

A Wealth of Water:

Joint community-based projects benefit Vietnamese children and youth

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Fast Facts

PROJECT TITLE:	Water projects in Vietnam
PROJECT PARTNER:	The Women's Union of Lang Son Province
PROJECT AREA/COUNTRY:	Vietnam
TARGET GROUPS:	Children, youth and communities
PROJECT DURATION:	Water projects in Vietnam have been supported since 1996 and are still ongoing

“Clean, safe drinking water is scarce... [N]early 1 billion people in the... world don't have access to it... And still today, all around the world, far too many people spend their entire day searching for it... [T]ime lost gathering water and suffering from water-borne diseases is limiting people's true potential. Education is lost to sickness. Economic development is lost while people merely try to survive...”

The Water Project (http://thewaterproject.org/water_scarcity)

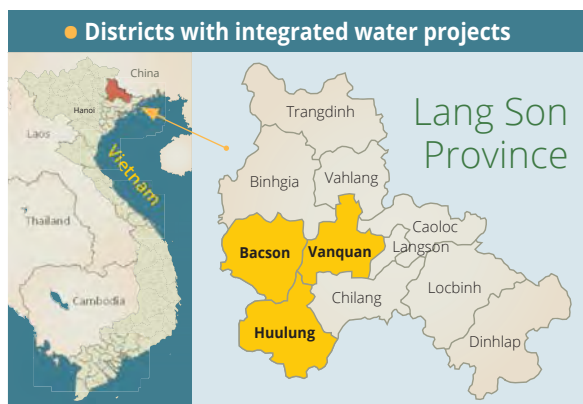
This dire reality affects many people in Vietnam's upland regions, where the impact of both the lack of water and the lack of access to clean potable water, threaten to erode family and social structures.

The need for a reliable source of clean water thus becomes urgent and all-consuming. When this is met, transformation begins.

Supporting joint water projects in Vietnam since the mid-1990s, terre des hommes (tdh) Germany's involvement has been instrumental in the realization of such transformation. Terre des hommes works closely with main partner organization The Women's Union of Lang Son Province as well as local affected ethnic communities.

Transforming with water

As a whole, Vietnam is a country rich in water resources, including plentiful rainfall, yet despite this water wealth, some areas suffer from great scarcity during the dry season. The water that is available to many communities is often either dirty or unsafe, infested with microorganisms that cause skin diseases, diarrhea and other digestive problems, eye infections and an overall weakened immune system. And yet, people must drink, bathe, wash their dishes and clothes, and irrigate their gardens or fields: water is essential for life.



“During exam period I need time to study for my exams but then I had to fetch water, because water is more important. I sometimes went to school unprepared. I got bad grades and became so sad and ashamed that I wanted to leave school. Some of my friends in my village did drop out, because they couldn’t stand the pressure any more. Without the water from this project, I don’t know if I’d still be going to school...”

Setiawan, 14
 from 2012 terre des hommes water projects

The simple absence of a stable, nearby source of clean and safe water for this youth meant physical hardship, ill health and the probable sacrifice of his education. Many of the children and young people, who, like him, are growing up in Lang Son and elsewhere in northern Vietnam’s remote, mountainous regions bordering China, experience very similar conditions. Their parents are small scale farmers struggling to make a living off mostly barren and rocky land. Villages lie far apart across mountain peaks and ravines, and the only water source is sometimes a river located miles away, requiring arduous daily water collecting trips for every family.

Understanding the situation on the ground is the first step for tdh. Only when the complex weave of challenges becomes clear is it able to decide to engage with its partners to begin building solutions for some communities in the province.



The children of Huu Lien

Through our long-term partnership with the Women’s Union of Lang Son Province, tdh in October 2014 started another integrated drinking water project, the third of three similar projects within the Lang Son province – targeting the community of Huu Lien, in Huu Lung District. The project (to run until September 2016) focuses on health and improvement of living conditions especially for women and children.

The c. 3,500 villagers of Huu Lien – similar to countless others in this region – were dependent on polluted mountain streams for their water supply. This water crisis had started a downward spiral that seemed to be culminating in the community’s loss of livelihoods, health and family coherence.

The lack of water affects all aspects of daily life here and can have a far-reaching

Lang Son Province – A Snapshot

POPULATION:	c. 850,000
ETHNIC NATIONALITIES:	Nung (43%) and Tay (37%)
AREA:	c. 820,000 hectares
ARABLE LAND:	c. 110,000 hectares
PERCENT OF POPULATION	
BASED IN RURAL AREAS:	> 85%
BELOW POVERTY LINE:	> 50% (Earning a monthly income of < 400,000 Dong, c. 15 Euro)
HUNGRY:	18% c. 30-40% of children under 5 are malnourished

impact. At least one family member spends up to three hours walking on steep mountain slopes every day to fetch water for the household. This means they cannot spend that time doing other work like farming. There is also little paid work available in the communities to supplement daily requirements beyond what farming could provide, while the inhospitable, arid soil only produced one harvest a year.

This threatens food security – more often than not, the mother – often results in malnutrition among the children and motivates more family members, mainly men, to leave home to seek paid jobs elsewhere. Women also sometimes leave for perceived better opportunities in China, where some unfortunately are forced into sex work or sold to Chinese

men. Many other women and the children are left behind to fend for themselves.

Children bear the brunt of the impact from this crisis.

The departure of adults from their families means less parental support for school or homework and less supervision overall. The parent left behind needs help fetching water and is then forced to choose one of her children as ‘water carrier’. Physically, the young water carriers often break arms or legs as they have to walk on uneven, winding paths while weighed down by buckets and other containers for water.

Like young Setiawan relating his experience above, this affects the child’s performance at school and causes both emotional and mental stress. Sometimes

Men and women participated in the digging of trenches for the water pipelines in Huu Lien.



children are pulled out of school entirely, and the future for these children looks dismal.

The people of Huu Lien needed a sustainable way out of this vicious cycle, and resolving the basic issue of water seemed to be the answer. In fact, the two other tdh-supported

water projects in Hung Vu (2005-2008) and Tri Le (2009-2011), also within the Lang Son Province, had demonstrated highly successful outcomes and served as models for this project in Huu Lien.

Context is key

Since arriving in Vietnam almost twenty years ago, tdh has developed a solid understanding of the local context and the main priorities of community members here in northern Vietnam. All its three supported water projects are collaborative and integrated, reaching beyond the mere provision of, or access to, water. The goal of its intervention is the 'wellness' of a community as a whole, and this can include – but is not limited to – environmental protection, health, education and income generation; and always emphasizing the needs of children.

Over the years, tdh has built on valuable lessons learned.

Participation, please!

Community ownership and stakeholderhood of all tdh interventions is put to the fore. A 2012 external evaluation recorded that both the

Impacts:

How access to water has improved children's lives in Hung Vu and Tri Le

- 82% of households (970 of 1,183) use water from the project
- 92% of the people in Na Nuay community make use of the water – the most of all target beneficiaries
- 80% children reported improved performance at school and – “Going to school is more fun!”
- 83% households reported improved health – the incidence of diarrhea, skin infections, eye diseases and gynecological diseases has decreased
- 80% reported improved hygiene and sanitation practices while cooking, bathing and cleaning
- Hours previously given to getting water were redirected to farming, and spending time in the community or with family
- Male family members were are now more likely to help with housework and show interest in their children's lives

process and outcomes of the two earlier projects reflected the effectiveness of tdh's approach of supporting work that is based in the community. Context-sensitive and locally rooted, it is therefore locally relevant and sustainable. The major impacts, listed above, point to key improvements in the lives of the communities' children.

In Hung Vu and Tri Le, with circa 4,000 community members per commune, the strategic preparation process included information sharing sessions to encourage a strong sense of ownership of, and a willingness to maintain the project even beyond the implementation phase.

Community members' support and participation was necessary for project-related construction and transport work, while local knowledge of the surrounding mountains helped locate appropriate water sources. Finding water resources on higher ground allowed for the transport of water to individual villages without needing pumps.

Awareness raising campaigns introduced environmental concerns, in particular, forest conservation, which linked to reforestation of bamboo and the protection of water sources. Hygiene



Women and children in Hung Vu are happy with the new water tank.

and related health issues were raised in community health workshops. As evidence of the effectiveness of the project's combined elements (prevention education, the improved access to water and the resulting increase in self-motivation and confidence), Hung Vu and Tri Le community members later found the funds to build over 200 new toilets and over 100 bathrooms.

Children's rights are human rights

Another key element of the ongoing education work in the communities is based on tdh's own priority focus on children; the key cross-cutting topics of children's rights and gender equality were incorporated into every activity. Facilitators used this as an entry point to discuss traditional roles and the social norms governing the lives of women and men, girls and boys.

The realization of children's rights forms the foundation of tdh's work globally: it supports projects and partners whose works contribute to improving children's lives. This also includes women's

empowerment and gender equality, because these are intimately connected to and have an important influence on a child's development overall.

tdh's joint integrated water projects thus attempt to respond to children's ability to thrive on multiple levels and across a broad spectrum of themes – and it faces the innate complexity of the topic head on.

At first glance, a child's right to a healthy environment is the most relevant. Soon, however, it becomes obvious that this right is intertwined with other key rights – the right to live, survive and develop; the right to good health; the right to food; the right to an appropriate accommodation; and the right to education.

tdh regards children as full members of their villages or communities and they are therefore equally affected by a community crisis, like the water scarcity in Lang Son. Core values 'in action' – like trust, respect, participation, ownership, equity and diversity – have helped create fertile ground for acceptance, collaboration and even self-driven continuation of projects.

There is also the recognition, early on, that the power and decision-making over local water resources must stay in the hands of the villagers. Empowerment, self-determination and participatory approaches eventually permeate all aspects of community life and give children and young people a voice in favour of their future.

A wealth of water

All of these valuable experiences are applied in tdh's newest project. After an appropriate preparation period focusing on education and awareness raising work, it is Huu Lien's time to install its first clean, easily accessible drinking water system.

The source lies high in the hills, and the water is collected and filtered in a 4 m³ cement tank. It then flows down through the mountainous terrain via a 16,000 meter long piping system, ending in larger 10 m³ cement tanks. Project participants built a total of 11 reservoirs to reach all the villages, including Huu Lien's school and the provincial health administration facilities.

Families now have access to clean and safe water for drinking and for use in their households and home gardening. Those who used to be water carriers – mainly women and children – now no longer have to risk their limbs along twisting, uneven paths to the water sources.

Maintenance of the new water system is crucial and so every family contributes a



monthly fee of 3000 Dong (c. 12 Cent). A 'supervisor' is designated in each village to ensure that the system works efficiently and can be repaired if needed.

This entire project cost 1,732,250,000 Dong (75,603 Euro). Given its emphasis on education, participation and community ownership, this is both cost-effective and sustainable. The numerical impact is Huu Lien's population of almost 3,500, but the actual impact is much broader, since the community can pass the valuable insights and knowledge gained during the project to future generations.

Globally, there is talk of a water crisis, although the earth is rich in water and there should be enough to go around. Individual water consumption is only a small part of the problem, it is mainly our industries that are polluting, mismanaging, exploiting and otherwise destroying clean and safe water sources for personal use. The world's growing population demands more and more water, and big business uses this as an excuse for uncontrolled expansion and exploitation. Unfortunately, it is the rural communities who are often at a disadvantage when companies or cities encroach on their land and water resources.

To address this larger problem, part of the discussion around water needs to revolve around basic human rights and accompanying legal protection. Practically, however, small-scale, participatory and community-based projects like the ones tdh supports – in the interest of children's rights – are a good beginning and demonstrate that there are low-cost, sustainable solutions, which can create positive 'ripple effects' within a region.

These immediate solutions may not always influence larger political developments, but they do directly impact children's day-to-day lives. A bottom-up approach allows the people themselves to


feel confident and empowered – to speak out or to act – and this new ability may, in the long run, lead to sustainable change.

The children of Huu Lien today

The people of Huu Lien have been using their new water system since January 2015. During initial follow up monitoring by tdh and the members of the Women's Union it appears that the same positive changes witnessed in the Hung Vu and Tri Le projects in Lang Son are also taking place here.

It is especially rewarding to see a change in the daily lives of Huu Lien's children, who are now able to, well – really be children. Of course they are still expected to help their parents in the household, and maybe even fetch the water – but with the water tanks only a relatively short distance away, this previously draining and dangerous task easily becomes part of a sociable early morning and evening routine.

Parents can exhale, send the children off to school and focus on the day's work without the constant, nagging pressure of having to do more, or not having enough time to do what is needed. Their attention can turn to farming or seeking additional income, and when the children come home after school, there is time to share and to simply enjoy being together as a family.

And the children? They can do what children and young people do best: play, learn, grow – and live. 



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Stateless Children Protection Project: Asserting the big difference of a name and a nationality

BY VICCI TALLIS, PHD

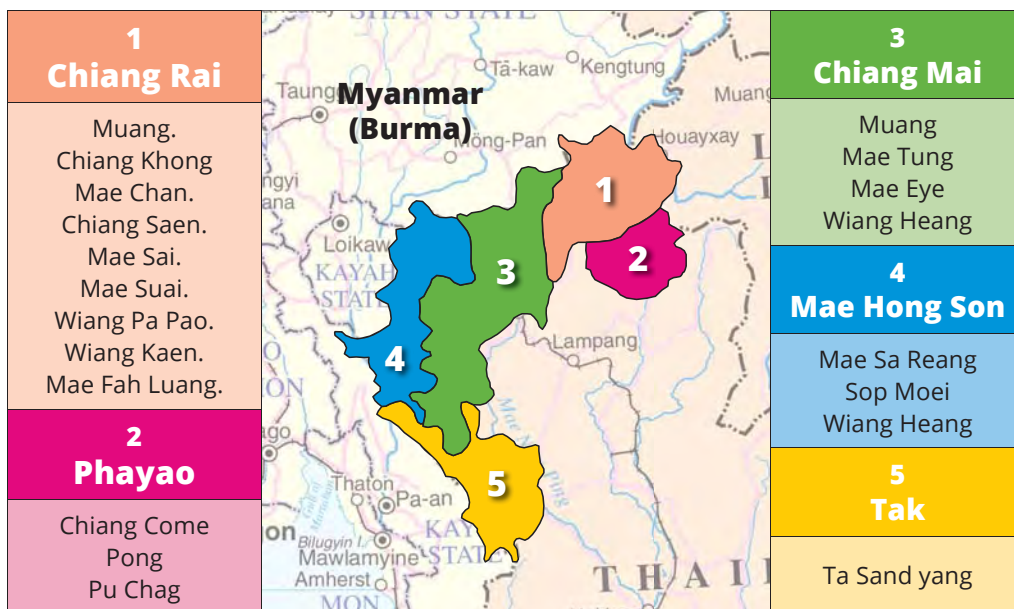
Fast Facts

PROJECT TITLE:	Human Rights in Thailand – Protection for Stateless Children
PROJECT PARTNER:	Stateless Children Protection Project Committee
PROJECT AREA/COUNTRY:	5 provinces in Northern Thailand
TARGET GROUPS:	5,000 children, 1,500 families and 200 communities
PROJECT COSTS:	518.804,00 Euro
PROJECT DURATION:	01 January 2011 to 31 December 2013

The **Stateless Children Protection Project (SCPP)** is a network comprising seven NGOs working together to advocate for stateless children and the protection of their rights. SCPP is active in five provinces in Northern Thailand (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Phayao, Tak).¹ See map below.

Established in 2008, the network received funding from terre des hommes Germany and German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for a three-year programme. The

vision of SCPP is the *protection of stateless children and their families' rights in target communities through legal advice, media campaigns, policy advocacy, and data collection activities.*



¹ <http://www.stateless4child.net/eng/>

A critical goal of the SCPP from 2011-2013 was to *protect the rights of stateless children and their families as provided under Thai law, and, where possible, to assist in obtaining legal status for at least 5,000 children and their families in 20 Districts located in 5 northern provinces of Thailand.*

SCPP uses a multi-pronged approach to address the complex issue of stateless and nationless children. This includes:

Advocacy

- Advocating for policy reform
- Conducting media campaigns to raise awareness of the target group about their rights, and to reach Thai society, Thai government officials, and the international community.

Stateless children in rural areas are taught about their rights and how to obtain citizenship.

Research

- Developing and maintaining database and information systems to measure project effects as well as clarify situation in target areas.

Capacity building

- Ensuring the sustainability of the project's work through institutional development whilst building the capacity of and empowering the target group to identify and address the problems of statelessness in their own communities.

Service provision

- Providing services such as legal assistance and advice for stateless people in attaining their lawful rights.
- Providing mobile classrooms to ensure child education.





Coming out of the success of SCPP, a new network was created at the beginning of 2014, namely the Legal Status Network Foundation. The LSNF has, with 32 affiliated organisations, been registered and is seen as a powerful voice for stateless children's issues.

The Context

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts the right of a person to a nationality (UDHR 1948: Article 15). Thailand is one of the countries that ratified the Declaration but is not a signatory to more specific legal instruments on nationality and statelessness such as the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.²

Stateless and nationless children refer to children who do not have citizenship, and therefore, are unable to access rights that are afforded to citizens of a particular country where they reside. In Thailand there are estimates of over 2-4 million adults and children who are either stateless or nation less.

Particular to Thailand, people who are stateless do not enjoy any form of legal status. On the other hand, nationality-less people are those without Thai nationality but who may have been registered and recognized in the Thai legal system. These people often hold a legal status card – white in front and pink in the back, which is also known as the Ten-Years Card³.

Often the issue of statelessness focuses on the challenges experienced by adults, without proper mention of the specific and complex issues faced by stateless

SCPP provides "mobile classrooms" and comes to the monastery where boys who are stateless get free education. SCPP staff educate the children on their rights and options to obtain Thai citizenship.

² <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a2535c3d.html>

³ The SCPP Project Assessment. Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Board



In the schools in rural areas, the SCPP project staff provides students with information on their rights and how to obtain the citizenship under Thai law.

children. Over the last decade there has been an increase in stateless children owing to the growing number of migrants living in and/or coming to Thailand. There are many causes of statelessness among children:

A child's parents may have come from ethnic nationality groups from Burma/ Myanmar who migrated to Thailand due to domestic conflicts with the Burma/ Myanmar government.

The isolation of ethnic and minority groups has resulted in a lack of knowledge on the process of registration and issues around attaining citizenship.

The incompleteness of the civil registration system in Thailand has resulted in many children being under-surveyed and under-registered (and therefore, unrecorded).

⁴ Chaturong Boonyarattanasunthorn, SCPP Evaluation Advisory Board member

Regardless of the reason, the impact of being stateless is the same: deprivation of human rights such as the right to travel, the right to work, the right to education, the right to health. Without access to fundamental human rights, one's life is a constant struggle made more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

Resolving the stateless status of children in Thailand is complicated and time consuming: whilst a few, particularly those from minority groups, may be granted "temporary residence rights" to Thailand, the process of obtaining citizenship and enjoying the rights that go along with it is much more difficult.

In every society, holding nationality is the best condition for access to human rights. A person who holds nationality of the owner state has rights to access resources of that state. On the other hand, the statelessness of a person limits his or her access to rights and resources of the land where he resides.⁴

Stories of success

SCPP has achieved much in the three year project cycle which is evidenced in every aspect of their work. The project has been formally evaluated and many lessons have been learned.

Staff from SCPP interviewed highlighted many stories of success including: a strong network working towards a common goal, the setting up and maintenance of the data-base, advocacy and lobbying – pushing for and following up on policy change, community knowledge building leading to community empowerment in addressing rights abuses and issues, youth development and empowerment.

STORIES OF SUCCESS 1:

Networking for a common goal

“One organisation cannot do it alone. The network has many conflicts but has a common goal and shared priorities.”

– SCPP member

SCPP is made up of seven independent, diverse organisations operating in northern Thailand who came together in 2010 in order to better address the complex issues facing stateless children, and believing that a more holistic and integrated approach would lead to better results. Leaders of SCPP, who have long been in the field of addressing the issue of statelessness, see that the gains made over the last few years are directly related to working together. The network members are:

1. The **Phayao Community Rights Organization (PCRO)** based in Phayao Province and established in 1997. It was originally founded to assist stateless persons fleeing conflict in Laos and living in refugee camps in Phayao. After these camps were closed over 40,000 refugees stayed in the area and needed assistance in attaining Thai citizenship and their rights for health and education.

2. The **Mirror Foundation** based in Chiang Rai has been working with ethnic nationality groups persons since 1991. Their goal is to strengthen ethnic nationality groups communities through a grassroots approach; they run projects such as youth group trainings, cultural preservation and exchange, small economic-building projects, ecotourism, health, education, missing persons assistance, and environmental conservation.
3. The **Hill Area and Community Development Foundation (HADF)** also based in Chiang Rai has been working with ethnic nationality groups communities since 1985. The main areas of focus for HADF include: environmental conservation, health, youth trainings and network building, and ecotourism projects. It is one of the oldest and most established NGOs in Northern Thailand.
4. The **Ban Saeng Mai Project** is the third organisation of the network based in Chiang Rai and has been operational since 2006. This project provides a safe house for at risk young women as well as a coordinating center for advice and counseling. The center also conducts life skills trainings for its residents.

SCPP team also goes to the community and provides free legal assistance to stateless people.



5. The **Development Center for Children and Community Network (DCCN)** established in 1993 is based in Mae Hong Son Province and focuses on environmental issues, child protection, stateless persons, land rights, community education and health.

6. The **Gab Fai Community Theatre Group** based in Chiang Mai and was established in 1996 in order to provide youth with an opportunity to come together and build their skills as performance artists whilst conducting community theatre productions. The content for the productions has included raising awareness about trafficking, sex work, political participation, gender roles, HIV and AIDS and violence against women and children.

7. The **Child Trafficking Watch-Thailand Organization (CTWT)** based in Chiang Mai is a network of 25 NGOs that work on children and women issues covering seven northern Thai provinces: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Lam-pang, Nan, Tak and Mae Hong Son.

One of the spinoffs of SCPP as a strong cohesive network has been the ability to collectively work with the state. SCPP

works to protect the rights of stateless children and their families as provided under Thai law, and, where possible, to assist in obtaining legal status for these families. Resolving statelessness among children cannot be achieved by NGOs alone and requires collaboration between the state and NGOs. SCPP has been successful in collaborating with the state and has gained credibility through its efficiency in the speedy submission of legal status applications and in the rigors of collecting authentic documentation.

SCPP staff demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the complexities of statelessness and rights and are recognized as experts in the field who have addressed such issues for years. They understand the mix of legal, policy, cultural, economic and social relationships in the community and have skills, expertise and contacts that the government can tap into: SCPP experts are able to diagnose problems and present valid legal status applications acceptable to the state. They are often called upon by the state to assist in the process. The collaboration between SCPP and the state has led to senior government officials having a greater and more nuanced understanding of the stateless issue.

The SCPP network has, in its short existence of working together, made the issue of citizenship more prominent, raised the problem of stateless people and established a working relationship with government, including providing a capacity development and advisory role on various committees to ensure that the voice of stateless people is heard. The policy for the criteria on Thai Citizenship is currently under review in parliament – and SCPP has strong representation in the committees debating and pushing for the changes. In the event of policy reform the role of SCPP will be to advise on, and monitor implementation.

Respected community leader showed support for SCPP project and informed everyone on the importance of being good and active citizens despite the stateless status.





STORIES OF SUCCESS 2: The set-up of a database

“ Without proper documentation stateless people ‘do not exist’. This is one reason why the database is so important. The job of SCPP is to document the minorities, the people living in the margins and mobile populations.”

– SCPP member

A key to facilitating the registration and granting of citizenship to stateless and nationality-less children is accurate information and data: unfortunately this has also been one of the biggest inadequacies in the Thai registry system. One of the main activities of SCPP is the development of a stateless people database. Prior to the formation of SCPP the individual partners each had their own database system which varied in format from one another. Although data from the different organisations are forwarded and entered

into a central database, the process had been intermittent and lacking in database updates. At the end of 2013 the database had information on about 20,000 stateless persons.

The key purpose of the database project is to provide a standardized and systematic database for which all organisations may enter data directly into the central database, which makes it possible to provide a statistical overview of stateless people in the five northern provinces of Thailand for both the general public and for government records.

Through the SCPP project the databases in all seven organisations were streamlined and standardized allowing each sub-database to connect to the main database and to a website. Organisational staff was trained in order to build capacity in data collection and capture, to ensure rigorous standards and quality

During the visit of then Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatt in Chiang Mai in 2012 stateless children spoke out about their experiences.



The Stateless Youth Group shared their story as stateless children through a performance of a traditional dance during a public forum. The youth group was also trained by SCPP on community theatre.

of information. The format of the original data paper collection forms was upgraded to a software system that can process results rapidly and update information regularly. Every organization can access the same information and check for repetitive records.

The database and website upgrade has enabled more information to be collected: including, for example, a categorization of adults (over 18 years) and children and a disaggregation of data according to gender, etc. The database improvements ensure more comprehensive and

inclusive (particularly of ethnic groups experiencing legal status problems) information.

A task of such magnitude will obviously have some key problems, and these remain challenges for the ongoing sustainability of the database project. Capacity is the biggest hurdle, and although skilled staff were employed to do the data entry this remains a problem that needs to be addressed if the database is to be maintained to retain its rigor. Coordination across the seven organisations also poses a challenge – the database relies on timely data entry, adherence to deadlines and constant communication. Expectedly, some organizations are more regular and committed to the database than others. Equally crucial is the need for sufficient funding as a recent lack of funds has meant that the database has not been updated since the end of 2013. Given that the database system is the only one that contains the information about stateless persons in the five northern provinces it is imperative that it is maintained.

Despite all these challenges the database has been one of SCPP's success stories: many organisations working on the problem of stateless children and adults have acknowledged its importance, as has the Thai government. The data collected has been invaluable in quantifying the issue and is a useful tool to raising awareness of the stateless person's issue. Furthermore SCPP has been able to use the data in their advocacy efforts.

STORIES OF SUCCESS 3:

Empowerment of stateless people

"Stateless people are becoming more assertive, they are understanding their problems, dealing with their own situations and taking effort to know their rights."

– SCPP member

SCPP has assisted 5,237 children in obtaining legal status, thus ensuring that they are now able to access their rights. Community empowerment is a key goal for SCPP and many different techniques (youth programmes, drama and other creative methods, legal clinics) are used to empower stateless people to better cope with the daily challenges of being stateless and to advocate for their rights to citizenship.

A starting point for empowerment is enabling people to tell their individual stories in whatever way they feel most comfortable – for example through writing, singing, or drama. In this way people realize that they have a shared experience and story, that their issues are not only personal but are also political, and that they have rights. Such programmes enable people to better deal

The Policy Makers and District Governor opened a discussion with the stateless people group and SCPP team to coordinate and work together to fulfill and protect the rights of stateless people.



with the lack of dignity and rights that go along with being stateless, provide solutions for dealing with issues such as lack of access to education and health care and provide information on rights violations such as forced labour and trafficking. Often stateless people are very isolated: people in Mae Sam Lab, a Karin village in Mae Hong Son, for example, after an intervention from SCPP set up a village committee to address their issues.

Focusing on youth, SCPP has developed young leaders who are able to educate their peers about their rights and this has started a movement of young people who are working for change. SCPP has also empowered individual youth in getting Thai citizenship which impacts greatly on dignity and access to rights. A young man assisted by SCPP has this to say after achieving citizenship for himself: "I am proud of myself. I am 100% Thai".

The youth theatre programme is an entertaining way to raise social issues. The theatre group studies the stories of the community in preparation for writing the scripts. In this way the issue of the status and rights of individuals, actual experiences and stories of people in the area are adapted to the plays. The plays are perceived by both the audience and members of the theatre group as "being

The Legal Clinic of SCPP is open for every stateless people needing legal assistance.



about us". The plays also present legal options and other solutions to problems in an understandable way. A question and answer session with the staff follows each performance and opens an opportunity for young people in the audience to raise their issues and concerns.

SCPP is also mindful of the special needs of stateless people with disabilities and provides materials that cater to the deaf or hard-of-hearing, and to the blind, ensuring that all groups of stateless people who need information and support are adequately covered.

Moving Forward:

LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE FIRST THREE YEARS

The SCPP is one of the successful projects supported by terre des hommes, Germany and the BMZ, and funding resumes in 2015. In 2014, the SCPP needed time to take stock of the project, opened the network for external evaluation, and prepared the continuity proposal which is now under consideration. In the meantime, member organisations resumed their activities toward SCPP goals, although at a minimum. Work in 2015 will draw from the following lessons learnt in the first phase of the project and SCPP staff believe that the broadened network will have even more success:

LESSON ONE:

Policy advocacy is crucial

Policy work is vital to the issue of stateless children. The network regards policy work as a key to a structural change that brings wider and better impacts. The strategy of working on policy engagement is more effective than mere concentrated individual lobbying, given the fluidity of people in top government positions. The network has a role in both policy change and policy implementation.



LESSON TWO:

Networking is important

Networking is a critical ingredient for negotiating power. SCPP as a whole, and the organisations that make up SCPP have garnered much credibility for the work that they have done and this has given them leverage with top government officials and ministries.

LESSON THREE:

Empowerment ensures sustainability

The empowerment of villagers is essential for the sustainability of the project. The corner stone of empowerment is education and knowledge sharing – once villagers know their rights they are better able to tackle both individual and community issues and challenges. Knowledge can eliminate fear and

ignorance: whilst in the past villagers did not know their rights and were afraid to contest issues, they now address rights violations head on.

LESSON FOUR:

Information is critical

The availability of data is a critical component for ensuring that people have access to the information that they need. The database plays a big role in making such information available and in providing a mechanism to track stateless people and monitor progress in changing status. 🔴

The District Governor and government officers handed over certificates and ID cards to children who successfully obtained Thai citizenship through the SCPP project.



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Young leader:

Mueda Nawanat

“I strongly believe in our power. I strongly believe we can change our future. So now we need to start working together.”

Mueda (Da) is 28 years old, a strong and articulate woman whose passion for the rights of stateless people is obvious. Her inspiring story is one of perseverance, strength and lots of support from her family, community and organisations such as Stateless Children’s Protection Project (SCPP) and the Development Centre for Children and Community Network, (DCCN) and Earth Rights.

Da’s parents are from Karen State and left Burma over 45 years ago to escape the conflict. Da was born in

Thailand and the family lived in a small village in Baan Tharue in Mae Hong Son with 21 families. The village had limited resources – and there was no school and no clinic. Da’s father believed strongly in education and wanted Da to go to school: she left home at the age of seven to live and study at a temple which was located in another district – she was the only female student.

When she first left home, she had no concept of being stateless but this changed as she got older and experienced firsthand verbal abuse and prejudice for being “stateless”, having no Thai citizenship and therefore no rights. She started to see that her life was different from children with Thai citizenship when upon graduating from primary school, she was denied the scholarship she deserved and not even granted an honourable dismissal; certificate because she was stateless. These problems persisted throughout high school – she was constantly asked for documentation such as a birth certificate and education certificate which she could not provide. When she graduated from high school, she was unable to get a diploma which was a requirement for getting into university.

Da, is a fighter, and was determined: *“I wanted to learn. My father was the leader of the community who taught me a lot including the importance*



of education". Even when teachers told her, "education is not important for you, just quit school, work for your family – studying is not useful for your life", she kept on following her dream of getting an education and being in a position to assist other stateless children. Her determination was fuelled by her passion to make changes for herself and for others: "... They said stateless people are garbage – not useful for our country. I was very sad and also very angry".

A growing consciousness about the challenges of being stateless and the plight of other stateless children led Da to getting involved in activism around statelessness issues. She aspired to be a representative of stateless children and so began to tell her story and the problems that she faced. *"I needed to do something so I started to get involved in many things to develop myself."*

Da realised that Human Rights was the key to solving the situation of stateless people, and that conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) were important tools to offer protection. She decided to study law: of course the same constraints that had affected her access to education earlier on in her school career also impacted on her ability to attend university, coupled with restrictions on travel and lack of access to student financial support due to her stateless status. Whilst at a seminar on statelessness issues, the president of Payap University, a private university located in Chiang Mai heard Da speak on the rights of stateless people and her own dream to study law. He then offered her a scholarship to attend the university. Da was the first stateless person to attend and graduate from the University. Whilst at University, Da continued to raise the issues facing stateless people and set up a University group to address human rights violations.

For Da, activism was and still is important. *"Every place, every time that I have the opportunity to talk about stateless people I will do it."* The problems for stateless people begin at birth: being denied a birth certificate creates problems for people throughout their lives – around issues of education, health access (Da's father died due to lack of access to health care), the right to have a registered marriage, the right to travel – within Thailand and beyond. The lack of rights makes people more vulnerable to abuse. They are not protected by labour laws, are prone to human trafficking and denied the benefits given to registered Thai citizens. People without nationality are viewed as alien – and are often subjected to verbal abuse which impacts on their sense of dignity and self-esteem.

After graduation, Da volunteered at the Stateless Children's Protection Project and the Development Centre for Children and Community Network and set up her own project – the Mekong Youth Assembly. MYA is an advocacy organisation of and for youth in 6 countries (Burma, Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam) working on children and youth rights and the environment that was facilitated and set up with financial and technical support from terre des hommes Germany South East Asia Regional Office. The vision of MYA is for

young people to be empowered and be at the forefront of addressing issues that affect them most. With over 200 members, the network of youth groups strengthens communities' capacities to defend their earth rights. Da represented Southeast Asia region in the first International Youth Network meeting organised by terre des hommes in Germany in 2011, and she has joined several regional meetings of the terre des hommes Southeast Asia Youth Network (SYN). Da has represented the SYN in the ASEAN Youth Forum and other regional events.

Changes in legislation governing the citizenship laws in Thailand after ten years of advocacy impacted directly on Da's situation. With the support of her NGO DCCN, Da fought to get Article 23 (allowing for people born in Thailand before 1992 to apply for citizenship) passed. Her story was used as a case study for Article 23 and she was the first person to gain citizenship under the Article in 2008.

"Why did we fight for this? Because if we don't have Thai nationality that means we cannot get any rights. I may be a non-citizen but I am human so that means if you have rights I also have rights the same with you."

Although there has been some successes, stateless people are still discriminated against and Da acknowledges that there are many changes that need to take place. Da's dream, growing up, was to be educated, to become a lawyer and to help people. Now she says she has studied law and she can help people but that is not the end for her. She uses her experience even more in her activism. She wants to see youth stand up to protect their rights and their lives, to see the community use their knowledge to help young people.

"I don't fight for myself but I fight for my family and also my village. If I fight, if I win, they win with me."



Mueda Nawanat (Dada) became Legal Assistant of SCPP project after she finished her degree in Law. With her own experience in dealing with statelessness for 12 years, she shares her story with policy makers to make them understand the issue and fulfill children's right to citizenship.