



# Newsletter

*Clean water, a human right not a luxury*

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Cambodia has been very fortunate to not having reported a major outbreak of COVID-19 this year. Though their weak and spotty healthcare and reporting system may be a contributing factor, the dispersed and isolated nature of the traditional village culture provided natural social distancing.

Siem Reap Province depends largely on foreign tourism and traditional farming... tourism in the city and the nearby Apsara Reserve (temple sites) and hundreds of small villages loosely organized into farming communes across the rest of the province. Immediately after COVID-19 began to spread from China the tourist business collapsed along with the supporting infrastructure and associated jobs. This resulted in many people exiting from the urban environment of the city to the very low-density environment of their rural villages. It is meeting the need for safe and clean water for these village residents that *Water for Cambodia* exists.



Cambodia initiated very strict controls on people entering the country through its two international airports soon after the virus began to spread worldwide. In addition to screening upon arrival, a mandatory quarantine was initially implemented. This was at least a part of the reason there have been so few cases locally. Recently our lab director, Massimo, reports that “*Here (in Siem Reap) there is no Covid at all. It is like a dream.*”

Luigi and the entire *Water for Cambodia* team resolved to do everything possible to continue to operate safely and effectively through this challenging time. Protecting individual health and safety was paramount both for personal well being and to be able to continue to function as a source of filters, training, testing and client support. Each employee was encouraged to stay at home if they were not feeling well and to keep their own family members safe. Masks, hand washing, gloves and increased facility cleaning became part of the daily routine. To date the entire staff and their families have remained free from infection.



### **Water for Cambodia team geared up to operate sensibly and safely**

The daily routine of building and preparing filters for installation has been able to continue uninterrupted. The field team continues to visit villages identifying areas of need, assessing interest and working with new families. Each visit has been conducted while being mindful of health considerations.

During this year The Rikreay Lab (the officially registered name of the *WFC* water testing lab) has seen a reduction in the number of commercial test requests, as expected, but continues to be fully financially self-supporting. The demand for testing by local NGOs, schools, businesses other than tourist oriented customers remains steady. Recently some larger hotels have begun re-opening and renewing their testing agreements. Our testing laboratory has truly become an important resource in the Siem Reap community at large.

Richard Jones is a friend and regular visitor to ***Water for Cambodia*** from the UK. He and his many North Wales neighbors are long-time supporters of Cambodia and its children... This article is a brief report in his own words of his February 2020 visit to install bio-sand filters.

Siem Reap, Cambodia February 11, 2020... A visit to Luigi to catch up on his news and see some of the installing team I have gotten to know over the years, and to plan for the Thursday morning installation trip for me to join in with Luigi as the guide and leader. All his team of locals are up to speed on how to install and explain to all that receive one.

The very next morning at 8:30 I am at the filter HQ to find that we are going to install filters sponsored by my cousin Jane, a couple from Penyffordd Gaz and Ruth, a couple from Gloucester Chris and Noel and one from myself which is just titled N. WALES FRIENDS. A very hot and dusty morning down roads we would only class as farm tracks at best to the homes one can only describe as shacks, if they had the storm winds the UK has had over the last few days they would be gone, flattened. Always humbled by the reception and hospitality of each family on every installation. Each family wanted to understand how the filter works, why it works and always extremely appreciative, so representing each sponsor is indeed a privilege. Each family will have far less need of the local quack doctor with questionable skills and knowledge for upset tummies, and far less need for charcoal to boil the water safe to use. These 4 filters were installed fairly close to the main ***WFC*** NGO depot so therefore easy for the installing team to keep an eye on them, have feedback and give advice. The main contaminate in the ground water around Siem Reap is a heavy presence of iron, not good and their water and cooking containers are stained a brown/copper colour.

Children were conspicuous by their absence and quite possibly in school, but some of the clothes donated by Sheena from the Wednesday line dance class were given out to some families during that morning and it is almost a certainty that each recipient now has 2 shirts or shorts instead of 1 !! Thank you Sheena, glad I could pass them on.

The street of my guesthouse is very narrow so as Luigi dropped me off at the end of it we spotted the tuky man who had taken me in the morning. He had expressed great enthusiasm and interest in the filters, had never seen or heard of them before, so I had encouraged him to ask the Khmer guys in the yard to learn more. He wanted one and the deal was that if he collected one in his tuk-tuk with all the bits and pieces that go with it there would be no charge for him at all, (usually each recipient has to pay the delivery charge of about \$5, this does give them a sense of ownership and responsibility considering that \$5 could be a week's wages for some. Luigi agreed that one of his staff would install and then carry on home in the next village if it was picked up late afternoon. All agreed and a win/win situation we were back at the depot to load up. There was only just enough room in the tuk-tuk for me after we had loaded up and the installer Kong Hun following behind.

I thought his house was a local one but no, no, no, I'm guessing at an hour to get there, and probably to an area very few if any foreigners had ever been or likely to go to, through densely populated villages which always have a street side market from sun-up to well into the evening. We did get there eventually and met his wife and 2 year old daughter. Poor thing was frightened of me, probably never seen a barang before, but after an hour and we were leaving I did get a very guarded smile while clinging tightly to papa. Another happy customer, a very long drive/ride back to Siem Reap and a very welcome cold beer, or 4!! So a successful morning and afternoon and a very relaxing evening.

**SPECIAL NOTE: Sothy, our senior lab tech delivered her first child, a healthy baby girl, in September... Congratulations!**

*Only YOU can help our team continue giving this gift of clean safe water.*

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