

# FAO officer helps give children brighter future

Non-profit initiative supports schoolchildren and communities

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An FAO officer has described her motivation in setting up a non-profit initiative that is changing the lives of children and communities in Thailand.

'ChuayDek - Raising greener generations' supports schoolchildren from low-income families, who would otherwise struggle to receive an education.



*Happy days: Fortuna and Sriaram (far right) with schoolchildren*

It also helps those at potential risk of falling into drugs, prostitution or begging. Its work has been supported in the past year by donations from, among others, two FAO groups – the 1% for Development Fund and Fasting For Food.

Forestry officer Serena Fortuna said: "Throughout my life I've always wanted to support, in a somewhat more continuous, concrete and direct way, people in need. But I was never in the right place at the right time. I think my life in Thailand gave me that opportunity."

Fortuna visited Thailand for the first time in 2002, with an Italian NGO, and lived in Bangkok from 2007 working with the United Nations Environment Programme, the latter including collaborative work with FAO.

"The idea to start collecting funds began over a dinner one night," she explains. "We were in a nice restaurant, where between 10 people or so we spent approximately US\$300. It may not seem like a large amount of money, but with my close friend – who herself came from a local

area in Thailand – we realized that the amount we spent in one dinner could allow a young student to study for a couple of years, or to feed an entire school of 120 children for nearly a month. “From the initial idea of a ‘one-off donation’, we rapidly moved to that of getting active within our group of friends and providing more continuous support.”

Fortuna and her friend Siriporn Sriaram then made further enquiries. A senior colleague told them about the Buddha Kasettra School, which aims to help children from hill tribes and others from the northern province of Mae Hong Sorn and surrounding provinces. Buddha Kasettra in Thai means the ‘Buddhist way of agriculture’.

In addition to the normal curricula, the school teaches the children principles of organic agriculture and mutual respect.

The funding helped the school pay for children’s meals and for education, among other things.

Fortuna left Thailand in late 2010, taking up her role with FAO, but the initiative in the country has only grown stronger.



A non-profit organization was created in 2012, enabling the volunteers to organize fundraising parties and events, access funds from governments, make donations tax-deductible, and to approach donors.

FAO officer Simone Borelli and clerks Elisa Miccinilli and Annamaria Ventresca were also founding members of ChuayDek, while several other FAO colleagues have since provided support through various means.

ChuayDek received one donation from FAO’s 1% for Development Fund, whose members from FAO and WFP give 1% of their salaries each month to pay for small projects worldwide.

The donation paid for the farming of organic rice for the children – up to 50 tonnes depending on weather conditions – and for daily meals for around six months. A workshop also taught parents and local farmers about organic farming. Maria Grazia Bovo, a member of 1% fund who appraised the project prior to funding, said: “It was an excellent initiative and a nice mix between an agricultural and educational project. The 1% Fund strongly welcomes such initiatives.”

On Wednesday (17 Oct) in Rome, ChuayDek received a donation from FAO's Fasting for Food group (*pictured below with Fortuna and others receiving donations*), during the latter's 14th anniversary. Since 1998, members of the group have skipped one meal each week, donating the money saved to small projects across Asia, Africa, Latin America and Western Europe.



The donation will help schoolchildren, some of their families and teachers to learn how to use the organic rice not only as food but also as a source of income. Livia Cellini, coordinator of Fasting for Food, said: "We chose ChuayDek because it reflects our main purpose – supporting small projects that make a difference and build a sustainable change."

ChuayDek also supports environmental awareness and education through first-hand experience. In February 2012, 30 schoolchildren left the mountains where they were born and swam for the first time in the ocean.

"I believe that when dedicating our time to ChuayDek, my friends and I can complement our work in FAO," added Fortuna.

"We learn from our work at FAO and we bring what we know directly to people who might benefit from this knowledge. Likewise we learn so much by working at grass-roots level, enriching and inspiring our work at FAO."

**Further information and links:**

[Chuaydek](#) ; [1% for Development Fund](#) ; [Fasting for Food](#)

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**Additional acknowledgements**

ChuayDek wants to acknowledge all the help received from several friends, without whom much of the work done in the past two years would not have been possible. *Graciela Andrade* (source of inspiration, guide and pillar of the group), *Simone Borelli*, *Annamaria Ventresca* and *Elisa Miccinilli*, *Marco D'Errico* (and his bands, who always put his music at the service of the others and of collecting funds), *James Edge* (for the immense help in the restyling of the website), *Victoria Alemany* (for having helped me in the Christmas raffle last year), *Livia Cellini* and all the "fasters" as well as *Maria Grazia Bovo* and all the 1% , for having got interested in our initiative and funding several activities, *Rachele Santini* (for all the help on communication), and several friends and colleagues who donate regularly or in specific occasions. We also thanks inTouch team for having gave us the opportunity of sharing the story of these children with the organization. The list of friends to be thanked would be very long and we virtually thank each one of them; we strongly believe that we are only a bridge to bring more happiness to children in need... it is only working hand in hand that we can contribute to make their lives brighter. (more supporters at [www.chuaydek.org/our-supporters.html](http://www.chuaydek.org/our-supporters.html))