



MIKEL FLAMM

Providing poor families in Mekong Delta with water and sanitation

Habitat for Humanity is known as a Christian housing ministry committed to providing safe, decent and affordable homes for those in need. Lesser known is the active role Habitat plays in ensuring the transformation and development of the community after the houses are built.

In Vietnam, Habitat is collaborating with the provincial authorities to help more than 700 families in the southern province of Kien Giang to better their lives through housing microfinance, vocational and technical training, and technical support in sustainable shelter, water and sanitation improvements.

Pilot Project for Home Improvements

In a pilot project, Habitat and its partner Friendship Union, representing the Kien Giang province's People's Committee, invested more than US\$117,000 in loans to these families for their home improvements. The project is implemented and monitored by the Women's Union of Kien Giang, an active

organization responsible for promoting the rights and empowerment of women from national to village levels.

The families being helped by Habitat and its partners are living in the districts of Hon Dat, Chau Thanh and An Bien in Kien Giang. Many families in Kien Giang live in flood-prone housing along the province's numerous canals and waterways. Safe drinking water and sanitation have been ongoing concerns, impacting health and well-being.

Mutual Partnerships

Since October 2005, Habitat's project has assisted more than 500 families living on a monthly income of less than 300,000 Vietnam dong (about US\$19) to improve their living conditions. Habitat's technical support team, together with the Women's Union partners, visit the selected families and determine what is required for home improvement. Habitat provides technical expertise in the development of a family-

oriented construction plan. This entails recommendation of materials and procurement processes, as well as construction methods, to ensure optimum results for the family concerned.



MIKEL FLAMM

One Family's Experience

The home improvements vary from family to family. For some, it means having new floor tiles to replace the dirt floor, or a holding tank for rainwater harvesting to facilitate access to clean water. Others may opt for a new outdoor toilet or a ramp with wheelchair access for their handicapped children.

Among the first families targeted by the Habitat program is that of Phung Thi Dung, from the village of Binh Lac. She and her husband took a 5 million Vietnam dong (about US\$318) loan under Habitat's microfinance initiative to build a solid foundation, which will elevate their home above flood level, and to put in a floor.

Under Habitat's guidance, Dung has joined with other women in her village to approach local building supply vendors. Their combined purchasing power helps them negotiate cost incentives above what each could have received on her own.

From Houses to Wells

In the village of Hoa Thanh, six women are investing their loans in deep tube wells to create reliable access to healthy drinking water. With a lack of access to clean water, residents collect rainwater but are often forced to use water from the river, which contains rubbish and raw sewage.

These six women are working with one local contractor, who has agreed to discount well-digging services and provide a one-year warranty on the wells. Habitat's technical team taught the women to prepare high-quality cement to create a clean base around the wells once they are complete.

Sustainable Development

Habitat's work in Kien Giang reflects the goals of the government's Vietnam Agenda 21. This is a framework of broad strategies to ensure sustainable development in the country in the 21st century. In the coming decade, Vietnam has identified core priorities, which include eliminating hunger and alleviating poverty, and empowering women through socio-economic development activities.

Aiding the cause of poverty alleviation is HFH Vietnam's five-year strategic plan, which aims to serve 18,000 families through housing microfinance, vocational and technical training, and technical shelter, water and sanitation improvements by 2011.

Through loans and technical expertise, Habitat has enabled more than 500 families—and is set to help at least another 215 families—in Kien Giang to further their means of livelihood, knowing that their improved houses will be a better protection against the elements, and a safer and healthier environment for their children to grow up in.

Contact

Peter Witton, Director of Communications, Asia-Pacific
pwitton@habitat.org

