



Report to the Rufford foundation

Rufford Small Grant - for Nature Conservation

(Reference 17.04.07)

Pilot Tánh Linh waste recycling program -Vietnam

1. Mekong Plus

Bernard KERVYN is a cofounder of this organization. From the beginning the long term strategy has been clear: set up a strong local team, and as soon as possible, encourage the constitution of a local NGO. This has now materialized by the creation of Thiên Chí (see www.thienchi.org) which has taken over the Việt Nam Plus programs in Bình Thuận province. Another local NGO -Anh Dương (see www.anhduonghq.org) has similarly been created to take over the programs in Hậu Giang province.

In the meantime the operations have been extended across the border, in the poor Cambodian province of Svay Riêng, thus compelling the change of name from Việt Nam Plus into Mekong Plus.

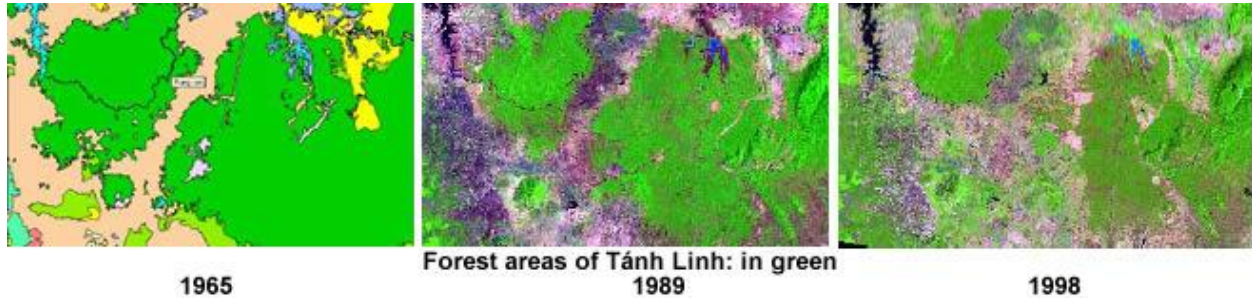
Mekong Plus supports Thiên Chí, which has taken over the Tánh Linh program last year but all operations are run in close cooperation. Mekong Plus is funding Thiên Chí, but Thiên Chí is increasingly finding complementary funding directly, without going through Mekong Plus.

2. The waste recycling program

Although the need for waste management and recycling has been identified as a priority by the local authorities as early as 2003, finding an adequate piece of land has been a serious obstacle in Đức Linh district, still unresolved. As a result we proposed the same program to the district of Tánh Linh, which boulder Đức Linh, and this is where the pilot has been implemented. In the process the land allocated by the district, although is located in a remote place with a bad road and no electricity, has been coveted by other parties, thus hampering the implementation for many months. The land issue is a sort of

paradox, because the program aims at reducing the waste in large proportions, thus alleviating the pressure on land in the region.

The pressure on land can be illustrated by the quickly receding forests:



(from: <http://www.geoinfo.com.vn/UserFiles/File/Cac%20cong%20trinh/1.pdf>)

The waste recycling program should make a significant contribution to protect the land and forests of the region.

The pilot program is now a success, it has convinced the district and provincial authorities of Tánh Linh, who have even allocated a second piece of land in another commune, 25 km away from the present site in Lac Tánh.

The program areas of Mekong Plus and partners, and the district of Tánh Linh. The 2 green spots indicate the location of the pilot site (south) and the replication site (north).



3. Achievements

While the program was well designed and looked quite straightforward at the beginning, it has proven pretty difficult to make it sustainable. The design won a World Bank innovation award for environmental programs (2005).

One difficulty has been the sorting of the waste. In rural areas of Vietnam the people tend to use whatever they can, as a result the proportion of organic waste, or useful waste, is less than in and around the cities: less than 50% in Tánh Linh, compared to over 75% in the small and rural town of Phan Thiết. Much time is spent for sorting the waste, while the final result is only for less than 50% waste.



The other disappointment has been the fluctuating market prices for plastic waste; the waste collectors in the region have quickly understood some plastic waste fetch a good price (0,4 € per kilo). As a result only the less valuable, or even the useless waste reaches the waste recycling site.



However demand for organic fertilizer is increasing quickly, and so its market price. The site sells at 1500 VND/kilo (0,07 €), which covers all expenses. The latter have increased due to the severe inflation in Vietnam last year (27% according to the government) and salaries must be increased to retain the workforce. We will soon increase our price to 0,08 € which will be enough to cover all costs and to allow a small increase in salaries for the workers on the site.



The volume of waste has increased and because we could only sort and recycle less than half the volume, the capacity of the Lac Tánh site has been doubled. The capacity in compost production will thus increase as well, from a little more than 5 to tons to over 10 tons/month. The second site will again double the capacity, but in phases.

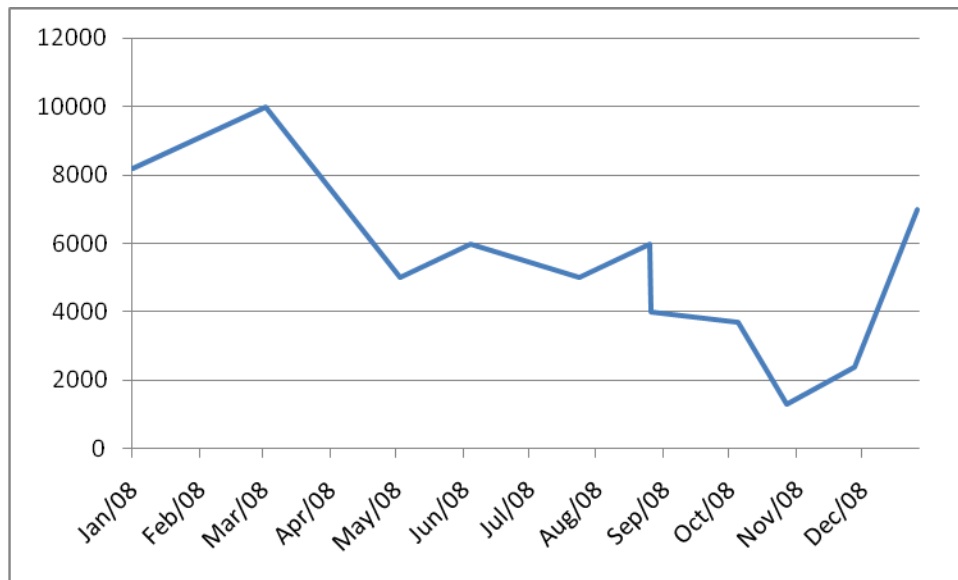
If the program is now technically successful and financially sustainable for its running expenses, its incomes do not cover capital expenses. Mekong Plus is constantly looking for additional funds to invest in new installations and expand the scheme. In and around town, the government budget is much larger, and waste management a higher priority; yet the vast majority of the people in Vietnam live in rural areas. It is not conceivable that rural waste be carried over long distances.

4. Financial report

We have received 5.000 GBP in July 2007. Mekong Plus had to contribute a large part to allow this scheme to be completed. During the 17 months (August 2007-December 2008) the expenses were as follows:

	In VND	In GBP
Equipment & investments in infrastructure	373.144.125	14.926
Research	20.147.000	806
Promotion with farmers	21.120.000	845
Assistance to the workers	2.700.000	108

Salaries and other running expenses were covered by the sale of compost. Sales are largely dependent on the rains and the agriculture cycles. Rains have been exceptionally long and abundant in 2008. Compost is mainly used for rubber tree plantations at the moment.



It is worth noting sales have not been affected in volume after we dropped the price subsidy increasing the price from 900 VND to 1500 VND. A new increase to 1700 VND will be implemented soon.