
VietHope Newsletter

Summer Issue V

June 2005

VietHope is a non-profit organization dedicated to Vietnam's socioeconomic development. We at VietHope believe that the wealth of Vietnam lies in its human capital and its prosperity is dependent on the harnessing of this human capital. As such, we believe that good education is indispensable to Vietnam's growth and future.

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WORD FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

by *Nam Tran Nguyen*

Dear friends,

Since our last newsletter, VietHope has undergone a number of exciting changes. I am both proud and excited to convey to you our accomplishments and challenges as well as the optimism that we feel for the future of VietHope.

Earlier this year, VietHope hosted its second annual retreat. The retreat was an opportunity for members to meet, "catch-up" in person, and talk strategically about VietHope. During the event, members enjoyed a day of skiing in the mountains of New Hampshire and many hours of discussion on VietHope's current progress and future direction. The discussion dealt with key organizational and strategic issues and laid out our goals for 2005 and long-term goals to be achieved by 2007, which marks VietHope's 5th year anniversary.

In 2004, VietHope focused primarily on improving our internal organization and making ourselves operationally more efficient. We worked to improve the communication line within our organization, create a process for better data management and establish stronger relationships with our donors/sponsors/supporters. We are very proud about our accomplishments in 2004 and hope to use the momentum to drive results for 2005.

By focusing on our internal operations in 2004, we feel we now have a strong platform to ramp up our programs and projects.

Our core goals for 2005 are straightforward: (1) double the size of Scholarship A Program (50 scholarships by the end of 2005) (2) increase the University Scholarship Program (USP) by 6-fold and (3) establish a good working relationship with a new local partner in Vietnam. We have spent the majority of 2005 building the relationships with partners and establishing internal processes to achieve these goals; and, we feel confident that these goals will be achieved.

VietHope believes that a well-established scholarship platform is a key element to our long-term strategy. We will continue building our scholarship programs in order to establish a strong and robust platform that would significantly contribute towards our goal of improving access to education for under-privileged students. We are excited at the challenges and the opportunities and believe that with your support, we can achieve these goals.

Thank you for your continued support...we look forward to a great 2005!

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Ways to Support VietHope:

VietHope welcomes anyone who shares our mission. There are a number of ways in which you can support VietHope.

Donations to the Scholarship Program:

Sponsor a child's education for \$10/month

Become a donor by donating a flexible amount

Donate to other VietHope projects

VietHope Membership:

Membership fees cover any shortages in funding for VietHope projects and to cover operations expenses.

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UPDATES ON VIETHOPE PROJECTS

The University Scholarship Program

By Anh-Hoa Nguyen

Last year VietHope launched the University Scholarship Program, which provided financial support to first-year college students from rural areas who demonstrated both financial difficulties and great academic potential. In the first year of the program we awarded scholarships to five promising first-year college students from the Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and the University of Foreign Trade. Each student received \$250 for the academic year, which covered their tuition, fees, and books.

VietHope will expand the program to universities in both southern and central provinces in the 2005-2006 academic year. Twenty-five VietHope university scholarship recipients will be selected from the admitted first-year students from the University of Medicine and the University of Technology in Ho Chi Minh City, two leading universities in Vietnam. Another fifteen scholarships will be rewarded to students from the University of Science and the University of Medicine in Hue.

As always the University Scholarship Program would not have been possible without the invaluable financial support of our donors. We are deeply grateful for your generosity and hope that you will continue to support this program as well as other VietHope projects that aim to improve access to education for poor students in Vietnam.



Reading Room in Con En

by Lynn Huynh

In April 2005, VietHope has committed to fund additional children and general education books for a small library in Con En. Con En library was built in 1994 by Mr. Hai who wanted to provide children of Con En a place to explore the world through books. Over the years, these books have grown old and need replacement. He has made a request from VietHope to purchase new books in order to renew the children's interest in reading for enjoyment.

Con En is a small islet approximately 340 hector wide and is located in the middle of the Tien Giang River (population 4,000). The library is located in Cho Moi hamlet, Tan My district. It is one of the most remote and poorest hamlets along the Mekong River. The main source of income comes from farming and fishing. Due to the isolation and poverty level that this islet experiences, the children are forced to quit school after the fifth grade in order to assist their parents. Therefore, the library has become an important place for these children to continue learning through books and magazines.

General Information on Vietnam:

Population = 81.6 million

-80% of population resides in rural regions

-45% poverty level in rural areas

-71% of rural population without access to clean water

Gross National Income per capita = US\$430

Education in Vietnam:

Primary Enrollment rate:

Female = 90.7%

Male = 92.1%

Lower Secondary Enrollment Rate:

Female = 62.1%

Male = 61.3%

Upper Secondary Enrollment Rate:

Female = 27.4%

Male = 30.0%

Literacy rate = 94%

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ISSUE IN EDUCATION

Accessing Tertiary Education – A Key Success Factor for Vietnam’s Economic and Social Prosperity

By Uyen Kim Huynh & Uyen-Khanh Quang-Dang

Rapid economic growth has fueled the demand for skilled labor

Since the late 1980s, Vietnam has experienced rapid economic growth through a restructuring program known as *Doi Moi* which transformed the centralized economic system to a market-oriented economy and thus, bringing about changes in the supply and demand for skilled workers. Economic growth has created new job opportunities in the industrial, service and public sectors. An even faster increasing proportion of the workforce is in demand for professional and technical jobs. Industries across all sectors will require an equal growing trend of highly skilled workers in the job market. Providing better access to university and tertiary education and training for Vietnam’s growing skilled workforce is critical for developing economic and social prosperity throughout the country.

Building knowledge and skills

At universities in Vietnam, students are able to build skills of synthesis, analysis, and argumentation. They learn how to reason systematically about critical questions and issues, to place facts in a broader context, to consider the moral implications of actions and choices, to communicate knowledge and questions effectively, and to nurture habits that promote lifelong-learning behaviors outside the formal academic setting. Higher

education also allows for the opportunity for intellectual exploration across all disciplines which is essential for nurturing a cadre of self-motivated, responsible thinkers. Through higher-level education, Vietnam will contribute to its developing society by training a qualified and adaptable labor force, including high-level scientists, professionals, technicians, teachers, and future government, civil service, and business leaders.

Laying the foundation for social cooperation and networks

Higher education has many purposes beyond the acquisition of concrete skills in preparation for the world of work. Universities are the crossroads for social cooperation, which can foster strong networks, stimulate voluntary activity, and promote extracurricular learning and innovation. A university education contributes to the promotion of civic behaviors, nation building, and social cohesion. The institutions, relationships, and norms that emerge from university education are instrumental in influencing the quality of a society’s interactions, which underpin economic, political, and social development.

Short supply of skilled labor due to lack of access to education

However, achieving higher education for the workforce that is necessary for Vietnam’s growing economy remains extremely difficult for most students. Currently, the average student in Vietnam studies 10-12 years which comprises primary and secondary education. Most do not receive tertiary education after completion of high school. Of those students who are 18-21, only 9% are enrolled in higher education compared to 71% in the U.S.

Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life.

*--John Dewey,
Democracy and
Education, 1916*

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Vietnam's universities and other tertiary education institutions reveal low student enrollment and high attrition rates. The vast majority of college students is unable to attend or is forced to drop out due to the high cost of study. In addition, there is a large percentage of university-age students who live in such remote areas of Vietnam where access to universities is nearly impossible without scholarships and living stipends. These factors in addition to large cutbacks of government spending for higher education institutions have significantly affected Vietnam's potential for developing its human capital as well as its economy.

The costs of higher education remain the biggest obstacle. Until Vietnam is able to implement sweeping reforms to allow for better financing of higher education, university-age students must cover the total cost of study themselves. At National University in Hanoi for example, tuition and school fees for students average \$150/year, which is unaffordable for most Vietnamese families who have average monthly incomes of \$32 (even lower for those living in poorer more remote regions).

Increasing access to and quality of higher-level education is vital for a thriving society. Education in Vietnam will continue to be the most important socio and economic developmental tool. University and other tertiary education institutions have a critical role in 1) supporting economic growth strategies by providing the workforce with the required skills, and 2) the construction of socially cohesive societies.

Allowing the Vietnamese youth to fulfill its promise

Providing better access to higher education remains a top priority if Vietnam wants to modernize and compete in the global market, as well as, continue to be one of the

better performing economies in the world. The successes of the reform processes have created a confident and energetic generation of Vietnamese youth who are looking forward to a prosperous future. With nearly two-thirds of Vietnam's population under 25 years old, Pham Tat Dong argues that "the celebrated features of youth" such as "activeness, vitality, responsiveness to reforms, and bravery" would enable young Vietnamese to undertake and fulfill the "tremendous tasks" entrusted to them by the nation.

Investment in human capital through education will help Vietnam strengthen its economy as well as create a society of skilled workers which will be a leading force in bringing prosperity and affluence to its citizens.

VIETHOPE VOICES: THIS HOSPITAL WARD

By Kim-Son Nguyen

From the wide-open windows of the second floor of the hospital ward I stared out into the fog-covered bay, littered with limestone mountains majestically arising from the tranquil waters to pierce vertically into the low-lying white clouds. I took a deep breath, inhaling the fresh ocean air, cherishing this respite before turning back inside to visit patients in the AIDS ward of the provincial hospital of Quang Ninh.

As the only bilingual person in a small team of one local staff physician and HIV experts from Harvard Medical School, I did most of the talking. Our next patient was a twenty-eight-year-old woman, who struggled to sit up on the narrow, straw-matted bed upon seeing us. Her hair disheveled, her cheeks sunken, the woman started talking by telling us to save her son. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness in the room, I saw a little boy lying on his side across the foot of the bed, holding onto the calves of his mother.

“Please help my son,” pleaded the woman again. The local physician turned to me to stress that the woman, not the boy, was the patient we were supposed to examine. We found out that the woman, living with HIV for years, had been having bloody diarrhea and abdominal pain for the past week. Yet throughout the interview she insisted on talking about her son, downplaying her own symptoms. The boy had been complaining of visual changes.

“My son is going blind,” the woman insisted. After much prodding we managed to do a physical exam on the boy. His visual acuity decreased to seeing close hand movements only. “CMV retinitis,” Dr. K.,

one of the two American doctors, whispered to me, referring to an viral eye infection that affects HIV-infected patients. Left untreated, patients would invariably go blind. In the United States the disease would be easily treatable. In Vietnam the medication was simply not available. The boy was losing his sight, and there was nothing we could do. We proceeded to ask about the patient’s family. Her husband had died from AIDS a few years ago, and the boy no longer could attend school because the family could not pay the tuition.

“Please help us,” the woman said. We told her the differential diagnoses for hers and her son’s conditions. We recited the promise that antiretroviral medicine was coming. We did not tell that there would not be enough medicine for all the HIV patients in Vietnam. “It’s a tragedy,” Dr. K. again turned to me after we had left the room, painfully aware of our inability to help.

Many times during that recent trip to Vietnam I encountered families broken by the devastating AIDS epidemic, many people unable to escape extreme poverty, many children unable to go to school because of financial difficulties. Things many of us in the Western world take for granted such as basic access to health care or access to education are out of reach of many families in Vietnam. At times the problems of poverty seem insurmountable. At times VietHope work seems to be a tiny drop in the ocean. But having witnessed the many children living in extreme poverty throughout my trip, I strongly believe that our work is worthwhile.

While aiming for long-term effectiveness, VietHope knows that the suffering of the present needs to be addressed, that children need to go to school now, not next year, not

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for a
prosperous
Vietnam
tomorrow...

when so-called long-term reforms are implemented. Like a compassionate doctor, VietHope knows that its projects are humble compared to other much larger NGOs, but to each child, each family that we help, our help is tremendously important. We never lose of the big picture, but we always focus on helping each child at one time.

I turned back to the window opening into the bay. Out there the bay displayed all its magical natural beauty to the visiting tourists. In here, in this hospital ward, and in the homes of millions of Vietnamese families, poverty raged--unseen, unwitnessed, or uncaptured on any tourist's camera.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: VSA-VIETHOPE ALLIANCE

by Uyen-Khanh Quang-Dang

VietHope has joined forces with the Vietnamese Student Associations across the U.S. VSAs (Vietnamese Student Associations), found at universities across the nations are devoted to activities related to Vietnamese culture. VietHope will be working closely with VSAs across the nation with the following basic goals:

- (1) Harness the energy and talents of young Vietnamese university students to establish a network of people who are interested in contributing to Vietnam
- (2) Provide a platform for VSA members to participate in development activities for Vietnam
- (3) Establish long-lasting partnerships with VSAs to publicize and fundraise for VietHope programs and projects

The idea for this program came about through VietHope's efforts to increase the

manpower behind the fundraising initiatives that are critical to the success of our programs in Vietnam. We quickly realized the potential that lay in VSAs, as they are hubs of energy, creativity, and initiative—why not partner with these groups of young Vietnamese-Americans who share many of the same goals as the VietHope team? Combining forces could only mean greater benefit to students in need in Vietnam.

We are currently cementing relationships with VSA-VH Alliance Representatives at various universities. Our objective is to work closely with selected VSAs over the summer so that fundraising efforts can kick off next academic year.

LETTER FROM HO CHI MINH CITY

*by Hoang Thi Kim Lien,
VietHope Scholarship Recipient*

Ho Chi Minh City, 5/4/05

Dear VietHope,

My name is Hoang Thi Kim Lien, I am one of the five students who were very fortunate to receive VietHope University Scholarship for 2005. Exactly according to the name of the organization, "VietHope," this scholarship not only assisted me financially with my tuition, but also has greatly motivated me to excel. The scholarship helped me realize that in life everyone will encounter luck if only we strive to do our best.

We should not lose hope in any difficult circumstances, but rather live our life happily with an objective in mind. Because life is always filled with great and wonderful things and an opening heart that will always welcome those things. Do you agree?

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When I was in junior high school, I often dreamt that I was sitting in a lecture hall in a university where I would be studying. I imagined working in a city filled with life and energy where I enjoyed my job while financially improving my family's economic condition. This has been my driving force to struggle hard to achieve my goals. Today, part of my dream has come true. I am a first year female student and like many of my friends who first arrived in the city, we have encountered many challenges that have forced us to adapt quickly to our environment. Luckily, I became friends with Xuan who introduced me to the members of Nhiep Cau Xanh and through them I learned about VietHope's University Scholarship Program. Through the Scholarship Program, not only did I receive financial assistance, but I received another special gift—friendship. I am extremely happy to know members of Nhiep Cau Xanh and VietHope and be able to enjoy several good conversations with you all.

I am very thankful for the support and care you have given to me and to all the students who are struggling. You all have made us feel more confident as we take our first steps in our path to a higher education. Again, I would like to thank you, Nhiep Cau Xanh and VietHope. I hope that Nhiep Cau Xanh will always be the bridge that connects VietHope to the students in Vietnam.

Finally, I wish you all great health and success in your life and work. May VietHope grow stronger each day through your support of the students in Vietnam.

Hoang Thi Kim Lien

VietHope

for a prosperous Vietnam tomorrow

Donation Form

The objective of VietHope's Scholarship & University programs is to provide financial assistance to children in poor rural areas in Vietnam who cannot afford the costs of continuing their education. The students are selected on the basis of financial need, performance in school, and their motivation to excel. Your contribution will directly support the education of these children.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Please check one or several of the boxes:

- I wish to sponsor a child through VietHope's Scholarship Program. With my support of \$10/month, I will help children in Vietnam attain a higher level of education.
- I wish to make a contribution of \$_____ towards the University Scholarship Program.
- I wish to support and become more involved in VietHope's work by becoming a member for \$25.

**Please make checks payable to:*

VietHope, Inc.
423 Brookline Avenue, #199
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Signature

Date