

# **Life and Hope Association: Engaged Buddhist Strategy Transforming Compassion into Social Action**

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to find the strategy transforming compassion into real social action by Buddhist NGO that considered as a new movement of Buddhist social work in Cambodia. The loving-kindness and compassion as wishing and wanting to see other happy will not be just in the form of compassionate mind when it is taken into action. This study will show one upper step of sustainable development concept from compassion when it is applied by socially engaged Buddhist movement. The engaged Buddhist strategy of Life and Hope Association brings the Buddhist concept of compassion into social well-fares and services for the sustainable development of community and human resources. Bringing disadvantaged children and vulnerable women into the better mainstream society by empowering them through education as the tool to lead their lives and it can be long last impacts for individual and society. This work comes from the real field experience with intensive involving in the organization's social activities for three months in order to see how this Buddhist NGO's initiative strategy could bring the needs for sustainable development to meet with the sustainable help that provides the long last impacts that mean for active model transforming compassion into real social action.

**Keywords:** Buddhist NGO; Compassion; Engaged Strategy; Social Action

## Introduction

The Life and Hope Association (LHA) is a non-profit, non-governmental, and non-political organization that founded in 2005 by the monks of Wat Damnak in Siem Reap, Cambodia. This is one of the very well-known Buddhist NGOs in Cambodia that works in helping the poorest of the poor in the communities and educating disadvantaged children, girls, and young women. It mainly focuses on the women because the founders realized that in Cambodian society, the female is the most disadvantaged people and widely less educating than male. They can easy to be the victim of their unequal education opportunity and gender discrimination in the society they live in. It can be questioned of how the Buddhist monks can work for the women while having many monastic rules regarding female issues? Interestingly, to see the monks view on this issue as Ven. Lorm Loeurm expressed that:

Who would take part and give hands to help them when women are discriminated on many social and educational opportunities by the culture that most of the people ignore this. As the spiritual leaders, the monks should not tolerant to see these vulnerable women and girls living with hopeless and lack of caring from the society. The monks can work on changing the mindset of people to raise up the value of gender equally respected by empowering the girls through educational opportunities. (Ven. Lorm Loeurm, 2016)

This idea especially comes from the former venerable Somnieng Hoeurn who is the founder of Life and Hope Association. He wanted to use the spiritual favor of the monks that respected in Khmer society to work for the social contribution to the marginalized and needed people. He gathered the volunteering monks who interested in social work activities to form the Life and Hope Association even though the local people seemed unhappy to see this kind of NGO run by monks. As Vuthy Thoeurn, the project coordinator of Buddhism in Society Program said:

The people criticized that it is not the monks' business to involve in social activities like the lay people. They should rather stay at the temple only and do their monastic jobs. However, when our activities are well-known and received more recognition locally and nationally. The people will stop criticize of what we are doing. (Hoeurn, 2016)

This is the misunderstanding of the people that religion is distinguished from society while in fact Buddhism neither separate but it integrates into nearly every norm, belief and practice of the people in society. The loving-kindness and compassion stand as the Khmer core characteristic that can see the people easy to smile for each other, easy to pity when they see the poor and disadvantaged people and want to help them even he or she is not the rich one. We cannot deny that this is not the impact of the Buddha's teachings in which the people learn from the monks. However, the roles of monks are put into teachings rather than actions in socially while making social services happen, loving-kindness and compassion need actions to bring self-impact contributing to the people who need helps.

This makes a small group of monks took to reconsider whether how if they are not just simply teaching the people to be compassionate but also put themselves as a sample of making compassion into real action through Buddhist socially engagement. To be Buddhist NGO, bringing them one upper step to ingrate the Buddha Four Noble Truths as the co-relative causes, effects, and solutions for prior research analysis the groups of people those

who are most needed helps, what are their sufferings? Why do they suffer? How to help them and do they really benefit from the ways that help are provided by Buddhist NGO?

### **Compassion in Engaged Buddhism**

The compassion and loving-kindness are closely related virtues, representing two facets of benevolence, or goodwill that both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions embrace in these virtues. According to B. King, both of these are closely tied to the development of freedom from selfishness and ego-centeredness in which one actively cares more about the welfare of others, one is focusing on less and less upon oneself (King, 2009). In socially engaged Buddhism does not merely seek to eliminate suffering, but actively identifies compassion (karuna) as a virtue to be cultivated as a mean to this end. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are understood to entail, in part, an action that is motivated by compassion. Right effort is directed often at the cultivation of compassion, both in traditional practices and in contemporary socially engaged Buddhism (Chakrabarti, 2012).

As Nagarjuna expresses the basic principle of Buddhist social action: the universal altruism of “great love” (mahamatta) and “great compassion”, or “great empathy” (mahakaruna). The primary Buddhist position on the social action is one of total activism, an unswerving commitment to complete self-transformation and complete world-transformation. This activism becomes fully explicit in the Universal Vehicle (Mahayana), with its compellingly implicit in the Individual Vehicle (Hinayana) in both the Buddha’s action and his teachings: granted, this attention in the latter was on self-transformation, the pre-requisite of social transformation. Thus, it is squarely in the center of all Buddhist traditions to bring basic principles to bear on actual contemporary problems to develop ethical, even political, guidelines for action (Kotler, 1996).

Engaged Buddhism is not just a Western movement but can be found all over the world. Engaged Buddhists see their work as part and parcel of their spiritual practice. Typically they address issues including moral, cultural, spiritual, social, political, and economic dimensions. Although they draw on traditional Buddhist ideas and practices in which engaged Buddhists also model their work on non-Buddhists such as Mahatma Gandhi and the Rev (Bailey, Randall & Taitz, 2006). Martin Luther King Jr. In addition to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivarakas, the prominent engaged Buddhists include A.T. Ariyaratne, leader of Sri Lanka’s Sarvodaya movement which focuses on objectives that may be achieved and recognized in this lifetime, in this world. Ariyaratne has focused on the “ten basic human needs” that must be met for liberation to be possible: a clean and beautiful environment, an adequate and safe water supply, clothing, balanced diet, simple housing, basic health care, communication facilities, energy, education related to life and living, and free access to cultural and spiritual resources. This list is offered as a modern version of the Buddhist “middle way” a balancing of the material and spiritual aspects of social change (Queen, 1996).

### **Life and Hops Association**

Life and Hope Association (LHA) is a non-profit, non-governmental, non-political, and an education-focused organization. It was established in 2005 and run by monks of Wat Damnak in Siem Reap, Cambodia. It committed to breaking the cycle of poverty by providing compassionate care and access to education to the poorest and most vulnerable in Cambodia –

especially children and disadvantaged young women. With believing that the root of all suffering is ignorance and that loving care and a good education can provide a way out of poverty (Life and Hope Association, 2016). This organization comes from the compassionate mind of the Buddhist monks who want to see the lives of many disadvantaged people and want to help them as a part of social responsibilities. This can reflect on the words of Ven. Choeurn Chhun, the first assistant of Wat Damnak and second co-founder of LHA said:

We can live because of the lay people, we can't tolerant to see they are suffered and we do nothing to help them. As the monks, we should do some things to help them in return and the society that we rely on. (Ven. Choeurn Chhun, 2016)

This idea of helping people reflects through five main projects LHA that cost \$ 253,464 per year to bring hopes to the lives of hundreds of young women, and families.

The first program, Sustainable Community Project (SCP) is the project aiming to assist the families in target communities around Siem Reap with the financial burden of sending their children to school. The monk of LHA enters into a social contract with poor families with children, where LHA provides basic support to the poor families in exchange for their promise to send their children to school instead of using them as a source of income. In addition, LHA provides school uniforms and supplies. LHA also provides microloan with low interest to improve the future economic wellbeing of families (Ratha, 2015). Many poor families do not even manage to send their children to go to school and usually the children are asked to stop at the early primary school level. The parents would send them to work for the family after they have learned reading and writing from the school. Even though people are more aware of the importance of education but the effects from poverty still prevent many children from entering the school. In which we cannot complain as the fault of the parents alone because of some poor families they really do not have the choice rather sending their children to work. The monks who are usually familiar to the local people knew well about this problem. In order to bring back these children to school, LHA made a home visit to the villages, recruited the poorest families as the members of SCP project to provide them monthly food sponsorship and school-kits sponsorship to the children annually with the requirement that all parents must send their children to go to school. Even this is not a direct resolution but it could make a huge change when LHA still provides skilled technical consulting support to the parents of children to start their own business under loan provision from the organization with low interest. When the families are able to live independently, the organization will invite them to retire from the membership and replace by new poor families.

The second project, Children Development Village (CDV) is an orphanage children's home providing full support and family-like care for up to 45 children from age 4 or 5 until they finish the secondary school. They come from extremely poor and disadvantaged backgrounds who lost one or both parents and some come from abusive or neglectful families and HIV-positive children. CDV aims to empower these children by providing them education, shelter, food, and all health care needs (Savorn, 2015). Children who live at Children Development Village will be sent to study at the public school from primary up to secondary school at less before they are allowed to decide whether they want to peruse higher education or leaving from the center after graduation. LHA will provide them the scholarship to study high school and a bachelor degree in the city in order to enable them to break the

cycle of poverty and strive for a brighter future. In which there is another center called PAGE available for the girls who graduate secondary school from CDV to live in for continuing their high school.

The third project, Program Advancing Girls' Education (PAGE) is a place for girls who wanted to continue their education through high school and beyond. The Page's primary goal is to provide educational opportunity through full high school scholarship to young girl students who finished grade 9 from rural villages to study high school and university in Siem Reap City (Ratha, 2015). Because a high school does not available in many remote villages although children might need to travel very far from their villages to school every day. This only those who have sufficient economic support from the family can do while other poor children often can finish the only secondary school level. Since studying high school is regarded as a big obstacle of economic burden to the families that parents usually cannot support their children. To help these girls, PAGE provides a full high school scholarship to over twenty you girl students every year to live and study in Siem Reap until they graduate. This is a full scholarship that includes all school tuition fee, accommodation, food, study materials, and other necessities for a living. With this scholarship can make a big change in their lives, where the girls have more opportunities to study and experience living in the city that will make them see broader view of the society they live in. On the other hand, the girls will be able to pursue higher education in bachelor degree with support from the organization.

The fourth project, The Park Hyatt Siem Reap & LHA Sewing School (STS) established in 2006 for teaching the skills to young disadvantaged Cambodian women who gave up the school and lack of the skills to work. Over sixty young girls graduated from here and got the jobs or run their own sewing shop at home. This school is founded because of former Ven. Somnieng Hoeurn realized that many young girls in Cambodia usually have to work at brick factories or construction sites where they are subject to hard labor because of low education and skills (Ratha, 2015). The STS will recruit 28-30 students every year to learn about ten months of training over fifty different sewing skills or models. This comprehensive knowledge can then be drawn upon to foster economic opportunity for individuals or families. In which they have a job guaranteed by the organization that has local partners in Siem Reap and other provinces to get the girls work in after they finish from LHA Sewing School. Each student will be given a sewing machine and small starter pack to begin their new life with their new skill.

The fifth project, Buddhism in Society Programs (BSP) aims to translate the Buddha's teaching (Dharma) into the daily life of people in communities, and bigger society in which to empowering the monks from different local temples to actively engage in social services (Vuthy, 2015). For instance, one of the most well-known projects of BSP is building peace houses for the poor families in Seam Reap. In which 109 houses during five years were built for the poor families in different villages. The houses received from a donation by individual people, family, group, and organization in abroad and the volunteer monks, staff will cooperate with village headman to invite local volunteers to join building the house for the poor family in their village. The monks and staff work with the local communities to get information from the local leaders about the poorest families that woman is a widow with many children living in a small old shelter that they called house.

## **Engaged Strategy**

The initiative strategy of LHA which originally from the traditional temple based practice of Wat Damnak in social welfare for the young poor students living at the temple. Ven. Somnieng Hoeurn and Ven. Choeurn Chhun gathered the group of volunteering monks and lay people to restructure and modernize the system into association or non-governmental organization. LHA works like other local and international organizations that primarily received support from abroad to run the projects instead of from local donation. It differs from other NGOs in which the executive director must be the monk and in the organization structure there are monks and laypeople work together.

The ideas of involving in wider social responsibilities from the temple cannot simply reply on the local supports to manage many projects that hundreds of women, children, and poor families are the beneficiaries. It is the challenge of how the Buddhist NGO could do this? The organization must have the good governance, good relationship, accountability, transparency, and human resources management that make it is qualified to find the sources of the fund from abroad to support the programs for children, youths, and women. This organization could happen because of Ven. Somnieng, who used to involve in HIV and AIDS program for many years with other NGOs before he decided to establish an engaged Buddhist NGO by himself. He was recognized as the first Cambodian monk who graduated from Haward University. During his studies in the US, he made friendship to many people from different fields of works and introduced them about LHA. Though he is a very active young monk leader and motivating speaker with highly qualified knowledge made him able to invite many foreign highly educated people who are themselves the rich men or have a connection with many organizations in the US, Europe, and Asia as the sources of fund to support what his organization is doing. Many foreign donors came to meet him and being inspired by his powerful words to help the women and children in Cambodia until they wanted to dedicate themselves to support LHA's activities. For example the story of Dr. Lawrence by Ven. Lorm Loeurm:

“Dr. Lawrence Chan, a Chinese businessman from Hong Kong who is recently the founder of Seal of Love Charitable Foundation to support LHA's projects and activities. However, he was a former Christian but after his only one son passed away, he came to visit Siem Reap and met Ven. Somnieng accidentally at the main office of LHA in 2010. After the conversation, he was interested that monks could speak English and many of them working for the poor and disadvantaged people. He started to involve in and become one of the main supporters of LHA in many projects. Especially, he provides ten scholarships to the monks who engage in social works with LHA to study at the University degree every year. Up to now, over 22 scholarship monk students under his supports. These monks have become the very important human resources of LHA, under the requirement of the scholarship they have to manage the time to work at LHA after the school time during the week. In so doing, during the student life time they can learn from the university, work for the organization, and contribute to the needed people and local community. This is the way that LHA buildings the capacity of its human resources (Ven. Lorm Loeurm, 2016).

More interestingly, in order to make the good management of organization it opens to all partners who are the direct or indirect donors, foreign volunteers, and people from external

institutions to get involved in structuring and designing the governance and management models of LHA's structure and programs to make it systematically arranged with the reliable standard. In which before it came to run all five projects, many monks and lay people have been sent to learn from many partnership organizations. Most of the main donors are invited to sit as the board members of the organization and come to see the projects and activities irregularly by themselves. Besides this, every year will have the foreign volunteers apply to work for the LHA and providing a technical advisor to help to build internal staff capacity and improve the organization's activities and services. Like Mrs. Carrol from Australia, she used to work for many international organizations around the world and currently also working as a volunteer at LHA in the position of board member and technical advisor.

Even though, Life and Hope Association has potential to get more supports from many places and many local and international organizations that want to support the projects and being partnership with but it decides to limit itself not to receive more money to expand its programs bigger but rather strictly focuses on quality of its activities and services with the available sufficient funding of the year. As Ven. Lorm Loeurm, the current executive director said:

When we make our organization is good in quality, accountability, and transparency there will be many donors and supporters from different organizations want to support us which we don't need to write the proposal and struggle to find the fund like other organizations do and we have more choices whether to accept or not. However, we don't accept all sources of a fund that are different from our policy and goal to run this organization (Ven. Lorm Loeurm, 2016).

When asking the questions of why LHA does not want to expand its projects by receiving more money from other sources to expand its project to help more people? The answer is it would not be a good idea to focus on quantitative by wanting to help many people or making the organization bigger without knowing self-limitations of the organization. In term of quality, many small organizations together can work better than a big organization anyway. The bigger organization usually has to deal with many staff and busy with a lot of documents in order to make itself look accountability and transparency in using money. However, it has the pros and cons especially when a project is not a single partnership. They will be forced to spend more time working on communication and documentation with all cooperative partners which make them less of time in real work and cannot pay full effort work on the program. Then the beautiful report does not always reflect the reality of project implementation and its results. This differs from a smaller organization even though often being complained about poor in documentation and report. But they do have more time to spend on the field works and this more directly impacts to the community and beneficiaries that NGO involves in. Like LHA, its staff does not always need to be those who are highly educated from a very famous university with good grad and good writing and speaking English. Because the programs are mainly about community development, women, children. Although the most importance is the right person for the right job and in social work the good man should be regarded as the most importance than everything. As Ven. Lorm Loeurm said:

We want to have the staff who are highly educated from the university, have job experiences and professional in their works but the most important

qualification that we are strongly committed to recruit any staff to work for LHA must be a good man in both views and behaviors. Even he or she has satisfied every requirement but if without these two things we will not select them because LHA is working for the poor and disadvantaged people and no one can be rich by working here. Only those who are willing to dedicate themselves to these social activities can do it well and we can trust them. As long as we have the good man in our organization, we can maintain LHA's reliable and transparency pictures toward local, national and international donors. (Ven. Lorm Loeurm, 2016)

The degree does not guarantee that he or she can work well with the community and the children. These groups of people need those who be able to communicate with them in which LHA has the monks who are respected by the people in the community and most of the staff are former temples boys and female staff that many of them were the scholarship students of LHA that after they graduated, they applied to work for this organization. These people know well about the problems from their own experiences. They can work effectively to serve the programs of an organization that once they used to be its beneficiaries.

And what would it do to sustain the organization? The answer might be strange for the NGOs but thoughtful. LHA comes to help disadvantaged and vulnerable people but it does not want to see these people in Cambodia. This would be frank to hear the answers that make us have to reconsider the roles and missions of NGOs again. As the statement of Ven. Lorm Loeurm, the executive director of LHA that:

NGOs do not necessary to be a sustainable organization. They are not the pride of Cambodia because they are meant many people in the country are poor and disadvantaged from opportunities and lack of caring from the state. The job of NGOs is only helping people but when their life is better improved the NGOs should have no reason to stay there but should let the people learn to be independent and help themselves. LHA as well, will not be a long last organization. When there are no people to help, that means our mission is complete, the organization will stop its works finally. (Ven. Lorm Loeurm, 2016)

### **Encouraging the Monks to work for Social Activities**

They do invite the monks the involve in social activities by providing the scholarships to the young monks who are the university students and provide leadership training to the temple leaders in Siem Reap at least two times a year. The scholarship monks will be required to work part time in charity and social activities of LHA. The temple leaders have introduced about Buddhist socially engagement through the training workshops and encouraged to take part in doing some social activities for the people and community in their areas. For example, one activity of Buddhism for Society Program called emergency relief. Every month, LHA will bring the volunteering monks to help disadvantaged families affected by a crisis such as natural disaster from flooding, fire, or extreme financial hardship in different villages. There is the technique to help these people by getting the local monk leaders to involve in. LHA will ask information from monks in the villages to suggest four most needed families in each village for LHA team be able to reach them. At the same time, LHA also invites him to join for this emergency relief in his village when the LHA team comes. In so doing, the abbot of



each temple will have a chance to learn and do social activities from this program. He will be proud to be a part of this charity activity and LHA will ask the abbot to give support to these families and suggest the families to see the abbot when they need helps. As usually each temple will have a lot of rice, food and nonfood items such as blankets, mats, mosquito nets from the donation. The temple can share these things to the people who need them. This way effectively works in which LHA visits the families only one time but can keep consistently helps to the poor families through the local temple's supports and getting more and more monk leaders involve in social works wherever LHA team takes a visit to help the people.

On the other hand, to build the peace houses for the poor and widow families sometime LHA gets direct recommend from the abbots who once involved in charity event of LHA or chief village. Or the organization will publish an announcement about the applying for peace house for those qualified poor families that want to apply for a house. LHA team will take a visit to see real situation of a family before considering to offer them a new house.

#### Case study of Ta Chan's family, Siem Reap

They live in a very small and old house made of palm leaves with eight people. One their youngest daughter has a heart leak since she was born but her parents cannot afford to send her to the hospital. To help this family, LHA conducted emergency fundraising to get some minimum of money and sent her for the health check-up at the hospital in Siem Reap. Then LHA built a new house for them. This house has become the fundamental property for the family to move forward after having better accommodation for their children.

(Ta Chan, 2016)

Each peace house cost approximately \$ 2300 (materials only) from the donation, for the technician and labor costs are free from volunteering of young monks and local villagers (Ven. Lorm Loeurm, 2016). Importantly to note that this activity contributes to two critical social impacts one is helping to the poor families with accommodation and the other creating harmony among the villagers to practice volunteering work and learn to be non-selfish by helping other villagers when they are in need of help. However, this will not happen if without the monks who guide them and ask for help from village chief man. LHA knows how to use the favor of monk spiritual leader to motivate local people to involve in community responsibility by sharing the help through free laboring. Thus when the monks get in involve in building the house for disadvantaged families and the people see the monks are working, they will feel shameful if they do not give help to the monks constructing a house because it also benefits to the people in their village. Although many of them will happy to come to help the monks voluntarily till sometimes the monks no need to do anything only guiding the local volunteers how to build a house according to the peace house model of LHA. Empirically, this helps to create the culture of helping each other among the villagers that can ask for help from other villagers when he or she wants to build a new house, the people will share this kind of free laboring as they will get this kind of help when their turn arrives.

#### Responses to the Child Rights and Education

LHA opened the house for caring the orphanage and disadvantaged children since earlier of founding the organization. Recently, over twenty children are living under the care of LHA in which other twenty children had graduated secondary school and left the center for higher education and work. Most of these children experienced in different family and social

problems before they came to live at CDV. Usually, LHA will get informed from the local authorities and village chief men about these disadvantaged children who lack caring and no one in their family able to look after them. LHA team will take a visit to see them and ask for permission if a family allows its child to live and study at the kid center. The organization manages the staff that usually called moms to look after the children 24 hours per day. In the beginning, CDV used to face with the financial support crises because it was still a lack of financial support from the international donors although sometime Wat Damnak had to be the temporary and primary sources of help to survive the center and feed the children. The rice and dry food were brought from the temple to the kid village and some of its money was shared to pay for the staff salary when there were no supporters in order to make sure that the CDV is still manageable before it gets sufficient support from the international donors. This we cannot deny that the temple has played a very important role stands to subsidy the center when it needs helps.

In which it can happen because of the monk leaders of the Wat Damnak that usually teach the people to transfer their traditional practice of generosity that based on making merit through monks and temples' donation into sharing for other social responsibilities. This temple does not strict on encouraging the people making a donation in order to support the temple's infrastructure and construction projects. It has the master plan of how much the temple needs for these then the over need of money should be shared for contributing to other social responsibilities. This can be done only when the local Buddhists are tough about awareness of the important of sharing. They will agree and happy to share their contributions to other social work activities that the monks do.

All children who live at the CDV are fully supported about the accommodation, education, and food. To make sure that all children have good access to education LHA has provided both formal and informal education by sending them to the local state schools and offering them extra particular important classes at the center. From my observation, the children who live at the center seem to receive an education than those who live at home with the families in the villages. As the results from the school, most of these children can get better grade than others because they usually have additional classes provided by CDV center in order to support their knowledge from the school and skills in difficult subjects.

#### Case study of Land Leen, CDV

Now she is 14 years old, a grade 4 of a primary school student. She was late to attend the school for many years because her parents left home although she had to look after her younger brother and youngest sister. When LHA received information from a village headman, the team came to visit her home and recruited her with a younger brother to live CDV in 2012. During living at the kid village, they are sent to study at the local public school and provided English, Khmer, and Math classes after school time. Land Leen is well-known as one of the very excellent students who always receives the first outstanding student award from the school since she lives at CDV (Leen, 2016).

LHA strictly respects the rights of children in education and care by not allowing any people to use the benefits from their childhood for their own favors. Thus even though many groups of foreigners come to visit this center occasionally but during the study time, the organization will not allow disturbing the children in exchange for some contributions to the

center like other places. All child right laws are applied to protect the children in the center and the staff must respect to these rights and commit to the regulations that set up by the organization.

### **Empowering the Girls through Education**

This PAGE center was opened in 2008 to accept poor and disadvantaged school girls from rural villages to study high school in the city by staying at the center's hostel. This is not much different from the CDV center in term of management but it is mainly focused on girls only. Providing underprivileged girls an opportunity and empowering them through education of high school levels from grade 10 to 12. Recently, 28 girls are living at the center. They were recruited from different rural villages in Siem Reap by LHA team that including monks, staff, and senior students to conduct the field visit and interview the girl applicants who apply for the scholarship with LHA. Since the beginning, this becomes one of the very successful projects that direct benefits to individual young girl students because this scholarship offers them an opportunity to have accessed to better education in the city and at the same time they are able to learn other skills after school time that provided by the PAGE or other private schools and institutions. Every student has to spend at least three years living and studying at PAGE. They are required to study at the public high school, learning computer and language skills at the center.

Moreover, every week monk from LHA will come to provide the morality lesson based on the Buddha's teaching to all students in order to make them become not simply educated people but also the good person in the society. They must have to learn about the morality and code of conduct principles for living, learn to respect oneself and others. That is strongly committed for the center to educate and train these young girls to be the highly responsible person from the positive changing in their behaviors. As they do have to share the works and responsibilities among the students such as housekeeping, cleaning, and cooking. These kinds of works can be used as the training technic to improve both mental and physical development and strength of young students. After graduation, if they want to study bachelor degree at the university, LHA will offer the partial scholarship for them. This will be covered the tuition fee cost 100% for the first year, 75% for the second year, and 50% for the third and 25% for last year. Generally, they will work part time and study in the evening or on the weekend. On the other hand, for those who applied for other places that usually will not include the living expenses, the organization will support them \$70 per month. From the estimation, there are 5 students graduated bachelor degree and two master degree since the PAGE started in 2008 and recently five girls just graduated bachelor degree, two of them are working with LHA and three other working for the private companies.

#### **Case study of Yun Nhoeurn, Page**

In 2007, after I finished the secondary school from my home village I was recruited to live at Page for continuing my high school then I was able to pursue my Bachelor Degree in Accounting in Siem Reap city. This was my great time that I ever experienced because I didn't expect that I could finish even high school if I were at my village that needed to travel 25 km for school every day. As my two brothers gave up their school because of this. So I was so lucky to live with Page and supported by LHA. During I studied my Bachelor Degree I have been working at LHA's head office for three years as accounting

assistant officer and doing part time job after work. I have to send some money to support my younger sister studies at home. After I graduated in 2015, I do apply and get the new job at the Bank in Siem Reap. (Nhoeurn, 2016)

Lastly, sewing vocational training school was set up for providing the alternative skills to the girls and women who gave up the school. Because in Cambodia, usually female get less to access to education than male. They have often stopped their studies since the primary or secondary school levels. In so doing, to help them avoiding from the victim of ignorance and become the labor forces in which the skills will be a good choice to strengthen this individual female capacity to live independently in society. Now is the eleventh generation, there are twenty-eight young women from various communities surrounding Siem Reap, Kompong Thom, Batheay Meanchey and Udon Meanchey provinces. LHA Sewing School provided them 40 lessons of making clothes for ten months and small business training course in order for them able to find the job or run their own business at home after graduation. However, in order the guarantee that most of these students will get the job after graduation, LHA has made a connection with many partners such as the companies, shops, and hotels in Siem Reap and other provinces. They usually come to contact with the sewing school since early of the course and again come to recruit the students before they graduate one month. As the result, no one is unemployed after graduation from the LHA sewing school. Moreover, Social Enterprise called "LHA Sewing Center" run by Mr. Clive and Laura that can provide more than 20 job positions for the students after graduate. This Sewing Center produces variety sewing products according to the local and international orders such as school Uniforms, Hotel Uniforms, Companies Uniform, lady robes and t-shirt.

### **Real Social Action Changes**

When the compassion is translated into action by the Buddhist monks in socially engagement. The people were not happy to see the more involvement in social activities of the monks in new forms that rarely be seen in the past. It is the common reaction of people that will not immediately accept what they have not seen or experienced before. However, when the more that monks involved in social activities and the more positive social impacts made by the monks, the people will gradually open their mind to accept and appreciate what the monks are doing for the people, community, and society. As during more than decades, not only Life and Hope Association from the temple that works for the people and community but also several other Buddhist NGOs around Cambodia start to involve in different social activities depend on the issues and problems in their areas. Such as Buddhism for Social Development Action (BSDA) that works for the street children and HIV and AIDS families based in Kampong Cham, Buddhism for Education of Cambodia (BEC) focuses on morality training and supporting education activities in Battambang and Independent Monk Network for Social Justice mainly involves in social and political issues especially when there were the big issues of land grabbing and political conflict over election last two year and Monk Community Forest that work to protect the evergreen forest in northwest Cambodia. The people have seen their activities through online media especially the Facebook that wildly use among the Cambodian youths. This recent generation is remarkably influenced by the western culture and receives many ideas and knowledge from online media

around the world. It made them be more optimistic when seeing some things new happen in the country. They can use their own critical thinking to judge the actions rationally rather than bringing them as the cultural bias.

This more positive reaction from the public regarding the Buddhist socially engagement contributes to a changing perspective among the Sangha constitution that used to view this involvement as affecting to the monk community. This negative points of view about monks' social activities prevent many monks to initiate the social program activities because they were often afraid and judged as the political movement. Then would hardly to receive permission from the Sangha administrative organization that under the government supervision but when the monks' social activities got wildly recognition from local and international interests, the situation is improved and monks are more open to run the NGOs like the LHA. It is not a big organization but it is well-known among the monk community. Its activities inspired many young monks and temple leaders especially in Siem Reap to follow its path of compassionate action. Obviously, some of the monks are running informal program in their temple villages. For instance, Ven. Noeurn Vutthy, the abbot of Wat Rameat who thinks to bring out school boys into the temple and provide them an education. He accepted more than one hundred boys in 2016 to ordain as the novices and send them to the Buddhist primary and secondary schools. Moreover, he asked his temple, local villagers, to share the money for constructing the concrete road around the village without asking for help from the government. This favor spiritual leader in some points can lead to great community and social contributions from a different small cooperative group of people which the monk work as the leader to gather people and motivate them to share and engage in common social responsibilities.

The compassionate mind has been applied by Buddhist socially engagement that focused on more basic human needs in the modern world must be met for liberation certain sufferings related to daily living and quality of livelihood. Such as a clean and beautiful environment, an adequate and safe water supply, clothing, balanced diet, simple housing, basic health care, communication facilities, energy, education related to life and living, and free access to cultural and spiritual resources. More importantly, is a sustainable development which the concept of social engagement meant to reach. This is the reason that LHA must be in the form of Buddhist NGO that offers a wider opportunity and possibility to bring the sustainable helps to meet with sustainable needs in the local and community levels. In which the organization can stand as coordinator with the supporters who are also emphasized to give helps in term of sustainable development then meant the demand (donor), market (needs) and supplier (NGO) are met to bring compassion into real action with long last impact and sustainable mean.

## **Conclusion**

This can be concluded that the compassion when applied by the modern socially engaged Buddhist NGO, it is significantly concerned more about the sustainable development of providing help with longer impacts than in traditional practice that usually based on generosity that shows in the form of donation and emergency relief. Though, it comes to the initiative strategy modernization of the current Buddhist NGOs, especially LHA that systematically designed the target groups of people to help and actively identify the causes of their problems before designing the suitable projects and activities in response to particular

different issues. Active compassion has been critically planned with socially engaged strategy. When compassion is put into action the impacts are more sustainable in social development. The changes in people life and community can be well-reflected to the social activities of LHA. This public recognition will bring the local, national and international interests to invest in social development with LHA that made it be able to bring more lives and hopes to many other disadvantaged children, youths, and women in Cambodia through education by socially engaged monk strategy.

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