



MEKONG PLUS!  
&  
Việt Nam plus  
community  
development

## Computers in the villages!

Paradox: while Vietnam enjoys a much higher education level than many countries with a similar level of income, the gap between the large towns and the rural areas is huge. There is an abyss between the expensive schools in Saigon or Hà-Nôi, and the others in the villages<sup>1</sup>. Besides, education is expensive, right from the creche! Rural schools are so weak that for their students, university is almost beyond reach, one must finish high school in a large town. This is very costly, up to 50 euros/month, equivalent to 2 times a poor family's budget! Those who have not enough savings, sell their land... We are a small NGO, to have a good impact one must be selective, and focus on what one can do better than others.



*Queuing for registration!*

This is the rationale behind the computer program! A student who has the certificate A in computer science gets an extra 2 points, over a total of 30 at the end of high school. But... there are no computers in rural schools! The government has set a professional training centre in Dúc Linh (where we have been working for the last 6 years), but of course for the many children who live 30 km away, access is impossible, especially for the girls. Anyway it is fully booked and expensive.

Mekong Plus and Việt Nam Plus have thus equipped a number of schools with second hand computers, 5 for the price of 1 new. With 1500 euros one school is equipped with 10 computers, tables, a current stabilizer and training for 2 local technicians. The students register in large numbers, the computers are busy 10 hours/day, 7 days/week. Each such centre trains 150 students for 6 months, in groups of 10 to 20. They pay 5 euros against 10 euros in the government professional school. And the school is never far.



*The great day: exam!*

We put the priority for the poor: a contract is signed with each school, at least 10% of the children must come from the very poor families, therefore the teachers must encourage them to register, and provide the training for free.

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<sup>1</sup> Certain schools have their gold book: the parents who wish to put their child n this school must commit a certain amount of money. Upon the opening of the school year, the school chooses the children whose parents have committed the largest amount!

This seems so different from the usual clichés about development programs! But to get out of poverty, the peasants must find other jobs, the modernization of agriculture half of them will have to leave agriculture. And without a degree, one can hardly find a job paid 1-2 euros/day. So, to help the rural people, one must help them to leave the farm. All costs well counted, Mekong Plus provides 1,5 euro per child, he himself pays 5 euros. The teachers have an extra job. Everybody is happy.

For the fun, a competition was organized last Sunday, Mekong Plus has asked them to work on different topics related to health, the environment etc. Great excitement, stimulation guaranteed for the hundreds of students registered in the course!

Bernard, assisted by Thân  
Dúc Linh, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005

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Việt Nam Plus (France) and Mekong Plus (Belgium) develop joint programs in Vietnam with local partners and other NGOs. Mekong Plus works in Cambodia as well. Funding of the programs is made possible thanks to your support as well as with funds from institutional sources. You may also give us email addresses of new people.

Your questions, encouragements, supports are most welcomed! Come in contact with us:

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