

# OneHeart Newsletter

Issue 05 | Autumn 2020



## Lời chào

2020 has been an unprecedented year with the uncontained COVID-19 pandemic and climate change related fires, hurricanes, and floods, causing unimaginable devastation in both USA and Việt Nam. Lives were lost, families scarred, properties destroyed, and communities on edge, but your unwavering support and commitment have allowed us to continue meeting these challenges head-on one-by-one. For that, THANK YOU!

Because of you, we raised nearly \$61,000 from March to July to donate over 51,000 PPE units to front line workers and care packages to families and the unhoused population. Again because of you, we raised \$35,000 to respond immediately to the devastating storms and flooding in Central Việt Nam, directly distributing 1,114 relief packages and assisting in the delivery of relief kits to over 3,000 households in Thừa Thiên-Huế Province.

We have our work cut out for us for the rest of the year and into 2021 to address the increasing COVID-19 cases and PPE needs, the victims of the tropical storms and natural disasters, the lack of laptops and internet for distance learning and the need for capital loans to help support socioeconomic development in Thừa-Thiên Huế.

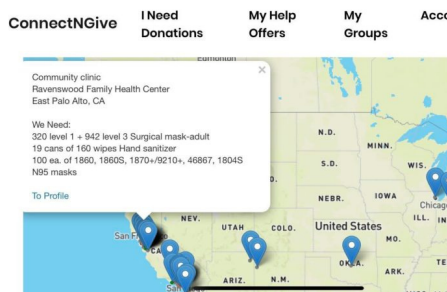
We cannot thank you enough for your support and kindness through your donations to allow us to continue to empower youths, partner with families, and build communities. May you and your loved ones be blessed, and we wish you all a peaceful holiday season.

Thien-Nhien Luong  
Executive Director, Design Capital Asia  
Board Member, VANGO Network

## COVID-19 Relief & ConnectNGive.org

VANGO Network Collaboration

We would like to thank every one of you who has supported us through the years, and especially this year when we asked for your help to deliver PPE supplies to communities in need in North America and Việt Nam, supporting those fighting COVID-19 on the frontlines. We raised \$60,775.31 and have delivered 51,105 units of PPE supplies to 51 hospitals and 49 community clinics and organizations in USA and Mexico thus far.



There has always been a need to streamline distribution and donation of PPE supplies from organizations and groups who have them to those who need them, but the rapidly increasing confirmed COVID-19 cases in the USA sparked VANGO Network and PIVOT to put together the team to launch ConnectNGive.org, an online platform that connects donors to recipients to address PPE needs by coordinating and tracking donations so that care providers can focus on what they do best without compromising their safety or quality of care and so that the PPEs that are available can be delivered efficiently and not go to waste.

Seeing how useful and successful ConnectNGive.org was in facilitating PPE donations, we held a Facebook fundraiser to help support the team behind the platform, which raised \$3,140 exceeding our goal of \$3,000. On top of that, ConnectNGive also received a \$15,000 grant from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and \$10,000 in AWS credit from the 1917 Fund. To date, ConnectNGive.org has over 190 registered accounts, which has assisted the delivery of over 80,000 units of PPE supplies. In the future, we hope to continue to utilize this tool to support any future health emergencies, as well as collaborate with local governments to implement ConnectNGive in their own communities.

We would especially like to thank Ben Truong and everyone at ConnectNGive who have put together such a dynamic team to address this urgent need and use their skills and talents for social good, and we also want to thank our board members who led VANGO Network's PPE supply donation and delivery efforts.





While we were busy coordinating PPE donations in North America, we were also supporting our communities in Thừa Thiên-Huế, who were in varying degrees of lockdown and quarantine from Tết until the end of April. As soon as we received information about coronavirus in early February, we began coordinating workshops in Việt Nam to help prepare our staff and volunteers to help keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe. Schools were completely closed and in phases shops and businesses closed too, leaving many of the families we serve with no source of income. With an individual donation from USA matched by Design Capital Asia, a team of HIPE staff and youth distributed COVID-19 relief packages to families of 119 peer health educators facing difficulties due to coronavirus closures. These relief packages included basic necessities that they would otherwise purchase from the open-air market, so that they could better observe the stay-at-home guidelines. Along with these relief packages came online Zoom COVID-19 prevention trainings, in addition to the series of creative workshops for HIPE youth.

## Tropical Storm Destruction & Recovery in Central Vietnam

VANGO Network Collaboration



Opening up the monsoon season, Tropical Storms Noul and Nangka left Central Việt Nam with severe loss of life, land, property, and access to basic necessities like food, water, and sanitation. New storms and additional flooding continue to wreak havoc all over the region, but with your support, we are able to alleviate the struggles and challenges of these communities. Như Hồng, current HIPE coordinator and former HIPE Cohort I PHE, commutes to the office from a rural area that was impacted severely by these storms and shares with us about her family's experience with the storms and a reflection on providing disaster relief to other families in desperate situations:

"You could say that 2020 was an eventful year for the people of Central Việt Nam, with the pandemic, storms, and floods that have caused countless damage to my family and the people of the countryside. *Bão chồng bão, lũ chồng lũ*. That's what people keep saying about this time in Huế. One storm had passed, causing immeasurable damage. The people couldn't repair their homes in time, and another storm had already arrived to hit our homes again. The flood water from the first storm didn't recede in time, and another flood rose the levels even higher. The road from my village to Huế City was submerged for more than a month, and still the water has not receded.

The biggest damage for my family was probably all my dad's work tools swept away in the water. He spent so many years of his life building his collection, only to watch it taken away in such a short moment. I kept hearing people lamenting, *He worked hard all year and lost everything, ông trời has no mercy on the people*. Some houses were almost completely flooded, drenching tons of rice or overflowing chicken coops. Because of the roads that split open, my parents and others were unemployed for a whole month. The main source of income for so many families was completely cut off, exacerbating the struggles we were already facing.



In Huế, we are used to floods. But this year, I've witnessed the worst floods in all of my life. My house was inundated with over a meter of water for 7 days straight--no electricity, no internet. All our furniture was under water and my dad had to find a board, so that our family could float above the water. The feeling of sitting near the roof for so many days in a row was really uncomfortable. And as a health educator, I noticed all the inconveniences to our normal activities, hygiene, eating, drinking, etc. Every day, I had to watch my parents swim in the flood to bring our belongings above the water, the water levels rising and nothing I could do to help. That scene was so painful and still haunts me today.

I remember vividly one morning when the floodwaters had suddenly surged. We didn't have any boats or means of transportation, but our neighbors shared with us, helping us to evacuate to higher ground. People often say that villagers live more emotionally with each other, and perhaps it's true. During the days of the flood, my parents received countless phone calls, all asking about our situation and updating about the weather as we had lost power and internet and had no way of learning any news. When our food supply ran out, the *câu* and *dì* in the neighborhood shared their food, supporting each other through this time of hunger. After the flood passed, some offered support and assistance, distributing instant noodles, rice, and other food to withstand those days. When they heard about the landslide in Quảng Nam, they didn't hesitate to share such precious food portions with those in worse conditions. I truly admire the spirit of solidarity and camaraderie of those days.

Participating in the disaster relief efforts was truly meaningful to me. From morning to night, we worked together to buy, prepare, and deliver relief kits for those most devastated by the floods. We sat in the back of the truck amidst the packages to reach the most submerged households. Seeing the eyes, the smiles, the handshakes, and the confused words of thanks from the parents washed away our fatigue from working tirelessly day in and day out. I can still hear their voices, thanking us for offering them a lifeline through these most difficult days. It's easy to be distracted by our own lives, but delivering these kits reminded me of the hardship that many face everyday, not just storm and flood damage but the severely ill and disabled.

I was truly shocked and touched by the hearts of the people at home and abroad who raised money to support us in Huế, even though many were so far away, unable to see the situation first hand. You didn't know personally the people here, but you still willingly gave up your precious money to help those in need. It's something so honorable and I'm still so amazed. Everyone's contributions during this period truly saved and kept alive some of those who were suffering most from the floods and storms.

On behalf of my family and everyone that you all helped us to support, I thank you. - Như Hồng"



## Healthy Initiatives through Peer Education (HIPE) - 2020 Challenges and Trends

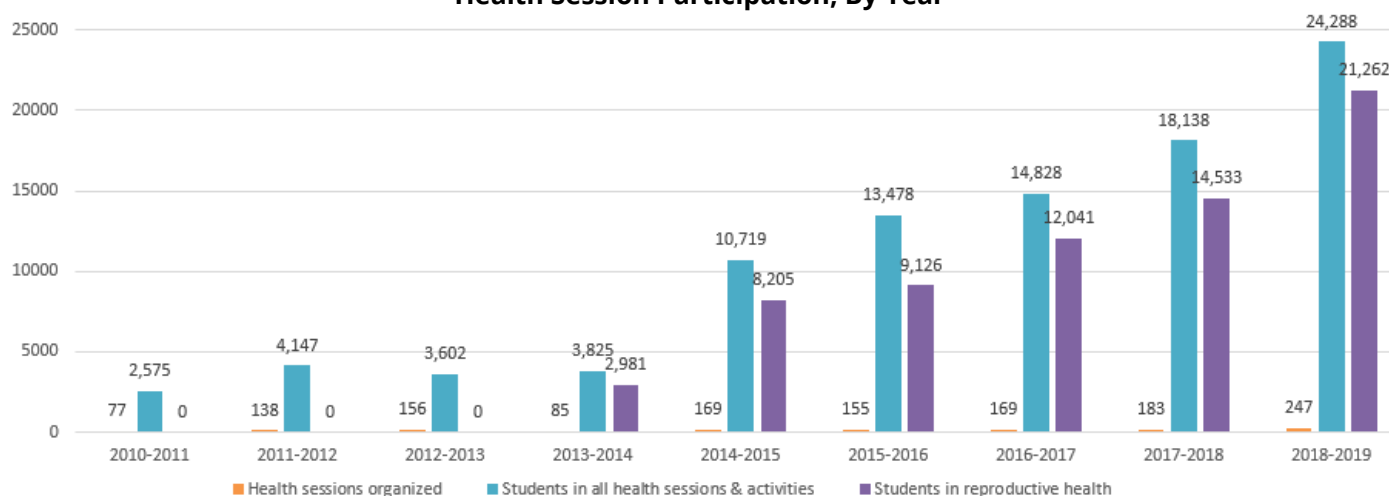
In partnership with Design Capital Asia

HIPE halted from February to May to observe the COVID-19 lockdown. With no choice, we moved training online, but technological limitations created barriers for most of our beneficiaries. Only 14% have access to a computer, and 55% have smart phones but many without data/internet. With the support of EMpower, we tackled this obstacle to a degree, but most still lack access to basic learning devices and tools. Although challenges to conduct in-person health sessions as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown and now the tropical storms have impacted our target outreach for this year, we aim to provide more connectivity so that these already disadvantaged populations can continue health education training. We are still in need of laptops and smartphones to adequately meet the needs of our 150 active peer health educators and welcome donations of used laptops and/or funding to purchase more.

Despite all the closures, HIPE still managed to provide training to 132 peer health educators and conduct outreach to 4,100 students in adolescent sexual and reproductive health, child sexual abuse prevention, gender education, and human trafficking prevention. Since 2010, the number of students trained annually to be educators has increased by 744%, the number qualified as Peer Health Educators has increased by 900%, and the number of HIPE participating schools and shelters has increased by 800%. The number of health sessions annually has increased by 260%, the number of participants in all health sessions and activities has increased by 843%, and the number of participants in reproductive health sessions has increased by 613%.



**Health Session Participation, By Year**

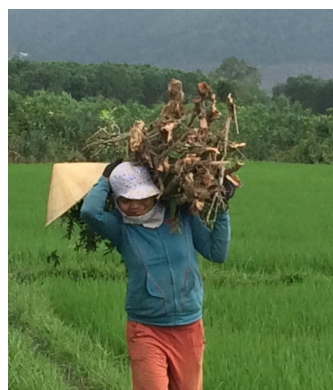


## Melaleuca for Socioeconomic and Sustainable Development

In partnership with Our1World

By now, you've probably heard of tea tree oil, *Melaleuca alternifolia*. Most melaleucas are endemic to Australia, though some have been cultivated in Southeast Asia for centuries and have become widely used for various purposes in these regions. The species in Việt Nam is *Melaleuca cajuputi* ("cây trà" or "cây trà gió"), the source of cajuput oil, the main ingredient in most dầu gió, the traditional medicine oil treatment commonly for respiratory and skin conditions. In fact, Việt Nam is one of the leading cajuput essential oil producers worldwide.

In 2018, VANGO and Our1World began a pilot program with a modest budget of \$5,000USD to restore the natural habitat of *Melaleuca cajuputi* trà gió with 2,100 seedlings and 1.4 acres (5,652 m<sup>2</sup>) in Phong Xuân commune of Phong Điền district, just north of Huế City. The main goals of this project are: 1) to restore the plant's habitat, and 2) to provide supplemental income from essential oil for traditional medicine to 3 peanut farmers, 1 of whom is a traditional medicine doctor.



With the first harvests in 2019, farmers were already able to recoup the original \$5,000 investment and can now continue to grow and harvest. They can even grow other plants amidst them for additional income. Seeing the success in our pilot program, we plan to continue and expand this project as part of the flood recovery program to address economic and livelihood needs in the area.

As we delve into research about Vietnamese *M. cajuputi*, we see how this plant can play a major role in effective and sustainable solutions to socioeconomic development and environmental preservation, offering many opportunities for income generation and job creation and for climate change mitigation and reversal through mangrove restoration and preservation. We are putting together a team of youths to help spread more knowledge of environmental and sustainability issues and solutions and lead community-based environmental protection efforts.





## Other Updates

In partnership with Music Bridge



- VANGO Network received a \$20,000 grant from the California Arts Council to support Vân-Ánh Võ's project "MEKONG--Soul & Life" about the music and culture of the Greater Mekong Subregion, set to premiere at The Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. in May 2021.
- With PIVOT--The Progressive Vietnamese American Organization, the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network, and the Union of North American Vietnamese Student Associations, VANGO held two Zoom workshops this year featuring artists and musicians of diverse cultural, social, and immigrant perspectives and backgrounds in support of Vân-Ánh Võ's project "Songs of Strength-S.O.S."

In partnership with Design Capital Asia and Our1World



- Seeing how HIPE benefited youth ages 10-24, we wanted a program to address the needs of children below 10 years old. RONG House spent its first year turning the empty center into a home to children in the neighborhood.
- Despite the pandemic and storm closures, in this first year, RONG House has held 14 events with over 154 participants, including the weekly library and the biweekly Hội vui cho bé children's fair and storytime.
- Currently, they are developing curriculum and programs to provide a wider variety of ongoing programs to both children and parents in the community.

## Get Involved

At VANGO Network, we love collaboration and are always looking for new partners to find common ground and expand our reach both here in the US and in Việt Nam.

For more information about our projects or how to get involved, please feel free to reach out to us any time!

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You can also donate directly at [www.va-ngo.org/donate](http://www.va-ngo.org/donate). We are currently in desperate need of donations to support our youth with online learning and recover losses from the devastating tropical storms in the region, as well as donations to support socioeconomic development through capital loans to small and medium sized businesses.

To sign up for our mailing list, visit [www.va-ngo.org/contact](http://www.va-ngo.org/contact)

Xin cảm ơn ạ.