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In the last couple years, I've been backpacking third world countries in search for ideas using local raw materials to help develop a self-sustainable community in the underprivileged areas. This early September, I came across a service trip opportunity with Project Mingde, and thought it'd be a good experience learning the design and delivery of service from scratch.

I was part of the health service team at this project; our primary aim was to evaluate the effectiveness of health promotion previously delivered by another group of students at Daping and secondary aim was to assess the health conditions and needs at Tengcun.

Prior to the trip, we came across difficulties during the pre-trip assessment on the disaster risks, health behavior and access to healthcare facilities because there wasn't much information accessible online. With the help of Mr. Mong Ke Lu, a local chair of voluntary charity, we were able to gather information about the area and plan accordingly to the local needs.

Communication with the locals was helpful before performing health assessment because there are sensitive topics that may interfere with the interview i.e. politics and religion. When we were engaging in conversations with the locals, we realized they have a common practice in praising the design of sewage disposal and handling of water. With a protective concept in mind, it is difficult to assess the problem and deliver health intervention, hence I believe this is an area we can improve on, in order to accurately perform health measures and deliver effective care service correspondingly.

On a different note, although there are health clinics in the village, we found that access to hospitals is not easy. In case of emergency, the patient would have to go on a few hours of bumpy ride in order to get to a hospital with sufficient equipment and facilities. Based on interviews with the secretary and villagers, we gathered that stroke and traffic accidents are common in the village and survival rates are not optimistic. In future visits, introduction of first-aid classes may be beneficial to the population and also education on road safety may help minimize accidents.

At the site visit to Daping, our hiking boots finally came into use. Grace and I had a fun mission hiking up the mountain to trace the origin of water source; we were able to locate the water storage system and took some sample back in HK for screening. Since it's a novel experience, we didn't realize we have to store the water at appropriate temperature and perform part of the analysis right away. I suppose we learn from our experiences and wouldn't waste our effort slipping around like Bambie at our next visit!

Another area I want to point out is related to disaster risks. Although the villagers know they have to put out fire with water and leave the house in case of landslides and flooding, they don't have a specified area for evacuation. In case of disaster, villagers may be anywhere in open area or in the mountains, which make it difficult to keep track of people/casualties. It'll be helpful to explain the importance of designated evacuation areas in future visits.

To conclude, it was a good opportunity learning skills in health assessments, pointing out health problems and potential risks. This site visit has added values and enriched my experience; it acts as a stepping stone to future humanitarian projects I wish to participate in.