

# ECO SPONGE ACTION (ESA) PROJECT REPORT

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## I. Participants and Goals:

### 1. Participants:

Participants include 11 Japanese volunteers recruited through NICE (Never-ending International workCamps Exchange) Japan and 8 local volunteers (7 Vietnamese and 1 Australian) from SJ Vietnam.

All the volunteers were high-motivated and willing to gain experience and understanding through working with local volunteers to improve the life of the Fisher Village (FV) people.



### 2. Fisher Village (FV) – “Main focus of the entire project!”

The FV (or "The Island", which is one small part of the village) consists of 20 families living in temporary ragged houses floating on the Red river. All of them are extremely poor, having no land as well as jobs in their hometowns. They come to Hanoi hoping to get a job and earn more money for their families and children.

However, the fact remains that, in Hanoi, everything is expensive and it is not easy to have a job which gives them enough money to have a normal life. Therefore, they have to accept hard jobs to make ends meet. Some of them collect rubbish on the street, dumping ground, or are carriers at Long Bien market, etc. They do not have enough money to rent a flat or house on the land in city, so they have to live on floating houses on the Red River. Their children, all of whom are badly malnourished and illiterate, have to sell collected fruits, vegetable, provide heavy carrying service at Long Bien market or even catch shrimp overnight.

### 3. Goals:

#### a. Direct goals:

- Promote the use of Acrylic Sponge to broaden the awareness of people in water protection and environmental preservation in daily life.
- Promote the poor FV women to make Acrylic Sponges, which are to be sold mostly and firstly in Japan.
- Invest donation money to improve local life of the FV.

#### b. Indirect goals:

- Enhance partnership between NICE and SJ Vietnam, and friendship between Vietnamese and Japanese cultures.
- Promote NVDA's Common Actions all around Asia.

## II. Activities:

### 1. Main event schedule:

Sat 04/09 Sun 05/09	Pick-up		
Mon 06/09	Orientation	Visit the Fisher village + Boattrip on Red river	Vietnamese culture night
Tue 07/09	Meeting with local people at the FV about Acrylic sponge project	Interview with FV people + Teach poor women how to make Acrylic Sponge	Discussion
Wed 08/09	Football match between 2 volunteer teams: Japan - Vietnam	Interview with FV people	Discussion
Thu 09/09	Organizing activities with the children at the Youth house school	Visit KOTO school – Vocational training centre	Discussion
Fri 10/09	Visit the Environment Consultancy Center in Hanoi  Going to Bac Ninh to witness the Waste Water Treatment technology in an industrial zone.	Interview with FV people + Teach poor women how to make Acrylic Sponge	Discussion (with SJ Vietnam Director and Youth House coordinator)
Sat 11/09 Sun 12/09	Trip to Halong Bay – World Heritage		
Mon 13/09	- Purchase <i>Thung phuy</i> (tanks) - Prepare for presentation to FV people - Shop and cook Japanese food		- Presentation - Dinner with FV people
Tue 14/09	- Interview with FV people. - Find material for making Syusyu and chopstick holder.		Discussion
Wed 15/09	Help FV people carry tanks and roof covers.		Discussion
Thu 16/09	- Group 1 to help FV people fix their houses. - Group 2 to interview with the FV leader. - Group 3 to prepare presentation and workshop held at Foreign Trade University (FTU)	Free	Discussion
Fri 17/09	- Presentation and workshop at FTU	- Meeting with FV people about long-term project. - Collecting sponges, Syusyu and chopstick holders at the FV.	Discussion
Sat 18/09	City tour	Clean up + Final Evaluation	Farewell party + Japanese culture night
Sun 19/09	Free		

## 2. Activities in detail:

### a. Discussions and Promotion:

Discussions are held almost every night in order to evaluate daily activities, set the schedules and brainstorm the solutions for short and long term project.



There were activities held at the Youth House to play with the children there, who come from the FV. Activities such as: Japanese traditional games, songs and teaching children how to make simple Acrylic Sponge.

There was also a meeting with the Youth house coordinator to understand about the children's life and the school activities, from then, the volunteers would brainstorm more about the future plan. After visiting the Youth House, volunteers had the chance to visit KOTO school – A vocational training center for disadvantaged children – and looked forward to seeking partnership from KOTO to let children from the FV have job training and enjoy more open opportunities in the future.



The team also paid a visit to the *Centre for Environment and Climate change Research*. This visit gave the Japanese a chance to understand more about the Vietnamese Environmental problems. Plus, another visit to the Bac Ninh Industrial Zone gave them information about the waste water treatment technology in Vietnam.

A successful workshop was held at FTU consists of various presentations about SJ Vietnam, NICE and ESA project, discussions with university students about solutions to long term projects and World Tanabata Actions.



### b. Interview with FV people:

Various interviews with FV people were made by both the Japanese and Vietnamese volunteers to find out more about the life and needs of the FV people. From the interview, the volunteers could understand the cause and living conditions of the FV people, then, have essential clues to come up with a concrete solution to provide the FV people with more stable jobs based on what they had collected from the interviews.

### c. Teaching women how to make Acrylic Sponge, Syusy and Chopstick holders:



The ESA Project has been established for more than one year and achieved concrete success. Last year, 4 women in Vietnam made 189 sponges and more than 150 sponges have been sold (300 Yen per one) in Japan. This year, the Japanese volunteers in cooperation with the local volunteers continued to promote the making of Acrylic Sponge to be sold in Japan by teaching more women from the FV how to make Acrylic Sponge.

The Japanese volunteers also came up with an idea to promote making Syusyu (hair-tight) and chopstick holders from unused cloths to be sold in Japan like Acrylic Sponge.

**d. Helping FV people fix their houses:**

A short-term project to invest donation money to provide temporary facility improvement to FV life by buying *Thung phuy* (tanks) or roof covers and help FV people fix their houses.

All volunteers were happy and hard-working to join with FV people conveying tanks to each house, setting up roof covers and putting tanks under the floating houses.



**e. Cultural exchange:**



Both Vietnamese and Japanese culture nights were held during the 2-week program.

On the Vietnamese culture night, various presentations made by Vietnamese volunteers about *Ao dai* as well as other traditional clothes, or the upcoming 1000 year anniversary of Hanoi and some legends about Vietnamese origin.

On the Japanese culture night, delicious dishes made by the Japanese volunteers represented the unique culture of Japan and brought the home taste to all the Japanese as well as an exciting cultural experience to all the Vietnamese.



A friendly football match between Japanese and Vietnamese teams was held on the football field near the FV. Although the time for the match was short, everyone was enthusiastic and willing to show their best athletic abilities. After the football match, both teams participated in a Vietnamese game and then had a nice lunch in the rest house.

**III. Results:**

## 1. Fulfillments:

Even though the weather was harsh, all the volunteers were high-motivated from the beginning until the end of the workcamp. They had been working hard to achieve the best result.

All of the volunteers were strongly aware that the workcamp was really important to understand more about current situation of disadvantaged FV people.

### a. Direct goals:

Various activities were planned and done in different places and different forms to promote the advantages of Acrylic Sponge and to understand the current environmental situations of Vietnam.

The ESA Project has continued successfully and encouraged more women from FV to join as well as received more support from FV people. One creative factor contributing to the success was the idea to encourage the other women who could not have enough talents to make Acrylic Sponge to make Syusyu and chopstick holders instead.



**In total:** 110 Acrylic sponges; 52 Syusyu and chopstick holders.

#### ● Short-term project:

A sum of money 12.500.000 VND (641 USD) was also invested to bring the **short-term project** into reality. Tanks or roof covers were up to the conditions of each house. People from FV helped the workcamp leader buy well-quality goods, and in turn, the volunteers helped the FV people fix their floating houses no matter how hard the work might be.

#### ● Long-term project:

The **long-term project** includes the continue of making and selling Acrylic Sponges and other products made by the FV women in Japan, aiming at making their income more stable in the future, and fund-raising combined with investing donation money effectively to improve the FV life.

For one phase of the long-term project, it is better, considered by all the volunteers, if the Acrylic fiber is bought at a lower price for a bigger profit, if possible, had better be bought from a wholesaler. In addition, enlarging the market for Acrylic Sponge made by the FV women is considered a good opportunity to earn more money to support the FV.

For another phase, the volunteers, in each discussion, all brainstormed and studied different aspects, such as improvement to life conditions, education for children, public awareness etc, to come up with the most effective solutions to

the **long-term project**. There were different main detailed ideas and solutions given by the volunteers, listed below:

- Micro-finance, requiring clear plans from the FV people to judge its effectiveness and a concrete contract to keep their responsibility.
- Proper education for children from FV, including improving curriculum of the Youth House and seeking for further education.
- Job training for both teenagers and adults, including considering KOTO as a potential partner as well as searching for a low-fee vocational training centre, with a program which supports disadvantaged or low-education people, if possible.

The micro-finance plan was chosen to proceed but, in fact, the final decision could not be given because of some difficulties (These difficulties will be discussed later in the **Difficulties Section**) that occurred. Further discussions and considerations should and must be done in the near future to give final decision to the micro-finance plan.

**b. Indirect goals:**

The workcamp organization was considered good with a variety of work and activities that strengthened the bond between each member of the volunteer group, plus, opened more opportunities for cultural exchange.

Living in Vietnam was wonderful memories for the Japanese volunteers. They all had the chance to discover Vietnamese lifestyle from FV, delicious Vietnamese food from eating out for lunch or dinner and Vietnamese landscapes from Ha Long Bay Trip and City Tour.

One big benefit for all the volunteers was the local bus card, which proved to be very convenient in visiting any places in Hanoi, though sometimes patience is needed for waiting as well as crowdedness.

To sum up, both Japanese and Vietnamese volunteer team had been cooperating and working well and smoothly together, contributing to the success of the project. Besides, despite cultural differences, each member from both teams was good friend to the other and learned a lot throughout the 2 weeks.

**2. Difficulties:**

Still, there are difficulties remained during and after the project. These difficulties should be considered in order to achieve a better result in the future:

- **Accommodation:** All the Vietnamese volunteers could not have enough room to stay in the workcamp house, hence, could not join the whole discussion, which might lead to missing information.

- **Long-term plan:** It was difficult to come up with a concrete plan or decision for micro-finance or any other ideas for using effectively donation money. Below are some suggested difficulties:
  - FV people had different opinions about the micro-finance plan:
 

They found it hard to come up with a detailed plan to tell the volunteers as small businesses are unpredictable. On one hand, the volunteers would like to do fundraising and might have donation in December; then set up the structure of business for the whole village. On the other hand, the FV people wanted to have immediate financial support in this September, explaining that this was a good season to start their animal raising, then they would sell their animal products in the next February (the Lunar New Year occasion).
  - Lack of knowledge about Vietnamese educational and administrative system, social system as well.
  - The FV people's lack of official documents, making it hard for them to look for jobs or send their children to public school, even to buy land.
  - No support or connection with local government.
  - Not enough time for detailed research, or even clear understanding.

## VI. Conclusion and Suggestion:

### 1. Conclusion:

The ESA Project has achieved considerable success in receiving firm trust from the FV people. This will be a strong base for any further decisions from project members.

The 2-week program has provided all the volunteers with new awareness about global problems of poverty, broadened their social and cultural experiences and given great opportunities to give opinions and ideas. This should make it easier for further discussion between Japanese and Vietnamese volunteers.

### 2. Suggestion:

- An ESA mini-blog is opened to keep in touch with all the volunteers and also to hold discussion if required.
- The selling of Acrylic Sponge is reported to the Vietnamese volunteers through e-mails.
- Study first-hand how to stabilize the making-selling process of Acrylic Sponge, which means studying how to make the making-selling process happen more frequent and earn more profit.
- More researches and studies are done.
- Promote NVDA's Common Actions all around Asia.

