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VIETNAM : Training centre for professions in the water and environment sectors

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Upon the request of the Department for Co-operation and Cultural Action and the Trade Commission of the French Embassy in Vietnam, a mission involving Messrs. François Ozanne from the Water Management Company of Paris (SAGEP), and Jean-François Donzier from IOWater, was organised with the assistance of ACTIM, in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue and Hanoi from 14 to 22 March 1999. Several working meetings with the Ministry of Construction, the School of Construction and Urban Development, representatives from the French Embassy and French companies in Vietnam, made it possible to formulate a development plan for the second phase of the Training Centre for Professions in the Water and Environment Sectors, in existence since 1997 in Gia Lam-Hanoi, with financial and technical assistance from the French bilateral co-operation and the Lyonnaise-des-eaux-Suez (SAFEGE).

The needs to be met are huge

They concern both :

- **The institutional training of executives from national and municipal administrations** , to fulfil two objectives : the implementation of reforms in the area of water management, and the modernisation of the management of municipal drinking water supply and sanitation utilities ,
- **The operational training of personnel from municipal drinking water supply and sanitation utilities**

It involves providing the necessary practical knowledge in order to plan for essential new investments, above all for sanitation and wastewater treatment, to rehabilitate drinking water supply systems (leak detection,...) and water treatment plants, to ensure the effective operation and maintenance of facilities, to improve administrative and financial services, to develop relations with consumers, to introduce the principles of quality assurance.

It is estimated that the Vietnamese water utilities employ around 14,000 people for a population of 76 million inhabitants. Once the whole population is supplied with drinking water and all towns are equipped with a sanitation system, the number of employees will be around 50,000. We can consider a ratio of 20% executives and 80% workers and employees.

It seems that compared to the normal average ratios, workers are over represented, but that there are not enough junior executives (foremen, technicians).

An ambitious project

In order to meet these important needs for improving the efficiency of Vietnamese water utilities, it is necessary **to move towards a system of professional training** :

- **organised by Vietnamese trainers in the local language,**
- with reduced training costs compatible with the water utilities' revenues and paid for in local currency,
- **offering modern training courses,**
- based on the technological know-how of leading French industrial groups,
- using both equipment currently available in the country and facilities and material which will be developed in the coming years, for practical learning under working conditions.

It is clear that it must result in a sustainable system, which, after its setting-up, can "exist by itself" without being dependent on permanent external financing.

Based on these principles, **a preliminary agreement was signed** , in the presence of Mr. Nguyen Van Lien, Vice-Minister for Construction, by Messrs. Donzier and Ozanne on the French side and Messrs. Nguyen Dang Can, Director of International Co-operation at the Ministry and Nguyen Van To, Director of the School of Construction.

This agreement plans, above all, a joint investment between France and Vietnam for carrying out the second phase of the project which will mostly associate French companies working or interested in this country.

A study tour, from 18 to 28 May 1999, enabled a delegation from the Vietnamese Ministry of Construction, led by the Vice-Minister Nguyen Van Lien, and from the water utilities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, to meet French suppliers and companies interested in this project, to visit the **National Training Centre for Water Professions (CNFME) in Limoges-La Souterraine** as well as the University of Montpellier and our partners from VERSEAU.

The missions carried out by IOWater experts allowed the collection of the data needed to prepare a document which will be proposed to the French Fund for Priority Solidarity and the French Ministry of Foreign Trade.

The context remains difficult as the water companies, although financially independent, have small budgets for training purposes. However, the Vietnamese partners' willingness can be relied upon, including the Ministry of Construction, very interested in this project, which proposed to bear the costs of the new buildings, and the Hanoi People's Committee which could provide the land.