

Project Sukacita

Bringing Joy to Those We Serve



Text and photos by Chia Yi Mian

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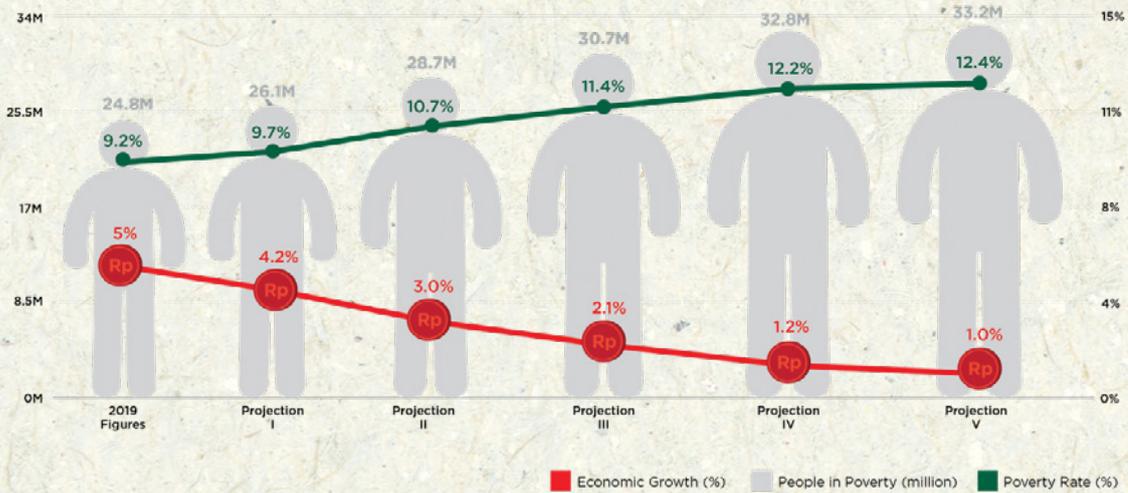
2020 was a rough year not just for Singapore, but for the whole world. As measures were put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19, community involvement projects (CIP) could not carry out their usual activities. As part of the organising team of Project Sukacita VII 2019, an overseas CIP in Indonesia, I was dismayed that we would not be able to follow up with the villagers that we had interacted with previously in person.

The team and our goals

A flagship community service project under the Tanoto Scholarship, Project Sukacita is a platform where Tanoto Scholars work together to volunteer and contribute towards enhancing the quality of health and education of the underprivileged communities. The annual CIP has been running since 2012. Our team comprises Tanoto Foundation scholars from the National

University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, Singapore Management University and Nanyang Technological University. With strong support from the Tanoto Foundation and the three schools, a total of 33 volunteers took part in Project Sukacita in May 2019.

Our project aims to encourage the locals in Pangkalan Kerinci, Indonesia, to adopt a healthier lifestyle by improving health awareness, achieved through conducting health screenings and health education. In Indonesia, one out of four children under five years old face the threat of stunting. Stunting is the result of malnutrition and a lack of physical and social stimulation. This can impact a child's development, resulting in lower cognitive ability and, on a larger scale, impact economical productivity. Of note, the SMERU Research Institute¹ projected an increase in the poverty rate in Indonesia as a result of the COVID-19



The Impact of COVID-19 Outbreak on Poverty: An Estimation for Indonesia, SMERU Institute, April 2020



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pandemic, further perpetuating the risk of stunting in children.

Serving the community

During our two-week long trip, we held multiple educational activities with the children which taught them the importance of hand and oral hygiene. Targeting our concerns of stunting in the region, we also engaged the children with interactive play to educate them on food nutrition and the importance of a balanced diet. Separately, we held two sessions of health screenings for the children and their parents. The health screenings focused on identifying existing ear and oral conditions for the children and the measurement of body mass index and blood pressure, and addressing any acute concerns, of the adults. 143 children and 122 adults underwent our health screening programme.



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During the health screenings, our volunteers shared advice tailored for each participant based on findings during the sessions, and provided educational pamphlets. Participants with alarming complaints or conditions requiring medication were directed to local doctors who volunteered their time with us. As our project only spanned two weeks in an entire year, it was important to ensure that the locals were directed back to the local healthcare system for follow-ups. Having local doctors volunteering on-site was the first step towards sustainability and ensuring long-term follow-up.

We also launched a longitudinal programme with the local childcare to track the children's height, weight, diet and dental hygiene monthly. The collected data is reviewed by our team such that early identification of children who are not growing adequately or require more nutrients in their diet will receive prompt intervention. With this, we hope to alleviate the problem of stunting faced by the children we serve. The Tanoto Foundation, which oversees our project, is also actively engaged with the Indonesian government in efforts to prevent stunting. To find out more, visit <https://tanotofoundation.org/stunting>.

Looking to the next trip

Although Project Sukacita 2020 was cancelled, I hope that the local children will be reminded of us when they practise hand hygiene frequently during this pandemic. I also hope that the locals will be as excited to see us again as we are to serve them again! ♦

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About the Tanoto Foundation

The Tanoto Foundation is an independent philanthropic organisation founded by Sukanto Tanoto and Tinah Bingei Tanoto, based on the belief that every person should have the opportunity to realise his or her full potential. Tanoto Foundation programmes stem from the belief that quality education accelerates equal opportunity. We harness the transformative strength of education to realise people's full potential and improve lives. Tanoto Foundation focuses on making an impact in three areas: improving learning environments, future leaders development, as well as medical research and sciences. Tanoto Scholarship provides scholars with a holistic leadership development programme. Beyond financial assistance to deserving undergraduate students, the scholarships also equip the scholars with structured leadership skills training, community service and networking experience.

Legend

1. Education programme with childcare children – handwashing exercise
2. Project Sukacita VII – with local partners and volunteers
3. Health screening – education session with specially designed health education booklet
4. Health screening – screening children for dental caries

Reference

1. Suryahadi A, Al Izzati R, Suryadarma D. The impact of COVID-19 outbreak on poverty: an estimation for Indonesia. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3dgp12p>.