

YEGAP celebrates **10** years of  
promoting entrepreneurship  
in the region

July 2016, Volume 17



# Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur

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## Message of the YEGAP Chairman

Foresight is a gift. But most of the time, foresight is simply a long-term vision of greater things for something presently insignificant.

When one realizes the huge potential of the business, seize the opportunity for the business to grow. Success, coupled with hard work, is a tried and tested formula. Success, after all, is in the minute details that make daily operations work.

The challenge of every entrepreneur is always coming up with new services and products to keep up with ever changing times. Innovation should not be an option for businesses; it should be a way of doing business.

At the end of the day, what matters is the driving force in the core of it all. It should always be about giving stakeholders top-notch products and service. As an entrepreneur, it is good to go back to basics no matter how much growth the business undertakes.

Good products and services can only get one so far, but adhering to the basics makes people loyal to a brand. And that makes all the difference in assuring that success is long term.

Amidst growth and innovation, our featured young entrepreneurs in this issue continue to advocate the importance of keeping the core values in which their companies operate around. For these entrepreneurs, it has always been about giving their customers and stakeholders relevant products and service. And as they progress, they continue to share in their glory and successes.

We hope you will enjoy this issue of the Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur. We invite you to read through each page, and take a little out of everything.



*Anna Marie Periquet*

Chairman, YEGAP

# Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur

A publication of the Young Entrepreneurs  
Group of Asia Pacific

# YEGAP invites young entrepreneurs to CACCI Conference in Taipei



## 30th CACCI Conference

Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry

**The Rise of Asia: Taking a Bigger Role in the Global Economy**

**November 23-25, 2016 | Taipei, Taiwan**

The Young Entrepreneurs Group of Asia Pacific (YEGAP) led by its chair Ms. Anna Marie Periquet, is inviting all young entrepreneurs to gather and share their knowledge and experiences during the YEGAP Breakout Session at the 30th CACCI Conference in Taipei on November 23-25, 2016

YEGAP, one of the Product and Service Councils under CACCI, aims to promote a pro-enterprise spirit for young entrepreneurs among the Asia Pacific country members of CACCI. It hopes to encourage more collaboration between enterprises, universities, social corporations and government which will serve as the anchor for startups and business innovation.

The upcoming CACCI Conference offers another venue for all promising young entrepreneurs to identify challenges and opportunities, and discuss promotion and development of the entrepreneurship movement in

the region.

### *About the 30th CACCI Conference*

Jointly-hosted by the Chinese International Economic Cooperation Association (CIECA) and Chinese National Association of Industry and Commerce Taiwan (CNAIC), this year's Conference will take on the theme "The Rise of Asia: Taking a Bigger Role in the Global Economy."

Over the past 50 years, global economic realities have undergone a sea change. Economic miracles by successive Asian countries – starting with Japan and continuing with a host of others at regular intervals – have enabled Asia to re-emerge as a dominant force in the global economy, growing bigger and richer. There is a growing consensus around the world that the center of gravity of the global economy is shifting towards Asia and that this trend is most likely to continue in the decades to come. The IMF considers Asia the "world's

most dynamic region", noting that it accounts for 40 percent of the world economy and will deliver nearly two-thirds of global growth over the next four years.

The 30th CACCI Conference this year, which also marks the 50th Anniversary of the Confederation since its founding in 1966, will address the following questions: How can Asia play a much bigger role in shaping the global economy in the 21st century than it did in the latter half of the 20th century? What challenges would Asian countries – individually and collectively – face in playing such a role and how will they meet these challenges? How should Asia – which in the past was heavily dependent on exports for its growth – nurture its new "second engine of growth", which is domestic demand, in order to sustain its strong performance?

To register, please contact the CACCI Secretariat at [cacci@cacci.biz](mailto:cacci@cacci.biz)

# Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur

A publication of the Young Entrepreneurs Group of Asia Pacific

# Nominations now open for 6th Asia Pacific Young Entrepreneur Award

The Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) announces the launching of the 6th Asia Pacific Young Entrepreneur Award. The award will be presented at the 30th CACCI Conference in Taipei to be held in late November this year. CACCI is requesting all primary members to submit their nominations.

## *The 6th Asia-Pacific Young Entrepreneur Award*

Inaugurated in 2006 to commemorate the 40th anniversary

of CACCI, the Asia Pacific Young Entrepreneur Award – which is presented every two years – aims to honor excellent young entrepreneurs in the Asia Pacific Rim who are not only successful in their business, but also advocate corporate social responsibility for the good of their country.

The award is open to female or male entrepreneurs below 45 years of age, nominated by any CACCI primary member. The nominee must be engaged in his/her country-based or international-based profit organization and actively involved in a business-related non-profit organization or in

a CACCI primary member country's activities.

He or she must exercise excellence in entrepreneurial and business leadership, and must be regarded in his or her country with integrity and known for practicing good business ethics.

For a complete list of criteria, rules and nomination process, email the CACCI Secretariat at [cacci@cacci.biz](mailto:cacci@cacci.biz)



## *Ceylon Chamber's YMF facilitates Young Global Leaders 'South Asia Bridge Initiative'*

The Young Members Forum (YMF) of The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC) successfully facilitated the WEF (World Economic Forum) Young Global Leaders 'South Asia Bridge Initiative' which was held in Colombo on February 18, 2016.

The one-day event took place at the CCC head office and the session was conducted by 6 panelists, namely Dr. Saman Kelagama - Executive Director of the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Dr. Indrajit Coomaraswamy - Advisor to the Minister of Development Strategies and International Trade, Mr. Rajendra Theagarajah, Deputy Chairman of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the CEO of NDB Bank, Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, Executive Director, Regional Centre for Strategic

Studies, Ms. Linda Speldewinde, The founder/Managing Director of AOD Sri Lanka and Mr. Anushka Wijesinha - Chief Economist of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Saman Kelagama, addressing the gathering on the topic of 'Prospects and Challenges for South Asian Regional Integration' stated that "South Asian countries have a lot of potential to integrate regionally and there is enormous potential in the region that could be explored. There is a need to re-look at our overall framework and what adjustment we could do to that framework, so that the existing anomaly can be rectified".

Dr. Indrajit Coomaraswamy speaking on the topic 'Sri Lanka's New Economic Context' said; "Sri Lanka is now looking at a new growth model,

which is private sector driven economy and two main pillars of that growth model is Exports & FDI's. He said, no country has been able to transform the export market without a significant growth of FDI's". He also added "If you look at large countries like China or small countries like Singapore export driven growth and FDI's are a big part of their success stories".

The session was also addressed by Mr. Rajendra Theagarajah, Mr. Anushka Wijesinha and Ms. Linda Speldewinde, respectively speaking under the topics of "Sri Lanka as a Regional and Global Business Hub", "Shaping a Dynamic Sri Lankan Economy" & "Women in Business: New Opportunities and Socio-Cultural Issues." Professor Imtiaz Ahmed addressing

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# Forbes' 30 Under 30 Asia summit highlights success of millennials in tech

by By Caroline Preece, ITPRO

The first ever 30 Under 30 Asia summit, held in Singapore on May 19, celebrated 300 of the continent's most successful young entrepreneurs and innovators.

The event was part of the Smart Nation Innovations Week being held in the country, which also included Innovfest unBound, the Tech Saturday carnival and the Big Bang Data exhibition, exploring the impact of data at Singapore's ArtScience Museum.

Alan Griffin, Forbes Media's managing director for Digital Asia, said: "We are delighted to bring Forbes' successful Under 30 Summit to Asia for the first time and look forward to hosting a dynamic and powerful group of millennials in Singapore. This summit will provide a unique platform for young entrepreneurs, game-changers and disruptors to come together, to learn, share, collaborate, be inspired and give back to the local community in Singapore.

"Singapore, ranked among the world's most competitive economies, is also one of the most globally connected countries. As a leading tech and innovation hub in the region, Singapore is the perfect location to host this summit."

In the 2016 BNP Paribas Global Entrepreneur Report conducted by Scorpio Partnership consultancy, 32 percent of the 2,600 high net worth global entrepreneurs surveyed came from Asia, compared to 47 percent from Europe and 14 percent from the US. Among them, 32 percent were under the age of 35, totalling 837 so-called 'millentrepreneurs'.



*The first ever 30 Under 30 Asia Summit held in Singapore on May 19, 2016 celebrates 300 of Asia's most successful entrepreneurs and innovators.*

In the UK, it was recently revealed that 59 percent of entrepreneurs under 35 are women, which surpasses the global average of 47 percent. Only 16 percent of UK entrepreneurs over 55 are women, however, pointing to a clear generational shift.

In 2014, just 5 per cent of founders in Singapore were women. Among this year's 30 Under 30 honorees in the enterprise tech category, just four (1.2 percent) were female.

These honorees were Dian Guan, co-founder and VP for PatSnap; Li Hui, CEO of MikeCRM; Melanie Perkins, co-founder and CEO of Canva, and Michelle Sun, founder and CEO of Code First Academy.

"As Singapore pursues its vision to become a Smart Nation,

it is important for us to provide our entrepreneurs and start-ups the opportunity to share knowledge, and to work towards a common goal of creating new innovations to tackle shared global challenges arising from ageing populations and urban density," said Steve Leonard, executive deputy chairman of IDA.

"Singapore, with the raw ingredients for entrepreneurs to build and grow their business, is naturally the best place to hold this summit in Asia. Our partnership with Forbes to bring the Under 30 Summit Asia as part of our Smart Nation Innovations Week will allow young innovators to come together to work towards this common goal." ■

## Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur

A publication of the Young Entrepreneurs Group of Asia Pacific

# Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia List: 300 Top Young Leaders, Inventors And Entrepreneurs

By Rana Wehbe , Forbes

First the U.S., then Europe and now Asia – Forbes 30 Under 30 has truly gone global this year to highlight the young talents emerging all around the world. For months on end our correspondents from around the region have been looking for the 300 best and brightest millennials who are disrupting and changing the faces of their industries.

To make it happen, Forbes assembled over a dozen reporters from China to Australia, India – and about as many countries in the region – to research and come up with thousands of nominations covering all industries. We then looked through and cut the list down to a few hundred names that were sent to our panel of 30 judges, who helped decide who made the final cut. Those included household

names like designer Kenzo Takada and Malaysian Hollywood actress Michelle Yeoh, as well as highly respected experts in their fields like Kaifu Lee, Solina Chau, Allan Zeman and many more.

The outcome was a group of 300 young and driven entrepreneurs and game-changers who are contributing to their industries in a significant way. These include a mix of brilliant sports stars (Indian cricket Captain Virat Kohli, 27), leaders in technology (facial recognition developer Yin Qi, 27) and those who are doing great things to change the world around them (affordable housing architect Alok Shetty, 29).

With 10 categories in total, the inaugural 30 Under 30 Asia list highlights inspiring young leaders in various fields covering consumer

technology, enterprise technology, the arts, health care & science, media, social entrepreneurship, finance, industry and retail.

Here are just a few of the stars who made it to the list this year.

## Health Care & Science

**Wang Shirui, 28**

**Cofounder & CEO, Medlinker, China**

Pursuing post-graduate studies at Harvard Medical School in 2013, he realized that being a doctor isn't the only way to help patients. Given China's shortage of doctors and its piecemeal medical system, the young doctor thought he had a better idea for improving health care. So he headed home. "There are two ways to solve the problem," says Wang. "You can create more doctors or help the existing ones be more efficient. *continued on page 6*

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the gathering under the topic of 'Dystopias: Can the youth in South Asia help?' mentioned that humans can destroy the earth not once but nine times. He mentioned two types of dystopias and, in the middle of all these dystopias; creating utopia, he said, is the biggest challenge.

The program was attended by a 25-member delegation of the Young Global Leaders and also the members of the Young Members Forum of the Ceylon Chamber.

The participants also interacted with the panelists. Young Global Leaders Forum of WEF (World Economic Forum) Sri Lanka Representative Mr. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, initiated this session in collaboration with the Young



(left) Members of Ceylon Chamber's YMF pose for a group photo (right) WEF Economic Forum Young Global Leaders 'South Asia Bridge Initiative' starts the session.

Members Forum of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. The event contributed to the enhancement of relations between countries in South Asia. The Young Global Leaders Community is a global network of senior leaders representing a cross section of the society.

Young Members Forum (YMF) of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce is an



arm initiated by the Chamber to identify, engage and develop the next generation of Sri Lankan leaders by providing an inspirational growth opportunity for them through various strategically driven programs. Currently the YMF has a significant number of members consisting of corporate executives, entrepreneurs and students. ■

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# Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia List: 300 Top Young Leaders, Inventors And Entrepreneurs

By Rana Wehbe, Forbes

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second through Medlinker.”

**Enterprise Technology**  
**Yin Qi, 28**  
**Cofounder & CEO, MEGVII, China**



Megvii develops facial recognition applications and other artificial intelligence technology—and China’s rapidly growing security and Internet-finance sectors are taking notice. The Beijing-based company counts Citic Group and China Merchants Bank as key customers. Ant Financial, the financial arm of Alibaba, allows customers to log into their accounts via facial-recognition instead of a password. “We are using this technology to solve very basic problems,” says Yin. Started in 2011, Megvii has already received \$50 million in funding, valuing the company at \$200 million.

**Consumer Technology**  
**Taichi Murakami, 29**  
**President & founder, Livesense, Japan**

While in high school, Murakami searched for part-time work but quickly realized there weren’t many



listings online due to high costs. As a freshman at Waseda University he launched Livesense. It operates help-wanted websites for part-time and temporary jobs, and a site for customers to share reviews about employers. The \$95 million-valued company also dabbles in real estate. Murakami is the youngest entrepreneur to list on the First Section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange (in 2012) and its startup section, Mothers (in 2011).

**Manufacturing & Energy**  
**Leandro Leviste, 22**  
**Founder, Solar Philippines, The Philippines**



Electricity rates in the Philippines are among the highest in Asia, and Leviste

is convinced that solar power can bring them down. He started Solar Philippines in 2013. The following year, the Bank of the Philippine Islands gave the company its first \$1 million loan to install a 700-kilowatt solar rooftop power plant. Today Solar Philippines has received \$100 million in backing from local banks, and in January completed building the largest solar farm in Luzon, a \$150-million, 63-megawatt project.

**Entertainment & Sports**  
**Kwon Ji-yong (G-Dragon), 27**



**K-pop/Hip Hop idol, South Korea**

In an industry full of lookalike boy bands, singer/rapper G-Dragon (yong is dragon in Korean) stands out. The K-pop star already been on two solo world tours, thanks to a loyal international following. And a cutting-edge style has made him a front-row fixture at Chanel shows. Though in the business since age 5, G-Dragon rose to fame as part of the group Bigbang. “I think not getting much attention from the start actually helped me build a stronger career,” he says. ■

Asia-Pacific  
**Entrepreneur**

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# How Vision – and Persistence – Built Bangladesh’s GrameenPhone

*an article from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania*

Iqbal Quadir is the founder of GrameenPhone and the founder and director emeritus of the Legatum Center for Development and Entrepreneurship at MIT. He sat down with Karl Ulrich, vice dean of entrepreneurship and innovation at Wharton, to talk about his self-made journey from growing up in one of the poorest countries in the world to building a global business. In many ways the embodiment of the entrepreneurial spirit, Quadir explains how everything connects. An edited transcript of the conversation appears below.

**Karl Ulrich:** *I want to take us back to your origins. Tell us about where you came from.*

Iqbal Quadir: I came from Bangladesh, from a relatively smaller town called Jessore. I grew up there and went to a boarding school inside Bangladesh. I was somewhat of an urban kid. But in 1971, when there was a war in the country, my family went to the rural area and I experienced the rural conditions in Bangladesh that year. My friends were often children of peasants and other small farmers. That had always had an impact on me, so I talk about that.

**Ulrich:** *How did you end up in the United States?*

Quadir: I guess I was an entrepreneur. My father died when I was 14 years old, and I somehow aspired to get a good education. My mother had provided some funds, but I managed to get to the U.S. with some scholarships. Eventually, I got almost a full scholarship, and so that is how. I simply tried myself.

**Ulrich:** *That is a common path for some of our most successful entrepreneurs in the United States. I wonder if you could tell us about GrameenPhone?*

Quadir: GrameenPhone is the largest company in Bangladesh, and it has 55 million subscribers. Sometimes the stock market is valued at some \$7 billion. It was really for four or five years I tried to convince people that this is a good idea, it is something to be pursued. But I think

if we want to go back to its origin, it’s good you asked me about my personal origin. Those impacts had certain germ of thoughts that eventually gave rise to GrameenPhone.

This is why I think no matter how rigorously we think about problems, at a deeper level passion is important because it drives us to find a logical solution. Even behind logic, you may have a passionate pursuit, which gives rise to finding a logical solution.

In my case, I knew that I came to America and there were extraordinary opportunities here in the United States. I managed to go to good schools and get good scholarships and whatnot, but I also had in mind the conditions I have seen in Bangladesh. I was always on the lookout for good ideas that could do something about it. Two really important ideas have stuck me in to doing that. One is that the economic progress does not necessarily come from pouring capital into it, but rather people becoming more efficient in managing their tasks. It’s a question of improvements or skills. But also how, in a sense, economic progress can come out of thin air.

For instance, I was actually attracted to Adam Smith because he mentioned Bengal, which is Bangladesh, that is how I was originally drawn to it. He said in antiquity, three places had good wealth: ancient Egypt, Bengal and eastern China. He attributed those things to inland navigation, and his point is that people could exchange through inland navigation, specialize in exchange and divide the division of labor, and through that wealth is created. Through that, there was what he called “opulence” in antiquity. I became a fan of Adam Smith. What is interesting is that many good things come out of division of labor, including inclusivity, because if I want to specialize in something, I have to give up something else to you.

Separately, I had another important thing I observed. When I was an undergraduate, I was part of a college team that decided on buying a \$3



*Iqbal Quadir, founder, GrameenPhone*

million computer — one big mainframe that took a whole roomful of machinery. When I was doing my graduate studies here at Wharton, we learned all sorts of application for computers. But the key point is that there is this Moore’s Law that says processing power is getting squeezed more and more in to the same chips, which means the prices of these processing powers is declining rapidly, which means that these machines are going to countries that do not have very much capital.

So I actually tried, in the middle of 1980s, to create a Bengali word processor. But we realized that the masses couldn’t use it because most people do not know how to read or write. But an event took place in my life in 1993, and by this time I had tried to be a budding investment banker. I was to work in a small firm that had just some rudimentary networks, so we didn’t have floppy discs and cumbersome activities. One time it broke down, and I was waiting for somebody to come and fix it. That reminded me of a day in 1971, 22 years earlier, when my mother sent me to get some medicine from this rural setting. *continued on next page*



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I was from a middle-class family, my father was a lawyer, but in this setting I walked 10 kilometers to get this medicine. And when I went there, the medicine man wasn't there. I walked all afternoon back.

I remembered that on productive days, sitting in New York while waiting for someone to come and fix my network, and kind of said, networks help, so if you are connected you can get things done. If you don't get connected, then you don't get things done. And I realized two new things, which is that microchips are getting squeezed into phones in the early '90s as they were becoming digital phones. Before that, cellular phones were analog phones. I also realized a powerful point from Adam Smith, that there were many things that come out of division of labor, and division of labor gives rise to productivity. But he said the extent of the market tells you how far you would be dividing. Let's say I start focusing on fishing, but I will stop there and not necessarily go any further in fishing only salmon if the market is small. If the market is bigger and bigger, then I can specialize narrower and narrower.

The point is, the ways to connect determine how large the market will be and how far the division of labor will advance. All of this made sense to me, so ultimately I realized that if Moore's Law is bringing down the price of connectivity, connectivity would be a profound force in transforming these countries. I became so convinced of this because of these insights of these other people. I am basically stealing their ideas. I basically said, hey I have to stay put on this. So I stayed for five or six years, convincing various parties to come together and create this company. I jokingly say that is how I lost my hair.

**Ulrich:** *I want to turn our attention to those young people who are in developing economies. What advice would you give to a young entrepreneur who is growing up in Bangladesh or Pakistan?*



Quadir: My own example itself could be followed. I am not trying to sell myself, but what I am trying to say is that I have more authority on myself. I got an education in the West, therefore, I was informed. I tried to think clearly of what is necessary, but nowadays that is easier than when I tried to educate myself. There was no Internet, for example. Now you can even sit in Pakistan and learn some of these things.

The other point is, remember, I was saying you need one thing to get to the other thing. The fact that cellphones now exist through my work or other people's work, then that should make their lives a little bit easier in getting the information. You can get a lot of things that did not exist before, but it is always important to get an education, to think clearly. Think about things that might be available in the West that can be adapted in the lower-income countries. There may be other ways of solving these problems, but this is the one that I found to be profoundly transformative, and things can hang together around that kind of economic interest dovetailing. ■



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# Citi PH recognizes 'green' firms, young entrepreneurs

By Linda B. Bolido, Philippine Daily Inquirer

**T**wo new categories have been added this year to the annual Citi Microentrepreneurship Award (CMA)—Youth Microentrepreneur of the Year and the Special Award for Green/Sustainable Business.

The new additions were announced during the launch of the annual CMA on May 17, which recognizes entrepreneurs who have overcome poverty with the help of microfinance institutions “as partners in financial inclusion and enterprise development.”

The Youth Microentrepreneur of the Year will be presented to a successful entrepreneur between the ages of 20 and 30 while the Special Award for Green/Sustainable Business will recognize a microenterprise “that participates in environment-friendly activities to ensure that all processes, products, and manufacturing activities adequately address current environmental concerns while maintaining a profit.”

The annual CMA, a joint undertaking of Citi Philippines, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and Microfinance Council of the Philippines Inc., has honored in the past 13 years the Citi Microentrepreneur of the Year and one regional awardee each for Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Special awards are also given for Agri Micro-business and for Community Leadership.

Nominations for all categories will be accepted until July 15. Winners will be announced in December.

The Microentrepreneur of the

Year receives a cash prize of P200,000 while each of the other awardees, including those in the new categories, will get P100,000.

Semi-finalists will receive a cash incentive of P10,000 while loan officers and MFI branches of each awardee get a cash incentive of P10,000 each.

During the launch hosted by BSP Governor Amando M. Tetangco Jr., said the 14-year-old CMA had remained relevant and meaningful through the years because of “changes and enhancements ... introduced in response to developments on the ground.”

Citing industry figures, Tetangco said the environment for the development of the microfinance sector continued to improve based on sustained coordination and cooperation with industry players and stakeholders.

“In December 2002, for instance, there were 390,635 microfinance borrowers from 119 banks. By 31 December 2015, the number of banks providing microfinance loans had increased by nearly 43 percent to 170 while the number of borrowers had increased by 277 percent to roughly 1.47 million. Overall, microfinance loans increased by 333 percent from P2.6 billion in 2002 to P11.3 billion in 2015,” he said.

The BSP governor said it could be assumed that microfinance had improved the financial standing of microentrepreneurs, as they have accumulated savings of about P4.5 billion as of December. Compared to deposits as of December 2011, Tetangco said the amount represented a 22 percent growth.

Tetangco said it was encouraging global surveys indicated that “the Philippines has one of the world’s best environment for promoting the quality of life of people through sustained development of the microfinance sector.”

The Economic Intelligence Unit’s 2015 Global Microscope on Financial Inclusion ranked the Philippines first in Asia and third in the world in terms of regulatory environment for financial inclusion, he pointed out.

He reaffirmed the CMA partners’ commitment to continue to find better ways to grow microfinance, such as mentoring microentrepreneurs under the CMA program.

“The mentoring was aimed at improving their (CMA winners) enterprises by providing support suited to their specific business needs. It covers, among others, helping products and services become more competitive in local and/or international markets; providing guidance in identifying critical processes and areas for improvement; offering technical advice on infusing innovation into enterprises; and facilitating the development of business competencies. The end goal was for microenterprises to eventually transition into small and even medium enterprises,” he said.

Piloted last year, Tetangco said they would refine the program this year based on lessons learned from the engagement of the University of the Philippines Institute for Small-Scale Industries (UP ISSI), which mentored 13 past CMA winners for 7-8 months.

## Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur

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# Entrepreneur building up Cambodia with 'Lego-like' bricks

By Jack Board, Channel News Asia

**K**ongngy Hav is no engineer. He is no construction expert, nor a designer. Yet the young Cambodian is trying to indelibly shape the country's housing sector.

Amid Cambodia's looming housing crisis, Kongngy, 31, is becoming a force for social change through a simple idea that is slowly finding foundations.

He has developed "My Dream Home", a program designed to provide quality, affordable green housing to those who cannot afford to buy traditional housing.

It utilises an interlocking brick system, which resembles Lego, designed to provide sturdy construction and that can be put together by people without building skills.

Through the initiative, an average small two-storied home can be built for between US\$4,000 and US\$6,000, including design and construction help. Kongngy says such a dwelling would take two low-skilled people just a couple of months to build.

He says that is 20-40 per cent cheaper than traditional housing, less labour intensive and better for the environment, with consideration about location, safety and access to utilities and clean water.

"It's not a place to stay but a place to live that will be comfortable for life,"

The bricks, mostly made from soil and sand, are also aesthetic for modern building and do not harm the environment when they are made, Kongngy explains.

Cheap housing is in high



(Clockwise) Social entrepreneur Kongngy Hav; A newly made brick; The partially built house of Chan Thy on the outskirts of Phnom Penh.

demand in Phnom Penh and that need is only going to grow more pressing. Despite some efforts by other non-government organisations the "chronic shortage", as Kongngy describes it, remains an imposing challenge.

The government estimates that 1.1 million new homes will be needed by 2030, on top of the housing shortage that exists now. Most of these dwellings will be for low-income families, as people flock for opportunities in the capital.

"People are moving to live in cities to find employment or education.

It's a global phenomenon. They are trying to find something better," Kongngy said.

"So Phnom Penh is very crowded and government workers live in small houses, with four or five people living inside and they eat, sleep, play, do everything inside. It's not good for them."

Kongngy's idea stemmed from a personal dilemma. He and his wife could not afford a home in the city.

"We had a good education and can find a good job but we were already working for seven

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# Entrepreneur building up Cambodia with 'Lego-like' bricks

By Jack Board, Channel News Asia

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years and could afford anything," he said.

"How about the other people? How many years would they spend to buy a house? He recounts the time he spent living in communities of garment workers, Cambodia's ubiquitous economy-drivers trying to survive on as little as US\$61 a month as recently as 2012.

"In their lifetime they cannot earn enough money to build a house. This gave me some reflection and I thought I should do something. I know how hard it is."

Despite no formal qualifications, and being called a "crazy man" by his wife for trying such a venture using his own savings, about 40 different projects have now been completed.

On the outskirts of Phnom Penh, Chan Thy is building a new house for his family, after moving from Kampong Speu. He is toiling alone in the sun. But even if he does not work every day he is preparing to move in by July. The cost for materials was just US\$1,700.

Many Kongngy's customers are businesses, including local cafe chain Brown Coffee and restaurantur Lim Vann.

"The bricks represent the manual work of Cambodian people. It looks beautiful," he said.

While this does match his original ambition to help the poor, Kongngy admits these ventures spread awareness and boost funds that can be used to subsidise other projects.



(Above) The finished "My Dream Home" product, constructed by a middle-income (Below) The natural look of the bricks have found their way into projects by the likes of hipster favourite 'Brown Coffee'.

"We want to do something that will at least give new hope to a lot of people," he says.

"And maybe one day I can build my own dream home." ■

#### About CACCI

Established in 1966, the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) ([www.cacci.biz](http://www.cacci.biz)) is a regional grouping of apex national chambers of commerce and industry, business associations and business enterprises from 26 Asian countries.

#### About YEGAP

Organized under the CACCI umbrella, the Young Entrepreneurs Group of Asia Pacific (YEGAP) aims to provide a platform for young entrepreneurs from the region to network with each other and explore areas of cooperation in suitable programs geared towards the development and promotion of entrepreneurship among the youth. To contribute articles for the Entrepreneur newsletter, please email [cacci@cacci.biz](mailto:cacci@cacci.biz)

## Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur

A publication of the Young Entrepreneurs Group of Asia Pacific