

Thai Nguyen CPR Newsletter - Dec. 1999

Over Population Causes Poverty In My Village

- Duong? Thi? Vu? -

Overpopulation causes poverty in my village. I was born and grew up in Dung Lai, one of the impoverished, mountainous villages of Bac Giang province. Therefore, I know well about the real situation of village life.

All my villagers are farmers. They work hard day and night but still live in poverty. Their incomes are low and mainly from agricultural production. Moreover, their products are affected by many factors like farming conditions, natural disasters, destruction of insects, and now, they are facing overpopulation.

According to the most recent census of the population, on average, each family has three children. But from the census of ten years ago, each family had an average of five children. 60% of families had six to seven children. 25% had one or two children and the rest three to five children. Now, 50% of families have one or two children; most of them are young couples. 10% of families have six to seven children, and the rest have three to five children.

The fact is that all resources are limited and not enough for people to be well-fed and clothed. On average, each person is supported with 12 kg of rice a month. About 20% of families do not have enough food to eat during the year and they have to cook a mixture of rice with potatoes, sweet potatoes or maize. Many of them are in debt year-round. The irony is that the richest people have small families,

and the poorest people have large families. Some families have to move to the south with the hope of a better life. Some children have to go to cities to make money for their family.

In large families, children are not well-taken care of and parents have no money for children to get further education. According to a recent survey, 7% of children have to leave school before secondary school. Over 80% of children have to leave education after secondary schools. Only 13% of children go to high school and just 2% of children go to university. Most children said that they have to stop learning because of their poor family and they needed to contribute to their family's labour force.

It is true that the population is increasing steadily while every resource is limited. Throughout the village, there are a few TV's and some motorbikes. There are often conflicts or rows in large families. Some parents force children to get married when young. Because of the population increase, along with low education levels, it is difficult for people to get out of the poverty trap.

So, the problem is how to reduce population to improve people's lives. The facts show that most people cannot stop bearing a lot of children because of religion and traditional thinking. Some people think they must accept every child that God sends them. Others think that many children die before they grow up. Therefore, they bear several children to ensure having someone to take care of them when they are old. Some men want to have sons instead of daughters, so they want to keep having children until they have sons.

As for women, they don't like to have an abundance of children. Most of them want to limit the size of their families but they know of no safe way to have fewer children. I think it is necessary that people are educated to have the right perception of the results of overpopulation. Couples should be informed and have access to safe, effective and inexpensive methods of family planning of their choice for regulation of fertility. Moreover, overpopulation is not only my village's problem, but also the problem of the whole of Vietnam as well as a concern of the world. Governments should issue a one-child policy that is bound to give their people a better life.

What Is The Thai Nguyen CPR?

- Nguyen Trang? Bang -

The Thai Nguyen Centre for Poverty Reduction (CPR), operating under Thai Nguyen University, is part of the Localized Poverty Reduction in Vietnam (LPRV), a Canadian-Vietnamese collaborative project to build the capacity of Vietnamese universities and community leaders for poverty reduction. The LPRV was developed and established by 2 Canadian universities (UBC, Laval University), the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi, and 5 participating Vietnamese universities (Thai Nguyen, Vinh, Hue, Dalat, and HCM City). The project will be implemented over 5 years, from August 1998-2003.

The Thai Nguyen CPR is located in the Department of Management Science and International Relations, Office of Thai Nguyen University, Thai Nguyen City. Because Thai Nguyen University does not yet have a main office, the CPR has only a small office on the campus of the Teacher Training College. The Centre serves as a place for meeting, discussing, and exchanging information among CPR members, as well as a place to receive visitors and collect information on poverty reduction.

*The Thai Nguyen CPR has 20 members, including 9 full-time members who carry out the CPR's main activities and 11 part-time members. The Director of the CPR is **Dr. Tu Quang Hien** and the*

*Program Co-ordinator is **Mr. Nguyen Khac Son**. All CPR members are professors at Thai Nguyen University and many are staff at various governmental offices in Thai Nguyen. The CPR has also established working relationships with other organizations and institutions concerned with poverty reduction.*

From the beginning, the Thai Nguyen CPR has implemented a step-by-step workplan based on the overall design of the LPRV, including the following activities:

- 1. Feb-Mar, 1999 - Based on previous surveys, CPR selected 3 communes for research: (1) Dong Lien, Phu Binh District, (2) Quy Ky, Dinh Hoa District, (3) Trang Xa, Vo Nhai District.*
- 2. May, 1999 - CPR organized 2 English classes for CPR members, beginning with a Vietnamese teacher for the first 4 months and continuing with Canadian Sean Corrigan for the next 2 years, sponsored by World University Services of Canada (WUSC).*
- 3. Jun-Oct, 1999 - CPR members made over 10 visits of 4-6 days per visit to local communes to establish collaborative relationships and conduct primary research*
- 4. Jun-Aug, 1999 - CPR hosted Canadian intern, Jason Morris (also sponsored by WUSC) to conduct research and share experiences with CPR members over 3 months. The internship has recently been extended until March, 2000.*
- 5. June, 1999 - CPR received Jim Delaney (WUSC) to visit and work with Thai Nguyen CPR for one day.*
- 6. Workshops on gender – CPR held 2 workshops on Gender Issues, one for 3 days in March 1999 at Nui Coc Lake, Thai Nguyen, and another with local officials in Dong Lien, September 21-22nd, 1999.*
- 7. Current activities – CPR is currently concentrating on commune-level research, for which they will be writing a summary report in the new year, and preparing for the international LPRV workshop in Nha Trang, December 16-18th, 1999.*
- 8. Upcoming activities – CPR will welcome Dr. Nora Angeles of UBC to work with Thai Nguyen CPR from December 9-15th, 1999.*

Poverty And Poverty Reduction In A Mountainous Area

- Nguyen Thu Quynh -

I come from Yen Bai, a mountainous area in Northwest Vietnam. I know about poverty because I was born into a poor family.

First of all, I want to talk about large families; one of the many reasons for poverty in my hometown. Vietnamese people think that a large family is a happy one. This belief has lasted for a long time. The first purpose of having lots of children is to continue the ancestral line, so people keep having children until they have a son. My grandparents, for example, had nine children. The second purpose is to have more laborers to work for their family. People don't realize that having more children will lead to a lack of money for them to study or even to survive. Therefore, the standard of living in these large families is not high.

Secondly, in mountainous areas there are many ethnic minority groups. These people don't settle down and they are used to a nomadic lifestyle. It is one of their customs. This means that after a few months living in one place, they move to another to find food. It takes a short time to grow trees and raise animals but they are poor because they don't have rice, vegetables, chickens and so on.

Thirdly, the land is very hilly in Yen Bai. It is difficult for people to cultivate land. People often grow rice on high mountains or hills but there is generally not enough water to grow grain. Therefore, they make small gains. There is not enough food for them to live.

In addition, people in mountainous areas often cut down trees for fuel. Many mountains and hills are bare. This leads to flooding. Floods are very dangerous for people as crops are affected and houses are destroyed, so people lack food and shelter.

Also, there are not many schools or teachers in my hometown. Many children don't go to school. They are not educated, and they don't have much knowledge of technology or society. They have no skills for business or many jobs and therefore they can't escape from poverty.

Hopefully, in the future, there will be no hunger or poverty in my hometown; there will be more success stories.

The Causes Of Poverty And Methods For Poverty Reduction In Vietnam

- Nguyen Thuy Giang -

Poverty is a vast social problem in many countries and worldwide. Men, women, and children are facing death by starvation in some parts of the world. For Vietnam, poverty is one of the main issues facing the people. There are many causes of poverty in Vietnam:

- *The first cause is from the war with the U.S.*
- *The second cause is from overpopulation.*
- *The third cause is social vices such as: drug addiction, prostitution, gambling and burglary.*
- *The fourth cause is natural disasters which happen to a developing agricultural country like Vietnam.*

So poverty reduction is one of the most important policies of the government in Vietnam. Poverty reduction means raising the level of the poverty line as well as people's living standards. The problem is how to implement that theory. The following methods will help to alleviate poverty in Vietnam.

First of all, we should understand and try to surmount the causes of hunger and poverty, reduce the population explosion and reduce the social vices that cause so many difficulties for us. These include unemployment, illiteracy, parents being able to afford to send their children to school,

and people being reduced to poverty because of gambling, drug addiction and so forth. These lead to the fact that people are becoming poorer and poorer. Overpopulation, social vices as well as illiteracy prevent the country from developing.

Secondly, poor households need to be provided with capital (money) and employment skills to improve living conditions. It means that we not only raise money and provide money for the poor but also we have to find a way to help them get out of the poverty trap.

People's living standards are rather low because of their low level of education. Therefore, another important method is to enhance the intellectual standard of the people. Improving the knowledge of the poor will increase their employment opportunities and help them a lot in industrialization and modernization of the country in order to reduce poverty and put an end to misery and to live better.

The most important and unshakeable method to implement poverty reduction in Vietnam is the combined effort of the government, its branches of administration, banks and the best efforts of the poor.

The Reasons For Poor Families In Quang Ninh

- Nguyen Ngoc Hai -

I was born and grew up in the province of Quang Ninh which is an agricultural and mining area in the North of Vietnam. My town has many factories, farms and coal mines, so many people are attracted to living and working there. They produce agricultural products, coal and many kinds of goods for themselves or for exporting to other regions or to foreign countries. Although my town has many opportunities for improving its economy, poverty still exists.

The town is influenced by old customs or much out of date thinking. It is believed that each family has to have a son and that a family without a son is an unhappy family, so they keep having children until a son is born. This causes overpopulation and the birthrate is rising fast. A family often has four, five, or more children. It is very difficult to find a comfortable life because they have to pay for food, clothing and sometimes the education of their children. Most children, however, haven't been educated. They are forced to work hard to earn money. This is true even for small children.

Furthermore, my town is in a mountainous area and there are some minority groups living there such as the Tay and San Diu. They live by cultivating farms, hills or valleys. The farmers do all their work by hand without modern technology.

There are not only farmers but also coal miners working very hard. The miners always work in difficult conditions but their salary is very low. The salary depends on their producing capacity which means if their boss has good contacts with other businessmen or other companies, the workers will have a salary and if not they will have to wait for a long time. So they work all the time but they don't have enough money for themselves and their large families. For this reason, they have to borrow money from their bosses or other rich men in order to survive. The miners become borrowers year after year and so the poor remain poor.

The government has been suggesting ways to improve the economy. I'm hoping my hometown will benefit in the future.