

EFFECTS OF A RIGHT INVESTMENT

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With a medium investment - VNĐ123 billion, a small sum in comparison with some VNĐ400 billion worth of damage caused annually by floods in the Mekong Delta - a network of canals in the Long Xuyên Trapezoid was completed in a four-month period from April to August 1997. This network includes four canals:

- Tuấn Thống Canal: In April 1997, PM Kiệt gave order for this work to be started. This canal was 29 km long, 25m wide at bottom and 35m on surface connecting Thoại Ngọc Hầu Canal with Rạch Giá-Hà Tiên Canal and allowing flood water to flow into the Gulf of Thailand. This work is worth VNĐ22 billion. The PM instructed local governments to take care of this work and prevent embezzlement.

- T6 Canal and two branches, Lung Lớn and Luỹnh Quỳnh, leading to the Gulf of Thailand.

Thus, there are two main canals: T6 and Tuấn Thống and water will pour from them into Lung Lớn and Luỹnh Quỳnh canals, and then, into the Gulf of Thailand. These two canals are 75m wide. In building this network, around 11 million cubic meters of earth were moved and some two billion cubic meters were used to build roads and some ground for future residential areas. The network of four canals came into use since Aug.25, 1997.

It's too early to estimate effects of this network on the struggle against flood in the Mekong Delta. It was reported that at 7:00 a.m. on Aug. 11 the level of water at Tân Châu by the Tiền river reached 3.9m and at Châu Đốc by the Hậu river: 3.17m. *Saigon Giải Phóng* (on Aug.12, 1997) estimated that it's a matter of days before the level of the Tiền river pass 4.07m (alarming level of third degree).

However, in the middle of August, a part of this network was completed and started to help reducing flood. By Aug. 25, the network was completed and after that, changes in the level of water in the Tiền and Hậu rivers were as follows:

- In Aug. 28 and 29, the water level at Tân Châu varied from 4.13 to 4.16m; at Châu Đốc : 3.65 (peak).

- In Aug. 30, at Tân Châu: 4.12m and at Châu Đốc: 3.65m.

- In Aug. 31, at Tân Châu: 4.09m and at Châu Đốc: 3.65m.

- In Sep. 3, the water level lowered slowly. The weather forecast said the water level would make no increase in days after, and then, inch up slowly.

- In Sep. 9, at Tân Châu: 4m and at Châu Đốc: 3.1m. The water level fell some 0.01m a day. Thus, the water level in the Hậu River (at Châu Đốc) was 0.9m lower than that in the Tiền river (at Tân Châu), while this difference in Aug. 28, before the new network of canals came into use, was 0.5m only.

So we saw that the new canal network could make the water level in the Hậu river 0.5m lower and help farmers reap the summer-autumn crop and start the winter-spring crop on time, however, it couldn't prevent the water level from reaching a height of 4m in the Tiền river and 3.3m in the Hậu river. To limit the water level in those two rivers to a height of 2.5m, there must be a canal connecting them from Tân Châu to Châu Đốc, and some new outlets leading to the Gulf of Thailand. The total length of these waterways will be from three to five times longer than the Tuấn Thống-T6 network.

1. One more crop on an area of 35,492 hectares

The Tuấn Thống-T6 network can help to wash aluminous substances away from an area of 35,492 hectares and allow farmers to plant one more crop on this area, that is, to produce 354,920 tonnes of rice more every year (with an average yield of 10 tonnes per hectare). This extra output is worth VNĐ581.4 billion (with an average price of VNĐ1,700 per kilo). This income is much bigger than the investment put in the new canal network.

2. Public works planned for the year 1998

Because public works for 1997 were started late and floods came 20 days early, so farmers had to reap their summer-autumn crop earlier with the result that an amount of 400,000 tonnes of rice were lost. Therefore, in 1998, we had better start the planned public works earlier.

The communication 4296/KTN issued by the Government Office on Aug. 2, 1997 included an instruction of the PM that the MARD should cooperate with the National Institute of Technology and Natural Sciences, the Steering Committee for

Urgent Public Works in the Mekong Delta and People's Committees of An Giang, Đồng Tháp, Long An and Tiền Giang to make plan to drain floods from Đồng Tháp Mười to the Tiền river and this plan must be carried out in 1998.

In 1998, there are projects to make floods flow from Long Xuyên Trapezoid to the Gulf of Thailand and from Đồng Tháp Mười to the East Sea. The following are our opinions about these projects:

- A second Hậu river?

The nearest place to drain floods from Long Xuyên Trapezoid to is the Gulf of Thailand but the flood-water, which could help to wash aluminous substances away will pour uselessly into the sea. We think that it's wiser to cut a river parallel to the existing Hậu river with a view to washing aluminum away from some 400,000 hectares in U Minh and Cà Mau Peninsula, that is, allowing the Mekong Delta an extra yield of 4 million tonnes of rice a year.

- A third crop in An Giang and Đồng Tháp Mười?

If the new river is 3-5 times wider than the Tuấn Thống or T6 canal, the peak of water level in flood season 1998 will be kept at 2.5m while dike network in An Giang and Đồng Tháp can keep back a water level of 3m. Thus, farmers can plant a third crop and produce one million tonnes more every year.

- Are floodgates at river mouths possible?

In dry season, we had better prevent water from flowing into the sea in order to keep back seawater by building floodgates at the mouths of Lung Lớn and Luỹnh Quỳnh canals. These floodgates will cost a lot of money, but we can put some turbines there to produce electricity. These turbines can operate six months a year during the rainy season (from May to November). These floodgates can ensure good land drainage and keep the water level under 2.5m in the flood season, that is, allow a third crop in Đồng Tháp.

A sum of money, even a small one, can produce good results if it is used properly. We must remember that the investment of VNĐ123 billion in the canal network in the Mekong Delta is very small in comparison with what was wasted by such embezzlers as Phạm Huy Phước last year.