

## Thông tin về Thiên nhiên và Bảo tồn

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# Polluted water sickens 10,000 people

**HÀ NỘI** — Brackish water heavily impregnated with alumina is making the 10,000 people who live in the hamlets of Lộc An Commune, central Thừa Thiên-Huế Province, sick.

They have drawn their polluted water from the Tam Giang Lagoon for 10 years knowing that its use made them susceptible to infectious diseases.

The people were resettled from a floating-village 20 years ago, explains Phú Môn Village People's Committee chairman Nguyễn Diệm.

"We boat dwellers thought we would drink clean water when we moved," he says.

Instead, the villagers are using water that is heavy with both salt and alumina.

Fellow villager Nguyễn Thị Mỹ complains that the school uniforms of her two grandchildren are discoloured after a few washes in the dull, red water that she draws from a well.

It's the same for the people of neighbouring Hai Hà, Bắc Thượng and

Châu Thành villages.

An elderly man displays a cup of rancid boiled water and says the people of his Châu Thành Village haven't sufficient money to buy rice, let alone clean water for drinking.

On hot days, the stench from the wells is offensive.

### Known danger

"I understand that using unclean water can cause acute diarrhoea and I'm sorry for the children who have to drink the polluted water," says Phùng Thị Toan, in Hai Hà Village.

UNICEF reports that unsafe water and poor sanitation are associated with the high malnutrition rate among Vietnamese children under five — one in every four — and contributes to the worm-related illnesses that afflict almost half of all the country's children.

Some patients treated at the Lộc An Commune health clinic since early April have tested positive to the vibrio cholera bacteria.

Phú Môn People's Committee chairman

Nguyễn Diệm concedes that the polluted water is the major cause for an increase in digestive diseases.

Lộc An Commune People's Committee deputy chairman Lê Chí Thanh, says the polluted water has been discussed at meetings between the people of the hamlets and district officials but without results.

People have attempted to filter the water with sand, grit and stones but health inspectors who tested the results say the water is still not fit to drink.

### Year of Sanitation

Viet Nam was among the countries to propose that the United Nations declare 2008 the International Year of Sanitation, IYS.

"Sanitation helps the environment" is one of the year's five messages.

The others emphasise that sanitation is vital for health; is a sound economic investment; contributes to social development and is achievable.

"Sanitation is in a state

of crisis and needs to be addressed with real urgency," says United Nations Viet Nam representative John Hendra.

"There is not much time left to reduce the gaps between the current situation and the targets and deliver on our promise for rural sanitation," he says.

"Sanitation is no longer only a personal issue."

A Thái Bình Medical College Preventive Medicine Administration survey of 224 communes found that only 7.8 per cent of rural markets and 11.7 per cent of the rural population have access and use reticulated water.

UNICEF provided technical and financial support for the survey.

The Health Ministry's Preventive Medicine and Environment Administration director Nguyễn Huy Nga says the Viet Nam Government has made a strong commitment to improving people's access to sanitation.

"Money and raising awareness of the people are the difficulties," he says. — VNS