



Annual **Report** 2005

**act:onaid**  
international vietnam

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# abbreviations and acronyms



<b>AAI</b>	ActionAid International
<b>AAV</b>	ActionAid International Vietnam
<b>Alps</b>	Accountability, Learning and Planning System
<b>CG</b>	Consultative Group
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>DA</b>	Development Area (geographical area in which AAV works)
<b>DIPECHO</b>	Disaster Preparedness ECHO
<b>ECHO</b>	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
<b>F&amp;F</b>	Funding and Fundraising
<b>GCAP</b>	Global Call to Action Against Poverty
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>HROD</b>	Human Resource and Organisation Development
<b>ICT4D</b>	Information, Communication and Technology for Development
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>IPM</b>	Integrated Pet Management
<b>LNGO</b>	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MIS</b>	Management Information System
<b>MTR</b>	Mid-Term Review

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PLWHA	People living with HIV/AIDS
PRRP	Participatory Review and Reflection Process
S&C	Saving and Credit
<i>Reflect</i>	Regenerated Freirean literacy through empowering community techniques
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WU	Women's Union
Currency used:	
£	Great Britain Pound

# our vision

A world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys their right to a life with dignity.

# our mission

To work with poor and excluded people to eradicate poverty and injustice.

# values that we cherish and believe in

Mutual respect

Equity and justice

Honesty and transparency

Solidarity with the poor, powerless and excluded people

Courage of conviction

Independence

Humility

# Part 1: Overview





## Country context

Vietnam's achievement in terms of poverty reduction since the *Doi Moi* (renovation) reform process was launched in 1986, is one of the greatest success stories in economic development. The proportion of the population ranked as wealth poor fell from 58% in 1993 to approximately 20% today, and there has been a consistent improvement in social indicators, from education enrollment to infant mortality. While some regions and some population groups benefited more than others, Vietnam continues to reduce poverty considerably faster than other countries at a similar development level.

The “story” behind the reduction in poverty has changed over time. Earlier gains were associated with the redistribution of agricultural land to rural households, in a context where economic reform provided the right incentives for increased farm production. The gains from these changes have now mostly been reaped. More recently, the driving force behind poverty reduction has been associated with the creation of jobs for the young predominantly rural labour force. Increased income diversification has helped farmers reduce vulnerability to shocks. Many farmers who previously focused exclusively on farming activities have now chosen to run services or rural industries with potential for higher incomes.

Poverty reduction in Vietnam has been associated with strong economic growth and sustained by several reforms. Key strategies placed due attention on social policies aimed at keeping development inclusive, with an effort to build and improve governance. More recently, fundamental changes are taking place in the way the Government operates. For example: the 2001 Constitution which empowered the National Assembly in voting; a new Law on the State Budget, changes in terms of decentralization and devolution to



empower lower administration levels, and the new Law on Anti-Corruption. The recent 10th Party Congress approved the 5-year Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010, in which Vietnam made clear its aspirations to become a middle-income country by 2010. With a focus on policy formation and governance this is an important time for policy influencing in Vietnam.

Implementing reform strategies will not be without difficulties. On the structural front, the policy area where reforms are most advanced is in regards to integration with the world economy. Based on the current progress of bilateral negotiations, Vietnam is set to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) by the end of 2006. Accession to the WTO is a difficult process particularly for a developing country like Vietnam. Poor accession agreements could reinforce the danger of fewer economic

gains for the poor in the future and economic restructuring could cause a major loss of livelihoods. New poor and vulnerable groups may emerge. On the governance front, the abuse of public office for private gain risks making everyday life miserable when it happens at low levels, and at every level leads to resource misallocation and waste. When this happens, the poor and excluded people suffer most.

Though gender equality has made great progress in Vietnam and the emphasis on equality in Vietnam's policies have consolidated the principle of equality between women and men in society, significant gaps remain. Women are still paid less for equal work and are often denied equal rights to household property despite improvements in legislation. Women also face barriers to participation in public life particularly at the local level.



## *Large number of people living 'just above' the poverty line and vulnerable to shocks...*

**T**here are several issues that must be dealt with in fighting poverty and injustice in Vietnam. First, progress remains precarious in view of the large number of people subsisting on incomes only marginally above the poverty line. Economic shocks related to external factors, natural disasters or economic interdependence that comes with integration and globalization could force millions of households below or back below the official poverty line.

While the pro-poor nature of economic growth in the country over the last decade provides good reason to be optimistic, there are also clear signs that development is becoming less inclusive. Not surprisingly, the landless, bigger households, those with more children or with more elderly members, and women-headed households tend to be among the poorer or poorest.



## *Inequitable development...*

Second, the benefits of the reform process have not been distributed evenly across different regions and across all strata and segments of society. Emerging disparities have an important geographical dimension and according to the Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs (MOLISA), mountainous provinces account for nearly 70 percent of poor households. This figure is expected to increase to more than 80 percent by 2010<sup>1</sup>. In 2004, the ratio between per capita household expenditures in the richest and the poorest quintiles of the population grew to 12.04 compared with 6.03 in 2000. It is critical that there is more equitable resource allocation mechanisms, especially in the social sectors. State investment to date still favours richer regions.

While geographical disparities exist, it is ethnic minorities who have benefited the least from Vietnam's economic success and remain among the poorest. Without significant and drastic

changes, disparity between the majority 'Kinh' and ethnic minorities is foreseen to grow. It is anticipated that by 2010, more than two thirds of those living in hunger could be ethnic minority people. While poverty has fallen steadily among the other groups, it is fair to say that in the case of ethnic minorities growth will not be enough. Specific and targeted policies will be needed ranging from the redistribution of land, to the legal recognition of communal agricultural practices, to the development of social services in local languages. Also need are measures to improve the representation of ethnic minorities in local decision-making processes and building good governance in the most remote areas.

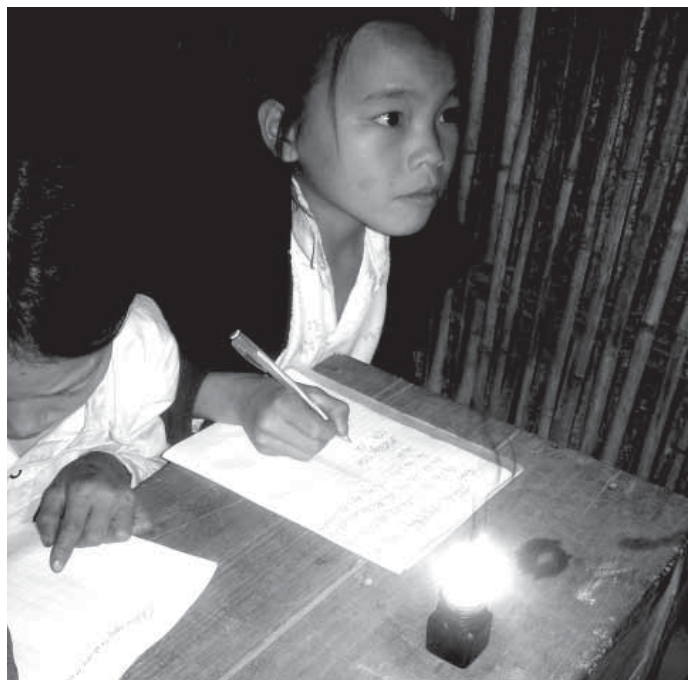
While poverty in Vietnam is largely a rural phenomenon, this is not to say that poverty in urban centers is non-existent or unimportant. As rural-urban migration is likely to accelerate, there are clear links between rural and urban poverty and rural-urban migrants a

*1. MOLISA- National Poverty Reduction Target Programmes Report, 2004*

potentially vulnerable group. The insufficient development of urban infrastructure, restricted access to social services in the case of unregistered migrants, and the absence of strong social networks characteristic of Vietnamese “villages”; may keep many migrants in poverty and unable to claim their basic rights.

In addition to ethnic minority groups and migrating and migrated people (including people who have been trafficked), people living with HIV and AIDS, and commercial sex workers are also found to be among the most vulnerable to poverty and to an inability to claim their basic rights. Within all of these groups as well as in general, women and children are found to be particularly vulnerable for a number of reasons. As these groups have benefited and are expected to benefit the least from current development they must be the target of any intervention.

Increasingly, landless farmers are deemed to be an emerging poor and vulnerable group. The un-affordability to invest in seemingly unprofitable rice production and other risky farming activities, as well as rapid urbanization has forced many farmers into vulnerable situations.



## *Unequal access to social services....*

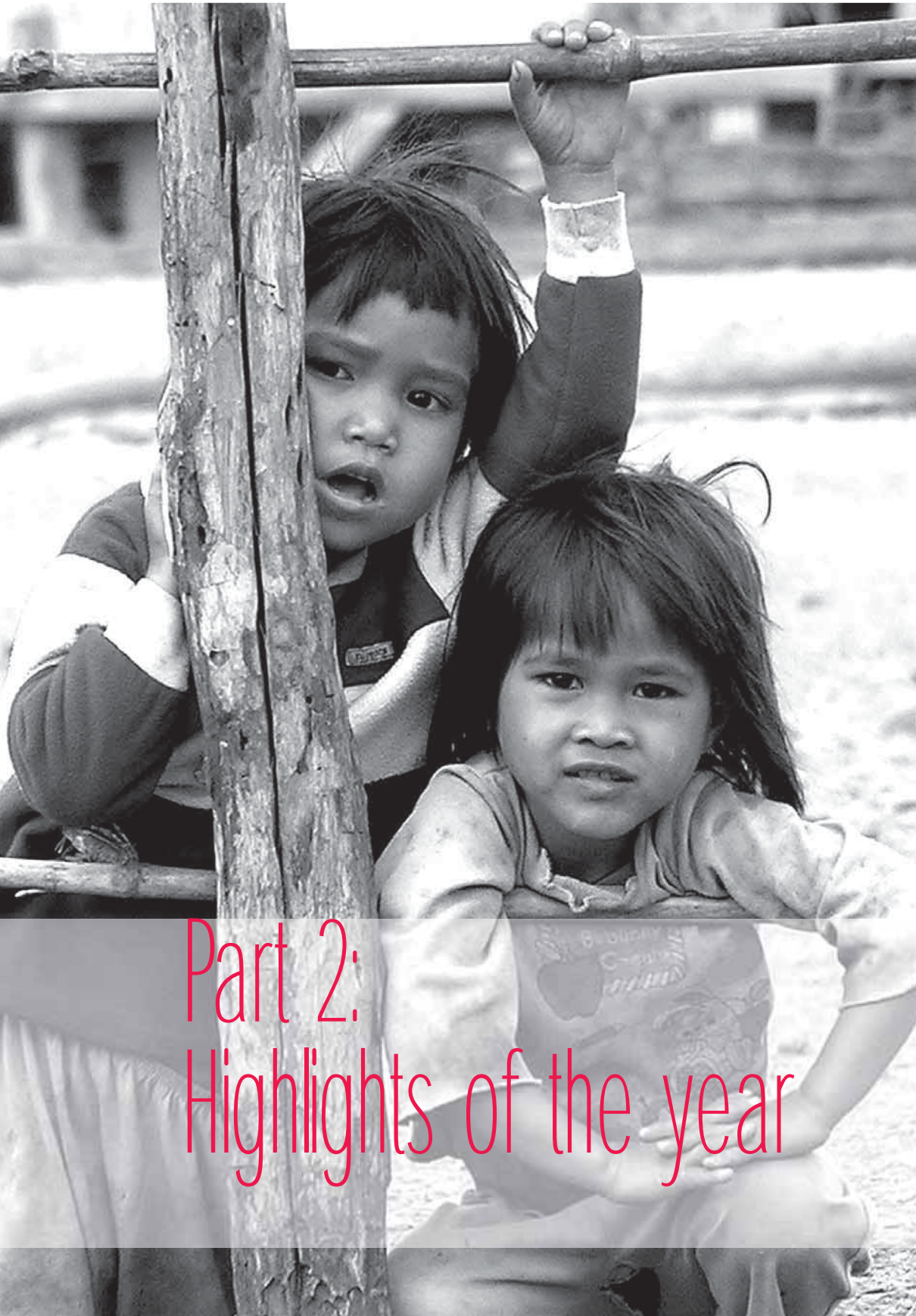
**T**hird, economic transition brought dramatic changes to the social sector. In education, the overall performance is considerably better than that of other countries at a similar development level. In health, all figures confirmed a positive trend. However, large disparities exist between the rich and the poor. The cost recovery policy, if fully applied, may put the poor and excluded people into a worse scenario of unaffordability for these services.

Reducing the incidence of poverty, while also expanding the protection of society's most vulnerable people and ensuring their right to a livelihood and participation in the development process, will place heavily demands on Vietnam's public institutions, mass and civil society organizations. Accountability and government capacity at the local level are

two bottlenecks in the present system. The responsiveness and accountability of government is closely tied to the depth and breadth of public participation, and the defense of the basic principle that all citizens, however rich or poor, are equal before the law.

Vietnam must confront these challenges while pursuing an intensive and rapid process of international integration. Increasing links with the world community can help make growth more sustainable by providing access to markets, capital, technology and new ideas. However, there must be policies and a roadmap to ensure well-functioning domestic markets and institutions that respect principles of equity and enable the least well-off to benefit. That must be a priority for development actors in the next five years.





Part 2:  
Highlights of the year

## OUR “PROUDS”

### *Proving its advantages, Reflect goes far beyond the boundaries of literacy*

Introduced into Vietnam in early 2000 by AAV, *Reflect* is an approach which has been highly appreciated by communities as well as authorities where it was implemented. To date, several development organizations including other International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the World Bank (WB), the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program (AusAid) and others, have adopted *Reflect* into their adult literacy programmes. In areas where AAV works, more than 11,000 participants, mostly women of ethnic minority groups in the remote areas of Vietnam and Laos, have benefited from these programmes. Apart from being used for literacy, *Reflect*

has been introduced into each and every programme area as a potential entry point to integrate other programme components. Overall, *Reflect* has clearly proven itself to be a very effective approach to mobilize and to empower people living in poverty and exclusion. Aiming to further expand the use and impact of this approach, AAV is focusing its effort on promoting the adoption of *Reflect* into programmes of other NGOs and government agencies. A *Reflect* network led by AAV has been established. Reviews and research on the *Reflect* approach have been carried out in order to provide a more concrete basis for lobbying the government's policy makers for a formal recognition of *Reflect* as an effective approach to adult literacy.



## *Changing conventional approaches in tackling cross-border human trafficking*

A 3-year sub-regional initiative to fight trafficking of Vietnamese women and children began in January 2005 with the establishment of a network of NGOs and government agencies from Vietnam, China, Cambodia, and Taiwan where Vietnamese women and children are trafficked to. The initiative originated from our analysis that most regional and national interventions in combating human trafficking have focused largely on prevention and reintegration. We found that while contributing to the protection of communities and vulnerable groups from being trafficked and helping to reintegrate victims of trafficking, these interventions largely failed in supporting those who have been trafficked to other countries and remain there in servitude and solitude. Fundamental rights of these victims are severely denied and violated. Many trafficked people are repeatedly trafficked and risk becoming stateless. They experience extreme hardship and deserve more attention from organisations and individuals working in the field. To tackle this, coalitions have been developed among NGOs and government agencies of Cambodia, China, Taiwan, Vietnam and the United States to fight against the trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Taiwan. Members include AAV, Save the Children UK, Oxfam Quebec, Vietnam Migrant Worker Office (Taiwan) and VietAct (US). Apart from international agencies, contributing to the success of the initiative is a large number of local agencies and self-help groups.

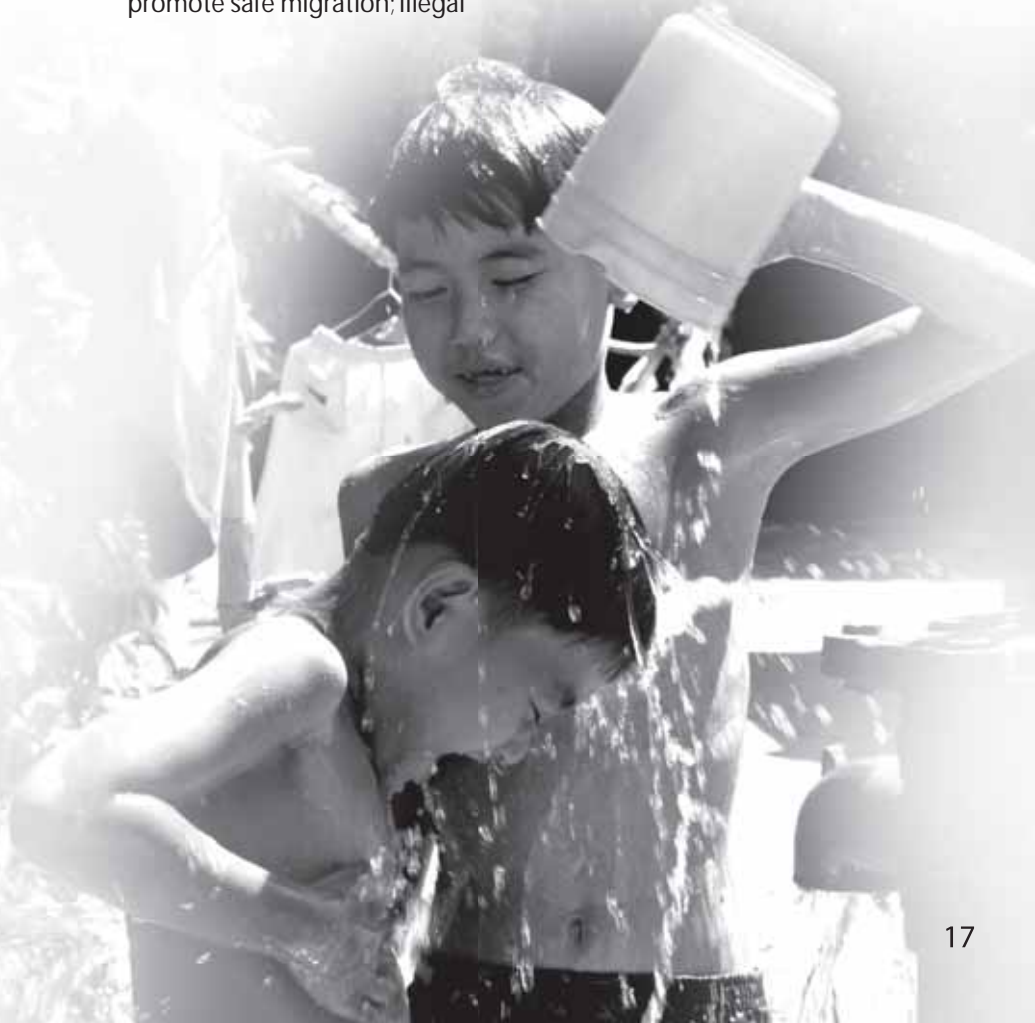
In the first phase of the AAV supported “Cross Border Anti-trafficking project”, a study was carried out in Southern

Vietnam, Cambodia, China and Taiwan in order to better understand the situations women face before departure, at their destination point and when they return.

The report highlights trafficking being related to five key factors: poverty and lack of opportunities; women's agency (capacity to decide); lack of governmental and non-governmental mechanisms to promote safe migration; illegal

and criminal mechanisms for migration that cause trafficking; and gender inequality as seen through women's unequal access to education, to work, and to participation.

Based on the research results, AAV will begin phase II of the project to support women before their departure, at their destination points, and those who choose to return so they can assert their rights.



## *New progress in the mobilization of people and media*

2005 saw significant progress in the mobilization of people and media with a number of diverse activities. Among them, the most significant event was the organization of a 'People's Caravan' from October to early December 2005. The Caravan was a forum for poor and excluded people such as migrant workers, people living with HIV&AIDS, ethnic minorities, farmers, and others to engage in dialogue with policy makers, local authorities and the wider public. Apart from raising public awareness of issues such as food insecurity and the rights of women to decent jobs, the Caravan also helped to create a platform to mobilize people living in poverty and exclusion to claim their economic and social rights.

Within the framework of the Caravan, a series of events have been held such as workshops, meetings, talk-shows, cultural festivals and sharing of testimonies across several provinces of Quang Ninh, Dien Bien, Ha Tinh, Ha Noi, Hai Phong and Ho Chi Minh City with the active participation of more than 500 concerned stakeholders.

All the issues from livelihoods to food security were well recognized by the National Assembly and the People's Councils, as well by those from the Ministry / Departments of Investment and Planning who were present in the Caravan and by other policy makers through mass media channels.

Another remarkable event took place when delegates from the Vietnam People's Caravan of farmers, feminists and journalists crossed the border to join the Asian People's



Caravan in Hong Kong. The purpose was to advocate for those from developing countries to be able to claim equal access to world resources, and in the fair governance of trade and markets. The right to equal treatment with regards to agriculture subsidies for developing countries like Vietnam, was a message which was strengthened by Vietnam delegates and recognised by international organizations through mass media channels.

The Caravan is one of AAV's advocacy efforts which aims at making policies pro-poor. It was deemed to be a successful approach and all the Caravan's messages were captured and broadcast on key channels of Vietnam National Television as well as through leading newspapers. The Caravan attracted the attention of a large number of readers and viewers throughout the country and beyond.

## *Offering hands to other country programmes*

**A**AV has been a member of some regional and international working groups/projects such as the Food Rights Campaign, Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children, and a HIV&AIDS Campaign, as well as integration with the larger ActionAid family. Over time it has strived to integrate and exchange staff with other Country Programmes. Until recently the latter saw only limited success.

This year however, AAV was able to send staff to support several country programmes in many different ways. In response to the call for support following the destructive tsunami, a Senior Officer for Education joined ActionAid International (AAI) Sri Lanka on a two-month assignment to provide technical support to the local team to set up an Education Programme. In addition, the Manager of Funding and Fund Raising undertook a 6-month secondment at the request of AAI Thailand to deliver support in programme management, campaigning on WTO and facilitating the 3-year planning process. Later in the year, the Manager of Human Resources and Organization Development (HROD) took a 6-month dual job contract to support AAI Thailand in the development of the programme structure. Finally, the Head of Finance also continued his assigned job as the financial advisor to all of the country programmes in the sub-region.

All of these exchanges have been highly appreciated by the recipient country programmes and successfully facilitated capacity building and shared learning to and from Vietnam. The real implementation has gone far beyond the original secondment plan.



## *First Vietnamese to take senior most leadership*

**F**or the first time since AAV began work in Vietnam, a Vietnamese national staff member has taken the top leadership position in the organisation. This is a firm recognition in the steady growth in leadership, development knowledge, governance and management capacity/ability of the national team, and more importantly

the largely positive shift among government organizations and local communities with regards to credibility and reliability of the fundraising capacity of the national leadership. Without a doubt, the appointment of the Vietnamese Country Director will support the nationalisation process being planned in the next five years.



## *OUR ‘SORRYS’*

### *DIPECHO funded project*

**A** 15-month Pilot Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Management Project began in January 2005 in AAV's three long-term programme locations including Cau Ngang district of Tra Vinh Province, Ninh Phuoc district of Ninh Thuan Province and Vu Quang district of Ha Tinh Province. It was funded by the Disaster Preparedness programme of ECHO (DIPECHO) and with matching funding from AAV.

Unfortunately, several project activities started heavily behind schedule due to the shortage of human resources and expertise. It took about four months to fill the position of the Project Coordinator because of a lack of qualified candidates in the local labour market. Consequently, the Project lagged behind schedule for 4 months. In addition, some interventions were implemented without proper technical input and with poor coordination. A lot of confusion occurred between the donor and AAV due to relatively poor communication being kept. The ActionAid Emergencies Team in general and AAV in particular had to allocate a much greater amount of resources than anticipated to keep the Project going on the right track and achieve its planned objectives.



AAV learnt some important lessons from the implementation of this project. There must be a feasible project design which fits in well with local practice and AAV's system; a good assessment of capacity and ability of local partners and AAV's internal

resources needed for the project implementation; as well as a carefully conducted risk analysis during the project design; and on-going and improved communication with donors on project changes.



## *Freezing of high financial reserves*

In 2005, there was the issue of £454,000 for Vietnam which was frozen in the report period due to the build-up of a high-level of reserves. This, on one hand, seriously affected the start-up of new Development Areas (DAs) with child sponsorship income. On the other hand, it limited us from working at the national level on some issues such as anti-trafficking of women and girls; fighting against domestic violence; HIV&AIDS; and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Lessons drawn from this are:

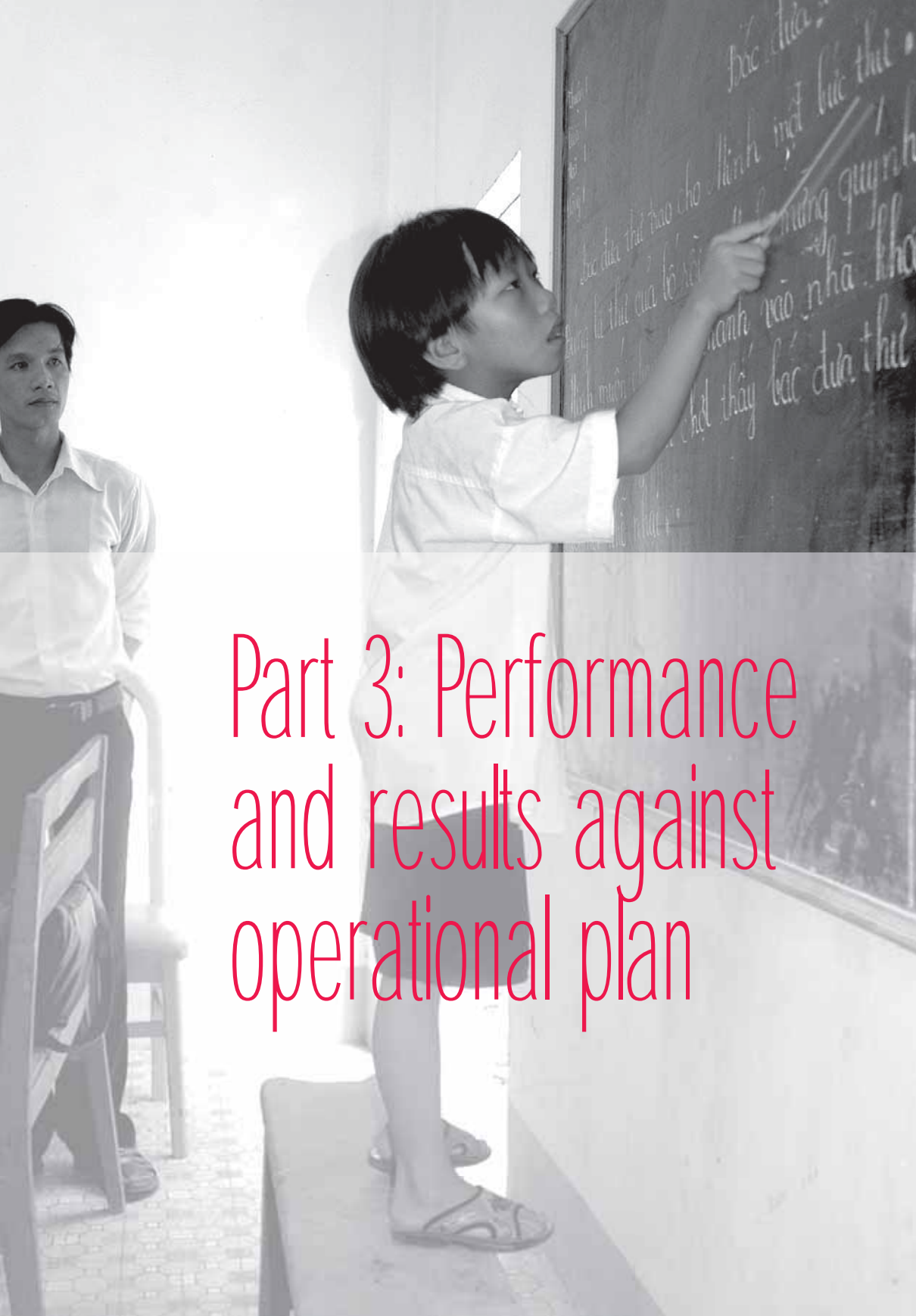
- ❖ We have to carefully develop a work plan and to manage the reserve level of DAs/themes financed by multi sources (e.g. DA/themes funded by sponsorship income and partnership income; DA/themes funded by sponsorship income and partnership income and Next Step income; DA/themes funded by sponsorship income and partnership income and national funds or unrestricted funds).
- ❖ We have to clearly inform our partners of the sources of income for the DAs/themes and the requirements from donors (if any).
- ❖ Whenever there is additional income for an existing DA/theme, there should be a rolling out process involving all stakeholders (partners; program; F&F and finance staff) to integrate the proposed activities with the existing ones.



### *Child sponsorship funding withdrawal*

**A**s per AAV's operational plan, a new DA was planned in the Central Highland province of Dak Lak with funding from child sponsorship. Required papers and procedures were prepared timely and appropriately in line with the child sponsorship policy. Regretfully at the last minute, an official permit for the application of child sponsorship

from the government authorities was not obtained due to the political sensitivity of the area. As a consequence, 1,450 child histories allocated for this DA were withdrawn by the funding country. The unsuccessful application reminds us on the importance of careful planning and taking care in dealing with government agencies in sensitive areas.



# Part 3: Performance and results against operational plan



*Strategic objective 1: Promoting the rights and entitlements of poor and marginalised people and ensuring a just and decent livelihood.*

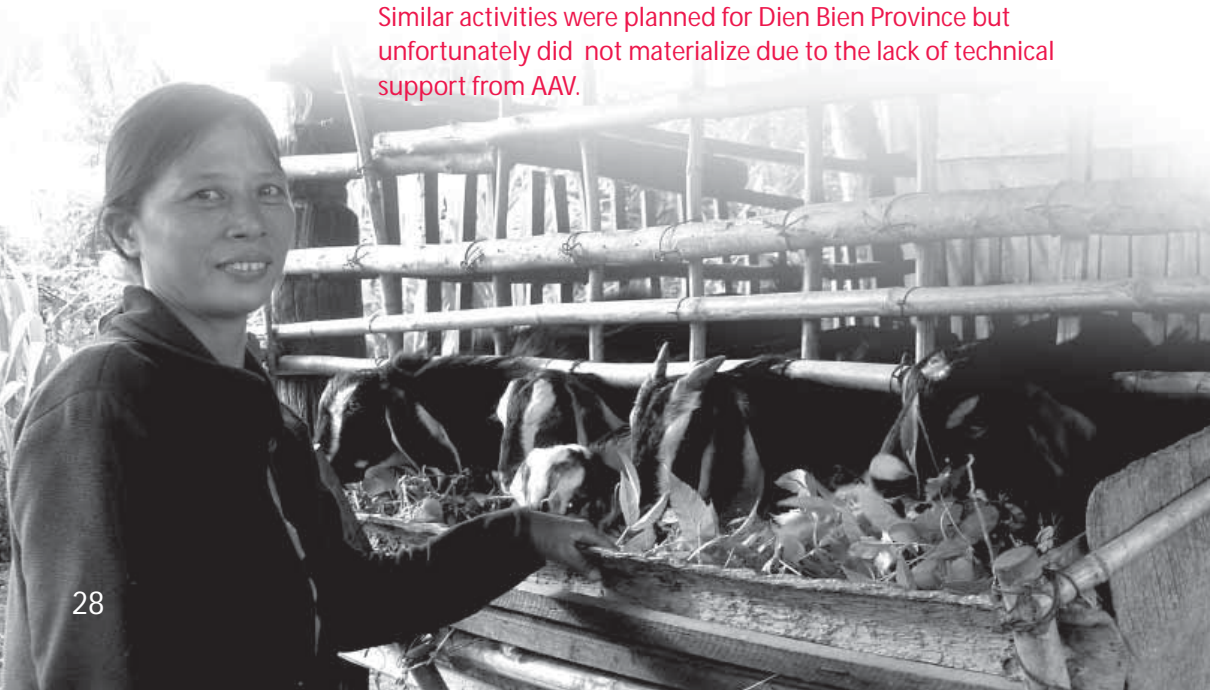
*Diversified interventions creating alternative livelihood options*

In addition to training and technical support which make up the majority of activities in all programme areas, a large number of demonstrations took place for : cow, and sow raising; and dry rice, cardamom, citronella

and mushroom cultivation. Interest groups were formed with carpenters, fishermen and others. These demonstrations and groups provided alternative options for the poor to improve their food security during difficult times.

*"My family used to solely depend on rice and maize. We were only able to cultivate one crop per year due to harsh weather and a lack of irrigated water. As a result, we have always faced food shortages at least 2 months per year and my children often go to school with empty stomachs. Since AAV came here, its staff persuaded us to grow citronella on areas which have been abandoned for years due to poor and exhausted soil quality. It's unbelievable that citronellas grow well on this land with very little care. After the first 3 months, we harvested and sold some citronella oil to a contracted company at the price of USD13/litre. Amazingly, this plant has granted us chance for our survival." Mr. Sinh, Phong Quang commune, Ha Giang province.*

Under the framework of a social forestry component, seven bee-keeping groups were formed in Vu Quang district, Ha Tinh Province, which generated more income for 110 households in poverty which included people living with disabilities. This new kind of farming created a chance to explore non-timber forest products from local forests which in turn helped reduce illegal logging and protect the environment. Local partners also actively lobbied local governments to allocate fourteen hectares for local farmers for the purpose of reforestation and gardening. Similar activities were planned for Dien Bien Province but unfortunately did not materialize due to the lack of technical support from AAV.



## *Saving and credit schemes put formal credit providers under pressure*

Since its shift to a rights-based approach, in recent years AAV stopped setting up new savings and credit (S&C) schemes to offer micro-financial services to poor and marginalized people. Nonetheless, schemes which were formed during the past 10 years are reportedly growing steadily and benefiting 29,250 members and their families with a majority of them poor women. Most of these schemes are financially sustainable and offer diversified financial services for local people especially for poor women. The schemes helped create a practice of savings among poor people. With loan assistance, a number of members have invested successfully in their own small businesses and production enterprises that helped them escape from poverty. Convenient financial services helped poor and excluded people demonstrate their creditworthiness and also helped assert heavier pressure on local banks for more pro-poor service provision. Government banks became more active

than before and where staff previously spent their days in offices they were instead going to villages to disburse loans through mass-organisations. With a changing context since 2004, AAV has tried to connect current borrowers of S&C schemes who need bigger loans with the Bank for Social Policies in Ninh Thuan Province. However, this initiative was not completely followed up with in 2005 due to discontinuation of partnership with the local NGO and a shortage of human resources.

AAV also introduced a micro-finance initiative to provide vulnerable unregistered migrants in Go Vap district of Ho Chi Minh City, as well as trafficked returnees in Nam Dinh, Ninh Binh, Cao Bang Provinces with small amounts of credit for income generation activities. However, findings from recent reviews unveiled that the impact of those schemes was modest owing to its small loan size, cumbersome financial procedures and absence of proper management systems.



At the national level, AAV is coordinating current S&C schemes supported by AAV to date to transfer themselves into credit institutions in pursuance with the Government's newly issued Decree No. 28/CP. Additionally, AAV actively participates in the network of microfinance organizations so as to promote sharing and mutual support from concerned stakeholders.





## *Creating space for PLWHAs and raising people's awareness on HIV&AIDS prevention*

In an effort to fight against the prevalence of HIV&AIDS, AAV has supported further interventions during 2005 across DAs. Thousands of training courses on HIV&AIDS were conducted for villagers, school children, urban migrants and sex workers. 50 peer-group clubs were established for people living with HIV&AIDS (PLWHAs), their relatives and people who were considered high risk to meet and share their experience on a regular basis. 11 "village to village" communication groups were formed in Uong Bi Township, Quang Ninh Province to

disseminate knowledge for villagers on how to prevent HIV&AIDS. An initiative entitled "Photovoice – We talk about ourselves" was also held for PLWHAs in all DAs. Within this activity, PLWHA who wished to participate gathered from various DAs to learn to take pictures *Reflecting* all aspects of their daily lives through their own perspective. In response to World AIDS Day (1st December), rallies were held in all DAs on a large scale to raise community awareness and mobilize the public to fight against the spread of HIV&AIDS.



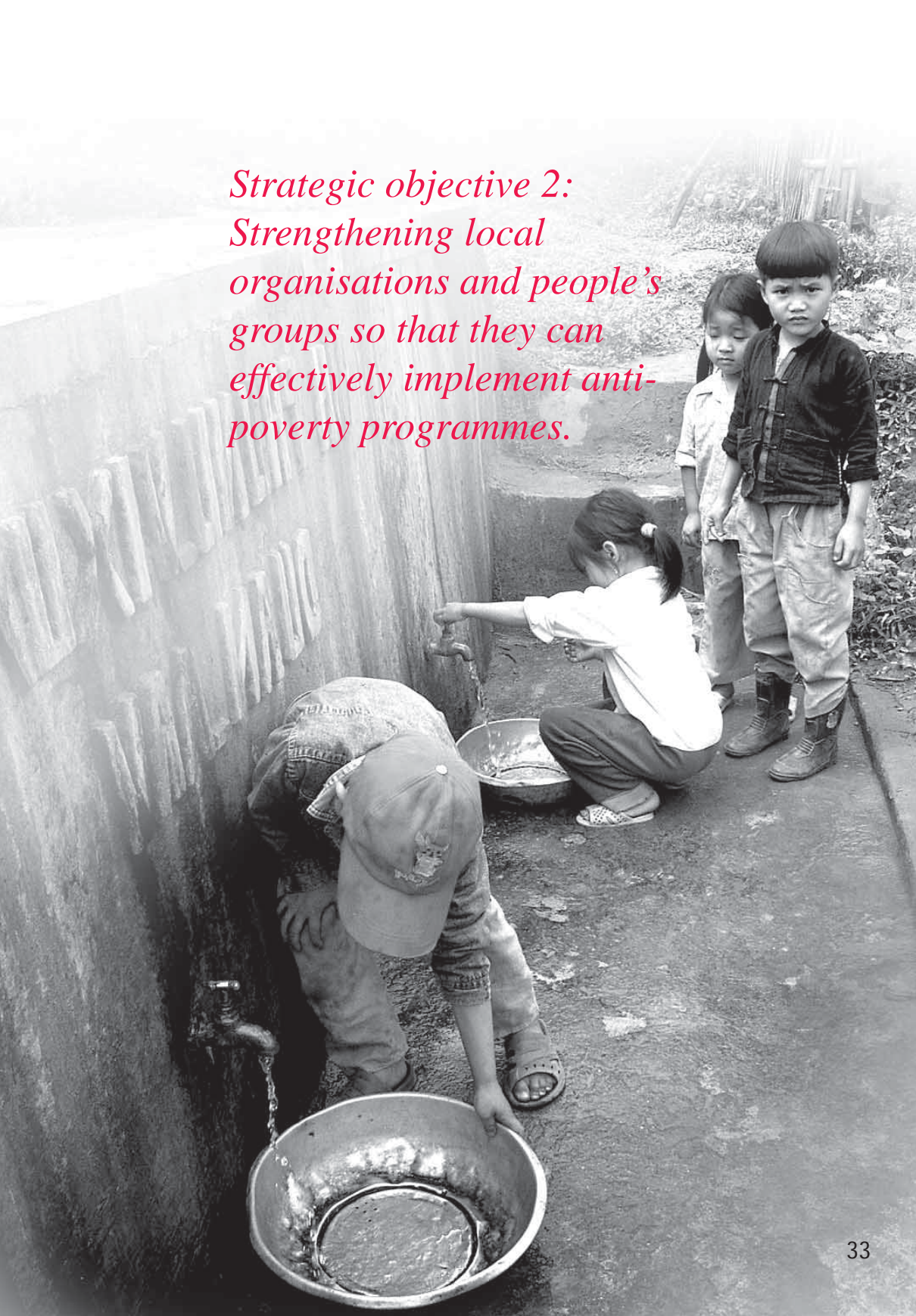
### **How have lives of PLWHA changed?**

*“My family fell into an extremely difficult situation when my husband died because of AIDS. Right after being informed that I had been infected with HIV from my husband, I tried to commit suicide but failed because of thoughts of my newborn son. I kept on living because of the slight hope that my son would escape from the deadly virus. However, all hope turned out to be in vain when my son tested positive when he was only 18 months old. My son and I faced heavy discrimination and were looked down on by our neighbors. Consequently, it was extremely tough for me to earn a living. As a last resort, I worked as a rubbish collector and earned around VND10,000 (US\$ 0.65) per day to try to afford daily modest needs. Luckily, I have been encouraged and supported by AAV staff. They helped me to build a small house to replace the dilapidated and earthen one we were in. Thanks to this invaluable support we now no longer panic every time the rainy season comes. In addition, my son is offered monthly support for his health checks and provided with basic medicine which can help to sustain his life. I now feel more confident and no longer afraid of talking to other people”*

Nguyen Thi San, Group No. 3, Thanh Son commune, Quang Ninh province.



*Strategic objective 2:  
Strengthening local  
organisations and people's  
groups so that they can  
effectively implement anti-  
poverty programmes.*



## *Partnership with community-managed groups is being intensified*

**A** AV has furthered expanded its partnership with people's organisations. Great extension efforts have been made to further develop existing community-based groups such as Water User's Associations, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) clubs, S&C groups, and *Reflect* circles. Some new peer groups have also been formed in urban areas for sex workers, migrants, and drug users to share and discuss common interests and issues.

Family-groups appeared to be a good platform for villagers to analyze commune budgets and planning processes in Ha Tinh province. These exercises reportedly held local authorities accountable for their allocation of resources to its citizens. Villager's perspectives were raised at regular commune people's council meetings, and some issues were incorporated into the council's resolution.

Active discussions in *Reflect* circles across DAs progressively encouraged learners - with a majority of them women - to raise their voice. Sex workers, parents of drug users, and PLWHAs in Ho Chi Minh City and Quang Ninh Province now have an enabling space to share their experiences, their challenges and their strategies for overcoming these challenges.

However, the establishment of too many community-based groups appeared to have created unintentional and counter-productive effects in several DAs as each group appeared to pursue only its own objectives. Good coordination and cooperation was absent to create a shared synergy for social change which was as the ultimate intention of these groups.

## *Building a civil society network for food security (CIFPEN)*

Started in 2004, the project entitled “Building civil society network for Food security” had significant achievements in 2005 with the active participation of civil society in a food security and poverty elimination network (CIFPEN).

The network aims to reinforce civil society in Vietnam in (i) analyses and action capacity, (ii) alliance building and (iii) debate and advocacy capacity with regard to food security and the fight against poverty. In 2005, the network focused mainly on the building capacity for advocacy, in which, both national and grassroots advocacy approaches are emphasized. Advocacy capacity is built through training, workshops, as well as research and building grassroots level models. Not only network members but also community people were involved and benefited from advocacy

reinforcement activities. As the name of the network implies, the network activities focus on the issues of food security, in which livelihoods of the poor are at the center. CIFPEN activities, which have been implemented mainly in the provinces of Ha Tinh, Dien Bien, Hoa Binh and Ha Noi have been able to encourage and facilitate the direct participation of the poor including women and men living with or being threatened by poverty, in various processes of decision making, policy implementation or policy amendment. The promotion of this participatory approach has empowered farmers and others living in poverty who previously never had access to a real platform or any chance to participate in a democratic dialogue with the authorities at the local level. This is expected to be a starting point for people living in poverty and exclusion to fight for their own rights in the future.



Besides the work with people living in poverty and exclusion, other activities were launched including advocating for the role of Vietnamese NGOs and to mobilise society to engage in the debate on issues affecting people living in poverty and exclusion. This helped to legitimize the role of civil society organizations in the development process and open more democratic space for the critical engagement of civil society organizations for more pro-poor policies and to effect social changes.



## *GENCOMNET - a fruitful partnership for gender equality and community development*

There have been a large number of local NGOs working on gender-related issues. Nonetheless, a majority of them are working in isolation and there has not been either a formal network or a forum for them to share their knowledge, experience and best practices in Vietnam. Recognizing this gap, a network of local NGOs working in gender and community development (GENCOMNET) was jointly initiated by AAV and others in August 2005 to create a synergy and linkage for organizations involved in gender issues. Currently, it is in the early stage of capacity building and developing joint action. Some activities have been organized such as meetings and workshops. For the time being, network members found regular information sharing, and capacity building workshops very useful. With a strong commitment from founding members and the first

three-year elected executive committee in place, the network has great potential to enhance future cooperation, especially in joint activities like campaigning and advocacy work.

The first benchmark of the network was a forum on domestic violence. This turned out to be very successful with the active participation of network members and drew the attention of media and policy makers. The forum came up with a unified message which was submitted to the National Assembly to advocate for the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence. This has since been debated in the Assembly. In the future, the network is expected to contribute more to gender equality, promotion of accountability of government authorities to the poor, women representation, and other initiatives focusing on rights and entitlements of poor and excluded people.



### *Joint advocacy efforts to fight domestic violence*

*In November 2005, in conjunction with the World Anti Violence Against Women Day, a forum was organized by AAV in cooperation with GENCOMNET for activists, artists, culturalists and victims of domestic violence to raise their voices and concerns with each other and share these with the policy makers and the public. The forum lasted for one day with presentations on successful models and talks from activists, scholars, parliament members, affected women and men. In the evening the workshop continued with cultural activities and performances from professional artists. Parliament members and mass-organization leaders also participated, shared their views and highlighted their commitment to fighting domestic violence. This was for the first time members of the National Assembly participated in such an event.*

*The event was highly appreciated by concerned stakeholders, activists as well as the wider public in the context of rigorous debates over the potential issuance of a Law Against Domestic Violence. Presently, the majority of the public and policy makers, due to insufficient information, have underestimated the prevalence of domestic violence and its consequences on women's lives and women's advancement.*

*Strategic objective 3: Promoting good governance by advocating for an accountable and transparent service provision by government agencies and other stakeholders.*



## *Supporting planning reform*

2005 witnessed the completion of the national five-year Socio Economic Development Plan (SEDP) 2001 – 05 and preparations for the new SEDP 2006 – 10. The Government of Vietnam decided to apply participatory consultations for the plan in coordination/collaboration and with support of NGOs and the donor community. More than 10 local consultations were held across the country to collect people's perspectives from the grass-roots level. In addition, thematic consultations have been conducted with enterprises and provincial governments.

As an active member in this area of work, AAV in partnership with the ADB, pioneered a pilot community consultation for SEDP in the Central Highland's Gia Lai Province. The pilot, apart from collecting very useful input to the SEDP, played a critical role for participating agencies to gain experience in conducting field consultation exercises in other locations. Based on the success of the pilot, AAV conducted a second exercise in Cao Bang- one of the poorest, most remote provinces in the northern mountainous region. Findings from these exercises pointed out a number of challenges/gaps in the SEDP. In particular, the objective on economic growth for the Northern Upland areas is deemed to be relatively ambitious and the fact that the plan does not consider the competitive economic advantages of regional border economies is considered a weakness. Such findings from all local consultations have been synthesized and submitted to the SEDP drafting team to incorporate into the revised version.

This process also provided provincial and district planning staff with useful tools in participatory planning processes



and learning. The process itself was highly appreciated by all stakeholders, especially the poor and particularly the ethnic groups, who to date, had few chances to have their say in such an important plan. We believe

the application of participatory consultation would help ensure the national plan is more responsive to the real needs of the poor and excluded people whom the plan targets.





## *Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP)*

In response to the Global Call to Action against Poverty, AAV formed an alliance with four International NGOs to carry out a number of activities under the umbrella of this campaign. It is important to note that within the current political context, demonstration and marching in any forms (which might be standard activities of GCAP in other countries) are not allowed in Vietnam, especially at this sensitive time when Vietnam is in accession to the WTO. As a result, only some small-scale events have been held to raise public awareness and understanding of global issues concerning poverty and injustice, and the need for joint action to address such issues.

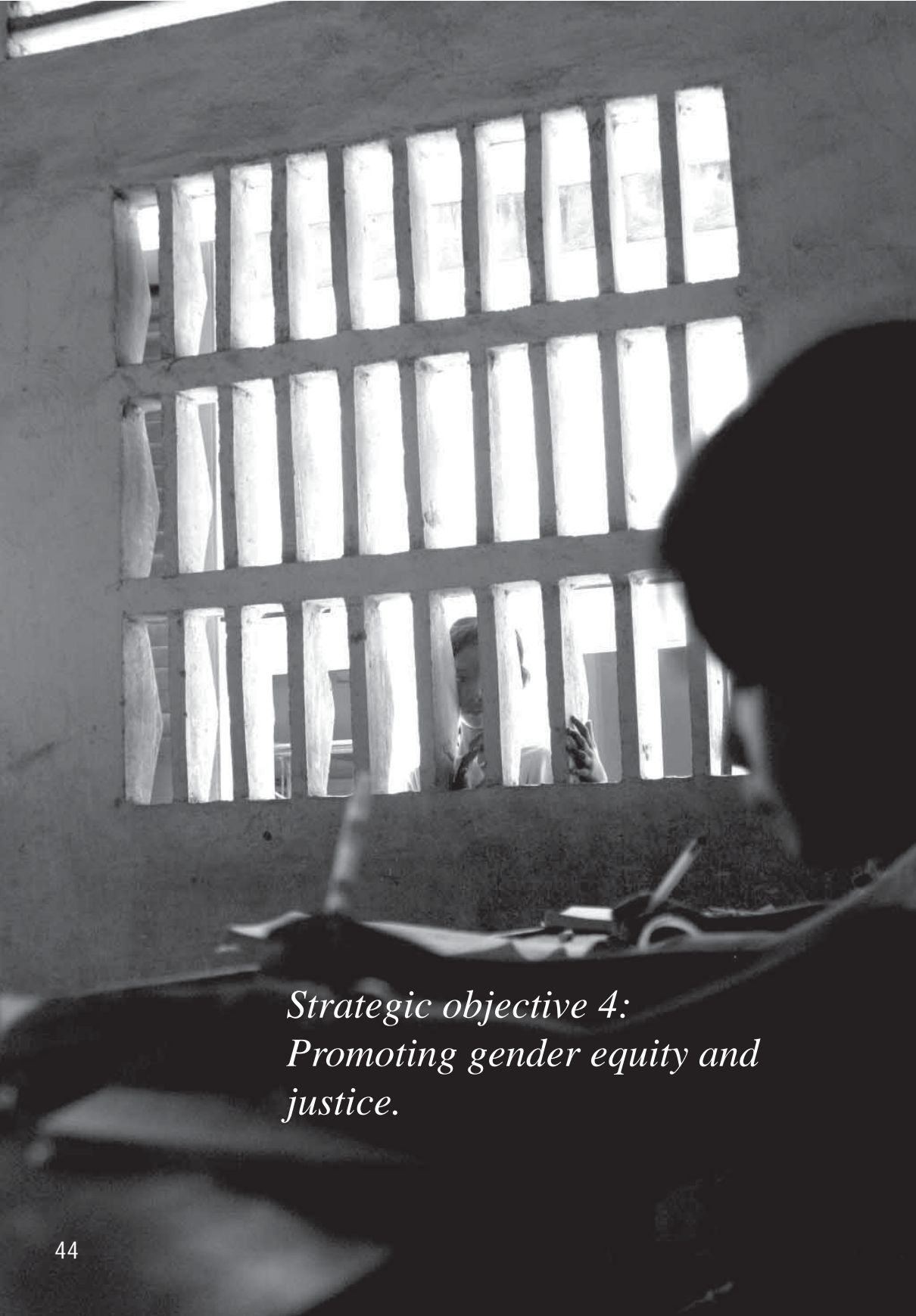
A 15-minute programme was broadcast on the National Television Channel (VTV1), which introduced the world phenomenon of poverty, its correlation in the Vietnam context and GCAP's objectives. The video conveyed diverse views on poverty and called for joint action. The footage drew public attention to the facts and causes of poverty in Asia including Vietnam due to trade injustice, aid conditionality, and people's recommendations to keep aid more effective.



### *Still a distance to go*

While a number of basic training programmes on the Grass-root Democracy Decree were conducted at field level for primary partners, such training was not organised for AAV staff to provide them with a proper understanding on the issue. The “Report Card” initiative which was kicked off in 2004 started with a study tour to Bangalore, India but then was not seriously followed up with in 2005 due to the critical shortage of human resources, and lack of capacity. The Information, Communication and

Technology for Development (ICT4D) initiative piloted for the first time in Thanh An and Thanh Nua communes of Dien Bien Province which has the potential to provide the poor and excluded people with a great deal of information did not receive great attention and did not materialise into plans for scaling-up though local villagers and other organisations. Sadly, funding for the initiative ceased, and no serious review was undertaken to measure its effectiveness and possibility for replication. Consequently, these centres are now forgotten.



*Strategic objective 4:  
Promoting gender equity and  
justice.*

## *Combating domestic violence against women*

**D**omestic violence against women is one of the most serious and visible violations of women's rights. However, there is limited awareness of this violation of rights and it is usually hidden and considered a family matter - particularly in rural areas. Research was conducted in two rural provinces of Ninh Thuan and Dien Bien to explore real pictures and based on that interventions are designed to tackle the issue. The research unveiled that while officials have some understanding of the issue, local people do not believe it is serious problem. In their perception, domestic violence only occurs when it harms the woman's body or health.

A project was started following the research in two provinces of Ninh Thuan and Ha Giang to challenge gender stereotypes and the prevailing local perception that while men are

normally regarded as bread-winners and household heads, women are expected to be subordinate and peace-makers within the family.

The project also helped to build the capacity of the local Women's Unions with active participation of village and commune mediator committees. These mediators played the key role in dealing with domestic violence cases, making proper interventions and requesting for higher/outside support. Through the channel of mediators, the most vulnerable women were approached and appropriately supported. Those who suffered from domestic violence were profiled in the village and commune books for regular monitoring. Follow-on interventions include legal and medical support, education for and warnings to the perpetrators, and criminal measures in the more serious cases.

## *Enhancing women's representation*

**W**ith regards to power and decision-making, women's representation in the legislature, judiciary, policy making bodies, and proportion of administrative positions in both private and public sectors, has remained low, *Reflecting* potential gaps and weakness in the part of the government administration in addressing women's representation. In addition, many women government officials are not in leadership positions with women officials often assigned to stereotyped fields of government such as children's or women's affairs, social affairs, education and health, and rarely in top positions in the defense ministry or diplomatic affairs. Economic disparities between women and men, patriarchal structures, and gender stereotypes have continued to limit women's political representation.

To address women's representation in decision-making, AAV, in 2005 launched an initiative to conduct a survey on this and to provide testimonies in the 50th UN Commission on the Status of Women held in New York in March 2006. Also in this campaign, a workshop to discuss NGOs' involvement in making governance and politics gender sensitive is going to be organized in 2006. This campaign will specifically advocate improved participation of women in the next term of Vietnam's National Assembly in the 2007 election.

From the program side, enhancing women's leadership has been given high attention. With their active involvement in AAV programmes, a number of women have gained the confidence of local authorities and are being promoted to key positions in local governments.





*while attending all trainings provided by AAV. After a few years she became a competent S&C cluster leader. In 2003 she was successfully promoted as Vice Chairperson of My Loc commune Women's Union. Presently, she is*

*commune Chief Administrator who is very influential to commune authority decisions.*

*Tran Thi Vien, My Loc commune, Can Loc district, Ha Tinh province.*



*Strategic objective 5: Influencing the inter-governmental and multilateral institutions to enact policies and programmes to address the needs of the poor and marginalized people.*

## *Reflect enables thousands of people to escape from illiteracy*

**A**lthough Vietnam is considered one of the poorest countries, it has achieved significant results in education. The rate of children entering primary and secondary schools is relatively high and 94% of the population is literate. However, there are huge numbers of people between 15-35 years old are illiterate and most of them reside in remote and mountainous areas. The rate of illiteracy in these areas makes up more than 35% of illiteracy in the whole country while the proportion of population in these areas is only 13.5%. This rate is particularly high among ethnic minorities. It stands at 75% among Dao and 88% among H'mong communities. In addition, the number of illiterate women is double that of men.

In 2005, AAV placed strong emphasis on adult literacy for poor women from ethnic minority groups. Unlike conventional methods, AAV adopted the *Reflect* approach

in which adult illiterate gather and discuss, analyze, draw action plans on any issue relating to their daily work and life. Through such processes, participants become empowered with not only literacy and numeracy but with other life skills and practical knowledge, which enables them to be more confident to effectively participate in communal activities. Recent reviews in the DAs showed that most of the work surrounding *Reflect* is highly appreciated by participants and due to their involvement in *Reflect* circles they can not only read and write but also have improved hands-on production knowledge and skills.

Apart from literacy, AAV supports children living in poverty to have better access to pre-school and primary education through activities such as providing essential teaching equipment, fresh water and sanitation in schools, and scholarships for children living

in extreme poverty and those living with disabilities. In areas populated by minority groups where Vietnamese is not their mother tongue, AAV supports teaching Vietnamese to pre-school children and teaching local languages to teachers in order to remove the language barrier which exists in primary school. As a result, school children in programme areas of Cao Bang Province now feel more comfortable going to school.

### ***Language no longer a barrier***

*"I did not like going to school because I often got bad marks. I did not understand what my teacher said as I was unable to speak and listen in Vietnamese (language of the majority) whereas my teacher was unable to communicate in my ethnic language. I was extremely scared when I was asked to answer questions. My classmates always mocked me when I wrongly answered. I told a lie to my parents that I had been ill and felt exhausted traveling for 40 minutes over rocky mountains to reach the school as an excuse to stay at home.*

*The teacher came to my house shortly afterward and encouraged me to return to school. I was persuaded and came back to school. My teacher can now speak H'Mong language and she even gives more understandable lessons by telling stories and using visual materials to illustrate the lessons. All schoolchildren in my class find it easier to understand and obtain higher marks. We are now eager to go to school everyday."*

Cu Thi Phua, 7 years old schoolgirl, Khung Nhung village, Ha Giang province.

Through promoting the establishment and operation of parent-teacher associations, AAV helps to raise awareness among poor, illiterate families regarding the importance of and the rights to education. The associations also give parents the opportunity to have their voice heard in

school management. Alongside supporting the establishment of community learning centers and community libraries (ICT4D), AAV also provides technical support and advice in organizing and operating these facilities which helps ensure the sustainable and life-long learning of the community.

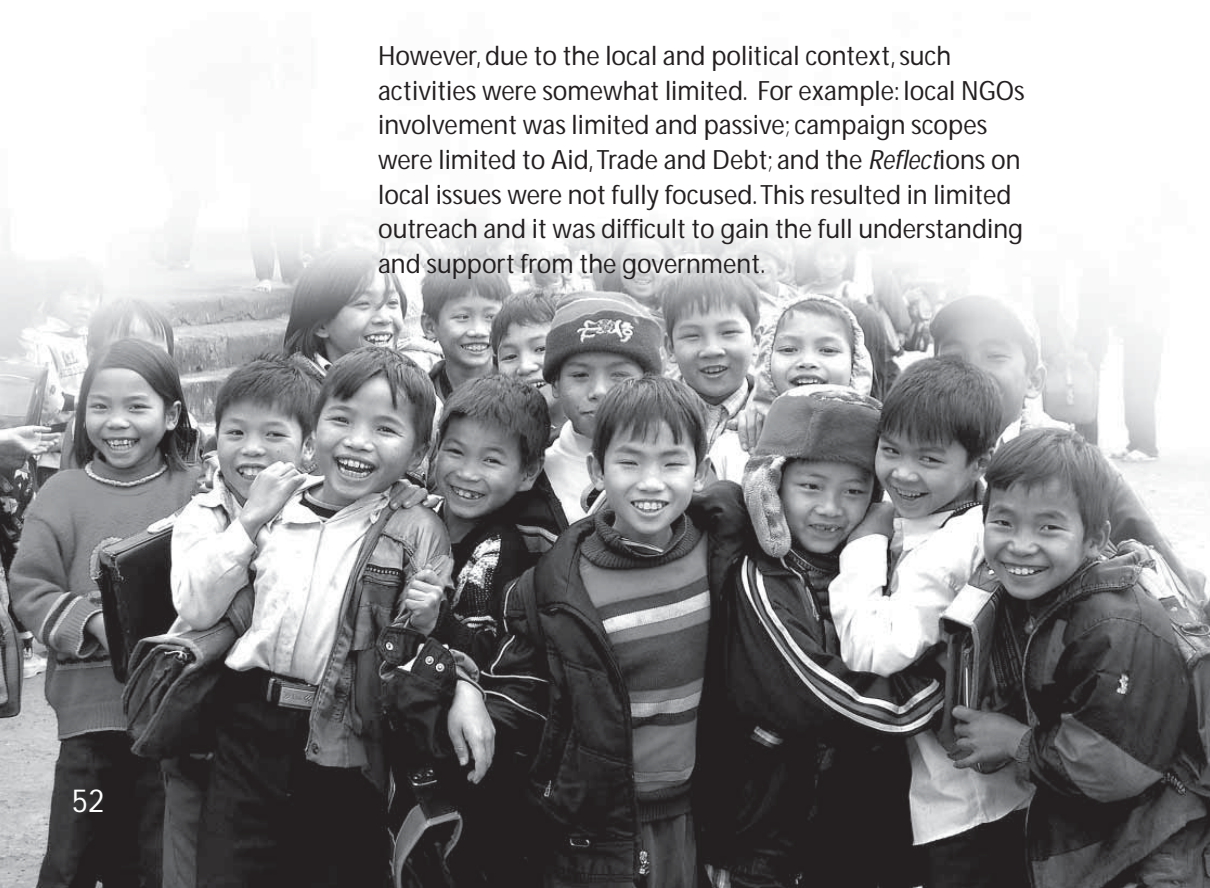




## *People report on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

**T**he MDG framework and its implementation were the subject of action research conducted in 122 villages in the poorest areas throughout Vietnam from May to July 2005. People's *Reflections* and demands were well captured and *Reflected* in a report that was published and widely circulated in late 2005. These *Reflections* and demands were also captured in a MDG film that was broadcast on VTV1. This process provided crucial input for the joint report submitted at the United Nations MDGs summit in September 2005 in New York. For the first time, the voices of grass-roots people on policy issues was widely and comprehensively *Reflected*, attracting the attention and recognition of policy makers and the wider public.

However, due to the local and political context, such activities were somewhat limited. For example: local NGOs involvement was limited and passive; campaign scopes were limited to Aid, Trade and Debt; and the *Reflections* on local issues were not fully focused. This resulted in limited outreach and it was difficult to gain the full understanding and support from the government.



*Strategic objective 6: Promoting social responsibility of the corporate sector so that it is more responsive to the poor and powerless.*



## *Equipping women migrant workers with basic legal and social knowledge*

After conducting research in Hai Phong, Hanoi, Da Nang, Binh Duong and Ho Chi Minh City, AAV realized that migrant workers have very limited knowledge on their rights and entitlements. Hence, in collaboration with the Labour Unions of Hanoi, Hai Phong and Go Vap district of Ho Chi Minh City, AAV designed and implemented a number of activities to address these issues. More than ten thousand migrant workers were provided with training and counseling on the issues of their concern. At the same time, about one hundred labor union staff were provided with a Training of Trainers so that they are able to provide advice to the workers upon request. In the workshops and public hearings organized by ActionAid and the Labour Unions in Hanoi and Hai Phong, many migrant workers said that their understanding on legal and social matters improved after participating in the training and counseling sessions. Tran Thanh Hang, a migrant worker working for Sao Vang Company in Hai Phong, stated in a public hearing that: "...we, women workers are provided with trainings and counseling on family planning; reproductive health; HIV prevention and the labour code. We feel very happy because we are equipped with relevant and useful knowledge for better lives". In the same event, a representative of Sao Vang Company in Hai Phong City admitted it was a win-win scenario stating: "The training and counseling help improve the workers' knowledge and awareness... This is one of the factors that contributed to the achievement of the company's production plan".



## *Initiative to promote corporate good practices*

A website ([www.vietnamforumcsr.net](http://www.vietnamforumcsr.net)) has been developed to provide space for CSR activists to share experiences, reports and debate. The CSR Award initiative has been highly appreciated by Ministry of Industry; Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs; Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Vietnam General Confederation

of Labour; Vietnam Leather and Footwear Association and the International Labour Organisation. More than 30 companies participated in the competition and 15 were short-listed for the final round and award ceremony in February 2006. The good practices from winning companies will be shared in the forum and uploaded to the website.



## *Performances against our organisational plan*

2005 marked a speed up in the HROD performance plan with the completion rate of 95% of the planned HROD activities. For the first time in the past 3 years, HROD budget spending reached 80% against the plan. In addition, 2005 signified changes in the role of the HROD function towards the direction of organisational development rather than the traditional administrative role. This includes change interventions with the structures, policy, systems and staffing of the organization. Major achievements against the 2005 plan include:







### *Moving toward competency-based human resource management*

**T**he introduction of a new human resource management system towards a standardised competency-based management system was agreed by AAV's management team in mid 2005 and received support from AA regionally and internationally in August and November 2005. By December 2005, with support from external consultants, a competency

framework for AAV was finalized. The framework is being piloted in 2006 and rolled out at wider scale initially in Bangladesh, Thailand and Uganda as a part of international HROD projects. Job analysis and the development of competency-based job descriptions for AAV staff have occurred, with all new job descriptions effective from the first quarter of 2006.

*Internationalization progresses - but at a slow pace*

A taskforce on internationalization has been formed which includes staff from different layers with a gender-balanced presence. Some key papers have been drafted to pave the way for the process. However, due to the unavailability of a necessary legal framework, the establishment of local Advisory Boards did not materialize during the year and this, together with other activities, will be pursued in 2006.





## *Shared Learning and Knowledge Management*

**A**s planned, approaches and systems for effective learning and sharing, documentation and decision-making have been introduced in AAV in 2005. The management information system (MIS) project is being undertaken with the establishment of a MIS

taskforce. A document control procedure was introduced to all staff during the staff retreat and will be applied across the organization in 2006. Regular shared learning sessions (Friday Curiosity) were introduced for staff in the Hanoi office once a month.



## *Toward a gender sensitive agency*

In order to deliver its ambitious gender-related objectives, gender sensitization for staff and partners was prioritized and supported through the provision of regular training to ensure gender responsiveness and affirmation to organizational commitments in this area.

With regards to staffing, a sex-based balance has been ensured at junior and middle levels. However, the ratio at the senior level remains unbalanced similar to prior years due to the unchanged structure and staffing. Organizational policies and practices are being continuously improved to *Reflect* gender sensitivity with the active involvement of the gender coordinator in all strategic and policy work. The agency structure has been changed to improve gender responsiveness. Policies, recruitment practices, work environment and fund allocation have taken gender differences into consideration.

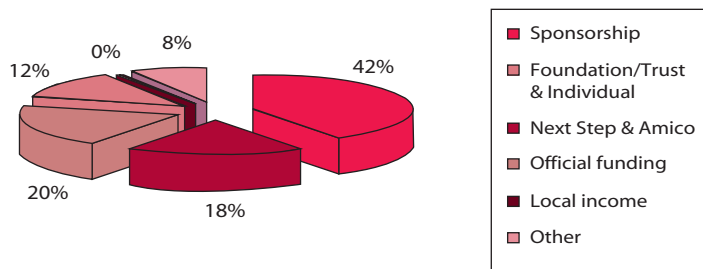


## How funds have been used

In 2005, total income was £1,484,000 which accounted for 74% of planned income (£1,999,000), a 4% increase compared to the previous year. There were two main reasons for a low realization of income. Firstly, one potential donor (the Finish Embassy) changed its policy for which INGOs are eligible to apply for funding, and consequently we did not raise £166,000 as planned from this source. Secondly, there was a cut of £200,000 from AAI during the report period.

Child Sponsorship continued to be the biggest source of funding which contributed to 42% of total income. By the end of the year, AAV had 6,284 active child sponsors from Italy, Spain, the UK and Ireland. Additionally, there were more than 2,100 Next Step and Amico sponsors contributing to 18% of our income. Donor servicing – including reporting, organising donor visits, have been kept up to standard and taken place within agreed time limits.

Income by sources



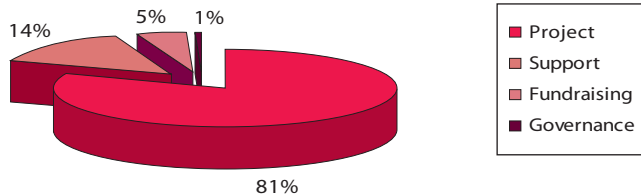


Income from official donors was the second biggest source which accounted for 20%. AAV continues to remain in a strong and trusted relationship with the Department of Cooperation of Ireland (DCI) and continues to receive funding from DCI for its new and innovative programmes in different areas throughout the country to address the issue of women's rights (anti-trafficking of women and girls, fighting against domestic violence against women, and work on migrant women and workers' rights) and education for ethnic minority children.

Capacity building for local partners on fundraising was actively undertaken. Two training and sharing sessions were successfully conducted for all partners. A Child Sponsorship Report Writing Training and Annual Sponsorship Meeting were organised in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City for 60 participants which were appreciated and viewed as effective and useful.

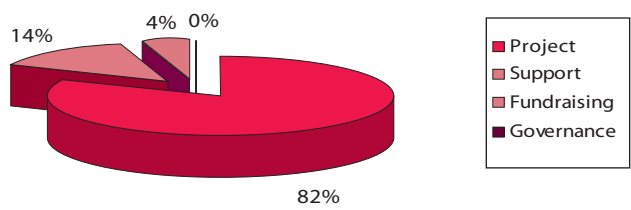
Budget utilization against the annual plan experienced a 6% increase, from 74% in 2004 to 80% in 2005 (£1,494,000 versus £1,887,000). We would eventually be able to disburse higher amounts during the report period if the level of unconfirmed budget was lower (40%) and we did not face difficulties in raising funds from key donors. Actual expenditure skyrocketed 35% compared to 2004.

### Actual Costs by Statutory



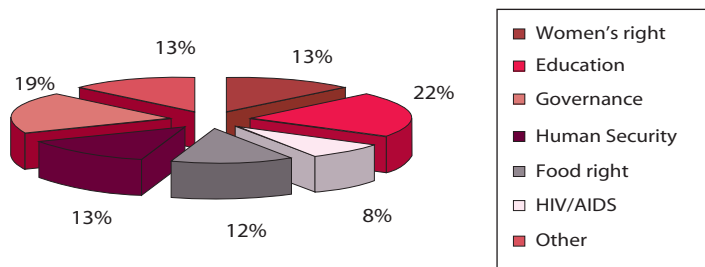
The nature of spending was well maintained with 81% of spending for direct programme operations. In 2005, only 19% of spending was for indirect administrative and fundraising purposes.

### Planned Costs by Statutory



Education saw the highest disbursement with 22% of total spending, closely followed by Governance (19%). HIV&AIDS work received the lowest disbursement at approximately 8%. Human Security spending was much higher compared to prior years at an equal level with Women's Rights (13%) thanks to new funding from the DIPECHO funded project.

### Expenditure by theme



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