

Health in the Backyard



In 2012 the [Oxford University Clinical Research Unit \(OUCRU\)](#) was awarded £29,999 over three years to implement an engagement project alongside its **Vietnam Initiative on Zoonotic Infections (VIZIONS)**. The project uses simple digital storytelling techniques to bring to the surface the participants' ideas about personal and public risk and perceptions of disease and transmission.

The project

[Health in the Backyard](#) complements the VIZIONS research project, which evaluates the link between humans and livestock and aims to integrate disease surveillance to aid early detection of emerging epidemics. VIZIONS researchers work with individuals in the farming and meat industries in the Dong Thap province of southern Vietnam.

Health in the Backyard has developed a creative method of engagement, bringing scientists, stakeholders and the community together directly. It supports the community by giving members of high-risk groups the knowledge, support and equipment to photographically document their working lives and edit this into a narrative. This type of participatory storytelling is powerful, allowing them to directly react to and engage with the health issues in their everyday lives while giving the community pride in their own story.

The 30 resulting photo films are used as a catalyst for discussion, using participants' actions and perceptions to inform training days organised by OUCRU and to improve farming skills related to zoonotic infections. This training promotes understanding of risk, enabling members of a vulnerable community to make choices about their health and the behaviours that might affect it.

The partners

Working with film company [Fact & Fiction Films](#),

who have trained a team of Vietnamese facilitators in media and facilitation skills, ensured the high quality of the project outputs. The facilitators are also trained by VIZIONS scientists so that they can identify when a photo or point made by a community member is of interest or concern and should be followed up. Strong partnerships with the provincial Department of Health Education and Information and the Sub-Department of Animal Health give support for workshop planning and consultation on participant selection.

The most valuable partnerships in this project are between OUCRU, the farming and meat production communities, animal health officers, and health workers. Researchers and health officers gain a much better understanding of their research communities, and stronger lines of communication ensure the concerns and perspectives of stakeholders are considered. These relationships will continue to be beneficial long after the project ends.

The strengths

[Health in the Backyard](#) strengthens VIZIONS research, as it promotes the spread of research ideas, makes the research agenda more relevant, and informs the way research is conducted. Understanding the perceived risks also makes the educational material produced better tailored to community needs.

The project has benefitted from thorough evaluation and documentation. It builds on learning from similar past projects and the robust evaluation ensures it will be a valuable resource for future projects. The project's success has led to further funding to expand the project to other research and geographical areas.

Image credit: Mr Trương Văn Ba, Health in the Backyard project participant