WORLD HABITAT DAY

The first Monday in October is designated by the United Nations as World Habitat Day—an annual day that recognises the right to adequate and decent shelter for everybody, and reminds us of the collective responsibility of citizens of the world to support access to this basic human right.

The United Nations chose the theme of Harmonious Cities for 2008 to raise awareness about the problems of rapid urbanization, its impact on the environment, the growth of slums, and the urbanization of poverty as more and more people teem into towns and cities looking for a better life. In Vietnam, this is a reality that can be seen in all the major cities as people from rural and remote areas crowd into Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The ongoing economic transition intensifies the impact on, and liveability of cities with increasing water pollution; air and noise pollution; land degradation; loss of civic and public space and a growing housing crisis. All of those factors contribute significantly to the living and working conditions of people.

Habitat for Humanity in Vietnam recognises the pressing need in urban areas for adequate housing and shelter and continues to explore ways in which to work to best meet the growing demand of an urbanized poor population.

Message from the Director

Dear Partners

Thanks again to each and very one of you for your continued support.

The need was already great but with the economic downturn, the pressure at the bottom end will inevitably increase again. Timely then, that as a result of all of your support that the Vietnam program is growing at a rapid rate. Systems are now at a point where we are able to deliver high quality programs while at the same time maintaining genuine transparency and accountability.

Please then keep that support coming. We are in a position to translate it into lasting impact within communities of real need.

Have a great month!

Warm Regards
Nick Alexander
URBAN POVERTY IN HO CHI MINH CITY

To meet housing and development needs in Ho Chi Minh City, Habitat for Humanity Vietnam is working to broaden the focus of its program to urban development, to attack and mitigate urban poverty. In June-September 2008, HFHV undertook a broad scale mapping survey of urban slums and squatter settlements in Ho Chi Minh City. The aim of this survey was to gain a first hand understanding of the settlement patterns of slum housing in the city and to understand where the greatest needs are. A team of Habitat staff and volunteers from the University of Technology undertook a visual study of all districts in the city as well as a spatial analysis using aerial photographs and remote sensed (RS) images.

Estimates of substandard housing vary widely, however it is clear that slums are extensive and growing. According to the Vietnam Housing and Living Standards Survey (2004), 16.0% of households in and around Ho Chi Minh City live in substandard inadequate housing with very poor or non-existent access to water and sanitation. While, 17,033 households in Ho Chi Minh City are living below the official poverty line in 2008, the Department of Land and Housing estimates that over 300,000 people live in slum conditions. By this measure, the need for housing in Ho Chi Minh City is very great.

The mapping study identifies key districts in the city in which Habitat’s program could extend the greatest benefit. The Ho Chi Minh City program team are now working with local partners to identify specific needs and work towards mitigating urban poverty in those areas.

Did you know?

- The official population of HCMC is 6,650,942
- In 2000 the official population was 5,248,701
- 17,033 households live below the 2008 re-adjusted official poverty line in Ho Chi Minh City
- Over 300,000 people are estimated to live in inadequate housing in HCMC
- Between 15-20% of the urban population are estimated to be rural-urban migrants.
- The majority of the urban poor are migrants
WHAT A HARMONIOUS CITY MEANS...

To celebrate and promote World Habitat Day in Ho Chi Minh, HFHV coordinated an event with the English Speaking Club of the Youth Cultural House encouraging young students to explore the theme Harmonious Cities through an essay writing contest and a public speaking competition. The entrants submitted thought-provoking papers from a youth perspective and spoke eloquently about the elements that contribute towards the creation of a harmonious city. Common themes through all the entries included cultural heritage, poverty alleviation, environmental awareness and goodwill. The final held on 5th October at the Youth Cultural House attracted more than 200 people with the winner Mr Pham Ly Thien highest points for the speech contest and Ms Nguyen Minh Trang receiving highest points for her written paper. The event generated much discussion and awareness around what young people can do to contribute to the creation of their own harmonious cities and how to turn awareness into action.

In your opinion, what is a Harmonious City? Ms Nguyen Minh Trang writes...

Harmonious city is always the dream of any cities in the world. In order to become harmonious, the city must have agreements between men and society, between men and nature. For this reason, merely few cities all over the world are considered to be harmonious. As far as I am concerned, there are three main characteristics that a city possess to have to make its dream come true. Those are heritage protection, the poverty alleviation programs and environmental cognition.

Our society is developing rapidly and architectural monuments are modernized. Therefore, heritage protection becomes essential for a city to preserve its traditional culture and to make it differ from the others. For example, if you have a chance to visit Hoi An city, you will know why it is more prominent than cities which do not have historic architectures. You are able to figure out that the Chinese has lived in Hoi An by looking at antique houses with rare wood and panels engraved with Chinese characters, or you can learn more about Cham civilization when visiting My Son Temple. In addition, if traditional architecture is still well-preserved, future generation has opportunities to learn about their origins or how the city came into being. For this reason, children are able to know the history of their hometown naturally without learning by heart what are written in history books. To conclude, the first characteristic that a harmonious city should have in order to be stand out among the other cities and to help next generation learn city culture is heritage protection.

Moreover, poverty alleviation programs should be necessarily applied effectively because how can a city be called harmonious when the standard of living of the poor is low or the gap between rich and poor is still high? Poverty exists in every city and it is not easy to be reduced. However, if government officials, social organization and volunteers cooperate with each other, poverty is no longer a big problem to deal with. They should supply food, water, shelters and sanitation for those in need. Once poverty is lessened, the life of citizens is improved. Also, poverty can result in criminals. For example, people tend to steal money or food when they are hungry and have nothing to eat, or they can fight or do anything to hurt the others when their life is so miserable. As a result, poverty alleviation programs greatly
contribute to the improving of people's life and the criminals reduction in the city. That is why a harmonious city really necessitates those programs.

Finally and most importantly, advanced environmental cognition plays major role in helping city become harmonious. Everybody should have consciousness about protecting the environment. In Singapore city, for example, people are not likely to litter so the streets are famous for its cleanliness and a Green Transport Day which is held yearly by the government to reduce air pollution and traffic jams by encouraging everyone to go to work by bicycles. Once people care about the place they are living, their city can receive benefits that clean and pure environment provides in return. For instance, people who live in Singapore city are able to breathe in fresh air and they do not have to worry about going to work late. Consequently, everyone should take into account the environment and protect it by raising environment awareness in order to be able to live in harmonious city.

In conclusion, there are many qualities to evaluate an city. However, in my opinion, a city can be regarded as a harmonious city if it has three crucial characteristics: heritage protection, poverty alleviation programs and environmental cognition.

SOZO, a not-for–profit organization working in Ho Chi Minh City, celebrated World Habitat Day by donating two houses for needy families in My Tho City. By funding the houses and providing the volunteer labor over the week, Sozo helped two families access safe and decent shelter.
Up north in the Xuan Hoa District, Mrs. Men worked hard to support herself and her family by growing rice, and breeding pigs and poultry. But even with the long hours that she worked, her meager pay was just not enough as she has 3 school aged children and spends the majority of their money for school fees and on food. The family’s house had an old dilapidated kitchen with soil walls. The kitchen was once plastered nicely but with time and a leaky roof, it began to deteriorate and the family could not afford to repair it. It is not that the family did not want to repair the kitchen, as Mrs. Men stated “We didn’t have enough money for anything but absolute necessities let alone a new kitchen.” The state of the kitchen was so bad that Mrs. Men said that, “We couldn’t cook whenever it rained, we had to cook in the hallway.” The smoke from the cooking permeated the house and coupled with already unsanitary conditions, the family members, especially the children, continued to fall sick, including suffering from rhinitis. Adding to these difficulties was their ongoing struggle in rainy season with their yard, with no drainage it flooded regularly which allowed animal excrement from their animals and other pollutants to contaminate their water supply. Mrs Men’s family toilet did not have a roof which created unhygienic conditions and terrible odors. All these factors gave cause to Mrs Men to worry about the safety and health of her family.

Through the TYM Fund, which Mr. Men has had involvement for more than 10 years, she was introduced to Habitat for Humanity Vietnam’s Housing Microfinance Project. With a 6 million VND loan, the family saving and technical assistance from Habitat, Mrs. Men was able to build a new kitchen, pave the yard and repair the toilet. The health benefits for the family were seen immediately. The new hygienic toilet has also improved the family’s health by decreasing their gastro-illnesses. In addition, the family no longer has to worry about a contaminated water supply and nor has to breathe in the cooking fumes. Mrs. Men is very proud of her new brick kitchen and simply states, “Now my family has decent kitchen, thus better health.” She also looks to the future brightly and hopes to expand the breeding facilities of their animals to create a better income for the family.
Tien Giang
- A total of 1,452 families served to date
- Progress report for KOICA completed.
- A mid-year meeting was held among the Project Management Committee members on the project imple-
  mentation review and the plan for the last months of FY 09. Consensus on FY 09 plan was achieved.
- Training was held for 50 project partner' staff, content including project procedure (particularly the revised
  criteria and process for beneficiary selection, which focus on ensuring transparent and inclusive selection
  process); Project financial management.

Kien Giang
- 28 financially active poor families received new loans to improve their housing and WATSAN condition.
- As of July 31, 1,312 families (Phase II from Jan 2007) enjoyed better housing and WATSAN
- Both Construction Supervisors were trained on house costing system by Technical Services Co-ordinator.
- Final decision was made on Mr. Thach Thanh Minh who is currently Construction Supervisor of the KG Housing Credit Project. According to this decision, Mr. Minh will officially start his new position with Rainbow Village Project on 1 November 2008. Recruitment of new replacement is in progress.

Rainbow Village
- Site filling has been completed and the site is ready for construction.
- 38 members are active in the savings schemes for families.
- Eight community members are continuing production of woven mats for the ICF Grasslands Project.
- New school year opening day with 81 enrolments.
- Community training sessions have had good attendances
- Financing program to assist with viability of mat weaving project.
- Vocational training partnership with GTZ.
- Provision of additional community organiser in our partner organisation.

Ho Chi Minh City/ Dong Nai
- In Dong Nai, a total of 178 families served to date.
- In Nha Be, Ho Chi Minh City a total of 112 families served to date.
- A survey is being designed for Stage 2 of the mapping exercise. The survey aims to identify communities
  that HFHIV can work with to meet pressing housing and development needs in urban areas. It’s proposed 3
different communities ie urban, semi-urban and rural areas of the city.
- A customer satisfaction survey is being created for Dong Nai project. The population sample to be inter-
  viewed is 15%

Northern Program
- 25 families received loans from Housing Microfinance Project in Vinh Phuc Province in August, 2008; total-
  ling 163 families have been served to date.
- Prepared Baseline survey report for PROMISE project of Kim Lai fishing community in Hai Duong City
- Conducted baseline survey for FISH project of Dong Xa fishing village community in Binh Giang District, Hai
  Duong Province.
- Conducted training needs assessment in Vinh Phuc province and prepared IEC activities.
- Ms. Nguyen Thi Mai, a Vinh Phuc Project IEC Officer has started working voluntarily for HFHI-V since Septem-
  ber 22nd, 2008 before her starting date in October 1st, 2008.

Technical Services
- The second round of field-testing has been conducted in Tien Giang and Kien Giang Provinces for the User-
  Defined Costing System. Basic training has been given to the local Construction Supervisors, who will now be-
  gin to use the completed portions of this costing system.
- The Construction Standards descriptions and references have been updated to reflect Vietnamese
The first round of field-testing has been conducted in Tieng Giang and Kien Giang Provinces for the Construction Standards. Basic training has been given to the local Construction Supervisors, who will now consider the standards and provide feedback to management staff.

Five volunteers have been recruited for various technical assistance tasks, including: creating 3-dimensional architectural presentations of the Rainbow Village Project, research for the HCMC Mapping Project and translation of technical documents.

The Technical Services Department has begun talks with staff in Ha Noi for survey, design and costing assistance in the PROMISE Project.

Engineers Without Borders have agreed to provide 3 fully funded volunteers for out of RMIT to fulfil technical roles.

Volunteers Program.

- Application of new donation transfer procedure with three stages (50%, 30% & 20%) for love house building in Tien Giang to reduce burden of advance cost on partner and process the program faster. It was suggested to have an official meeting with TUFO to discuss and make clear the new procedure and to apply for Tien Giang love house project from now on.
- Organization of a volunteer social event to gather all former and potential volunteers. During this event, the orientation on Habitat’s missions, activities and job and volunteer opportunities will be presented to raise understanding on the organization to volunteers.
- First Aid training conducted.
- Boston College are providing 1 fully funded volunteer from December 2008 to act as an IEC specialist.

Operations

- Initial discussion and sharing about Habitat Values at work. The theme will be one of the ongoing discussions discussions at Monday meetings.
- Continuing process to create organisational culture based on continuous learning.
- The supportive collaboration amongst the technical team has been evidenced as the clear clarification of the roles and gradual breaking of cultural and professional barriers between local and expatriate staff.
- Initiation of process to integrate internal controls introduced by HFHI with those previously implemented by HFHV financial manual of HFH Vietnam. Feedback and Inputs are still being collected for finalization and approval before being officially introduced on December 01, 2008.
- Project based funding and accounting continues being embedded in the organizational systems through reporting, tracking, on-the-job training.
- Career development plan, Leadership development plan further developed in collaboration with HFHI colleagues.
- Set-up of the new server and IT infrastructure at office in Kien Giang.

Marketing

- Effectively organized and executed a program overview visit from Hosea Lai and Alfred Tsang.
- Agreed terms as sole Community Partner for Coldwell Banker Vietnam.
- Chevron Vietnam to donate a further US$10,000 to Kien Giang WATSAN program.
- HFHV website went live on the internet.
- Essay and oral presentation competition event in collaboration with the English Speaking Club (ESC) to recognize UN World Habitat Day 2008. Various multimedia involvement.
- Organizing a double platform visit from Mikel Flamm, Hiew Peng and Shala Carlson to showcase the PROMISE, FISH and Vinh Phuc projects in the north and carry out a follow up photo report on Rainbow Village in the south.
- School Program initiatives with several international schools in collaboration with Embers Asia.
- Successfully participated in the BBGV Charity Fun Run to raise program awareness, encourage volunteerism and raised VND 800,000 in merchandise sales.
- In talks with Liberty Insurance regarding partnership around micro-insurance for clients.
Special thanks to all whom continue to support HFH Vietnam

HFH of Cass and Schuyler Co.
HFH of Greater Los Angeles
Augusta / CSRA HFH
HFH of Lincoln County
HFH of Valley of the Sun
HFH of Jacksonville Beach
San Francisco HFH
Hartford Area HFH
Dane County
Las Vegas, Inc.
HFH of Greater Boston

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*Please note that the Hanoi office contact details have been updated due to a recent move

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