

VIETNAM LAOS CAMBODIA



MEDICAL & SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN

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LAO WATER PROJECT

Villagers in Ban Kok Savahn now have abundant supplies of clean, fresh water, thanks to a MSAVLC-sponsored water project.

Ban Kok Savahn is a village of about 500 people in Jumpet District, northern Laos, some 20 kilometres away from Luang Prabang. However, it is a world away from the charming French-colonial, world heritage town on the banks of the Mekong River, visited by wealthy tourists.

MSAVLC donors have paid for three villages in the Jumpet District to have new water systems, to replace the old or redundant ones. It was these villages that we went to see with Andrew Brown, Founder and Director of our partner organisation 'Support Lao Children', who is managing the water projects for us.

There is no bridge across the 300 metre-wide Mekong from Luang Prabang, so to reach Jumpet District you first have to use the motor-boat ferry. This can take up to four vehicles, plus any number of motorbikes and their riders, and foot passengers. The ferry takes about half an hour to cross the river, as long as there isn't a queue of traffic wanting to use it.

We took a car across on the ferry, and on reaching the other bank, we said goodbye to civilisation and set off to visit the villages. The road was unmade and unbelievably dusty, rutted and bumpy. There were a few pick-up trucks, motor bikes, but no other cars. We passed over a river on a low



Shower time in Ban Kok Savahn

concrete a bridge, where the water can rise rapidly in the rainy season, flooding the bridge and the land around. There were men washing their motorbikes in the river, and a girl was washing her hair alongside them! The area was steep and hilly, the upper slopes were mostly forest but there were rice terraces in the valleys.

In the villages, life is very hard. Average life expectancy is only 47 years old, about 40% live below the poverty line, and most people live on less than \$2 USD a day. Many new mothers have to return to work in the fields shortly after their babies are born, often with them on their backs, and there is a 20% infant mortality rate in the first year. In the past the women had to collect their water from the

river, and in the rainy season the river banks became very slippery. Women had been known to fall and break a leg or a hip. Hospital costs were too great to repair these injuries, and as a result some women died. The water itself was contaminated, often from villages further up the river, and it had to be used not only for washing themselves and their clothes, but for drinking as well.

As we reached Ban Kok Savahn we could see that most of the houses were made of wood or thatch. Some had corrugated iron roofs, which would be unbearably hot in the summer. There were a few more solid houses under construction, but we were told that they might take years to finish, whilst their owners saved up enough money

to complete the task. As we walked around the village we could see that the villagers were growing bananas, papayas, pineapples marrows and garden vegetables; ducks, chickens, pigs and dogs were wandering around. The villagers are mostly poor farmers, and many of the men were away clearing the forest to plant their crops. There were children in ragged clothes, and a few women peeped out at us from their houses.

We went first to meet the village chief, who showed us around. He told us that until recently Ban Kok Savahn had an unreliable water system. Their water had been sourced from a stream that runs all year round, but for four months of the year, during the rainy season, the water had been very polluted. He proudly took us to see the work that had been done to improve the system. A large new water tank had been built, three metres by three metres square and over two metres tall. New pipes had been laid from a water source up in the mountains. The pipe-laying had been done by the villagers themselves, and it had taken 80 families ten days to dig a trench 2.8 kilometres long, and then lay the pipes from the water source to the tank. Unfortunately, they experienced some trouble with the water flow at the first attempt, and the water did not reach the new tank. In order to get the water flowing, they spent a further month working, and had to lay 700 metres of extra pipe, making a total of 3.5 km of pipes buried under ground! The villagers received no payment for their labour, but the water system is now working and supplying fresh, unpolluted water to the six water stations in the village. We walked up to the holding tank and took pictures of it. The tank now continuously feeds the water stations throughout the village, and we saw them in action. One boy was having a shower under one, and a woman was washing her clothes at another. It was so gratifying to see such a good result and it had obviously made such a difference to the villagers' lives. MSAVLC initially sponsored the whole project, but the villagers had raised some money from their rice sales which they contributed towards the cost of the system.

Andrew Brown also took us to two

other villages, Ban Hoi Mut and Ban Kok Xai, where together our two organisations have improved the water systems, so that the villagers now have access to clean, fresh water.

In Ban Hoi Mut the holding tank was fed from the polluted river. A lot of repair was necessary and new pipes had to be laid from a clean water spring found high up on the mountain



The village of Ban Hoi Mut in Northern Laos.

side, over 1.2 km away, and accessed through dense jungle. These pipes were connected to the existing tank and then to water stations in the village. Now the system is complete, most villagers don't have to walk more than 100 metres to a water station, and the water quality is good, as its source is a spring, not the river. We walked up to the holding tank and saw the pipe feeding it. It now has copious water flowing from it, and is quite a sight.

In Ban Kok Xai the old water tank has been extended to double its size, and we climbed up some new steps, past the village school, and then further up a steep hill to view it. We were warned to stamp our feet, to scare away any poisonous snakes which may be lurking around. The extended tank was very impressive, and we could hear the water flowing into it from the new pipes which ran for five kilometres up through jungle

to a mountain stream. The new system has made a tremendous difference to the villagers, as previously their water ran out before everyone could receive their share.

With new water systems in place, all three villages have a reliable, clean water supply, and the villagers' lives are a little easier, and much healthier as a result.

The Trustees are hoping to raise more funds to help other villages in northern Laos, by providing new, or improved water systems. With your help we can provide clean, fresh water, a service which we in the West take for granted.

Mary & Peter Lidgard

**DON'T FORGET TO
'GIFT AID' YOUR
DONATION.**

**For every gift-aided
pound which you give,
Chancellor Osborne will
give us an extra 25p.**

VISIT TO VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA

For the past two months Mary Lidgard, MSAVLC's Honorary Secretary, and I have been travelling through South-East Asia, evaluating all 13 of the charity's projects. This was the sixth time that we have visited Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the ten years that we have worked for the charity. But on this trip, I have never been more convinced of the importance of these project evaluation visits.

In his book "The White Man's Burden", William Easterly, Professor of Economics at New York University,

progress has been made towards attaining them.

The Trustees of MSAVLC do not have impossible goals, our objectives are quite limited. That means that when the Trustees visit Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, we can evaluate the use of the funds which we send to each project, and report back to you, our donors. Unfortunately, such evaluation and reporting back does not happen with projects run by some of the international agencies and big charities.

On the 9th March, Mary and I set off from London's Gatwick Airport to

already informed all our project leaders of the aims of our visit. These were:

- To discuss the projects which we have funded recently and proposals for future project funding,
- To view and check any equipment which has been purchased recently using MSAVLC funds,
- To meet patients and clients who have benefited from the aid sent by the charity,
- To check records of transactions, receipts and maintenance protocols, and
- To obtain verbal or written reports and photographs so that we are able to report back to the Trustees, our supporters and donors.

Our first appointment in Hanoi was with PACCOM (the People's Aid Coordinating Committee). They are the government agency who have helped MSAVLC for many years with our travel, translation and co-ordination of our visits. Having agreed our programme with them, we visited Thanh Xuan Peace Village to meet the Director and the children and see equipment which had been purchased recently by the charity.

From Hanoi we flew to Cambodia where we visited our First Aid Project, and saw the new showers and toilets, at New Hope Children's Home in Poipet. We then met disabled clients at Disability Development Services in Pursat. We met staff at All Ears Cambodia, and Lynn and John went with them to the outreach clinic in Prey Tralach. Whilst in Phnom Penh we also looked at a project run by an organisation called 'Daughters of Cambodia', who work with young women rescued from human trafficking and the sex trade.

We travelled on to Ho Chi Minh City to see the equipment which we have recently purchased for Hoa Binh Peace Village, the orphanage for victims of Agent Orange.



John Firth and Mrs Chea Navy in Pursat, Cambodia

states very forcefully that billions of dollars worth of aid from Western countries has been wasted on poor people in the third world. His message is that aid agencies, big or small, must account for the aid which they give, and he accuses the World Bank (who he worked for as an economist for 16 years), the International Monetary Fund, and many international agencies of setting impossible goals, and then not evaluating whether

travel to Hanoi, Vietnam. We were accompanied by John Firth, the charity's Honorary Treasurer and his wife Lynn, who is the Trustee responsible for the distribution of our Bulletins. This was to be John and Lynn's first visit to South-East Asia and we were keen to give them as broad an experience of the countries and our projects as possible, in the two weeks that they had available.

As on previous visits we had

Lynn and John then flew back to Britain, but Mary and I went on to Dien Bien Phu, and then to Lai Chau in Vietnam's Northern Highlands to meet trainee midwives in Phong Tho.

We also travelled south to Ha Tinh Province, to inspect equipment at Ha Tinh General Hospital, and at the Agent Orange Rehabilitation Centre in Cam Xuyen. We met with the Directors of Ky Anh Blind and Ky Anh Elderly Associations, and we went to the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh, where we planted a tree to commemorate MSAVLC's celebration of 50 years of Aid.

Back in Hanoi we met officers from VAVA, the Vietnam Association for the Victims of Agent Orange, and also some of the recipients of the fifty wheelchairs donated by MSAVLC.

We then flew to Luang Prabang in Laos, to see the water projects in Jumpet District and to visit Deak Kum Pa Orphanage.

We returned once more to Hanoi to see the celebrations for the 40th Anniversary of the re-unification of

Vietnam, before flying home just in time for the election results.

Over the next few editions of the Bulletin we hope to include articles detailing many of our project visits,

and giving details of the people that we met, and who have been helped by the charity.

Peter Lidgard



Planting the tree at the Vietnam-British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting was held on the 28th February 2015, at St. Marks Methodist Church in Cheltenham.

The meeting was well attended, and reports were given by the Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer of the charity's activities during 2014.

The Honorary Secretary stated that 2015 will again be a challenge. The main activity will be the visit of a delegation to all the charity's projects, which they aim to evaluate, and discuss with the Project Managers. It is hoped that the Trustees will be able to meet patients and clients who have benefited from the aid sent by the charity.

The Trustees aim to keep our website and Bulletin mailing-list up to date, in order to inform our donors and supporters of the charity's activities. It is hoped that we may be able to encourage more young people to be aware of MSAVLC and its work, in order to maintain the charity's sustainability.

A celebration of '50 Years of Aid' given by MSAVLC to the people of S.E. Asia, is planned for June 2015. The chairman reported that all the tickets had been issued, and he thanked the Vietnamese Embassy for offering to host the event.

In his report the Honorary Treasurer noted that although regular income for

2014 was down, the charity's funds had been boosted by a number of generous legacies.

The Charity's Officers for 2015 were elected as follows:-

Chairman: – Peter Lidgard

Honorary Secretary: – Mary Lidgard

Honorary Treasurer: – John Firth

Trustees: – Lynn Firth,

Deborah Dainton and

Susmita Ghosh.

Dr. Stewart Benzie was appointed as the Charity's Medical and Scientific Advisor. The appointment of The Right Honourable George Howarth M.P. as a Vice-President was also confirmed at the meeting.

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