

PIERRE H. MAINGUY

Millennial Social Entrepreneur

Community First

President & Board Member

By the time he was 30 years old, Pierre Mainguy had brought water to over 10,000 villagers in northwestern Cambodia.

At the time, very few development projects would take place in this part of the small Southeast Asian Kingdom, simply because there were no paved roads that lead to these villages.

And this is how Pierre met the leaders of the remote and forgotten community of Sen Sok. Many families there during those years were constrained to one meal a day at the time, for lack of innovative and productive agricultural techniques.

This made Sen Sok a prime choice for helping people build their own community from ground up. And we did.

But the story of Community First starts in Southern California, where Pierre first met senior consultant in Philanthropy John C. Whaley nine years ago today.

At the time, Pierre was a financial analyst in Downtown Los Angeles. And as any ambitious finance major before the 2008 financial crash, the then 23 years old business graduate was looking forward to a successful career in the lucrative world of early-stage private equity.

But after having produced a paper on rural development in Southeast Asia as part of his business studies based on his field research in Cambodia, a new perception of humanity's reality started to take shape in Pierre's mind. And soon, that reality started taking root. Literally.

A few months later, thanks to John, Pierre was able to travel to Cambodia, a country he knew very little about. This is when and how he was given the opportunity to effectively work on some of humanity's' most pressing challenges.

Having seen the despair of mothers unable to feed their children and fathers having to leave the cradle of their family to seek paying jobs far from home was a turning point for Pierre.

At that point in time in his life, Pierre was charged by John Whaley with a simple mission: create sustainable projects to help people lift their own communities out of poverty.

As a result, community first begun focusing its youthful energy and yet limited resources towards ensuring families had a chance to "stick together", instead of breaking apart due to forces they do not and cannot control.

Driven by the idea that the villagers they worked with should be considered as stakeholders rather than, as some may see them: "poor people"; Pierre & John started working on an equity-driven approach towards community development that focused on the needs villagers saw as a priority.

Enters the local youth, the pulse of Cambodia's heart who pledged to actively partake in and help with Community First's vision. With tens of Cambodian university students, most programs have turned into profoundly Cambodian owned & driven projects ran and designed by local community organizers.

In his talks, Pierre discusses the challenges he had to overcome, and the opportunities for development he found in the most unlikely and forgotten places. He also shares his experience working on the ground, in villages spanning from the Mekong delta, all the way to the ancient Burmese cities in Myanmar as a Millennial social entrepreneur.

In the eight years since Community First was created from scratch, the Pasadena-based organization has helped improve the lives of thousands of families, thanks to its local and international network of volunteers and academics.

Millennial students from the capital city of Phnom Penh, all the way to the University of Edinburgh across the massive continent of Eurasia are now rushing towards community first's Aquaponic Farm School and its R&D Laboratory adjacent to Angkor Wat, the largest man-made religious shrine built by mankind.

By working with the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture and the Kingdom's Department of State, and with prestigious international universities, Community First is leading the way in the development of a new kind of philanthropy that is both driven *and* implemented by the people.

Today, the villagers of Northwestern Cambodia are facing the challenges of climate adaptation on their own. As a result, their food security is now in jeopardy. 2014 and 2015 each set the record for hottest calendar year since scientists throughout the world began measuring surface temperatures over 150 years ago, and 2016 is almost certain to break the record once again [[link](#)].

This means that the dry season of Southeast Asia's rice basket is turning into persistent droughts, while the rainy season exacerbate the monsoon rains, and provoke unprecedented floods in living memory.

This is why Community First is now the leader in spreading aquaponics across rural areas, where the very livelihoods of countless families are at stake.

Most importantly, 2016 will mark the year when Southeast Asia's very first rural aquaponic school will have been built. This will give the necessary tools for families to reclaim their freedom from the economic and environmental forces that they cannot control.

To learn more about Community First programs, watch the Sen Sok web documentary on access to water in rural Cambodia: watch trailer. And to learn more about aquaponics, visit village-aquaponics.org