

Initial Steps towards a Healthy Urban Living Environment Final report

I. Background/Rationale

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam with a population of nearly 4 million, is seeing an intensive urbanization process. Together with an economic growth, the city is facing many challenges to its residents' health including transport air and noise pollution. It is a fear that unless urgent measures are implemented immediately, Hanoi's living environment will face the same massive environmental problems as many cities in other regional developing countries like Bangkok or Manila.

Numerous studies have found that a polluted living environment and physically inactive lifestyle are making a significant contribution to the increase of morbidity and mortality of chronic non-communicable diseases such as CVD, diabetes and cancers. For these reasons, with financial support from HealthBridge Canada, HealthBridge in Vietnam conducted a project entitled "Initial Steps towards a Healthy Urban Living Environment" in two phases: Phase 1: Oct 2006 – Mar 2007 and Phase 2: Jun 2007 - Dec 2007.

Based on the project objectives and activities, we summarize the actual results of the project in this report.

Overall objectives:

The goal of this project is to identify the problems, opportunities and resources and develop action plan for a "Road for People" program in Vietnam

The specific objectives of the project are:

1. Increase understanding of current fuel-dependent vehicle-related environment issues of Hanoi and big cities in Vietnam
2. Identify existing positive policies to support and the gaps to fill up
3. Increase public support for improving the urban environment
4. Identify the key potential partners to work with in the future
5. Initiate an action plan for program implementation
6. Capacity building for the project team

II. Brief Description of Activities Planned and Completed

Phase 1:

- Conducted media screen and developed media surveillance database: On a daily basis, screened 30 central & local newspapers, updated the media surveillance database and classified articles by topics on urban planning and traffic issues in Hanoi and big cities.
- Conducted personal observation: Developed an observation form in Vietnamese. Made field trips to 3 areas (in the old quarter, in the urban core and in the newly-developed areas) to observe and took pictures of the traffic situation and road infrastructure for non-motorised transport vehicle.
- Reviewed documents of different ministries and agencies: Collected and reviewed documents of the governments agencies and organizations working on urban transport issues, including the following notable documents:
 - The Hanoi Comprehensive Urban Development Program (HAIDEP) – Draft reports, Hanoi urban environment fact book, and other documents
 - Hanoi Urban Transport Development Project – Assessment on Environmental Affects

- Hanoi Urban Transport Development Project – Research for solutions on transport management and non-motorised vehicles
 - Hanoi Transport Police Office: Measures to reduce traffic accidents in Hanoi
 - Vietnam Development Forum: Motorbike Master Plan
 - Swiss – Vietnamese Clean Air Program (SVCAP): Baseline report on Hanoian's awareness on air quality of the city
 - Hanoi Committee on Population, Family and Children: Reviews of playing grounds for Children in Hanoi.
- Reviewed existing legislative documents at central and local level (Hanoi city)
 - Gathered international information on the issue
 - Article “Diversity creates urban planning enigma” by Debra was published on the Vietnam News. The translated Vietnamese version was on the Times newspaper (the Tet edition)
 - Participated in the Ministry of Transportation’s Online Forum on Solutions to Traffic Congestions. Our suggestion was to encourage residents to ride bicycles instead of motorbikes. Mobilized friends and colleagues to participating in the online forum to support us.
 - Prepared a situation analysis report
 - Initiated relations with a number of partners including: the SVCAP, JICA, lecturers of the University of Traffic and Transport. Introduced HealthBridge Canada’s new program (Road for People)

Phase 2:

- In the phase 2, we identified an emerging issue of the city: there was an investment plan to turn Unification Park (Le Nin Park), a beautiful park of Hanoi into an amusement park (Disney Land). This would have negative effects to the city’s environment and more importantly, the Park will probably no longer belong to the public. Therefore, we decided to carry out a campaign to oppose the construction plan (the timeline and budget of the Project were revised and approved by the HBC):
 - Investigated the investment plan, seek the information on the Hanoi’s People Committee’s attitudes on the issue
 - Investigated the current situation of the park, made interviews with locals using the park daily (vendors, nearby-residents, people go to the park to do exercise...)
 - Looked for alliance:
 - Posted information to the internet: Hanoian forum, oversea student forum, urban planning forum, architecture forum and got many positive responses
 - Attended a Livable cities Workshop in HCM City to raise the issue among urban planning professionals
 - Met with professionals: architectures, urban planners, writers, historians, lawyers and INGOs (Ford Foundation)
 - Created a front group:
 - Convincing the Vietnam Urban Planning Association (VUPA) to participate in the front group
 - Networking persons with high credibility: Architecture Tran Thanh Van, Lawyer Cu Huy Ha Vu, Professor Nguyen The Ba.
 - Organised a workshop on green public places in Hanoi. Participants included: representatives of Government Office, Ministry of Construction; Hanoi

- Media campaign on the issues: Around 50 newspaper articles about the issue; A series of 3 TV reports in VTV evening news; a forum on Vietnamnet online newspaper for public opinions on the issue.
- Worked with the front group to keep countering against the investors until the Hanoi People's Committee issued an official document to reject the Disney Land Plan.
- Organised the first "Car free day" in Hanoi: Worked with Vietnam Xanh (Green Vietnam), a voluntary youth club in Hanoi to organize cycling around the town on World Car Free Day (22/09/2007). HealthBridge provided the club with a small fund for making flags and band rolls. Media was also invited to attend the event.
- Networking activities:
 - Attended ecocity workshop in Nepal
 - Developed an online forum: <http://eco-cities.info/forum>
 - Developed relations with many professionals in urban planning at home and abroad.
 - Developed relation with Professor Jan Gehl, asked for permission on translating his famous work, "Life Between Building". Got the electronic copy of the book for translation.

III. Planned vs Actual Outputs and Outcomes (ie discussion of what you planned to achieve and what you really did achieve)

1. Increased awareness of the current situation, problems and policy in Hanoi: The project team gained a better understanding of the issues related to urban traffic, environment and urban planning by collecting, documenting and reviewing evidence on the current situation of the city. An analysis report on traffic situation in Hanoi was prepared to identify current problems. The project team was also aware of current Government policies and plans to deal with the issues. A Vietnamese database of articles relating to urban traffic, environment and urban planning issues was developed and regularly updated. These outcomes could be considered groundwork laid for undertaking a future eco-city program.
2. Increased public support to improving the urban environment: Ideas on using bicycles to protect the environment, improve health and reduce traffic congestion were raised among the public by articles on local newspaper and online forums and by the event of cycling around the town on World Car-free Day. The "Saving Lenin Park" campaign was strongly supported by the public. Following the campaign, the public continue to raise a request to the Hanoi Government not to use parks in the city for business purposes.
3. A list of potential partners were identified: Many government agencies and organizations were contacted and introduced about the HealthBridge's new program Road For People. By running the Saving Lenin Park campaign, a good relation with the Vietnam Urban Planning Association was developed and the project team found it a potential partner to work in the field of urban planning. Contacts with many individual professionals were also set up.
4. Initiated future plan: making a survey on public spaces in Hanoi. By conducting the "Saving Lenin Park" campaign, the Project team discussed with the Ford Foundation on the possibility of development a proposal on research on public spaces in Hanoi to

provide evidence for future advocacy work. The next call for proposal will be October, 2008.

5. Improved capacity of the Project team to work in the field of eco-city. Through the activities undertaken in this project, the Project team gained better understanding of the issues, practiced their networking skills and developed new relationship with individuals and organizations working in the field. More importantly the Project team gained an experience on creating an alliance and using the media was an effective way to create public pressure and influence the policy makers.

During the implementation of the project, there was a flexibility in revising the activities, timeline and budget to reach the proposed objectives. Several planned activities were not conducted and replaced by other activities:

- Brief interviews with local residents' opinions on current situation of transport and living environment were not conducted because when collecting researches relating to the issue, the Project team found the Household Interview Survey by HAIDEP and the Baseline research on Hanoian's opinions on air and air quality already covered the issue. These research results could be utilized for the situation analysis report. Therefore, the Project team decided not to conduct the interviews and reserve the fund for the next step to run the "Saving Lenin Park" campaign.
- Printing leaflets on Lenin Park for distribution to people coming to the park was not as planned because the Project team decided to focus on using the media as the most powerful tool for their advocacy campaign countering the investment plan. The fund was allocated to organizing a workshop to raise the issue to the public and the media.
- The first "Car free day" in Hanoi was not referred in the list of the proposed activities. The project team found this an opportunity to draw public attention to the issue ie. to obtain the 3rd objectives, therefore, decided to organize the event.
- The translation of the book "Life between buildings" were not performed as planned because there was not enough funding. Nevertheless, the Project officer and Jan Gehl agreed that they would work to seek for a fund from the Danish Embassy in Vietnam to finance the publication of the book in Vietnamese.

IV. Recommendations:

1. HealthBridge should continue to work in the field of eco-city with a focus given to improving the public spaces in the city and promoting environmental friendly transport vehicles. For the former area, Vietnam Urban Planning Association with its high credibility among professional could be a potential partner and Ford Foundation could be a potential funding source. For the latter area, more efforts should be given to advocating for policies prioritizing non-motorised transport (cycling and walking). From the experience of this project, the youth could be actively involved to promote cycling and using public transport means among the public.
2. A capacity building project on eco-city for local government officers should be developed to improve their awareness and understanding of the issue. Through the meeting with local authorities, the Project team found that many of them were not aware enough of eco-city issues and partly affected by business investors, therefore, come into wrong decisions.
3. For further strong commitment to work in the eco-city field, HealthBridge Vietnam should be more active in looking for funding source and employ a professional staff with 100% of his/her time for the eco-city program. Currently, there is only a Project office working

partly on eco-city program. Most of her time was contributed to the tobacco control program, therefore was not be able to enlarge the eco-city program.