AUSTRALIANS AND VIETNAMESE: PERSONAL TIES

SCOTT O’NEILL — ELIMINATING DENGUE

Professor Scott O’Neill has never had dengue fever yet he has spent most of his scientific career trying to find a way to eliminate the virus. His persistence seems to be paying off. Early results from field trials are so promising, countries such as Vietnam are lining up to take part.

The discovery preventing mosquitoes from transmitting the dengue virus has been welcomed internationally, especially in Vietnam where dengue is on the rise—more than one million cases of dengue were reported in just 12 years between 1998 and 2010. This is in part because of rapid urbanisation, more water infrastructure such as household taps which ironically can lead to more mosquito breeding sites, resistance to insecticides and possibly climate change.

In 2006, Professor O’Neill’s team, Vietnam’s National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology and Institute Pasteur began laying the groundwork for Vietnam’s first trial on Tri Nguyen Island near the port of Nha Trang, on the country’s south central coast.

Professor O’Neill inspects mosquitoes before their release. Photo: Eliminate Dengue

The plan had the support of 95 per cent of the island’s 3,250 residents.

“We started collaborating with Vietnam in 2004 ... it’s people-to-people relationships that enable things to happen. You get to know people, you share ideas, you build up trust.”

FRANK AND ADRIAN CAIA — FROM AUSTRALIAN VINES TO VIETNAM

When Francesco Caia and his son Domenico started farming grapes just outside Mildura in northern Victoria more than 40 years ago, they couldn’t have imagined the next generation, Frank and Adrian, growing the business to a point where today almost 40 per cent of its growth is in the Asian market.

Starting out as a small farm supplying the dried fruit industry, GrapeCo is now producing 20 different premium table grape varieties and marketing more than 900,000 cartons of table grapes per year. When the market for grapes opened in Vietnam just a few years ago, GrapeCo was ready.

“Mr Hai from Klever Fruits, a Vietnamese fruit importer and retailer was very interested in what we had to offer,” Adrian said. “He liked the farm and our facilities and appreciated the personal investment that a family-run business brings. We began small, sending him samples, and now we have a very strong relationship. We’ve invested in varieties to suit Vietnamese consumer tastes and this has paid off for us.”

With weekly exports to Vietnam, GrapeCo is looking forward to a long and prosperous relationship between the two countries.

FRANK AND ADRIAN CAIA — FROM AUSTRALIAN VINES TO VIETNAM

HUONG DANG — STRENGTHENING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

For Huong Dang, the last 16 years have been filled with obstacles but her love of learning, determination and one life-changing moment saw her take a completely different path to a career in social enterprise.

Huong grew up in rural Vietnam attending school when she could and helping her widowed mother and two siblings to harvest a few paddy fields, the family’s only living. At just 13 years of age, she left the only life she knew and went to Hanoi to work as a live-in nanny.

Today—16 years later—she has a master’s degree from Melbourne’s Swinburne University and works as a manager for KOTO, a social enterprise and training centre in Vietnam.

Unable to fit night school into her work as a nanny, she made a brave decision to put her education first. She ended up living under a staircase, preparing and selling food by day and attending classes at night.

On most nights, she slept for only two hours. Then one day, her life took a new direction.

“A woman in my class told me about KOTO and that was the beginning of my new path,” she said.

After a year with KOTO, Huong had finished her secondary education, trained in hospitality and learned English! With the encouragement of KOTO founder Jimmy Pham, Huong applied for a scholarship to study a Diploma of Business Management at Box Hill Institute in Melbourne. Her success there saw her offered another scholarship to study an Associate Degree in Commerce.

In 2015, recognising Huong’s commitment, determination and talent, Swinburne University of Technology offered her a place to study a Master of Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

Today Huong is back in Vietnam and working as International Partnership and Engagement Manager for KOTO. She still has a passion for learning and now also has a passion for Australia and strengthening the ties between social enterprise in Vietnam and Australia.
JANE GAVAN — FOSTERING CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN BUSINESS

BUSINESS KNOWS THAT INNOVATION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS. BUT HOW DO YOU PROVIDE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR INNOVATION TO FLOURISH, PARTICULARLY WITHIN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR?

Enter Dr Jane Gavan from the Sydney College of the Arts at the University of Sydney. Last year Dr Gavan challenged a group of Vietnam’s final year art and design students to turn industrial waste from six factories into art and design objects. In just two weeks, what was destined for rubbish tips was transformed into art and presented to academics, business leaders, and politicians at an exhibition in Hanoi.

Students took waste such as rubber from shoe soles, denim, used paper patterns, wires, aluminium and plastic and created objects as diverse as jewellery, furniture, light shades, clothing and objets d’art.

This was phase 1 of the Factories as Studios Vietnam—Creative Manufacturing Residencies project, designed to expose business to creative thinking and processes. The second phase will see artists-in-residence located in factories, and working with the factories’ waste and machinery to create art and inspire innovative manufacturing and business practices.

The project not only creates opportunities for artists to earn a living but for others to be inspired to look at their world in a different way.

A collaboration between Australia and Vietnam, the project presents opportunities for both countries to learn and develop environments where creativity and innovation can flourish.

PAUL SMITH AND CRISTIANO CARVALHO — WATER PARTNERSHIPS

PAUL SMITH LIKES VIETNAM SO MUCH HE HAS VISITED THE COUNTRY 28 TIMES IN 20 YEARS. HE NOW HAS HIS ‘DREAM JOB’ AS INTERNATIONAL MANAGER FOR THE AUSTRALIAN WATER ASSOCIATION (AWA).

In this role, he is in a prime position to connect expertise within the Australian and Vietnam water sectors. Supported by the Australian Government, the AWA is working on several projects in Vietnam to help the country’s infrastructure development and at the same time lead to opportunities for the Australian water industry.

“Vietnam faces similar challenges to what Australia learnt to deal with during our last 20 years of water reform,” Paul Smith said. “The private sector now plays a key role and our water sector can withstand external shocks such as climate change. Vietnam, with its fast growing economy, its policy of ‘equitisation’ (where state-owned enterprises are partially sold to the private sector) and decentralisation has much in common with the Australian water sector.”

AWA works with Vietnamese authorities in areas such as asset management, technology transfer and training, private sector participation, implementing water safety plans, reducing water loss and mobilising finance for infrastructure projects.

AWA’s approach is also to match Australian water companies with counterparts in Vietnam through twinning programs to share experiences and expand knowledge in water management, such as WA Water and Hue WACO.

“My team and I recently visited Hue to provide training in asset management, water treatment, and design and construction practices in water mains for Hue WACO water corporation, our twinning company,” Cristiano Carvalho, Strategic Investment Project Manager at WA Water Corporation said. “We’re also sharing our experience in human resources development, customer services, IT and water quality. In return, we can learn a lot from the way Hue WACO manages its water supply system with limited funds and its monitoring and filtration processes.”