



Newsletter

Clean water, a human right not a luxury

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Water for Cambodia has chosen to defer our planned celebration of 15 years of success in bringing clean safe water to thousands of Cambodian families and schools.

All of US around the world who support *Water for Cambodia* must concentrate on the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The unknowns of the near future make it impossible to plan the celebration worthy of the accomplishments YOU have made possible: 25,000 filters in 15 years helping 150,000 children and their families. We have chosen to cancel this year's planned June 4th celebration. Next year we'll look back at our accomplishments and together take pride in what we have done.

Members of the Board of Directors are staying in close contact via SKYPE with Luigi and the team in Cambodia as we monitor the situation there. To date there seems to be very little impact in Northern Cambodia and what little there is has concentrated in Phnom Penh. There is virtually no tourist presence in Siem Reap resulting in hotel and restaurant closings, very little traffic and a natural sheltering taking place. *Water for Cambodia* staff are taking prudent steps to protect themselves and the villagers they are in contact with. Regular hand washing, gloves and masks have become routine.

We are also developing plans focused on the contingencies of the potential spread of COVID-19 within the country. *WFC* is committed to protecting our staff and the families we support as well as insuring the long-term health and viability of *Water for Cambodia*. This mission is too important to jeopardize all that has been accomplished by YOU and our staff in Cambodia.

We witnessed a real success story and visited an area of great opportunity to create the same life changing success for hundreds of other families

Several members of the Board of Directors visited two districts in January. One was the site of a continuous effort by *Water for Cambodia* since its first in-country installations bringing clean safe water, hygiene education, sanitation and health awareness to households and children in the schools. The second district was far more remote with few all-weather roads, a lack of access to clean water or the most basic concepts of hygiene and sanitation. This served as a great measure of what can be done vs. what must be done!

Puok District is located a few kilometers Northwest of Siem Reap on National Road 6 which stretches to the Thai border. It was a natural place for *Water for Cambodia* to begin introducing bio-sand filters. At that time, *WFC* began working closely with the Ankor Children's Hospital which had begun an outreach program to reopen the local health center and begin addressing health and hygiene needs. This was a perfect fit and where the first filter was installed in the local primary school in February 2006.



Students watch our crew installing a bio-sand filter at the Lboeuk primary



The first household filter installed in February 2006

The balance of the first 30 filters were installed in village homes in Lboeuk and Thnort Chrum. It is a testament to the robust design and its value as a source of safe water and improved health to these families that the first filter installed that day is still in daily use 14 years later.



The first household filter installed still in use today

Today in this district six primary schools have multiple bio-sand filters in use to supply clean safe water to students and faculty as well as enclosed working wells to ensure a secure source to feed the filters. Further nearly 1300 or about 70% of households in this area now have bio-sand filters. This is expected to grow to 80% by the end of 2020. All this has contributed significantly to enthusiastic healthy children who attend school regularly and a noticeable increase in family wellbeing. All this has been possible through YOUR generosity and the dedication of the *Water for Cambodia* staff on the ground.



Students at the Lboeuk school in February 2006

In 2006 few children had access to bicycles or uniforms or new backpacks... today this has changed! Nearly every child rides a bicycle to school, carries a backpack and the majority are now wearing clean uniforms. All these healthy families are currently able to



Students at the Kok Pnov school in January 2020



participate in the improving local market economy. They are no longer compelled to waste their limited resources on unnecessary health care driven costs and the low productivity resulting from their own poor health. This promotes the chance for continued economic and educational improvement and is evidenced in the enthusiasm and health of the kids.

Varin District is a remote largely unimproved agricultural area with barely passable roads, located at the Northern extreme of Siem Reap Province. It presents *Water for Cambodia* with both a challenge and an opportunity. Varin is recognized by the Provincial Department of Rural Development as an area that has fallen behind others in development and access. It is a sparsely populated area that relies principally on cassava cultivation to satisfy the growing Chinese market. This district has only benefitted from organized schools for 3 or 4 years. Each school building is a primitive three-room structure constructed by the villagers. None have access to clean safe water or a functioning latrine and fewer than 5% of district homes have access to safe water.

Water for Cambodia staff made a comprehensive survey of the needs of district schools and homes during 2019 and the board followed up during January to learn first-hand the extent of the needs. Board members joined *WFC* staff to visit three schools where school staff proudly showed off their students and schools



while discussing their desire for meeting the basic needs of health and hygiene. The contrast between school districts was dramatic, though many of the students wore traditional Cambodian school uniforms they lacked access to books, school supplies and did not have bicycles. No class room

displayed any educational materials so common in the Puok schools. In one case the “chalk board” was made up of darkened planks nailed to the wall. There was no access to water at all but one school where an uncovered well was nearby. This requires that students bring water from a home source or go without. Latrines, even the most primitive, were non-existent so this need was met by going into the nearby woods... this applied to both girls and boys of course.



Water for Cambodia has identified Varin District, its families and especially the schools as an opportunity to begin changing the lives of children and families in the same way it has in Puok and other districts throughout Siem Reap Province. Like in Puok, this will not happen in a year or even five years. Culture change, education and improving the lives of hundreds of families will take time and the dedicated efforts of the *WFC* staff and resources only YOU can supply.

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

Visit us at: www.waterforcambodia.org or contribute directly at

Water for Cambodia P.O. Box 1121 Bristol, RI 02809