

**Project reference**

EuropeAid/113172/C/G

**EC Partners**

- Enfants et Développement
- Save the Children, UK

**Facts and Figures**

- Duration: **2003-2007**
- EC contribution: **€1.4 million**



**EUROPEAN  
COMMISSION**

## Education

### Early childhood development in ethnic minority communities in Northern Vietnam

*"Thanks to the project my children enjoy going to school and they are less frequently sick. This is very important to me."*

32-year-old mother, Dao ethnic minority, North Vietnam

**Context: Ethnic minority children and education**

Life in remote, ethnic minority communities in Vietnam can be a struggle to survive with many difficulties: child malnutrition, no year round access to clean water, a general lack of hygienic latrines, lack of information and language barriers. This results in fewer opportunities, poor quality education and healthcare. Although the Vietnamese government works to alleviate poverty, ethnic minority areas remain poor.

In order to help the government, the EC together with the NGOs '*Enfants et Développement*' and '*Save the Children UK*', joined the efforts of local communities and teachers to develop a child friendly community and to alleviate poverty in two districts in Lao Cai and Quang Ninh provinces in the North of Vietnam.

Before the project started in 2003, a large number of school-age children, especially girls, were out of school in these districts. Moreover, less than half of the kindergarten-age children were attending kindergarten, most women were illiterate and could not speak Vietnamese. Out-of-school children were forced to work long hours in the fields, often in cold and unhygienic conditions. Informal and extra-curricular education was also very limited and children had very few safe places to play.

In 2003 the EC agreed to finance "*The integrated early childhood development project*" which would last until 2007. The concept of the project is really simple: the more coordinated support a child receives from the most areas and the earliest age the better.

**Objective: Working together for a child friendly community**

The single main objective of the project is to help children reach their full potential by encouraging the development and refinement of a healthy, holistic and caring environment.

The project combines physical development activities (nutritional, health and hygiene), cognitive development, emotional development and social development activities. While keeping the child at the centre of attention, they also target the families and communities.

**Impact: What has been achieved?**

- Over 3 000 children in six communes of two provinces along with 5 000 parents and other caregivers have received support
- Pre-school activities in 36 villages of six communes have been set up and used as a catalyst for developing and promoting village-based and village initiated early childhood development activities.

## Early childhood development in ethnic minority communities in Northern Vietnam

### Ensuring every child's right to survival, protection, care and optimal development

One teacher stated that the project's achievement in opening non-official pre-school classes in villages has clearly changed the authorities' attitude at all levels concerning ethnic minority people and their potentials. The local authorities are now providing allowances for pre-school teachers from their own budget. Young ethnic minority women were selected within the villages to become pre-school teachers.

During the project implementation many officials from the Ministry of Education and the provincial authorities paid visits to non-official pre-school classes and were impressed by the child-centred learning model. This support and approval from the highest level of authority in the education sector has given the female teachers a new social position in their villages. Today more and more young ethnic minority girls are investing their efforts in becoming teachers (not only pre-school).

In 2006 the district authorities agreed to mobilize funds from villages, organizations and the district budget to establish more pre-schools for ethnic minority children, based on the model developed by the project. Currently 80% of the villages in the two districts, where the project has been active, have child-friendly pre-school classes.

The success and effectiveness of this project reaches even further. At national level the government is revising its National Program Strategies and many of the lessons learnt from this project have been taken into account.

The government is keen to reach as many children as possible with the development approach that this project has spearheaded in Vietnam. Setting up an early childhood system and training new staff in other areas of the country is now strongly supported by local government, NGOs and the European Commission which has agreed to further funding of about €0.75 million for a follow-up project in the Northern Province, Lao Cai.