



**Dear friends, colleagues and partners:**

The year before has been a very different year for all of us – challenging our individual commitments, abilities, creativity, patience, and sanity. I wanted to share these reflections with you all as we end a very unusual year and wish you a better year ahead.

The conditions we were in for most of the past year allowed us more time for **self- reflection** - to reflect on “how effective we really are in enabling and empowering our community partners”. Are our efforts to support our partners enough? Are we truly helping them achieve their aspirations for self-determination, community development and resiliency in the most effective way? As we reflect on our previous support to partners in the social environmental movement across South East Asia region– on what works, what could work better, we know we could always do better.

As a community of social and environmental advocates and activists we are inspired by the resilience demonstrated by our CSO and community partners in the face of multiple challenges-continued marginalization, increased repression aggravated by the added restrictions brought about by COVID 19. Their ability to endure is inspiring. Despite all the challenges, we as individuals and our community partners faced in most of 2020, we continue to find hope within ourselves and the energy to smile at the odds we face on a daily basis. On reflection, last year was also a year of **inspiration**.

We learned to be **kinder and more caring**. In an increasingly “digital and logical world”, how does kindness and care make a difference? Our young partners in the Learning and Media Network in the Lower Mekong showed us how important kindness and caring is for any individual’s development. They showed us that knowledge and skills are better gained when this is presented in a kind and caring way. With support from friends, colleagues, families and partners we responded to the urgent appeal for rice and salt of some of our Higaonon partners in Northern Mindanao when the lockdowns started in March 2020. Our deepest gratitude to all those who showed their support for our community partners. In this movement we are in, we need to take care of each other and be each other’s pillars of strength. We learned the value of asking “how a person feels” as much as “what they are doing”.

Somehow, we and our partner CSOs found the energy to work together and jointly find **creative** solutions and to make our responses better, more flexible and effective. *Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) Swasta* (Private Vocational High School) Arjuna Laguboti, our partner school in Sumatra was able to produce hand sanitizers for sharing with communities and health centers in Pintubosi Village, Situluama Village, Gasaribu Village; to the Sub-districts in Laguboti, Sigumpar and Porsea, at a time when it was most needed in the early part of the COVID 19. Young people from Mong Pan Youth Association and Nam Khone Alumni Network in Myanmar were the first responders in the Shan state - informing their own communities of the risks brought about by this virus and ways by which the community could protect themselves. We also found ways to reach out to partners amidst the isolation brought about by lockdowns and the travel restrictions through the “Noken” events in Indonesia and the establishment of community nurseries and home gardens in the indigenous communities in the Philippines.

Learning from 2020 would not have been possible if not for the commitment and engagement of all our partners from the social and environmental movements at the local, regional and global levels; the continuing support of our donor-partners; the dedication of our staff, board and fellows; and each and every small effort you all made to get us through the year with our hearts and minds intact. Our sincere thanks to all of you.

We look forward to finding creative and flexible ways to continue to support the social and environmental movements in South East Asia in the new normal.

Here’s to wishing you all a kinder, hopeful, caring and creative 2021. Have a wonderful year ahead!!!

Regards,

*Suraya A.*

**Suraya A. Affif**  
Chairperson of the Board, Samdhana Institute

