

**Dear Fellows, Colleagues, and Friends,**



It's the end of the year again and a good time for us to reflect on the past and prepare for what will be coming. For us, the Year of the Ox turned out to be quite different than the calm, dependable, and friendly cow image we often see in a lunar calendar. In fact, the past year was more like a "raging bull," with a strength and velocity that intensified many health equity challenges that will likely continue in the years to come.

We were saddened by the news about the loss of many family members and friends and also disheartened by the rising inequalities and social injustices that the pandemic exposed to us in many places. But the stories from our Fellows and partners, like the ones shown in this newsletter, give us reasons to remain hopeful and determined. They are working tirelessly to advance equity and social justice, both individually and collectively, both spontaneously or through EI-supported collaborations. We are delighted to share the progress of several of our Fellows' second-year projects, as well as many new promising initiatives that are starting through the 14 projects under CMB/EI Community Building Fund.

With some change and some new staff members, the EI program will start the Year of the Tiger with increasing energy and enthusiasm. Our EI family is growing and we cannot contain our excitement to welcome the new 2022 Fellows (to be announced in February). We will host our lovely 2021 Fellows in their "first" in-person gathering, back to back with our warm EI family reunion and resilience building opportunity at the 2022 Annual Forum, on the beautiful [Kata noi beach](#) in Phuket, Thailand. Nearly 40 of you have already signed up and we hope to connect with many more of you online. We expect the next year, despite uncertainties and ongoing challenges, will be more active in our individual and collective efforts to build community and engage partners towards a shared goal of [systems change](#) for health equity. We look forward to supporting you and our equity community to advance the important cause we all care about.

Happy holidays & happy new year!  
**Piya on behalf of the EI Team**

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## HIGHLIGHTS

### **Anticipation is Building for Our 2022 Annual Forum**

EI Staff and Fellows could not be more excited about our **2022 Annual Forum!** This January 21-23 gathering in Phuket, Thailand is a double milestone for EI: it will be our first in-



Phuket, as well as in the virtual space, as we engage with Fellows who are unable to travel at this time.

person event for Senior Fellows since the outbreak of COVID-19 and it will be preceded by the very first in-person learning event for our 2021 Fellows (January 15-19). We expect enthusiasm to be high, the learning to be deep and rewarding, and the creativity to flow freely! The focus of the Annual Forum is "Improving Resiliency in Health Equity," and we know Fellows will have many insights to share on this topic. We look forward to seeing many familiar faces in

### **Community Building Funds: Investing in Networks**

How can our Senior Fellows do more to respond to the equity challenges and needs they encounter in their day-to-day work? Are there ways they can combine innovation and collaboration for greater impact?

Fellows responded to those questions in their project proposals for our new

**Community Building Funds**, which are intended to help Fellows strengthen equity community networks in their respective countries as well as in the broader region. We are pleased to announce that 14 projects have been selected for support. The diversity of project topics highlights both the creativity and pragmatism of our Fellows: advocacy campaigns for plantation workers, raising voices of border communities, developing a health equity index, social inclusion of refugees, and leadership capacity building for health equity, among other topics.



## **COMMUNITY BUILDING**



### PHILIPPINES NC MEETING

Virtual Meeting – 30/10/2021



### **Nominating Committees – An Essential Element of EI Programming**

Networking is baked into every component of EI programming – including the process of nominating and selecting new Fellows. EI **Nominating Committees** in five countries play an essential

role in keeping the EI network diverse and dynamic: the committee members reach into their respective networks to help us identify professionals who are passionate about health equity and eager to build their leadership skills. We are grateful to the members of our Nominating Committees in Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam, whose time, energy, and connections enabled us to have a strong pool of candidates for our 2022 cohort. We look forward to introducing our 2022 Fellows in the new year!

### **Somsak Chunharas: A Leader Lends His Perspective**

Among those serving on our Thai Nominating Committee is [Dr. Somsak](#)

**Chunharas**, former deputy minister of health and current president of the Thailand National Health Foundation. In a recent conversation with our Fellows, Dr. Somsak shared highlights from his leadership journey as well as his perspective on how to construct systems for health equity. Dr. Somsak began his career as a physician and director in community hospitals in rural areas of Thailand, and he carried those experiences into his later work on health policy and system research. There is a “need to strive toward collective well-being while allowing individual autonomy and societal diversity,” he said in his remarks, and that requires a complex system to identify, balance, and meet competing needs. Dr. Somsak explained that he relies on “chaordic management” – an approach built on purpose, principles, participation, and plan – to envision, construct, and repair complex systems for health equity.



**CMB-Mahidol Postgraduate**  
Scholarship Program for Myanmar Scholars

Scholarship for Myanmar nationals working on health equity including those working in ethnic areas

Available programs:

- ★ Master of Public Health (MPH)
- ★ Master of Primary Health Care Management (MPHM)
- ★ Master of Science in Biomedical and Health Informatics

For the 2022 Academic Year  
Application period: November 20 - December 31, 2021

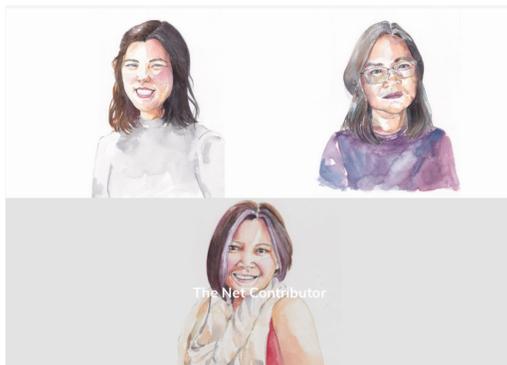
For further information and applications:  
<https://graduate.mahidol.ac.th/CMB-Mahidol-Postgraduate-Scholarship/>

**Support for Myanmar Scholars**  
The **CMB-Mahidol Postgraduate Scholarship Program for Myanmar Scholars** aims to build the capacity of Myanmar nationals who are working towards health equity, particularly those in ethnic minority areas of Myanmar. The scholarship applies to three programs in Mahidol University: Master of Public Health (MPH), Master of Primary Health Care Development (MPHM), and Master of Science in Biomedical and Health Informatics (MSc Biomedical and Health Informatics). The applications will be for the 2022 academic year, and the application deadline is December 31, 2021. For

information on eligibility and the application process for this fully funded scholarship, [please click here](#).

## SECOND-YEAR PROJECTS

Second-year projects give Fellows practical training in designing, implementing, and evaluating projects as well as teamwork. They also encourage Fellows to collaborate across borders and disciplines so that multiple perspectives and skill sets can catalyze fresh approaches to health equity challenges. We are pleased to share the highlights of several second-year projects from our 2017 and 2019 Fellows.



### Voices of Hope: Portraits of Seven Fellows

Two 2017 Senior Fellows, [Lawrence Aritao](#) (Philippines) and [Do Thuy Duong](#) (Viet Nam) created a book of profiles titled “Voices of Hope” that features seven Fellows from a variety of sectors. Their goal in compiling these portraits was to find and elevate the inspirational personal stories of people striving for health equity. As EI Executive Director Le

Nhan Phuong points out in the book's foreword, the personal stories make tangible the shared values of the EI community, "such as courage, humility, service, kindness, resilience, empowering others, tolerance, and inclusion." To read the profiles of Beverly Ho ("The Silent Worker"), Somporn Pengkam ("The Equalizer"), Sati Rasuanto ("The Net Contributor"), Kotch Voraakhom ("Seeing Green"), Archie David ("A Dreamer of Widening Horizons"), Luong The Huy ("A Ten-Year Journey"), and Do Thuy Duong ("A Leader of Leaders") – [click here](#).

### **Health Communication: An Overlooked Equity Challenge**

2019 Fellows [Nguyen Quoc Thanh](#) (Viet Nam), [Alfredo Coro II](#) (Philippines), and [Letchimi Devi](#) (Malaysia) examine the complexity of health communication in their research report, "Health Communication as Equity Challenge: A Case Study with Vietnamese Migrant Workers in Malaysia." People need more than access to health services, they also need to be able to understand, process, and communicate basic health information in order to make appropriate health decisions. Even when Vietnamese migrant workers can converse in Malay or English, survey responses showed, they may be unable to clearly articulate their health issue or may be fearful to ask questions during a visit with a health professional. The three Fellows recommended creating a Health Literacy Toolkit, which would include "journey maps." By combining artwork and useful information, the journey maps could guide migrants through different scenarios – for instance, what to look for, what to do, and what to pay attention to before, during, and after a health care visit.



### **Empowering Key Local Actors to Respond to Stunting in Indonesia**

While Indonesia has achieved a decade of solid economic growth, stunting among children is a stark example of how health inequity persists in the country. In their second-year project, 2019 Fellows [Blandina Rosalina Bait](#) (Indonesia), [Gideon Cauton](#) (Philippines), [Goris Mustaqim](#) (Indonesia), and [Le Thi Nhat](#) (Vietnam) looked to empower key local actors in East Nusa Tenggara

(NTT) Province, where stunting affects 42 percent of children under age five. When key actors at the village level have the necessary skills, tools, and resources, they can design better programming to alleviate stunting. The team of Fellows have based their empowerment strategy on data collection, behavioral analysis, stakeholder engagement and training, and advocacy. One successful outcome was a "training of trainers" workshop that attracted officials from multiple government agencies and a local NGO – who now can serve as a pool of facilitators to provide support as other districts develop or scale up their anti-stunting efforts.

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## **OUR FELLOWS TAKE ACTION**

Our Fellows demonstrate that action for health equity can be taken at the grassroots level or the health systems level, within one country, or across borders, and by professionals working in government, academia, nongovernmental organizations, business, the arts, international bodies, and

many other sectors.



## **Borwornsom Leerapan: Restructuring Health Care Systems**

The research of [Borwornsom Leerapan \(Ack\)](#) (2018, Thailand) on health systems and breast cancer care suggests that further strengthening of Thailand's universal health coverage (UHC) may be needed if it is to be sustainable over the long term. One framework for restructuring health care systems is value-based health care, which incentivizes healthcare providers to focus on the quality of services rendered, rather than the quantity. Ack shared his insights

during a November 17 panel discussion on financing the global expansion of cancer care and control, joined by researchers from Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Liberia, South Africa, and Turkey. During the virtual discussion, part of the London Global Cancer Week program, Ack pointed out that payment mechanisms in Thai UHC traditionally paid for chemotherapy in hospital settings only, and that limited numbers of hospital beds – especially in public hospitals – created inaccessibility or delays in chemotherapy treatment, leading to undesirable outcomes and patient experiences.

## **Natarajan Rajaraman: Challenging Our Assumptions**

One way to spark a dialogue about systems change is to challenge some of our commonly held assumptions. [Natarajan Rajaraman \(Raj\)](#) (2019,

Singapore) used two provocative statements to catalyze a discussion on universal health care during his presentation on August 19 as part of

EI's Brown Bag Series. His two statements – "UHC is useless – what we need is Universal Quality Care" and "Strategies to achieve UHC damage efforts to improve quality" – questioned an overreliance on strategies that aim to extend coverage, through such means as insurance and increasing the number of providers, without a corresponding emphasis on quality of care. From Raj's perspective, improving provider performance is key to improving health outcomes, though the process of introducing appropriate training and incentive structures for providers can be extremely challenging. Raj is the CEO of [Maluk Timor](#), an NGO that uses education and expertise to strengthen and support Timor-Leste's health system.

## **Road to UHC- Improving Healthcare Worker Performance**

BY NATARAJAN RAJARAMAN (2019)

THURSDAY, AUGUST 19, 2021  
ON ZOOM: 15:30-16:30/BKK  
17:30-18:30/TLT



## **Kotchakorn Vorakhom: Taking Climate Action**

### **[Kotchakorn Vorakhom](#)**

(2018, Thailand) combined pragmatism and passion as she spoke about the urgency of climate change in the run-up to the recent UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). "Bangkok is a city of water," she said in an [online](#)

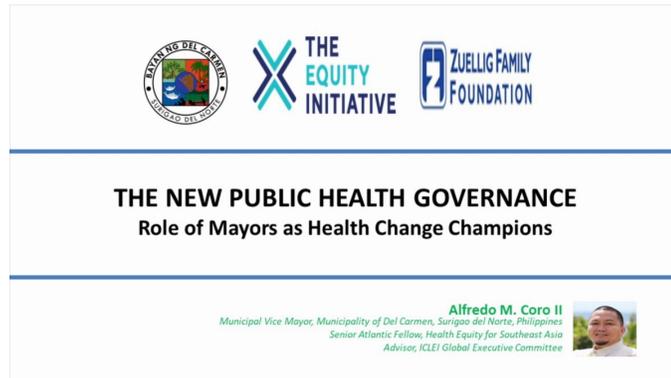
[conversation](#) with Célia Blauel, the deputy mayor of Paris, and if sea levels rise two meters by the end of the twenty-first century, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects, her home city will literally be under water. Trained as a landscape architect, Kotch has been highlighting ways to embed green spaces in urban areas, so that cities can

better adapt to higher temperatures, flooding, and other impacts of climate change. She also aims to ensure a Southeast Asian perspective is incorporated in global discussions on climate change, pointing out that her region will feel the effects earlier and with greater intensity than in many of the more developed nations. We were thrilled that Kotch appeared on the big screen at COP26, as she was featured in a video during David Attenborough's opening remarks – [click to watch](#) (Kotch appears at minute 5:45).

### **Alfredo M. Coro II: Mayors as Health Change Champions**

During a Brown Bag Series presentation, [Alfredo M. Coro II \(JR\)](#) (2019, Philippines) shared his belief that mayors can be health change champions by taking on the role of multi-stakeholder management and building a process of co-

ownership of health outcomes. JR, who serves as municipal vice mayor of the Municipality of Del Carmen in the Philippines, highlighted his experience in designing the Seal of Health Governance (SOHG) program. He describes SOHG as a health leadership program that encourages local leaders to be actively engaged with their community's health concerns and to rely on open community participation to develop local solutions. SOHG focuses on local health leadership capacity development, simplifying health outcome measurement tools, and promoting local health service delivery innovation, among other steps. COVID-19 has only reinforced the need for local-level accountability, proactive leadership, and community participation and empowerment.



### **Phetdavanh Leuangvilay: Tracking a Virus in Real Time**

In March 2021, avian influenza A(H5N6) virus was detected for the first time in humans in Lao PDR during routine surveillance for influenza-like illness, and [Phetdavanh Leuangvilay \(Sunn\)](#) (2019, Laos) was part of the team deployed to Luang Prabang to undertake a multidisciplinary rapid response investigation. Their investigation focused on four villages, including the one where a five-year old child became ill with the A(H5N6) virus. The team conducted a real-time risk assessment and concluded that there was a high risk of undetected infection in poultry due to past reports of poultry illness and death, and a moderate risk of additional human cases. [Click here](#) to read their report, published in *Influenza and Other Respiratory Illnesses*. Sunn also delivered an update on the global and regional situations on zoonotic disease at the 10<sup>th</sup> National One Health Symposium, held November 25-26 in Vientiane.

## **EI STAFF NEWS**



### **EI Staff Transitions**

In the past few months, EI has welcome a new staff member and said farewell to two others. The team is delighted to welcome [Siraprapa \(A\) Morrodkute](#)

as our new program assistant. A is a graduate of Thammasat University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in political science with a concentration in international relations. Before joining EI, she worked as a cabin crew member for Emirates Airlines and as a coordinator for the international section of International Research Associates (INRA). We extend our appreciation to former staff members **Petlada (Pupae) Ouratanakawee**, A's predecessor in the program assistant role, who has taken a position in the development assistance field and to **Nazir Ul Haq**, our former monitoring & evaluation manager, who has returned to his native Pakistan.

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## **EI CALENDAR**

**In-Person Learning Event for 2021 Fellows:** 16-20 January

**2022 Annual Form:** 21-23 January

**Prince Mahidol Award Conference:** 24-29 January

**2022 EI Fellows Announced:** February

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**Send us your news!**  
**Help us build an engaged community for health equity by sending us updates on your speaking engagements, highlights of your work and travel, and interesting projects you encounter. Send your news to:**  
[info@equityinitiative.org](mailto:info@equityinitiative.org)