

# PROJECT LOKUN 12

## - Abstracts of Reflections

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### From the Doctors

“Over the span of four years, this project has grown in scale, extending its influence beyond Pursat. Although the team had changed, the spirit of Lokun lives on. I saw in you the sincerity in reaching out to the Cambodian villagers, the courage to walk out of your comfort zones, the fortitude to withstand challenges and the humility to serve mankind. This trip has been a very rewarding experience for me, not only in terms of personal growth, but also in reminding me of why I did medicine initially.”

Dr Lie Sui An, volunteer medical doctor, Lokun 12 and Lokun 3 (June 2008)

“I'm amazed at the hospitality and resilience of the Cambodian people, even in the midst of lack and sickness. Reminds us of the priorities in life!”

Dr George Anene, volunteer medical doctor, Lokun 12

“During a conversation over the population whitepaper, I asked a young man what his take on ‘The world is flat’ was. The boy went on a discourse about how flat and condo apartments could help the world cope with population growth. He had no idea what Friedman was trying to tell us about globalization. While we must be cognizant of how the world affects Singapore, it is equally important to know how our effort can help to transform the world.

It is commendable that this group of young people took up the initiative to venture beyond the usual holiday destinations. In organizing the charity clinics, they learned about the economics of social responsibilities, the logistics of community medicine, and the relevance of high-touch clinical medicine. I hope to see more senior doctors in the trip. I'm sure their vast clinical experience will benefit the students greatly.”

Dr Koo Wen Hsin, volunteer medical doctor, Lokun 12

### Reflections from the ground

“The children in Cambodia have touched us in so many ways with a simple ‘orkun’ and a smile. I think I will never forget this little boy who gave me a necklace made of string and straws during our first day of clinics. (The necklace is hanging in my room now!)”

Jessica Ng, Education Head, Lokun 12

“Transport also seemed to be a rather huge obstacle that many of these Cambodians face. In Singapore, we are blessed to have an efficient transport system... The Cambodians definitely do not enjoy this luxury, and these House to House visits made me realize the countless obstacles that lay between healthcare and people in the country. Most of our hypertensive patients are in their 50s and 60s; and with the onset of years of countless toiling in the fields harvesting rice... It is more than them just finding transport to the organization I realized; some of them are physically unable to endure the pain of a 30-minute bicycle ride, or even a 5-minute motorcycle ride...

... They [Lokuners] had gone on one of those personalized visits to the local villager, who was simply too weak to visit the clinics herself. Upon examination, our doctors discovered an ovarian tumor that was metastasizing and had spread to other parts of the body... Before our team left her compound, she told Isaac and Chrisanda to “help her”- words of plea that were so simple yet which exhibited so strongly her complete helplessness... we discussed the plausible alternatives and decided that it was wise to refer her to St. Joseph’s Church- a cancer care facility in Battambang which would provide long-term chemotherapy and radiotherapy. However, upon further discussions with our in-house specialist Dr. Koo, it was decided that nothing would be done- a decision which was initially shocking to me but something I came to terms with. For such patients with a highly likely chance of end-stage cancer, Dr. Koo raised the possibility that she might pass away either enroute the facility, or in the facility itself... Would she rather pass away in the company of her beloved family or in some foreign facility far away from home? What were her chances of survival even after prolonged cancer treatment i.e. was her prognosis good? What were the costs on the family, especially during the harvest season?”

Tan Sher Yin, Development Committee Member, Lokun 12

“... It's in the hearts and minds of our Cambodian friends and teammates, with whom we have had the pleasure of working shoulder to shoulder, that I most clearly see the brightest hope for the future of Cambodia. Hearing them share their hearts about how they have been inspired to dedicate their lives to such missions, the gratitude they have for the work we came to do, and the burdens laid upon their hearts for their country, it struck me then - they are the future, and I, as a member of this project, am immensely privileged to have been a part of its humble beginnings.”

Zebedee Wong, Development Committee Member, Lokun 12

““To cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always”...Bringing a smile to patients, in spite of their ailments, had been one of the biggest contributions I believe we have brought to the needy communities. If I had to summarise the entire trip in one sentence, this trip was one that inspired me to go back to these villages in the future to comfort and relieve the sick.”

Bryce Tan, Marketing Committee Member, Lokun 12

“With Project Lokun being my first overseas community involvement project, it was a very meaningful and eye-opening experience. It has helped to me to grow as a person and it has changed my outlook towards life. Likewise, I

hope too that I have helped the Cambodian community in some little way or other and that I have managed to make a difference in a least one person's life over there."

Gary Teo, Education Committee Member, Lokun 12

"The Lokun 12 trip to me was eye opening and really brings reality right to my very eyes. Seeing first-hand how much help the team could serve to the villagers, I can't help but feel gratified to be part of the effort. I felt unjustified for these villagers as they do not have proper healthcare services. I believe that everyone, no matter how poor deserve at least basic healthcare services that they can rely on."

Yin Leng, Pharmacy Committee Member, Lokun 12

## A Special Tribute to Translators

On this trip, we were also very fortunate to have Cambodian students from both Cambodian and Singaporean universities joining us as translators. They contributed to this trip immensely and without them, we could not have done as much for the villagers due to language and cultural barriers. For some of them, it was also the first time they have volunteered for such a cause and stayed for such a long duration in a rural setting, and Lokun has inspired them to become more involved in local community efforts. Their leader, Alex, a Cambodian student studying engineering in NUS, was also inspired to establish his own project to gather Cambodian volunteer translators for other humanitarian efforts. We hope that his project will kick off on a good note and go on to reach out to more needy Cambodians in various provinces.

"This project makes me realize simple help, simple asking, simple smile and simple thank regardless language barrier and different backgrounds, which makes significant difference in those people in need of help especially unfortunate Cambodians."

Im Seiha, Cambodian Volunteer Translator

"Lokun 12 was such an inspiring and fulfilling trip that I've ever anticipated. The team as a whole is truly passionate in helping the less fortunate in Cambodia despite the living conditions. A big thank you to every lokuners on behalf of every life you've changed during the trip."

Vichra, Cambodian Volunteer Translator

***On the importance of strong local partnerships and to implement changes with the local context in mind in championing our cause:***

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"We managed to inspire and work much more closely with the local Cambodians, so much so that Alex is inspired to start his own organisation to

help OCIPs obtain translators and Vichra goes for outings with Pharm comm. We managed to establish a friendly relationship with our hosts: I recall Mr Jed's dissatisfaction when we first met him during our recce trip due to some of the miscommunications our team had had with him. During the main trip, he seemed ready to help us with anything (even small things like leaving the lights on) and seemed keen to take us up on a health development program. We also established clearer health development plans with Brother Francis and the Marist Brothers."

Liu Biquan, Project Director, Lokun 12

### *On translating knowledge into the hopes of tomorrow*

"... I thought about the team's place in Cambodia and for a moment, I pondered on the role of OCIPs in Cambodia... I constantly ask myself how we can make an actual, sustainable impact on the Cambodian healthcare. The answer I realized... is perfection in DISTANCE and TIMING. Distance brings to mind the balance between directly offering help and keeping our distance so that the Cambodians can slowly gain ownership of their own health and their health system. In terms of timing, I really felt that especially for this trip, we were at the mercy of many issues. One personally frustrating issue was with the closure of the local hospitals during the weekends that was severely hindering our acute referral programme... but again help was always at hand, this time in the form of Dr Sitha... was in fact a blessing in disguise... allowing him to personally handle most of the referral cases... to garner support and trust from the villages. It dawned on me that the single entity underlying wonderment, companionship and fear was simply, Gratitude."

Julia Ann Lee, Development Head, Lokun 12

"I remember asking a woman about her family history. The translator spoke to her in Khmer, then turned back to me saying: "Her family died in the Khmer Rouge" Considering the scars of the past helps us understand the Cambodia of the present. Only then can we work towards a better future for this country"

Josiah Wong, Clinics Committee Member, Lokun 12