

CAMBODIAN YOUTHS HELP DEVELOP COMMUNITIES FOR FREE

This is a pleasant sight and attitude that is not only welcomed by many communities, authorities, and monks, but often even supported by them. It is difficult to find a member of Cambodian society who does not desire change. However, when speaking to LCDI students, one is struck by their attitude towards change; these are young people who do not merely desire change, but are motivated to bring about change through their own efforts.

"I have love for the poor and love for my country" says **Senate**, an ex-agricultural laborer who wants to improve herself and the people around her. "I will study hard to become great to help my country" says **Chantheourn** who doesn't see herself as the same person since enrolling as a student at Leadership Character Development Institute earlier this year. Truly remarkable sentiments for 20 year old females from the provinces.

Why do they feel this way?

Rithy, a 27 year old ex-carpenter from Pursat, speaks with enthusiasm about the personal transformation generated through a year of intensive study with LCDI. Once a common tradesman, he is now an educator responsible for coordinating LCDI activities with government officials and businessman in the province centers - a responsibility inconceivable in his former life.

In each of LCDI's eight Provincial Training Centers 20-40 students mostly below age 20 receive accommodation and training free of charge in a one year comprehensive program. Many more children and adults in surrounding communities also receive training from part time programs. Students of the LCDI Teacher Training Center in Phnom Penh are dedicated to running these centers without any salaries as their practical training in the provinces for 6 months.

LCDI training methods concentrate on bringing out the leadership quality which resides in every individual. 25-year-old **Thach Channy**, teacher in the Prey Veng center, stresses the need to share knowledge with rural people and instill a sense of self worth in them. "If we are weak we will be changed by the environment, if we are strong, we can change our surroundings."

"Intelligence, Love and Unity is needed to develop Cambodian society as a

whole. *leadership without character destroyed Cambodia*" says **Tom Sereimony**, teacher, Kampong Chhnag center.

LCDI is the brainchild of **Mr. M. Singh** of Malaysia, a peak performance trainer and part time university lecturer; **Raj Ridvan**, a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer; **Dhinu Dhanveer**, an LCDI instructor using the Khmer language and **S. P'lay** of Malaysia.

With full NGO registration and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, they have implemented an educational program which provides Cambodian youths with



practical skills in subjects such as English, Computers, and Management while simultaneously developing their potential and perception for community development.

LCDI is committed to maintaining a gender balance. Stressing equality among all people, LCDI's confidence building program gives Cambodian women a new sense of worth and ability which is uncommon. 17-year-old **Sok Ni**, a teacher from Kampong Cham center sees herself as a completely transformed person since enrolling with LCDI six months ago. "Previously I never went anywhere," she says, beaming. "I always stayed in the house. Now I have more confidence. In the future I want to travel around the world, and help more poor people."

Mr. C. W. Cho, Managing Director and CEO of Advanced Bank of Asia in Phnom Penh, visited LCDI's Phnom Penh center and said he found the students remarkably different from most

Cambodian youth he has met in his four years in the country. "They have confidence in themselves, their faces are very bright. They are not shy." Growing up in post-war Korea, he says he can relate to the problems facing the Khmer population today. "We had a war, and about 2 million people died. When I was young, educating rural, provincial people was very important. Education was the key to developing the war-shattered Korean society and economy."

Terry and Ruth Carpenter, Country Directors of Lattar Day Saints Charities quote the words of John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you. But ask what you can do for your country." They say "its truly refreshing to see LCDI students following this example."

LCDI activities focus on individual and community development with the vision of establishing a network of 184 centers for improved living standards, checking social hazards like AIDS, domestic violence, child trafficking and other abuses. Redeveloping communities involves many interrelated activities where human resources, a base and a network is essential. With dynamic youth energy, LCDI is in 8 provinces and has students in training to operate 20 centers by June 2001.

While the Phnom Penh center receives support from the UN World Food Program, the majority of LCDI's resources have resulted from private donations. As a young NGO with no official funding, LCDI functions with basics. LCDI youths believe that this will change as people see their sincerity, commitment, and effort.

Some centers draw as many as 200 part time students but are unable to seat all of them. Many classes are held outside and are subject to weather conditions. Very poor children, orphans and street kids could be enrolled if food and school materials were provided. LCDI is optimistic that funding will be received and that many more who wish to enroll in the programs will be reached.

LCDI is constantly in search of secondhand furniture, equipment, and other materials for the province centers.

*Organizations and individuals willing to consider a win-win association with LCDI can contact Mr. Singh at 012-894 434, or email lcdi@forum.org.kh or visit the web site at www.geocities.com/l_cdi for more information, Cambodian Public Bank a/c 10-1743, Contributions in cash or kind can be directed to LCDI through The Malaysian Embassy addressed: to LCDI for the attention of His Excellency **A.H. Anuar**, Ambassador of Malaysia, No. 5 Street 242, Phnom Penh.*

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