

CHANGING LIVES, CHANGING COMMUNITIES:

HOW THE MAE FAH LUANG FOUNDATION
INSPIRED US TO CHANGE THE WORLD

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The Mae Fah Luang Foundation, Thailand

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The Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage
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Overview, Purpose, and Goals of the Global Exchange

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Have you ever visited a new place and people and been moved at your core? Once touched, have you then felt inspired to mobilize yourself and others by shifting into a higher consciousness? And, with the boost of energy from that inspiration and mobilization, have you been empowered to positively change your world and follow the lead of people who are doing just that kind of global change?

These were only some of the extraordinary outcomes for me and a group of my students from NYU on a trip to Thailand in 2009. The adventure began when I was asked to do a training in late May, 2009 with the Mae Fah Luang Foundation Under Royal Patronage (www.maefahluang.org). The three day workshop with the senior leadership of the Foundation was focused on executive coaching, leadership development, communication and strategic skills, and social entrepreneurial best practices.

I was asked to do the leadership and coaching training because it is what I do and love. I am Clinical Professor at New York University in the heart of New York City. I head a program called the Wagner Program for Social Ventures and teach a sequence of four classes in Social Entrepreneurship at the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and the Stern School of Business. The teaching sequence is:

1. Fundamentals of Social Entrepreneurship, which takes place during the fall semester and focuses on the basics of social entrepreneurship, introducing students to various successful and inspiring ventures, and the process of self-transformation and empowerment;
2. Advanced Social Entrepreneurship, which takes place during the spring semester and focuses on project selection, development and completion by the end of the semester;
3. A newly developed Global Social Entrepreneurship Field Study class, on site in another country, which begins in May of 2010 and will start out back in Thailand. This Global class will learn from the Foundation's work and contribute through various projects, including a micro-finance project and savings literacy program for local women in the Doi Tung Development Project.
4. Local Social Entrepreneur Field Study, which takes place the following fall semester, and gives students the opportunity to work in a number of profit, not-for-profit and NGO settings and apply in "real life" the lessons learned from the previous classes. Classes consist of supervision, skills training, value clarification, contribution skills and next steps.

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M.L. Dispanadda "Duke" Diskul presented on the Mae Fah Luang Foundation at New York University in 2008.



One of the leaders in the Foundation, M. L. Dispanadda "Duke" Diskul, who is the Director of their Center for Social Entrepreneurship, had presented to my NYU class in the fall, 2008. I had never heard of him, the Foundation, or their work and knew nothing about Thailand. But I completely trust the woman who brought Duke to us, Sunisa Nardone. Sunisa graduated from Brown University in 2007 and a year later found herself working in Thailand for the Foundation. She is half Thai and half American and proved invaluable as a visionary, trip designer, translator, and guide, before, during and after our experience in Thailand. (You'll find her chapter at the end of this book.)

After the presentation at NYU, and seeing the extraordinary work the Foundation is doing, I knew we must go to Thailand and contribute whatever we could to support them and their work. I had no idea how to do this, since I had never been there, but I knew I needed to go. A number of our students were inspired and motivated in the same way and showed interest in joining us on the trip to Thailand. They too saw the incredible opportunity to learn from the Foundation and wanted to find a way to contribute. However, as the realities of time and money limitations set in, a number of interested students had to drop out, particularly because the students paid their own expenses for this trip.

Yet, four students remained, two women and two men: Bethany Halbreich, who will graduate in 2011 with a BA in Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Global Initiative from the NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study; Alexander Hu, who graduated with the class of 2009 with a BS in Finance and a minor in Social Entrepreneurship from the NYU Stern School of Business; Nick Jensen, who will graduate in 2011 with a BA in Sociology from the NYU College of Arts & Science; and Amanda Raposo, who will graduate in 2011 with a BA in Social Work and minor in Social Entrepreneurship from the NYU Silver School of Social Work. They came with us to Thailand to share the experience of a lifetime. Their stories and their lessons learned are included in their respective chapters.

In addition to the student chapters and sections contributed by the Foundation, a vital chapter is also contributed by Sunisa's American-sister-in-spirit, Elizabeth Sherman. Elizabeth describes the content of our classes, the social entrepreneur training approaches we use in class, and what we have learned on how to reach and motivate contemporary

college students to become effective social change agents. Elizabeth writes from up close. She graduated from Dartmouth in 2008 and soon became the Teaching Assistant for the Fundamentals and Advanced classes at NYU. She knows the material and the students very well from first-hand experience. She has her own recent experience as a college student, was the class TA for the academic year, and made the trip happen as our Administrator. Without her excellent organizational and management skills on this end, to compliment Sunisa's invaluable logistical help on the Foundation side, this trip would not have happened. She was able to co-create an experience for the students and each of us that was more than anyone could have expected, much less dreamed.

The other member of our team was Joshua Wexler, my son, who also graduated from Dartmouth in 2008 and is currently working for an international consulting firm, headquartered in New York City. In the Foundation training in Doi Tung, Josh presented his work on social networking and worked as a consultant with various workshop participants on helping them solve their current work challenges. Back in Bangkok, Josh also prepared and gave a PowerPoint presentation for the Foundation's senior leadership, with an overview of what he had observed as a consultant on the Doi Tung site and suggestions for future directions for the Foundation. He was an invaluable contributor to the experience, bringing a skill set far more developed in business consultation than his mother, or most of us on the team, could have ever imagined or contributed.

Another crucial member who joined our team when we got to Thailand is the Head of the Foundation's Knowledge and Learning Center, Pimpan "Whan" Diskul na Ayudhya. Whan was an incredible facilitator of our introduction to the Foundation, made sure we had anything and everything we needed during our experience and for the training workshop, and took the students under her wing to help them learn and grow. She's been great working with us over the past year since, as we prepare for another amazing experience there this year. Her chapter shares a bit of her personal experience working for the Foundation.

This "Team Awesome," as we came to call ourselves, met in the Bangkok airport on May 19th. We were met at the gate by a kind and smiling representative of the Foundation and it was the beginning of the extraordinary Thai hospitality we were lucky enough to receive from the

beginning to the end of the trip. Our airport guide was the gracious and helpful, Kod, from the Foundation, who whisked us to the next airplane, which took us to Chiang Rai in northern Thailand. From there, we drove to the site of the Foundation's development work, Doi Tung. When we finally arrived after a 24-hour journey, our adventure truly began.

THE ADVENTURE AT DOI TUNG

The other members of "Team Awesome" have contributed to this book and will be describing their experiences and lessons learned in the upcoming chapters. To give you a basic overview of our experience, you'll find a map of events with some photos on the following pages.

The workshop experience is based on what we have found works in our classes at NYU and our national and international workshops elsewhere. We particularly focused on the principles of successful social entrepreneurship, the CORE 4 Life Skills¹, which help change makers succeed, and how to effectively practice the principles of Transformative Action for true global change. These skills are essentially the most practical aspects of applied psychology, business practices, and social entrepreneurship. They are harvested from my 25 years as a clinical psychologist and executive coach and from a development team of experts and colleagues who have evolved and practiced the CORE 4 and Social Entrepreneurship model over the last 15 years. We have found that one of the most powerful applications of CORE 4 is in the world of social entrepreneurship, global change and development, and social innovation. CORE 4 provides a framework and skill set to turn negative into positive, find the win/win in a situation, connect in a deeper way to different cultures and beliefs, help people find their life purpose and act from it, and maintain the change maker's well-being while they become increasingly effective social entrepreneurs. You will find the CORE 4 skill sets and their definitions listed in the box on the following page.

¹ McGrath, Ellen (2008). *CORE 4; The 4 Essential Skills For Changing Your World Inside and Out*.

Connector Skills
The skills and techniques that help us build bridges to others, communicate effectively, and form deep and meaningful relationships
Liner Skills
The skills and techniques that help us establish boundaries and limits in a non-controlling way to ensure safety and that we will be treated with respect
Converter Skills
The skills and techniques that help us transform a negative mood or thought into energy
Strategist Skills
The skills and techniques that help us identify goals, develop a strategic plan, and obtain a desired outcome

DOI TUNG SCHEDULE HIGHLIGHTS

Day 1 We arrived at the Doi Tung Development Project and toured the Royal Garden, the café, and the offices of the Foundation where the training will be held. We got settled and had a brief introduction to the Foundation's work and got the itinerary for the week before heading to bed early, due to the jetlag.

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The Mae Fah Luang Garden, Chiang Rai, Thailand



Day 2 Traveled through the mountains and climbed to the top of one mountain to visit the Pang Mahan Reforestation Project Site to learn about the first phase of the project development. It was one of the most harrowing drives we have taken. Arrived safely at the top, thanks to very skilled drivers, and mostly well, thanks to motion sickness medicine. Very worth it! Imagine sitting at the top of the world, surrounded by beautiful mountains recently reforested by the local people under the guidance of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation.

3

Hand-made road on the way to the Pang Mahan Reforestation Project



4

Lunch on the ground with village leaders and the MFLF team at Pang Mahan



We sat on straw mats with local village leaders, some of whom were former opium farmers during the height of opium growth in the "Golden Triangle" region. We had a feast of fresh fish and vegetables from their mountain-top garden

and experienced first hand their saying: “Eat what you grow. Grow what you eat.” All the while, chatting through translators and sharing everything imaginable about our mutual lives, experiences, hopes and dreams. It was one of the best highlights of the trip for most of us—a true global-bridge experience at the top of the world.

Day 3 Toured phase two of the Foundation development work at Doi Tung, with knowledgeable guides from the Foundation, including visits to the coffee roasterie, and weaving, paper and ceramics factories. We all supported the development project directly on our trip to the Doi Tung outlet store where they sell many of their products. All around Thailand, they have Doi Tung Lifestyle shops and Doi Tung Cafés that sell the various Doi Tung products.

5

The visit to the weaving factory at the Cottage Industry Center and Outlet.



In the afternoon, we traveled to the Hall of Opium, a museum that the Foundation has set up to educate visitors on the history of the opium trade, both in the region and in the world. Afterwards we stopped at the Mae Fah Luang Art and Culture Park, which houses beautiful collections of artifacts from the cultures of some of the minority groups in northern Thailand. After a fabulous meal at the Art and Culture Park,

we finished our evening with a stop at the night market in Chang Rai.

Day 4 Students toured more Foundation facilities, including the Montessori schools for the village children and the fields and processing plant where macadamia nuts are grown and processed.

Our presentation team met with Sunisa and Dr. Charles Mehl, an MFLF Assistant for International Matters who researched and developed the content of the Opium Museum. They were our key translators between Thai and English. To our surprise, we learned that some of concepts we take for granted do not easily translate. Sunisa and Charles helped us understand how to better communicate with a Thai audience and appreciate differences in culture and ways of thinking and processing information.

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Dr. Ellen McGrath lectures at the CORE 4 workshop.



After extensive help from our translators, we began the workshop that afternoon with far more accuracy and cultural connection. The workshop began with an introduction to the material, our team, and the goals for the weekend. Participants were 45-50 managers and project leaders from different areas of the Foundation, and all spoke at least some English, but varied in their levels of fluency.

So during the weekend, we often took breaks to help with translation and understanding. There was also a

constant informal translation going on between coworkers. Communication flowed, just not in the way anyone had expected. So, we all went with the flow and it worked out quite well for all parties involved.

7

Workshop participants practice connection skills.



We started the actual skill training with the Connector skill set, defining it and explaining why it is the most important set of life skills we can develop, and gave examples of the steps in a successful connection. We also worked on Bullseye Communication strategies and techniques for interacting with people in a meaningful and authentic manner.

To practice these skills first hand, everyone broke out into small teams to practice and receive coaching on some issue they currently face at work. Afterwards, we asked them to give each other feedback on their partner's eye contact, body language, energy level, active listening skills, contribution to the conversation, the balance of needs in the conversation, etc.

We ended each evening with a team dinner outdoors and then a de-briefing session with the students to work with them on the experiences of their day.

Day 5 We began the workshop (a full day today) with the Liner skill set, followed by a discussion of the meaning and importance of setting boundaries for safety in a respectful way. This Liner

skill set spawned a powerful group conversation about the cultural meaning of confrontation, which Thai people often avoid out of respect for others. Everyone then broke into groups to practice coaching one another again on boundary problems and challenges they face in their work lives.

That afternoon we moved on to the Convertor skill set, covering the ways in which stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma can negatively impact both our personal and professional lives and strategies for converting the negative thoughts and moods into positive actions.

Day 6 We started in the morning by giving the small groups another practice session with the coaching skills and found people were significantly more confident in using the CORE 4 skill sets and coaching each other on various work-related challenges.

Then we moved on to the Strategist skill set and discussed techniques for setting and achieving goals. Participants formed "Accountability Partnerships" to work together to hold one another accountable to complete their individual goals.

8

The MFLF staff exchange feedbacks and views on the CORE 4 lessons.



We finished the workshop with a powerful wrap-up and feedback from participants, including a thoughtful gift presentation to each of us by members of the Foundation. Participants also stayed to see the student presentations

about their experiences and what the students had learned. We were all quite impressed with the students' presentations, so much so that the students were invited by the Foundation leadership to return as interns the following summer.

THE ADVENTURE IN BANGKOK AND ENVIRONS

Days 7-12 More meetings and dinners with Foundation leaders; tour of Bangkok, a few days in Hua Hin, a nearby beach where the Summer Palace is located, and finally a summary lunch back in Bangkok to decide next steps and future collaborations with Team Awesome and the Foundation.

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"Team Awesome"
at the Temple of
the Grand Palace,
Bangkok, Thailand



Day 13 Returned to NYC to build the next links in our global bridge half way across the world between NYU, the Foundation and other social entrepreneur groups.

When we returned to New York City, we all agreed we were changed in a profound way. We also felt we had been given an invaluable gift by the Foundation, for they opened their hearts to us and shared their programs with us in such a generous and powerful way, we were able to learn from and with them about what true global social entrepreneurship is at its best.

We all agreed that the only way we could integrate this empowering experience was to write about it and share our experiences with others. Thus, this book was born and it is intended for those in Thailand, the United States, and around the world who wish to learn how to work together, the young and mature, from many different cultures and backgrounds and ethnicities, to produce the kind of positive change the Foundation has accomplished, no matter how great the obstacles to success. The example of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation can inspire and empower all of us in that journey of positive change.

To help us along the way, the students, advisors and I summarized eight essential life lessons from our experience, which we found to be very helpful as we slowly, but surely, transformed into global social entrepreneurs ourselves. Our hope is these eight lessons are as useful to you as they were to us in growing and developing all of our capacities for global social impact.

2

Eight Lessons in Empowerment for Global Change

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- | |
|---|
| 1. There are no insurmountable obstacles when we do what we are called to do: change the world in large and small positive ways. |
| 2. More than ever, it takes a global village to grow social entrepreneurs who can create and deliver results. A strong, inspired team with diverse, complimentary skills is essential for success in positive global change. |
| 3. Regardless of age and stage, become committed students again, wherever you go, to learn invaluable lessons in social entrepreneurship. |
| 4. Live from your vision, values and commitment each day to become far more powerful as an effective change agent. "Compare-and-compete" strategies drain power, and operations based on ego-feeding eventually destroy the project and its original purpose. |
| 5. Having clear bottom lines, or boundaries, is necessary for the success of any social entrepreneur activity. A focus on the visible bottom line provides the strongest safety and support to the project and the contributors. |
| 6. Negative thoughts, mood and behavior can be converted into positive energy for change, even under the most impossible conditions. |
| 7. The success of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation is built on their capacity to set and maintain realistic goals, and lead a strategic campaign to realize their vision. |
| 8. The core values of the Princess Mother and the Foundation can empower all of us and be a source of enormous energy, power, and success in creating positive change and effective community. |

EMPOWERMENT LESSON 1

There are no insurmountable obstacles when we do what we are called to do: change the world in large and small positive ways.

The students, our consultants, and I felt that going to Thailand and working with the Foundation was an impossible dream, at some level. We had never been our experience to others. We also knew that true social entrepreneurship works like that. It is about taking reasonable risks, finding ways to scale what seems like insurmountable peaks, and constantly renewing our commitment to the well-being of others, as well as ourselves. In this process, we learned how to scale the tops of mountains and survive the depths of the valleys, all the while learning how to keep moving forward until we succeeded—truly an invaluable lesson.

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EMPOWERMENT LESSON 2

More than ever, it takes a global village to grow social entrepreneurs who can create and deliver results. A strong, inspired team with diverse, complimentary skills is essential for success in positive global change.

One of the most surprising lessons for us was to learn that we are not the isolated Americans we had assumed, but are part of a vibrant global village. We discovered that this village could work together very effectively to create change that would have been previously unavailable, because of global divisions, distance, and a lack of heart or skill. With the Foundation, we were able to experience more of our similarities rather than focus on our differences, and we found that we enjoyed each other and had so much to exchange. We also found that we share a deep commitment for social change, an affinity for the Princess Mother's values, a passion to make a difference, and a drive to learn as quickly as possible how to do so. We worked together as a team, all of us committed to do whatever it takes to succeed at our shared goals. By this connection and teamwork, we exceeded our expectations in every arena in which we worked, and the Foundation seemed to share the same experience.

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Pimpan "Whan" Diskul leads a discussion on the reforestation project with the students and local village leaders.



EMPOWERMENT LESSON 3

Regardless of age and stage, become committed students again, wherever you go, to learn invaluable lessons in social entrepreneurship.

I have found that life's obstacles can never keep you down if you are committed to learning and growing from all of your experiences. Often

our greatest lessons come when we least expect them. They may also come in unlikely places from unlikely sources, like on a mountain top from a former opium farmer, now village leader. Despite the fact that this man spoke no English and I no Thai, he turned out to be one of my best teachers on our trip.

Soon after we returned to NYC, we found out that the Secretary General of the Foundation, M.R. Disnadda “Khun Chai” Diskul, had recently been honored as the Social Entrepreneur of the Year for 2009 by the Schwab Foundation at a special event in Tokyo. His wife, Khunying Puangroi Diskul na Ayudhya, the Executive Director of the Foundation, asked me a critical question after that event. She wondered why he had won this award, when there were so many outstanding nominees, and why I had said the Foundation was one of the most successful social entrepreneurial groups in the world. She said they were so busy working in the field that they did not know where or how they stood on the world stage with other social entrepreneurial groups. Khunying was sharing one of the key secrets to success in social change and at the Foundation – one that they live every day – which leads us to Lesson 4.



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M.R. Disnadda “Khun Chai” Diskul mingles with the local people in the DTDP.

13

Khun Ying Puangroi Diskul na Ayudhya speaks at the CORE 4 workshop.



EMPOWERMENT LESSON 4

Live from your vision, values and commitment each day to become far more powerful as an effective change agent. “Compare-and-compete” strategies drain power, and operations based on ego-feeding eventually destroy the project and its original purpose.

This lesson is especially meaningful to “Team Awesome” because we had been studying and practicing connection skills all semester, appreciating how powerful they are in producing outstanding results in our social entrepreneur projects and in the overall quality of our lives. We learned these kinds of connector skills from the CORE 4 model, which combined with social entrepreneurship, was the basis for the Thailand training and the NYU classes.

The vision and values of the Foundation are an outstanding demonstration of how to apply Lesson 4. One of their strongest beliefs is that in helping the people of the Doi Tung Development Project, they must help them to help themselves. They recognize that it will not be beneficial to make the local people dependent on the Foundation, so their efforts revolve around planning for how the people can continue the program on their own. This builds in dignity and respect for the local people and will ensure the sustainability of the project, as it is not about the ego of the Foundation, but the well-being of the people they serve.

EMPOWERMENT LESSON 5

Having clear bottom lines, or boundaries, is necessary for the success of any social entrepreneur activity. A focus on the visible bottom line provides the strongest safety and support to the project and the contributors.

Setting boundaries is not always the most fun task, but it is crucial for our safety, our well-being, and our success. When it comes to social entrepreneurship, it can be easy to experience burnout or overload by taking on too many tasks and roles. Though our work is important and

our efforts can change the world, we cannot do our best to help others if we don't take care of ourselves. Boundaries can help us to set limits for ourselves and sustain a healthy balance. It is also highly important to get clear on the roles and expectations for all members of the team and to establish specific deliverables and deadlines to ensure the success of the project. These boundaries help us to maintain our commitment to our vision and values by providing guidelines for how to follow-through.

In building the Doi Tung Development Project, the Foundation set some important boundaries to help them achieve success in the project. They developed a 30-year business plan for the DTDP that aligns with their value of helping the people to help themselves and be able to sustain the project. They have set a deadline for when they will hand the project over to the local people and are working hard to provide the necessary support to the local people and stick to this goal.

EMPOWERMENT LESSON 6

Negative thoughts, mood and behavior can be converted into positive energy for change, even under the most impossible conditions.

Our negative thoughts, moods, and behaviors can keep us from achieving our potential, if we let them get the best of us. States of anxiety, stress, depression, and trauma can get us down and make us feel overwhelmed, helpless, and hopeless. Taking steps to convert these states into positive energy for action and change is crucial for us to continue moving forward and to meet our goals. The conversion process also gives us the opportunity to learn from the situation to either avoid or improve a similar one in the future.

One of the best global examples of positive conversion is the Foundation's success in eradicating poverty in the villages of Northern Thailand. In the relatively short period of 20 years, they have successfully reduced opium growth to nearly nothing and established numerous alternative sources for income, improving the livelihoods of the local people substantially. Also impressive are the Foundation's efforts to convert the negative experiences of the past into lessons we can learn from for the future. Rather than try to erase or hide the turbulent history

of this region, they have established ways for us to learn from how and why these things happened and how they can be converted. The Hall of Opium and Doi Tung Tourism efforts educate visitors about these important lessons.

EMPOWERMENT LESSON 7

The success of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation is built on their capacity to set and maintain realistic goals, and lead a strategic campaign to realize their vision.

Sometimes we accomplish things by chance or luck, but most often we need to be focused and strategic in order to meet our goals. Our success as social entrepreneurs is dependent on our ability to visualize a desired outcome, set a realistic timeline for goal completion, use creative strategies to obtain resources and skills needed, connect with others who can support our goal, and convert any obstacles and setbacks so that we can keep moving forward. These skills help us to plan and achieve our goals fully, to think things through, and to see where we are going.

The Foundation has a number of inspiring strategists on their team, setting goals based around "what works" best for all, not around things to feed the individual ego. They also have a very flexible and adaptive approach to changing goals, depending on what they learn with and from each other and the local people. Their integrated approach to development is a beautiful example of strategic planning, as it builds in an understanding of the needs of the local people and realistic goals and expectations for development. They recognized, for example, that they should base short-term goals around health needs and long-term goals around education because if they started by building more schools, few people would be able to attend, as their health and other basic needs had yet to be met.

EMPOWERMENT LESSON 8

The core values of the Princess Mother and the Foundation can empower all of us and be a source of enormous energy, power, and success in creating positive change and effective community.

This two week experience showed us that when social impact behavior is value-based and combined with coaching and social entrepreneur skills, the results are among the most successful in the world. The work of the Foundation reminds us that we are truly a global village and it is essential to stay connected to each other and come from a place of our core values as a compass guiding us in all our goals. By staying true to the values of the Princess Mother and remembering that all people are important to the well-being of a country, the Foundation was able to convert some of their poorest and most vulnerable citizens to productive contributors to the common good. The example they set is empowering and a lesson we all need to learn. We owe a great thanks to the Foundation for their leadership and inspiration in this critical area of social change.



14 His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Her Royal Highness Princess Mother visit their subjects in Thailand.

3

An Introduction to the Mae Fah Luang Foundation

The Mae Fah Luang Foundation Knowledge and Learning Center

WHO IS THE MAE FAH LUANG FOUNDATION?

The Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage (MFLF) is a Thai not-for-profit development organization that manages numerous projects in Thailand and other countries in Asia. The MFLF's three flagship projects in northern Thailand are the Mae Fah Luang Art & Cultural Park, whose aim is to preserve the Lanna culture shared by the peoples of the Greater Mekong Sub-region; the Hall of Opium, an interactive museum showcasing the history of opium and drug production and abuse, with the aim of educating the general public and reducing demand for drugs; and, most notably, the Doi Tung Development Project (DTDP) started in 1988, a Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development (SALD) project, whose objective is to solve the drug problem from the supply side, by tackling it at the root causes of poverty and lack of opportunity. Since 2003, the DTDP has been recognized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as among the world's best practices in alternative development.

The name, "Mae Fah Luang," in Thai literally means "Royal Mother from the Sky". It is the name given to the founder of the Foundation,

HRH Princess Srinagarindra, the late Princess Mother of the present King of Thailand, by the hill tribes on remote mountain tops, as she was often seen coming down from a helicopter, the only means to get to the remote area of Thailand then. The people of Thailand also affectionately refer to HRH as “Somdej Ya,” the Royal Grandmother. Since 1962, HRH spent an extensive amount of time traveling around the country and witnessed the way of life of the villagers in remote areas. HRH displayed far-reaching vision, a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to the country’s physical and spiritual development, and a desire to help her son, His Majesty the King, to better the lives of the people in Thailand. With all of this in mind, the Princess Mother embarked on a number of projects to assist the people.

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The image of HRH the Princess Mother descending from the helicopter earns her the name “Mae Fah Luang”, which translates into “Royal Mother from the Sky”.



WHAT IS THE SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD DEVELOPMENT (SALD) MODEL?

The MFLF’s SALD model, based on HRH the Princess Mother’s development principles, has evolved over 20 years through hands-on experience in development. It is a people-centric approach, which is based on the belief that all people are born equal and should develop towards the essential truth of his or her being, and that no one wants to be a bad person, but not everyone has opportunity to be good. It also recognizes that the root causes of many social ills are poverty and lack of opportunity. In

order to survive, people are forced to engage in narcotic crop cultivation, drug and human trafficking, the destruction of the environment, and countless other crimes.

Thus, the MFLF’s vision is to empower all people regardless of their gender, religion, race or political orientation, to help themselves and continue to develop on their own; to live with dignity and in harmony with the natural environment; and to be good, sufficient, and capable members of the society. The Foundation’s development mission is, therefore, to provide people with opportunities in having good health; secure, viable, and meaningful livelihood; and, appropriate and challenging education.

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The MFLF’s Social Development staff meet with the target community to build mutual understanding.



This holistic transformation takes time. Long-term vision and sequential intervention allows development to evolve and for future generations to eventually take over. The Foundation sees itself as a temporary safety net and a facilitator for long-term self-reliance. All MFLF development initiatives begin with an in-depth understanding of the geo-social reality of the target area and community. This examines the physical and social reality on the ground, such as geographical conditions, rain fall, temperature, and local people’s attitude, habits, beliefs, and fear. Then the Foundation reaches out to communicate with the people and to win the hearts and minds of stakeholders at all levels, namely the central government, the local leaders and the target grassroots population. Only after that can the Foundation engage in participatory development with the community, and local people start

to take ownership and bring out their best selves to speed up their own development. All activities are broken down into short-, medium- and long-term phases, starting with an important “quick-hit” phase that produces tangible results to address the community’s immediate needs in fewer than 150 days. In the quick-hits and short-term phases, the Foundation focuses on solving the immediate problem of health, before refocusing priority to the next phase to address the problem of poverty by providing livelihood options. The subsequent phase is education, which is vital in empowering the people so that they can permanently break away from the vicious cycle of sickness, poverty, and ignorance.

A DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR THE WORLD

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The denuded land in 1988, before the Doi Tung Development Project



Doi Tung was once a secluded place in the north of Thailand, in the heart of the once notorious Golden Triangle, on the border of Myanmar. The DTDP area covers approximately 15,000 hectares (about 37,000 acres). There are 29 villages and about 11,000 people that live in the area. The problems of Doi Tung were complex. This watershed area became denuded by overly intensive application of traditional slash and burn cultivation, further accelerated by commercial opium growing. Most of the six ethnic groups living there did not have Thai citizenship. They received little attention from government officials, and what little attention they did receive was often antagonistic. Armed groups occupied parts of the area. This made it even more difficult for government officials to provide any assistance to the local residents. Without proper irrigation,

local people relied on single season rain-fed crops, which did not provide them with sufficient food for the whole year. They became dependent on opium cultivation as a source of income and as one of their few medicines. Although the global trade in narcotics is extremely lucrative, those growing the crops actually received only meager returns. The people of Doi Tung remained poor. With opium readily available, many of the hill people became addicted to the drug. To help their families survive, young girls were driven to prostitution, but in addition to money, all too many of them also brought home the incurable HIV/AIDS.

The timeframe for the Doi Tung Development Project, which reflects these various challenges, is 30 years, broken down into three phases. Phase I is “Bridging the Gap between Doi Tung and the Outside World” (1988 – 1993). During this period, basic infrastructure was developed. Opium growers were paid daily wages to become forestry workers. Not only was the forestland restored, but the people received a secure and legal source of income immediately. Basic life necessities and job and skills-training opportunities were provided to all people—men and women, old and young. Besides the preserved forest, sustenance or utility forests and economic forests were planted to create short, medium, and long-term economic benefits for the local residents. Phase II, “Livelihood Development” (1994 – 2002) was focused around income generation—a first step on the road to sustainability. Several economically viable local resources and plants were identified and the Foundation introduced the concept of value-addition in order to optimize the value of limited local resources. Phase III, “Sustainability and Exit” (2003 – 2017), is about strengthening the business units so that they are not only self-sustaining, but also profitable. Branding the Doi Tung name became more important. Doi Tung coffee is a registered geographical indication, like Champagne or Parmesan. This will help ensure that the local people will uphold the standard and quality of the products under the name, Doi Tung, once the MFLF phases out. In this phase, it is vital to build local capacity and empower local people to take over once the project ends. The DTDP now focuses on giving the new generation education that fosters them to become capable and responsible citizens, life-long learners, and to understand and appreciate the effect of their actions on their lives, the lives of others, and on the environment.

The Foundation knows that development must be measurable and that a development organization is responsible for lives of people. The DTDP has to be accountable to all stakeholders for what it does. Since 1988, when the Project started, the MFLF conducted a yearly census for socio-economic and environmental data, in order to measure what the people get out of the project each year, as well as how to adjust and improve the development plans.

Flexibility and adaptability are among the DTDP's key success factors. As a social enterprise that generates its own income to further its social mission, the DTDP is able to be flexible and adaptable. The MFLF has been financially self-sustaining since 2001. Income from the four business units, Foods (coffee and macadamia), Handicrafts (textiles, mulberry paper, ceramics), Tourism, and Horticulture (orchids and other flowers), pays for the salary and wages of approximately 1,700 employees, and supports social and development activities in the project area.

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Shade-grown Arabica coffee in the Navuti economic forest



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One of the 22 branches of Doitung Cafe



These are some of the statistics that have been gathered over the past 21 years: In 1989, the average income in the target area was \$104 per person per year, (USD 1: Baht 36) (Equivalent to \$193 in 2007 after factoring in inflation). In 2007, the average income had increased to \$1,043 per person per year, up to the average income for all of Chiang Rai Province. Total income from agricultural land increased about 3-fold from \$388,889 in 1988 to about \$1.2 million in 2007, despite the fact that the total agricultural area was reduced from 58% of the total project area to approximately 12% (replaced mainly by reforestation). This has been achieved by emphasising the maximization of the resources at hand, through value-adding processes and the utilization of modern market-driven product design. In education, in 1992, 56% of the population was illiterate and only 0.2% had college or university degrees. Today, the number of university graduates has increased more than 25-fold, from 18 to 465 people. The majority of the new generation attends schools in the project area, which have adopted innovative curricula employing educational approaches, such as the Montessori Method and Constructionism, adapted to the local context.

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The Doi Tung area in 1988



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The Doi Tung area in 2007



By 2017, the MFLF will phase itself out of the development and management of the DTDP, leaving the project's social enterprises in the competent hands of a new generation of local leaders.

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Representatives from the Mae Fah Luang Sub-district Organization are the future leaders of Doi Tung.



OUTREACHING THE DEVELOPMENT BEST PRACTICES

In 2002, upon the request of the Thai and Myanmar governments, the MFLF shared its SALD model across the border into the Shan State area in a village where 6,022 ethnic minorities, who formerly grew opium, live. Since then, it has been sharing its expertise in SALD with other areas that have requested assistance. To this point, the MFLF has successfully applied the same principles and approach, as well as its lessons learned and best practices from the DTDP, to Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Indonesia, adapting to each unique situation on the ground.

THE MYANMAR EXPERIENCE

DOI TUNG II: YONG KHA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, SHAN STATE, MYANMAR (2002 – 2004)

When the MFLF first got involved in Myanmar, local conditions were severe. People died almost every day of malaria, tuberculosis, and other diseases. Food supply was not enough for everyone for the whole year. Children suffered from malnutrition. People were trapped in a vicious cycle of sickness, poverty and ignorance. The people lived in a survival world.

Thailand and Myanmar had a long history of warfare and the local people were naturally suspicious of the Foundation's involvement. At first, the MFLF team was not allowed to enter into the villages. Less than ten people came to receive medical service from the Thai mobile medical unit on its first mission. However, the MFLF team was persistent and worked to prove its sincerity and commitment. A series of Thai mobile medical units provided the "quick hit" in healthcare to combat various problems, addressing the people's immediate needs. This earned the trust of the local community. In addition, as was identified by the local people as priorities, a 16-bed hospital and a school for 500 students were built by paid local workers. More important than these constructions was the empowerment program that the MFLF introduced. The skills of local health personnel were strengthened through on-the-job training. As part of ensuring the community's self-reliance, young people were recruited and trained as malaria and TB technicians to diagnose and treat these diseases. Para-dentists and health workers were also trained to monitor the overall community health and disease outbreaks.

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The MFLF mobile medical unit in Myanmar to cure immediate health problems as part of the "quick hit" phase.



On the economic front, the MFLF surveyors assisted the local people in constructing a 30 kilometre-long (about 18.6 mile-long) irrigation canal. The canal irrigates 320 hectares (about 800 acres) of farmland, enabling the local farmers to grow sustenance and economic crops three times a year.

The MFLF did not just build a school, but also designed a practical skills curriculum to complement the formal education. The students spent one hour each day learning agricultural skills in the school's vegetable plot, chicken coop and fish pond, which provide food for the school lunch program. This had the additional benefit of providing the children with the skills to help their parents at home.

In three years, the local community went from zero cash and zero food security to full self-reliance food security and earning an equivalent of \$704,574 (both in cash and in kind). The total three year investment amounted to \$640,000 or about 10 cents per person per day.

BEYOND THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE TO THE GOLDEN CRESCENT DOI TUNG III: AN INTEGRATED KARAKUL SHEEP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, BALKH PROVINCE, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN (2006 – PRESENT)

Already one of the major producers of illegal opium, after the 2001 invasion, Afghanistan became the largest producer and exporter of illegal opium and opiates in the world. In 2002 the government of the United Kingdom, recognizing the MFLF's contribution to the elimination of opium poppy in the Golden Triangle, invited the MFLF to share the DTDP's experience in eradicating poverty to eliminate or prevent opium poppy cultivation at the First Afghanistan Drug Coordination Conference, held in Kabul. Since then, many Afghan delegations have come on study visits and attended development-training programs at Doi Tung. In 2006, the government of Belgium requested the MFLF work with them and the Afghan government, under a trilateral cooperation platform, to launch a SALD project in Afghanistan.

The same methodology was applied: first understand; then, reach out to listen and learn on the ground, and only then start to develop. With funding from the Belgian government, the MFLF conducted exhaustive consultations, research, and meetings with various Afghan partners and stakeholders. Finally, the MFLF, the Afghan Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), and local Afghan partners launched the Balkh Livestock and Rural Enterprise Development Project, also known as the A4 Sheep Bank (A4SB) in November of 2006 as a preventative measure to opium cultivation.

The reasons behind basing the project on sheep are that: 1) sheep are an important asset in the rural Afghan economy; and 2) there is much value-adding potential for products derived from sheep, such as yarn, carpets, food products, skins and hides. The A4SB began with a 'quick hit' by addressing the health of sheep to replenish the domestic sheep population decimated by years of conflict and drought. A subscription-based veterinary service is provided by trained Afghan para-veterinarians. In return, the sheep owners who opted to participate in the veterinary service are obligated to pay the bank a certain percentage of their newborn female lambs every year. The sheep bank takes these lambs and lends them out to economically vulnerable families, identified by their respective communities. The interactions among different actors in the rural community increase dialogue across all social sectors and contribute to the community's solidarity.

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Hands-on training
for the local mobile
veterinary unit in
Afghanistan



The impact of the A4SB can be clearly seen. By November 2008, two years after the project was established, the mortality rate for flocks participating in the program is 2.42% versus 18.99% of non-participating flocks. To translate this into monetary terms, each registered sheep owner would, on average, increase their total asset value by approximately \$640 per year. Overall, the project has saved approximately 3,747 ewes, valued at \$149,880, for the 236 registered sheep owners.

Value-added activities will be established to boost off-farm income. Local sheep owners will be able to utilize wool processing, tanning, and carpet weaving activities that have higher value-chain development potential. Today, a yarn-spinning machine based on the bicycle wheel, introduced by the MFLF, can be made locally for less than \$80. This intermediate technology can improve yarn-spinning productivity by approximately 150%.

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Afghan women give feedback on the new yard spinner introduced by the MFLF.



**FROM OPIUM TO CANNABIS; FROM HIGHLAND TO COASTLINE
DOI TUNG IV: ACEH SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD
DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
ACEH PROVINCE, INDONESIA (2007 – PRESENT)**

In 2004, Aceh province of Indonesia was hit by a tsunami; about 200,000 people in Aceh alone were reported as dead or missing. The livelihood along the coastline was wiped out. Aceh needed to be rebuilt. What remained intact after this disaster was cannabis grown in the hills, which had earlier been sold to help purchase weapons for the civil conflict.

In November 2005, the government of Indonesia, upon the recommendation of the UNODC, invited the MFLF to share its experience, to help it address the problem of poverty and related cannabis cultivation in Aceh Province, Indonesia. The MFLF's aim is based on the vision set out by the governor of Aceh, to increase per

capita income from \$1 to \$2 per day for 1.5 million impoverished Acehnese. This is to occur by the year 2012, speeding the recovery of livelihoods in Aceh, which have been ravaged by 30 years of civil conflict and the tsunami disaster.

In April 2007, the MFLF introduced a “Holistic Malaria Preparedness Program” for Mukim Lamteuba, a village cluster of 4,717 people. As in Myanmar and Afghanistan, the local villagers were initially suspicious of the MFLF's intentions. Team members were asked if they were missionaries. The team showed through their words and actions that they had no hidden agenda, but were committed to improving the people's well-being with the hope that one day, the villagers can continue with their own development.

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Malaria-infected child in Aceh, Indonesia volunteers to give blood sample.



In this program, local representatives were trained to lead their community to fight against malaria. As a result, within three months, malaria was almost completely eliminated from Lamteuba. Today, the Provincial Health Office of Aceh and the local university are working with the MFLF and its local partner to extend this model province-wide. The Indonesian Ministry of Health has also recognised that the program is a successful model of a comprehensive anti-malaria program together with poverty reduction which should be applied in other provinces of Indonesia.

The MFLF has also been working closely with its local partner, Sambinoe Foundation, and with government agencies and grassroots communities on “Sustainable Rural Development Programs”

for Aceh. In addition to the pilot sustainable rural development program, which began in Lamteuba, another holistic sustainable rural development learning center has been established in Maheng-Lamcot village (population 559). The Maheng-Lamcot program encompasses irrigation, agriculture, and livestock components.

A core objective of the ‘Aceh-SALD’ initiative is to revive the traditional ‘gotong royong’ spirit of cooperation and unity of local communities, empowering them to improve their own livelihoods.

In June 2008, the MFLF received an “Anti-Drug Award” from H.E. Susilo Bambang Yudhono, President of Indonesia, for its contribution through the project in Lamteuba. The ‘Sustainable Rural Development Centre’ in Maheng-Lamcot has been recognised as a learning center for other areas in Aceh, receiving over a hundred visits in a year from national and provincial government officials, members of the private sector, as well as international donors.

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The Goat Bank at the Maheng-Lamcot Learning Center



THE POVERTY-ALLEVIATION REFORESTATION MODEL ASSISTED REGENERATION MODEL – PANG MAHAN CHIANG RAI PROVINCE, THAILAND (2005 – PRESENT)

In 2005, the MFLF, in partnership with the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of the Siam Commercial Bank Plc., began a reforestation project in Pang Mahan, an area neighbouring the DTDP. The area covers 2,242 hectares (approximately 5,600 acres) and is the home of 18 villages of different ethnicities totalling 7,232

people. Based on lessons learned at the DTDP and advances made in ecology and forestry, the Foundation switched from the monoculture method to a method of caring for the existing trees and replanting a variety of species already indigenous to the area. However, the Foundation has adhered to its best practices regarding replanting with three types of forests: conservation forests for watershed areas; sustenance forests for the people to utilize; and, economic forests for long-term economic sustainability, to ensure the harmonious coexistence between people and nature.

In addition to reforestation, an extensive irrigation system was constructed to accelerate the natural regeneration of the forest, prevent forest fires, serve the agricultural area, and to be consumed in the homes of 10,784 local people, including those beyond the project area. People earn wage income from reforestation work and other supporting programs while waiting for the medium-term and long-term cash crops in the economic forest to become utilizable. Better varieties of seeds and breeds of livestock have been provided in forms of in-kind loans through a system of “banks” in order to create supplementary income.

With lessons learned and best practices from the foundation’s previous projects adapted and applied at Pang Mahan, the average investment for reforestation per hectare decreased from \$551 at Doi Tung to \$441 at Pang Mahan.

NATURAL REGENERATION MODEL – PUNA CHIANG RAI PROVINCE, THAILAND (2007 – PRESENT)

The Puna Reforestation Project is also in the Mae Fah Luang District, covering an area of 2,242 hectares (approximately 5,600 acres) with a population of 7,639 people. It is a partnership between two Thai development foundations—the MFLF and the Chaipattana Foundation (a foundation established to carry out development work of HM the King)—with the objective of extending the MFLF’s reforestation model to a wider area, benefiting an even greater number of people. The reforestation model was further refined; the method of “natural reforestation” or indirect reforestation was implemented. No new trees were planted, but sustenance and economic forestry zones on

the outer edges of the reserve forest allow the watershed area to regenerate itself without human interference.

This new reforestation approach decreased the average investment for reforestation per hectare even further, from \$441 at Pang Mahan to \$224 at Puna. Not only is it less costly, but the forest is growing back even more quickly using this method of reforestation.

TURNING DOI TUNG INTO A LIVING UNIVERSITY

While extending the SALD approach internationally, the MFLF also aims to develop the DTDP as a Living University to carry out its development legacy, while keeping pace with rapidly accelerating and evolving development issues, thus maximizing benefits to as many people as possible from its extensive experience and successful implementation. The Living University will be based around the sustainable livelihood development model, which tackles drug-dependent economies by addressing their root cause – poverty.

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A delegation came to Doi Tung on a study visit on Border Security Management.



The Living University will have dynamic, interactive, two-way learning in the real-life classroom of Doi Tung and other MFLF extension projects, featuring the MFLF development projects. The diverse development courses will not provide fixed answers and easy, one-size-fits-all solutions. Rather, visitors will take lessons back with them to adapt and apply to their respective situations. Each spin-off, each new

case outside of Doi Tung, will be treated as research and development for more effective and sustainable future solutions. DTDP training staff will visit alumni development sites, and alumni will return to Doi Tung for further training and knowledge sharing. Eventually, the Living University network will have global reach and relevance, and the SALD model will be a cornerstone of new developmental models.

4

Fulfilling Life at the Foundation

Pimpan Diskul na Ayudhya
Head of the Knowledge and Learning Center
The Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage

“I would like to wish all of you happiness and prosperity physically and mentally so that we’ll have strength to help others who are much less fortunate than us, so many of them, to be a little happier. I thank you all again.”

This is part of the speech in 1989 by HRH Princess Srinagarindra, the late Princess Mother of our present King, to the volunteer doctors, nurses, and health workers who worked for her Medical Volunteer Foundation.

I met the Princess Mother once from afar, but I was still so young then that I did not pay much attention to her. When I first joined the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (MFLF) and was told to be proud working for her, since she was the founder of the Foundation, it did not move me much. I chose my job then because the Foundation has good reputation and it allowed me to do good. However, after over 10 years of working with the organization, I know HRH well through her work, and appreciate and revere what she has done. I have a recording of her voice saying that quote on my computer, and listen to it to boost my morale when I am down. Today, I find myself working days and nights striving to keep her legacy alive.

HRH the Princess Mother takes a look at a patient with a prosthetic leg during one of her mobile medical unit tours to rural Thailand.



The MFLF has been a dream workplace. It gives a lot to you and it takes a lot from you. It requires that you give your best in all you do to help others to live better and one day, to become self-reliant. It makes you sleep in tents and walk for miles to prove your sincerity and commitment to the people you pledged to help. It teaches you to respect, to listen, and to learn from the people you work to help. It teaches you to be selfless and only give, give, give, and give. Then, it reminds you that your best just isn't enough, but that you have got to improve yourself to be even better so that you can do more to help more people. However demanding and tiring the work, it does make you a full person, happy and satisfied.

Joining the Foundation in 1999, I was one of the few staff at the Bangkok office. The business units of the Doi Tung Development Project (DTDP), one of the Foundation's flagship projects, were growing in size and scope. There was so much to do. The Bangkok office became the marketing arm of tourism, horticulture, food, and handicraft businesses; exporting its handicraft products, while at the same time, trying to bring international press and tourists to Doi Tung. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in recognition of the Foundation's achievement as a successful case in tackling drug supply problems in a sustainable manner, endorsed its products and, later on, promoted its development model to the world. So, I was a sales rep, PR person, and tour guide at the same time and had to know as much as possible to be able to tell and sell the stories and products. At that time, I visited

Doi Tung frequently, knowing many of the locals there but only at a superficial level.

In 2001, I left the Foundation to study for my master's degree in the U.S. I instinctively looked for schools that would allow me to study business and social development. It made me realize the uniqueness of what Doi Tung was doing and aiming for: sustainability, in terms of facilitating a holistic and integrated transformation as a social enterprise, making its own money to further its social cause. After almost two years, I was just ready to come home and save the world!

Back in Thailand, the Foundation's first international project in Myanmar had just been launched. So, I took a job as a personal assistant to the Foundation's Secretary General, Mom Rajawongse Disnadda Diskul, or Khun Chai, who is both a visionary and hands-on leader. I had to travel with him to Yong Kha, the project area in Myanmar many times. The field experience was invaluable. I was filled with ideology, as I had just come out of school, so to me, the project was another big classroom, but where I could learn real lessons about life skills and human values.

Khun Chai at the project site in Myanmar discusses work with the local people, project staff, and representatives from the Thai government.



Though Myanmar and Thailand had been fighting one another for centuries, trust can be gained through sincerity, perseverance, and commitment. Mistrust or even hatred can transform into kinship and cooperation through humility and mutual respect. It sounds easy and romantic, but in reality, before you can win the people's hearts, you have to adjust, readjust, change, and balance or keep fine-tuning your plans and actions until it is right. In the field, your antennas have to be

switched on 24 hours a day so that in the end, those whose lives and deaths depended on a malaria treatment, worth less than \$10, would allow you to help them. Having nothing much to survive on, it is pride and dignity that a human being holds on to.

The Wa people, an ethnic group known to the West for their head-hunting reputation and for drug trafficking to most Thais, died every day from lack of diagnoses and medicines for malaria. They suffered from scabies, itched, and did not know what to do. They would rather have someone pull their teeth out without sedative than bear the chronic pain. Some children found their sweets from sucking sap from leaves. After the year and a half that I was involved in the project, my life had been touched forever.

The experience also made me realize that there is no black or white reality, and we should not see things in terms of absolute right and wrong. Life is not that simple and straightforward. One cannot impose one's standards on others or pass judgment on others. Reality changes with time and context, and what you see on the surface might not be the real problem. I learned first-hand that democracy, which most of us so dearly uphold and whose virtues we studied about at school, means little if people have no food to eat or do not know if they will live tomorrow. It is only when people are ensured their basic needs, physically and spiritually, that we can ask them to exercise their rights and choose for their better future.

In Yong Kha, I could sense the deep connection between the facilitators and the beneficiaries of the development. The foundation worked hard to address the people's needs and empowered them to stand on their own. The people also worked hard to maximize the opportunities they were given. This is why, when the project was ended due to political uncertainty, most of us were heartbroken. However, today we cannot help but be proud of the people-to-people collaboration and the hope and spirit that we were able to rekindle there.

The MFLF has also been sharing its experience in SALD with a community in Balkh Province, Afghanistan upon the request of the Afghan and Belgian governments. Unlike in Thailand and Myanmar, we did not work with former opium growers, but with an at-risk group of those who might enter into narcotic crop cultivation if there were no alternative livelihoods.

The Afghan people I have met are real fighters. Like anybody else, they want to be better off and live with self-esteem. Eradicating their only source of income, opium, without providing them with better and viable alternatives, only forces them to opt for worse ways out, such as selling their daughters into prostitution. Instead of restoring human virtues and helping to build human capital, this kind of development only corners people and it might enrage them to seek revenge.

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The Afghans in a sheep market in Balkh Province



Living in cities, we are often out of touch with the reality of the world we all live in today. Our ideas and minds are shaped by a sea of information, pure and twisted, through a myriad of channels. How many of us, instead of drifting along with the flow, actually pause and try to find truth through direct experience, digging until we find the real reality, and go back to our inner selves to discover meanings? Why believe in everything we hear and see? Solutions for the problems in today's reality must not be the same as yesterday's or tomorrow's.

Throughout my stay at the MFLF, I have been very much inspired by our Secretary General, my colleagues, and most importantly, by the fact that I could actually help to make a difference in people's lives. HRH the Princess Mother gave us a very simple philosophy, that 'no one wants to be a bad person, but not everyone has opportunity to be good.' Looking at myself, I was always given opportunities to be good and do good, to learn, to experience, and to thrive on my own.

Nowadays, I wake up wanting to do more and go to bed thinking about what I did not have time to think during the day. How could I not do so once my life has been touched by all these experiences? Though my days are stressful, they are very fulfilling at the same time. Khun Chai often says that he is very lucky to be given the opportunity to work at the Mae Fah Luang Foundation. If someone else was given the same opportunity, he or she could probably have done better. However, since it is his responsibility, he must give his best effort. I agree and am living the same conviction.

Recently, I became a head of a newly established unit, the MFLF's Knowledge and Learning Center. Simply, its goal is to extract and consolidate, as well as analyze, the Foundation's best practices and lessons learned from our experience in Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development, or SALD, in order to share them with those who have the same aspiration or problems. In other words, my role is to help maximize the proven development principles and methodology, based on the Princess Mother's philosophy, to benefit as many people as possible. This is also my dream and I would love to have more people join us on this journey.

THE STUDENTS OF THE WORLD

One of the MFLF's original goals for the DTDP is to excel at what we do in order to become a development model for others to learn from. This has evolved into the "Living University" concept. The idea is to facilitate people from all walks of life to come and learn together and from each other in the huge, open, dynamic, and real-life classroom of Doi Tung and other campuses of the MFLF's extension projects.

The visit of four New York University students from Professor Ellen McGrath's Social Entrepreneurship class at the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service is part of the Living University. Unlike any other study visits, they proposed to produce a book about their lessons learned. At first, we were hesitant because New York and Doi Tung are different worlds—culturally, linguistically, and psychologically. One week might not be sufficient to blend the two worlds, let alone learn from and understand one another fully. I was even more concerned when one of the students started talking about having culture shock when she first arrived.

So, we insisted that the students had to meet with us every day after their tour around the Project to review what they saw, to make sure that they understood, and to address any of their questions. On the first night, we learned about what they did at home and their expectations for this trip. The projects that they are doing back in New York are impressive. It was obvious that the students have passion, determination, and are eager to learn. They asked a lot of questions but we suggested that the best way to learn is through their own direct experience. They needed to absorb what they see, hear and feel from the Project, and then we can start talking.

We saw their understanding grow every day. They were very receptive and respectful to all the people they had contact with. Each of them has unique, but complementary qualities. The Project really opened up their perspectives. However, they did not just learn from us, but also from one another along the way. We did not feel competition among them, but would hear them offering, discussing, and exchanging ideas.

On the last day, each of the students had to give a 10-minute presentation of what they learned and how they would apply it to their projects. The youngest of them is 19 years old and the oldest is 22. All of the MFLF staffs in the room were struck by their capability to grasp the essence of the project and by the sincerity of their feelings. One of our senior management even cried.

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Professor Ellen, Elizabeth, Josh, Amanda, Nick, Bethany, local leaders, and the MFLF staff at the Pang Mahan reforestation site on their first day of the tour



We were so proud of the students. It was very little that we did. We only gave them a chance to be in Doi Tung and to meet, feel, and learn from other people's life stories. The rest was the power and potential

that lies within each of them. One student, a few days after she went back to the U.S., wrote to us about how she successfully applied what she had learned from Doi Tung—the ability to listen and learn from local stakeholders—to her work. I would not be able to pull it off myself if I were in her place. She was proud and we were proud.

At the Foundation, we take pride in being a committed and result-oriented team. So it is very satisfying to meet the same kind of people and to be able to share this spirit with others.

A VIRTUOUS SPIRAL

Professor Ellen McGrath, her teaching assistant, Elizabeth Sherman, her son, Joshua Wexler, and the four students went through our rigorous study visit on their first two days. As planned, they got to see, touch, talk, and listen through hands-on experience and meeting with real doers.

Then, it was our turn to sit in on their CORE 4 workshop. We were reminded of our inner power to connect, focus, inspire, and achieve. They told us that these are already our strengths in the field, but we also need to cascade and reinforce them throughout the organization.

The song that Professor Ellen asked us to sing, “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine,” brought us back to our core value, a belief in each human’s worth, dignity, and potential. We have been directing our energy to bringing out the best in the people we work for. Now, we need to do the same with all of our staff.

The whole experience, the CORE 4 class and the student visit, was refreshing, rewarding and inspirational to all staff involved. Our hearts grew bigger as theirs did. The mutual belief, passion, experience and understanding have created an upward spiral of connectivity. Their visit bolstered our commitment to the Living University aspiration.

To borrow from something our Secretary General likes to say, in order to leave our children and grandchildren with a peaceful world, we need to start to “take a little less, and give a little more”. The NYU students have proved to us that their generation has willpower and potential to bring about a sound and sustainable future. They are fortunate to have the guidance and support of Professor Ellen. There are still many rough diamonds out there in New York, Doi Tung, and all over the world awaiting the opportunity to shine.

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The NYU, BCI, and MFLF teams in May 2009 at the Doi Tung Development Project, Chiang Rai, Thailand



5

Empowering Young Leaders to Change the World

Elizabeth Sherman
Project Manager, Bridge Coaching Institute
Teaching Assistant, New York University

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A view overlooking
the mountains at
Pang Mahan



From where we sit on the hilltop at the Pang Mahan Reforestation Project site, we have an incredible view of the sprawling hills of Thailand to the east and the hills of Myanmar to the west. Members of the Knowledge and Learning Center (KLC) of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (MFLF) have just given a powerful and inspiring presentation about the first phase of the Doi Tung Development Project that began here in the

northern hills of Thailand some twenty years ago. We've toured the self-sustaining camp where members of the project team live and work together, growing seedlings of various plants and trees that will soon be transported to hillsides stripped of plant life as a result of slash-and-burn agricultural strategies. We've met the welcoming project team and leaders of nearby villages, who were equally excited to meet us and to share their experiences and knowledge, translated by the talented members of the KLC staff. Now as I sit cross-legged in the open-air porch, overlooking the breathtaking view of the surrounding hillsides and enjoying a generously and abundantly prepared meal, I cannot help but think, "How in the world did I get here?"

Eight months ago, Dr. Ellen McGrath, whom I work with at the Bridge Coaching Institute, invited me to attend the first session of the course she was newly teaching at New York University, Social Entrepreneurs: Change the World Through Coaching and Social Action, an introductory course to the growing field of Social Entrepreneurship. I was already interested and involved in social change, but had yet to hear the term "social entrepreneurship." Knowing this, Ellen thought I would enjoy attending one of her classes to learn more. After just half a class session, I was intrigued and excited by the course material and the NYU students, and I knew I had to be a part of this class and this growing movement! Since then, I have had the privilege of working with Ellen as a teaching assistant in both the introductory class and the advanced class that grew from it and was offered the following spring.

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Dr. Ellen McGrath
in her Social
Entrepreneurship
class at New York
University



THE GROWING FIELD OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

To define it basically, a social entrepreneur is someone who uses innovative solutions to tackle society's most urgent social and environmental problems. The emphasis here is truly on innovation, as we move away from traditional social and government services and not-for-profit organizations that have had varied effectiveness and are often dependent on government or private funding. A social entrepreneurial venture is distinct from not-for-profit organizations, because it includes profit in its business models to achieve financial sustainability. Unlike other for-profit businesses, however, a social enterprise focuses on its impact on people and the community, as well as the environment, rather than simply focusing on the financial bottom-line. This is referred to as the triple bottom-line: people, planet, profit. All three are important factors for social entrepreneurs. Where entrepreneurs, in general, may change the face of business with new, innovative practices, social entrepreneurs create positive change in our society and environment by applying both proven and innovative business strategies and models of change. Though the term itself may be a relatively new one, "social entrepreneurs" have been fighting against social injustices since long before the term was coined.

The shared values of social entrepreneurs and change agents around the world, including integrity, accountability, and respect for the human dignity of all others, are values held in high esteem at New York University. On the forefront for educational resources and curriculum devoted to social entrepreneurship, NYU recognizes social entrepreneurship as "a form of public leadership that maximizes the social return on public service efforts while fundamentally and permanently changing the way problems are addressed on a global scale²."

Our fall introductory course is one of many that NYU supports as part of an effort to further develop a curriculum around social entrepreneurship. The course serves as an introduction to the concept and field of social entrepreneurship and presents examples of social entrepreneurs, innovators, and visionaries who are creating new strategies for solving society's problems. These case studies highlight both big,

² New York University Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation Program in Social Entrepreneurship. (2009). Social Entrepreneurship. Retrieved July 13, 2009 from NYU Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/reynolds/social/index.flash.html>.

global efforts, and also smaller, more local ventures and change agents working to resolve some of our most pressing social issues of poverty, disease, and conflict, among others. The course also challenges students to think of themselves as change agents and start to imagine their visions and values for bringing positive change to the world. Together, we work to empower these young leaders to imagine a better world and to see themselves creating it!

The advanced class grew from an interest and need that we saw in the introductory class; once empowered and inspired to create a positive change in the world, we found that our students wanted and needed more support to put their ideas in to action! The advanced course was established as a practicum, a project-based course in which students were expected to turn their visions for social change into a reality.

It was very helpful to have the full support of NYU as we worked with students in both the introductory and then the advanced classes. Originally housed in the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service, the two classes have now been cross-listed in the Wagner School and the Leonard N. Stern School of Business in an effort to provide even more support to the students enrolled and engaged in the courses. Another important and exciting development is NYU's commitment to establish Social Entrepreneurship as a minor so that students can take more courses in this area and be even more strongly supported in their goals to learn about how best to bring positive change to the world.

EMPOWERING YOUNG LEADERS TO CREATE LASTING CHANGE IN THE WORLD

As social entrepreneurs ourselves, we took a very innovative approach to teaching both classes. From day one, we expressed that we were not looking to create a traditional, lecture-style classroom, in which students were expected to listen quietly to their professor and soak up all of her expertise and wisdom. Instead, together as professor, teaching assistant, and students, we worked to create a community of learners who challenge one another to grow and to learn from each other and the various knowledge, experiences, and resources that we each bring to the table. Within this cultivating learning environment, we focused on three areas of development: expanding our knowledge, adopting

innovative approaches, and building the skills necessary to effectively create positive change.

Early in the semester for the introductory class, we focused on expanding our knowledge around the field of social entrepreneurship, first by describing and defining it. We then worked to better understand the injustices of the world and the steps that other innovators are taking to address them, encouraging the students to think creatively about ways that they might approach a similar problem in their communities through simulated and interactive exercises. Along with this, and equally important to knowledge of the world and others around us, however, is knowledge of the self. We strongly believe that to bring the most effective change to the world, we must work on being our best possible selves. So throughout the semester of the introductory course, the students worked on a transformative coaching portfolio, in which they were asked to reflect on their vision and values for change in the world, how they experience privilege and adversity in their lives, and their experiences of social change, as a way to engage the class material on a more personal level. This assignment proved to be a very powerful and meaningful experience for all of the students.

Crucial to successful social entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship in general, is innovation. In both classes, we examined new models of social change and innovative ideas of successful social entrepreneurs. One new model that we focused on is the theory of transformative action, which was developed by the founder of the class, Dr. Scott Sherman, who taught the course at NYU in 2007 and then passed it along to Ellen. He studied the practices of prominent leaders and social advocates and found that the keys to their success were 1) speaking the truth and exposing injustices; 2) being able to transform conflict, animosity, and hatred into cooperation, synergy, and goodwill; and 3) working towards building a new, better society, rather than just tearing down institutions of injustice in the old society³. The students read Dr. Sherman's book and we focused on the importance of each of these three principles for battling social injustice. Though the first, identifying and exposing injustices, is an important place to start as an agent of change, to really create lasting and meaningful change, we must envision creative solutions to the problems in our world and put them into action.

³ Sherman, Scott. (2008). *The Transformative Way; A Practical Manual for Changing Yourself and Changing Your World*.

The final project for the introductory class was a “Blueprint for Social Change,” in which students developed an innovative idea for how they would take action around a particular issue or need that they saw. The advanced class grew from students’ desires to continue to work on these blueprints, to actually launch their social ventures and begin to make lasting change.

In order to move forward on this essential piece of the process – taking action – we realized that our students needed more support and empowerment around skill development. In this way, Ellen’s background in psychology became an even more important aspect of the class than we could have anticipated. Her work on the CORE 4 skills⁴ to success in personal and professional endeavors, developed from research on applied and positive psychology, as well as 30 years of working with clients in a clinical and coaching environment, has been extremely meaningful to me personally and became a powerful tool in our classroom as well. We worked on each of the four skill sets for the following types of things:

Connector Skills (relationship skills) –

- Connecting to self to better understand strengths, as possible areas of contribution, and areas for improvement, as possibilities for learning and growing and indicators of where to look for others with complimentary strengths;
- Improving communication skills to work with a team on developing a social venture;
- Identifying ways to build trust and understanding, especially when working with a community in need;
- Learning to communicate your passion for your social venture and share it with potential supporters and funders.

Liner Skills (boundary skills) –

- Learning to set appropriate boundaries to create a safe and respectful work environment for self and others;
- Developing the ability to say “no,” respectfully, in order

⁴ McGrath, Ellen. (2008). *CORE 4; The 4 Essential Skills For Changing Your World Inside and Out*.

to uphold your personal needs and values, and to maintain the work/life balance needed to be healthy;

- Getting clear about the roles and expectations of team members and working together to meet stated goals and objectives;
- Maintaining a commitment to the triple bottom-line: people – planet – profit.

Conversion Skills (mood/thought management skills) –

- Examining the things that may trigger us, adding to our stress and anxiety, and make us less effective in our work;
- Learning to convert our negative thoughts and moods about ourselves, others, or our work into positive energy for change;
- Understanding how to work with populations who have experienced extreme poverty and trauma in their lives and what that means for their ability to overcome the challenges that they’re facing.

Strategic Skills (goal completion skills) –

- Setting realistic goals and objectives;
- Establishing a timeline for goal completion;
- Identifying the strengths of different team members, in order to maximize these strengths, and the areas where there is room for improvement or need of a different skill set in order to develop these skills or recruit new team members with complimentary strengths;
- Developing a plan for action that will align with the vision of one’s venture and create the desired positive change.

Along with these overarching skill sets, we found that the students in the advanced class needed additional support around specific business skill development for the creation of their ventures, such as for writing a business plan, forecasting a budget, fundraising, and other things. For these needs, we brought in various resources, including guest speakers who specialize in certain fields and could speak about

their business experiences. We encouraged students to connect with these people and others who could be helpful resources and who would be happy to share their experiences. All of this skill development was particularly important for students working to launch their ventures. Many students were extremely grateful for the practicum experience and the “laboratory setting,” as one student called it, in which they could develop their ideas, access the resources they needed to put them into action, and get support from fellow classmates working to do the same and often facing similar challenges.

One of the most inspiring things about the advanced class, in particular, was how effective the “community of learners” approach was for supporting the students in project completion. Each with different skills, experiences, and resources, the students found that they each had so much to offer one another, whether it be help creating a budget, a connection to a contact in a related-field, the technical skills to get a website up and running, and even the retelling of a story of adversity to reassure everyone that “we are not alone” in this sometimes-challenging fight for change. In addition to doing exercises to discuss the exchange of skills and resources, we had the students form accountability teams. These teams met weekly, both inside and outside of class, to discuss each member’s individual project and goals and to hold one another accountable to project completion.

Meeting and working with the talented NYU students who took the introductory and advanced classes in social entrepreneurship was, in itself, an amazing and rewarding experience. Their drive and passion to bring positive change to the world is electrifying! Then factor in Ellen, who is a talented and dynamic professor, and both classes are a recipe for success. She has the ability to bring out the best in each of us and maintains an impressive balance between pushing us to grow and step outside our comfort zones, while also creating a supportive and nurturing environment in which to try new things. It was unlike anything I have ever experienced in the classroom and I always left each session feeling energized and empowered because of what all of us created together!

THE DOI TUNG DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: EXPERIENCING THE LIVING UNIVERSITY

For our introductory course, we tried to bring in a number of local social entrepreneurs to share their experiences with the students. When Sunisa contacted Ellen to say that she would be traveling through New York with the Director of the Center for Social Entrepreneurship at the MFLF, Dispanadda “Duke” Diskul, and another team member, we thought it would be extremely interesting for them to come present to the class as an example of some of the international social entrepreneurial work happening. After an informative and impressive presentation on the work of the Foundation in Thailand and other countries, Ellen and I met with Duke and his team afterwards to talk about future possibilities. She was so amazed by the meaningful work that they have done to improve the lives of the ethnic hill minority people in Thailand and to expand their model in other countries, she felt that she wanted to contribute in whatever way she could. So she mentioned to Duke that if it would be helpful, she would love to come to Thailand to present some of the Bridge Coaching work and do a CORE 4 training to support their staff.

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(from left) Elizabeth,
Professor Ellen,
Sunisa, and Duke



What began as a simple idea and informal suggestion soon grew to an exciting possibility and then a powerful reality. Sunisa knew how successful the collaboration could be and worked really hard to facilitate communication between the MFLF and BCI and to help organize the trip

and training once the leadership of the MFLF was on board. When we knew we were going to go to do a training with their staff, Ellen began to inquire about ways that some of the students might get involved, both to learn from the successes of the Foundation and to contribute something back. Part of that contribution is this book! Our hope is that this book will reach people around the world to share the powerful work of the Foundation and also be a resource to other social entrepreneurs, who have so much to learn from the successful model that the Foundation has established.

In her introductory chapter about the Foundation, Pimpan “Whan” Diskul na Ayudhya, the Head of the Knowledge Center at the MFLF, describes the goal to turn Doi Tung into a “Living University.” Whan was a powerful part of our learning experience during our time in Thailand, sharing with us, both formally and informally, the vision, successes, and lessons-learned from the Doi Tung development work. This Living University model is by far the most effective way to learn and experience just how powerful the work of the Foundation really is, since seeing is believing. The student chapters will tell you more about our incredible experiences meeting the local people and touring the development sites, so I simply want to express how moved I was by the experience, and how grateful I am to have been a student of the Living University at Doi Tung and to have been adopted into the MFLF family, as we all were during our time there!

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Pimpan “Whan” Diskul Na Ayudhya shares with the students the MFLF’s best practices and lessons learned.



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Economic Empowerment in the Doi Tung Development Project

Alexander Hu
New York University Class of 2009

BACKGROUND

My name is Alexander Hu, and I am a 2009 graduate of the New York University Stern School of Business. I graduated with a major in finance and minor in social entrepreneurship and am now using my business education to launch a social venture called The Human Color. The Human Color is a clothing brand that stands for human unity and seeks to address issues of racism and discrimination through artistic cultural expression and grassroots activism. The trademark design of the brand is a color gradient that includes the spectrum of human skin tones—a human rainbow. I conceptualized The Human Color during my senior year at New York University, and further developed it into a business plan in the Advanced Social Entrepreneurship course.

After being involved in human rights activism for over five years, I began to feel grated by the often stark and in-your-face imagery of the field and its calls to action. A stereotypical example would include a jarring statistical figure paired with a pithy call to action— all in bold, gritty, and capitalized typeface. But one of the most important lessons that the not-for-profit and citizen sectors have learned is that people

do not respond to large numbers no matter how shocking they are; they respond to faces, to names, and to stories. The grim and rough imagery that was so pervasive in my experiences with activism made important statements, but I felt that it was also turning many people away from the causes. I designed The Human Color out of a desire to introduce a symbol that evoked hope and vision for a better future— one that focused on positive progress and harmony. I wanted to retain the culture of grassroots activism that had become a part of me, but with a fundamentally different approach and appeal.

The most natural direction to follow from creating The Human Color symbol was to create a clothing brand, as clothing serves as one of the most popular forms of self-expression and defining identity. To integrate the design into clothing would allow people to make more than a fashion statement, but also a statement of humanity. When customers wear a product by the brand, they will be able to find their own skin tone within the gradient and feel like a part of the greater whole of humanity.

After deciding to launch a clothing brand, I started the next step of searching for manufacturers to produce my designs. As a business student who passionately believes in corporate social responsibility, I wanted to ensure that my business model would be socially responsible and ethical. I did not want to partner with an opaque manufacturer that I was unfamiliar with and that may have been violating international standards of labor practices; I wanted to find a partner that empowered its workers and allowed them to lead wholesome and sustainable livelihoods.

The Doi Tung Development Project fit this criteria perfectly, and finding out about their work through classmate Patricia Chungsathaporn was truly a blessing. She had brought a beautiful handcrafted scarf made by the project to share with class. When I held it in my hands and read about the United Nations-recognized alternative economic development work of the organization, I instantly knew that I had to partner with Doi Tung—it was love at first sight. It was even further kismet that Professor McGrath was planning a trip to Thailand to visit the foundation and experience its revolutionary work. I didn't hesitate for a moment and knew right away that I had to go on the trip to meet the extraordinary people at Doi Tung and share my idea with them. I graduated in mid-May and boarded a plane to Thailand three days after the ceremony.

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The visit to the
Mulberry paper
factory



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN DOI TUNG

The aspect of the Doi Tung Development Project that intrigued me the most was its core approach of economic empowerment: the Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development (SALD) model. As both a business student and a human rights activist, I was interested in seeing how the SALD model effectively lifted people out of poverty while providing them with a viable set of skills and opportunities to build a new future.

The ability to make a sustainable and respectable living for oneself is a fundamental human right, and economic empowerment develops that ability in people suffering from poverty. Being able to support oneself and one's family not only allows for a safe and healthy livelihood, but it also creates a strong sense of self-worth and fulfillment. Through its work with the villagers of Doi Tung, the Mae Fah Luang Foundation has been engendering this holistic brand of empowerment. By shifting the villagers away from growing opium and equipping them with handicraft skills and agricultural know-how, the Foundation has armed the villagers with a valuable set of job skills that are both licit and more profitable.

The most important part of the transition is that it was not forced; the Foundation communicated with the villagers and presented them with alternative livelihoods that they could pursue. The villagers chose to adopt the new opportunities. This form of communication and connection was essential to establishing trust and understanding with the villagers, and it showed them that the Foundation was genuinely intent on providing them with better livings. The fact that the villagers

made the decision and choice themselves is very important to the path to self-empowerment. One of the main guiding principles of the foundation's work is a quote from H.R.H. the Princess Mother that states that people who resort to desperate measures like opium cultivation do not have the intention to do bad; they just don't have the opportunity to do good. And when those opportunities were laid out for the villagers to consider, the villagers seized them because they understood that they offered the hope and chance for a better future.

The increase in the villagers' personal incomes has drastically improved their standard of living and afforded them with new opportunities. Villagers, who used to live in fragile bamboo and thatched roof cottages, can now afford to purchase concrete houses that provide more safety and shelter. Home appliances including refrigerators and indoor plumbing allow the residents to enjoy a higher level of health and sanitation, and television sets and radios provide entertainment and news. Automobiles, trucks, and motorcycles have also become affordable to the villagers and have improved their means of transportation. Most significantly, higher incomes have empowered villagers to pay for college education for their children and to send them to some of the most reputable universities in Thailand. The ability to provide the priceless opportunity of higher education for children illustrates the intergenerational impact of economic empowerment.

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The Doi Tung people who used to live in bamboo cottages, are now living more comfortably in concrete houses.



One of the villagers, a man named Pichai, shared his story of empowerment. When the foundation began its work in Doi Tung, it employed Pichai as a gardener. Later on, he applied for a business loan

from the Foundation to set up his own garden plots and greenhouses. He paid back the loan within a year and now successfully grows and sells his crops. Pichai currently earns 10,000 baht per month, roughly the amount that he would earn in an entire year before he began his work through the Foundation. With his own business and higher income, he can now afford many of the aforementioned goods and is paying for his child's university tuition.

Kham and Orawan are two women who work at the weaving factory in Doi Tung. Kham, who was one of the first factory workers 20 years ago, saw her income rise from about 1,500 baht to 9,000 baht per month and is now the factory head. Orawan, who works in the quality control department, saw her income rise from 600 baht to 5,400 baht per month. Her two youngest children are attending Doi Tung-established schools and her oldest daughter is attending university at the top of her class.

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Kham (left) passes her weaving techniques to young weavers.



Stories like these illustrate how dramatically these villagers' lives have improved and show the effectiveness of SALD's economic empowerment. The average yearly income per capita has increased nearly 900% from 3,722 baht in 1988 to 37,543 baht in 2007. Through learning about the SALD model, I identified three key characteristics that make it unique and effective. These three characteristics are its ability to maximize value, its objective to transfer ownership, and its successful harnessing of demand.

MAXIMIZING VALUE

The Doi Tung Development Project is a shining example of a model that utilizes resources to the maximum extent and constantly creates value through its interconnected value chain. Coffee beans that are harvested in the hills of Doi Tung are prepared, roasted, and packaged to be sold to buyers throughout Thailand. They are also brewed and served at numerous Café Doi Tung locations in espresso, latte, and specialty drinks. A versatile and useful plant called vetiver grass is also widely utilized in the Project's environmental conservation work as well as its handicraft processes. The best example of the Project's value-generating resourcefulness is its use of the macadamia nut, also grown in the hills. The meat of the nut kernel is packaged and sold with a variety of different flavors. The meat of the nut kernel is also used in other products including macadamia herb, cookies, and nut spread. The husks of the nuts are used mulch and the inner hard shells are used as charcoal fuel in the ceramics plant, and the ashes are then used in the glazing process. No part of the nut is thrown away in the whole process.

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Flavored macadamia nuts, product of the MFLF's value creation, are now available in Thailand's leading supermarkets.



Through creating a system that maximizes utility and value, the development project can offer premium products that can earn higher profit margins. The project, which has been financially sustainable since 2001, earned \$13 million USD of income for the year 2008. All of its profits are reinvested in social development programs and 40% of the revenue are used to pay the workers' salaries.

TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP

One of the most intriguing and significant goals of the Project is its objective to transfer ownership and management of its operations to the villagers by the year 2017. The objective is intriguing because it stands in contrast to the prevailing culture of self-preservation that exists throughout organizations in the United States. The project's goal of self-removal as opposed to self-preservation is a testament to their dedication to empowering the villagers to stand on their own feet and operate independently. The deadline of self-removal drives the Foundation to utilize its resources effectively, measure its impact meticulously, and ensure that the villagers are acquiring the necessary training and experience to support themselves. The development project conducts census surveys and data collection to track its progress from the start.

The objective of transferring ownership is significant because it marks the next step of economic empowerment for the villagers: ownership of the factors of production and entitlement to all profits and benefits. The business and operations of the Doi Tung brand become the managing responsibility of the villagers and transforms them into entrepreneurs and business professionals in their own right. This transfer and transformation is truly the epitome of economic empowerment, and a powerful method of lifting people out of poverty by helping them help themselves. The sense of ownership that will be bestowed upon the villagers will no doubt instill in them a sense of pride and responsibility that will drive them to continue to grow and pass their success down to new generations.

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Former hired gardeners have become the owners of flower nurseries.



DEMAND VS. PITY

The fundamental reason why the SALD model is an engine for economic growth is because it is not a charity—it is a market-driven model that harnesses the driving demand of consumers to pass on economic rewards to the villagers. During the formative years of the Doi Tung initiative, the late Princess Mother emphasized that people should purchase the products made by the villagers not out of pity or charity, but because they are of high quality, and are unique products that are desirable. Indeed, the SALD model unlocks and transmits the talents, abilities, and intelligence of the villagers into impressive products that can be marketed and sold. Be it coffee, ceramics, or clothing, the villagers of Doi Tung are capable of producing goods that are in demand and that is what they should be recognized for.

Utilizing demand as the driving force is what allows the SALD model to be adaptable and implemented in other countries. The Mae Fah Luang Foundation has established sites in Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Aceh to combat narcotic crop cultivation and alleviate poverty. By studying market forces and demand in each country, and tapping into the expertise and wisdom of the local inhabitants, the Foundation is able to customize its development model into versions that work for the people and the country.

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Doi Tung's ready-to-wear collection at the Bangkok Fashion Week



THE HUMAN COLOR & DOI TUNG

Because the SALD model is market-driven, it is dependent on a stream of demand for its products not unlike a business. After seeing the big picture and understanding the structure of the project, I realized how a partnership between The Human Color and Doi Tung could be more powerful and beneficial than I had previously thought. Currently, the Doi Tung brand is distributed solely in brick-and-mortar locations in Thailand, operating 20 Café Doi Tung coffee shops and 12 lifestyle retail stores in regions from Chiang Rai to Bangkok. Partnering with Doi Tung would expand its market to the United States, where The Human Color is primarily based. Moreover, since The Human Color is an online retail site, it can potentially expand Doi Tung's market to other parts of the world and expose it to the benefits of e-commerce. The Human Color would then provide an additional stream of reliable demand for Doi Tung's products. Just like the SALD model has been implemented in other countries, the Doi Tung brand can also stand to expand internationally.

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Doitung's furniture collection produced by local villagers at Doi Tung.



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A Doitung Lifestyle shop in Bangkok, Thailand



The partnership would not only expand Doi Tung's market, but also its international presence. I was shocked to learn that Doi Tung's other business partners did not make an effort to give recognition to the organization. With the partnership between The Human Color and Doi Tung, I wanted to make sure that Doi Tung's role and story would be fully publicized and known to customers. The work that the Project is doing is truly revolutionary, and governments and aid organizations worldwide can learn much from Doi Tung's example. My hope is that The Human Color can help spread awareness of the SALD model and generate attention to the development project.

MOVING FORWARD

Visiting Doi Tung was a life-changing experience and it opened my eyes to the inspiring and powerful methods of empowering people to pave a better future for themselves and generations to come. I witnessed the strength and resilience of the human spirit and its will to overcome poverty and reach for success. The hopeful message and story of Doi Tung and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation have encouraged me to continue developing the same vision of hope with my own venture. The first collaborative product of the partnership between The Human Color and Doi Tung will be a scarf, just like the one that introduced me to the Foundation. I hope it will be the first product of many more to come.

7

Individual Empowerment in the Doi Tung Development Project

Amanda Raposo
New York University Class of 2011

"To effectively reforest the land, we must first plant the forest in the hearts of the people."

—HRH the Princess Mother

Empowerment. With such a beautiful metaphor it's hard to recognize how complex and challenging it can be to truly empower people. I am a young social entrepreneur working to help homeless teenage mothers in New York City build independent lives for themselves and their children. When I started this project I thought myself innovative in believing that empowerment was the key for change. I soon found that this value was a guiding principle to most organizations working with at-risk populations, but few knew exactly what it meant, where to find and apply it, and how to make it work. For the past year and a half, I have searched for the answer to these questions and came to find that it might be too idealistic a feat. Perhaps our society had become too disconnected and too competitive to empower people? Then, I visited the Mae Fah Luang Foundation at the Doi Tung Development Site in Thailand, and it was there that true innovation became my inspiration.

LESSON ONE: HOW EMPOWERMENT WAS FOUNDED— UNDERSTAND, REACH OUT, DEVELOP

I arrived at Doi Tung after a week in the urban jungles of Tokyo and following the end of an incredibly hectic semester at NYU. Our first tour was of the Reforestation Project in Pang Mahan and as I stood on top of a mountain decorated with tropical trees and flowers overlooking magnificent views of Thai landscapes, I took a deep breath of fresh air and thought to myself, “this is what I need.”

We learned that the Golden Triangle was at the heart of the opium trade only 21 years ago. I was confused. They spoke of such destruction of both the environment and the human race, but I could not see a hint of devastation in the beauty that surrounded me, or in the faces of the village leaders that we had the privilege of meeting. Could so much have changed in my lifetime? My previous knowledge told me no. Organizations back at home dedicate their missions to just one, maybe two, of the many social ills that Doi Tung faced, which were, among others-- drug addiction, poverty, poor health, violence and war, lack of education, and environmental damage. It would take years to make a dent in just one! My mind was fixated on how the Foundation could have come in and fixed all of these problems, but I learned quickly that this mindset in itself was what separated me from their solution.

The local people did not trust the Foundation at first. They had previously had bad experiences with other developmental programs, which were either inefficient or short-term and thus failed to create any long-term positive change in their lives. However, the Mae Fah Luang Foundation recognized that it is not possible to simply bring services to the community and expect them to succeed. Foundation staff made it clear that they were there to learn from the local wisdom of the people. “Development must respond to the geographical and social realities surrounding the community,” said His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. “We cannot impose but seek to understand what the people really need and explain to them our development principles.” The vision for Doi Tung Development was created through an equal exchange between the community and the Royal foundation. Those who were in need also had something to offer, and those looking to offer a helping hand needed the people to guide them.

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Villagers share their experience with various developmental programs and how the MFLF “has helped them to help themselves”.



For example, the Foundation discovered that the people wanted to learn how to grow crops that would be competitive in the global market. Originally, they grew opium using slash and burn methods because they simply did not know another way to make a living. The people learned from the Foundation that to survive and sustain themselves “people and nature must coexist in harmony, interdependently” (quoted from the late Princess Mother). Together, through equal communication and understanding, they taught each other about the land—how to reforest them, grow cash crops and create a thriving business without compromising social and environmental values.

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The hill tribe people are superb sewers. However, in the past they had no means to sell their handicrafts, and had to rely on opium cultivation.



Rather than coming in and trying to impose solutions, the Foundation included the local leaders so that they could develop their own. In doing so, they empowered the villages to take ownership over their own community and feel a sense of belonging. By asking for the villagers' approval and guidance, they also learned the most effective role the Foundation could play in meeting community needs. With this transparency, they built trust, and from social trust emerged a community empowered to work together and create their own positive change.

LESSON TWO: HOW EMPOWERMENT WORKED— HEALTH, LIVELIHOOD, EDUCATION

In New York City, statistics of homeless children and families, and of those dependent on welfare, continue to rise. This, in turn, increases statistics involving crime, violence, and poor health. How do we as a society address these problems? We expand—we build more shelters, we add more services, and take in more people. We also restrict—we put stronger regulations on government support to decrease dependency. We assume—if these individuals are unable to rise out of poverty, even with our assistance, then they are just unwilling. We accept this failure as a part of our social construction, and so the cycle goes on.

In Doi Tung, the lives of 11,000 had been transformed in 21 years, and in nine more, the villages will be empowered enough to take over the development project themselves. In less than a lifetime, many individuals who were opium growers and addicts, starving and sick, who didn't have running water or educational opportunities, were transformed into happy and healthy, self-reliant and socially conscious individuals with educated children working towards community independence. I was witnessing a phenomenon. How was this possible?

To empower the people, the Mae Fah Luang Foundation made sure to first understand itself. Everything the Foundation did was true to the principles it preached. They asked the local people to be self-sustainable, so the organization was self-sustainable as well. They are not dependent on grants or donors because they do not want to people to be dependent on them. They taught the villages the power of interdependence, so they developed revenue streams that met the needs of the community while also meeting the needs of the Foundation and all of the people involved.

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Community members have the right to vote in their village meeting.



In the development of our organization, I wanted to help the young women providing them access to the same opportunities I had growing up—good health, an education, and a strong sense of community. The question was how to empower them to take advantage of these services offered. I soon realized that providing access was not enough. What I learned at Doi Tung was that for people facing poverty, access must be provided in sequence. The Foundation's sequential approach focused on stability and self-reliance first. Only afterwards could the space for individual growth and social responsibility be created.

With a quick hit, the Foundation met the most pressing needs first—health. Access to health services provided tangible and immediate benefits that continued to build the trust of the people. They then focused on financial stability. Viable and sustainable livelihood options presented opportunity for self-reliance and positive self-esteem; both keys to empowerment. With this newfound inner-strength, the people then had the means to focus on long-term community development.

For instance, with a steady income, the children were no longer needed as helping hands in the fields and so could go to school. As Mae Fah Luang continued to stay true to empowerment as its guiding principle, they did not just offer education, but the Montessori Model of Education. The Montessori Approach is student-centered rather than teacher-centered. It follows a child's interests and self-motivation so that he or she has the opportunity to make their own decisions. Rather than providing education, they guide the children to teach themselves and this

builds their self-esteem. The children take ownership of their education and as a result are empowered to learn on their own. Sound familiar? The tools used to build inner-strength and social purposes among the community are passed down to the children through education so that they can rise back up again in the form of future village leaders. And the cycle goes on.

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Education is a long-term goal in the DTDP, compared with the more immediate health needs of the local people.



LESSON THREE: A CLEARER VISION OF EMPOWERMENT—MY GREATEST TAKE-AWAY

The beauty of empowerment is that it lasts. It starts with one individual and catches like fire until the community is thriving. It does not discriminate against a certain type of person, but proves that every individual within a community has something important to offer. To be empowered is to believe that “I matter.” It is the understanding that I am not the problem that society is trying to fix, but I am part of its solution.

My lessons at the Mae Fah Luang Foundation showed me that in order to create a sustainable solution for poverty, our focus must not be on meeting the needs of the people ourselves, but instead on fostering their inner-strength and social stability to do so themselves. Economic development is essential, but only a means to an end. The ultimate goal is to guide the people towards a happy and dignified life through building self-reliance and self-esteem, social purpose, and educational opportunities for the rising generations.

Rather than breaking the cycle, the Foundation built a new one. They

showed the poor how to provide for themselves by creating products for the well-to-do. The wealthier members of society helped to bring the people out of poverty by consuming their goods. The people were guided, not provided for and so they now have the tools to raise their own children as active members of the community. As educated community members their children will grow to be community leaders and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation will have officially worked itself out of the job. “Help them help to help themselves. If we are not around, the people must be able to continue on their own or it will not be sustainable.” This is what the late Princess Mother said. There will be no need for an overarching provider because the Foundation has created a cycle—an interdependent network of people, a human ecosystem in which the community can provide for itself and not just survive, but thrive.

HOW WILL I TAKE THESE LESSONS HOME?

Baby’s First Home is New York City’s first student-led initiative to open a supportive housing program for teenage mothers outside of the foster care system. Our organization was founded on two principles: the power of youth and a firm belief that each individual has something to contribute regardless of social factors. In order to pursue this mission we had to embrace and trust whole-heartedly in our ability, as youth, to change the world. We needed to empower ourselves so that we could learn how to empower the women we want to serve.

Over the past year and a half we have dedicated our time to understanding all matters involving homelessness and teen pregnancy in New York. We met with the representatives of organizations in both the public and private sector, and we took tours throughout shelters in New York City. From spending time with the homeless, to interning at existing shelters, to having the privilege of meeting with executive directors of various organizations, we did everything in our power to learn as much as we could about these social issues.

To our surprise, many individuals we spoke to, who had had first-hand experiences with homeless persons, expressed serious frustrations about the programs and services with which they were familiar. They reported the tendency for clients to fall back into unstable environments

and even homelessness regardless of the services offered. Although they were all able to provide their clients with the basic needs and tools for success that they once lacked, several reported the failure of the programs to actually help break the cycle of poverty and dependency in which their clients were stuck.

On the other end, the individuals who are or were once homeless shared similar dissatisfactions with these systems. They explained that in such a competitive society, it is not enough to just have their most basic needs met. They told us of programs that offered tools to help the homeless achieve short-term goals (i.e. shelter, food, money, healthcare, basic education, minimum-wage jobs, etc), but were unsupportive of long-term goals (i.e. higher education, home ownership, community involvement and social integration). These services were neglecting the root cause of the problem and instead just healing the symptoms.

We soon understood that the missing factor was empowerment. Our program needed a more humanistic approach—one designed to help the individual succeed, that caters to unique needs, rather than one monolithic solution to help the homeless. Our program also needed a multi-dimensional approach—one that addressed basic needs through financial stability, inner-change through life skills training, and social-purpose through community involvement.

We lined up services such as counseling, peer mentorship, health education, financial literacy, leadership programs, childcare, parenting classes, and spiritual support; as well as access to community service opportunities and educational and vocational training—but there was still something missing. We were providing, not guiding. We were not self-sustainable as we wanted our residents to become, and we were not involving every stakeholder that might support or receive support from our organization.

While at Doi Tung I realized that we were simply not in line with our own principles and needed to focus on developing them more. What did we mean by “regardless of social factors.” How might we apply this idea of empowerment? I started by thinking about community needs. It was too big of a picture to grasp. I then thought about my own needs and it brought me right back to the top of the mountains of Thailand. I am a city girl and all I needed was a breath of fresh air. What if Baby’s First Home went green?

By using local space to grow an organic farm, then selling produce to food suppliers in the local community, we can come one step closer to being a self-sustainable organization. In doing so we are also meeting three community needs: poverty alleviation, public health, and improving the environment. The garden will act as a means for us to develop a hands-on job-training program. Through this program our residents and community members can learn business skills, marketing skills, leadership skills, and become specialized in the growing fields of health and sustainability.

For the community, this will bring a public green space, fresh produce, a volunteer opportunity, a job-training opportunity, and lessons in health and environmental studies. For our residents, in addition to gaining social trust they will learn skills to help them become financially self-reliant, both of which are key to stability, empowerment and success with long-term educational goals. Rather than coming together as a common problem they will be working with a common purpose towards a common solution.

With the help of marketing guru Giles Dickerson and the combined forces of our Baby’s First Home team, things were starting to make sense. In creating a community garden we will be providing opportunity for an equal exchange of resources between individuals in a local community, homeless or not—everyone has something they need; everyone has something to offer. Our job was to simply bridge the gap between those serving and being served. To do so, involvement must be in everyone’s self-interest. By meeting a community need through self-interest, everyone is empowered to be involved and work towards greater social change. The garden was a start, but with more stakeholders involved we had to continue brainstorming under the umbrella of our own principles.

To our delight, we realized that our successful bi-monthly fundraising event that we had already launched was right on target with our greater vision. Kids For a Cause is a series of donation-based, themed pajama parties for kids whose working New York City parents get a night off, their children get a night of fun, and Baby’s First Home gets 100% of the proceeds. In this way, everyone is helped and being helped. In an interdependent community, everyone benefits.

Any support we receive outside of these programs will be returned by any support we can offer. For those who have the ability to give, we

will provide an opportunity for them to receive. Understanding that to be human means that we always have the ability to learn and grow, our goal is to develop a network of support in which we can match each individual with the guidance and expertise they need.

At first we feared that we were straying from our ultimate mission; our call to action to help the homeless teenage mother. Why was she so disenfranchised? Because she was a victim of the breakdown of society—of a cyclical and intergenerational dependency on public services and social distrust. Homelessness is a result of failures within the community, so the only way to solve it is if the community takes ownership and actively participates in making it better. Why did we see hope in her? Because she is human. And just like anyone else, she wants to be happy and improve the quality of life for herself and the people she cares about most. This simple truth breaks all barriers between those helped and being helped. This is what everyone wants and needs, regardless of social factors.

That's where we come in. Our hope is simply to help improve the quality of life in our own community by realigning the resources that already exist. We will do everything in our power to assess the needs of everyone involved in our program, from the homeless to the philanthropists, and leverage our power as an organization to connect them with any resources that can help fulfill their lives and enhance their well-being. Like Doi Tung, we will help our community thrive by guiding our people towards the development of their own urban ecosystem.

COMMUNITY BOARD HEARING

My head was spinning as I stepped off of the plane from our 21-hour journey home. I felt like I had just woken up from a long dream, but also knew that I had come back a changed person. I had so much to tell our team and so many lessons to share. I feared there was no way I was going to be able to truly express how inspired I was. Little did I know how immediate the effects would be.

On the day I arrived there was a Community Board Hearing scheduled for us to present Baby's First Home to the community in which it will be located. At the front sat the Community Board and various

community leaders and in the back were members of the community. An individual or group interested in proposing a new project or initiative for the community speaks to the audience and opens the floor for questions. After listening to what the community has to say the board votes to approve or disapprove the proposal.

Before it was our turn to speak, a police officer presented his program. He wanted to bring a youth development program to the community, "to bridge the gap between the police force and inner city youth." Although the people thought the cause was great, nobody wanted it in their neighborhood. As much as the board tried to keep order in the court, things began to get out of hand. People were yelling at him and insulting him, telling him to 'take the program somewhere else!' After he attempted to address their concerns the board voted and did not approve his program.

Then it was our turn and we were asking for the same thing. We knew right away that the presentation we had prepared would not suffice. It was up to me to improvise. Nerves kicked in, but then I remembered a simple lesson from Doi Tung and realized I knew exactly what to say. I took the microphone and started speaking over the noise.

"My name is Amanda and I'm here to present to you our organization, Baby's First Home. To be honest, I am a little intimidated by what just happened, so before I get started I'd like you to know one thing. We are here in hopes to gain your support, but most importantly we are here in search for your local wisdom. We are very passionate about our project and our cause, but you know this community best so we are here to learn from you."

To my surprise, everyone silenced. I took this opportunity to explain the mission of Baby's First Home and then the floor was open to questions. They were somewhat aggressive at first, asking about safety and security, the selection process, and other program details. We were prepared to answer them all. As time went on they became increasingly excited and started to offer up advice and support. Finally, when Baby's First Home was put to vote, only four out of about 30 board members said no. With

this notion, we had officially been approved and recognized by the local community—a big step for our success as an organization. Afterwards we connected with everyone that offered their guidance so that we could continue to build a relationship with the local community.

“To effectively reforest the land, we must first plant the forest in the heart of the people.”

It can be to truly empower the people. But because my Western mind was thinking too hard about how to fix a problem I was separating myself from the solution. The Mae Fah Luang Foundation inspired me by bringing me back to the basics. We need to coexist with nature; we need to help each other; we all have something to offer; we all want happiness. But to make these principles a reality is far from simple. A successful social venture must be self-sustainable and must actively involve every stakeholder. Every action must be consistent with its beliefs and every individual must feel empowered to apply these guiding principles transparently. I heard this phrase on the first day I arrived at Doi Tung, up at the top of the Thai mountains at the Reforestation Project. At first all I could think was, “How?!” It was a powerful vision but how did they make it possible? As days went on I gained the lessons and experience I needed to answer this question myself. By the end of the trip I had unexpectedly turned its meaning inwards. I was so inspired that I could not wait to come home and help my own community thrive. With this, I realized that empowerment starts with the self—myself—and the same goes for every individual waiting on the sidelines with something unique and beautiful to offer to their community.

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The new generation of Doi Tung smile with hope for their better lives.



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Community Development and Engagement in the Doi Tung Development Project

Nicholas Jensen
New York University Class of 2011

I awoke on a mountain. The grass outside is wet from the heavy rainfall the night before, and only part of the lawn is visible. Thick, billowing fog gently brushes the tips of the perennial grass, nestling in a quiet pause between mountain peaks. A tender orange glow breaths through the fog, steadily growing stronger and evaporating the mist.

This is the image that I will remember for the rest of my life.

Coming from rural Nebraska, I could not have dreamed of going to a place of such beauty, such richness of life and nature. These were things that I had only heard of but never imagined that I would see so early in my life. After high school, I moved halfway across the country to go to school at New York University in New York City. During my first two years at NYU, I realized that I wanted a career that truly made an impactful, positive difference in people's lives. With this commitment in mind and heart, I took a class in Social Entrepreneurship, taught by Dr. Ellen McGrath.

While in Dr. McGrath's class, an opportunity arose to go to Thailand. It was an amazing chance to see the world and I thought that I might be able to contribute something on the trip. As the course continued and more details about the trip surfaced, I became increasingly hesitant—the

timing of the trip conflicted with previously arranged summer plans—but realizing that all things happen for a reason, I found myself counted among those confirmed to make the journey.

The first night that we arrived in Thailand, two other students and I stayed in Bangkok. We went out exploring to see the different night markets and outdoor taxis in the busy, crowded metropolis of the capital of Thailand. What a different experience we had the next day traveling to Chiang Rai and to the Doi Tung Development Project. This is where we were introduced to staff members of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage, and to the legacy of the Princess Mother.

The next several days were spent learning the ins and outs of all the different aspects of the Doi Tung Development Project and getting a glimpse of how the people's lives had transformed. I hope to share the most powerful lessons I learned with you in the following pages.

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Local militias in the Golden Triangle sold drugs and arms before the Doi Tung Development Project.



LESSON ONE: YOU MUST FIRST ADDRESS THE BASIC NEEDS OF THE INDIVIDUAL BEFORE ANY COMMUNITY CHANGE OCCUR

One lesson I learned is that people will produce, contribute, and add value to society when given the opportunity. For years, the people in the Doi Tung project area (which is in the heart of the Golden Triangle) had no other option but to grow poppies for opium production in order to make a living to feed their families and ensure their safety. Because they were in such a remote location, the local people had little market leverage

trying to sell other products, but the abundance of opium and the local drug lords ensured that the world market would come to them.

What came to mind during my observations of the various steps of the development project was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow, a famous psychologist from the West, studied and published theories of individual development. First, one must fulfill basic survival needs—food, water, air and shelter. Then one can focus on fulfilling safety needs. Only after those two needs are met, accordingly, can one develop love and belonging—having friends and family. Then, esteem needs can be fulfilled—being respected, having confidence, before finally and ultimately developing self-actualization—creativity, problem solving, morality, etc. As the image below shows, we have to work from the bottom up in fulfilling our needs.

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Maslow's
Hierarchy of Needs



Twenty years ago, when the Mae Fah Luang Foundation first came into the project area, Doi Tung, in the northern hills of Thailand, they found the once-healthy forests dead and bare. There were no paved roads, and there was no running water. Everyone was operating in survival-mode, trying desperately to meet his or her basic survival and safety needs. Not many villagers could understand Thai and they didn't have Thai citizenship to ensure them any government protection or aid. Because of this, they couldn't travel and didn't have access to any kind

of basic infrastructure and were essentially trapped on the mountaintop. The presence of the drug lords further deflected any government assistance.

The Princess Mother believed that if people had an alternative to destroying the land and producing drugs, they would take it. The problem was, the alternatives did not exist. For the first phase of development, the Foundation realized that they needed to offer an immediate income-earning alternative. So they started hiring the villagers to start reforesting the land - paying them with cash income more than what they were used to getting from selling opium. The Foundation intentionally focused on livelihood development, rather than opium cultivation or drug problems, aside from establishing a drug rehabilitation center. They chose to focus on the positive and create alternative options for the local people. This is how people began voluntarily transitioning from drug production in the development area.

Another issue that the Foundation addressed when they first entered the Doi Tung region was the poor health of the local people. One of their “quick hit” and short-term strategies was to provide vaccines and medicines that could improve the health of the people, therefore helping to meet their most basic needs in the hierarchy. Without good health, people cannot work or take advantage of other opportunities for development.

The lesson here underscores something magnificent: people want to contribute positively to society for the greater good. People will choose to produce rather than destroy. People only turn to destructive devices out of desperation. I felt this lesson impacted me because it changed how I thought about basic human needs and our inherent spirit of altruism. Understanding this allowed me to move forward in my endeavors without feeling a need to impose doing-good onto others. Rather, I can now work to provide avenues and opportunities for people to naturally fulfill their need to contribute.

LESSON TWO: SELF-ACTUALIZED INDIVIDUALS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO BUILD-UP THOSE AROUND THEM

Another key lesson that I learned while at the Mae Fah Luang Foundation was that once an individual has reached Maslow’s stage of “actualization,”

he or she can help those around them to reach that level. If an individual was starting to do well, and his family was also being provided for and reaching actualization, he would look to help his friends and neighbors.

I witnessed an example of this at the Mae Fah Luang official garden. Originally hired as a gardener, one man was able to save up enough money, while building confidence in himself and his skill, to start his own gardening business. He now grows flowers and seedlings that he can sell to the Mae Fah Luang garden to be planted. Entrepreneurship is perhaps one of the greatest measures of societal progress and development. Initially, this individual needed employment assistance from the Foundation, but now he is providing others with employment assistance.

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Pichai, former MFLF’s gardener, is now the owner of flower nurseries.



This was a key distinction that I noticed between communities in Thailand and communities in the United States. While most people want their and surrounding communities to succeed, American culture is embedded in a constant state of competition. Competition drives the American Dream—constantly comparing and competing with those around us. Who has the nicer car? Who has a higher salary? Who has more lavish vacations? In America, we are constantly “keeping up with the Joneses.”

By interacting with the villagers, I felt that they cared about their neighbors’ happiness and success, as though it was intertwined with their own. One person’s suffering did not lift another person by comparison;

rather, one person's suffering brought another person down. It was an ownership and investment in bettering one's own life, which included bettering those around you.

Another example of this is the drug rehabilitation programs and social mores set up by the villages. In order to get the drugs out of the villages, they had to cut off the demand for drugs. The local drug addicts were offered rehabilitation and communities started to set their own standards for drug offenders. In one village, if someone was found to be abusing drugs, they had the choice to go to jail or to rehab. If they were found abusing drugs a second time, they were given the same choice again. But if this happened a third time, the offender and their family were banished from the village. This particular lesson helped me understand more profoundly the Thai sense of community. It made me realize what we in America should strive for, and what shortcomings we possess when it comes to developing community.

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Slash and burn cultivation was a common agricultural practice in the Doi Tung area up until 1988.



This really hits home for me, because I am a Resident Assistant at a Freshman Residence Hall at NYU. One of my primary job functions is fostering a sense of community and stimulating communal bonds between residents. While it definitely is a very different environment, some of the key components of community will remain. It is something that I personally believe in, that we should look after one another: that the people who surround us are a reflection of our own selves. It reminds me of my time on the Obama campaign. While in states like Iowa, Nebraska, and Missouri we would go door to door and talk to regular folks who

were just trying to get by. The Obama campaign was promoting the reality that one neighbor's demise is not another's success; that we have common problems that must be met with community solutions.

In one small town in Missouri, I spoke to a couple for upwards of three hours (trust me, it was that scintillating for me to stay for three hours). We really meshed and went round and round talking about community issues and how one person can greatly change circumstances. One particular problem their community was facing was a giant pothole that had been starting to ruin their cars. We discussed that although one person going to the city council or community board might not make that much of an impact, but that one person could gather, rally, and organize the neighbors who want to see a change in the pothole situation. And the one person complaining swells to ten concerned citizens, which turns into fifty active community members holding their elected officials accountable to provide services they were elected to provide. The beauty of the Obama movement is that core to the structure is an idea that we are all intertwined in each other's success, so it makes sense for us to help others as much as possible and make communal actions.

This part of an Obama speech sums it up nicely: "A belief that we are connected as one people. If there's a child on the south side of Chicago who can't read, that matters to me, even if it's not my child. If there's a senior citizen somewhere who can't pay for her prescription and has to choose between medicine and the rent, that makes my life poorer, even if it's not my grandmother. If there's an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties. It's that fundamental belief, I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper that makes this country work. It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams, yet still come together as a single American family. 'E Pluribus Unum.' Out of many, one."

LESSON THREE: A COMMUNITY "ACTUALIZES" MUCH LIKE AN INDIVIDUAL DOES

The final lesson learned was that communities develop in the same way that individuals develop. If we look back at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we can see that communities must reach basic and safety needs before

developing any kind of identity or collective sense of self worth. From there, communities can actualize and help others to develop just as well.

One story that we were blown away with was the story of the stream that ran through two villages. These villages are nestled in the mountains, and so clean running water can be an issue the further downstream you are. But since the community upstream was able to provide basic safety needs and develop as a community, they started to look out for the well being of neighboring communities. They “actualized” as a village. This community upstream took it upon themselves to ensure that they kept the stream as clean as possible so the next town had clean water. In this way one community helped another community meet basic safety physiological needs.

If it wasn’t impressive enough that one village was helping out with another village, we sat down to talk about the sub-district administration in the region. We found out that the sub-district administration had won many awards for efficiency and good government, which was impressive. But what was more impressive is that when neighboring sub-district administrations needed some help, the other sub-district administrations would step up and provide assistance. This blew our minds! Imagine that instead of the state of New York and the state of New Jersey constantly competing against each other and having power struggles on joint projects, they worked together and helped each other. This was paramount in our lessons on how these communities really worked together to develop and improve the lives of the people.

One of the other links in this chain of strong communities is the education system. Some of the classrooms in the villages use the Montessori approach to education, enabling students to pursue their natural curiosity and fall in love with learning. I believe that this kind of education will lead to leaders that will bring their strong sense of community to even higher levels of government, up to the nation of Thailand, and then Thailand will actualize and help neighboring countries, and then Asia will actualize and help other continents. If this system has its way, the entire world will actualize and become one huge community of people—six billion people, all working together.

I can take this back to my own communities and, in my own way, really encourage this principle that we are our brother’s keeper and that we are not islands, but joined together. What we experienced in Thailand does

not have to just stay there. It can happen anywhere and it begins in our own lives, spreads to our communities and will continue at an exponential and spiraling rate. Individuals help individuals, they collectively build community; communities help communities, they collectively build villages and towns; towns help towns, collectively build state and district governments; states help states, and up and up and up.

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People of Doi Tung are encouraged to preserve their cultures.



NEXT STEPS: BRINGING DOI TUNG TO THE WORLD

I look forward to returning to the Land of Smiles again to work and extend the impact and model of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation. While the Foundation has built a very strong, creative brand in Doi Tung, it is only known mainly in Thailand and small circles in the fashion community. While we may not want to make the Doi Tung brand and label ubiquitous, I think that there is a definite demand in America.

For instance, a lesson that I learned long ago is to not make it your mission in life to change people’s default behavior. You should, instead, use people’s default behavior for the betterment of society. In America, there is an attitude where you have to compete with your neighbors (like I said, “keeping up with the Jones”), so products that are as rare and as beautiful have a definite market in the US. And when one neighbor can say that they \$2,000 in purchases went to support such a great cause as the work the Foundation does, they will inspire their neighbor to do something equally as good in order to “keep up.”

I would love to help the Foundation bring the Doi Tung brand to an international market and create pathways for goods from social enterprises to be brought to appropriate markets.

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Doitung booth at
MACEF Fair,
Milan, Italy
September 7-10,
2007



CONCLUSION: CREATING COMMUNITY AND BUILDING PEOPLE

I think back to that cloud I saw the first morning in the mountains of northern Thailand. As I envision its delicate majesty, I see that I am the cloud. Clouds are fleeting, they come and go. When the sun evaporated the cloud, the mountains were what remained. While I was there for only a short time, observing and absorbing what I could, I eventually left. Even as people come and go, the foundation of these communities are solid and strong as mountains.

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Human Connection through the Transparent Lens: The Smile that Prompted a Million More

Bethany Halbreich
New York University Class of 2011

“Yes,” she said. Her eyes embodied an enthusiasm that I haven’t seen since Steve Jobs invented the iPhone, and a peacefulness that I have never before witnessed—one that was possibly of a similar solitude to that of Gandhi. Graceful, enduring, and comforting, her stare ensured me that everything was going to be okay. Her eyes brought to life what her heart knew.

I had never before paid so much attention to detail; every blink, every wince of her face. I analyzed every flinch she took and tried my best to detect why she did it. I even identified six different smiles, and matched her with a color in my head. In today’s day and age, one might diagnose me with a case of “Obsessive Attention to Detail Disorder,” but I simply call it my newfound “Act of Seeing.” Anyone can look, but can we see? Anyone can hear, but can we listen? There was nothing in between her and I; not a worry in the world; I smiled, she smiled, and we became friends. Perhaps “yes” was the only English word she knew and the reason why this was her greeting to me. I was so awestruck by the beauty in her eyes, I failed to notice that she said “yes” rather than “hello” in an effort to show me she was open to learning about my purpose in Doi Tung, and sharing her own.

Upon our arrival in Doi Tung, we asked for information on all the places we were to visit the following day so we could be fully prepared to experience whatever there was to experience. However, I quickly came to realize that this was the wrong approach. One can never experience something properly if they have a preconceived notion of what their experience should entail. Sunisa, a crucial facilitator of our visit, suggested that we observe for ourselves, rather than solely base our opinions off of the translator's perspective.

In essence, we were there to find the heart of the matter and to spread the word. However, each of us was there for a different reason as well. I was primarily interested in assessing the effects of good and bad cross-cultural communication. This subject matter is something that has never failed to intrigue me. The way we think and transmit information from the outside world, inward, becomes engrained in us from birth, and continues to become even further embedded in us as time goes by. Though we may share certain common human experiences across cultures, we are each born into different societies and cultures that impact our perspective of the world from the time we are born. Our culture of origin plays a critical role as we further our understanding of the world and determines how we perceive opportunity and success. Malcom Gladwell's current bestseller, *Outliers*, generated hype over the claim that "our ability to succeed at what we do is powerfully bound up with where we're from⁵." HRH The Princess Mother of Thailand grasped the meaning of this view to a great extent. Since 1988, her philosophy: "When people are given the opportunity, their potential can be realized," has changed thousands of lives in Thailand, and continues to do so.

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Ex-opium growers
have now become
coffee farmers.



⁵ Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers*. November 2008. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008. Print.

A FOUNDATION THAT REALIZES THE POWER OF POTENTIAL

Now, the people of Doi Tung have the means to live to their greatest potential. It is evident that they are unconditionally appreciative of the opportunity that the Foundation has provided, and for the infrastructure the development project has implemented. None of us needed a translator to figure that out; all we needed was a set of eyes and ears. We could see the appreciation in their smiles, and hear it in their voices. The woman who greeted me with a "yes" was the epitome of the expression, "a smile is worth a thousand words." I didn't know who she was or what her story entailed; all I knew was that she smiled and spoke as though she was grateful for having the opportunity to be happy. Could it be that twenty years ago she was impoverished, sick, and deprived of the resources needed to keep herself alive? This downward spiral was completely reversed by the Mae Fah Luang Foundation's work. Now, this woman's quality of life is far superior than she could have ever fathomed.

The Foundation's development approach is a simple one: Understand, Reach Out, Develop, and Continue. The reason why the Foundation's work has been so successful is because they became familiar with every inch of the land, and every person who called it home. Only then could they effectively assess the need and empower the people. Of course, there are hundreds of other established philosophies intertwined with this one (such as the philosophies tightly woven into the people-centric development approach of the SALD model of Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development) but it all boils down to the simplistic framework of Understand, Reach Out, Develop, and Continue. However, if this approach is so simple in its entirety, why is it that much of the world has proven incapable of grasping such a concept? Assuming that the large majority of us desire a happier world, we must strive for smiles across continents, and communication on a global scale. To do this, we must understand other cultures, realize the power of opportunity, and the potential of the individual. And that is precisely what the Mae Fah Luang Foundation exemplifies and what my visit to Doi Tung engrained in me.

A FOUNDATION THAT MANIFESTS LIFE-CHANGING PHILOSOPHIES

I believe that if what you learn never manifests itself in some way, you never really learned it. My visit to Doi Tung was exceptional because I saw how these philosophies were manifested, and how they truly took a life-changing effect on over 10,000 people. Sometimes the best of us preach to the extent that, sooner or later, we fail to walk the walk; we need to put our words into action. After the first day of our visit, I was speechless. Never before had I seen something like this in action; I had only read about it in books that depicted the reversal of the downward spiral of an area. In my head it was simple: a group of highly committed people realized that help was needed so they gathered the relevant resources and took action. I was witnessing extraordinary philosophies manifest thousands of dreams. I was in awe. When it truly hit me, a tear came to my eye, and at that moment, I knew it. I knew that this is what I need to do for the rest of my life. I knew in my heart that there were millions of other people who were not as lucky to have a team like the Mae Fah Luang Foundation supporting them. I instantly thought of the dozens of other countries that could significantly benefit from this model. There are dozens of countries with such corrupt governments that they make sure some of their people never see happy days; countries with impossible infrastructure; and many that have been on a downward spiral for years and will not survive if something is not done soon to reverse the cycle. My visit to Doi Tung showed me a world of possibility; a world where persistence, determination, and love can make the impossible, possible; a world where the micro approach is just as important as the macro; and a world where the appreciation of joy in one woman's smile can prompt a million others.

In this chapter, I will discuss my ideas about the true meaning behind the Mae Fah Luang Foundation's development philosophy: Understand, Reach out, Develop, and Continue and the importance of why one step cannot exist without the other. Taking action on a macro-level begins on a micro-level, with one person. The Doi Tung Development Project's mission statement says it all. Their mission is "to ensure that the people of Doi Tung are economically self-reliant and able to continue the process of their own development as responsible citizens, amid an

ever-evolving globalised world, without compromising the environment or their own cultural values." An Individual exists in a culture of a world filled with opportunity.

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The MFLF creates jobs for the people of Doi Tung by having them processing coffee and sell them at Doi Tung Cafes.



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Khun Ying, the MFLF staff, and local weavers at the Bangkok Fashion Week



LESSON ONE: THE POTENTIAL OF THE INDIVIDUAL: MICRO VS. MACRO; WITHOUT ONE, THERE IS NO OTHER

As he smiled, the courage behind his eyes pierced through me as though he knew exactly what I wanted. Now I was curious- I wanted to learn more about him; who was he? He was a little boy peeking from behind the classroom door. Moments later, another head behind the door became visible, and then another; Three small smiling faces stacked one on top of another. It was a sight; they were glowing from within. I didn't

only look, but I saw. It was fascinating to me how happy these children were and I wanted to learn why. A few seconds later (after my surprise instance of admiration had ample time to seep in), I followed with the “wai” (the traditional Thai greeting where the hands are placed together on the chest, and the head is lowered to touch the tip of the hands); they did the same, chuckled, bumped heads a bit, and wandered off.

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Montessori students are equipped with creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking skills.



Their smiles were incredibly endearing, and it was apparent that each of these small children had a large personality of their own. They were not only happy; they were satisfied. Perhaps it is because they were learning through the Montessori method, which concentrates on the true nature of the individual and is focused around the philosophy of helping people to help themselves. The program gives the students the confidence to embrace their own voice, and eventually work towards improving their community. Everyone in these communities is aware that the individual is essentially the most powerful piece in this domino effect. Once a villager acts and his/her surroundings take recognition of it, the village reacts, followed by neighboring villages. These actions then have the potential to reach the sub-district level, and possibly the country, and the world. Thus, the individual begins a series of events that could undeniably lead to prominent change. The children of Doi Tung have a clear understanding of this and now many of them have aspirations to be doctors, teachers, and lawyers. A couple of the parents that we interviewed were in tears as they made it apparent that their utmost wish is for each of their children to lead a better and happier life

than they had. Their children know that they can, and therein lays the beauty of opportunity.

Following my first visit to Doi Tung, I remained in Thailand for two extra weeks to produce and host a television pilot for a show promoting social ventures that are currently changing the world. We decided to focus the pilot episode on Doi Tung, and I returned for a second time. The first time I visited, I was practically speechless; I did not believe what I was seeing. It was all too good to be true—impossible. Upon my second visit, the lessons that I learned had time to seep into my soul, and I realized that it is possible. This time, instead of greeting me with the wai, a couple of the women gave me a “goodbye” hug that immediately filled me with joy. The filming went incredibly well and the bonds that I had with a couple of the villagers grew even stronger, despite the language barrier. Maybe one day, if the television pilot that I produced were to get picked up by a network, that same woman who greeted me with a “yes,” and had an angel’s smile, would be able to smile to millions of viewers all at once.

It takes one smile to initiate a million more and to lead a movement. The power of the individual has never been greater before in history. We have the unequivocal ability to make decisions and make our dreams come true if we think on a global scale and understand the cultural nature of those we intend to help or simply communicate with and learn from. HRH The Princess Mother understood this very well, and now the Foundation’s Global Outreach Program is bringing this understanding to action in Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Aceh (Indonesia). Because these countries face similar problems of poverty and narcotic crop cultivation, the Foundation’s Center for Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) is encouraging the SALD (Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development) model as well as lessons they have learned from their experience in Thailand. By allowing other countries to benefit from their invaluable pool of knowledge, the Foundation is putting the cycle of good work into motion. The fact that the Foundation is now working with our group from New York University further proves this notion as we are now building a bridge of knowledge from Thailand to the United States, spreading the wealth of deep understanding around the world.

Peace-maker, Gandhi once said: “Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step

you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to freedom for the hungry and spiritually strong millions?" Each step that the Foundation takes is a step towards creating peace and freedom on a global level.

LESSON TWO: ACT GLOBALLY

"I am a citizen not of Athens or Greece, but of the world." —Socrates

I found it incredible that HRH The Princess Mother made an enormous effort to learn everything about the land and its inhabitants, inside and out, before she encouraged any sort of change. She persevered until the people were just as passionate about the project as she was. She knew that in order to effectively institute change, we must exist, not only for ourselves, but also for our community.

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HRH the Princess Mother plants the first tree as part of the reforestation project at Doi Tung.



The reality is that we live in an age where one person can greatly influence millions. There has never before been a generation so passionate about creating positive change in the world as ours, and yet, there are also too many people who use the phrase "we can change the world" far too casually. If we are committed to instituting positive change on a global scale, we must carefully and individually examine the need in

each of the world's countries, and dissect issues from a grassroots level, while taking the culture into immense consideration. This is exactly what the Foundation's Global Outreach Program is achieving in Afghanistan. They are successfully implementing the SALD model because they have examined the task at hand from a grassroots level, and used pictography to overcome the language barrier until the community was just as passionate about implementing the model as they were. The Foundation's development work outside of Thailand is the prime example of a successful expansion of knowledge beyond borders.

But why must it be our duty to act on a global scale? If we were to shrink the world's population to a village of 100 people (with all existing human ratios remaining the same):

- 6 would possess 59 percent of the entire world's wealth.
All 6 would be from the United States.
- 80 would live in substandard housing.
- 70 would be unable to read.
- 50 would suffer from malnutrition.
- 1 would be near death; 1 near birth.
- 1 would have a college education.
- 1 would own a computer.

If you can read this text, you are lucky. If you awoke this morning with more health than illness, you are better off than the one million people who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the shooting pains of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world⁶.

One morning in Doi Tung, as the sun slowly poured over the shadows of my face, I awoke to a heavenly sunrise. I stood on a balcony watching the waves of light-grey cotton clouds ascend gracefully into the dawn. A ray of light pierced through the clouds, becoming brighter and brighter, leisurely overflowing over the elegant contours of the weightless blanket of cotton. I took a deep breath and stood in awe. How did I get here? In that moment, I realized how truly lucky I was not only to witness such a beautiful site, but also to witness it in such good health, happiness, and opportunity. I stared deep into the silence of the

⁶ Zweifel, T. D. (2003). *Culture Clash: Managing the Global High Performance Team*. Select Books: New York, NY.; United Nations, www.un.org; The Global Hunger Project Inc., www.thp.org; Population Reference Bureau, World Population Data Sheet, www.prb.org.

dawn and was touched by the vastness of our world. The view extended infinitely without division; it was one fluid array of colors, motion, and silence. Doi Tung is a beautiful place—both in nature and in spirit. There are no dead ends—every philosophy that brought on positive change was connected with another one that further expanded on that change, even beyond the borders of Thailand. This accomplishment is an example of our duty to think and act on a global level.

LESSON THREE: UNDERSTAND CULTURE “TO UNDERSTAND IS TO NOT UNDERSTAND”

While we were filming the television pilot, I met an American man named George who has been living in Thailand for the past 20 years. He explained to me that when he moved to Thailand, the amount of energy it took to make one Thai friend was equivalent to that of making five American friends. The greater effort required to do so was not only an expenditure of extra energy, but also a very conscious and purposeful action—an initiative that most are not incentivized to undertake when being supported by native social structures. Because immersing ourselves in a culture other than our own is often a pursuit, not a need, we often capitulate the idea. If we don’t grow up bilingual or in a multicultural household, we tend to find no reason to spend this extra energy.

Throughout my lifetime, I would like to positively influence as many people around the world to the greatest extent possible. Essentially, I want to make people smile; it is really as simple as that. Luckily, I learned how to start in Thailand, “the land of the smiles.” However, we cannot work together to change the world without fully grasping the fact that understanding the other side is not merely nice and morally right; it is a strategic necessity⁷. Before beginning their work in Doi Tung, the Mae Fah Luang Foundation fully understood this and took the necessary steps. Even though the majority of the Foundation is composed of Thai people, they knew there was still a great deal to understand before they could make the appropriate move.

As Nucha, the Field Manager for the Mae Fah Luang Foundation’s Global Outreach Program in Afghanistan, explained to me the steps

that were taken in order to successfully implement their strategy in a completely different culture, I was, once again, in awe. With such a simple and integrated approach, it took a group of no more than 25 people to progressively change the lives of more than 3,000 people. The Foundation worked alongside the grassroots level, community leaders, experts on the development of Afghanistan, and the Afghan Government. Collaborating with all aspects of the project proved to be the only answer. Even though they did not speak the same language, both sides knew it was a barrier they must overcome. When pictography was used and ideas and plans were thoroughly explained, the Afghan people began to understand the Foundation’s fundamental underlying purpose—they understood that the MFLF was working to empower the Afghan people. And it became implicit that the mutual appreciation and understanding of this effort was required of both sides. In order to empower people on a global scale, we must fully understand the nature of those with whom we intend to communicate and help.

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The MFLF staff reach out to and communicate with local Afghans.



Before taking off for Thailand, I knew that understanding Thai culture would pose its challenges, but I assumed that it would be fairly easy. Clearly, I was wrong. I found that culture lies in the terrain of what outsiders don’t even know they don’t know. Perhaps to understand is to realize that you will never fully understand the other side, but still must respect it.

⁷ Zweifel, T. D. (2003). *Culture Clash: Managing the Global High Performance Team*. Select Books: New York, NY.

Of course, full understanding of this notion is most blatantly apparent on a corporate level. For example, HSBC Bank has generated a remarkable response from their new campaign: “Only by understanding what people value, can we better meet their needs.” Breman Tzur, SVP/HSBC told Marketing Daily: “We as a bank are really interested in learning what drives people’s life decisions and how might we best get at what really matters so we can develop the best products that meet their needs⁸.”

However, sometimes even the largest and richest corporations in the world don’t understand. For example, In China, Coca Cola’s “Coke Adds Life” slogan was translated to “Coke brings your ancestors back from the grave”; the “Got Milk?” campaigns slogan in Spanish is Tienes Leche?, which means “Are you lactating?”; When Chevrolet investigated why it’s Chevy Nova model had virtually no demand in the Latin American market, they realized that “Nova” was understood as no va, “does not work.” Of course, not only am I talking about language—I am also talking about something deeper than that: cultural perception. A glaring example is when Gerber started selling baby food in Africa; it used the same packaging as in the US, with the baby on the label. Only later did the Swiss company learn that because most people in Africa don’t read English, companies routinely put pictures on the label of what is inside the container⁹.

Yes, these are quite humorous examples, but imagine when a silly mistake like this leads to a huge miscommunication or worse. As globalization spreads and our world becomes smaller and smaller, we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to learn from one another to try to better understand our diverse cultures.

LESSON FOUR: OPPORTUNITY IS EVERYTHING

“When people are given the opportunity, their potential can be realized.” —HRH the Princess Mother

8 “HSBC takes over a NYC park with its ‘Soapbox.’” The Financial Brand 29 JULY 2009 Web.1 Aug 2009. <<http://thefinancialbrand.com/2009/07/27/hsbc-nyc-soapbox-brand-campaign/>>.

9 Zweifel, T. D. (2003). *Culture Clash: Managing the Global High Performance Team*. Select Books: New York, NY.

During my first semester of college, I knew I wanted to “change the world,” but I didn’t have any idea how I was going to do it. I joined every relevant club imaginable, competed in the social-sector of a business plan competition, made an effort to make my existing company philanthropic, and interned for a nonprofit organization. I found no answers and very few like-minded people. One day, a student that I interned with heard I was very interested in the field of social entrepreneurship, so she brought Professor McGrath’s class to my attention. Three months later, I found myself in a classroom sitting among other highly motivated young change makers. To me, this was one version of heaven on earth. If I had never decided to take the internship with the nonprofit organization, I would not have had the opportunity to write this chapter. Similarly, if my good friend had not relentlessly insisted I attend the internship fair at New York University, I would probably still be unclear as to how to “change the world.”

I now have a clear idea of the path on which I’m headed. After witnessing firsthand the lives of those who overcame the catastrophe of the Opium Trade, and how these lives were drastically improved because of the what one person (HRH The Princess Mother of Thailand) initiated, I know that I want to work towards implementing this model around the world. And there is no reason to wait.

My greatest lesson from the Doi Tung Development Project lies in the power of opportunity. In addition to sharing my observations and lessons-learned, I intend to share how what I witnessed has influenced my motivation today, and how it can influence others as well. For now, I hope my television pilot will be one way to expose more people to the extraordinary work of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation.

An Individual exists in a culture of a world filled with opportunity. A woman’s smile changed my life, and it has the potential to change a million more. Perhaps it is the attention to detail that will provide the ultimate connection we have been searching for. In essence, her smile instigated a certain motivation in me to give a million others a reason to smile like her; To smile because they have been given an opportunity; To smile because they are living to their greatest potential.

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Lessons from the Mountain: Drawing Conclusions from Infinite Beginnings

Sunisa Nardone
Consultant to the Mae Fah Luang Foundation

Sometimes the simplest truth is the one that takes the longest to arrive at; the best answer is obvious to the villager and not the PhD; and a possible way to tackle poverty is found in the mountains of Northern Thailand, in a place so remote that twenty years ago it was considered no-man's-land by any government official in the region. Then, life in the Golden Triangle existed under competing regimes of drug lords who harnessed local labor to grow opium. People depended for their survival on meager money from the illicit crop. Profits went to a select few, who sold drugs and arms and fueled instability in the world. We have heard this story before, and continue to hear it echo from Afghanistan to Colombia.

Somehow, two decades later, here is a book chronicling how the lessons from Doi Tung can be used by changemakers in the United States and around the world. What a reversal of fortune. Something interesting must have happened in the interim, during those two decades, while we weren't looking. And with this group of people from the West coming to Thailand, we see that knowledge must be a two-way street that doesn't discriminate between developed and developing.

This is the last chapter in a book describing the journeys of discovery undertaken by four students, one professor, and a teaching assistant, all from America. I've been assigned to conclude their stories

of realization and wrap in a few glib observations of my own. As someone who is half Thai and half American, I could neatly conclude this particular multicultural narrative. Instead, I would like to write about beginnings. What I was privileged to witness in Doi Tung was a gathering of so many like-minded individuals, each with their distinct passions, that I can't in good faith write a conclusion to the upward spiral of energy and ideas that is sure to come out of their meeting. I can only chronicle how we all got there, on the mountain of Doi Tung in May, 2009, because this collaboration has the potential to be brighter than I can imagine.

SEEDS OF THE MAE FAH LUANG FOUNDATION

The idea for the Mae Fah Luang Foundation took root because of the Princess Mother's desire to reach out to the most disenfranchised communities in Thailand. In fact, the particular community that she picked to help up in Northern Thailand consisted mostly of non-Thai citizens. They are the ethnic hill minorities, whose relatively isolated past when the frequently moved to find newer fertile lands has led them to identify by their ethnic group more than as citizens of any one country. These Akha, Lisu, and Lahu people employed traditional handicraft skills and basic farming techniques to eke out a living in the mountains where Thailand, Myanmar and Laos intersect. They had no access to healthcare or education. Roads didn't reach those dwelling in the area. There was no electricity.

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The barren condition of Pha Mee village in 1988.



Most of all, these people saw no hope for the future. Nothing was changing on their horizon; their sons and daughters were born to help them work the field; they died from curable diseases; they learned to grow opium and work under the control of others, living day to day and holding onto survival as best they could. They expected to exist just as their parents had.

This is where—in time and place—the Princess Mother decided to build her house. She called it her home in the mountains. With that declaration, roads were built, the army looked at security in the region, and the Thai government's presence was made known. Children were sent to Border Patrol Police schools-- the closest thing to existing government infrastructure in the area. Because of this flurry of activity, drug trafficking routes were deflected elsewhere. Something stirred on the horizon, but not everyone had lifted their eyes to see it happen. Change was coming to the mountain; future destinies were being re-written.

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Opium cultivation was the only source of income for the Doi Tung people before the MFLF's development.



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A traditional weaving tool made from bamboo had limited production capacity, despite the weavers' extraordinary skills.



STARTING INTO SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

I graduated from Brown University in the United States, ready to enter the workforce and earn my way into a big house with two cars and 2.1 children; to take my place in the privileged ranks of Those With A Comfortable Life. But something happened, and it is a something that I see more and more with the people of my generation. This something is a restless yearning for more than the promise of a steady paycheck (although that is certainly welcome).

I have noticed a growing sense among top graduates that with all this education, with all this promise and potential and long years of being told to be the Best of the Best, some of us can feel a responsibility for earning more than our annual bonus. We want to measure our success by more than the size of our televisions and the number of our SUVs. Perhaps this restlessness is not so new, and only the latest iteration in a long line of generations moving from the Peace Corps times to the more recent flocks enlisting in Teach For America.

There has been a large amount of press coverage concerning this phenomenon, particularly around the fledgling industry of social enterprise, which was where I landed when I flew home to Thailand for the 2007 holiday season. I went into my friend's workplace to have a chat with the good people who run the Doi Tung business brand and the Mae Fah Luang development initiatives. One month later I packed my things from New York City, said my hasty goodbyes, and arrived in Bangkok, rearing to go and full of my own grand ideas about Rural Development, Community Work, and Making A Difference.

REAL LEARNING BEGINS

I was given the same advice that the NYU students received: put away your preconceptions. Stop holding on to your itineraries, background research, theories and textbooks. Some things are best absorbed by osmosis. Seeing is believing.

And I was every bit as confused and indignant as I assume those NYU students were. My preparation was all I had to go on as I worked in the rural countryside, as I worked in Thai, as I worked with people who didn't even speak Thai (and probably liked me better because my Thai is not too

fluent either). It was a long learning process, and most days I was exhausted just from following the conversation in Thai all day, whether we discussed agriculture or what to have for dinner. Everything was new—the family-style workplace, the tendency to nibble at food all day, the way people use their phones and SMS more than emails. These banal observations occupied my day, leaving me little room to absorb the real action. And yet I was in the field—talking, interviewing, seeing forests being planted in the hearts of the people, as Amanda noted, or value-adding activities bringing income to the local community, as Alex discussed.

Eventually I found myself in distant fields, wading through muddy dirt roads in rural Aceh, Indonesia, trying to get from the project site into the village leader's house in the pitch dark, holding my headscarf on as best I could as I slipped and fell and laughed with the team through the 3-km walk into town. I had come a long way. It was an unlikely experiment for a bookish city girl who likes to write, to become a rural adventurer who talks about rice, corn, goats, and irrigation systems. I am no expert by any stretch of the imagination. But somewhere along the way, my journey turned into an exercise in bringing whatever skills and commitment I have to the table, and making them available to further the work of the Foundation.

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Sunisa with her colleagues at the MFLF, Earth (left) and Joy (right)



BRIDGING TO NEW YORK

I had the happiest of problems: how to sell an outstanding product. In development terms, the challenge was to make the work of the Foundation known in circles that matter. The SALD model works—it has been replicated across countries—and now it is time to build the

reputation of the Foundation globally. I spent my time at the Foundation writing speeches that put the holistic development work into terms and phrases that the rest of the world understands. I thought about social enterprise, social innovation, the Millennium Development Goals and lasting change. Sustainability was a hot buzz word.

In September 2008 the Foundation team had a 3-day window in New York City in between engagements elsewhere. I finagled permission to fill our time with networking and meetings. We did a presentation to New York University students taking a class on social entrepreneurship. Good minds sparked, and key people were intrigued.

CONNECTING THAILAND

Nine months later, I met a slightly jet-lagged and very excited group of cool New Yorkers-- they were mostly wearing black—in the airport in Bangkok.

Two days later, the students and I were immersed in our study tour. We were sitting at the groaning table of the famously delicious cook, Kru Eet. She ran the 1,000-day drug free rehabilitation facility for the Foundation in the early years of development, until it was no longer needed. Now she watched intently as we dug into squash stuffed with minced pork and home-made sesame sauce, steamed fish in lime and chilies, and fresh spring rolls from the vegetables in her garden. In return for her stories of the drug rehab days, we ate. A lot. Food is important in Thai culture, a warm sign of hospitality and welcome, and when most people around the table don't speak the same language, we relied on gestures to communicate goodwill.

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Sunisa explained the students about intermediate technologies at the weaving factory.



I developed the pride of a mother hen as I watched these students learn to listen and inquire. In their listening they gave of themselves to the speaker, who explained what changed on the day they realized that the lives of their children could be different from their own. For each local person, there was a moment when they believed in the work the Foundation was offering them. By choosing to become weavers, growers, and cultivators, they chose to do things differently from how it had been done in the past.

The Thai people we talked to blossomed in the attention they received. They couldn't fathom why these students from far away—well-dressed, smart, intimidating with their easy access to a life only seen on TV—why they wanted to hear details of life on the mountain. One speaker told us that, “Obama is better than the last guy, who seemed to love war,” and was delighted by the reaction he received. A mother made everyone cry as she talked about the day she realized that her children would learn to read and avoid the life of hardship that comes with illiteracy.

It was my first time translating solo. There was no easy out when I got stuck, and listeners and interviewees alike had to be patient as I circled around the meaning I was trying to make. “Empowerment” is a word in English with no direct translation in Thai. To get there, I hopped from “feeling good” to “being able to do things on your own and for yourself”, to “lead your own community.” It was an awkward translation.

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The NYU team learns the history of the Mae Fah Luang Art and Cultural Park.



I also struggled to talk about “actualization”, that concept of Maslow fame and Nick’s interest. My effort at asking went something like:

“You know... that thing that happens after you have food, and a roof over your head, and education for your kids.”

More often than not, people replied with: “What is there, that is more than that?”

And we began our elliptical dance of understanding all over again.

CONCLUDING AFTER ALL

Sometimes I think that just by trying to ask these questions—even if people can’t yet imagine an answer to them—we are changing their horizon of possibility. Maybe they go home and talk to their family at the dinner table about what happens after health and job security and education are achieved. What is there next? And in the act of wondering, they dream of a new possibility in life as it spirals upwards in` health and wealth and happiness.

This is the best beginning that I can imagine to developmental progress. This is the real gift of bringing people to the Doi Tung Development Project. What the NYU students were giving when they listened, and took notes, and tried to get an answer about quality of life, or women’s rights, or some other intangible and seemingly obscure issue—what they really gave to the person being interviewed, was the sense that the person sitting in front of the students mattered.

I hope the process inside went something like this:

To this privileged American sitting in front of you, your answer matters. In fact it matters so much that they flew here, halfway around the world, to hear you explain how the arc of your life has changed in these last decades. They want to learn from you.

And with this sense of importance and place in global citizenship, you can walk away knowing that you have a story to tell. You have a story of struggle and resilience and budding success to share with others,

because on a certain day, you had the courage to try farming coffee instead of opium. You became a coffee roaster instead of selling the beans to others to roast. You took a risk and reached upwards for the possibility of a better life, and the rest of us are lucky to hear you share how you did that, and what made you decide to take that step.

If the above is indeed the case, then everyone—Thai and American—can leave the table knowing that they came together with grace and humility, across cultures and continents, to have a real and satisfying exchange. To outline where we go from here, I would need to anticipate countless sparks, ideas, and connections. Instead, let us take courage that we now have an idea of how we got here, and we grasp the strength with which we can, and will, move forward.