows, successful projects that empower the urban poor have a lasting impact. They change the society.

Contact Lim Phai, Urban Sector Group, [usg@forum.org.kh](mailto:usg@forum.org.kh)

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## Education: Pre-school And Primary

By the beginning of the second session the group had developed a framework for tackling the key issues. Using a child-centered model, four themes/issues were identified:

1. Access (facilities, materials, teachers, community participation)
2. Equity (gender, ethnicity, urban/rural/remote)
3. Quality (curriculum, teacher)
4. Relevance (curriculum, language of instruction, local/community)

It was acknowledged, or discovered, that all four themes were related. For purposes of discussion we initially divided the four related themes into two axes: Access/Equity and Quality/Relevance. However, in practice, boundaries blurred. For example, children will not go to school (access) if the curriculum is irrelevant.

Much of the first session's discussion focused on pre-school, though it was generally agreed that this concept was too narrow and that it was more profitable to think of Early Childhood Development (ECD).

Questions of equity underpinned the entire discussion. This was because it was discovered that in all three countries ethnic

minorities, particularly girls, living in rural and remote areas, had the worst access to education. This trend was more pronounced with pre-school. This raised difficult questions: education for whom? Education for what? This led to discussion about relevance. It was agreed that the most important element of relevance was a clear and specific link between education and livelihood. This raised issues of food security and health. While acknowledging that the education sector alone could not tackle these issues, it was agreed that the curriculum could play a much larger role. Two of our participants spoke of an Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM) in Primary Schools being conducted in Cambodia. This program seemed to fit well the criteria of relevance. Improving relevance for these most disadvantaged groups was considered a vital ingredient of improving quality. A second assumption was that improving quality would lead to more equitable access.

There was some feeling that all programs should be conducted in the first language (based on what we know of children's cognitive and linguistic development) and that donors should encourage the funding of such programs, particularly where ethnic minority girls will benefit.

Notes by Gary Ovington, email: [Ovington@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:Ovington@loxinfo.co.th)

# Education: University, Graduate Work, Research, Exchanges, Distance

The group convened three times to discuss a number of issues relating to higher education in Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam. Upon the completion of these meetings, the participants identified several common issues and provided recommendations for further action on those issues. These recommendations should be understood to provide general guidelines that will have to be implemented on a country specific basis. Because higher education is essential to the creation of intellectual capital and skill building, higher education is essential in creating future leaders, technicians, planners and those members of society needed to alleviate poverty and sustain development on all fronts.

Below are the main issues identified by the group and recommendations for further consideration in addressing them.

## **Issue 1: Teacher shortage and training**

- a. There should be training grants to support foreign study by teachers, who must return to teach in their home countries.
- b. The development of greater financial incentives to keep teachers in the education field is crucial. Likewise, teachers must be provided with continuing education and incentives to actively participate in training activities.

## **Issue 2: Teaching methods**

- a. Training workshops inviting senior, experienced lecturers, as well as foreign lecturers, should be developed to promote greater exchange of teaching methodologies.
- b. Greater linkages are needed for faculty exchange on an international level.

## **Issue 3: Research**

- a. Development of an ongoing campus science center using technology and professional exchange.
- b. Research should focus on and relate to material taught in class and in the student's area of study.
- c. Government industry and universities should develop incentives to promote faculty development through research. In time, it is hoped that this will also be linked to the development of a system of meritocracy.



*Primary Education group*

d. NGO internships.

e. Research should extend beyond math and science to social science areas to provide support and growth to society at large.

## **Issue 4: International Cooperation**

- a. Local and foreign universities should focus on their abilities and talent to locate areas of mutual benefit. This should create lasting and more stable relationships.
- b. Development of joint research projects.
- c. Development of greater foreign language facility to support educational exchange internationally.
- d. Earlier and closer cooperation between local and foreign universities to plan projects and obtain funding.

## **Issue 5: Increasing educational access**

- a. Develop policies to promote completion of primary and secondary level education by women. Over time this will increase potential access to higher education.
- b. Develop policies to promote greater merit based access.
- c. Clearer policies between government and universities regarding student costs, tuition, admission (Cambodia).
- d. Expansion of the number of private institutions.
- e. Development of policies to make education more affordable (student loans, scholarships).

## **Issue 6: Standards and Quality of Education**

- a. The term 'quality' education should be defined within each country. What are the criteria for such an education?
- b. Develop instruments to measure educational achievement.
- c. Develop a system of accreditation to insure a uniform level of education. Such a system must apply equally to both public and private institutions.
- d. Development of credit transfer system.

## **Item 7: Investment in higher education**

- a. There should be a fundamental investment in higher education as the products of that education form the intellectual capital of society. Such investment should not detract from investment in the primary and secondary levels.
- b. Development of loans and scholarships (see issue 5 generally).

## **Item 8: Relevance of Education**

- a. Universities should be responsive to the needs of their students, local communities and the nation in general.
- b. There should be some system to evaluate the results of student educational experience, i.e. to measure the results of educational outputs.

*Contact Jack Bailey, Institute of International Education, [iihn@hn.vnn.vn](mailto:iihn@hn.vnn.vn)*

## Health: Primary Health Care and Reproductive Health

The group consisted of over 22 people of diverse backgrounds. Participants were from all three countries representing government offices, mass organizations, NGOs, international organizations and educational services. Four topics were chosen to focus discussion:

1. Community Health services integration
2. Community development
3. Sustainability/budget
4. Coordination collaboration across borders

The larger group broke into two smaller groups with each group discussing two topics. Discussion followed group feedback with the following observations, recommendations and suggestions/lessons learned.

- Primary Health Care (PHC) is at various stages of implementation across the three counties.
- Population densities of the three countries cause problems in implementing PHC.
- Commitment of village workers is good and important to successful health care. Village-level people are very willing. Commitment is better in the villages than in urban areas. It is very difficult to get urban people to stay and work in remote areas or at the village level.
- There is poor management of workers in PHC.
- At the present, PHC follows too much of a top-down approach. It needs to use a more bottom-up approach.
- It is difficult to implement PHC without skilled, knowledgeable human resources.
- The quality of services is poor and there is a lack of awareness of the concept of PHC.
- Ownership of the program is very important.
- There needs to be better understanding between INGOs and local partners.
- Pooling resources would be useful.
- Mass organizations need to be involved at all levels.
- IEC 'skills' are needed by all PHC workers.
- Capacity building in all PHC skills is needed at all levels, but especially at the community level.
- Health workers should be facilitators at the community level.

- Advocacy is very important.
- Funding needs to be sustainable.
- Collaboration of sectors at all levels is needed. Integration of all stakeholders at the community, district and provincial level is important for PHC work.
- Need to ensure that health staff have appropriate knowledge of local culture and language.
- Collaboration, coordination and planning between international organizations, NGOs and the national program is needed.
- Need to do strategy planning with all the stakeholders from the beginning and at the community level.
- Identify and take into account population characteristics for strategic plan development.
- A strategy for transfer of the project/program needs to be considered by all parties during the planning of the project.
- Models and studies should be reviewed so the project is sustainable.
- Funding issues need to be resolved.
- Train 'local' and ethnic minority people to work in their own geographic areas.
- Supply of equipment/supplies/kits needs to be secure.
- Need to establish links/committees at the community level.
- Need to meet the local needs of the trainees (training needs assessment should be carried out before training begins).
- Need to be thinking of training social workers for the future.
- We need to learn to listen to the community.
- Need to build capacity/awareness of communities to mobilize resources and to demand government health care services.
- Create a government forum for all stakeholders to share and exchange information.
- There may be a need for motivation incentives.
- There should be regular meetings to share information on activities and progress for all stakeholders.
- There should be regular monitoring of progress.

*Prepared by Nancy Miekle, Health Unlimited – Lao PDR Email: huphclao@laonet.net*



*left: Higher Education group (p.17)  
above: Primary Healthcare group*

# Labor, Working Conditions

## Discussion Topics:

1. Labor Situation
2. Labor Law Enforcement & Inspection
3. Labor Issues, Garment Industry
4. Labor Policy
5. Minimum Wage
6. Living Wage

## Conclusions:

- Low skills of workers do not support the needs of the labor markets in the three countries.
- There is a lack of resources (Human, Financial).
- The remuneration is not reasonable.
- Labor laws are not effectively enforced.
- Tripartite partnerships are weak, need strengthening.
- Countries should ratify more ILO conventions (Core).
- Labor market information needs improvement.
- Labor welfare is primitive.

## Recommendations:

- Strong commitment from government to enforce labor law (esp. in Cambodia and Laos).
- Improve the quality and quantity of education in rural areas, including vocational education.
- Create jobs for people.
- Explore the range of possibilities of the internet:
- send and receive information.
- international networking for employers, consumers,

- organizations, governments, NGOs, trade unions, etc.
- advocate for better work conditions, salaries.
- employment opportunities.
- Promote the rule of law & transparency.
- Establish a labor court.
- Develop industries, especially agricultural processing in rural areas to create more jobs in the area & stop the stream of job seekers leaving rural areas for cities.
- Develop infrastructure, especially roads, to maintain access to rural areas.
- Change traditional thinking of the labor force to a market oriented economic “first for consumer, not for farmer”.
- Management training needed for government agencies.
- Transparency and accountability needed in Foreign Direct Investment firms (foreign workers, executive MOU).
- Improve skills: build up training centers, labor, and employment service centers.
- Promote living wages.
- Networking of labor market information needed.
- Promote industrial relations, maintain management relations.
- Promote labor force monitoring.
- Compile and track employment data by sector.
- Compile and track unemployment data.
- Compile and track in and out migration data.
- Compile and track price data.

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## Legacies: Land mines, UXO, Agent Orange

*Participants, aware of the devastating effects of these legacies of war in Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia, and of the enormous task of clearing and rehabilitating affected land, communities and disabled individuals, recommend faxing the governments of these countries about the following.*

That funding for clearance, survivor support and development of affected communities be extended;

That data from the Level One surveys on mine/UXO contaminated areas with relevant socio-economic impact data be made available to tall relevant government departments, mine clearance and development agencies in Cambodia and Laos so as to assist prioritization and good planning for mine affected communities;

That a comprehensive Level One survey be carried out in Viet Nam as early as practical with cooperative funding and technical assistance;

That Laos, Viet Nam and the United States accede to the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty;

That a meeting of those involved in mine action planning in Cambodia, Viet Nam, Laos and Thailand be held, preferable in Viet Nam, to share policy and coordination frameworks, legislation on mines/UXO, disability and land tenure issues.

### With particular reference to Agent Orange we:

Strongly support that documentation on Agent Orange continue in Viet Nam and extend to Cambodia and Laos; that it be made available in a centralized site and widely publicized;

Strongly support that organization of a conference of scientists on the effects of Agent Orange in the South East Asian Region;

Encourage the launching of an international campaign on Agent Orange issues, and linking with existing campaigns on clearing military toxins, with a view to raising awareness and eventually the question of compensation;

Encourage the creation of an International Association of Agent Orange Victims;

The task of following up on each of these recommendations was given to particular members of the group.

*Denise Coghlan, LWS – Cambodia, Facilitator, [jrscam@forum.org.kh](mailto:jrscam@forum.org.kh)*

## Land: Pressures of Population and Legal Issues

Land use and allocation is interrelated with many other issues. The sectoral group raised the importance of clear national policies that address the complexity of the situation by integrating land management with natural resource management and paying attention to the need for urban as well as rural land use planning. National policies also need to set clear guidelines and enforcement mechanisms on public versus private land use [especially in situation where large concessions are granted to companies, organizations, or individuals]. Laws and policies must protect women's land and inheritance rights and must also respond to the needs and interests of various ethnic groups who may prefer communal ownership to individual allocation.

Participants from Laos and Cambodia raised particular issues that policy makers, NGO's and International Organizations should take into consideration.

Four Cambodia key issues included:

1. Anarchic land allocation, which is leading to land grabs and land speculation by those with power.
2. Land loss by poorer people. Lack of clear regulations and enforcement is leading to situations where poorer farmers have their land stolen from them or are forced to sell
3. Lack of basic services such as agricultural extension and health services. This situation threatens people's livelihood, since low land productivity or health problems force people into a cycle of debt, causing them to sell their land.
4. All of the above factors have led to increased urban migration and to unplanned and unsafe urban expansion

In Laos, key issues included:

1. Lack of coordination and training among the many sectors involved in land management. In Laos, various Ministries including Finance, Agriculture and Forestry, Industry and Handicrafts, Commerce and others are involved in

managing different categories of land. It is very difficult to coordinate the work of all of these sectors and to provide adequate information and training to staff at the district, provincial, and central level who are responsible for carrying out this work.

2. Threats to women's land rights. Women's inherited property and their right to common property are at risk because of the tendency to register all official documents in the name of the "head of household".

Both countries identified a strong need to involve communities in the land allocation and management process. This approach will require openness, flexibility, and a willingness to experiment with various models such as communal ownership and community based land use planning.

NGO's were seen as having an important role to play in identifying issues and collecting information for law and policy formation and implementation. Because many NGOs work at the community level, they can educate villagers and local officials about land rights and can act as a bridge between villagers and officials in land disputes. NGO's also need to alert the national and international community to threats to sustainable and fair land management, such as the trend towards handing over land management to international corporations which distribute land to tenant farmers and control the production and marketing of crops. NGO's can also advocate proactive planning in both urban and rural areas in order to avoid situations where misuse and overcrowding lead to natural or man-made disasters.

Finally, the group suggested further exchanges between these two countries since they appeared to have complementary experiences: Cambodia is working strongly on its legal framework and dispute mechanisms, but Laos has more experience with the rationalization of land use at the village level.

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left: Legacies group(p.19)

below: Microfinance group (p.21)



# Microfinance and Economic Development

## Laos

In Laos 160,000 households are estimated to have no access to credit. Laos was successful in putting microfinance(MF) on the consultant group agenda highlighting the issue for Government and Donor's attention. This has increased resources available to micro-finance. The cooperation between the government and the UN has enabled Lao PDR to launch its first Microfinance Program.

According to the Bank of Lao PDR, a Government body specific to supervising microfinance institutions (MFIs) is called for; Central Bank has to establish one office, which will ultimately be responsible for issuing required regulatory framework. Capacity building has to include government Officers to support the MF industry, not only promoting the capacities of implementing agencies.

Institutional sustainability is essential to achieve significant poverty reduction through microfinance. MFIs can become self-sustaining if capitalized and consistently supported with technical advice and a conducive policy environment.

Options for strengthening MF Programs: strengthen existing institutions; Converting an existing organization that went into MF as a specialty area; establishing a new organization/group through a Microfinance program; strategic situational analysis of market supply/demand and policy environment. Integrity and transparency of financial sector is KEY, and the interest rate needs to be set freely by the institution/program to ensure full financial sustainability.

A paradox exists when Government often is unable to regulate moneylenders but at the same time does not allow implementing savings and lending groups to establish themselves.

Range of interest rate depends on the suppliers for the services. For example, if the Government subsidized credit is under 1 % flat, emerging MFIs set up their rate freely around 2 – 4 % flat and the money lenders have very high rates up to 30% flat per month. The key issue for interest rate is financial sustainability.

## Viet Nam

In Viet Nam, currently 46% or 5.4 million households have no access to credit. Various government programs: VBARD (Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) is the largest with 20% of borrowers from poor households; collateral is required. VBARD collaborates with mass organizations in using their network to deliver loans and provide incentives to them, e.g., 5% to cover operational costs and to link community mobilized groups with credit schemes. Currently, the State Bank has stopped establishing new PCFs and is conducting a review on the PCFs' performance on nation-wide scale.

It is estimated that 50% of the total loans in Viet Nam are informal.

New approach to working with Women's Union to decrease

administrative costs and improve efficiency. This new approach is mainly the division of work among Women's Union staff and technical staff hired externally. This has resulted in dramatic reduction of operating costs.

Are there any examples of operating MF programs in Viet Nam that are financially sustainable? Response: Very few, e.g., TYM managed by national Women's Union is 8 years old and financially sustainable; and CEP in Ho Chi Minh City managed by the City Trade Union. Larger issue is institutional viability as community based coops provide services, but cannot reach institutional sustainability: no TA and no capital from above; micro and regulatory framework remains unclear.

Another observation in Vietnam is that where there is MF program operating, moneylenders charge lower interest rates.

The Asian Development Bank/World Bank (ADB/WB) helped to set up the MF Resource Center in Viet Nam but in effect the Government does not use it and WB continues to fund programs that contradict the purpose and objectives set for the Center.

One needs to separate two issues here: Will MF be sustainable if it is supply driven? The question is not what the WB/ADB will finance but it must be driven by demand emanating from the community/grassroots and then go to WB and other donors for financing.

One should not encourage NGOs to take WB/ADB loans on their terms. Another theme is requesting commercial banks to lend to the VBP. ADB/WB involvement in VBP is not a sustainable proposition. VBP uses WB money to lend to the poor, but in reality this merely indebts the poor.

### Some lessons learned

- Interest rates for some micro-finance programs at PCFs, RSHBs and S&C schemes should be based on "market" rates, not subsidized ones.
- The Government should let the rural financial institutions make their own decision on interest rates, i.e., the interest rate cap should be removed.
- Savings mobilization plays a very important role in sustainable development of financial institutions and addressing the saving needs of the rural poor. The experience of PCFs and microfinance of international NGOs in Vietnam show that the poor, in general, can save. Savings sometimes seem to be more important than credit, especially for the poor as it helps them smooth their expenditures and cope with emergency lump sum needs.
- The most successful, sustainable programs are those in which loans are not tied to specific purposes.
- Bottom-up and Linkage with Mass Organizations has

proven to be effective in targeting the poor but not necessarily efficient in program implementation and staff productivity.

- Small installment payment is a much more appropriate alternative to lump sum repayment method.

### **Cambodia**

Support and strengthening of micro finance services in rural areas through the Rural Development Bank and national and international micro-finance operators (MFOs) for provision of credit services in support of agriculture and rural economy based on free market for development, efficiency and sustainability.

19 banks; MF operators – 51 (local and international organizations): Demand: \$125 million: interest: 3 -5 %.

Most recent estimate shows that over 427,000 MF clients being served in Cambodia. Government has stayed out of implementation and this has left the MF sector providers alone. There is no interest rate caps; recent regulatory environment changes: (1) Registration now required for all organizations; (2) Formalization of programs with more than 10,000 clients.

The registration fee to become an MFI is quite high (set by the IMF). The annual fee is \$ 2,500 for the MFIs central office and annual fees of \$ 2,000 for each branch office.

Government should keep away from regulation & supervision of MFIs.

Acknowledge the HIV/AIDS threat; 3.5 % UNDP Pilot project MF/HIV: also being piloted in Nepal, Cambodia and India; Build capacity of MFIs to deal with threat of HIV/AIDS.

### **Common Highlights of Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam panels**

- 1) Emphasis on MF for poverty alleviation rightly recognized by Government and civil society in three countries.
- 2) Presence of MFIs in three countries: but with some variations in numbers. The process of providing credit to the poor needs to be decentralized. Therefore, capacities/skill of local/people's organizations to be emphasized. Demand oriented approach rather than a supply (of funds) approach should be adopted.
- 3) Rate of interest to be settled: to be left to the market of MFIs. Capping of interest to be avoided.
- 4) Sustainability: In the initial stage, outreach important. A balance between outreach and sustainability to be attempted.
- 5) Regulations framework: User friendly and MFI friendly should be the spirit.
  - 1) Identification of poor and targeting important. Don't take people much above poverty line (may be around the poverty line).
  - 2) MF applicable for farm, non-farm and trading activities.

3) Gradual accesses to market by improving management and transparent accounting system.

6) Dialogue on national, domestic and regional level is very helpful and needed: But also important to recognize differences – e.g., population size/density and level of MF industry and role of Government in each country; different political systems in countries.

### **Suggested common follow-up points**

- 1) A common platform is needed for continuation of dialogue and exchange of views and experience. Establish working groups in each country inclusive of Government, civil society and professional sectors.
- 2) Technical assistance by donors should be solicited for common working groups.
- 3) Technical assistance for developing industry standards of MFIs: Capacity building needed for skills of staff and community organizers/leaders.
- 4) Exchange/field visits: promote more exchange between South and Southeast Asia; provide opportunities for learning by doing.
- 5) Reward best practices; get donors to understand and support best practices.
- 6) Donor's policy coherence and promoting sustainability.
- 7) Countries encouraged to establish APEX funds (Autonomous Funds)
- 8) Develop proposal for a comparative study that could be used as an advocacy tool with Government.
- 9) Establish a professional working group, e.g., with funding from APRACA (housed within FAO/Bangkok). ADB, World Bank, DFID might be requested.
- 10) Develop Asian specific case studies and industry standards.
- 11) Establish cross-country field visits for appropriate Government personnel, e.g. Central Banks.

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*Nutrition panel*

# Nutrition and Child Survival

## I-Observation

Nutrition is a critical problem for the three countries. The causes of nutrition problems are:

- Poverty.
- Poor food security.
- Limit of nutritional knowledge, inadequate health care for mothers and children, limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities, poor hygiene practices, and inadequate breast feeding.
- Newly emerging market economy, which is widening the gap between the rich and the poor.
- Invasive spread of HIV/AIDS (Cambodia).
- High illiteracy rates among women (58% for Cambodia, 40.9% for Laos, less than 10% for Viet Nam).

Present situation of children in the three countries is:

- high rate of PEM (50% for Cambodia, 40% for Laos and 33% for Viet Nam) and high infant and maternal mortality rate:
- IMR 89 per 1,000 live births, MMR 473 per 100,000 for Cambodia
- IMR 82 per 1,000 live births, MMR 530 per 100,000 for Laos
- IMR 40 per 1,000 live births, MMR 130 per 100,000 for Viet Nam

Policy: each country has National Policy on Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- National Plan of Action on Nutrition for 10 years period

Measures/Approach:

- National structure for nutrition as a separate institution (Viet Nam and Cambodia)

- Technical department and network down to grass root level with Ministry of Health
- National Socio-Economic Plan for five years 2001-2005

## II-Conclusion

Tackling nutritional problems poses great challenges for the three countries. They are:

- Poor and very low income.
- Lack of commitment from all parties concerned, including the private sector.
- Strong participation from the community needed.
- Need to increase knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) on nutrition.
- Operational research.
- Government should spend more on basic social services, especially the nutritional sector.
- Strong commitment from international donors for basic social services, in particular on the nutrition sector.
- Capacity strengthening.

## III-Recommendations

1. National policy on nutrition and concrete plan of action should be developed (Laos).
2. Government and international community should give more attention and assistance to nutrition.
3. Promotion of strong KAP among stakeholders and population at large.

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## Private Investment, Trade and Tourism

The Lao PDR adopted new economic policies in 1986 and since that time it has both expanded its commercial relations with foreign countries and promoted private investment in economic sectors that encourage production of goods for export. The Lao PDR also has widened trade relations with neighboring countries in an effort to expand export markets. The main exports at present include wood and wood products, electricity, agricultural products (including coffee, tea and minerals), garments and handicrafts. In this particular context, the passage of Normal Trade Relations by the U.S. Congress would greatly help promote trade between the Lao PDR and the U.S.

In addition to promoting responsible private investment in export oriented commodities, the Lao PDR has also identified the tourism sector as another investment opportunity. The Lao PDR National Tourism Authority has prioritized the development of tourism

along two lines: Eco-Tourism and Cultural Tourism. The aim is to promote the natural scenic beauty of Laos as well as promote the rich cultural diversity of the country. The value of the experience is seen as the key element to promoting tourism. In this context, the aim is clearly not to promote mass tourism but to channel tourism along the two prioritized themes. Such tourism anticipates generating local jobs as well as promoting understanding about the country.

The principal constraint associated with promoting tourism is the weak physical infrastructure of the country such as roads, transportation networks and communications, and accommodations. Other limitations also exist which limit the expansion of this economic sector including local working capital.

Contact Bill Tuffin, [bill@laopdr.com](mailto:bill@laopdr.com)

# Process of Developing Proposals:

## Roles of Governments, Local and International NGOs and Funding Agencies

In addressing this very large and broad topic, the sectoral group first reviewed the various steps of the project cycle, from project identification through appraisal, negotiation, and approval to implementation and *post facto* evaluation.

The sectoral group then broke into four smaller groups to consider the strengths, weaknesses, and problems encountered by governments, local NGOs, international NGOs, and funding agencies (including international NGOs) in developing good funding proposals. The results of these discussions, which were reviewed by the whole sectoral group, are summarized in the following table:

### **Governments:**

*Strengths:* Should be in the “driver’s seat” given overall responsibility for national development. In best position to know/determine national development priorities

*Weaknesses:* Insufficient capacity, weak donor coordination mechanisms. Can be beholden to donor priorities and development agendas. Corruption issues, lack of transparency

*Problems:* Need for improved project approval and project reporting mechanisms

### **Local NGOs:**

*Strengths:* Includes wide range of civil society actors (local NGOs, mass organizations, socio-professional organizations, interest groups, etc.) Independence, diversity, flexibility. Excellent knowledge of local needs and resources, “with the people”

*Weaknesses:* Human resource capacity remains limited. Extremely limited financial resources. Unclear status vis-à-vis governments. Often excluded from government programming

*Problems:* Insecure funding base, difficult to plan without longer-term guarantee of financial resources. Governments often suspicious of local NGOs. Lack of comprehensive NGO laws and registration procedures, etc.

### **International NGOs:**

*Strengths:* Solid international experience in many sectors, including disaster relief, provision of basic services, community organization, training and technical assistance, research and information exchange, networking, development education, advocacy, etc. Credibility and “name brand”, solid commitment to sustainable development and pro-poor development. Ability to mentor and support local or community-based groups. Willingness to experiment and take developmental risks. Can serve as “watch dog” for both Governments and funding agencies

*Weaknesses:* Sometimes limited capacity for complex projects. Sometimes limited capacity to scale-up successful development initiatives. Often short project cycles, including funding uncertainties. Can be dogmatic, or more interested in “progressive” advocacy/rhetoric than on-the-ground development

*Problems:* Continued uncertainty re: longer-term funding. Unclear government registration procedures and coordination mechanisms. Visa approvals. Access to senior government decision-makers (sometimes)

### **Funding Agencies:**

*Strengths:* \$\$\$\$ Knowledge, best practices, technical resources and skills. Claim a clear development vision (i.e. know what want to accomplish). Part of established development networks (e.g. partnerships with other donors). Can command attention of governments (policy dialogue, conditionality)

*Weaknesses:* Arrogance and insensitivity (sometimes). May not know real, “on the ground” situation (i.e. too HQ bound). Inflexible programming timeframes and procedures and overly complicated funding requirements. Fickle development agendas including lack of long-term commitment to longer-term development processes

*Problems:* Funding cycles, no longer-term guarantee of financial resources for specific development activities. Increased competition for scarce development resources

A final working session was devoted to **policy and other recommendations**, as follows:

### **Governments**

Governments need to establish clear development and sectoral priorities, and should be prepared to refuse or re-direct funding proposals that do not correspond to identified priority needs. Governments should provide clear guidelines for the operation of local and international NGOs, including NGO laws, decrees, and regulations, clearly defined registration procedures, and meaningful project/programme reporting procedures and timeframes. Governments need to establish clear coordination mechanisms as focal points for donor agencies and NGOs, including vis-à-vis line Ministries (“one stop service” for donor/NGO coordination); such coordinating mechanism should have the capacity to analyze NGO work, to provide information and support, as well as to monitor disbursements, etc. All partners/stakeholders should give more attention to development impact (as opposed to disbursement figures). Governments should encourage the establishment of local NGOs and other civil society organizations to promote national development

## Funding Agencies

Funding agencies, particularly large bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, should be more sensitive and responsive to national processes, including meaningful support to the development of national strategies and approaches (i.e. less donor-driven development). Funding agencies should provide clearer guidelines as to the nature of their funding programmes, including what they will or will not fund. Funding agencies also should, to the maximum extent, simplify their funding proposal requirements, particularly for local NGOs. Funding agencies should try to be more flexible, and provide more “seed money” to promote a wider range of development experience. Funding agencies should encourage more, and more effective participation by NGOs and other civil society voices in the development process. Funding agencies should give more attention to the recurrent or operations and maintenance costs of development initiatives to ensure longer-term sustainability. Funding agencies (including international NGOs) should attempt to reduce their administrative and overhead costs so as to direct more funding to field-level development activities

## Other Recommendations

Corruption compromises the achievement of poverty alleviation as well as sustainable development. It thus was agreed that all stakeholders must strive for maximum transparency and all development partners should pledge to reduce corruption in all development activities.

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## Mass Organizations and Local NGOs

Mass organizations and local NGOs must ensure that they have clear organizational mandates (e.g. mission statements) as well as transparent organizational structures (e.g. Boards of Directors or other advisory bodies, membership regulations). Local NGOs need to further develop their capacities with respect to project identification, project proposal preparation, project monitoring, reporting, and evaluation. Local NGOs and other civil society organizations need to actively assist Governments in developing clear policies/laws/decrees/guidelines with respect to the establishment and operation of local/civil society groups

## International NGOs

International NGOs should attempt to engage Governments as well as other partners in more dialogue and consultation to ensure shared understanding of development priorities, policies, and initiatives. International NGOs should continue to foster the establishment and development of local NGOs through seed funding, mentoring, and other partnerships. International NGOs (and funding agencies) should do more to promote “best practices”, as well as to indicate development “failures” or “what didn’t work and why” – sharing of development experience. International NGOs (and funding agencies) must continue to focus on capacity building at all levels (i.e. provincial/district as well as central level), including follow-up or refresher training as well as study tours for policy-makers and technical-level staff (regional study tours, or “best practice” rather than “development tourism”)



above: Processes of Developing Funding group

left: Private Investment, Trade and Tourism group

# Services for and with Persons with Disabilities

## Weaknesses:

- Access to services & information
- Lack of professionals
- Public awareness and advocacy
- Lack of capacity
- Budget limitations
- Lack of coordination

—CDPO, HI, AmCross, provide counseling. Other activities include database collection, education for children with disabilities, for the blind & deaf, and disability awareness raising.

- Gaps in services
- Lack of services & programs
- Needs of some people with disabilities just aren't met
- Lack of data, both qualitative and quantitative
- Lack of technical and financial support
- Lack of long term plans of action
- Income generation opportunities for some groups are still limited
- Legislation is not there

**Causes of disabilities:** malnutrition; communicable diseases; accidents, including violence; pre & post-natal; war.

## Primary Issues and Solutions:

- Similar causes of disabilities: war, traffic accidents, etc. —

need improved public health care services, public awareness campaigns and improved nutrition.

- High rate of disabilities and great need for rehabilitation — need to expand service networks, and actively involve people with disabilities.
- Stigma, lack of awareness, lack of access: promote existing services, improve IEC campaign.
- Lack of financial support — need cost effective use of existing funds, donor consideration and government aid.
- Implementation of legislature is limited, which means that improved monitoring and supervision systems are necessary, as is regional and international integration.
- Lack of capacity building cooperation means that continuing education, strengthening coordination bodies and better information sharing is necessary.

## Recommendations:

1. Active involvement of people with disabilities in all activities.
2. Improve government commitment.
3. Build fundraising capacity among project staff.
4. Cooperation between three countries & the region & internationally, especially in information and experience sharing, study visits, workshops, seminars and association exchanges.

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above: *Services for People with Disabilities group*



right: *Trafficking of Women and Children group*

# Trafficking of Women and Children

## General Comments:

- Causes of trafficking and migration include push factors (poverty, violence, unemployment, war or social conflict), pull factors (economic disparity – rural, urban, and international), and vulnerability to exploitation (lack of education, lack of awareness of trafficking dangers, corruption within law enforcement agencies, concepts of materialism and of children as business or labor opportunity).
- Ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable.
- To preserve dignity, trafficking survivors sometimes tell only good stories of their experience. This promotes exploitation of themselves and others. Also, despite horrific conditions, some trafficking survivors stay in exploitative conditions in order to provide money for their family and save face.
- Identities of traffickers/networks are not well enough known; this needs more research and cooperation.

## General Recommendations:

- Improve quality of life in source areas through poverty reduction, education, micro-credit, skills training, extended health services, etc.
- Promote public awareness campaigns on trafficking and re-trafficking, tricks, routes, and what to do.
- Decriminalize work without legal immigration status; ensure legal protection for sex workers.
- Improve framework, awareness, and implementation of laws and international conventions relating to labor and trafficking (including clear definitions).
- Reduce demand by traffickers/customers through education, legal mechanisms, and public shaming.
- Combat the corruption that fosters trafficking through advocacy with senior government officials, improved reporting and transparency (which allows corruption to be identified and acted upon), improved salaries, and focus on morality and social responsibility.
- Learn from successes/mistakes in combating the trafficking of drugs; in particular, beware of driving local trafficking into control of organized crime.
- Develop effective international focus point for information exchange, strategy, and policy (include governments and local NGOs).

## Child Trafficking

- Ensure children are not blamed or punished during process to return them to their home areas.
- When detained, separate children from adults to determine

whether children are with traffickers.

- Ensure ways to care for children who have survived but lack a safe family with whom to live.
- Develop strategies in light of the fact that child trafficking victims sometimes become recruiters of other children, usually from the same family or home community.

## Migration, Repatriation, and Reintegration

### Comments:

- Migration is domestic and international, legal and illegal; given the global market economy and the urban / rural economic disparity, it cannot be stopped.
- Lack of identification documents complicates repatriation and discourages voluntary return, as victims fear punishment.
- Women trafficked for marriage are sometimes abandoned depending on the sex of a resulting child.
- Ineffective reintegration programs and deportation quotas encourage re-trafficking.
- Victims who are unable to return to their home country sometimes become traffickers themselves.

### Recommendations:

- Promote informed decision-making by people who may migrate - legal migration options, improved protection of foreign workers, and general improvement of working opportunities and conditions for all workers, foreign and domestic, in both source and destination migration communities.
- Advocate for birth and citizenship registration.
- Promote formalized agreements between governments and service providers within and between countries.
- Ensure country of origin is properly determined before returning a victim. Don't protract the pre-return period.
- Train police and immigration officials on trafficking issues.
- Establish more shelters to care for survivors before their return to home areas. Services should include psycho-social counseling, health care, skills training. Ensure period of stay allowed fits the needs of the survivors.
- Ensure re-integration is linked to sustainable livelihood activities to prevent re-trafficking.

*Facilitator: Janet Ashby jashby@gmx.net Reporter: Jennifer Cameron jenc@laotel.com*

# Women's Organizations and Priorities

## Agenda:

1. Equality across Gender
2. Ethnic Minority Women
3. Women and access to Education
4. Issues in developing women's organizations
5. Roles of women in economic development

## Recommendations and Priorities

- To work to ensure that all women know their rights under the law, and the possibilities and opportunities that are open to them. This will result in increased gender awareness across society.
- To work to ensure that all women are supported by organizations and NGOs if they wish to enter into politics, that all women are able to be active in the political processes, and that all

women are educated about political issues, and therefore are aware of their potential influence.

- To close the gaps in the provision of basic services, such as education and health care, between rural and urban areas, a problem that was common to Lao PDR, SR Viet Nam and Cambodia, and to limit the difference in access to these services between men and women.
- For women's organizations, local and international NGOs, and governments to work together to create sustainable income generating schemes, and to thus increase the economic empowerment of women.
- To build and improve the capacity of women's organizations to address all these issues both regionally, nationally and locally.

Contact Ros Sopheap, Gender and Development, [gad@bigpond.com.kh](mailto:gad@bigpond.com.kh)



above: Women's Issues group

right: sunset over the Lao Cultural Center, location of the tenth Forum Conference



## INDOCHINA RESOURCES

Asia Society and PhotoVoice present:

### *Unbroken*

An Exhibition of Hope and Determination  
Photography for the Advancement of Child Rights

A traveling exhibition of photographs taken by street kids in Vietnam and Bhutanese refugee youth living in Nepal. The work is presented with a focus on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

May 3-5, 2002

Asia Society, 725 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

Hours: Fri 11 - 9, Sat - Sun 11 - 6

For more information and to register for the opening night, please call the Asia Society Box Office at 212-327-9276. For other viewings, contact PhotoVoice at 617-868-1516 or write to [photovoice@photovoice.org](mailto:photovoice@photovoice.org).

PhotoVoice  
19 Oakland St. Apt. 1  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
[photovoice.org](http://photovoice.org)

### *Taking it to the Streets:*

#### International Street Photography

An exhibit of street photography and film stills from around the world will be showing at:

The Puffin Cultural Forum  
20 East Oakdene Avenue  
Teaneck, NJ 07666

April 7 - April 28, 2002

Opens Sunday April 7, 2 PM

Including work by: Trystan Bates, Rachel Banai, Liga Balodis, Amanda Hickman, Francesca Magnani, Meredith Arena, Maria Lau, Lara Reyes, James Lefkowitz and Leti Velasquez.

For more information and directions to the gallery, see [www.puffinfoundation.org](http://www.puffinfoundation.org) or call (201) 836-8923.



*Engine Repair* by Amanda Hickman, is in the above exhibit. The picture was taken in 2001 in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam

### Documentary Film: *Daughter from Danang*

Directors: Gail Dolgin & Vicente Franco  
80 minutes, USA 2002

Mai Thi Hiep (renamed Heidi) came to the US in 1975 in "Operation Babylift", given up by a mother (Mai Thi Kim) who feared for her daughter's safety and adopted by a single woman who raised her to be "101% Americanized" in Pulaski, Tennessee. Twenty-two years after their anguished separation, mother and daughter are reunited in Vietnam.

Gail Dolgin and Vicente Franco's film weaves intimate and sometimes painful moments into a complex portrait of one of the lesser-examined tragedies of war - innocents on the sidelines, whose wounds are often invisible but whose loss continues to grow. Well-crafted and beautifully shot, the documentary won this year's Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary at Sundance.

PBS' American Experience will air the film in early 2003. It is now showing at the following film festivals:

April 4-7 - DoubleTake - Durham, NC  
April 5-20 - Minneapolis/St. Paul Film Festival  
April 8 & 9 - Philadelphia International Film Festival  
April 11 - Chicago Asian American Film Festival  
April 11-21 - Arizona Film Festival (Phoenix)  
April 12-17 - Bermuda Film Festival  
April 20-30 - San Francisco International Film Festival  
April 30-May 5 - HotDocs, Toronto  
May 11-12 - Portland, OR

For more information contact: [daughter\\_danang@igc.org](mailto:daughter_danang@igc.org)



### *Bombies: A Video on Cluster Bombs*

*Bombies* examines the problem of unexploded cluster bombs through the personal experiences of a group of Laotians and foreigners and argues for their elimination as a weapon of war. Unfortunately they are still a standard part of the US arsenal and were dropped both in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Directed by Jack Silberman. Produced by Lumiere Productions Inc.

57 minutes color, Closed Captioned, Grade Level: 10-12, College, Adult.

US Release Date: 2002 Copyright Date: 2001

ISBN: 1-56029-915-0

Bullfrog Films

P.O. Box 149, Oley, PA 19547. 610-779-8226,

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/bombie.html>

*An American in Hanoi:  
America's Reconciliation with Vietnam.*

By Desaix Anderson. Paperback - 296 pages (March 2002) Publisher: EastBridge; ISBN: 1891936034 \$24.95

"Establishing diplomatic relations with Vietnam was one of the more significant and least heralded accomplishments of the Clinton Administration. In *An American in Hanoi* Dexais Anderson delivers the first comprehensive account of this process with tactical precision and strategic overview. This book melds personal story, a case study of diplomacy in action, historical context, economic analysis, prognosis and policy prescriptions. Anderson's advocacy of engagement with Vietnam will provoke supporters and critics alike, thus serving the larger purpose of a national dialogue on a subject that continues to haunt the American psyche." - Winston Lord

*Government and Politics in Southeast Asia*

edited by John Funston 2001

ISBN 981-230-133X softcover US\$36.90

ISBN 981-230-1348 hardcover US\$49.90

Contains country chapters which provide a broad historical, social and economic setting for various institutions which it details, including traditional and modern governance.

Single country articles are available for purchase electronically at US\$6 per article at <http://202.0.149.29/index.html>, or email to [pubsunit@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:pubsunit@iseas.edu.sg).

*Persimmon:*

*Magazine of Asian Literature, Arts, and Culture*

*Persimmon: Asian Literature, Arts, and Culture*, a magazine whose mission is to bring to readers in the West original, lively, and informative writing on contemporary culture and social issues throughout Asia, has just begun its third year of publication. Each issue includes literature in translation, as well as articles on art, architecture, film, music, and theater in Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and Mongolia. There are also brief reports from a half-dozen Asian cities on current trends in the fine arts and popular culture. *Persimmon* (published three times a year, in February, June, and October) is available by subscription (1-888-6240-8653), and at newsstands and bookstores nationwide. For further information, including the table of contents of all issues, see [www.persimmon-mag.com](http://www.persimmon-mag.com).

**Vietnam Studies Websites**

<http://www.dei.gov.vn/VN/default.htm>- Database of Economic Integration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, containing policy documents and research reports

<http://www.vngender.edu.vn/> - Database of Vietnamese gender research and training, maintained by the Center for Family and Women's Studies, containing abstracts of research reports.

<http://www.dananguni.edu.vn/intro.vn> also

<http://www.hueuni.edu.vn> - the universities of Danang and Hue, including information about those universities as well as other useful links.

## FRD Office Opening Party

On Friday March 8 FRD officially opened its new office. FRD moved from the Interchurch Center at 475 Riverside Drive in November. Our new office, at 355 West 39th Street is on the edge of midtown, a ten minute walk from Times Square, Penn Station and the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Visitors at the party were able to see the new space, including the library which was set up by intern Martine Kalaw. More importantly, though, guests were able to chat with one another, eat regional foods, make new connections and rekindle old ones. Special guests included HE Ouch Borith, Permanent Representative of Cambodia to the UN, HE Aloukeo Kittikhoun, Permanent Representative of Laos to the UN and HE Ngo Duc Thang Deputy Permanent Representative of Vietnam to the United Nations and two First Secretaries from the Cuban Mission. Photographs taken by Andrew Wells-Dang, FRD Washington Representative.



### *Soul Survivors:*

#### *Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia*

by Carol Wagner, photography by Valentina Dubasky  
foreword by Jack Kornfield

*Soul Survivors* gives voice to women and children who survived the Khmer Rouge's secret genocide and the two decades of civil war that followed. The moving personal narratives document the lives of twelve people who stayed in Cambodia after the genocide and two refugees who came to the US as orphans, returning as young adults to help their country. Coming from diverse backgrounds, including a dancer, a doctor, a farmer, a teacher, a Buddhist nun and a women's leader, the survivors' engaging accounts demonstrate the strength and goodness of the human spirit.

Additional chapters describe how the Khmer Rouge came to power, the role of the US in Cambodia, the problem of six million landmines, the Buddhist peace movement, and how to help women and children in Cambodia. *Soul Survivors* includes a chronology of Cambodian history, a map of Cambodia, and an index. Sixty-five photographs draw the reader into contemporary Cambodia to witness the survivors' courageous work to rebuild their lives, families and culture. [see event listing below]

\$15.95, 256pp., Creative Arts Book Company, Berkeley, 2002

### *Civil War to Civil Society*

The author and photographer of the recently published, 'Soul Survivors', will discuss their experiences working with nascent NGOs and survivors of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime. Carol Wagner's presentation will focus on her interviews with women and children and their stories of genocide, war and the process of post-conflict reconciliation. Valentina DuBasky will present a selection of black and white photographs from the book as well as discuss her experiences working with Cambodian NGOs and as an official observer to the 1998 Cambodian national elections. **John McAuliff**, the Executive Director of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development, will give an update on the current state of democracy in Cambodia, the national elections in February 2002, and the hopes for a Khmer Rouge war crimes tribunal.

At the Asia Society April 17th at 6:30pm

Asia Society  
725 Park Avenue at 70th Street  
NY, NY 10021  
212-288-6400

### *National Human Development Report 2001*

Doi Moi and Human Development in Viet Nam

The National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities and UNDP have produced the first Human Development Report for Viet Nam the document has been published by the National Political Publishing House

It is also available online in Adobe Acrobat format at the UNDP Viet Nam website: <http://www.undp.org.vn/vnnhdr2001>

### *Another Vietnam:*

#### *Pictures of the War from the Other Side*

Book by Tim Page, Douglas Niven (Editor), Christopher Riley (Editor), National Geographic Society; ISBN: 0792264657 \$50.00

For the National Geographic book *Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War From the Other Side*, editor Douglas Niven helped select images by Vietnamese photographers. Niven will talk about those photographers and describe how their valuable, historic legacy came to light more than two decades after the war on Tuesday, April 23, at 7:30 p.m. at the National Geographic Society, Washington, DC.

A companion exhibition can be viewed in the lobby of the National Geographic Society headquarters building at 1600 M Street NW, . The exhibit opens at the Explorers Hall museum at National Geographic headquarters, Washington, D.C. on April 17 through August 2002.

### *Pacific Village Institute Summer Forums*

*Pacific Village Institute* (PVI) hosts forums for educators interested in deepening their understanding of Asian cultures and extending their networks and resources for teaching about Asia in US classrooms. PVI, a non-profit organization, creates collaborative, cross-cultural learning opportunities in Asia and the United States for high-school students, educators, and mentors. By facilitating meaningful exchanges between diverse cultures, PVI serves people seeking to deepen global awareness through direct experience and interaction at the grassroots level.

*Islam in Southeast Asia*—Over a two-week period, educators will have the rare opportunity to receive firsthand an intensive education in the contemporary cultural and spiritual activities practiced by some of the millions of Muslims living their faith in Malaysia and southern Thailand.

*Vietnam: Opening to the World*—Arriving in Hanoi, capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, this forum moves south through Hue and the former DMZ and on to Saigon and the legendary Mekong Delta. Throughout, the historical and contemporary relations between Vietnam and the US are explored in detail.

All Educator Forums are open to public, private, and parochial high school teachers, administrators, librarians, graduate students, and curricula specialists.

Contact: John Eastman, Associate Director, at (718) 786-5426, [john@pacificvillage.org](mailto:john@pacificvillage.org), [www.pacificvillage.org](http://www.pacificvillage.org)

### *Vietnamese Language and Culture at CUNY*

Mr. James Lap will be teaching an eight session Saturday class on Vietnamese language and culture through Queens College, City University of New York to take place in midtown Manhattan, beginning April 6, 2002. For more information or to register, see the Asian American/Asian Research Institute at [www.aaari.org](http://www.aaari.org), or contact James Lap at [AAHEC@hotmail.com](mailto:AAHEC@hotmail.com).

## PS...From the Editor

### People-to-People Exchange Through Government Filters

During the February 11 hearing conducted by Senator Byron Dorgan on the Cuba travel ban, one had to feel sympathetic with the uncomfortable position of the Bush Administration's witnesses (see [www.ffrd.org/cuba](http://www.ffrd.org/cuba)).

They and the Senator had just heard testimony on how the power of the US government had been directed against such dangerous travelers to Cuba as a grandmother who made a bicycle tour, a son of missionaries who took their ashes to the site of the Pentacostal church they had founded before the revolution, a competitor in an international Go tournament, and a professor who organized visits by people with a professional interest in colonial architecture.

Richard Newcomb, the director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the Treasury Department observed that, "This workload is an extremely heavy drain on finite enforcement and legal resources... At this time, we devote approximately 5 percent of our budget and seven full-time equivalent positions to the administration and enforcement of restrictions involving travel to Cuba." Commenting that travel policy had changed as Presidents changed, he affirmed that under the Bush Administration, "OFAC remains committed to carrying out the President's mandate that enforcement of the Cuban embargo be enhanced under current law."

*If Newcomb did not appeal to Congress to get OFAC out of the business of implementing these restrictions so it could concentrate on more important work, his testimony certainly provided good practical reasons to do so.*

He was followed by James Carragher, a professional Foreign Service Officer who now serves as the State Department's Coordinator for Cuban Affairs. One hopes that Mr. Carragher like many other people in the Department knows the current policy is counterproductive to its expressed goals but that he is obligated by his job to try to make a purse out of a sow's ear.

Particularly tenuous were his efforts to find distinctions in forms of travel: "One important tool to achieve that goal is engagement between people, outreach by everyday Americans to everyday Cubans. Outreach introduces the best of the United States to the Cuban people, supports the development of civil-society institutions, and brings alternative points of view to the island. However, travel outside the authority of the Cuban assets control regulations does not contribute to outreach or to our policy goal in Cuba."

Senator Dorgan pressed for his justification of the difference with US policy on travel to China and Vietnam. Carragher's response was to argue that, "the tourism industry in Cuba is under the control obviously of the government of Cuba, and part of the...foreign policy goals of the president vis-a-vis Cuba...is to minimize the flow of hard currency to the government in Cuba." Since the "Communist" governments of China and Vietnam obviously also benefit from such flows, Carragher's ultimate distinction was classical circular reasoning. The situation is different because "legislation prohibits strictly tourism travel to Cuba." Intentionally or not, he issued an invitation for Congress to change that.

Carragher also offered another opening for Congressional initiative, "I would submit that the outreach possibilities, which are currently licensable under current legislation, enable us to [bring to the Cuban people the currents of freedom] relatively effectively. **We certainly could — and always can — achieve even more effective outcomes.** (*emphasis added*) But outreach and introducing new ideas, new currents of thought, alternative ideas to Cuba, is very much in this Administration's interests, I believe, and very much in US interests."

*I marvel at the hypocrisy of denying Americans' freedom for the presumed purpose of enhancing the freedom of Cubans. More pragmatically, limiting travel to OFAC licensed providers, while insisting on programmed visits in which participants are always engaged with the approved purpose for their trip, minimizes opportunities for spontaneous unsupervised encounters which are presumably the goal of people-to-people exchange. Opponents of Cuba are prone to overstate the authoritarian dimensions of its government, but if they believe their own words, one would think the last thing they would want to do is force American visitors into preset channels which by their nature will also be most easily influenced by Cuban official agendas.*

—John McAuliff

## Resources for FRD

If you are in the happy situation of possessing stocks with substantial value above purchase price, did you know that by donating them to FRD or a similar 501(c)3 organization you receive full tax benefit of their value on the date of donation but we pay no capital gains when they are sold to support our work?

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Vietnam Museum of Ethnology catalogue, \$25

National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities Directory, \$4

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