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ABOUT ASSIST

Asia Society for Social Improvement and Sustainable Development (ASSIST) was established in 2003 with the aim of addressing sustainability challenges in the Philippines.

Today it has evolved into a self-sustaining, Pan-Asian, non-profit organization driven by passion and purpose for progress and prosperity in the region.



300+
projects



20+
countries



1,000,000+
individuals reached

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LET US KNOW your thoughts about this quarter's newsletter. _____

WORKING TOWARDS THE SDGs

As part of the global development community, ASSIST aligns its initiatives with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To demonstrate this, stories in this newsletter end with the icons of the SDGs that they help achieve.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGEMENT

Dear colleagues and partners in development,

We sincerely hope this newsletter finds you healthy and safe while we learn to live with this pandemic! As we all search and find what “new normal” means to us, personally and in our line of work, safety and health must be central to our plans.

At ASSIST, our entire workforce has been on working from home for the last 100 days, except in Vietnam, where the incidence and transmission rate of COVID-19 has been surprisingly low. We continue to work with stakeholders, manage our programs through virtual communication, and ensure compliance with all the local government regulations. Our colleagues have stood up to the challenge as real heroes to support both ASSIST and its stakeholder community.

That we have trained over a 1,000 people through virtual means, managed a successful fundraising campaign against hunger, moderated a UN-led private sector forum on slum upgrading in the African region and continue to plan/manage other development interventions all during this period is a testament to the human ability to adapt to change and the continued commitment from the development actors to forge innovative solutions.

As you read through this, we are sure you are making a difference in your immediate and extended communities through your programs. We thank you for your commitment, wish you the best in finding innovative ways to pursue progress during these tough times and continue to remain safe.

Karthik Subburaman
Regional Director

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our thinking about how we operate as an organization. First and foremost, we have taken several measures to ensure the safety of our employees and partners with prevention as our main objective.

Work from home, conference calls, and flexible working hours have become the new ways of doing business for most companies including ASSIST. We have seen that working remotely doesn't mean less collaboration but on the contrary, it shows the strength of our dedicated employees as they work together successfully in a virtual environment.

Our operating units are building strategies for the “new normal” and we expect these will come into fruition in the coming months. There are challenges ahead but we firmly believe we will come out stronger amidst these uncertainties because of everyone's hard work and dedication.

On behalf of the members of the management team, we sincerely thank you for your unrelenting support, commitment, and valuable contributions in these difficult times. Please continue to stay safe, positive, and productive.

Francis Solis
Chief Financial Officer

ASSIST's numerous projects typically involve large events, training programs, and many face-to-face interactions. These activities and many of our projects have been put on-hold as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that has reshaped the world over the past few months. The disease has led to massive global socioeconomic disruption, canceling different mass gatherings and activities to prevent further transmission, as well as creating widespread concerns of supply shortages across various sectors.

In this issue of ASSIST Now, we showcase the activities that were conducted with careful consideration and preparation to ensure our beneficiaries' safety from COVID-19, as well as listing the projects that we hope to reinstate in the coming months as more safety procedures are put in place.

**All items in gray are projects that have been put on hold temporarily*



INDIA



MILK

The aim of this project is to increase dairy farmers' income through the implementation of sustainable dairy management practices



ANALYSE

This project will enhance affordability and accessibility to high-precision laboratory testing facilities for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises to improve their competitiveness



SmartLi

This project aims to promote healthy air conditions and improve air quality in India through training and delivery of the latest air quality management technologies



BFBL

- Establishment of two new training centers in Ha Giang Province and Dien Bien Province
- Initiated with opening ceremonies the first two batches of student beneficiaries



BAKE

- Graduation and certification of first batch of training participants
- Initiation of second batch



CoopEnable

This project will improve cooperative development for Vietnamese farmers through education and application of innovative farmer cooperative models and food safety standards



DIGI-CONNECT

This project aims to develop an e-Learning platform to give remote training on the data-processing skills required to work in the BPO industry



Post-Consumer Resin Market Development

This partnership will gain commitments from consumer product companies to use recycled plastic and initiate the building of a plastics recycling factory



VIETNAM



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



Onion UNION

- Promoting farmers resilience amidst the pandemic
- Digitization of working sessions, development of an integrated pest management guide booklet for farmers



SOLution

- Transition to online training programs
- Development of an online platform



Master of Disaster

- Engagement with Task Force Children of the Storm to deliver MOD to children and their families



Creativelab

- Communication campaign to improve the knowledge being shared on COVID-19
- Development of communication toolkits for Signify to empower and strengthen skills



STEM Leap

This project aims to strengthen the understanding and appreciation of STEM subjects through engaging learning activities for gradeschool children

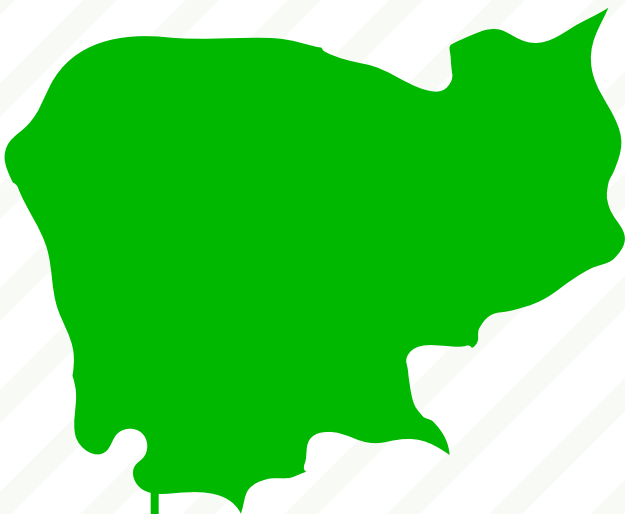


FUTURE MOVERS

This project will build an inclusive and market-driven vocational education and training ecosystem to empower and support internally displaced youths in post-conflict Marawi



PHILIPPINES



CAMBODIA



TACFP

This initiative seeks to establish an assessment center that will serve as a venue for aspiring food production assessors and trainers to learn and gain new opportunities



From Children of the Storm to Masters of Disaster

C OVID-19 has impacted every sphere of work, causing many shifts in the way ASSIST and other nonprofit organizations choose the focus of their projects. The Task Force Children of the STORM (TFCOS) is a Philippine-based consortium of five child-focused organizations and institutions that came together for the purpose of providing assistance to disaster-stricken communities and children. As a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns, TFCOS reached out for ASSIST's support to TULONG PASLIT (Help the Children), a psychosocial intervention program with a target reach of 4,300 families.

The Philippines has instituted a series of community lockdowns at varying levels since the outbreak of COVID-19 and many families find themselves burdened

by the physical, economic, and mental stresses brought about by these circumstances. ASSIST has donated 20 units of the Master of Disaster boardgame to TFCOS, not just to instill awareness and understanding of proper disaster preparedness but also to uplift spirits of children and their families during these rough times.

Never has it been more important to band together and reach out to one another in solidarity. An organized, collective response ensures that we will win the battle against COVID-19 within each community. ASSIST will continue establishing partnerships for progress and implementing projects that create social improvement and sustainable transformation.



#CombatHungerWithKuBO: From Fundraising to Feeding

Hunger and malnutrition affect 1 in 3 Filipinos, and the consequences of this last more than a lifetime. Social Weather Stations' (SWS) survey from late 2019 stated that 2.1 million families suffered from involuntary hunger, ranging from moderate to severe. These difficult circumstances have only worsened with the onset of COVID-19, trapping many families in their homes, struggling without work, unable to feed themselves.

To address the needs of the hardest-hit communities and families, ASSIST has launched KuBO (Kusina ng Bayan sa Oras na pangangailangan or Community Kitchen in Times of need) as a movement to fight hunger and malnutrition in the Philippines. The name of the project takes inspiration from the traditional Filipino stilt house or nipa hut as well as the folk song of the same name that enumerates different nutritious vegetables in the Philippines.



As part of GlobalGiving's Accelerator Program, a fundraising opportunity for nonprofit organizations around the world, ASSIST has raised USD 6,011 to build community kitchens for KuBO that will provide nourishment to an initial 500 family beneficiaries residing in the hunger and poverty-stricken areas of Manila on a regular basis.

The fundraising was conducted only through June 8 to 27, and through this initial fundraising, ASSIST hopes to not only gain the support needed to establish these community kitchens but also foster a sense of Bayanihan, a spirit of communal unity and cooperation to help our fellow Filipinos. The program will eventually be scaled to sustain the community kitchens to feed these families on a regular basis, to reach communities outside of Manila, and to empower the target beneficiaries through education on sustainable food preparation, hygiene, and sanitation.



Onion UNION:

Promoting Farmer Resilience Amidst a Pandemic



**Onion Union Season Two highlights taken from November 2019-Early March 2020*

Agriculture is one of the most hardest-hit sectors in the world, as livelihoods and business operations continue to be paralyzed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With farmers out of the field, local governments have resorted to new ways to keep them at work while preventing the virus from affecting their communities. Onion UNION in partnership with the East-West Seed Company, is one of ASSIST'S projects in the Philippines that is affected. To protect the farmers and communities from contacting the virus, the local government units where the four Onion Learning Center sites are located have taken responsible action to facilitate and implement necessary quarantine measures. One of them is postponing several activities such as Occidental Mindoro, Nueva Ecija, and Ilocos Sur harvest festivals, as well as the graduation of farmers in Mindoro and Ilocos Sur onion learning centers. In response to the pandemic, health precautions were strictly followed such as implementing a reduced number of farmers in the field to avoid virus transmission.



MOVING FORWARD ►►

As the project nears its end date in August 2020, some remaining activities are already being set in the pipeline such as the development of an integrated pest management guide booklet. The joint working session with the Philippine Department of Agriculture and local government units to align the training center and the forecast model with current and future government initiatives are scheduled to be conducted through a small meeting.

SOLution: Virtual Training is the New Normal



In the midst of a pandemic, where people are limited to the four corners of their homes for fear of catching and spreading the virus, technology has provided new and welcoming spaces for individuals and organizations to turn towards for continued operations. This holds true for SOLution (Solar-powered Irrigation System for Farming Communities), a project of ASSIST in partnership with Grundfos Pumps Philippines. The project aims to increase agricultural productivity of 100 farmers in Norzagaray, Bulacan by installing solar-powered irrigation systems. Last quarter, a two-day theoretical and on the job training on operation and maintenance of pumps and solar power irrigation systems was conducted.

The SOLution working committee has now converted face-to-face training programs into an online training program for the farmers, in response to postponed physical operations and activities brought about by COVID-19 and quarantine efforts. Discussions with the Department of Agriculture (DA) Region III, Municipal Agricultural Office (MAO) in Norzagaray, Bulacan, and Grundfos have already begun, with an end goal of developing an online platform that is easily accessible and can deliver more online training in the future.



MOVING FORWARD ►►

Plans to settle the on-going validation of pumps and further installation will be finalized once a travel pass for farmers has been issued.

Vietnam and the Successful Containment of COVID-19

On January 23 the first case of COVID-19 in Vietnam was reported. On July 1, Vietnam's Ministry of Health identified 355 confirmed cases, 335 of which are recovered, and zero COVID-related deaths. With global cases of the coronavirus at about 10.5 million at the time of writing and expected to continue rising, Vietnam's response has been lauded as a success story.

Crediting strong investment in public health infrastructure, early action to contain community spread, clear communication, and strong participation of all sectors in decision-making and implementation of necessary programs; Vietnam was one of the first countries in the world to lift all local containment measures. Thus, ASSIST's programs in Vietnam have continued with careful procedures in place to ensure the safety of all project stakeholders.

Certifying Beauty: Uplifting Women in Northern Vietnam

Contributed by: Carmela Ruiz, ASSIST Social Actions Intern



Even with the strong economic development that has led to better job opportunities for women in Vietnam, there is still a need to address problems of gender equality in the workforce. To help combat these issues, ASSIST together with the L'Oréal Foundation created a project called 'Beauty for a Better Life' that established mobile training centers in remote regions in Northern Vietnam that will provide beauty-training programs for underprivileged women in these areas that will help to develop their skills and capacities to become certified hairdressers and beauticians. The project is set to run from July 2019 - October 2021 in the target locations of Thanh Hoa, Ha Giang, Dien Bien, and Yen Bai in northern Vietnam.

The project's main objectives are to help increase the number of empowered rural underprivileged women that are able to find a job or start self-made entrepreneurial activities and also to improve their economic perspective and well-being through skills in basic finance and small-scale business management. The project aims to uplift 320 women

from these remote regions in North Vietnam as professional beauticians and hairdressers.

Despite challenges posed by COVID-19, two new training centers were established in selected provinces. On March 16, 2020, Bac Quang Vocational School organized an opening ceremony for the new training class in Ha Giang Province with the attendance of representatives from the Provincial Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA), Provincial Women Union, vocational schools representatives, and 20 registered students. Additionally, last May 18, the Dien Bien Economic and Technical College organized their own opening ceremony for the training class in Dien Bien Province, participants included Dien Bien Television Station, Dien Bien DOLISA representative, vocational schools representatives, and 30 registered students.



Baking New Opportunities for Vietnamese Bakers and Bakeries

Contributed by: Myda Fernando, ASSIST Social Actions Intern

When it comes to one's career path, the baking industry is falling behind as a choice for the working sector in Vietnam. New skills and techniques are needed in order to uplift craft bakeries as they continue to enter the industry alongside in-store bakers and bakery chains.

In line with elevating the call for improving the Vietnamese baking industry, ASSIST partnered with Deutsche Investitions-und Entwicklungsgesellschaft (DEG), SAF-Viet, and Ly Tu Trong College (LTTC) to launch the Baking training to Augment Knowledge and Entrepreneurial Development (BAKE) project that will run from March 2019 to January 2021. This project aims to develop the Vietnamese baking trade by focusing on teaching and molding the skills and techniques of craft bakers and in result, expand the pursuit for the baking industry in Vietnam. Given this, a vocational training center was established in Ho Chi Minh City, which offers specialized skills training for aspiring craft bakers.

In 2019, the Baking Training Centre was established at the Ly Tu Trong College and the training programs were set and conducted with the first batch of trainees. However, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many training sessions and activities were on-hold from March to April. With strong procedures and policies in place, activities were able to resume in late May, and on June 3, 2020, 14 students from the first batch of the training program graduated and received their course completion certificate. Alongside this momentous occasion was the Opening Ceremony where 32 students were welcomed and formed part of the second batch of trainees.

With qualified trainers and committed craft bakers, the BAKE project continues to provide training and opportunities for the students to grow as bakers and contribute to the future of the Vietnamese baking industry.



Creativelab Feature: New Dimensions of Learning in the Digital Sphere



When a pandemic strikes the planet, and no cure or vaccine is available, the best medicine that we can rely on is prevention.

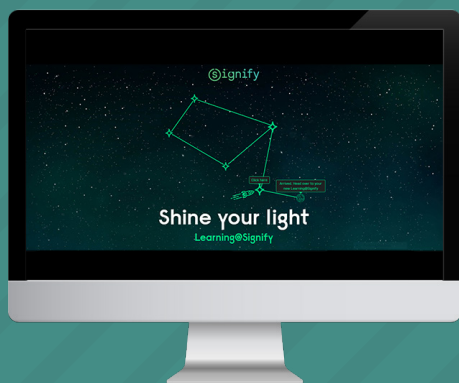
ASSIST Creativelab launched a series of campaign materials consisting of videos, infographics, and articles that promote safety measures and precautions in support of COVID-19 health awareness.

One of the campaign materials created was a video on how to stop the spread of fake news, which is rampant in today's modern age and puts numerous lives at risk. Addressing the civil society, ASSIST Creativelab also published an article on their newly-released website on how NGOs can craft an effective communication plan in line with the pandemic.

Follow ASSIST Creativelab's official Facebook page for more news and updates related to the development sector.



Learning@Signify 2.0: Shining Light on Skills Empowerment



As the world dives deeper into the digital age, the unrelenting modernization is shaping the corporate sector to be more competitive than ever. With the fluctuating demand of several industries and businesses, a huge skillset is required in order for someone to survive in a wide pool of workers.

In an effort to promote skills empowerment across its internal staff, Signify (previously known as Philips Lighting) has partnered with ASSIST Creativelab to develop an internal communications campaign to support the launch of their new learning platform, Learning@Signify 2.0, powered by Degreed.

The communications campaign consists of a series of animated videos complete with storylines that depict learning and skills development within the Signify universe, as well as banners and email GIFs that entice employees to visit the landing page, which announced the Learning@Signify 2.0 launch. ASSIST Creativelab also developed short how-to videos on how to use and navigate through the platform.

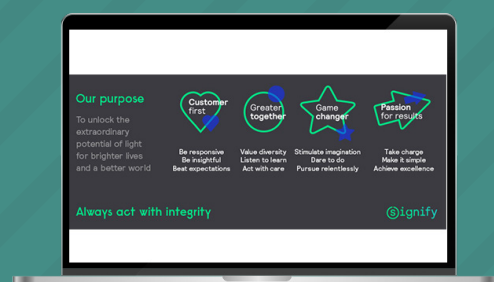
Signify Robot Process Automation and Design 4 Safety



Signify is further working with ASSIST Creativelab to develop high-quality narration-based videos as part of a training course to familiarize its internal staff on the benefits of Robot Process Automation (RPA) with Signify and how to Design4Safety.

The training course will be divided into two lessons namely: Automation and Industrial Revolution and RPA and its Contribution to the Industry. By the end of the first lesson, learners will be able to recall the early automation process and the influx of the Industrial Revolution while specific benefits and trends related to RPA will be the product of the second course.

Design 4 Safety on the other hand is an e-learning course designed to educate on the different kinds of hazards encountered by Signify personnel and how to categorize them.



A-TEAM'S LESSONS FROM QUARANTINE

Contributed by: Cidee Despi

“COVID-19 is no longer a minor inconvenience. It is now a paradigm shift that affects us on a global scale.”

When 2020 entered, I had big plans. I told myself I would travel more, try new things, and maybe even make new friends. Then, barely a quarter into the year, 2020 decided to take a detour. I, together with most of the world, was forced inside my home, to evade a virus we cannot see, stuck in lockdown.

As of this writing, Metro Manila is on its 100th day of community quarantine, making it one of the longest lockdowns in the world. In 100 days, I have gone out four times, walked 152,446 steps (half of what I accomplished in a month pre-COVID), finished reading 14 books, and have pressed “add to cart” an embarrassing number of times. COVID-19 is no longer a minor inconvenience. It is now a paradigm shift that affects us on a global scale.

The entire world is dealing with COVID-19, but what we often forget is that big problems (like a pandemic) impact us deeply and personally. Quarantine forced me to evaluate the way I live my life and understand what really matters to me when I don't have the outside world to shape me. To be stuck at home is to be stuck with me, alone in my thoughts.

For one, I have become more critical of the way I work and actively pursue ways to improve my productivity. Since March 15, we have been working from home, and it was not easy to adjust. Working in pajamas just did not feel real to me. Nothing separated my personal life from my work life and adhering to “office hours” felt inconsequential.

But eventually, I realized that dragging myself out of bed fifteen minutes before the start of the workday made me feel sluggish. I became disciplined about waking up an hour before so I can still have my slow mornings, give myself time to breathe before I open my emails so I don't feel overwhelmed

before I am fully awake. Now more than ever, I value being efficient with my work so I can enjoy my leisure after hours.

I have also learned how to take better care of my mental health. I rest when needed, and work out just to give myself a boost of serotonin. The quarantine has taught me that self-care is actively pursued. It is something you set aside time for and requires intention. We are in a very bad place. The least we could do is be good to ourselves.

“Working in pajamas just did not feel real to me.”

Consequently, I have learned to be actively good to other people. Even with social distancing, I find myself occasionally seeking more social bonding--something I did not do pre-COVID. I know now that I will not be finding myself stuck in social situations anytime soon, so instead, I muster up the courage to send a friend that message, check in on people, and maybe, if I'm feeling extra sociable, send them a Google Hangouts link.

Above all, the quarantine has exposed how deeply privileged I am. That, amidst a global crisis, I remain intact, able to prioritize self-care and do some online shopping. This position comes with obligations. When the “new normal” effectively plants itself in each of our lives, we all have the obligation to make ourselves useful. Because while we cannot avoid another global crisis, we need to be better in responding to it.

“Because while we cannot avoid another global crisis, we need to be better in responding to it.”



A-ctivate Social-Distancing.



S-tay Healthy.



S-anitation is key.



I-ncrease productivity.

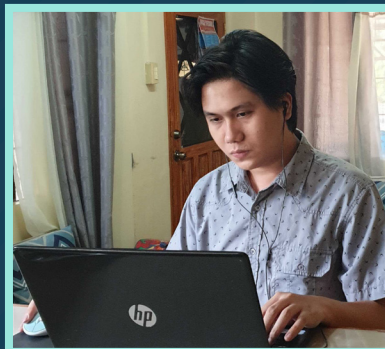
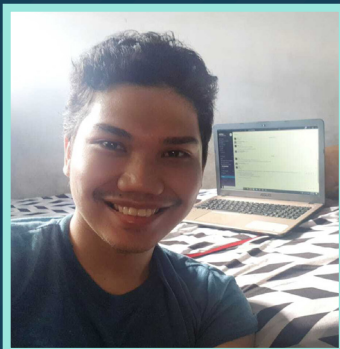
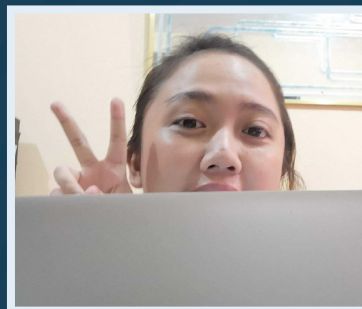


S-tay informed.



T-ake initiative.

OUR WORK-FROM-HOME SET-UP





Interactive Opinion: How can NGOs do better in times of a pandemic?

The current COVID-19 pandemic has brought major disruptions across the globe. As nations continue to combat the unseen enemy, NGOs play an essential role in promoting several causes, while giving importance to other existing societal issues such as poverty and inequality.

In this issue of ASSIST Now newsletter, we asked young professionals online and our own colleagues on their perspective on how NGOs can maximize their efforts to reach the most unreached communities in the midst of a pandemic.



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Bea Salazar, graduating Humanities student

Especially during a time wherein physical support is restricted, NGOs can better maximize their digital platforms in order to collect donations, connect with other organizations and affiliates, and ensure their specific cause will not go unheard. In fact, we're already seeing some sort of progress through NGOs utilizing marketing tactics, networking, and providing adequate ways for others to help out.



Jayashree Anbukarasu, Group Associate, ASSIST India

NGOs can support small and marginalized communities by supporting economic and livelihood opportunities and helping these communities adapt to the new context. Safeguarding the wellbeing of the community is very important at these times.



Gita Mariel L. Manuel, 3rd-year Integrated Marketing Communication student

Knowing that the NGOs are more likely able to reach out to the minority of the spectrum, they should maximize the opportunity to reach out to many remote areas as they can because not everyone is able to receive aid or help immediately.

They should also maximize their function as a bridge between those who want to help and those who need the help by researching on possible funding or donation opportunities and utilization of social media and other mass media platforms.



Bella Louise Reyes, 4th-year Economics student

I think good marketing strategies can help NGOs better communicate what they want to achieve to potential donors, therefore increasing the support they need to continue operations!



Ngoc Tran (Nicole), PMO ASSIST Mekong Region

As the pandemic situation is uncertain, I think one of the most important tasks is having preparation at all times, which includes finance, human resource, and information, etc. Also, consider this pandemic as both a challenge to overcome and a chance to adapt and search for funding opportunities.



Bea Deonio, graduating Economics student and currently an international trade fairs intern at European Chamber of Commerce

NGOs can do better by actively searching for funding opportunities! Coordinating with and learning from other organizations across the globe can help them understand their financial risks and challenges, and can, therefore, adopt long-term solutions.

MOD

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