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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

AGENT ORANGE IN VIETNAM PROGRAM 2012

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Agent Orange in Vietnam Program

Agent Orange in Vietnam 2012

Charles R. Bailey

January 28, 2013

Overview of the Aspen Institute Program

The Aspen Institute's Agent Orange in Vietnam Program promotes a comprehensive and sustainable response to the legacy of wartime use of herbicides in Vietnam. During 2012, we made further progress on each of our three broad strategies to this end: building commitment; providing oversight; and publishing timely reports. The current Program and its antecedents at the Aspen Institute and at the Ford Foundation can credibly claim to have contributed to important advances this year in Vietnam and in the United States. Especially notable were the Government of Vietnam's release of its *National Action Plan* for Agent Orange in June, the August 9th ground-breaking for the remediation of dioxin contaminated soils at the Da Nang airport and continuing discussions with the U.S. government on a multi-year Agent Orange strategy.

The Aspen Agent Orange in Vietnam Program also serves as the American secretariat of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin. The Dialogue Group was established in February 2007. It is a bi-national advocacy committee of prominent private citizens, scientists and policy makers working to bring all sides together around a humanitarian approach to ending the legacy of Agent Orange. The National Assembly's Committee on Foreign Affairs provides staff who serve as the Vietnamese secretariat. The Dialogue Group has two goals—to mobilize more resources for the ten year *Declaration and Plan of Action* on Agent Orange and to further mainstream constructive discussions leading to progress on this issue. To these ends, in 2012 the Program and the Dialogue Group took these steps.

Mobilizing Resources: The Dialogue Group and the Institute raised funds to complete a piped water system that brings filtered water to 259 households in Dong Son village in the A Luoi valley. The village lies near a former U.S. military base where Agent Orange was used during the war and its population has a significant incidence of conditions associated with dioxin exposure. The Public Private Partnership in Da Nang completed its first year, attracting support from foreign corporations and local government for an innovative program which is now providing services for all children with disabilities in a district in the center of the city. A second Public Private Partnership for children with disabilities was launched in Bien Hoa in October. The Program and the Dialogue Group also responded to requests from staff of U.S. lawmakers for their views on needs, focus and priorities.

Mainstreaming the need: In May the Aspen Institute published the *Second Year Report* of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin. The *Report* contains eight recommendations which together offer key elements of a long-term solution to the Agent Orange legacy in Vietnam. Health and disability services need to be expanded into the eight heavily sprayed provinces and the two dozen less contaminated dioxin hotspots need to be assessed and cleaned up. Both tasks are urgent. Dialogue Group Co-chair Ambassador Ha Huy Thong has invited leaders in the 29 provinces which were historically sprayed to give their comments on the *Report*. I spoke at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand prior to the August 9th Da Nang ground breaking and the Institute issued a press release the day of the ground-breaking to encourage the widest possible coverage of this positive and historic event. Ambassador Thong presented the *Second Year Report* at the 7th annual meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee on Agent Orange in Hanoi in September. In these and other ways, the Aspen program continues to promote the Dialogue Group's view that addressing the health/ disability as well as the environmental legacy of Agent Orange need no longer be a controversial issue.

The Agent Orange in Vietnam Program is located in the Aspen Institute's offices in New York and staff maintains broad contacts in the United States and in Vietnam. The next section of this report makes recommendations to the governments of the United States and Vietnam. The final section presents findings from Charles Bailey's December visit to Vietnam, his fifth and final trip in 2012, and typical of the program's breadth of outreach and activity. The trip findings also offer glimpses of the Agent Orange issue's human face.

Bilateral Relations and Public Policy on Agent Orange

In recent times, in part because of the work of the Aspen Institute and the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group, relations between officials in Vietnam and the U.S. have become steadily warmer and more focused on practical accomplishments on Agent Orange. This movement has accelerated since last August's ground-breaking for the project to clean up dioxin at the Da Nang airport over the next four years. The ground breaking is a matter of great satisfaction and celebration for Americans and Vietnamese, and a milestone in the relations between Vietnam and the U.S. on Agent Orange. Support, and even enthusiasm, for Agent Orange work has emerged and noticeably strengthened over the last 18 months within the U.S. Administration and the Congress. The Dialogue Group's *Declaration & Plan of Action* in June 2010 and statements by Secretary Clinton since that time have encouraged this view.

For FY 2013 the Senate Appropriations Committee has approved the highest annual allocation yet for Agent Orange in Vietnam. "*Vietnam—Of the funds appropriated under the heading 'Economic Support Fund,' not less than \$20,000,000 shall be made available for remediation of dioxin contaminated sites in Vietnam and may be made available for assistance for the Government of Vietnam, including the military, for such purposes, and not less than \$5,000,000 of the funds appropriated under the heading "Global Health Programs" shall be made available for health/disability activities in areas sprayed or otherwise contaminated with dioxin.*"

A senior Vietnamese official told me in December, “*We’re delighted to see the rapid development of bilateral relations: [President] Obama and the Congress have made some moves, in remediation[in] Da Nang and in research [in] Bien Hoa. We’d however like to see the U.S. government speed up—Da Nang is a good project... Our relationship is mature and we can talk frankly about war consequences.*”

And a senior American official had this to say: “*It [Agent Orange] is not a problem in U.S.-Vietnam relations... However progress needs to continue.*”

But there is not complete unanimity of perspectives between the two governments.

At a working level one Vietnamese official commented, “*We’ve shared our National Action Plan [on Agent Orange] with the U.S. Embassy and USAID when it came out last June. We did not table it at the September JAC meeting because the U.S. side would not have commented on it—no comment, no proposal, no answer.*”

An American official observed, “*In my own meetings with the Government of Vietnam I’ve been told that whatever the U.S. provides, there’s no end in sight for the needs of people with disabilities.*”

Nevertheless, the U.S. Administration has now formally committed itself to whatever it takes to clean up the dioxin at Da Nang—now scheduled for 2016. In the first quarter of 2013 USAID will release a RFP for an investigation of the dioxin contamination at the second major site of contamination, the Bien Hoa air base. I was told that it might be possible to assess the other 24 ‘lesser hotspots’ while work was moving ahead at the much larger hotspots at Da Nang and Bien Hoa. But the axiom in clean-ups—you never know what it will cost until you’ve finished—is proving to be true for Da Nang. In December the estimate for the Da Nang clean-up doubled from \$43 million to \$80+ million. For the Administration at working level there is more enthusiasm for the clean-up of dioxin contaminated soils at airports than for addressing other issues associated with Agent Orange- and particularly for addressing the possible impacts on people from exposure to dioxin. This enthusiasm will probably be sufficient to support the full costs for cleaning up at least the Da Nang and Bien Hoa airports. All in all, this does represent major progress and a major success for dioxin clean-up.

Administration officials, however, still appear reluctant to address adequately the health and disability issues that are the core of the Agent Orange legacy as perceived by the Vietnamese, the Dialogue Group and many other observers. The U.S. Senate-initiated idea for a ‘comprehensive multi-year plan for Agent Orange in Vietnam’ has stalled in the State Department even as the Vietnamese released their own *National Action Plan* on June 1st. In December 2010 USAID completed an external evaluation of its first \$3 million round of support for services to people with disabilities in Da Nang. A year later, in December 2011, it published a Request for Proposals for a new project worth \$9 million for “comprehensive and integrated services for people with disabilities” which is said to involve activities in Da Nang, Binh Dinh (Phu Cat) and Dong Nai (Bien Hoa) and a national small grants program. However the project has yet to be officially launched. This second round of American support does represent a welcome and significant increase in US expenditures on disabilities in Vietnam. But few would argue that it is

sufficient. And the delay in its implementation leads some observers to wonder if USAID understands the urgency of the needs in Vietnam.

Recommendations to the U.S. Administration

1. The Government of Vietnam's *National Action Plan* should be part of the on-going official dialogue on Agent Orange. The U.S. government should respond with written comments on the *Plan* as well as publish its own strategic plan for a multi-year effort on Agent Orange, as called for by Congress. This document could offer a framework for the contributions of other donors and become the basis for closer cooperation with the Government of Vietnam and Vietnamese nongovernmental organizations.
2. USAID should prioritize the heavily sprayed provinces, as called for by Congress. Design and implement a health/disability program with Vietnamese local government and nongovernmental organizations in the eight heavily sprayed provinces around Da Nang (Quang Nam, Thua-Thien-Hue, Quang Tri and Da Nang) and Bien Hoa (Dong Nai, Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc and Tay Ninh).
3. The State Department should seek out and actively encourage other bilateral donors as well as American and other foreign corporations in Vietnam to support health/disability projects through their development assistance and corporate philanthropy programs.
4. After nearly six years of appropriations for Agent Orange work in Vietnam the Congress should review progress and assess results.

Recommendations to the Government of Vietnam

1. Consolidate existing information on people with disabilities, their situations and their needs, for every district and province, beginning with the heavily sprayed provinces. Make it available to donors to inform decisions on programs and the overall levels of required resources.
2. Request the U.S. government to work with Committee 33 and the Ministry of Defense to assess and clean up the remaining smaller dioxin hotspots in Vietnam over the next 2-3 years. This goal can be accomplished at the same time that the U.S. and Vietnam are remediating the major dioxin hotspots at Da Nang and Bien Hoa at little additional cost.
3. Publish an annual report of expenditures on dioxin remediation, social services and allowances for people with disabilities, including those impacted by dioxin, and related costs. Such information would highlight the Vietnamese government's leading role in addressing these challenges and would help encourage a more generous response from U.S. policymakers.
4. Bring the Agent Orange issue before the annual meeting of the official Vietnam Development Forum (formerly the Consultative Group on Official Development

Assistance) to call for donors' support for health/disabilities projects in their on-going programs of development assistance.

Charles Bailey's Visit to Quảng Tri & Thừa Thiên- Huế provinces **December 2012**

I began my December 2012 Vietnam trip with a visit to Quang Tri and Thua Thien-Hue, two of the four most heavily sprayed provinces surrounding the Da Nang airbase. The purpose was to meet affected families, speak with local government, university and NGO leaders, assess work already underway and predict capacity to absorb additional funding.

The Office for Genetic Counseling & Disabled Children (OGCDC) at the Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy operates programs in early intervention and special education and a long term care facility in Nam Dong district. It also arranges surgical interventions (heart, cleft lip/palette) in eight coastal provinces from Ha Tinh to Binh Dinh and provides small loans to family businesses, scholarships, wheelchairs and vocational training in Quang Tri and Thua Thien-Hue. The Center operates on small but regular donations from individuals in Spain and other European countries, the U.S. and Japan. The German technical assistance agency GiZ provides a special needs advisor. I went with two staff from OG CDC to Dong Ha, where they are collaborating with the Quang Tri Association for Support of Vietnamese Handicapped & Orphans. We visited five families which the two organizations are assisting; two families are profiled here.



Tu (left foreground) was born in 2006 with a heart defect. His father, Tuan, is a porter and his mother, Trang, sells goods in the market. OG CDC and the Quang Tri Association arranged the two heart surgeries Tu needed. He is now active, engaged and in school and awaiting his third, and hopefully last, operation.



Thanh (photo on right, left foreground) was born in 2002 and is in 8th class in school. His younger brother is in 7th class. Both have stunted growth.

Their grandfather was in the ARVN and their father, Linh, spent 2 ½ years in the Peoples Army stationed at the Da Nang airbase. He is now a farmer and seasonal construction worker; their mother, Mai, is their full time caregiver. OG CDC and the Quang Tri Association are providing a loan and other assistance.

In addition to disability care providers and families I also met with senior staff in the Hue University Faculty of Economics & Development Studies and the Hue University of Agriculture & Forestry to learn about their work promoting economic progress in the remote, rural and heavily sprayed districts of Thua Thien-Hue. Their strategy is to introduce new market-oriented enterprises for farmers and to help them aggregate the small quantities from each farm to get better prices from wholesalers. They seek to lock in and spread these gains in incomes and productivity through training of trainers for agricultural extension workers in each commune. Hanoi National University's Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES) has also been pursuing a similar strategy to restore soil productivity and boost farm incomes in Quang Tri and Thua Thien-Hue. I spent a day with staff of the Hue University of Agriculture & Forestry visiting farmers west of Hue city enroute to A Luoi district where the University has established a Learning Center and farmer outreach program. These are some of their interventions.



Ms. De (left) lives in a house surrounded by producing trees—rattan, mango, star fruit, jackfruit, rubber and flowering acacia. She will replace cassava with more acacia so she can sustain more hives of bees. Each five hives produces 60 liters of honey, which she can sell for VND 200,000-VND 400,000 (\$10-\$20) per liter.



The University has also introduced farmers in the commune to guinea fowls (right) as a less disease-prone alternative to chickens. Staff tested the marketability for this new kind of poultry with restaurants in Hue city.



An official in Hong Tien commune of A Luoi district explains progress with transferring forestlands from state ownership to ownership of farmers and the commune. The University is advising farmers how they can benefit long term from their new asset while sustaining the forest ecosystem.

But disability remains a burden. These two heavily sprayed provinces have disability rates of 9.9% and 8.3% respectively as shown in the 2009 Vietnam census and both provinces exceed the national average of 7.8%. In December 2012 local officials, perhaps working with different definitions, offered lower estimates of the number of people with disabilities (PWDs): In Quang Tri 37,000 PWDs [vs. 59,234 in the 2009 census] and in Thua Thien-Hue, 29,000 [vs. 90,256]. Agent Orange victims were reported to number 14,000 in Quang Tri and 13,800 in Thua Thien-Hue.

Public Private Partnerships (PPP) & Other Donors

The Public Private Partnership (PPP) in Da Nang has entered its second year and has enrolled all of the 165 children with disabilities in Cam Le District in the Hope System of Care and 17 of the 120 young adults.



Catherine Karnow

One of the children in the Hope System of Care is Nguyen Thi Ly, born in 2001 with a deformed face, head and chest. Ly's grandfather was a soldier stationed in Quang Binh during the war. His two daughters, Ly's mother and her sister, are disabled. Ly's father is a bricklayer. The Hope System of Care has provided nutritional supplements and a scholarship for Ly, a new roof for the family's house and a small loan to Ly's mother to raise pigs. Here she is in school.

Two-thirds of the funding needed for this three year program has been secured from the Rockefeller Foundation, Hyatt Hotels and HSBC Bank. Da Nang officials are soliciting support from Vietnamese companies and Aspen continues to work with American companies to raise the additional \$235,000 required to enroll all of the remaining young adults with disabilities in Cam Le district in this program.

The PPP in Bien Hoa began in November with approval from the Dong Nai Peoples Committee and \$101,500 from the Asia Education and Friendship Association (Tokyo, Japan), Chino Cienega Foundation (Palm Springs, California) Grapes for Humanity Global Foundation (Longboat Key, Florida), and the Aspen Institute Agent Orange Fund (Washington, D.C.). In December, I met with an American company in Ho Chi Minh City with business interests in southern Vietnam. They are currently considering a proposal to join the PPP. It would be a tremendous advantage if a second bilateral donor with a hefty program in Vietnam were to join USAID and the Government of Vietnam in expanding services for people with disabilities.

Conclusions from Thua Thien-Hue & Quang Tri provinces

- The burden of disability in these two heavily sprayed provinces is significant. The overall numbers of people with disabilities show the scale of effort required; those numbers are relatively small, but the variance in those figures suggests that the FY2013 Senate

Appropriations Committee report language is wise to call for a disabilities survey as a first step in heavily sprayed provinces.

- Agent Orange victims are some 40% of the reported PWDs in Quang Tri and 50% of the PWDs reported in Thua Thien-Hue. A program focus on heavily sprayed provinces is likely to capture and include a more than proportionate share of the total number of recognized Agent Orange victims nationwide.
- We now have a known and tested three-part ‘package’ of services for children and youth with disabilities: surgery to improve mobility and rehabilitation at community-based centers; scholarships for inclusive education, special education, vocational training and school-to-work counseling; and family support through business loans and accessible housing upgrades.
- U.S. assistance in these areas could have a beginning and an end, no different than other USAID development assistance programs.
- Among the eight heavily sprayed provinces, Quang Tri and Thua Thien-Hue would be good places to begin when funds become available for health/disability programs outside Da Nang. As the trip report suggests, the two provinces have strong local leadership and robust local universities and NGOs.

Charles Bailey’s Meetings in Vietnam December 1-15, 2012

Quang Tri Province, Central Vietnam

Government Official

Phan Linh, Director, Quang Tri Department of Labor, Invalids & Social Affairs, Dong Ha

Local NGO

Duong Quat, Director, Quang Tri Association for Support of Vietnamese with Disabilities & Orphans, Dong Ha

Duong Van Thu, Office Manager

Visits with Families in Dong Ha

Thua Thien – Hue Province, Central Vietnam

Government Officials

Ngo Hoa, Executive Vice Chair, Thua Thien- Hue Peoples Committee

Đỗ Thị Minh Châu, Deputy Director, Department of Foreign Affairs;

Hồ Dân, Deputy Director, Department of Labor, Invalids & Social Affairs

Mr. Minh, Deputy Director, Department of Health

Mr. Hùng, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Environment

Hue University Department of Economics & Development Studies

Drs. Tran Van Hoa, Vice Rector

Mai Van Xuan, Dean

Tran Huu Tuan, Vice Dean

Bui Duc Tinh, Lecturer
Tran Van Giai Phong, Lecturer
Tran Minh Tri, Lecturer

Hue University of Medicine & Pharmacy,
Office of Genetic Counseling & Disabled Children

Dr. Nguyen Viet Nhan, Director
Huynh Thi Ca Tu, staff
Ngo Ba Phuong, staff
Kirsten Gruener, GiZ

Hue University of Agriculture & Forestry

Dr. Lê Văn An, Vice Rector
Dr. Ho Trung Thong, Vice Dean
Nguyen Thi Loc (animal nutrition)
Ho Tan Duc (animal husbandry)
Le Nhu Cuong (crop protection)
Dao Thi Phuong (animal science)
Nguyen Phi Nam (aquaculture)
Le Thai Hung (forestry)
Dao Thuy Hanh (crop science)
Ngo Tung Duc (forestry)

Da Nang

Government Officials

Dr. Luong Minh Sam, Director, Department of Foreign Affairs
Tran Van Phi, Vice Chair Peoples Committee and members of Hope System of Care Project Management Board, Cam Le District

Children of Vietnam

Luu Thi Huong, Program Director
Hoang Ngoc Tuan, staff

Others

Mark Rasmusen, Chief of Party, Development Alternatives International (DAI)
Bui Van Toan, Country Director, Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH)
Dr. Enzo Falcone, President, Care the People

Ho Chi Minh City

Farra Siregar, Country Director, DuPont Vietnam

Hanoi

Government Officials

H.E. Ha Kim Ngoc, Assistant Minister and Director-General, Americas Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Nguyen Thi Hoang Anh, Desk Officer, North America Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Dr. Le Ke Son, Director-General, Office of Committee 33, Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment

U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin

Ambassador Ha Huy Thong, Co-chair & Member, National Assembly

Prof. Vo Quy, Member & winner of the Midori Prize for Biodiversity 2012

Dr. Do Hoang Long, Member & Director-General, Party External Relations Commission & DG secretariat staff

Vietnam Public Health Association

Dr. Le Vu Anh, Vice President

Dr. Tran Thi Tuyet Hanh, staff

Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Bich, staff

University of Social Sciences & Humanities

Nguyễn Đình Toán

Viet Anh

U.S. Embassy & USAID

Ambassador David Shear

Eric Frater, Environment, Science, Technology & Health Officer

Joakim Parker, USAID Mission Director

Swedish Embassy

Ambassador Camilla Mellander

German Embassy

Ambassador Jutta Frasch

Yiannis Neophytou, Development Counselor

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

Motonori Tsuno, Country Director

Chu Yuan Hoa, Senior Program Officer

Others

Michael Michalak, former U.S. ambassador to Vietnam

Chuck Casey, U.S. Marine Corps

Kim Ninh, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation

Greig Craft, President, Asia Injury Prevention Foundation

Am Cham- Annual Meeting & Dinner