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CATALYST ASIA

ISSUE 01
APR-SEP 2015

A Publication On Societal
Leadership In The Region

20

BUILDING HOUSES TO BUILD COMMUNITIES

"My life changed from that point. I saw that people were hungry to contribute, to dirty their hands to make an impact. They just didn't have the platform to do so," he said. "It gave me the courage to continue."

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LOOKING TO UNDERSTAND AND HEAL AFTER A GENOCIDE

Youk realised, while speaking at length to individuals, that people were not caught up in vengeance, but ached to move past their losses.

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FAST TRACKING THE HUNT FOR TIME BOMBS IN LAOS

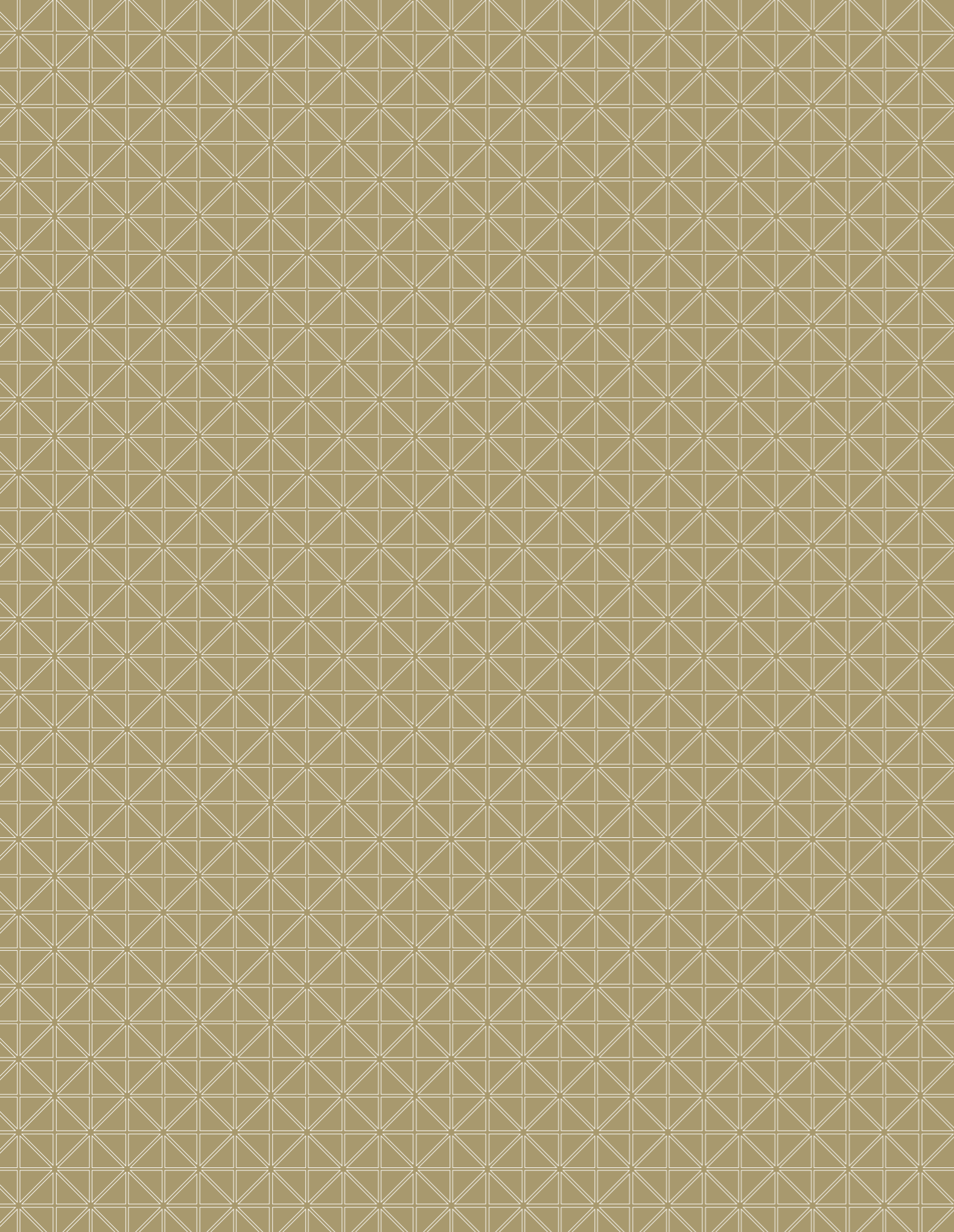
There is a huge gap in resources between what is available and what is required for the detection and clearance of UXO in Laos. "Simply put, you cannot resolve something you can't count."

COVER STORY

Singaporean moved by the plight of the Hmong

Three decades following the end of the Indo-China conflict, a bilateral agreement was signed in September 2007 between the government of Thailand and Laotian authorities that would lead to the re-classification of ethnic Hmong refugees as "illegal immigrants"... p. 35





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ABOUT US

Catalyst Asia is a publication by the Institute for Societal Leadership at the Singapore Management University. It is a collection of feature stories, interview articles and opinion pieces about how leadership is being exercised around societal challenges in Asia. We hope that Catalyst Asia will inform, inspire and catalyse new ideas for change.

EDITOR'S NOTE

At Catalyst Asia, we believe that real life can only be captured at a particular moment in time. Everything you read here is accurate at the point in which it was recorded. We do not expect details to stay the same and we hope that they don't. We have chosen a dark background for our cover page to symbolise a landscape of lesser known stories in the region. The ISL globe motif illuminates a featured picture but intentionally obscures certain parts to imply that the perspectives presented in Catalyst Asia are by no means a complete picture. We frame the story and offer a point of view. It is then up to the reader to form his own understanding and imagine how the remaining pieces of the story could look like. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Institute for Societal Leadership. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the Institute for Societal Leadership at the Singapore Management University Administration Building located at 81 Victoria Street Singapore 188065.

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PROTOTYPE, TEST, TWEAK, REPEAT

PROXIMITY DESIGNS LIVES UP TO ITS NAME

Though Myanmar's groundwater runs close to the surface, pumps presented challenges in the past for the country's farmers, according to Aung Din. People couldn't swing buying diesel machines at US\$250 and cheaper hand pumps at US\$20 wouldn't serve for irrigation and were "really hard to use and repair," she says. In the meantime, people employed the use of buckets for irrigation, ferrying 20 kgs on both sides 200 times a day in the dry season, she continued.

"There was a real opportunity for the foot pumps to come in at [around] US\$25 as an intermediary step and for irrigation for small plot holders during the dry season," she says. "We started showing them to farmers and villages and asking them about the price and this and that, and we quickly saw that these models need to be adapted ... for Myanmar farmers."

Yangon-based social enterprise Proximity Designs, then a country programme under International Development Enterprises (iDE), began its now-decade long mission to better Myanmar farmers' earnings.

What followed can be best summed up by the organisation's name and the sentence it forms: Proximity Designs. The social enterprise, which has stayed close at hand to observe and listen to customers, changed

tack on the pumps and set about prioritising the user through design. In this way the company created not just new products but experiences.

Design runs through Proximity like blood in veins, feeding into each of the company's four subdivisions as well as its ethos. In its approach and implementation, the organisation emphasises putting people first from the first. Perhaps the biggest difference between the company and traditional NGOs comes from how it interacts with users of its products.

"We didn't want to treat people as charity recipients or aid beneficiaries," Aung Din says. "When you treat people as customers and sell things, it's really a matter of giving them choice and affirming dignity. They decide whether what you're providing is valuable or not, so they hold you accountable."

People – so central to Proximity's mission – determine how its products are set up and sold. Around the time the company entered Myanmar with the Indian foot pumps, Aung Din says she and her husband and co-founder Jim Taylor came into contact with Stanford professor Jim Patell, who teaches with others a course on designing for extreme affordability. The class concentrated on "human-centered design," she explains.

"This is what most very progressive and modern companies ... in the UK and West use to design cool products, but for rich people," Aung Din says. "It starts with a real focus on the user and empathy for them."





Proximity, whose customers earn about US\$2 daily, used the strategies to revamp the Indian pumps.

“You have a rigorous process of prototyping, testing, getting feedback, tweaking, prototyping, tweaking, prototyping, tweaking, and really understanding all the aspirations and needs, wants, practical aesthetics, everything,” Aung Din continued. “Designers had never applied it to the poor in developing countries.”

The company soon extended its tailored approaches into other sectors: irrigation, renewable energy, financial inclusion and farm advisory services. Electricity presents an incredible challenge in the country, so Proximity formulated ways for farmers to water land without it, providing products such as “gravity-fed” drip irrigation equipment for sale. Meanwhile, one of the organisation’s specialty initiatives, “duck loans,” gets scheduled to line up with seasonal egg scarcity, according to the company.

More broadly, Proximity architects loan durations and timing to crop seasons and employs bullet payments, the company said in an email.

Proximity has two types of loans on offer: crop loans and livestock loans. The latter category comprises goat loans and the trademark duck loans. Spanning 150 kyats to 250,000 kyats, the loans are meant for rural farmers and often go to customers in the Delta, though Proximity’s reach has extended to Myanmar’s Dry Zone, according to the company.

This year, Proximity will begin commence enterprise loans aimed at micro-business owners in rural towns, the company wrote in an email.

Proximity operates its own design lab and team. Its investigations have turned up results

such as one simple trick that boost yields for farmers – a test assessing rice seed based on old Japanese practices that require only saltwater and a duck egg.

“That’s how we go about designing things, coming up with the best solutions,” Aung Din says. “It’s being able to fail early and fail fast and learn from it, and then in the end you end up with a better product or a service.”

A “scorecard” for the full year 2014 written in neat, block chalk lettering greets guests that walk into Proximity’s clean, modern office. As of the last day of June this year, the company’s “rural reach” had touched 170 townships and more than 9,500 villages. The count of irrigation customers neared 20,000 people.

At Proximity, the micro and macro have crossed axes. Myanmar’s transition “is still in the early stages,” Aung Din says. “We have leveraged a lot of our on-the-ground knowledge of rural areas and customers and thousands of villages to inform and do research on economic policies, so the two have converged.”

“For the macro to be effective it has to ... have input from on-the-ground and have that iterative, adaptive mentality,” she continues. “For what we do to be successful in helping families get out of poverty, I think you need [a] macro policy environment that is conducive ... You need the exchange rate to be managed, you need [a] good regulatory environment that supports banking and financial inclusion. You can’t just be working at one level,” she concludes.

Depending on whom you ask, change has come – and will come – to Myanmar. As the ecosystem evolves, so will Proximity Designs, whose name says it all. 🍌



MORE THAN JUST AN AUTISM CENTRE

The little boy stood against a green wall; his teacher coaxing him to look at the camera. He looked everywhere but at her. Another teacher made funny faces to persuade him. His classmates giggled but he didn't budge.

Photography attempt: Failed.

All in a day's work for a teacher – except that this is not a regular kindergarten. It's the Ideas Autism Centre (IAC) run by the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas), a think-tank promoting market-based solutions to public issues.

A closer look at the cheery classroom tells you that it's not a kindergarten. Chairs and tables are pushed right up against the wall to prevent the children from running around, but they still do.

The IAC is the only autism centre in Malaysia catering to low-income families in a holistic manner. It provides full day care, early intervention therapy and education to prepare autistic children for mainstream schools, at a low cost or for free.

Other centres usually offer partial day care, with therapy at an extra cost.

But Wan Saiful Wan Jan, chief executive of Ideas, said the idea is to enable the child's parents to work, if they chose to.

"Or else, how would they get out of poverty?" he said.

Thus, the IAC sets out to provide comprehensive care and education during working hours from 8am to 6pm on weekdays, in a neighbourhood where many of these children live, about 20km from Kuala Lumpur.

Opened in October 2012, IAC is a pilot project by Ideas to meet the needs of the poor, based on the principles of a free market philosophy which encourages greater self-reliance and less dependence on the government.

"This does not absolve the government from its responsibility but the key thrust is to reduce the burden on the government, and by extension, the tax payer," said Wan Saiful, 40.

Autism Spectrum Disorder covers a range of brain developmental disabilities which manifest as difficulty in social interaction, communication and repetitive behaviours. It was estimated that one in 600 children in Malaysia is autistic.

While there are private centres for the wealthy, the poor have to rely on charitable centres or government hospitals where it takes months to get a specialist appointment.

IAC tries to fill the gap.

Besides full day care, it offers speech and occupational therapy, and education. Its students, most of whom cannot speak, are taught language skills as well as therapy to develop their motor skills, said principal

Sharifah Salleh.

Many also need to learn to cope with sensory problems which cause them to, among others, get distressed at loud noises. Twice a month, they have horse-riding and swimming classes to improve their social skills.

Classes are also held for parents to learn to manage their children at home.

It has seven teachers and an occupational therapist, while a specialist from the government's Selayang Hospital visits once a month.

The goal is to have the children ready for mainstream school by the time they reach nine. So far, IAC has successfully sent nine children to regular schools.

Securing adequate funding is, by far, the toughest part of its journey.

Clearly, the fees aren't sufficient to cover the annual expenditure of RM750,000. Students pay only RM300 a month if their household per capita income is below RM1,500, and pay nothing if it's below RM500. (Per capita income is calculated by dividing the monthly household income with the total members. For example, a household income of RM6,000 for a family of six, works out to a per capita income of RM1,000.)

Currently, three corporate foundations are providing funding until the end of this year. Given that donations can fluctuate, Ideas is now looking at a model to redistribute from the rich to the poor.



Run by a libertarian think-tank, the Ideas Autism Centre believes that the free market can fulfil the needs of the poor – at a low cost too

At the beginning, it did try to do that by charging higher fees for wealthier students but that didn't work. Their parents preferred to send them to more exclusive centres. Ideas is now revisiting this plan – but this time, it will have separate centres for the two groups.

Wan Saiful said they are in talks to take over an autism centre in a posh neighbourhood which generates enough profit to run the IAC, and more.

"Our priority is to turn IAC into a social enterprise although at the moment, the model is a charitable one," he said.

This is likely to happen sometime this year.

As IAC is a pilot project, it is kept an open book to visitors, even its accounts, so that others may learn from its experience.

Ideas has also used this model for a school for refugee children which it set up in Kuala Lumpur in August 2014. The Ideas Academy, with 24 students aged 12 to 17, is a secondary school.

It has been a long journey but with funding now more certain, there is a greater sense of hope for IAC's children – including the little boy who refused to be photographed that day.

He may not like the camera but he was happy to welcome us with the traditional Malay greeting for elders – a kiss on the hand. 🙏





KHEK NOI

THE LAND WITHOUT THE CONCEPT OF A TITLE DEED

Located in Phetchabun, one of the northern provinces of Thailand is a quiet little sub-district called Khek Noi. Famous for its unique cultural offerings, intricate handicrafts and rich history, it is home to Thailand's largest community of Hmong people. For travel buffs, it is an off the beaten track experience and a stone's throw away from areas that offer adventure tourism. For residents though, Khek Noi has the potential to become much more than what it is today.

What seems to be standing in the way is a cumbersome system around public property laws and the issue of ethnic minority rights. In Khek Noi, purchase or lease of land is done on the basis of a verbal agreement alone. To many, this is an inconvenient arrangement that offers little security and poses challenges to the implementation of long-term investment plans.

Without a land title document, villagers are ineligible to apply for loan through normal lending channels and starting a small business remains an elusive dream for most.

Meanwhile, the local administration is left to deal with a headache of its own, as plans to expand the sub-district's water supply system and develop new tourist attractions may never be realised because necessary documents like land title deeds cannot be produced.

STICKY SITUATION

In addition to a common debate over whether highland minorities

are first comers or encroachers, the land situation in Khek Noi is rather unique, since the 72 sq km plot of land that forms present-day Khek Noi has been transferred back and forth, and given to and taken back from different government agencies as well as the villagers – a result of shifts in state policies on hill tribe development and natural resource management. Nowadays, the ownership of the land is divided among three agencies and with each comes a certain set of rules and restrictions.

"It's a bureaucratic mess and ethnic discrimination," said Suwit Sanyakul, 57, two-time elected chief executive of Khek Noi Administration Organization. "Newcomers who are Thai, land developers or businesses have no problem getting the authority to issue title deeds. It's just us. An entire sub-district without any land titles even though we have Thai citizenship."

An activist at heart, Suwit spent over ten years working in Hmong shelters with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and through the years he has spearheaded several campaigns alongside fellow Hmong – from requesting the district to hold a hearing on the construction of a wind power plant to fighting for the removal of the previous chief executive for abuse of power – with varying degrees of success. Eventually, seeing that the only way to fix the broken system is to work within it, he ran in the local elections and was elected both times. His campaign? Land rights and ownership.

BABY STEPS

Since starting his first term in 2009, this chief executive, who is also one of Khek Noi's first generation of university graduates, has stayed true to his promises and followed through on his campaign. Teaming



up with Khek Noi Administration Organization members, local leaders and villagers, they submitted letters, filed petitions and met with relevant agency officials. Despite an uphill battle that is mired in red tape, their sheer persistence and effort in petitioning and negotiation have resulted in small wins.

Villagers living on the 32 sq km land managed by Social Development Center Unit 38 Phetchabun Province can now build permanent structures like concrete homes and small shops, while those on the 32 sq km of land held by the Treasury Department can continue to use the land without having to pay rent.

"It's a small step but with the restrictions relaxed at least some villagers will have an alternative source of income other than growing ginger, and through boosting their income it will help increase our tax collections and budget for community development, too," Suwit added.

And how does the sub-district decide which project it will do? Public

hearings. Yearly, twelve small meetings are held in each of the villages and one large public hearing for the entire sub-district along with additional public hearings for important or urgent matters.

"He's a good chief and doesn't play favourites like the one before. Each village gets an equal amount of funds to carry out its own activities," said See Sakcharoenpanyabhum, 51, one of the four female members of Khek Noi Administration Organization Council and a representative of Moo 7. "I only wish we had more budget."

Still among other things, the sub-district managed to carry out road repairs, construct drainage systems, provide trash pick-up service, offer marriage counselling sessions and organise reforestation activities along with classes on Hmong traditions and handicraft work for the youth – all with a budget of 3 million baht. And in spite of the long road ahead in the fight for land rights and ownership which can drag on for years, it seems like there may be light at the end of the tunnel after all. 🍀



TRASH, TRANSFORMED.

Retno Hapsari is a middle-aged woman in her early fifties. "I'm from a very normal family" she says. "My father is a government official, my mother a teacher." We were driving back from one of her routine visits to the squatter community on an illegal garbage dumpsite in Cirendeu, just South of Jakarta. Sitting amidst a heap of bags and bottles in Retno's compact car, I was trying to figure out what makes this woman tick. But she isn't one to make bold statements. "I just think it needs to be done. There shouldn't be garbage dumps like this in Indonesia. Or anywhere."

Retno runs XSProject, an NGO that buys reusable waste materials from garbage collectors, and upcycles them into products such as laptop or book covers, cosmetic bags and storage boxes.

Until seven years ago, Retno was working in a multinational company and sitting on the advisory board of XSProject. In 2007, Retno took over the management of XSProject when American artist Ann Wizer, who had started the initiative as communal art project, left Indonesia. Retno believed in the

initiative because XSProject is not just about a creative approach to waste management, it is also about finding ways to improve the livelihood of a community of disadvantaged families.

At XSProject, a 5% share of product sales is channelled towards a scholarship fund, which helps children from trash picker families at the Cirendeu dump go to school. XSProject also picks up the occasional medical bill, pays for missing light bulbs, and provides employment for some of the family members of the community at the XSProject upcycling workshop. So far, 56 children have been enrolled in a local school nearby with funds from XSProject.

Over the years, Retno has come to understand the mechanisms of the trash economy.

Dumpsites emerge on empty plots of land with unclear legal status. Each dumpsite ends up being managed by one or several Lapak: These are families with enough means to build several shanty houses and carts. Each lapak allows poorer families to live in the shacks and assigns them a cart each morning which they use to comb the district for any form of trash. Everything reusable or recyclable is returned to the lapak, the rest is piled on top of a big heap of slowly rotting waste.

Living conditions in these informal settlements are harsh and unhygienic. Trash pickers usually come from outside the city, where they have fled from extreme poverty. They often do not possess official documents such as ID cards, marriage or birth certificates, which makes them especially vulnerable. Without legal documents, these people do not exist, let alone have access to economic

Retno Hapsari wants to help trash collector families improve their livelihoods. She has devised an ingenious support system that relies on upcycling and education.





THIS PROFESSOR WILL USE SALTWATER TO EMPOWER ASIA'S POOR

A bucolic charm possesses Kalinga: you could almost touch the sky and the clouds from the valleys and plateaus in this landlocked Philippine province. At 17 to 22 degrees Celsius, the weather is more pleasant than the heat and grime of the country's capital Manila. Here, life passes very slowly, and people are still very much into doing things the old way.

You could say that this is paradise on earth, except saying that would be romanticising the lives of the Kalinga people, who face real problems which threaten their livelihood. Climate change, one of their biggest challenges, affects the province's rice production. Landslides and unpredictable rainfall worry the farmers and villagers. The worsening weather also makes the people more prone to illnesses.

It doesn't help that they live off the grid, with electrification still not widespread in the province. This is why a lot of these people rely on kerosene lamps to survive the dark nights. Men are forced to walk miles just to buy kerosene from their neighbouring towns.

Professor Aisa Mijeno personally witnessed the difficulties by the Butbut tribe when she visited Buscalan, a small town in Tinglayan, Kalinga.

With her knowledge and experience in environmental engineering and sustainable energy, she thought that she could help develop a more

practical and accessible lighting solution for these people.

This was how SALT was born – a technology startup which utilises a simple yet ecologically- and economically- sustainable idea: a saltwater-powered lamp as bright as seven candles, or 90 lumens.

What makes SALT more outstanding is its business model, which is patterned after TOM's One for One concept. Each purchase of a SALT lamp means a family from an unelectrified community gets one too.

IGNITING INSPIRATION

A few months after SALT, the sustainable alternative lighting solutions company she co-founded, was awarded in June 2014 as one of the top ten tech startups in the 2nd Annual Ideospace Startup Competition, Aisa had to immediately fly to Seoul in November last year.

Chosen by the Young Entrepreneurs Society of the Philippines and Freelancer.com to represent the Philippines at the World Startup Competition in South Korea, SALT bagged the People's Choice Award during the event and the prestige of being the only Asian company to have reached the top five of 50 competitors.

These accolades would make you think Aisa had it all figured out from the start. But the truth is, no one would have thought that this was the path she was headed – not even her.

Before that fateful trip to Kalinga, she was busy lecturing students on

opportunities. Ironically, the informal trash economy that has emerged as a result of a dysfunctional municipal waste management system has become a source of livelihood for them – a few women from the trash picker community are employed as cleaners and seamstresses at XSProject.

"I have had people say that it is not good to give support to these people living here illegally, that it will make them lazy. But I don't see that. They live on the garbage dump because they are forced to; this is their life, day in day out. What we can do is minimal. We offer opportunities, but it is up to them to make something out of it."

Retno has found that the key to making long lasting improvements to the living conditions of these communities is to gain the trust of the

lapak. Last year, Retno managed to convince the lapak to support her plan to start a makeshift pre-school at the Cirendeu dump. Here, children aged 4 to 6 receive basic education and supervision three times a week. This was a response to Retno's observation that children from trash picking families who were supported by XSProject to attend mainstream schools were often not able to follow the pace of learning there.

The pre-school education provided at XSProject is intended to give the children an early head start and create a positive learning experience that will motivate them to keep on learning.

To continue the growth of XSProject, Retno reaches out to corporations with a win-win proposition. Rather than donating money,

corporations donate industrial waste on a large scale, and buy back the upcycled product as a unique form of merchandise, supplementing income from product sales in its retail outfit.

Through XSProject, the messy Cirendeu dump now symbolises a renewal hub of sorts where waste materials are given a second lease of life and the disadvantaged are given a little leg up to start well in society.

At XSProject, people, organisations and corporations are linked in a sustainable chain of creative entrepreneurship. Within this chain, individuals fulfil their professional ambitions while leaving a long lasting impact on their environment. 🌱



Men are forced to walk miles just to buy kerosene from their neighbourhood towns.



Embedded Systems, Data Structures, Algorithm Analysis, and CCNA (Cisco Certified Network Associate) Exploration, as a part-time Engineering professor at De La Salle University in Lipa, Batangas, a town outside Metro Manila.

But if it was any sign that her heart had always been in the right place, Aisa had been immersed in volunteer work long before. Shortly after graduating from college and into her first job, she resigned from her work so she could spend one whole year working with various NGOs.

"I call that now a year of enlightenment, when I travelled across the Philippines and Southeast Asia and did work for free—or sometimes, on my expense," she recollects. She became a Direct Dialogue Campaigner for Greenpeace Philippines that same year, wherein she received a measly PHP4,000 monthly allowance.

When the burden of financial constraints took hold, she was forced to quit being a campaigner.

In hindsight, losing that job may have actually been good, as it paved the way for Aisa's next, larger mission with SALT.

BRIGHTLY SHINING THROUGH

For Goldy Yancha, Ideospace's Associate Director for Community Development, what made SALT a winner from the start was its promise of changing lives as a social enterprise.

"SALT is exciting because of its great potential to disrupt and provide substantial impact to grassroots communities, especially unelectrified ones," Goldy relates.

Right now, one can purchase the lamp online, but Aisa foresees offline retail once sales pick up, depending on how and where the market receives them. Aisa envisions that they will serve underprivileged communities not just in the Philippines, but Asia's impoverished 615 million.

This coming April, SALT will begin distributing

the merchandise to the early adopters and their partner communities. "First beneficiaries are the 100 households in Bulalacao, Mindoro Oriental, the Hanunuo Mangyan. And then the 590 households, locals of Baranggay Gabi in Isla de Gigantes Sur, Carles, Iloilo," Aisa explains.

She is grateful for the opportunity to assist these communities, and the lessons she is picking up in her journey to grow SALT as a company. "We are learning, every single day we learn something new. I think the main pickup is you have to reach to people. If you have questions about something, don't be afraid to ask for help. And we are very thankful that there are people willing to help and guide us to the right direction."

Asked what advice she can give her fellow entrepreneurs, she muses:

"Stick to your principles—that is who you are." 💎



NON-PROFIT INITIATIVE GIVES BACK

'THE RIGHT TO LEARN' TO UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN



Watching a child's handwriting improve from being weak to strong is more than just an indicator of academic progress at the non-profit initiative called the Right to Learn project (RTL).

"When a child comes to the centre, his or her handwriting is usually weak, writing letters that are small and hard to read. After spending some time with us, you can see how they write stronger, bolder and more confidently. This is how we know that a child is improving, either by gaining confidence or improving academically."

An observation that project founder Yans Ganghadaran says is simple, but speaks volumes about the levels of education and attention given to a child, for him or her to learn effectively.

RTL provides free reading and writing classes, and activities for orphans, children from underprivileged shelters or low-income families. These children, from six years old to 17, attend classes at RTL that spark their creativity and innovation.

"When the children first come to our centre, they are quiet, shy and sometimes scared of speaking up. But over time, we encourage them to take part in many interactive activities, from costume making to painting, games and quizzes, and you will see a remarkable change in these vulnerable children," Yans explains.

Malaysian children attend compulsory primary education, as well as pre-school education and secondary schools. In a multilingual system, these children enjoy free education covering basic subjects for 12 years of their life. Since 2012, close to 2.7 million Malaysian pupils have enrolled in national

primary schools.

But lack of economic opportunities may force them to work, either by helping their families or completely missing out on school, as their low-income parents simply don't have the means to send them to school. And, while the United Nations note that primary class attendance is above 95%, drop out rates come close to 30% for secondary school students.

Large classrooms may also influence the children's academic progress with little attention given to weaker students. Yans note that the children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to 'slip' to the back of the class if not given the right attention, a situation that is influenced by their environment at home or upbringing.

A certified English and French teacher, her passion for creating RTL began when she was motivated to do more for the community beyond just a few hours of volunteerism.

RTL had its humble beginnings at a longhouse settlement in 2007, located next to affluent neighbourhood Taman Tun Dr Ismail in Kuala Lumpur. Yans started with reading and writing classes at a hall near the longhouses.

Four years later, the All Malaysia Malayalee Association (Amma) Foundation adopted the project. Today the project is housed comfortably at a first-floor shoplot along Jalan Rahim Kajai 13, with three small classrooms and plenty of space for activities.

"The foundation pays for my rent and electricity and that gives me the chance to take in more students," she explains.

The Amma foundation was established in 1975, supporting efforts to provide education to disadvantaged children. It provides assistance for students to pursue a tertiary education, and work on partnerships to assist the needy. To date, the foundation has given

out more than RM3 million in study loans and scholarships. Other donors include large corporation Berjaya Sdn Bhd that gave RTL a van so the children can be ferried for free from various shelters to the centre.

RTL's classes are customised to suit a child's academic levels. "The homes select the children to join us and we assess them. Sometimes they have reading difficulties or even dyslexia." With specific learning challenges, teachers are hired to help with these children.

The teenagers work on more complex issues such as discussions on global leaders and role models. They reflect their learning by painting a mural on Pakistani activist and Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, as well as discuss educational opportunities in Pakistan.

RTL relies on volunteers and paid teachers, who work with small groups of children so they get the attention they need, an approach that is showing results. "We try not to push the children to becoming 'A' students. We try to get them to improve from D (grades) to C, and C to progress upwards. So the teacher doesn't feel stressed and more importantly the child doesn't feel stressed."

Using her corporate training experience to further strengthen RTL, Yans devised a unique way of expanding her volunteer pool, by setting up an online volunteer reading programme through Skype. Volunteers based outside Malaysia or even Kuala Lumpur, can help the children in 30-minute reading sessions using audio books.

The initiative is hoping to expand its programme, so they can help more underserved students through imaginative ways of learning. Yans sees projects like RTL complementing the existing national system, an indication that the government and policymakers could do more to address the gaps in the schooling system. 🌱



BIG FISH

Leonard Theosabrata is a leading figure in Jakarta's creative scene. Transforming his family's furniture business was the beginning of a much bigger transformation of his hometown, Jakarta.

We follow Leonard Theosabrata up the stairs of a freshly renovated part of his family's furniture factory in West Jakarta. The office contains little more than a desk. Warm light filters in through the wooden drapes.

Leo has one of those ageless appearances. Thick-rimmed glasses and casual clothes make him look like the typical urbanites you would meet in a hip Jakarta restaurant on a Saturday evening; let's say in a place like Goods Diner.

Except that Leo owns Goods Diner and the adjacent Goods Department, together with a group of friends. He's a driving force behind a number of creative ventures that have changed the city's beat in recent years.

Leo grew up in Jakarta in the 90's at a time where clubs were opening up and kids were aspiring to become rock stars. He was inspired by American pop culture, especially design and music, and was able to convince his parents to send him to college in the USA.

With a smirk, he sums up his experience as a young graphic design student in Texas. "Have you seen the movie Dazed and Confused? That's how it was."

If Leo started out as a slacker, this changed when he discovered his talent and passion in product rather than graphic design. He moved to California to continue his studies. It felt like



he had found his place. But after graduation it was time to decide whether to stick around and pursue a work contract at one of the prestigious American design firms, or to pack his bags and head home.

"I decided to go back to Jakarta because I'd rather be a big fish here than one of many in a highly competitive environment," Leo says unabashedly. "I said to my friends: I want to be the product designer in Indonesia. I want to make an impact."

It was 2002 when he returned home. There wasn't much of a local scene for product design at that time. Leo started out by learning everything about wood manufacturing and the furniture trade at his father's factory.

"I was drilled by my dad. I still had my red or orange hair, but my dad took me everywhere with him, even to important meetings. We did a lot of furniture shows back then. And we founded Accupuncto."

As a duo, Leo and his father Yos Theosabrata created a line of stylish and well-crafted chairs. Accupuncto gained international reputation and won design awards such as the Red Dot. Leo's story could have stopped there. He had achieved his aspiration to become a

successful product designer.

But it didn't feel right. "There wasn't really any competition" he says, "I got bored."

In a way, Leo had become a big fish in an empty pond. Then, together with a couple of friends, the idea of Brightspot was conceived: a pop-up market for up and coming local designers that was to take place in varying locations across the city. "Brightspot turned into a springboard for young designers. It works, because people make money there. It wasn't just a big party, it proved a point."

Brightspot's success spawned many imitators. Hardly a weekend goes by in Jakarta without a pop-up market of some kind. But Leo soon realised the industry needed more than marketplaces.

"I saw that a lot of young entrepreneurs possess creativity and motivation but lack the know-how of manufacturing processes. I don't see how they can grow if they don't do this seriously."

This led Leo to set up Indoestri, a makerspace to build capability among young designers. At Indoestri, people take up membership to gain access to welding, wood cutting machines and other facilities of an industrial workshop, and join classes to learn new skills which can be applied to their individual projects.

Whatever drives Leo forward extends beyond building a reputation for himself and setting up profitable businesses.

"I am in the private sector, doing business for profit, but with good conscience. My goal is to support the middle sector. I have

been advocating the introduction of micro loans to young entrepreneurs like our vendors at Brightspot."

Leo is part of a generation of Indonesians who are aware of the privileges of their upbringing and are now working hard to give back to society.

Against the backdrop of widespread consumerism that grew under Suharto's authoritarian New Order government, Leo's story is a testament that new attitudes are emerging among the young, post-Suharto generation.

"Self made" is the motto of Indoestri, and it refers to more than the way products are made in Leo's workshop. It is a reminder that the future of Indonesia is in the hands of individuals who are empowered to shape history through a new brand of personal leadership. 🍷





BUILDING HOUSES TO BUILD COMMUNITIES

John-Son Oei pulls out a manual from the bookshelf. Words were scarce on the pages. Instead, they were filled with line drawings that showed how planks are to be assembled to make a wall, or how windows are made.

Yes, it's a house-making manual, and it's created by Epic Homes, an organisation dedicated to building homes for the 12,000 indigenous Orang Asli families in Peninsular Malaysia.

Oei, 28, is the founder of Epic Homes.

But Epic doesn't want to be just a builder of houses. It also wants to be a builder of communities, and a builder of systems to make house-building accessible to all.

To do this, it recruits volunteers to build houses alongside the Orang Asli community, with the hope of fostering lasting relationships between the different communities. And in return for a new house, the recipient will join Epic in building at least another three houses for their community.

"In this way, the Orang Asli community won't just get new houses, they will also become connected to a larger community which can be a source of support to them," he said.

A government survey showed that eight out of 10 of these indigenous families are in dire need of better housing, and better support.

But what makes Epic really stand out is its effort to create a house-building system that can be scaled rapidly. Someday, it hopes people may even be

able to order houses online from Epic which will deliver the components to them with a manual.

In this way, its admittedly ambitious goal of building a house for 12,000 families can be achieved.

"We want to put a system into place that will allow this venture to be sustainable," Oei said.

It all began with a toilet five years ago, in 2010.

Oei was then a college student with like-minded friends who wanted more from life than the rat race. None of them were wealthy. Oei, whose father passed away when he was 13, had worked his way through college, doing everything from making coffee to modelling.

Then, one day, a friend invited them to Kampung Jawa Kerling, an Orang Asli village in Selangor. An idea struck Oei when he saw the deplorable toilets. He thought they could rebuild the toilets as well as paint the rundown houses.

Without any money or expertise, they turned to social media. To their surprise, within a week and a half, they had 64 volunteers and RM10,000. They called the venture Project Epic or Extraordinary People Impacting Communities.

"My life changed from that point. I saw that people were hungry to contribute, to dirty their hands to make an impact. They just didn't have the platform to do so," he said. "It gave me the courage to continue."

All fired up, they then visited Kampung Hulu Tamu in Batang Kali, Selangor with the idea of replicating the project. But they found the houses so dilapidated that a fresh coat of paint wasn't going to cut it.



The idea was born: Build a house for each family that needed it.

Oei first thought they would raise funds and hire contractors. But he soon saw great scope here for volunteerism and community building.

"It would be great to build a house together and build relationships at the same time," he said. "And it would be so cool to be able to say that we actually built a house!"

But the process had to be simple enough for untrained volunteers to carry out, and had to be completed within three days.

No architect thought it could be done. A developer friend came to the rescue, and undertook the pilot project. Four workers built the first house in three days in 2012. It proved that it could be done.

The model was refined, and the next project was built by 30 volunteers.

Epic Homes was well on its way. As with the toilet project, there were no shortage of volunteers and funds. In fact, there are so many eager volunteers that available slots often get filled within 30 minutes.

"Money hasn't been a problem either," Oei said.

Corporations and donors fund the houses. The team runs side ventures to fund operational costs and salaries of its eight staff. This includes organising house-building weekends for corporations like Pemandu (the government agency in charge of reforms), AirAsia and Media Prima, as a team-building exercise.


Oei is also exploring a voluntourism sideline to raise funds for Epic while generating income for the Orang Asli through eco-tourism in their villages.

Epic has a pretty efficient system going now. It has an online portal to sign up volunteers and donors. Volunteers are trained in its workshop, and building teams are well structured with clear hierarchies.

Modular houses have been designed to speed up the building process as well as to allow customisation, to some extent, for each family based on their needs.

"We treat them as our clients, with dignity, not as victims. We don't want to foist upon them a design that we have chosen as this would make their house a daily reminder of their poverty and lack of choice," he said.

In its first year, Epic built only one house but last year, it built 16. So far, in all, it has built 30 houses.

To think, it all began with a toilet. 





CHARITY HERO

SYED AZMI INSPIRES COMMUNITY PROJECTS AMONGST THE YOUTH

"I'm a nobody, really I am no one. I like to be nice and I wanted people to be nice to others."

Syed Azmi Alhabshi shrugs off any compliments about his leadership skills, as a young person motivating others to do good.

This Petaling Jaya resident's first community project was an awareness campaign on how to be a good neighbour.

"I work in Johor and my parents live in Kuala Lumpur, and I thought if anything happens to them, the first person to help them would be my neighbours. I wanted to spread the word about being a good neighbour." This initiative began as get-togethers, hosting pot lucks and cleaning shared areas in the Taman Tun Dr Ismail where the family lives.

He moved on to organise FreeMarket in early 2014, a place where people can donate their pre-loved goods to the needy, such as single parents and hardcore poor families. The FreeMarket Facebook page has over 3,000

members and is growing, with FreeMarkets being replicated by communities in states outside of Selangor. No money changes hands and no barter is made, goods are simply donated to those who need them.

Syed uses Facebook effectively to publicise his projects. But he was surprised how quickly his work went viral, with more than 4,000 likes captured on his own page, possibly influenced by his humble and down to earth nature. Syed doesn't reveal his age, only to say that he is close to 40, because he wants others to continue serving the community without feeling out of place regardless of whether they were young or old.

His philosophy is simple. "People think you need to be in a society or have funding to do charity. But no, we wanted to change that. You don't need a single cent to start a drive."

In Malaysia, the cost of setting up a welfare society is low at RM30 per application, but there are at least 20 forms to complete along with fulfilling other legal checks by the Registrar of Societies (ROS). The ROS is strictly governed under the Ministry of Home Affairs, to prevent abuse in the social sector.

Syed's work may not be officially regulated, but he and his friends form a group called the Rakyat 4 Rakyat initiative, (Citizen for Citizen) a platform where everyone is considered a leader and offers an honest, rather grassroots approach to charity.

"We're not a formal organisation, and we're from different backgrounds. We disagree and we are free to express our opinion. When we disagree we find a solution to make things better," Hayati Ismail explains, a 41-year-old mother of three who is one of the core members.

In late 2014, Syed's work became controversial when they organised the "I want to touch a dog" event offering Malay Muslims a chance to pet dogs, a practice considered taboo amongst Muslims. The event received criticism, as well as support from Muslims and non-Muslims. Syed's phone was inundated with over 2,000 messages, some hate messages targetting him and his family, including death threats.

But, Syed and friends didn't stop their charitable work.

"We're stronger now than before, we're more careful with what we do. We try to do less controversial things. We keep to the sensitivities



of Malaysians," explains Hayati.

Syed's simple response to such backlash was to regroup and examine why they didn't work hard enough to educate communities on the cause, and strive to work harder at the next project.

Anytime they hit a roadblock, they'd return to the cause. Hayati and Syed shared the same point. "The cause is bigger (in importance). We're not doing any of this for fame."

"But, every time there is a challenge, it means we create tension. When people are criticising it means they are reading and learning about our cause," Syed adds.

Hayati points out that Syed forms the public face of the group. It's his large following that allows his campaigns to get the massive support it needs, so much so he had to convert his Facebook profile into a Public Figure page to accommodate everyone's requests.

She agrees with Syed that Rakyat 4 Rakyat

was made up of 'low-profile' individuals wanting to make a difference, adding that Syed's ideas and energy has helped fuel the projects to greater heights.

Syed admits he never sees himself as a role model, because he feels that there are critics who think he is a show-off. "Every challenge is an opportunity and I tell those who bash me to do better community projects and I will be their follower."

But for 22-year-old accounting student Intan Diyana, she says Syed is too modest. "I am inspired by Syed and want to do projects that will positively impact communities. Usually young people do community work as part of their homework. But when you do it on your own, it's different. It's more satisfying and you feel more inspired."

She is impressed with Syed's energy, and how one individual's actions could change the lives of others. Intan is even toying with the idea of working in the social sector,

rather than as an accountant.

Another Rakyat 4 Rakyat member Athirah Al Tarmidhi knows that planning and running a charity campaign is not easy. "Syed inspires me to do many things. Working with the team makes us very close. Syed is really funny, at the same time he is serious and very clear about the project's purpose."

Athirah, 25, is driven to launch her own initiative after witnessing the impact of Syed's work in the community. Athirah's full-time job is at a gourmet food company, but is committed to host a cycling for charity initiative.

Syed is modest, a lesson learnt from his father. "All those in the team are leaders, and everyone inspires me. My team mates are my role models."

At the same time, he is happy to offer advice to those wanting to recruit volunteers, "Be genuine, be honest about the cause. It's really nice to be nice to others." 🙏



IN FOR THE LONG RUN

— *General Electric (GE) was the first American company to enter Myanmar after US sanctions were suspended in 2012 despite a host of challenges plaguing the country. As large companies think broader about their corporate objectives, GE's recent move into Myanmar reflects a deeper purpose about how an inventor of great products is leading the way for companies to evolve into creators of great social solutions.*

In June 2013, General Electric (GE) and the GE Foundation announced a US\$7 million commitment in Myanmar to donate healthcare equipment and support significant training and capacity building efforts to strengthen Healthcare, Energy Infrastructure, Leadership Development and Rule-of-Law in the country, making it the first American company to invest in Myanmar after years of absence.

Myanmar began seeing an upsurge in foreign direct investments after a series of dramatic political and economic reforms and the subsequent suspension of several trade sanctions by the European Union and the United States against the country in 2013, two years after the end of the military junta regime.

Myanmar further announced its decision to refinance public debts owed to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, a move that signalled a strong intention to accelerate the country's economic reform and poverty reduction.

As Myanmar works towards integration with the global economy, a number of issues continue to confront the country's developmental efforts.

With a land mass that is the second largest in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, Myanmar is home to 52 million. To power Myanmar's economic ambition and serve the needs of Myanmar's growing population, demand for electricity will continue to rise. Today, demand for electricity is already outstripping supply.

Despite being rich in natural resources notably in hydropower and natural gas, over 70 percent of the population had no access to electricity in 2013, the World Bank reported. The National Electricity Master Plan study estimates that by 2030 the demand for electricity in Myanmar will be 5 to 8 times the level in 2012.

Myanmar also has the highest infant mortality rate (48 per 1,000 live births) and mortality rate for children under the age of five (62 per 1,000 live births) in all of Southeast Asia, according to a 2013 UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) report.

Even so, Myanmar is often said to be last frontier in Asia with tremendous growth potential. After a hiatus of many years, GE resumed its commitment in Myanmar following the country's transition to a civilian government.

"Myanmar is a market that has huge opportunity for growth. We are focused on expanding our investments and contributions as the government continues to make progress in its social and economic reform agenda to boost Myanmar's global competitiveness," said GE's CEO ASEAN, Stuart Dean.

GE's investment has been focused on healthcare, energy infrastructure, aviation, and capacity building as these business sectors address critical areas of basic human needs faced by the people of Myanmar.

Following a proposal made during GE Chairman and CEO, Jeffrey Immelt's visit to Myanmar in 2014, GE and Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise (MEPE) signed a collaboration agreement in November 2014 and agreed to work together on a new commitment to help in repowering and upgrading existing gas turbines in Yangon. This initiative will result initially in approximately 25 megawatts (MW) of additional power for Myanmar, which is needed to help the country continue on its rapid development path.

"GE had made a good effort in powering up Myanmar since the re-entry into the country in May 2013. I look forward to continuing to work with GE on these power plants repowering project to get Myanmar up and running with the electricity plan," said U Htein Lwin,



Managing Director of MEPE.

To address the high incidence of maternal and infant mortality rates, GE Healthcare launched a rural healthcare pilot project in partnership with the Myanmar Ministry of Health. Under this project, GE will supply both training and technology which includes the Venue 40 ultrasound, infant warmers, LED phototherapy, patient monitors and other equipment.

Beyond focusing on critical needs faced by the people of Myanmar, GE has also been working on capacity building within Myanmar. Through the Myanmar Executive Leadership Program (MELP), 27 leaders from business, government and private sectors in Myanmar had received training on leadership skills at GE's corporate training center in Crotonville, Ossining NY. In addition, the GE Foundation is supporting an undertaking by the International Senior Lawyers Project to help train civil society advisors on rule of law concepts as they engage with government officials on policy matters.


"It was a pleasure to have been involved in the first Myanmar Executive Leadership Program which provided me with deep insights about GE's best practices in leadership and innovation across its various operations all around the world. I have also taken away a number of eye-opening experiences and inspiration from the site visits conducted during the programme," said H.E. U Aung Than Oo, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Electric Power, who was part of the first batch of Myanmar leaders in GE Crotonville in March 2014.

"The Myanmar Executive Leadership Program represents GE's continued commitment to contribute its expertise, technology and solutions to help both government and local private sector companies solve the tough challenges faced in Myanmar. We hope to be able to inspire, connect and develop Myanmar's leaders of today and tomorrow as part of our aim to help Myanmar make progress in its social and economic reform agenda and boost its global competitiveness", said Stuart Dean, CEO of General Electric, ASEAN.

As a societal leader, GE has stayed competitive for over 100 years through continued investment in research, development and innovation. Yet, GE's investment into Myanmar is not without risk. In a study published by the McKinsey Global Institute, it was noted that companies investing in Myanmar could run "a major risk of disappointment".

"Foreign investors are afraid to invest in the country because there's no guarantee for them, because we still lack rule of law and infrastructure here," said Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi at the World Economic Forum in 2013.

Despite numerous issues that present risks of varying magnitude, GE remains unwavering in its commitment to support economic development and also broader capacity and capability development in Myanmar.

"The risk of not going in early to help the country far outweighs what some would see as impediments to doing business in the country. The time to invest in this country is now and it is for the long-term," said Stuart Dean. 



LOOKING TO UNDERSTAND, AND HEAL, AFTER A GENOCIDE



— *Youk Chhang's vision was initially borne out of hatred – an unlikely beginning for an organisation that is responsible for the healing of a nationwide trauma.*

At age 17, the Phnom Penh native had survived the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge, but just barely. The Khmer Rouge's ultra-Maoist policies led to the death, starvation and separation of thousands of families. When the regime ended on January 7, 1979 – after three years, eight months and 20 days – approximately two million people had been killed, with thousands buried in mass graves all over the country.

The youngest of six children, only Youk and three of his sisters remained; most of his extended family had perished under the party's cruel watch.

"I must admit I was looking for a way to take revenge rather than to reconcile with the perpetrators who committed the crimes against my family and many others," Youk said, seated in his office bathed in natural light.

And so, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) was established in 1995, as part of Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program. Through research, Youk hoped to shine a light on the injustices of the secretive regime, and bring those responsible to justice.

But his task grew as he and his team began travelling to villages throughout Cambodia to interview survivors and perpetrators of the Khmer Rouge. Youk realised, while speaking at length to individuals, that people were not caught up in vengeance, but ached to move past their losses.

"My first advice to all my staff – because I

don't always go there all the time – is just to listen. And I think people want to be free," he said. "They've been hostages of the past; they've been trapped by the past."

"Meeting with both the survivors and the perpetrators changed the way I see things and it turned [my purpose for] revenge into healing. I still believe that reconciliation is impossible in some cases, but healing individually is possible."

Today, DC-Cam has gathered more than a million documents: 100,000 interviews with Khmer Rouge survivors and perpetrators, 20,000 physical evidence such as mass graves and prisons, 600,000 photographs documenting the Khmer Rouge period, and about 300 documentary films made during that time.

This information has been utilised not only as evidence in the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, set up by the UN and the Cambodian government to bring the regime's top echelon to justice, but also to furnish a textbook educating teenagers about the period.

In Youk's eyes, this was a big victory. After the war was over, the international community sought to sweep the regime's atrocities under the rug in a bid for peace and national reconciliation.

But just as American writer William Faulkner once wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past," Youk believes that this page in history still affects the present. Over the years, DC-Cam has successfully lobbied the government – which is currently headed by Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge cadre – to make genocide education an integral part of the school system. Only in 2009 did it become compulsory for young Cambodians to learn about the country's dark chapter.

"They are still the generation that is connected to the survivors," Youk said. "They are

touched by genocide because of their family, of their parents, and it has a huge impact for their behaviour and their thinking and their way of life."


A first-time visitor to Phnom Penh will be struck by how often, and how nonchalantly, Cambodians speak about the loss of loved ones to the regime. More than 30 years after it ended, Youk believes that only now will Cambodians be able to consider reconciliation.

"It takes one generation to meet and discuss this in a less antagonistic and aggressive way," he said. "Had we met 20 years ago, most of the [reactions] I've collected then were either angry, passive, or negative."

Justice holds different meanings for different parties – especially in a court of law like the tribunal – but victims yearn only for the truth, Youk said. To this end, he is currently planning the construction of a genocide museum, which will be fully realised with a design by famed architect Zaha Hadid. The Sleuk Rith Institute plans to be the leading centre for genocide studies in Asia, and will house a museum, a research centre, and a campus.

Seeking to provide victims with a sense of understanding about the Khmer Rouge, the institution will also promote accountability among the public. Youk's ultimate, and ambitious, aim is to prevent future genocides.

"Since the UN Convention on Genocide Prevention was signed in 1948, not even one genocide has been prevented. It has happened again and again," he said. "Cambodia will learn from this mistake of human history."

"This is not about today; it's about the future." 



WE ARE ALL HUMAN

— *Ravi Saha enjoys chicken rice, watches local dramas, and complains about the public transport system and fare hikes. After living in Singapore for 10 years, he feels almost Singaporean.*

For some reason, locals seem to know that he is not from Singapore. Some even go to the extent of highlighting the difference. "I was once asked to give up my seat to a Singaporean as though I did not deserve it. I think it is because I'm a foreign worker," Ravi recalled.

Like many before him, Ravi left his hometown in Bangladesh for Singapore in an attempt to find a way out of poverty.

As of June 2014, statistics released by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) indicate that there are as many as 980,000 work permit holders in Singapore. That represents nearly 20 per cent of Singapore's population. A majority of these work permit holders are construction workers from Bangladesh, India and China, and domestic foreign workers from Indonesia and the Philippines.

The influx of foreign workers has altered

Singapore's society in several ways – some more perceptible than others. A study conducted in Singapore by AnOther Angle, a Singapore-based project group, found that perceptions of foreign workers as public nuisance that congregated in large groups, smelled bad or displayed unruly behaviour, were not uncommon among those surveyed.

A Singaporean respondent, Chester Yeoh, 18, said, "Low-wage migrant workers are not treated equally in our society because we see them as lower class."

Distance and negative perceptions from locals are not the only problems faced by migrant workers.

In a 2014 survey conducted on 328 male low-wage migrant workers by Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), a Singapore-based non-profit organisation that works to improve conditions for low-wage migrant workers in Singapore, it was revealed that one third of respondents are not being paid fairly by their employers.

A poor grasp of English and a lack of familiarity with their rights prevent these workers from expressing their problems, let alone approach the relevant authorities for

help. They are often left in a vulnerable position. Other issues faced include less than optimal working conditions and unsanitary, overcrowded living conditions.

More than a decade ago, TWC2 was started by a group of members from Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), following the death of an Indonesian domestic worker who suffered months of violent assault by her employer. The spotlight was shone on the plight of domestic workers living in Singapore, highlighting the lack of support for these domestic workers and concluding that much more could be done to assist them in times of distress. TWC2 was thus set up with the objective of improving the conditions for domestic workers working in Singapore and to promote respect for them through educating residents in Singapore. A year after its formation, TWC2 expanded its scope to protect low wage migrant workers both male and female alike, since they faced similar issues.

While an increasing number of policies has been put in place to protect migrant workers over the years, migrant workers have been facing declining conditions as a whole. As TWC2 volunteer Grace Baey observes, the agency fees for Bangladesh workers have





doubled from S\$4000 in the 1990s to S\$8000 to S\$10,000 presently, while the wages of the workers have not risen proportionately. The huge debts have compelled workers to work long hours under harsh conditions, placing them in a very risky position. In the Foreign Worker Survey done by MOM in 2014, the percentage of Work Permit holders who felt that employment agency fees were expensive went up to 40 per cent in 2014 from 24.3 per cent in 2011.

With greater awareness surrounding the plight of these workers, more individuals have stepped forward to champion and join the cause. TWC2 has expanded from a tiny organisation comprising a few individuals to a multifaceted organisation with 15 staff members and 60 volunteers covering five main areas today - advocacy and public outreach, social work assistance, research, cuff road food programme, direct services and care fund.

Under TWC2's cuff road food programme, Indian and Bangladeshi food is served to migrant workers while volunteers lend a listening ear and provide counsel on how

they may address their problems, where possible. In cases where migrant workers find themselves in urgent situations - such as negligent employers throwing them out on the streets or refusing to pay for urgent medical attention - TWC2 would step in to offer the migrant workers medical and rent subsidies from their care fund.


With the number of injury cases doubling to 1,791 in year 2013 from 807 in year 2011, it appears that more can be done to protect migrant workers. Advocacy is therefore an area that TWC2 is heavily involved in. TWC2 volunteers would organise periodic meetings with policymakers to explore lapses in the current policies and to consider possible improvements.

Over the 12 years, TWC2 has touched the hearts of many migrant workers through its work. More than half a million meals have been handed out to migrant workers since the cuff road food programme started in 2008.

As a non profit organisation, TWC2 relies heavily on volunteers and donations coming in from the public to carry out its ongoing

initiatives. Over 90 per cent of the donations collected from the public go toward charitable activities while the rest are spent on overheads. TWC2 requires around S\$500,000 every year.

Russell Heng, President of TWC2, said in a recent interview with AnOther Angle that the organisation is looking to strengthen their advocacy programme. "Overall, we've left advocacy very much neglected because we were very busy providing services and solving immediate problems of the workers. If we get distracted and just go on providing services, we may do good work but we end up just being a charity, where we may be helping people but never solving the problem," he said.

For all the negative perception surrounding low-wage migrant workers, many low-wage migrant workers interviewed by the author do not appear to take it to heart. Some even paint a rosy picture of Singapore and its people. As Mozammel Bary, a Bangladeshi low-wage migrant worker puts it, "Everybody is human, so humans have to love humans first." 

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FAST TRACKING THE HUNT FOR TIME BOMBS IN LAOS

Four decades have passed since the end of the Vietnam War in Laos in 1975.

Yet, the scars of war continue to affect Laos on a daily basis, a legacy that births from the fact that more than 270 million cluster bombs were dropped on Laos between 1964 and 1973, making Laos the most bombed country per capita in the world.

Today, one third of Laos remains contaminated with up to 80 million unexploded cluster bombs. The United Nations in the Lao PDR estimates that less than 2 per cent of contaminated areas have been cleared over the last four decades.

According to the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action in Lao PDR, at least 20,000 people (25 per cent of them children) have been killed or injured by unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Laos since the Vietnam War-era bombings ended. Reducing the impact of UXO on communities became the ninth Millennium Development Goal specific to Lao PDR.

Despite high levels of investment from the international community and advancements in the human and institutional capacity to deal with the situation, the problem of UXO is still very significant within Laos.

"The UXO problem now constitutes an impediment to socio-economic development in our country. We cannot carry out our development projects and poverty eradication

without getting the UXO out of our land," said Saleumxay Kommasith, Vice-Minister from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Former United Nations Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident Representative in Lao PDR Minh Pham speaks to us on a project that explores the use of new technology to fast track the current detection practice for unexploded ordnance.

How was the land ordnance project conceived?

Unexploded ordnance or UXO as we call it is a danger to the rural communities. Over the past decades, we have only managed to clear a very small proportion of the UXO that is distributed all over Laos.

There is a huge gap in resources between what is available and what is required for the detection and clearance of UXO in Laos. The UXO situation in Laos is tantamount to the imposition of a lifetime tax on development for the country. Being a Vietnamese-American, I have direct attachment to the issue and the desire to help drives me to look for new solutions that can help address this problem.

What do you hope to achieve and how has the progress been?

Laos is still using technology from WWII for the detection of UXO. Hand scans and clearance per hectare of land requires the deployment of seven people over a period of nearly one month. It is a slow and labour intensive process. I'm proposing the use of drones to speed up detection. It is estimated that detectors carried by drones would be able to cover up to 10 hectares of land in one day.

I am working with Johannes Baptist Stoll, a German expert on the use of drones for mineral detection to test if this technology can be used to accurately detect a variety of unexploded bombs, some as small as the size of a tennis ball.

Based on current data, we know that the concentration of UXO is in the North and South of Laos as these were the entry and exit points during the Vietnam War. However, a detailed UXO map has never been done. The information that is available from the US bombing sorties may not be fully accurate given that UXO might have shifted over time due to land movements and erosion.

We need to have a good map of the unexploded bombs. In the absence of full data, we will not be able to fully address the UXO problem. Simply put, you cannot resolve something you can't count. With a detailed national detection map, we can then classify the affected areas according to contamination levels. This will then help prioritise clearance efforts and determine the level of risk we are

able to live with.

We have started discussions with the government of Laos, specifically the National Regulatory Agency and UXO Laos, the implementing arm for detection and clearance, to get buy-in and support. The pilot project will require a funding of US\$100,000 and we are in the midst of raising funds from the international community.

What challenges have you faced?

A key challenge relates to skills and capacity gaps in Laos. To implement the project, we will need to have good, strong technicians with the skills to interpret technical data and make analytical assessments on whether something is a bomb or not.

Given the geography of Laos, we will have to test if the technology can deal with physical obstacles such as trees and uneven terrains that may interfere with the scan. To ensure cost efficiency, the extent of the detection should go according to the intended use of the land that is being scanned. For instance, land that will be used for agriculture would require scans that cover a minimum depth of 30cm. Land that is planned for infrastructure such as roads, schools, mining and other heavy industries would require scans that go much deeper and the cost of clearance would consequently be

higher. We intend to conduct a detailed cost benefit analysis to assess if the project would make financial sense.

The project team will also work closely with NRA/UXO Lao, particularly with the Ministry of Defense to address any related security issues.

What else is keeping you busy?

Malnutrition is a chronic problem in Laos. About one third of children under the age of 5 are underweight and 48 per cent are stunted. The first 1000 days of a child's life set the foundation for the quality of his or her physical and cognitive development. We are exploring ways to incorporate Moringa, a plant that has tremendous nutritional properties and health benefits, into the diet of children. An idea is to add Moringa leaf powder to the seasoning sachets in instant noodle packets, a food that is widely consumed in Laos.

Separately, we are also working on a project to design affordable cargo and people carriers for motorbikes in Asia. Through innovative design, we hope to help poor and small-scale entrepreneurs in Asia who already own motorbikes, and rely on them for their livelihoods, to achieve higher income potential by maximising their haul capability and mobility in a safe and sustainable way. 🍀



Minh Pham recently completed a 25 year-career with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), having served in New York, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. He specialises in international development, trade and sovereign debt.

During his last 12 years with the UN, he served as the Resident Representative of the UN Secretary General and the head of UNDP in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Jamaica and Laos.

In the Maldives, Minh played a key role in Maldives' constitutional reforms, which led to the country's multi-party democracy. In Sri Lanka, covering Asia and the Pacific, Minh led the publication of the Regional Human Development Report (a flagship publication of UNDP). Prior, Minh successfully advocated and brokered Jamaica's first major domestic debt relief, which resulted in savings of US\$500 million a year in interest payments.

Minh holds a M.A. in International Finance and Banking from Columbia University and a B.A. in French and Finance from the State University of New York at Albany. He is fluent in English, French and Vietnamese.



SINGAPOREAN MOVED BY THE PLIGHT OF THE HMONG



— Three decades following the end of the Indo-China conflict, a bilateral agreement was signed in September 2007 between the government of Thailand and Laotian authorities that would lead to the re-classification of ethnic Hmong refugees as “illegal immigrants” and subsequent deportation of identified Laotian Hmong refugees back to Lao PDR.

This came at a time when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was working to find a humanitarian solution for the plight of the Hmong even though it had never been able to gain access to the refugee camps in the Phetchabun province in Northern Thailand where nearly 8,900 Hmong resided.

These camps were home to generations of Hmong people who were recruited by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the Indo-China wars in the 1960s, and who fled to Thailand for political asylum at the end of the wars.

In October 1995, National Review ran an

article written by American public policy expert and commentator Michael Johns where the Hmong were described as a people “who have spilled their blood in defense of American geopolitical interests.”

Since the end of the war, the US has resettled more than 250,000 Laotian Hmong refugees. According to GlobalPost, between January 2010 and July 2012, the US granted Laotians asylum in 77 cases involving a total of 268 people. The country has not taken another Laotian Hmong case since then.

Meanwhile, a community of Thai-born Hmong



descendants has taken root in Thailand. It is estimated that the population now stands at 150,000. According to RADION International founder and executive director, Eugene Wee, the largest concentration of Hmong-Thai is found in the mountainous region in Phetchabun province.

Although the plight of the Laotian Hmong refugees does not necessarily extend to their Thai counterparts, the Hmong-Thai do face a host of other challenges.

In 2013, an article in Bangkok Post reported that “Nearly a million hill peoples and forest dwellers are still treated as outsiders – criminals even, since most live in protected forests. Viewed as national security threats, hundreds of thousands of them are refused citizenship although many are natives to the land”. The Hmong are one of six major hill tribes that reside within Thailand.

Singaporean Eugene Wee, founder and executive director of RADION International speaks to us about the lessons he has learned in the last eight years living among the Hmong community in Thailand.

How did you get started?

When I was still working in Singapore back in 2007, I found myself with 42 days of accumulated annual leave. That year, I travelled up to Thailand to work with HIV-infected kids and there, I saw 8,900 refugees confined behind barb-wires with hardly enough to get by in Phetchabun. I learned that many of them are Hmong.

Due to the sensitive political situation, the military started clamping down on media coverage of the camp and only a handful of NGOs remained to continue serving the refugees. With little media coverage, NGOs often struggle with getting the necessary visibility and funding for their work, but I feel that the core of humanitarian work should not be about publicity, finances or convenience. It should be about getting aid to the beneficiaries. Sadly, this is just one of many communities that continue to be under-served due to political issues, social stigma or simply because of the challenging terrain.

The more time I spent with the Hmong, the more I got to know them and the immense challenges they are faced with. For the

refugees, each day was a struggle to stay alive, for the Hmong-Thais (Hmong people born in Thailand), it was a struggle of an impoverished community plagued by drugs, crime and abuse.

I asked myself if I could help them. After an internal tussle, I proceeded to drain my savings and stock portfolio to help make life more liveable for the Hmong and this is also the founding moment for RADION International.

Who are the Hmong people and what problems do they face?

The Hmong are an ethnic group from the mountainous regions of China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. In Khek Noi a village in Phetchabun, there are about 14,000 Hmong people.

Putting aside the complicated historical legacy, there are serious problems within the community that need addressing. In the eyes of many Thais, the Hmong are seen as drug traffickers, but more often than not, the Hmong are simply drug mules lured by the promise of a quick way out of poverty. The Hmong-Thais remain severely neglected and marginalised, with little access to legal support, education and healthcare. An estimated 40 per cent of women are victims of domestic violence and there is no social safety net. In addition, one in four school-going kids under the age of 16 have a history of using drugs.

In my years of working with the Hmong, I have also seen kids being sold into the sex trade or for organ harvesting for less than US\$900. Over the last 8 years, we have been able to engage more than 30 per cent of the community through various programmes.

With multiple problems and limited resources, how did you decide what to focus on?

We did research on how the rest of the world approached problems. We also invited a lot of people to come down to learn about our work so that we may tap on their ideas. However, to get this right is a fine balance. First world development ideas need to be tailored to fit the local context. Additionally, too much foreign presence can be detrimental to local community development. So it's often about first understanding local context and getting community buy-in.

In my first year, we invested in a stock of breeding pigs and the intention was that the pig farm would provide a source of employment and income for poor within the community while giving locals a platform to trial new farming techniques. They started to become wary and mistakenly thought we were introducing competition to the locals. After a couple of weeks, my pigs started vomiting and dying. I found out that villagers had poisoned the pigs and 40 per cent of my livestock was lost that year! That cost us a 5-figure sum. Eventually, the villagers understood my intention and accepted that the pig farm was meant to benefit them. They then turned around to support and help protect it.

So there are no short cuts and quick wins?

Short-term projects can be gratifying and I think we need to understand that social problems cannot be solved overnight. We are talking about a 20- to 40-year effort. Change takes years!

Let me give you a rough idea of how challenging this can be. Hmong villagers have grown up with the idea of cooking within their own houses, a fireplace is often in the middle of their homes and while they cook, ash and smoke fills the house. People in these houses develop severe respiratory problems and diseases after long term inhalation of the ash and smoke. Many elderly folks came to us for medical treatment and it is only when we visited their homes that we realised the cause of the problems. We explained how the ash and smoke from the firewood in their homes cause health problems and we urged them to move the stove out of their houses. They were terribly reluctant, fearing that their stoves will be stolen if they placed them outside of their houses.

After 4 to 5 years of creative messaging, an elderly villager finally tried this out and positive word of mouth on the benefits of so doing eventually spread across the village. My point is it took us 4 to 5 years to convince them to drop a cultural norm and adopt an alternative approach.

Eight years ago, my work was focused on providing immediate relief to enable the locals to get by. But relief is very temporal by nature and to create sustainable change, we knew we had to seriously look at longer-term developmental projects. Today, we couple both relief projects to serve as interim aid and

development projects to strengthen the local capacity in areas like agriculture, life-skills and self care. It is our hope that these projects would nudge them toward sustainability and level the playing field for them.

How do you measure the success of your work?

Our developmental projects have key indicators such as reduction of domestic violence rate from 40 per cent to 30 per cent or reducing juvenile drug use in the next 5 years. That said, each step is pivotal on the partners who come alongside us as well as the receptivity of the projects by the locals. This is also why we emphasis on local expertise to help design community development programmes collectively.

Working in rural communities is extremely difficult, especially when societal norms can differ largely from the developed world, so, As such, we conduct community surveys and focus groups every two years to keep track of domestic violence rates and prevalence of drug use among kids, to know where we are and what more needs to be done.

Through creative education, we hope to reduce juvenile drug use especially amongst school-going children. One of the projects we are working on is to make drug use "Uncool".

Like many of their Asian counterparts, the concept of 'face' or reputation and dignity is an important one among the Hmong. Given that the locals subscribe to this, we are working on creative projects to reduce the appeal of drugs and change it from something that is appealing to something that is frowned upon.

What challenges have you faced?

Many social organisations in developing countries tend to be palliative in nature. Few will go beyond handouts to solve problems. So building understanding around the idea of working towards sustainable change and getting continued support for long term projects can be very challenging.

The other challenge will be in attracting and retaining top talents. Talent from the social and business sectors are reluctant to cross over because the salary on the social side is a lot lower. This is compounded by the fact that

people hold on to the perception that social workers should not be well compensated. We do receive donation in-kind but we can't pay our staff with donation in-kind! While we do work with various corporations such as 3M, Crocs, DKSH and Singapore Airlines on CSR projects, we also hope to encourage givers to move from giving out of convenience to deliberate and educated giving.

I attended a conference last year and something stuck with me. An owner of an airline company in the Middle East said, "NGOs need to understand business in order to achieve win-win partnerships." He then went on to share that more often than not, aircrafts tend to have spare cargo space. He mooted an idea to provide low-cost cargo space to humanitarian organisations to pre-position non time critical supplies to disaster prone regions. This way, the aircrafts can fly with maximum load and NGOs can tap

on this spare capacity to fly items at minimal cost. For CSR to create real value beyond driving publicity, the business and social sectors need to have genuine conversations.

Having been in this sector for eight years now, what are your reflections?

NGOs are often forced to engage in "grey-marketing" to emphasize the power of one simple action, or donation. But real societal problems take collective effort and an immense amount of time. You see reports that carry impressive statistics of children removed from malnutrition or that 80 per cent of all donations collected have been successfully channelled to villages. Yet, those who put out such reports hardly operate on ground to ensure that the resources are optimised and directed to solving real problems. There is little oversight on how the donations are being used

to benefit the community on ground. On the flip side, first world donors often don't want to read real stories. They prefer stories that put a warm feeling in their hearts without having to deal with the anguish of knowing societal problems and how they are contributing to change. Many would rather believe that a US\$50 donation could change the life of a kid.

I recently met with a group of young and enthusiastic Law students who wanted to teach villagers how to start a business, even though none of them had real-life experience in this field. I told them, "My dear friends, you have not run a business before. Why don't you consider contributing in ways that are closer to your field of knowledge and experience?" They did not like that comment and they later went on to partner another social organisation to carry out the plan.

In working with partners that provide medical care to the rural communities, we do get a fair bit of queries as to what "exotic" cases they will get to see in third world countries. Many well meaning professionals and students hope to do some good, but the poor don't exist to remind us of our privilege or their medical condition to expose us to "new and exotic" clinical cases.

What word of advice would you give to people who are thinking going into social sector?

We need to be very sensitive when it comes to working with lives; we need to be mindful not to impose our opinions and expectation on communities that we serve. Long term change starts with trust.

Social work has to be more thoughtful. Sometimes, we get involved in easy, palatable

charity projects that gratify our self-actualisation moments but do not bring about sustainable change. This reflects superficiality. We want to be seen to be giving back because it is convenient and it feels good, but we don't want to sink our feet in the mud. Some have no courage to see harsh realities.

Understand the problems first, then come up with solutions. It is more sustainable than deciding on the aid required and getting people to revolve around it. You need to be committed to your chosen cause and be prepared to invest years into it if you are truly serious about bringing change. The rock star or hero mentality has to fade. Social organisations need to be measured by long term impact, and not by status or overnight fame, or a warm fuzzy feeling after a trip to the third world. 🙏



Eugene Wee is the founder and executive director of RADION International, a social impact organisation that provides humanitarian relief and delivers community developmental programmes among the Hmong community in Phetchabun, a province in northern Thailand.

RADION International is a humanitarian relief and development agency dedicated to serving the most vulnerable and marginalised communities. It currently works amongst hill tribe communities in Thailand spanning across 120 km in land distance. Its international headquarters are in Singapore, supported by a country office in Chiang Mai, Thailand and a field office in Phetchabun, Thailand. The organisation works to reach oppressed and needy communities through practical actions such as community development work and direct relief intervention.



GENDER EQUALITY NECESSARY TO POWER MYANMAR'S SOCIETY



— Kelly Macdonald is a Canadian social entrepreneur and a public health professional.

She has been working for women's reproductive health, safety, and rights as a social entrepreneur and a public health specialist. She is a founder of the Yangon Bakehouse, a successful social business in Myanmar that provides culinary and social skills training to disadvantaged women, and assists them to secure jobs in the growing hotel, restaurant industry. She also works with

NGOs that provide social and clinical services to support positive outcomes for women's reproductive health.

Kelly has MSc degrees from the University of Guelph (Rural Planning and Development) and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (Reproductive Health Epidemiology). She also has a BA from the University of Calgary. She has been living and working in Africa and SE Asia since 1994 of which she has been living in Myanmar for 10 years with her family.

— Recent economic and political reforms in Myanmar have opened doors to a series of policy dialogues and civil society movements on issues including gender inequality and the lack of economic opportunities for women in Myanmar.

2013 was a watershed year for women in Myanmar.

On 20 September 2013, Myanmar played host to the country's first-ever international conference on women issues and empowerment solutions. The Myanmar Women's Forum, which was jointly organised by Women's League of Burma (WLB) and Women's Organisation Network (WON) attracted over 400 participants from corporations, government and civil society. This was followed shortly by a number of international conferences of a similar nature.

In light of Myanmar's recent economic and political transition, these forums reflected a growing appetite for platforms that would enable discussions around the importance of enhancing women's voice in society and the need to improve women's accessibility to jobs and economic opportunities through legal and policy reforms.

At 51.8%, women make up slightly more than half the population in Myanmar, according to the Ministry of Immigration and Population census in August 2014. Yet only 38% of women are in the work force, the majority of whom are unskilled.

"There is an urgency to better understand how women's labour force participation can be raised in a region as diverse as Asia. While markets such as Japan and South Korea are ageing surprisingly fast, others such as Cambodia and Myanmar are just stepping onto the global stage as they embrace economic reform. Across all these markets, raising women's labour force participation rate offers the obvious solution to achieving economic development," said

Dr. Yuwa Hedrick-Wong, Global Economic Advisor, MasterCard.

Kanthan Shankar, World Bank Myanmar's Country Manager added: "Myanmar is at a critical juncture for harnessing the forces of economic growth in a way that improves its human development outcomes and ensures that all segments of society can benefit. With continued attention to reducing vulnerabilities and improving opportunities, strong progress in gender-equitable growth and poverty reduction can be achieved for all men and women across Myanmar."

In December 2014, some twenty leaders of major Myanmar and international companies met in Yangon for the inaugural edition of CEO Champions Myanmar, an initiative that was created in 2010 by the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society to drive progress and responsibility for the advancement of women in the private sector.

"The launch of CEO Champions in Myanmar is yet another example of the will and need of women from Myanmar to play a leading and influential role in the future of the economy and society of their country and region. We welcome this new chapter of CEO Champions and look forward not only to their work in Myanmar but also to their discussions with their peers at the Women's Forum Global Meeting and in every country where our meetings are held," said Jacqueline Franjou, CEO of the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society.

On a national level, work has commenced for a coordinated move towards improving the situation of women and girls in Myanmar. The draft National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2012-2021) provides an integrated approach that aims to create enabling systems, structures and practices for the advancement of women, gender equality, and the realisation of women's rights, in accordance with Myanmar's expressed commitment to international standards, treaties, and agreements.

Myanmar is also seeing independent, emerging movements in civil society. Yangon

Bakehouse for instance, is a "by women, for women" social impact organisation that was founded by three expatriates and a Burmese in 2013 to address gender inequality in a small but tangible way; it provides culinary and social skills training to disadvantaged women in Myanmar.

Women at risk, women lacking a stable income, minimally educated women are recruited by Yangon Bakehouse and put through a 10-month employment and training programme that provides a fair living wage, work skills training, medical benefits and life skills training. At the end of the programme, Yangon Bakehouse 'apprentices' as they are called, are then given career assistance and placement opportunities across a network of cafes, restaurants and bakeries in Myanmar.

"We realise that we can't change Myanmar ten women at a time, but for those ten women, we hope to make a difference," said Kelly Macdonald, one of the founders of Yangon Bakehouse.

Canadian social entrepreneur and a public health professional speaks to Catalyst Asia on Yangon Bakehouse, a successful social business in Myanmar that provides culinary and social skills training to disadvantaged women, and assists them to secure jobs in the growing hotel, restaurant industry.

What got you started on Yangon Bakehouse?

Yangon Bakehouse was founded to address women's issues in Myanmar. We wanted to provide women with livelihood opportunities and to keep them safe. We wanted to give women opportunities that did not compromise their health, and options that safeguard their dignity. In Myanmar there is no social safety net. Even with NGOs, a lot of women are



falling through the cracks. We want to better their position in life.

The sex trade is common in Myanmar because a lot of women have close to no options. What options would you have if you were not educated past grade 2 or grade 4?

Yangon Bakehouse was also founded as a response to the lack of healthy, western food choices that are free from preservatives. We wanted to introduce western food options that are made from healthy, wholesome ingredients. When we first introduced Apple Carrot Muffins to the menu, locals in Myanmar were tickled by the fact that we were baking with vegetables!

As Myanmar opens up, there will be a need for more skilled people especially for the hotel and hospitality industry. So Yangon Bakehouse complements that need.

How has the journey been?

Yangon Bakehouse started operations in Dec 2012. Till today, the concept of a social business is still very new. There is no agreement on the meaning of it and no set pathways, unlike a traditional business. In a social business like ours, we are trying to address social inequality in a charitable way while applying a business lens.

Business principles tell us that in order to be successful, you need to operate a lean, mean machine. In a social business where training is at the heart of what we do, high overheads are unavoidable.

We train 24 women a year in two batches and we give them a fair wage and medical benefits while training them on technical and life skills. Trainers, uniforms and equipment all cost money. Due to the lack of physical space in the retail outlet, we have had to acquire additional space to conduct the training for our apprentices as well.

The issue of rent in Myanmar is outrageous.

Small organisations have to put down a year's worth of rent as upfront payment to secure the space. Rent has also grown exponentially. This is compounded by the fact that there is no protection for the renter. Rent hikes are unpredictable and the frail legal system provides no recourse. We are at the mercy of landlords.

In addition, financial institutions are so nascent that there is no policy of loans. A US\$50,000 loan for expansion is not an option that is available to us, so we are not able to expand in a big way. The lack of access to capital is a real limitation. To take in more women, Yangon Bakehouse needs more capital and capacity. The question becomes –If you wanted to scale,

how fast can you scale?

Did you anticipate these challenges when you first started out?

When we first started out, we projected that the profits we make from the bakery would go towards sustaining the non-profit aspects of the business. We were also hoping to get corporations to fund the training programme for vulnerable women as part of their CSR efforts.

Although there is talk of CSR in the business community in Myanmar, the scene is still very nascent. Corporations tend to give to monasteries or poor schools in the villages, and less so to social enterprises like ours. There is still a lack of understanding in the value of supporting social enterprises as a way to grow a corporation's ethical footprint. As Myanmar opens up, I hope that the concept of CSR for local businesses grows too. Foreign companies have supported us, mostly in-kind, during YBH's start up phase. For instance, from an Australian company doing water treatment in Myanmar, we received a water filtration system.

Do you feel that there is support for social enterprises?

There are no policies available to help social enterprises at the moment. Since opening up, the government of Myanmar has had to deal with a long list of priorities. So we are not expecting support from the government in the near term.

I have observed that more donors are getting tired of the NGO model where there is 100 per cent reliance on donations. NGOs cease to exist and operate when funding runs dry.

Social enterprises provide a different model because they are more accountable for their money. The business model of looking at cost recovery and even profit inherently means that they have the potential to be more sustainable.

Has Yangon Bakehouse been received well by the community?

The expat community in Myanmar understands what we are trying to do well and we have been getting support from them. What we would like to do better is in reaching out to the Burmese community. The concept of social business is still

foreign to them. We need to do better at communicating our mission and educating them that a percentage of what we make at the bakery goes toward training women.

Given the challenges you're facing, what is keeping you going?

We are in the business of providing an alternative paradigm to tackle social inequality. We are almost trailblazers as there are no pioneers and footprint that we can look to. Every day, there are new issues and problems that need to be fixed. I grapple between the non-profit and for-profit ends of the business and ask myself what the best ratio is. If you focus on the for-profit aspect, you necessarily focus less on the social reasons that got you started. Finding the balance between the two is a juggling routine. It is new and it is dynamic. I also wonder if this is contextual to Myanmar or is it an issue that is faced by other social enterprises regardless of where they operate.

Beyond charities and NGOs that have existed for 40 years and are still heavily reliant on donations, I believe there is a different way to address social inequality. The drive to nail it keeps me going.

What advice would you give to emerging social entrepreneurs who are looking to contribute to the betterment of society in Myanmar?

I wear four hats. I am a woman, a mother, a public health specialist and a social entrepreneur. I feel that every journey is unique. The wealth of life experiences that I've gained from wearing these four hats have shaped me and where I am going.

If I have to give any word of advice at all, I would say that you have to nail down your business model. It is even more important in a social enterprise because of the social aspects you are dealing with. You have to be realistic about how much cost you can cover.

A social business is business that is built to address a social issue. It is not a business that channels a certain amount to social causes, that's charity or CSR. You have to feel it in your heart to make a difference and to have clarity of your goals. CA



BRINGING CONNECTIVITY BACK

INTO THE LIVES OF UNDERPRIVILEGED WOMEN



— Carrie Tan, founder of *Daughters Of Tomorrow* speaks to us about helping underprivileged women find their confidence, employment opportunities and ultimately self-sufficiency.

How did you get started?

When I was running a social enterprise that provided skills training and sewing services in rural India, people asked – Why not Singapore? That was back in 2012, I did not know much about the poverty situation in Singapore. When I started traversing the social services circuit and meeting up with social workers, the experience opened my eyes to a whole new population that was living below an invisible poverty line.

These were households with monthly income of S\$1,200-S\$1,500 and some of them have four to five kids or even nine kids. Singapore is an expensive city, how do people live on a per capita income of S\$200 a month?

What made you decide to devote your time, energy and resources to helping them?

I believe that women are a highly underutilised talent pool. This is my core belief. I see that some of them are not discovering their potential and I wonder how I could help to uplift and empower them.

In our pursuit of high-tech, fast-paced economic growth, some people have been left behind. We are talking about single mums, mums with teenage kids who lack connectivity to society, families with no access to laptops and the Internet, individuals with no concept of a resume or knowledge of how to get the process of employment going, and people who are simply fearful and lack confidence due to the rapid pace of growth.

There are existing social assistance schemes that purport to offer internet access to low-income families at S\$6 a month, but did you know that the download speed is 1MB per sec? Whereas, in an average middle income household, we have access to fibre optics broadband that boasts a download speed of 500MB per sec. Imagine a primary school kid from a low-income household downloading an e-assignment at 1MB per sec.

What can we do to give them a hand up, not a handout?

I was a headhunter before going into the social sector full-time. I noticed that flexibility in the workplace is lacking. Women who are full-time mothers, wives, daughters back home can't also be full-time workers in a conventional sense. There is a lack of flexible work

opportunities and arrangements for women in Singapore. At DOT, we engage with employers to try and change their mindsets through our 'Employ to Empower' programme. The rhetoric here is that businesses can become social impact businesses.

How has the experience of engaging businesses been?

In working with businesses, I noticed that there is a tendency for employers to place responsibility of whether an employment works out on the employee. But in reality, responsibility is shared. Employers need to be more aware of the different hiring contexts of employees.

We are in talks with a listed SME in the F&B industry on a pilot project to create a culture of inclusive hiring where managers who are facing talent crunch can tap into a pool of flexible and dedicated workforce to help with the problem.

By uplifting human resource development capabilities among employers in Singapore, we can achieve the dual aim of empowering women and meeting business needs.

We are building a network of partner employers and have seen some early success with small to medium enterprises (SMEs), a lot of them are from the F&B industry who are looking for part-time staff. Examples of our partner employers include Herbal Oasis, LINS Smoodees, Alice in DOT's World, The Garden Slug, WeBread, Paradigm Learning and Le Grand School of Dance just to name a few.

Most of these connections have come from our sharing on social media and networking. Believe it or not, but 70 per cent of my time is spent on networking to expand our community of good-driven people!

How many people do you have on the team at DOT?

We have three board members, 30 volunteers consisting of men and women aged 18 to 40 plus from different nationalities, myself and a part-time outreach assistant whom we hired from our beneficiary pool.

What do you intend to do next now that you have built a database of external partners?

Now that we have group of potential employers, we need to build up a database of ladies. We work with the family service centres and existing networks of social organisations in Singapore to locate women with needs. DOT has just started doing this formally over the last few weeks. We now have a group of 60 women and we are hoping to reach 500 by the end of 2015.



The first thing to do with these women is to put them through a 'Confidence Curriculum' where they go through a calendar of varied workshops that aim to equip them with self-discovery, grooming and communication skills. We have training partners like a yoga studio, a cosmetics professional, corporate trainers, coaches and the President of the Singapore Women's Association come in as volunteers to deliver classes on a complimentary basis. We will also be launching a mentorship programme to provide customised support for individual women.

We also provide support programmes to help alleviate the stresses of our women. For example, an interesting thing we noticed when we were interacting with these underprivileged women is that their kids are more often than not a pressure point. When their kids ask for toys and gadgets, as mothers they will want to provide for them and this adds to their financial pressures. So we told ourselves that we needed to start a financial literacy workshop for the kids!

Can you share with us some success stories you have seen at DOT?

Madam M* is a 35-year-old Malay lady with five school-going children and one of the sewing ladies trained by partner employer Alice In DOT's World who is now earning regular supplementary income. She has

gained tremendous self-confidence through our programme after 15 years of being a home-maker and struggling to run her household on her husband's single income of S\$1,300 a month. She now earns regular home-based income and is happy that she's able to afford things for her children and help forge a better future for them.

Susanna* is a recently-divorced single mother of two teenage boys who suffers from clinical depression, whose condition was exacerbated by the irregular hours she used to work in a pub (night shifts). Since DOT found her a full-time employment with a herbal restaurant, she has grown in self-confidence, positivity, makes regular income and is able to be available at home for her children in the evenings.

(*Names have been changed to protect the identities of DOT's beneficiaries)

Where do you see DOT going?

DOT was formally incorporated in Aug 2014, although groundwork and community engagement started in 2012. We have seen some encouraging progress and it is my hope that we will be able to get more partners on board to level the playing field for these underprivileged women. I truly believe that women can catalyse change within their community – one family at a time. 🇸🇬

Carrie Tan is founder and Executive Director of Daughters Of Tomorrow (DOT), an organization enabling financial self-sufficiency for underprivileged women. Her previous career was in headhunting and HR consultancy, providing recruitment services and HR advice to SMEs and MNCs for 5 years. Prior to that, she was from the advertising and marketing field. Carrie holds a Bachelor in Arts from National University of Singapore in 2004, and is an alumni of Raffles Girls' Secondary School and Raffles Junior College.

Since embarking on DOT's work full-time from December 2012, Carrie has impacted more than 40 women in India, as well as enabled the home-based employment of 7 women and impacted the lives of over 30 low-income families in Singapore. She has spoken to schools, youth groups and corporate partners such as Google, Facebook, Elsevier and AECOM on poverty alleviation and enabling financial self-sufficiency for women. More information available at: sg.linkedin.com/in/carrietan



A WORLD IN CRISIS

CONFLICTS, REFUGEES AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

I have recently returned to Singapore after working for 34 years with the office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This is the UN refugee agency which has been mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations to be responsible for persons or populations forced to flee from their country as a result of persecution and /or conflicts in their own country.

They become refugees because they have fled across international borders and are no longer under the protection of any State. Hence the High Commissioner and his office become their de facto "government" assuming responsibilities that should otherwise be provided by a State. The foremost responsibility of UNHCR is to ensure the protection of refugees, ensuring their well-being, and to find solutions that would end their status as refugees. To ensure their survival while in the country of asylum, UNHCR has often to mobilise resources to ensure that basic needs of the refugees in their country of asylum are met and also to help relieve the burden on the host countries.

As one can imagine, working for UNHCR meant therefore that one is dealing with situations of conflicts and their consequences all around the world. Political strife, wars and violence have often life-threatening consequences on individuals and whole populations, either because they are deliberately targeted or because they are part of the collateral damages. In my last position in UNHCR as Assistant High Commissioner overseeing operations globally, I was confronted on a daily basis with dramatic events of outbreaks of violence and fightings in different parts

of the world, of people fleeing, their numbers, the survivals and casualties, the lifesaving needs that they have etc. My daily worries were whether UNHCR has presence in the places to which the refugees were fleeing and whether we were able to reach them on time to save lives, whether we were able to persuade neighbouring countries to keep their borders opened and whether we have the means to deal with any worsening of situations. So coming back to life in Singapore is somewhat of a culture shock to say the least. Yes, there is a world out there which is a far cry from the daily life in Singapore! Yet I think that we cannot be complacent about, or detached, from the realities happening in other parts of the world.

CURRENT CONFLICTS IN THE WORLD

During the last 5 years we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of major crises around the world. The outbreaks of new conflicts have been mainly on the African continent and in the Middle East, but there is hardly any region in the world today without on-going conflicts or low intensity warfare. Some of the conflicts such as the Arab/Israeli war, internal conflict in Columbia, Myanmar, war in Afghanistan, Somalia, have remained unresolved for decades. The more recent conflicts such as Syria, Iraq, S. Sudan, and Central African Republic, have taken on new dimensions. The scale and the rapidity with which these conflicts have spread, engulfing whole countries have caused huge destructions and major population displacements both internally and externally. It has been rare that the world is faced with so many major crises at the same time, which are not only spilling into the neighbouring countries, but are also having impact much further afield.

There is no simple analysis to explain why our world is in such a state of crisis today. Many factors are undoubtedly at play. When the Cold War



ended in the late 80's there were hopes that many crises would have been resolved with the decline of inter-state wars. Unfortunately the end of the Cold War has also been marked by an increase in intra-state wars caused by ethnic, tribal, or religious divides that mostly have their roots in post-colonial legacies, or years of repression, as the recent Arab Spring has shown. Globally, there has been increased competition for scarce resources, such as water, land and energy, with population growth, climate change and increased urbanisation adding to the pressure. When such situations are coupled with the lack of good governance, lack of development and political leadership, it is not difficult to see how certain groups could become disenfranchised and grow to become formidable forces fighting their own governments and even among themselves, creating chaos. The recent conflicts have also been complicated by the multiplication of armed groups of different affiliations that have international criminal or ideological links. The current crisis in Syria and Iraq with multiple and fragmented armed groups, and in particular, the rise of ISIL in the Middle East, is a good example of the complexity of today's warfare. What is particularly worrying is the fact that today's conflicts are easily contagious, with extremists groups in different conflicts and different parts of the world linking up and becoming more difficult to manage. In the African continent we have seen the resurgence of conflicts in countries where stability has not taken roots and peace has broken down, such as in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. In addition old conflicts such as Somalia and Afghanistan have remained unresolved.

HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES AND RESPONSES

Perhaps the most dramatic consequence of today's conflicts has been the scale of populations which have been forcibly displaced from their homes either within their own countries or crossing borders to other countries seeking asylum. Their recorded numbers have been the largest since the Second World War, with more than 51 million displaced, of which more than 17 million have sought asylum abroad. Still there is evidence that the real figures are much higher as many displaced will only surface after they have exhausted all means of surviving on their own.

HOW DO UNHCR AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS ASSIST THE DISPLACED?

Perhaps it is best to describe a typical scenario to explain the challenges that we often face in our response. While we have individuals who flee because of targeted persecution or threats to their lives, we have frequently whole populations who are threatened because of attacks by opposing parties in the conflict or war, such as we have seen now in Syria, Iraq, and S. Sudan, forcing people to move in the hundreds of thousands. Such mass movements often take place in very dramatic circumstances, with people having to leave their belongings behind and going through dangers and physical obstacles, travelling days on end in order to reach their place of safety. Many of the vulnerable such as the elderly, sick, women and children may not

even make it, or those who survive may be in such poor conditions that if help is not immediately available, they too will perish.

In the UN humanitarian system, the scale and complexity of the emergency and the extent of response needed is calibrated into different levels, with level 3 being the highest. Currently there are four level 3 mega emergencies which the international community is having to deal with, along with other smaller scale emergencies.

For those who are displaced within their own countries, commonly referred to as IDPs or internally displaced persons, the responsibility for response is shared among different UN agencies and NGOs. In situations where the displaced have crossed international border, they become refugees. Their presence in the country of asylum may become contentious with the local authorities and it is UNHCR's responsibility to negotiate with states to keep their borders opened and to ensure that refugees are not returned to the dangers they fled from. UNHCR's authority is drawn from its guardianship of the international legal framework, called the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which spell out the obligations and responsibilities of States towards those recognised as refugees.

Clearly, countries receiving refugees are concerned about the political, social, economic and security impact of the presence of large numbers of foreigners on their territories. Hence it is incumbent on UNHCR to work with the authorities to also help address their concerns. One of the most important tasks of UNHCR is to assist the countries of asylum to document the refugees through a comprehensive registration exercise, and to provide them with identification papers. It is during the registration exercise that groups such as combatants, members of armed groups or those who do not belong to the known groups of refugees are excluded. Once registered and recognised as refugees, the most immediate protection needs of the refugees, which is not to be returned to their country, is met. However in the course of their stay in the country of asylum, there are many other protection needs, relating to their rights and well-being, which are also critical and must be monitored on a continuing basis. Most notably, refugees, especially the vulnerable ones often find themselves in situations where they are easily abused and exploited. Sexual and gender based violence and exploitation of women and children in a displacement context take on greater proportion than in a normal society. Some of the worst abuses have been the forced recruitment of children by the warring parties and armed groups and have given rise to the phenomenon of "child soldier".

Regardless of whether the displaced are in their countries or outside in other countries, the physical life-saving needs are the same: shelter, water, food, sanitation, health services are especially urgent in the early phase of a mass influx - if their numbers are overwhelming, special sites would have to be found to establish a camp where such services can be organised. More often than not, the first responders are the local communities who accommodate the displaced and help to take care of their immediate needs. Despite the fact that the local communities receiving refugees are often very impoverished themselves, their generosity is frequently surprising and goes beyond their means. But this is not sustainable without outside help and hence the urgency to mobilise international assistance.

Humanitarian response of the scale that is needed to face the mega crises of today are confronted with a number of dilemmas. The first issue is the resources needed for the response. Each and every humanitarian emergency operation has to be fundraised individually without any guarantee that all funds needed will be forthcoming. On average most UN humanitarian appeals are funded not more than 50 per cent, with different emergencies, including the protracted ones, competing heavily for resources. Although humanitarian funding globally has increased manifolds in the last few years, the needs have increased even more dramatically. For UNHCR alone, the budget has grown in the last 5 years from some 2 billion to over 6 billion currently, and only some 3 billion were raised last year.

The cost of humanitarian assistance has increased not only due to the scale of needs but also due to the fact that the operating environment has become much more complex and access to those in needs has become more difficult. Many refugees and displaced are located in parts of the countries which are the most difficult to reach logistically as well as the most dangerous places, where unpredictable armed groups operate. Humanitarian workers, who used to enjoy protection by virtue of their neutrality and impartiality, are today often targeted and, like the displaced populations, are sometimes used as pawns in the warfare. Enhancing security measures for humanitarian workers, such as provision of personal protective equipment, armoured vehicles, residential security etc. have added heavily to the costs of operations.

International assistance brings with it a multiplicity of international actors and it is now quite common for UN agencies and NGOs, in their hundreds to descend upon any high profile emergency, as they are the main channels through which donor governments respond to these crises. On the one hand, this represents greater capacity at the international level to respond to crises but at the same time the multiplicity of humanitarian actors have added to the complexity of the operating environment. Co-ordination has become a major issue as with increased numbers of actors, competing for scarce resources; there is an imperative to ensure that there are no duplication or gaps in the response and to ensure coherence. In the current international response to the Syria refugee crisis, UNHCR takes the lead to coordinate the activities of some 200 international organisations and aid agencies in the 4 countries surrounding Syria. Co-ordination takes places at various levels, in the key operational areas in each country, at the national level and finally at the regional level, generating a need for a dedicated capacity. It is a challenge to ensure that coordination, while necessary does not divert resources from actual delivery.

With scarce resources and increased complexity in the operating environment, there has been a realisation among the aid community that it has to review the traditional way of providing assistance. Most refugee and displacement situations tend to be regarded as temporary, based on the hope that refugees and internally displaced persons can return to their home as soon as a conflict is over. In reality, those who have become refugees tend to remain in this status for an average of 17 years. Every effort has therefore to be made to increase the efficiency of aid delivery and to find ways of making assistance sustainable. Solutions are being sought in the greater use of modern technology and other innovations. In every sector of assistance, there is a race to find



ever more efficient ways of assisting the refugees. One of the innovative approaches which has been introduced in recent times have been the use of cash, in lieu of distributing food and relief items, in situations where local markets are available. This has not only benefited local economies but has given greater dignity to the refugees and allowed them more choices instead of waiting for handouts of relief items. Where circumstances permit, the focus is on increasing self-reliance and identifying opportunities for sustainable livelihood. It is also imperative that a longer term view be taken and that a development approach needs also to be integrated into the humanitarian response. There has been a recognition that the traditional way of focusing assistance for refugees in camps, while necessary in some circumstances, are not only costly but can hamper finding solutions for refugees. It also distracts attention from the fact that the majority of the refugees are in fact having to survive in a non-camp situation and do require assistance as well. In fact UNHCR has now made it a policy to find alternatives to camps wherever possible and to be mindful of integrating the needs of the host communities in the response both in the short and long term.

These new perspectives have brought about new debates and discussions in the humanitarian world. In 2016 the UN Secretary General will convene the first ever global humanitarian summit, the goal of which is to find new ways to tackle humanitarian needs in our fast changing world.

SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES

Every refugee's dream is to be able to return home sooner rather later. Indeed for UNHCR, the best solution for refugees is voluntary return to their home countries once a conflict is over or the situation has normalised. However this may be a very long wait and it is not uncommon that one or two generations of refugees may be borne in exile and would never have known their homeland. Nevertheless there have been successes in the past where refugees were able to return in large numbers to their own country, such as the Rwandans or the Mozambicans once peace returned to their countries. In some other countries, such as Afghanistan or S.Sudan, large numbers of voluntary return have taken place, but re-surgence of conflict have caused returnees to flee again.

Traditionally UNHCR has also advocated for third country resettlement, especially for those who are in need of special protection or who are particularly vulnerable. In the current climate, countries have become increasingly reluctant to accept large numbers of refugees for resettlement. For instance for some 3.8 million Syrian refugees, only some 100,000 resettlement places are currently being made available and mostly only in the western countries. This is in sharp contrast to an earlier era when almost a million Indo-Chinese refugees were resettled in third countries. Many refugees are therefore stuck in the countries where they have fled to and have to find means of integrating locally. In Africa, local integration has been successful in a number of situations, culminating in some cases of refugees being granted citizenship. By and large however this is not a solution that is easy to come by.


Given the often limited options for refugees in their country of asylum, it

is not a wonder that many have opted to move further on their own, even by illegal means. We have seen this now in the increased numbers of refugees who have fallen victims to human traffickers and smugglers and taking the most dangerous of routes to reach countries where they hope to have a future. A most worrying phenomenon in recent times has been the desperation of people, mostly Syrian refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea in smuggler organised boats which are not sea worthy, hoping to reach European countries. During last year more than 4000 have died while attempting this crossing, and this is only one situation. There are countless other situations where desperate refugees have been stripped of all they have by human traffickers and smugglers, only to have their hopes dashed.

We need to find alternative ways of allowing refugees to move legally. One of the more innovative solutions which UNHCR has tried to advocate is to provide refugees with legal migrant status, through the provision of temporary work permits by countries whose economy may be in need of labour.

THE FUTURE

Refugees have become one of the biggest humanitarian problems of our times, with global consequences. The crises that generate forced displacements may seem overwhelming in their scale; the challenges faced in our responses seem near insurmountable. Yet I know from my own experience, through the many crisis situations I have been engaged in, that the humanitarian responses of the international community have real impact at the individual level. There have been hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons whose lives have been saved and rebuilt from the ashes. One of the strongest motivations that have kept me so passionately engaged with the work of UNHCR for so long has been to see the resilience and strength of refugees and families rising above the atrocities and abuses that they have to suffer.

It is the individual refugees that we help to succeed who would be needed to help rebuild their broken societies. Left to languish they could become a lost generation who could form the roots of future conflicts. Helping refugees is not only a humanitarian imperative but one which serves as well the self-interest and preservation of the societies at large. 

About the author

Janet Lim has recently retired from the United Nations, after a career which spanned 34 years. She joined UNHCR, the UN refugee agency in 1980 and has served in various positions both in UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva and in the field. Her field assignments have included UNHCR's country and emergency operations in different parts of the world, including Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Western Sahara and Syria. In Geneva, she served in senior positions which included being Director of the Emergency and Security Services, Director of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, and during her last 5 years, she was the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations). In this latter capacity she oversaw the work of five regional bureaux responsible for UNHCR's operations globally, as well as two functional Divisions providing support to the field. Ms. Lim has particular expertise in managing complex emergency operations where populations have been forcibly displaced as a result of war and conflict. She was closely associated with the establishment of UNHCR's emergency response capacity and mechanisms. During her career with the UN, she has also been seconded at a senior level to UNAIDS and to the peacekeeping operation, UNAMA, in Afghanistan.

Ms Lim graduated from the University of Singapore in 1975 with a Bachelor of Social Science (honors). After a stint in the Administrative Service of the Singapore Civil Service, she pursued postgraduate studies at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, majoring in Development studies, before joining the United Nations. Ms Lim is currently a Fellow at the Singapore Management University.



WELL-BEING AND THE DRIVE FOR SUCCESS IS A DOUBLE HELIX

— *There is a popular story told of a businessman who was curious about why a fisherman in a small village was contented to just work for a few hours for a small basket of catch each day. “Why don’t you stay out longer and catch more fish?” he asked and “What do you do the rest of your time?”*

“I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a walk with my wife, sip wine and play the guitar with my buddies; I have a full and busy life” was the answer. The businessman proceeded to suggest that the fisherman spend more time fishing so that with the proceeds, he can buy a bigger boat, and very soon, with even more proceeds, he would have a fleet of fishing boats. He could then sell direct to businesses, and manage his own distribution and processing, move to a big city and further expand his enterprise.

The fisherman asked how long that would take. To the suggestion of 15-20 years, he followed on with, “What then?” The young businessman’s response was, “then, you can sell your company and become very rich”. “What then?” the fisherman asked.

The young businessman’s response followed, somewhat sheepishly: “Then you would retire, move to a small village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a walk with your wife and drink and play the guitar with your pals.”

Growing up in a fast-paced and economically driven society like Singapore, we are often caught in the same paradox. Like the businessman in the story, we tend to think that happiness will come in a distant future when we have more material possessions and when external circumstances are favourable. As an educator, I have made the same mistake in thinking that students’ well-being will come in the future; that what is more important is for them to accumulate an inordinate amount of knowledge, learn skills and develop attitudes that will get them good results and allow them to find a job and good life conditions so that they can, eventually, be happy.

Positive psychologists have convinced me that we can have our cake and eat it - that schools have an important role to promote individual well-being as well as drive for academic success and that both goals can work to reinforce each other (see Figure 1).

THE DOUBLE HELIX

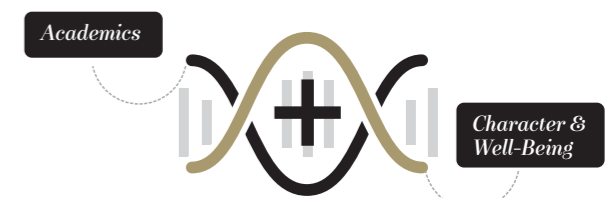


Figure 1: Academics and character & well being as a double helix



The theory of well-being advocated by one of the most renowned psychologists in this field, Prof Martin Seligman, Director of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, posits five key aspects that must be present for well-being to exist in all human beings: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA, in short).

When we apply Seligman’s model to education, it means that the best schooling must include educating children on values and character, as well as how to interact well with others, set goals for themselves and work towards achieving those goals. Positive education, a movement that is gaining momentum across the world, works to create a school culture that supports caring, trusting relationships. It is an approach that encourages and supports individuals and the community to flourish and focuses on specific skills that assist students to build positive emotions, enhance personal resilience, promote mindfulness and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

Enhancing positive experiences in schools is not a zero sum game. With reference to Figure 2 below, schools or systems that are high on well-being but low on excellence (academic or otherwise) will produce stagnation or students who underperform. Those that are low on well-being and high on the drive for success necessarily end up with students and staff who are cynical or burnt-out. Those that are low on both produce languishing students who are neither happy nor performing. Finally, when schools or systems focus on well-being and excellence, they will have thriving or flourishing individuals.

ACADEMICS VS WELL-BEING

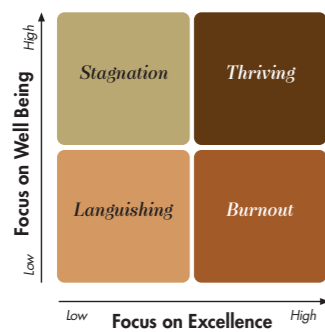


Figure 2: Focus on well-being and excellence

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that measures student performance by country in key subject areas such as Mathematics, Science and Reading.

Since its first study in 2000, PISA has been driving a lot of behavioural change and policy revision in many education systems around the world. Asian countries or cities, notably Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan outperform the rest of the world in the latest survey (2012) of fifteen-year-olds.

Countries that are aiming to emulate the high performers have been tempted to push for academic outcomes through more hours of classroom instruction, more homework and more frequent testing to climb up the ranklist. However, PISA statistics tell only one part of the whole story.

In order to ensure personal mastery and success for life, academic development has to be coupled with the development of character strengths and well-being. Researchers have come up with evidence suggesting a relationship between academic performance and strengths. Seligman and Peterson (2004), for instance, have identified six clusters of strengths under which they listed a set of character traits. The clusters consist of wisdom and knowledge, courage, love and humanity, justice, temperance, and spirituality and transcendence.

A team of educators at the Character Lab in New York has reduced the list of twenty four from the six clusters, to seven key character strengths that they are building a scientific developmental model for. The seven character traits are grit, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence, curiosity and zest. If schools are able to integrate the development of these key traits with efforts at academic attainments, the chances of children’s success in an increasingly complex and competitive world will be much higher.

To understand how we can make a fundamental change, let’s look at how a new government school in Singapore has embraced positive education in a whole-school approach. Westwood Primary School is a three-year-old elementary school in Jurong, whose vision is “to inspire our community to lead meaningful and engaged lives.”

With their school tagline, “Positively Westwood”, staff and leaders of the school, including the School Advisory Committee members have endorsed a framework that emphasizes imparting both skills and competencies and teaching wellbeing, so that the students can gain greater insights of the self as an agent for change and knowledge creation.

Building on Seligman’s PERMA model, children are taught to thrive through:

- Thinking Mindfully (Growth Mindset & Mindfulness): Positive Accomplishment
- Healthy Coping (Resilience & Energy Management): Positive Health
- Relating Well (Active Constructive Responding): Positive Relationship
- (Being) In the Moment (Optimal Engagement): Positive Engagement
- Values-driven Actions (Meaning & Purpose): Positive Meaning
- Emotions of Positivity (Gratitude): Positive Emotion

Daily activities and classroom interaction remind them that they are to be a “self-directed learner, trustworthy friend, compassionate leader, and confident and positive person”.

Some strategies used by teachers daily include common icons like the traffic light system to teach explicit reflective thinking. For example, a traffic-light to represent: Stop-Think-Go is used by teachers to guide pupils to reflect on their actions and thoughts in class. Teachers also hold regular “What Went Well” (WWW)

moments in the classroom, at the end of the day or week for regular reflection opportunities for the students. Reward charts are created to institute specific praise for effort, rather than just achievement in tasks and relationships. Teachers also make use of opportunities to offer words of affirmation to the children and support for peer encouragement of effort and behavior is also made explicit.

Southeast Asia is a region with one of the youngest populations in the world. Positive education or the development of well-being and character strengths can certainly lead to more positive attitudes and dispositions among schools in the region, no matter what stage their academic attainment is, at this point in time. Not only is positivity a desirable end in itself, it is also a means to other desirable ends and contributes to societal end-goals such as citizen well-being and quality of life, a compassionate and inclusive society, rootedness and commitment as well as an adaptive and resilient nation. It makes sense to embrace the double helix. 🌀

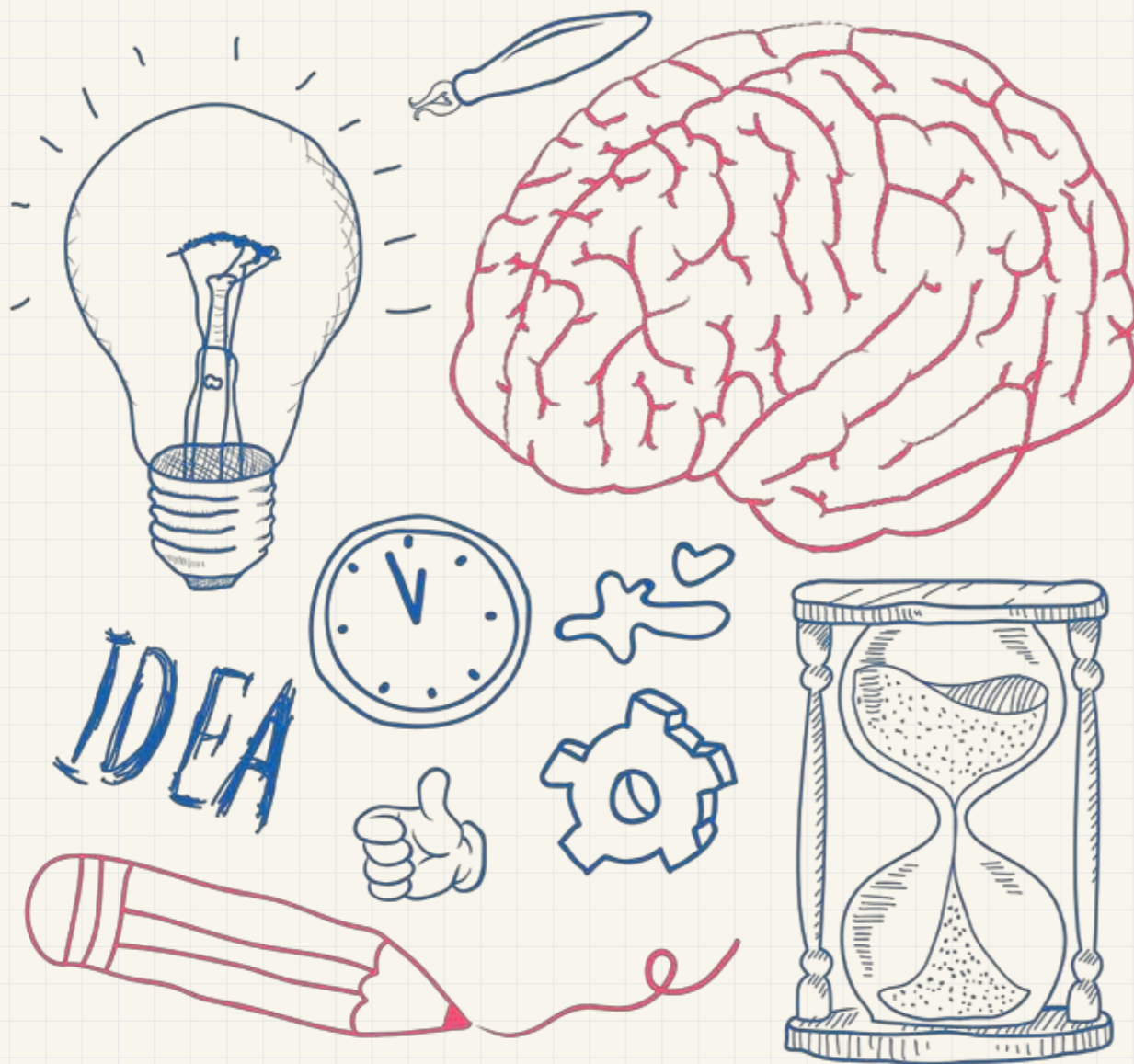
About the author

Dr Lim Lai Cheng is Academic Director of the Institute for Societal Leadership at the Singapore Management University. Prior to joining the university, she had worked as teacher, head of department, deputy principal and she was principal of three schools. She has served on various national committees on education reviews in Singapore. She is advisor to the African Leadership Academy in South Africa and the LEAF Foundation in Slovakia and a Director of the Principals’ Academy Inc, Singapore and a member of the steering committee of the International Positive Education Network.



STRATEGY

WHERE ART THOU?



There are many definitions of strategy and for the purpose of this article, I will use the classic Michael Porter definition - which is the search for a unique and relevant position in the market in order to differentiate itself for competitive advantage.

Strategy is the link between intent and outcome. It is about how an organisation goes about getting things done. It is the combination of choices that determine product lines, distribution channels, country approach, supply chain model, consumer segments and even revenue and cost models. It is the thinking behind the whole system that is put in place for a company to deliver the outcomes it wants to deliver. Investors, shareholders and even consumers will subsequently scrutinise the strategy - the believability around whether goals will be delivered well. This is why strategy is crucial for organisations.

And yet I have found strategy to be elusive in the social sector and that frightens me. I admit that this preliminary view has come from a research project of engaging with 30-40 social organisations across six Southeast Asian cities over the last seven months. As the research carries on, perhaps my nerves would be calmed when I discover that my fears are unfounded. But until that moment arrives, my current realisation is that many social organisations enjoy amplifying problems and simplifying solutions – with little to no thinking on strategy. Here are some of the observations I have:

A. TALKING UP THE PROBLEM

While it is good that the leaders of many social enterprises or non-profit organisations are aware of the issue they are attempting to resolve, many have spent more time 'marketing' this problem as a method of soliciting funds or recruiting volunteers. This has resulted in several leaders of social organisations talking up the problem with tremendous amount of data and research as a means of justifying the existence of their effort.

B. EXECUTING AN IDEA NOT A SOLUTION

While all efforts should be applauded, my early observations seem to suggest that there is a preference for most of these organisations

to pigeon hole their 'solutions' to education-based, training-based or services industry-based ones. On many occasions, these social organisations do not attempt to look at how the problem could be resolved other than what they can do for the victims of the problem and how education or training becomes the most logical and obvious conclusion. The eventual outcome within a city is a proliferation of social organisations providing education and/or training programmes to victims regardless of what the core problem is. Others add a services component (like a restaurant, bakery, etc.) to provide jobs. The result is the execution of a series of ideas rather than the delivery of a pipeline of integrated solutions.

C. LIBERTIES OF INTENTIONS

What appears to drive these social organisations are their articulated intentions, such as "empowering victims". Many of these intentions are not measurable in any real way and hence they serve more as inspiring goals for staff and donors rather than a strategic direction for change. Furthermore the link between how education and/or training actually empower the victims is assumed rather than proven since the rigour of what 'empowerment' means is not mentioned. One cannot help but ask if education is seemingly the best and only answer, what is the real problem?

D. WHAT DELIVERS SUSTAINABILITY?

We have observed that many social organisations face immense problems from the 3rd year of operations when the volume of victims they are trying to help start to weigh down on the original idea they had in helping them - Where will the new jobs be? How do I balance between the commercial viability and social aspects of the organisation? Sustainability cannot come as a surprise in the third year when it could have been a consideration right from the start. What delivers sustainability? Strategy - how things get done.

Unlike the diversity of the business world where there are different solutions to a need, it has been surprising for me to find out that most social organisations that aim to address societal problems provide similar solutions. The range is definitely narrower and the depth certainly shallower. This does not make real

sense when societal issues are more complex and difficult. Hence I find it hard to applaud effort when I think more could have been done and the fact that our world really needs better answers than simply 'more helping hands'. The brains do need to be included.

Leaders of societal impact organisations seriously need to be trained in strategy. The need to learn how to think deeper about issues, take a page out of Roger Martin's Harvard Business Review June 2007 article "How Successful Leaders Think" and have meaningful conversations around how strategy is formulated and executed. As long as this does not happen, I fear that the growth of societal impact organisations (which is inevitable) will simply be more people doing the same thing for a problem that is always changing.

Albert Einstein called doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results 'insanity', but I realise that some leaders have found it gratifying to do this as a badge of honour. Until the demand for sustainable solution takes centre stage, it will be hard to see any effort towards real societal impact as anything other than a daily ritual with accessories. 🧠

About the author

As the Chief Strategist for the Institute for Societal Leadership at the Singapore Management University, Tony Lai provides leadership on all areas with regard to strategy development and execution from a business and organisation perspective. His role covers the annual workplan planning, the Southeast Asia country insight process, regional marketing and engagement and capability programmes that target adults and undergraduates. He is also the non-executive director of The Idea Factory – an innovation strategy company that moved its global operations from San Francisco to Singapore in 2002 to focus on Asia. Tony's experience in both strategy and business has seen him hold positions in the past such as the Chief Operating Officer with APM Pte Ltd (a property management subsidiary of the ARA Group) from 2013-2014, Managing Director of Experiences at Mediacorp Pte Ltd in 2013, Assistant Chief Executive with the Singapore Tourism Board from 2009-2012 and CEO/Managing Director of The Idea Factory from 2001-2009.



LEADERSHIP 2.0:

THE NEED FOR A NEW TYPE OF LEADERSHIP



— *One of the most illustrious – and successful – leaders, Field Marshal Montgomery, defined leadership in the following way: ‘Leadership is the capacity and the will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which will inspire confidence...but must be based on a moral authority – the truth.’ Field Marshal Montgomery went on ‘men is still the first weapon of war’.*

These words cut across any kind of organisation – government institution, private institution, and business – and transcend much more refined and elaborate attempts because

of simplicity, applicability and accentuation of moral authority – the truth.

They bring out the crucial factor in leadership: moral authority and human beings. Leadership is about bringing yourself as leader across to the people, to motivate them, to explain what we are doing, why we are doing it, not to let them down and instil confidence in the leader thereby enhance their belief in themselves and the organisation.

When I joined the Royal Danish Foreign Ministry in 1968, the spirit of leadership was to be summoned to the office of your superior and told in no uncertain language what to do – and that was that. No explanation. In the late 1980s and early 1990s when I enjoyed the privilege of being Permanent Secretary, this was a non-starter. The leader has to tell, obviously, what to do, but even more important to explain WHY we are doing this, what is the purpose, where can we expect to encounter obstacles and how to overcome them. If done in the right way the young employee leaves the office full of enthusiasm and is able to adjust and adapt to changing conditions without consulting his/her superior. The time spent by the leader to motivate and to explain was richly compensated by a much higher degree of efficiency and time saving of not having to intervene continually. It made it possible for the leader to concentrate on defining the overall course and direction or to use military vocabulary strategy – where are we going – instead of tactic – what are we doing.

There is a deep, but not always appreciated difference between management and leadership. Management is about running things efficiently without too much knowledge or attention to why we are doing it and where we are going. A throughout well-managed organisation may head for complete disaster if it goes in the wrong direction. One of the problems in today’s world is the proliferation of management schools and universities churning out managers while overlooking or forgetting to teach where we want to go. Management efficiency focus on cost-efficiency highlighting that everybody in the organisation must contribute to daily operation and demonstrate that it cannot be done more efficiently in a different way or by

somebody else – justify your pay check in a narrow and short term view. The BIG risk is uniformisation with everybody running the same MBA programme through the company.

In a constantly changing world this is a dead end even if it works in the short term. Cost savings are often achieved by killing long term planning whose positive contribution will only be felt maybe a decade or two down the road. Future leadership (2.0) must tune into how to manage change, adjust and adapt to change, and how to implant these assets into the mindset of employees. Organisations applying leadership, especially leadership 2.0 must set aside resources and manpower for thinking outside the box of daily activities – at first glance waste of time, money, and manpower – but new paradigms, inventions, technology, human interaction will decide how the organisation looks in the future – how well it has adapted. The two classic examples are Kodak and Nokia. Both of them may have spotted the technological revolution inside their business (digital photos respectively the smartphone), but none of them adapted to this new technology preferring management instead of leadership 2.0.

New things make the organisation’s product line obsolete. Kodak and Nokia had spent years and billions of dollars to build a position, so ran the argument, why throw that platform away and jump into an unknown world? To change requires a costly and risky restructuring in addition to introducing a new way of thinking (cultural profile). So better stick to our bush and try to do things better (management) instead of doing things differently or doing something else that responds to the same need among consumers (leadership). What many organisations do not figure into their equation is that unless they do it themselves, competitors or newcomers will do it. Large organisations would be well advised to set up a kind of ‘guerrilla unit’ with the sole task of challenging decisions by top management.

Three blueprints are available. Command, control, and values. Control implies that very little leaves the organisation without some kind of control through supervisors or managers or leaders. That ensures a comparatively high quality level in conformity with the organisation’s

policy but is costly, cumbersome, and drowns employees' motivation. Why should 'I' devote a lot of attention and effort to my job when supervisors will vet what I have done anyway? Command means that very little is being done unless leaders pass the word down the line. A slow moving organisation is the result. Changes depend on leaders spotting the need, so unless words come down from above, nothing happens. Values are more fluid as leadership instruments and embed a certain amount of risks, but the advantages are a fast reacting organisation with motivated employees who know, through communication of values – the cultural profile – what the purpose is and which instruments to apply. Almost all successful organisations are led by values and not control or command.

Values should be based on five 'cores'. Core business: What is the business we are in? Core value added: Why should customers prefer our product compared to that of our competitors? Core message: How do we want customers and employees to perceive the company? Core working methods: How do we do things here? Core need: What is the underlying demand we are trying to fulfill?

Any leader must pursue trust, fairness, fulfill promises and live up to expectations created by him/her. The leader is there to lead and can be relied on to support the employees. Mistakes are unavoidable in any good organisation for the very reason that it is only by trying to do something in an unusual way that the organisation can gain experience, and sometimes it backfires. Four golden rules should be remembered. First, any fool can obey orders, the art is knowing when not to do so. Second, mistakes are to be analysed and learned from (avoid repeating them). Mistakes should not be used to stigmatise the employee behind the decision. Third, a successful Danish businessman always responded to demand for hiring more employees in the following way: No, do things differently. Fourth, sometimes the lesser risk there seems for the future of the organisation the more risk there actually is (as in the case of Kodak and Nokia), so run the risk now.

Fairness is alpha and omega and it is not the same as equality. Employees compare the reactions from above and judge leaders according to the degree of fairness with regard to promotion and freedom to act on one's own initiative. To praise is much more important than to scold. People grow when praised, but feel small when scolded.


Consistency and transparency fall in the same category. No leader will get anywhere near success if the smallest thread of capriciousness can be ascribed to him/her.

Analyses show that as soon as people move into doing work that require cognitive skills, pay (money) does not act as an incentive except for comparing what 'I' get to what somebody else gets (fairness factor).

Instead, three crucial items pop up. Autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Autonomy means that leaders give employees the freedom to act alone on their own initiative provided that it is done in accordance with the principles governing the organisation (values, cultural profile) and leads to results. It is no use to check that the employees are sitting in their offices during work hours if output is low. Mastery plays on the individual's excitement and happiness when in control of what he/she is doing. Any artist or sport's star will confirm the significance of mastery. The more people feel that they master the topic the more they work with motivation and the better is the result. They gain confidence, daring to do something and try something new – risk taking. Purpose is obvious in the sense that people must know how they fit into the larger picture. Only if they can see and understand how what they are doing contributes to the more sophisticated workings of the organisation can we count of a high degree of motivation. Before all major battles, Field Marshall Montgomery would talk to all higher officers personally, explaining how the orders to their unit fitted into the larger battle plan.

In the era of social networking the leader is up against an enormous amount of information,

some of which employees compare to information flowing from the leadership. The leader 2.0 must engage in the game of shaping perceptions. Nowadays this may be the most powerful parameter in exercising power. And leadership is exactly that; power over human beings however reluctant we are to acknowledge that and power over events is not to be kicked around. To be on the crest of the wave of how a society develops is indispensable. In this context the leader 2.0 should consider how to turn the increasing non-personal relationship to his/her advantage. Social networking neglects the instinctive desire among human beings to join groups and work with others. Human beings are social animals and leadership exercised with a touch of being seen and being felt as a person will enhance motivation and loyalty. One of the icons of today's world, Mark Zuckerberg, stated recently that "I will only hire someone to work directly for me if I would work for that person." The human factor, fairness, and the flat pyramid!

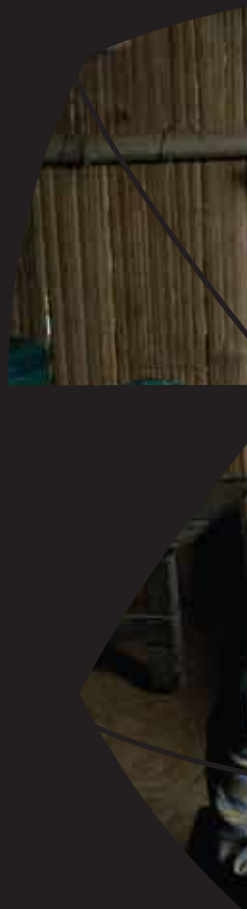
Leadership in all ages and all sectors depend on the ability to deliver results through autonomy, mastery, and purpose. If employees join the organisation because of common and shared values and feel attached to the organisation as a result value based leadership becomes possible. The leader must be seen, heard, and felt. He or she must always radiate confidence irrespective of how the situation looks – otherwise the employees cannot be expected to believe in the way the organisation is run. 

About the author

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