

## Vietnam

### After a Lifetime of Hardship, a Woman Finds Sweet Rewards in Cocoa



Nam Suong is well known in the Vietnamese cocoa community of An Khanh Commune, Chau Thanh District, Ben Tre Province as a pioneer cocoa planter who runs a thriving cocoa bean fermenting business. Though soft spoken and modest, she speaks with quiet pride about her thriving cocoa business, through which she supports her family. Suong built the business through her hard work and with the help of the USAID-funded SUCCESS Alliance program.

Even though her future now looks bright, for much of her life, Suong struggled with tremendous challenges. During the second Indochina War, she and her family took refuge in Cambodia. After the war, she worked briefly in Ho Chi Minh City and then returned to cultivate a small plot of land in Ben Tre with her husband, who was a war veteran and an invalid. They later moved to a small coconut farm (0.2 ha) in Ben Tre Province in the Mekong Delta. For the next 25 years, Suong, her husband and their children barely managed to meet their daily needs on

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the income from the coconut grove and any additional odd-job income she could earn.

In 2002 Suong heard that there was demand for a new product in her province, cocoa, and that this could be intercropped with the coconut trees on her farm. She began planting cocoa immediately. In 2004 she learned of the SUCCESS Alliance project and participated in trainings to learn about cocoa cultivation and post-harvest and fermenting techniques. Three years after planting, the cocoa trees began to bear fruit and her family's income also began to grow. Applying what she learned in trainings, Suong perfected a method of fermenting small amounts of beans in baskets. The surrounding cocoa farmers found this difficult to do themselves and were happy to sell her their fresh pods instead. Suong steadily increased the volume of beans she fermented while being careful to achieve a consistent and high-quality product.

In early 2006, the SUCCESS Alliance worked with Can Tho University, through the Australian Collaboration in Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) program, to supply Suong with a solar dryer for demonstration and to provide technical support and set-up. This solar dryer



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# Success Story

was a proven technology that had been developed and tested over a period of several years by AusAID and the Australian Center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) in Papua New Guinea. Upon receiving the dryer, Suong increased her capacity to dry beans on her small piece of land, so much so that now she takes in 12 tons of fresh pods per month to produce approximately 1.2 tons of dry cocoa beans, generating about \$600/month in profit for her and her family.

Suong has ensured her family's financial stability and established her name in the Ben Tre cocoa industry through her innovation, hard work and contribution to the community. "Before I began my fermentary business, I could only afford to buy one kilogram of rice at a time. We were living day-to-day then and it was all we could afford. These days, I buy 20 kilograms of rice at a time," she said. She also has the funds to pay for her child's university education in Ho Chi Minh City.

"I am proud to be a successful business woman. Cocoa has given me the opportunity to prove myself," she said. Indeed, Suong has proven that despite a lifetime of hardship, she still can find hope and success.



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