



## SUCCESS STORY

# New School Brings Hope to Disadvantaged

### New USAID-funded Boarding School Helps Central Vietnamese



Photo: USAID/Richard Nyberg

Y Nga, left, shares a joke with A Nga and Y Chuc outside their new school in Kon Ray, Vietnam.

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Telling Our Story  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Washington, DC 20523-1000  
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Ninth grader Y Nga bikes to her new school each morning through rolling, green hills. She passes the old elementary school where she and her junior high friends last year shared cramped quarters with younger pupils, and winds up the rocky dirt path. The road improves dramatically, suddenly, and she presses on up the terraced plateau. Her daily effort is breathtaking – and ends with the most spectacular vista for hundreds of miles.

Welcome to the Kon Ray Ethnic Minority Boarding School, brought to Nga by USAID. The school is perched high above lush valleys in Vietnam’s picturesque Central Highlands. “This school is so clean and so nice,” says the 14-year-old from Kon Keng village, an ethnic Sora farming community that produces cassava, rice, corn, and rubber. Her friend, Y Chuc from Mong Tu village, is especially impressed with the science lab, as they didn’t have one in their former school. With 240 students from ethnic minority groups, the school for sixth through ninth graders features modern facilities, a standard curriculum, and vocational training for young people. The \$600,000 school is one of a handful in the country that is set up to cater to the educational and social needs of students with disabilities. Wheelchair ramps zig zag up to all wings and rooms of the school and signs in Braille on the walls of each building help guide the blind.

Local communal leaders, who paid to level and terrace the school grounds, will also cover boarding costs. USAID built the school as one of many initiatives to help reduce the education gap between people like Nga living in rural mountainous areas and more prosperous families in urban areas. The Central Highlands, where the school is located, is the poorest region in Vietnam.

“This school project makes a good first impression of the donor community and what it can do to help our communities in this region,” says school principal, Doan Van Thoai. To Nga, the Kon Ray Ethnic Minority Boarding School opens doors to years of additional education. After finishing up ninth grade, Nga will head to senior high school. Further down the road, she plans to take up teaching, or become a doctor. Then, she pledges to return home to help her community.