



Dear Fellows, Colleagues, and Friends,

Excitement about our [In-Person Learning Event](#), held in Phuket, Thailand, March 12-20, was palpable even before the program got underway. This was the first real opportunity for the EI staff to meet with our 2021 Fellows and for them to meet with each other. Our main goal for the week was to foster bonding among the Fellows, and what transpired was absolutely phenomenal! We had an amazing week of truly getting to know each other, not superficially but at a very authentic level. The Fellows shared their life stories, their hopes and aspirations, and even their fears and uncertainties. The responses exemplified empathy, understanding, and support. Together, we discovered, and re-discovered, our individual core values and the common values that we all shared.

While learning we also had fun – a lot of fun! A field trip to Surin Island offered a thoughtful and unique learning experience as we interacted with the Moken people and learned about their ways of life. Arrangements for this study trip were made by Bohdi Garrett, whose social enterprise, [Andaman Discoveries](#), works to sustain Moken culture and facilitate community-based decision making. Snorkeling in the beautiful waters of the Andaman Sea and seeing the awesome corals were just magical for me. And of course, how can I forget the countless hours in the van karaoke-ing away oldies at the top of our lungs!

The pandemic may have delayed our getting together, but judging from what we experienced, it only serves to deepen our bonds of community. We came

away with a better sense of each other and, more importantly, of ourselves and what makes life worth living for us. I am truly grateful for what our staff and Fellows were able to accomplish together.

Le Nhan Phuong
EI Executive Director

HIGHLIGHTS



Welcome 2022 Fellows!

We extend a warm welcome to our 2022 Equity Initiative Fellows! These 28 changemakers share a passion for health equity and bring a diverse array of experience to the program – primary health care, mental health, disability rights, disaster response and resilience, rare diseases, the health of indigenous communities, and more – which are certain to enrich their induction year learning and collaboration. We look forward to learning more about their experiences and aspirations at the **Opening Retreat** in Hue, Viet Nam, April 22 – 29.

2022 Annual Forum Improving Resilience for Health Equity



Finding Inspiration at the Annual Forum...

Our [2022 Annual Forum](#), held virtually January 21-23, was a great success! With participation of Fellows from five cohorts and the thought-provoking presentations of invited speakers, the meeting reaffirmed the importance of our Fellows' health equity work. The Forum's theme of resilience came to life as Fellows talked about how they are putting health equity into action, as they reach out to stakeholders, introduce new mindsets as well as new skills, and identify the shared values that can set a foundation for system change.



...and Strengthening Bonds at In-Country Gatherings

In-country gatherings in Indonesia, Laos, and Viet Nam enabled Fellows to participate in the virtual Annual Forum as a group and experience some additional camaraderie. In addition to the virtual Annual Forum sessions, Fellows enjoyed time for shared reflection, bonding, and brainstorming about potential collaborations. There also were opportunities to build skills in design thinking (Laos gathering) and facilitating change (Viet Nam gathering). It is exciting to see how EI bonding spreads across cohorts and practice areas – and the enthusiasm of our Fellows to combine their knowledge, professional strengths, and innovative ideas to address health equity challenges in their respective countries.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Digital Health Promotion: A Tool for Health Equity

Digital health promotion (DHP) can play a positive role in health promotion, giving people additional ways to increase control over their health and its determinants, [Beverly Lorraine Ho](#) (2017), [Jeremy Lim](#) (2016), and their co-authors



write in “Digital Health: Promise and Peril.” The authors also highlight some of the ways that DHP can promote health equity. DHP can be a tool that expands access to care in remote or hard-to-reach communities, or that facilitates outreach to vulnerable individuals who may have difficulty seeking medical help due to stigma or out-of-pocket expenses. But making full use of DHP requires finding ways to overcome a persistent digital divide that can prevent populations that are older, illiterate, lower in educational attainment, or living in areas with poor infrastructure from accessing its benefits. [Click here to read the article.](#)



Delivering Care and Advocating for Action

Health care workers throughout the world have been on the clinical front lines throughout the pandemic, [Gideon Lasco](#) (2019), [Raudah Yunus](#) (2019), and their co-authors write in *Health and Human Rights Journal*, and many also have been advocates for action and

policy. In some cases, this has meant calling for supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE), and in other cases highlighting inadequate policy responses from government. Health care workers, the authors say, use their knowledge of the communities they serve, their understanding of the determinants of disease, and their standing in society to speak truth to power. The authors share contemporary and historical examples of health care workers’ courageous action. [Click here to read the article.](#)

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.

Bringing Expertise to his Home Region

When he was a university student, Abdel



Disangcopan's teachers stressed the need for talented professionals to bring their expertise to underserved areas of the Philippines. But Abdel found meaning in his work in Manila, serving as a law reform specialist at the University of the Philippines, so he did not seriously contemplate a return to his home region in what is now called the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Starting in 2019 however, he began reconnecting with his roots as he worked on projects to strengthen leadership capacity and develop new

policies in the BARMM, which has been in the process of setting up a new, parliamentary system of government following the 2014 peace agreement. Working in the region enabled Abdel to see opportunities for positive change, and in August 2021 he became director of the Statutory Committees Support Service of the BTA (Bangsamoro Transition Authority).

Abdel's role is challenging, given his department's objective of setting up a new legal framework and bureaucracy. Naturally he finds gaps between the study of law in a university and the new system taking shape in the BARMM, but his understanding of the local region and culture are assets to contribute to the process of change. And while the pace of that change can be slow at times, Abdel enjoys the "small wins" that occur in the process of building a professional culture, and he welcomes the chance to contribute his expertise to building a better society in the BARMM.

Cultivating Leadership for Public Health

[Xu Jin](#) (2018) is a co-author/editor of the first textbook on the essentials of public health leadership intended for China's schools of public health, titled *Foundations of Leadership for Public Health*. He also has been giving lectures and leading seminars on leadership in public health. Jin said he has found his EI training to be a source of inspiration in his teaching. "We find the students may benefit much more if experiential and peer-to-peer learning (a great advantage of EI) are combined with lectures and seminars." EI learning is being transferred from teacher to student!



Advocating for Action on HIV/AIDS

[Midnight Poonkasetwattana](#) (2019) has been appointed to the NGO Delegation to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) for 2022-2023. The NGO Delegation represents civil society on the UNAIDS PCB, the governing body of UNAIDS. Representing Asia and the Pacific, Midnight looks forward to sharing his programming knowledge, especially on community-led innovative

interventions, and bringing the voices community groups and key population organizations into discussions. [UNAIDS](#) brings together the efforts and resources of 11 UN system organizations to advocate for global action on HIV/AIDS.

Open Data: A Tool for Healthier Societies

How can sharing health and healthcare data lead to better societies for all? That was the overarching theme of a webinar held March 5 to mark International Open Data Day 2022, which featured [Clive Tan](#) (2022) as one of

the speakers and EI Program Director [Piya Hanvoravongchai](#) as moderator. The webinar, part of a series on “Digital Health for an innovative, transparent and accountable society in Thailand,” was convened by the Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP), a research unit under Ministry of Public Health Thailand. The webinar began with individual country presentations, and Clive focused on Singapore’s experience in his remarks on “Frameworks for Open Data Policy in Health.” Clive highlighted the importance of putting incentives in place to encourage stakeholders to make data accessible, as well as building trust in data governance systems.



SHARING INSIGHTS



Assessing Thailand’s Response to COVID-19 [Borwornsom Leerapan \(Ack\)](#)

(2018) shared data and insights on Thailand’s response to COVID-19 in a Prince Mahidol Award Conference (PMAC) side meeting on January 24. The session, which CMB cosponsored, focused on “Health Justice in

Thailand in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work in Progress.” Ack gave positive marks to the Thai health system’s ability to test, trace, and isolate (TTI) and to surge health care capacity. However, he noted a delay in the roll-out of vaccines as well as missed opportunities to build TTI infrastructure for vulnerable populations. “The learning ability of governance systems is key to systems resilience,” he concluded, and recommended using health justice as a framework for examining COVID-19 issues. Ack’s COVID-19 case study is part of a larger, ongoing project on Health Justice in Thailand, which is spearheaded by [Dr. Somsak Chunharas](#), president of Thailand’s National Health Foundation, and which receives CMB support. (To watch Ack’s presentation, [click here](#); to learn more about the Health Justice in Thailand project, [click here](#)).

Designing in Conversation with Nature

[Kotchakorn Voraakhom](#) (2018) described her approach to designing public spaces in a New York Times interview, [“An Architect Who Mixes Water and Nature to Build Resilience.”](#) Public spaces, Kotch said, “need to serve the whole city, the whole population, and the whole ecosystem,” she said, and creating a design that talks with nature helps to build in the resilience needed to respond to the impacts of climate change. These concepts come to life in her firm’s design of Chulalongkorn University Centenary Park in Bangkok, where the whole park is designed to collect and repurpose water, and in the process, create a beautiful green space for city dwellers to enjoy. [Click here to read the interview.](#)



A FELLOW'S REFLECTION

Dr. Paul Farmer, who died on February 21, was a pioneer in the field of medicine and public health. Our 2016 Fellows were fortunate to meet with him during their Global Learning experience in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In the paragraphs



that follow, our 2019 Fellow [Gideon Lasco](#) describes Dr. Farmer a role model for addressing health inequity.

Paul Farmer provided a conceptual vocabulary with which to articulate today's most pressing health challenges and link them with history, economy, and culture in ways that are relevant for my home country and those in similar contexts. By describing poverty, marginalization, and the "the massive accumulation of wealth in one part of the world and abject misery in another" as a form of violence (i.e., *structural violence*), he challenges us to act more urgently and forcefully in addressing health inequity.



At a personal level, Farmer's work has been very influential in my journey from medicine to anthropology and beyond, making me realize how relevant the social sciences are in helping us understand the root causes of illness and suffering. His account of how colonialism and slavery in Haiti ultimately led to the high rates of HIV in the country resonated with how my own country, the Philippines, has grappled with diseases like tuberculosis in ways that cannot be disentangled from centuries of imperialism, neoliberal capitalism, and their ensuing social exclusion. In trying to make sense of the coronavirus pandemic, I found myself looking to Farmer for inspiration, and his words on TB ring true for COVID-19 as well as for other diseases past, present, and future: "a social disease could not be eradicated without social action."

We hope to feature portraits of other Fellows' professional role models in future newsletter issues.

ATLANTIC INSTITUTE NEWS



Storytelling with Atlantic Fellows
StoryCorps uses informal, conversational interviews – generally between two family members, friends, or colleagues – to collect, preserve, and share the stories of people from many walks of life. (Its interviews will be familiar to listeners of public radio in the United States.)

The [Atlantic Institute](#) adopted StoryCorp's format for storytelling with five pairs of Atlantic Fellows, including EI's [Lawrence Aritao](#) (paired with Atlantic Fellows for Health Equity Sarah Hooper) and [Kotchakorn Voraakhom](#) (paired with Atlantic Fellow for Social and Economic Equity Johnny Miller). To listen to Law and Sarah's conversation, [click here](#); for Kotch and Johnny's, [click here](#).

EI CALENDAR

Opening Retreat: 22-29 April

SENT Forum: 7 May (Thai Fellows only)

Global Learning: 6-19 June

Atlantic Global Convening of Senior Fellows: 4-9 July

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