



Monsaengdao Ecological School

An eco-school for vulnerable girls in northern Thailand

Program Background and Priorities 2012-2014

Global Giving Challenge – Sept 2012



Association for Community and Ecology Development (ACED)



1.0 The Organization

Monsaengdao Ecological School was founded in 1998 by the Association for Community and Ecology Development (ACED). The organization develops and protects the rights of ethnic minority children, youth and highland communities through education, raising ecological and cultural awareness, and promoting the sustainable management of agricultural and natural resources.

Monsaengdao is located 30 kilometers south east of the city of Chiang Rai in northern Thailand. The property is 97 rai (approximately 38 acres) and is home to the **Monsaengdao Ecological School** and the Monsaengdao Training Center. In addition to the school, Monsaengdao has sustainable agriculture demonstration areas, environmental education trails, visitor accommodation and administrative facilities. The remainder of the property (60%) is dedicated to conservation forest.

ACED operates in two main program areas. The first is to support and strengthen local communities understanding and practice of sustainable agricultural techniques. The organization works to enable rural communities to preserve natural resources, biodiversity and achieve environmentally sustainable livelihoods. The second priority area is to empower marginalized rural people and to support their advocacy for human rights protection and development, especially the rights of children and women in local ethnic minority communities.

Monsaengdao Ecological School is ACED's flagship program and embodies the organization's philosophy and priority areas of focus.

2.0 Monsaengdao Ecological School

Monsaengdao Ecological School delivers a highly regarded education program targeted at adolescent, at-risk girls from northern Thailand's ethnic minorities (hill tribes) and remote rural communities. The school's curriculum, teaching and learning processes are developed according to the eco-school and environmental education concepts. It is one of eight alternative education schools in Thailand and is considered a model for providing ecological focused education for children from ethnic communities.

The curriculum incorporates general subjects as per the curriculum of the Department of Non-Formal Education. In addition, specialized elective subjects have developed by the school. These include: **Vocational Studies** - Arts, Organic Farming, Tourism and Hospitality, Cooking.

Life Foundation Skills - Environment Education, Ethnic and Community Culture, Occupational Skills, Social Development, Sufficiency Economy, Morality for Life.

Activity clubs - Performance and Arts, Environmental Conservation, and Cultural Inheritance.

The concept of sustainable ecological development is integrated in all the school's teachings and practices. Students learn about the protection of ecosystems, environmental management and the practice of sustainable agriculture. In turn, they are encouraged to disseminate this knowledge within their own communities. The school also exchanges the concept and their experience with both primary and secondary public schools in the wider community.

Before coming to live and study at Monsaengdao my skills were limited. I have learnt by doing so many different things including how to cook and look after myself. I have more responsibility and better leadership skills. In the future I want to be a writer and activist and use what I have learnt to help others to understand about hill tribe culture. I want to help to develop my community in positive ways.

Thai (aged 17, Akha tribe, President - Monsaengdao School)

3.0 The Students

Currently there are 20 girls from five different ethnic minority groups (hill tribes) at the school. There are also four Lanna (northern Thai) girls who have already suffered rights violations and have come to the school for emotional healing and to continue their education.

Girls in ethnic minority (hill tribe) and remote communities in the highland areas of Chiang Rai and Payao provinces are at risk of being trafficked into prostitution due to their families' poverty. In many cases, they drop out of school at the age of 12 after finishing elementary school. They are then expected to find work and earn wages to support the families. Under these circumstances, and with limited education, girls are often lured into prostitution by a network of traffickers many of whom often come from the same communities as the girls.

Monsaengdao's alternative education program gives at-risk girls the opportunity to pursue their education in an environment free from the pressure to earn income to support themselves and their families and protected from the risk of being trafficked.

4.0 Educational Approach

Monsaengdao Ecological School promotes an alternative integrated education. While teaching emphasizes practical exercises and self learning, equal emphasis is placed on supporting the students to live in a community and encouraging them to help others. Teachers offer assistance, guidance and

opportunities to the students throughout the learning process both within, and outside of, the classroom.

Awareness and appreciation of cultural identity is encouraged and celebrated. Daily life at the school is designed to replicate life in the students' communities as closely as possible. The girls cook their own meals, forage in the forest for traditional herbs and food, shop at the local market and sleep in buildings constructed in the traditional manner. Each girl is supported to develop self reliance, confidence and to be conscious of her individual importance. The students are empowered to be proactively involved in the development of communities to be socially, ecologically and economically sound for the future.

At Monsaengdao I learn so much about the culture of the other tribes and the communities that the other girls come from. We live as one family which also includes our teachers and 'father' (our Director). They help us, teach us and support us. After I leave Monsaengdao I want to continue my studies as I want to be a tourist guide. But I also want to return to Monsaengdao to help whenever I can. I want to be able to share my knowledge with other younger students in the future.

Nam (aged 18, Akha tribe)

5.0 The Challenges

The future of the school is uncertain as its current funding is under threat. Funding to support the core operations of the school was due to commence in July 2012, however it has been postponed until early to mid 2013. The school urgently needs to secure an alternative source of funding to provide emergency funds to keep the school operating in the immediate term. It also needs to develop strategies to address long term, ongoing funding requirements to ensure viability of the school in the long term.

Since its establishment in 1998, Monsaengdao Ecological School has conducted sustainable agriculture activities as a core component of the academic program. These activities provide the students with a chance to develop valuable skills and knowledge that can be applied throughout their life. An added benefit is that the school is supplied with fresh, organic produce.

To date these activities have been constrained by insufficient money being available to implement strategic development of the farming activities including the employment of experienced staff to sustain the farming and teaching activities.

6.0 Vision for the Future

Monsaengdao Ecological School's vision for the future is to be a model, eco-school servicing the needs of its resident students and the broader community.

The priority over the next 18 months will be to develop the Monsaengdao Eco Farm, an organic farm based on permaculture principles. The school's existing gardens and sustainable agriculture activities will form the basis of the redevelopment, which will see the school transformed into a model teaching farm. The educational curriculum will be further refined as the farm develops. Innovative hands-on programs combining contemporary organic agricultural techniques with traditional local knowledge will be developed. The programs will directly benefit the students and also cater to visiting groups and local communities who will be able to undertake training at the farm.

7.0 The Action Plan

The focus over the next 18 months will be on developing strategies and implementing programs that will progress the school's aim of being recognized as a model teaching facility and becoming more sustainable in the future. There are 3 key areas:

1. Organic farm

The school and training center already has established facilities including vegetable gardens, ponds and a small rice field. These existing areas will form the basis of the re-development of the property into an eco-farm. The eco farm will incorporate organic vegetable gardens, fruit orchards, nursery, compost facilities, fish ponds and poultry houses. It is anticipated that the farm will be a 'classroom' for the delivery of on-site training programs and supply the school with fresh organic food. Activities include:

- Employ an experienced organic farming instructor or accredited permaculturalist to begin the redevelopment of the property into a teaching eco-farm and to identify and develop education and training opportunities;
- Offer an internship to a recent graduate or stipend to an qualified volunteer (long term) to work alongside the organic farming instructor in the redevelopment of the farm and to assist in education and training program delivery; and
- Utilize the existing built facilities (include visitor accommodation and training rooms) more effectively for training programs that will generate revenue.

2. Eco-education curriculum and training programs

The school already incorporates eco-teachings in the classroom and intends to further develop its curriculum with the goal of establishing the school as a model eco-teaching facility and to achieve

private school accreditation. This accreditation would enable the school to access more government support for the school's activities. Activities include:

- Continue development of the school's curriculum. The current Environmental Education teacher will work with the new organic farming instructor to develop the school's sustainable agriculture curriculum;
- Develop the educational activities into a series of innovative training programs that will be delivered onsite and aimed at groups from local communities and visiting schools; and
- Ensure that the student activities (in and out of the classroom) reflect the school's eco-philosophy and commitment to being a model eco-school and teaching farm and that the students are actively engaged in the process.

3. Leadership skills

The students are actively involved in many aspects of the school's program activities and they take leadership roles in many activities that are currently conducted with visiting schools. The school actively encourages cascading leadership. Older girls mentor younger students and have defined responsibilities in the delivery of programs. Younger girls learn skills from the older students and have them as examples of what they can be in the future. Activities to further develop these skills include:

- Encourage them to actively participate in the redevelopment of the farm by involving them in decisions relating to what activities to include and priority areas to focus on;
- Provide them with strong mentors that they can look up to and learn from. They already have this in their young, female Environmental Education teacher and we will be looking to appoint a similar mentor to one of the agricultural roles (organic farming instructor, intern or volunteer);
- Provide opportunities for students to research and contribute information about traditional knowledge from their communities and to investigate contemporary best practice in organic farming and permaculture. This information will be used in the development of education and training programs.

I come from a community that lives by the river and still uses a lot of chemicals. Since I have been at Monsaengdao I have learnt so much about how to do things organically and how to live more sustainably. I know I cannot change the way my community does things overnight. But I am trying to get them to understand how what they do is impacting their health and the environment.

I talk to my family about things like not cutting down trees, reducing the use of chemicals and how to deal with the garbage better. I want to share my knowledge and demonstrate by doing things with my family first so that the rest of the community will see there is another way. My dream is to become a community leader so that I have the power and the right to solve problems.

Mei (aged 14, Lahu tribe)

8.0 How you can help the School

The target fundraising amount is **US\$49,500**.

Securing funds will enable the school to:

- **Maintain the school's current core operations** through the next 12 months. Funding will cover the day-to-day costs which include; food for the students and staff, basic services, and salaries for the current staff. This will give the organization time to re-secure the funding that has supported the program to date and/or source new funding from elsewhere; and
- **Redevelop the property into a teaching eco farm** and support the ongoing development of the school's eco-education curriculum and training activities. It will allow the school to employ an experienced organic farmer or permaculturalist to lead the redevelopment of the farm and teach the students, and to offer a stipend to an intern or long term volunteer to assist in the farm redevelopment project. Funds will also be used to build a small plant nursery to raise vegetable seedlings and trees for forest regeneration and purchase seeds and tools.

Food security is not merely sufficient quantities of food for consumption by society. It also includes safe food, free from toxic chemicals and diverse food, sourced by the seasons from the local area, without negatively impacting on ecosystems.

The aim of this project is not simply to provide food security by growing sufficient and safe food for the Monsaengdao students. It will also provide a natural classroom for the girls to learn skills, knowledge and understanding. This will empower them to protect the natural environment and use the biological resources of their communities and the country in a sustainable and balanced way.

Mr. Thewin Akkharasilachai (Director of ACED)

Thank you for taking the time to find out more about Monsaengdao Ecological School. We hope that you feel inspired by our work and feel as positive as we do about our future. Visit our [website](#) to find out more about our school and the programs we run.



And if you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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