

PROVIDING CLEAN DRINKING WATER AND JOBS TO THE VILLAGERS

A sustainable water initiative by Wateroam was started with the intention of not only providing clean drinking water to the villagers in Cambodia to improve their health but also create jobs for them.

By Lim Chong Tee & Michelle Lindsay Falcone



"Seeing the community being able to access clean water really makes my heart smile. I am happy to do more of this project because I want to see other communities also receive this clean water so they can live a better life as well."

New Life Foundation Field Staff

Roughly two billion people worldwide do not have access to clean water, but we at Wateroam are working to change that. We've developed a water filtration solution that is easy to deploy in the most difficult-to-reach places; for many, this is the first time they have had access to clean water. As part of our endeavour to end prolonged thirst, we aim to create sustainable solutions in water management that put the values of community development and empowerment at their core. To do this, we actively work with non-governmental organisations, charities, municipal governments and, most importantly, community members to ensure we understand and meet the needs of locals in the best way possible.

Earlier this year, we partnered with an organisation called the New Life Foundation to bring accessible and affordable clean water to a community in Cambodia. But this time, we also brought business opportunities to the locals as well. The intention of this program, called the Sustainable Water Project, was not only to improve health for the community but to also create jobs where opportunities for income are limited.

We first rolled out the program in Takeo Province of Cambodia, where residents are mostly elderly, and incomes are made by working jobs as

"I am very happy with this project. It enables me to have some revenue for my family and I can have access to clean water without any concern. It also enables my community to access clean water at an affordable price so we all can save our money for better living without wasting our money to buy medicines when we got diarrhoea."

Sok Kun, Villager

farmers or fabric weavers. Having to source clean water often takes time out of the day where individuals could otherwise be working and earning an income. Villagers previously relied on rainwater harvesting for drinking water, which is often contaminated during its collection from dirty rooftops and while in storage cisterns that are prone to mosquito breeding. Firewood is scarce and must be used for cooking, so few families boil their water before drinking it. As a result, villagers are at risk of water-borne diseases, which makes them sick and prevents them from working and providing for their families.

In March 2019, we visited a church in Trapang Vihear with New Life Foundation to install a ROAMfilter™ Plus, a water tank and piping which instantly resulted in 40 children and their families having access to clean water. New Life Foundation then trained locals in the production, packaging, distribution and sales of this clean water to create a micro-entrepreneurship scheme for families to earn additional revenue. In just a few months, the church community, who owned the water filter was able to cover their own costs and earn a profit to sustain future improvements for their neighbourhood.

The micro-entrepreneurs involved in packaging, distribution and sales made an average of \$70 per month in additional income. In a country where rural monthly salaries are roughly \$400, this increased income can have a substantial impact on the well-being of a family. Through the affordable rates of this bottled water, 50 more households in the community have been able to purchase clean drinking water for their homes. In the coming months, the church in Trapang Vihear intends to increase its self-sustainability by selling water to two NGOs and doubling its number of sales agents, widening the positive impact created by just a single water filter.

This widespread community development project not only improves health, but it improves livelihoods by creating a space for micro-entrepreneurs to flourish. The program can be replicated in many communities and scaled to various sizes depending on the needs and desired outreach. The church community in Trapang Vihear used the ROAMfilter Plus, which services 100 people for two years, however, the ROAMfilter Ultra can be used to create a larger distribution system as it can provide clean water for 700 people. In communities where clean bottled water is already available, but perhaps expensive, local micro-entrepreneurs can use the framework of



the Sustainable Water Project to establish their presence as providers and distributors of affordable water. This helps create an empowered and resilient community that can continue to develop sustainably into the future.

Bio of Co-founder/Author: Lim Chong Tee

Lim Chong Tee is the co-founder of Wateroam, a start-up that designs portable water filtration systems for use in disaster relief operations or rural communities without access to clean water. Their novel systems have since benefitted more than 83,000 people, including communities in Southeast Asia, South America and the Middle East. Chong Tee's environmental engineering studies at NUS gave him the opportunity to acquire the relevant scientific knowledge, technical know-how and business skills to further his social mission.

Co-Author: Michelle Lindsay Falcone

Michelle is passionate about improving quality of life for those without access to clean water. She has a Masters of Public Health from the University of Manchester and a B.A. in Development Studies from the University of California – Berkeley. She has worked and volunteered on four continents with charities, national health systems and social enterprises to make a difference in the lives of those in vulnerable or disadvantaged populations.

About the Contributor

Wateroam is a water innovation enterprise founded in Singapore in 2014 to develop water filtration solutions that bring about the quickest access to clean drinking water at disaster-hit locations and help to promote social change in rural development areas. Since its inception, Wateroam has received many accolades, such as the ASEAN Business Award, the Facebook Social Entrepreneur Award as well as being recognized as one of the representatives of the UN SDG Young Leaders for SDG 6 (Water and Sanitation).

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