

YOUTH DRIVING COMMUNITY EDUCATION TESTIMONIES OF EMPOWERMENT FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



This publication presents a collection of testimonies from young women and men from vulnerable backgrounds who have transformed their lives through community education and development activities. Their testimonies describe the challenges they faced in pursuing an education, how they benefited from community education programmes, and the active roles they now play in community education and development.

The publication will meet its objectives if it inspires young people and their partners to take action to:

- > Improve educational and learning environments for young men and women;
- > Improve the participation of young women in community building and democratic processes; and
- > Engage young men and women as active citizens working towards peace, democracy and sustainable development.

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YOUTH DRIVING COMMUNITY EDUCATION

TESTIMONIES OF EMPOWERMENT FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

SOME FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT YOUTH (AGE 15–24) IN THE REGION OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

POPULATION

- > 750 million young women and men
- > 60 per cent of global youth population (World Population Prospects, 2012 revision)

LITERACY

- > 99 per cent in the East Asia and Pacific region
- > 86 per cent of young men and 74 per cent of young women in South and West Asia have basic literacy skills
- > South and West Asia is home to more than half of the world's illiterate young women (39.5 million in 2012) (UIS.Stat <http://data.uis.unesco.org>)

EMPLOYMENT

- > Youth unemployment in 2013 (10.6 per cent) was more than double the rate of total unemployment (4.5 per cent)
- > Almost half (44 per cent) of the approximately 74 million out-of-work youth worldwide (2013) live in the Asia-Pacific region (ILOSTAT Database)

TESTIMONIES WERE PROVIDED BY THE FOLLOWING PERSONS:

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FOREWORD

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) promotes lifelong learning policy and practice with a focus on adult learning and education, especially literacy and non-formal education for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in 2009 considered the large numbers of young people who lack access both to learning opportunities and to employment. The Conference's outcome document, the *Belém Framework for Action: Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future*, emphasised the need to address the learning needs of youth and adults in a holistic and comprehensive system of lifelong learning.

Following up on the *Belém Framework*, UIL identified young people with little or no experience of school as a target group for research and policy dialogue, with the aim of increasing participation by this group in community education. UIL organised a series of regional policy dialogue forums in Bamako, Cairo and Jakarta in collaboration with regional and national partners in 2011 and 2013. Youth with disadvantaged educational backgrounds have limited opportunities in life, including limited access to employment and/or technical and vocational training, with all its implications for social participation. Testimonies provided by youth representatives in these forums brought the aspirations and learning needs of young people with low levels of literacy and life skills closer to national policy makers and practitioners.

In the Jakarta forum, UIL partnered with the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education

(ASPBAE), which helped in identifying youth representatives and provided mentoring support in preparation for their presentations and international travel – the latter being for many a new experience. Their presentations illustrated powerfully the impact that community education has had on their lives as learners and facilitators. I would like to thank ASPBAE and their local partners not only for their efforts in realising this publication, but in particular for their ongoing commitment to empowering disadvantaged youth in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is my hope that the selection of testimonies presented in this publication will encourage readers to strengthen their commitment to engaging young women and men in community education and development activities. Further testimonies are to be published on the publication's webpage, and we welcome contributions from youth from around the world.

This publication is a contribution to the implementation of the UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth 2014–2021. Comprising three operational axes – policy formulation and review with the participation of youth; capacity development for the transition to adulthood; and civic engagement, democratic participation and social innovation – the Operational Strategy has a particular focus on the needs of marginalised young women and men.

Arne Carlsen, Director
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)



Asia South Pacific Association
for Basic and Adult Education
Learning Beyond Boundaries

INTRODUCTION

In 2012 the 6th General Assembly of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) identified 'Youth and Life Skills' as an area of priority. As part of its effort to build a stronger constituency on youth and life skills within ASPBAE, a Working Group on Youth and Life Skills was established, bringing together select non-governmental organisations (NGOs) pursuing education and capacity building programmes among vulnerable youth, youth organisers/leaders from marginalised communities and Community Learning Centres active in the area of marginalised youth education. Through its deliberations, the Working Group has identified both the main issues and possible approaches to developing life skills and literacy capacities among vulnerable youth for advancement through civil society organisations (CSOs) through various regional and national policy advocacy platforms.

The case stories presented here focus on young people from vulnerable communities that ASPBAE members are actively engaged with and who have been mobilised in ASPBAE programmes for youth leadership and capacity development. Their narratives showcase the successes of empowered youth in rising to the daunting challenges presented by their environments. These narratives are self-authored – in some cases, with the assistance of the organisations involved.

Poverty is a common theme in their stories and has impacted significantly on their ability to access education. Many of these young people left school prior to gaining a qualification, either in order to marry early (girls) or to supplement the family income (Fahima Prity in Bangladesh, Shanti Devi and Subhash Maule in India, Sifa Humaeroh in

Indonesia and Fonseca Goveia Leite in Timor-Leste). The lack of basic literacy and numeracy renders entire indigenous communities (such as that of Carol Doyanan in the Philippines) vulnerable to exploitation. Poverty combined with drought strains the social fabric of villages by forcing able-bodied adults, including young adults, to leave and seek work elsewhere (India). Colonisation, discrimination and displacement have contributed to a crisis of identity among subsequent generations (as in the case of Brooklyn Emery in New Zealand).

For many of these marginalised youth, conflict was a daily challenge. Some were affected by domestic violence; others faced the constant threat of sexual harassment, crime, and violence in their neighbourhoods.

The case studies presented here are equally a showcase of the innovative programmes utilised by youth organisations. Scholarships have enabled many young people, particularly girls, to pursue an education despite their families' financial constraints (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines). And not just any education, but quality and accessible education beyond primary school; indigenous education that honours the unique identity of indigenous people and fosters pride in their culture (Philippines); skills training that prepares young people for dignified employment (India and Timor-Leste); education that expands horizons and creates an awareness of the power to shape one's own future. These are programmes which understand that education does not consist of just putting together a classroom and a curriculum, rather it is about creating a supportive community that will sustain the learner's commitment and ensure their attendance.

To the youth in crisis, the programmes provided positive role models, mentors and counsellors from among the community elders and leaders. Just as important was the emotional support that they found there: a listening ear, a hand to hold. Here, peers played a critical role through shared experiences and a common language.

Perhaps one of the most valued interventions was the creation of spaces – youth camps, clubs, after-school centres, workshops – places where young people could interact with their peers, draw strength from each other, develop self-discipline and a stronger sense of social responsibility, learn to value themselves more, discuss common concerns, and discover how they could take action together. The Life Skills Camp (New Zealand) that Brooklyn joined left such a strong impression on him that he now dreams of becoming a policeman to help his community and prevent the suffering associated with crime.

Sifa (Indonesia) wrote, “I am so thankful, and I don’t want their kindness to stop in me. They say we should pass it forward.” Like Sifa, other youth “passed it forward” by working together with the rest of the community to tackle issues as diverse as early marriage, public sexual harassment (Eve-teasing), and high drop-out rates (Indonesia, Bangladesh). Prity (Bangladesh) used the skills that she gained at school to bring information on health and livelihoods to remote communities. In India, Subhash and other community members used their new-

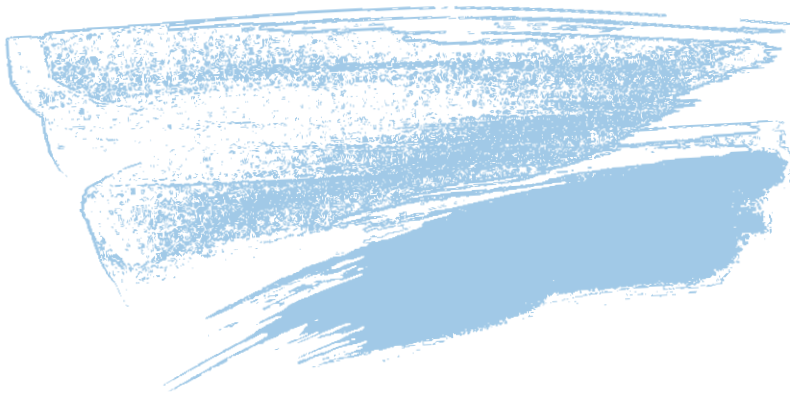
found skills in visual story-telling to promote government action on village-based water systems. In Timor-Leste, Fonseca’s sports programme became a vehicle for peace education and conflict prevention. Carol (Philippines), who benefited from the support of her tribal community, elders, NGOs, religious sisters and government programmes, has become a determined advocate of indigenous people’s education.

A key strength of these programmes was their integration within the wider community. This enabled them to facilitate processes for young people to engage with local government authorities, the police, community elders, religious organisations, teachers, and families.

Reading the testimonies, it is evident that each of the youth featured here has a distinct voice. What these programmes did was to amplify their voices. In doing so, the programmes empowered them – together with their communities – to become responsible citizens and agents for change.

The protagonists in these stories may be young, but in the words of Brooklyn, they are all “young warriors”.

Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan,
Secretary-General
Asia South Pacific Association for Basic
and Adult Education (ASPBAE)



SKETCHES FROM THE LIFE OF AN INSPIRED BANGLADESHI RURAL YOUTH

My name is Fahima Prity. In Bangla, Prity means 'love' or 'affection'. I am the second daughter in my family.

We live in a remote village called Shilmandi in Narsingdi District in Eastern Bangladesh. My father, Shahadat Hossain, was a poorly-paid government employee, and is now retired. My mother, Parvin Begum, is a housewife. I have four sisters and one brother. My father struggled to support such a large family, where love and poverty ran together.

He could barely afford the cost of my schooling. Even so, he was determined that I would complete my primary education. I started my pre-school education in a *Ganokendra* (Bengali term for 'People's Centres') children's learning centre. I was a cheerful, witty girl and good at school, games and acting. After completing my primary education at a government school, I went on to high school. When I was 13 years old, I was promoted to the eighth grade. With all the passion of an adolescent, I wanted to bring about change in my life. I wanted to see happiness in all of us, too. I desired to fulfil my dreams by completing my education.

"MY INTEREST IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES LED ME TO JOIN A LOCAL CULTURAL GROUP AND ATTEND VARIOUS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EVENTS."

In my village, there was a Community Learning Centre (CLC) by the name of *Papri Ganokendra*, which was administered by the Dhaka Ahsania Mission. I had seen the centre's youth group stage street-theatre and musical performances on several occasions. The group also helped young girls and adolescents to deal with their problems, identify their dreams and explore their leadership potential under the centre's umbrella. The group's activities excited me and I wanted to join them.

With the aid of my mother, I was able to participate in their activities, where I came to understand the realities

of the life that I would face. I learnt that the practice of dowry was a legally punishable crime. I learnt about reproductive health, about the equality of men and women. I was made aware of my rights as a girl, and that I should have an equal voice in every family decision. I soon became a proud member of *Papri Ganokendra*.

But I was a ship at sea, surrounded by poverty. My parents were unable to cope with our family's growing expenses, and I realised that I would soon be forced to leave school. In desperation I looked around for an alternative source of income, but there were few options open to high school students. I discussed my dilemma with the other members of *Papri Ganokendra*. Eventually, the centre's management committee agreed to contribute to my education. Later, I took a job as a community tutor teaching children at the CLC. I also began to work as a private tutor in order to earn extra money for my family. With fresh wind filling my sails, I set out for calmer waters.

My interest in cultural activities led me to join a local cultural group and attend various social and cultural events. I started leading the children's group and was nominated to the district's youth parliament. Gradually I became more involved in the *Ganokendra* Community Action Group, which sought to raise awareness on various social issues.



By the time I finished the examinations for my Secondary School Certificate, my family had begun to pressure me to get married. This was a big problem. I wanted to continue studying, and we fought frequently over this issue. Eventually, I won out and applied for admission to college.

In the meantime, I continued to participate in debates and meetings on various community issues, including the prevention of child marriages, marriage registration, marital relationships, adolescent and women's rights, and personal hygiene and cleanliness. I became confident that I could do something for the people in my village and identified a number of social problems affecting our area.

We had observed, for example, that girls were often mocked and harassed on their way to school by boys who gathered on street corners or at the school gate. Sometimes these experiences left the girls feeling abused. I discussed the issue with other members of the CLC, and we arranged a meeting with parents, local leaders, school teachers and young boys. With the help of the local law enforcement agency, we also raised awareness of the penalties for this form of harassment. Our initiatives resulted in a decline in the number of these incidents.

The early marriage of girls in rural areas, especially among poor families, represents another significant social problem. These girls are forced to end their schooling and become mothers at an early age – many suffer poor health throughout their lives as a result. I began to work on raising awareness among impoverished families of the consequences of early marriage. My work in this area is ongoing.



Celebration of World Environment Day

Early school-leaving is another significant problem in rural communities. Many poor families encourage adolescent boys and girls to drop out of school and work in the weaving factories in our district. But in the long term, these boys and girls will only find work as unskilled labourers due to their poor literacy and numeracy skills. This phenomenon is a major challenge to our community. Working together with other CLCs, we are trying to persuade factory owners to reduce the level of child labour in their factories and to provide education facilities to those who are still working.

“THE PRESSURE FOR ME TO MARRY GREW ONCE I PASSED MY HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL (HSS) EXAMINATION, AND MY PARENTS BECAME UPSET.”

I was inspired to become a member of a *Ganokendra*-based Community Action Group so that, together, we can mobilise parents to send their children to school. CLCs offer poor people opportunities to develop their literacy and other skills, and work with local micro-credit agencies in creating income opportunities. The community also uses the CLC as a place to debate local issues. As a member of the Community Action Group, I have arranged many social programmes on the issues of polygamy, dowry, violence against women and children, right to information, etc.

We also established linkages among our *Ganokendra* CLCs, a Community Resource Centre (CRC) that provides technical service to a cluster of CLCs, and local government agencies, including the departments of agriculture, fisheries, health, and youth development. These links facilitated the attendance of many young girls and boys at skills training courses organised by the respective departments. The courses covered skills as diverse as vegetable farming, handicrafts, fisheries and computer literacy. I enjoy this type of social work.

As part of my studies for my Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), I learnt some basic computer skills. This opened the door for me to become an information worker in the CRC. This opportunity extended my capacities and strengthened my leadership role. Information community technology (ICT) can be relevant to the life and livelihood of the rural poor. As an ICT-literate woman, I operated different ICT tools to disseminate the CRC's services in rural areas. Using these technologies, I was able to extend the CRC's reach into the rural population, including the provision of services to persons with disabilities. Individuals with health problems could describe

their symptoms or their situation to me. As an information worker, I could then search offline databases or on websites for possible solutions, including the location, fees, and schedule of relevant doctors or other primary health care services. I also assisted rural people in making contact with service providers outside the CRC.

“WITHOUT REALISING IT, I HAD BECOME A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS.”

Each day I would visit the *Ganokendra*, communicate with communities, listen to the problems of *Ganokendra* members, rural women, and adolescents, and help them to obtain appropriate answers from the CRC. I moved around to reach everyone in the village, particularly the women, adolescents and younger members. As an information worker, I not only disseminated information but also collected indigenous knowledge from rural people, recorded this information on the computer, and shared it with others. Any woman within the CRC's catchment area could consult me on matters relating to their livelihood or health. I became a well-known and accepted part of the community, where I was known as *Tathyo Apa* ('Information Madam'), *ICT Apa* or *CRC Apa*. I was also involved in various campaigns focused, among other things, on encouraging birth registration, raising public hygiene and promoting school enrolment. Without realising it, I had become a voice for the voiceless.

The pressure for me to marry grew once I passed my Higher Secondary School (HSS) examination, and my parents became upset. My mother was often asked why she hadn't yet arranged for her daughter's marriage. But I was determined to enter higher education.

Today, I am 19 years old and in the second year of an English honours degree at a graduate college. I have seen some of life's most cruel sides, but my spirit remains strong. I have struggled to come out a winner, defying all the odds. I have to earn money to meet my education expenses. I also have to support my brother and sisters in their education. My struggle continues. I study, I teach as a private tutor, and even work in a beauty parlour. I have become a role model in my community.

Working with *Ganokendra*, I helped to prevent 34 early marriages, facilitated 51 marriages without dowry, intervened in 31 cases of family violence, helped 4,263 women to receive loans for micro-enterprises, re-enrolled 139 school drop-outs, helped 2,311 people to access health services from public hospitals and much, much more.

I also got a chance to attend an international youth conference. I presented my work in *Ganokendra* at the International Policy Forum on Literacy and Life Skills Education for Vulnerable Youth through Community Learning Centres in Jakarta, Indonesia. This exchange of ideas and learnings from participants from other countries helped me to build an even more positive view of the future. At the conference, I also gained valuable insights into how to resist negative peer pressure, avoid dangerous situations, maintain motivation and handle responsibility. Attending the Forum helped me to acquire the mental strength that I will need for future initiatives.

I dream of doing something for the people, especially for our youth. First, I want to build strong linkages among *Ganokendra* youth groups and increase their awareness of how to prevent violence. When young people feel that they are safe – physically and emotionally – they learn better and participate more actively. A safe environment encourages honesty, trust and respect among youth and adults. Working with *Ganokendra*, I can act as a catalyst to encourage youth to make new discoveries, practise their interests and skills, test their independence, and take control of their lives. They can expand their capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible. We will strive to inculcate a *Yes I Can* perspective among youth. At the same time, we will develop micro-entrepreneurship. Using the *Ganokendra* platform, we intend to facilitate both opportunities for youth to learn income-generating skills and low-interest loans so that they can become self-employed.

“I DREAM OF DOING SOMETHING FOR THE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY FOR OUR YOUTH.”

I am proud to be an active member of *Ganokendra* and the CRC. People in my community value me, share their problems, and call me for advice on various occasions. I want to bring a smile to the faces of the less fortunate in our society. I want to become a respected social activist.

EARNING AND EMPOWERED

TROUBLED EARLY YEARS

The serene and lush green hills and mountains where they lived in Assam, India, stood in stark contrast to the ugly violence and abuse that Shanti, her siblings and their mother faced on a daily basis at the hands of an alcoholic father and husband.

Shanti was born in 1981 to a Nepalese father and an Assamese mother. Shanti is the oldest of three siblings and the only daughter in the family. Her father owned a small charcoal business and was able to provide for the family when Shanti and her brothers were growing up.

But her father's violent temper overshadowed Shanti's childhood. His habitual drinking and gambling often aggravated the situation further. Shanti's mother bore the brunt of his temper, and he would often beat her if he found fault with her cooking or she dared to answer back to him. She was her father's second wife, says Shanti. His first wife and their son died in uncertain circumstances. Shanti recalls that as a child she wanted to escape both the daily abuse directed at her by her father and her mother's emotional demeanour.

While he used to beat her brothers, he rarely raised his hand against her. He would insult her at times and en-

courage her at other times. Time dulls even the most painful of memories, and today her feelings towards him are mixed. Shanti says that her father loved her more than he did her brothers. He used to refer to her as *tum* (a familiar pronoun in Hindi used by elders towards younger family members) but her brothers as *tu* (a less respectful term). She remembers a pretty pink frock that he once bought for her and which she wore for many years.

Shanti was a good pupil. Her school principal encouraged her to help weaker students in her favourite subject – mathematics. At home, if her mother grew irritated when Shanti did not help with the household chores because she was glued to her books, her father would come to her rescue and insist that Shanti not be distracted from her studies. But if he spotted her talking harmlessly to the boys from her class, he would taunt her and tell her to run away or have an affair if she wanted to throw her life away. These repeated verbal abuses hurt her deeply. Eventually her father tried to arrange her marriage to a wealthy womaniser in the village. In 1997, aged just 17, she ran away to Delhi with an uneducated convenience store vendor by the name of Narayan.

A NEW LIFE, BUT NO RESPITE

Shanti's married life proved to be a continuation of the horrors that she had suffered in Assam. She had jumped from the frying pan and into the fire.

Narayan was a Nepalese man, five years her senior. He had no schooling and could neither write nor read. Shanti was subjected to marital rape and domestic violence. Narayan also hit their three daughters frequently. Shanti remembers having to pacify her shivering daughters outside on the terrace. To others, Narayan seemed a completely normal man, and he was even known to help Shanti with the cooking and washing. But neighbours living nearby were aware that he often beat his family.

The couple argued over Shanti's attempts to become financially independent. She began by giving tuition to children in her neighbourhood. She proved to be a popu-



Shanti Devi and her first employer

lar tutor and was soon earning Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 per month. The experience boosted her confidence and led her to take up a field job with an NGO, informing underprivileged families about their rights. The knowledge that she gained in this role, in particular relating to the availability of health care services and the work of women's support groups, empowered her further. Shanti eventually took a job at a call centre in Noida, where she earned almost double her previous wage – Rs 5,000 per month. As Shanti's self-esteem grew, she began to dress more professionally.

A jealous and suspicious man, Narayan resented Shanti's work. His violence against her escalated as he tried to force her to quit her job. He claimed that there was no need for her to work and that he was capable of repaying the loan that they had taken out to build their house (somewhere between Rs 60,000 and Rs 70,000). Whenever her office called, Narayan would berate her and threaten to break her phone. The final straw came when he attempted to strangle her. With death staring her in the face, Shanti fought him off with just one thought: she had to stay alive for her three daughters.

FINDING THE COURAGE

Following Shanti's initial police complaint, Narayan restrained himself for a time. But this respite did not last long. The harassment and abuse soon picked up again and Shanti was forced to lodge further complaints. One beating left Shanti with an ear infection so severe that she was forced to leave her job. To her dismay, Shanti found that she was unable to fend for herself and her daughters, or to cover the household expenses.

It was her friend Rani who first told her about the Azad Foundation and Sakha Consulting Wings, encouraging her to enrol in the organisation's programme. Another friend from her call centre days provided Shanti with the financial, moral and emotional support that she needed as she worked to change her life.

Shanti met with representatives of the Azad Foundation, an NGO that aims to "provide livelihoods with dignity" among other things by training disadvantaged women to become commercial drivers. Azad's sister organisation, Sakha Consulting Wings, is a for-profit social enterprise which provides safe transport for women, by women. Sakha provides employment opportunities to women drivers trained by Azad through a full-time chauffeur placement service, taxi service for women and on-call chauffeur

service. A new phase in Shanti's life began as she became a professional driver. But it wasn't just a new job. With the training, counselling and life management skills that she gained with the aid of Azad and Sakha, Shanti discovered how resource-poor women could negotiate life's day-to-day challenges. Shanti gradually learnt how to balance her domestic and professional responsibilities and to maintain her mental and emotional fortitude. She realised that she did not have to accept the violence meted out by her husband and that his actions were illegal. Most importantly, she came to understand that she had an inalienable right to be happy with her three daughters, her main source of strength and *shakti* (power).

There were times when she was on the brink of giving up and shutting herself off from the rest of the world. But when the going got tough, the counsellors and trainers from Sakha sought her out, held her hand, and put her back on track. In time, she learnt to identify and articulate her strengths. The psychological counselling and training that they provided helped her to develop a strong emotional core and recognise her rights as a woman. Her self-confidence grew as she learnt the importance of loving herself.

Shanti also took steps to reconcile with her family in Assam and brought her children to meet them. She learnt that her father had fallen ill and her brothers had failed in school following her flight from Assam. Today, standing on her own feet, Shanti is able to view her now elderly parents with compassion and affection. She calls her mother every Thursday, and they catch up on the week's events. She attended her brother's wedding two years ago in Assam, and even seems to have come to terms with her father's abusive behaviour during her childhood. She says that her birthplace, filled with childhood memories, will always have a special place in her heart.



Shanti proudly poses with her cab



David Cameron and Aamir Khan are proud users of Sakha cabs

Shanti has come a long way from those days of financial and emotional insecurity. She is a solid anchor for her children. Today, Shanti has two incomes: one from her job with Sakha and a second from the house which she has rented out. She treats her colleagues and clients with *apnapan* (as one of her own), and that is what endears her to them. Whether she is helping an elderly passenger into her taxi, ensuring her *duppata* (a stole-like garment that is part of popular Indian outfit, *salwar-kameez*) is not stuck in the door or checking that her passengers are not upset by an unexpected jolt, Shanti treats her colleagues and clients no differently from her loved ones. She follows company rules: arriving on time, ensuring her car is kept clean, and being unfailingly respectful to her clients. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed by her employers at Sakha. Shanti received the prestigious Kushal Mahila Chalak Award from the then Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit.

Perhaps one of the greatest changes in her life came when she left her husband four years ago. Although divorce proceedings are now under way, he still harasses her and tries to monitor her movements at times. But Shanti is equipped to deal with this more maturely now. She knows when to let go, but she also knows when to raise the alarm.

Today Shanti feels that she is finally living life on her terms. Each day still throws up new challenges, but she faces each challenge as a winner, not a victim. She is thrilled at the way her daughters have turned out. Her two older daughters are completely focused on their studies, and the youngest is top of her class, says the visibly proud mother. Her ambitions for the future are simple and unwavering:

- > To support her daughters in whatever they wish to do and to help them fulfil their dreams;
- > To become a trainer and teach other women drivers; and
- > To construct new floors in her house in order to increase her rent earnings.

Never in her wildest dreams did Shanti expect to meet with famous personalities such as Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan and UK Prime Minister David Cameron. But when the Azad Foundation and Sakha featured on an episode of *Satyamev Jayate* (a series of programmes on social issues), anchored by Aamir Khan, the star pledged to use Sakha cabs whenever he was in Delhi. Aamir was true to his word, and Shanti and several of her colleagues took great pride and comfort in driving him around. Sakha drivers were also invited to meet with David Cameron on his visit to India. Shanti and her colleagues had an interesting conversation with him, sharing their experiences as female cabbies on the streets of Delhi.

These experiences led Shanti to realise that her life has value not just to her family, but to other people as well.

LIFE'S LESSONS

- > *You can run, but you can't hide.* Running away from Assam to Delhi did not alleviate Shanti's pain; it merely amplified her suffering.
- > *One good friend can change your life.* A chance encounter with a friend from Shanti's call centre days got her through the financially and emotionally challenging training required to be able to drive a cab.
- > *Never give up, and never let go of your self-confidence.* A horrific childhood. An abusive marriage. A driver training course that she struggled with initially. Shanti could have given up, but she didn't. She strived and she succeeded eventually.
- > *Find a purpose for staying alive.* Her three daughters are the ones she lives for, dreams for, plans for, and works hard for.
- > *Information is power.* Information is strength. When Shanti was abused, she did not know her marital and financial rights. Words of help and guidance came from Azad Foundation, her employer, Sakha, and NGOs. Shanti realised that she was not alone in her fight. Help was at hand.

CHANGING RURAL LANDSCAPE THROUGH COMMUNITY VIDEO

Subhash Maule could have grown up to be just like any other young man from a rural community in India. But Subhash is different. He is a man on a mission to bring about positive change to his village and the lives of his fellow villagers.

Subhash lives in a multi-community tribal settlement called Kharwal, situated in the Nashik district of Maharashtra, near the foothills of the Sahyadri Mountains. Agriculture is the primary occupation of most households in the village, but it is an increasingly precarious livelihood. Over the past two decades, regular and pervasive drought has left the community frustrated and helpless. The impact on the village's socio-cultural fabric has been devastating. Faced with the looming inevitability of starvation, the adults and youth of the village migrate to urban areas nearby several times each year. There, they struggle to earn their daily wages in a fluctuating labour market. Those who stay behind in the village – mostly elders and children under the age of six years – are forced to fend for themselves. Water is scarce, and the poor condition of the roads in the area makes it difficult for children and elderly persons to transport large amounts of water. Yet, in the absence of their fellow villagers, they have to perform this task at least four to five times a day. Subhash grew up in these gruelling circumstances and has a strong desire to change the status quo.

But what sparked his decision to take action against water scarcity? What was it that transformed him from a boy struggling for survival under difficult circumstances into a young man determined to uplift his entire village? This is his story of change.

A few years ago, Abhivyakti Media for Development, a community media organisation based in Nashik, launched an initiative to create 'community media' by placing the medium of audio and video story-telling into the hands of marginalised communities. Collaborating with a grassroots organisation working in Kharwal, Abhivyakti identified an opportunity to equip villagers with video-production skills and to

aid them in telling their stories through the medium of film. It was a unique idea, but its realisation promised to be anything but straightforward. Firstly, there was the issue of whether people with no background in visual media and very little formal education could be taught the skills necessary to make a film. It was also unclear whether community media of this kind could in fact activate grassroots democracy and dialogue. What unfolded in the course of the project was both inspiring and of significant value.

Abhivyakti initially identified a few villagers and provided them with training in film-making skills. This group of adult learners consisted of four women and five men, including Subhash and Pushpatai, both of whom have since taken an active leadership role in the village.

Over the next four months, the Abhivyakti team involved the villagers in a phased workshop process, which included orientation visits and discussions about community film-making, workshops on story-telling and scripting, and input on camera and editing techniques. In practical demonstrations and hands-on training sessions, the techniques of cinematography and the art of capturing images and sound on camera were broken down into simple steps that were easy to learn. The team also created spaces for people to share their questions, doubts and concerns, allowing them to become comfortable with the learning process. Time constraints were relaxed when people were learning to handle the camera and microphone. The workshops focused their attention on their village, the issues that they wanted to highlight and

Subhash Maule preparing to shoot the community video on the water crisis



their coming together to create a story. The script for the film emerged through the sharing of their personal experiences and intense conversation about the water crisis. This interaction created a common bond, an eagerness and a culture of learning that contributed to the process of story-telling. It was clear that the scarcity of water in their village and the surrounding areas had affected them deeply, and they were anxious to take action.

Subhash's leadership qualities soon become apparent. His engagement with the story-telling process kindled memories of his father performing *kirtan* (singing devotional songs often carrying a social message) as he travelled to different villages. This stirred his resolve and motivated him to learn more. He was smart and took risks that distinguished him from the others. He was undeterred by the often slow pace of the learning process, the challenges involved in video editing, and the loss of earnings that resulted from his involvement in the project.

Subhash's determination helped to keep the team on track during the film's production. At the risk of evoking ridicule from others, particularly when it came to asking community members for their views on drought and cooperation, Subhash led the film-shoot in a calm and confident manner. During the shooting of a number of scenes in the village, the team – and Subhash in particular – received threats from various individuals with political ambitions. This marked a turning point in the group's narrative. The threats were not unfounded and the project could well have stalled at that point. But Subhash handled this development with a steadfastness that reflected his newfound sense of calling, and he continued filming. Another characteristic of his leadership was his trust in the collective process. He never clamoured to be in front; he shared his learning with others and encouraged the team to take initiative. It was this nature of altering the leader-follower practice that helped the team to rally round at the height of the threats. Subhash helped Pushpatai, who was also subject to several threats, by empathising with her, sharing his own fears and anxiety as well as his vision of a drought-free village.

The film was eventually completed after a few months' delay. It was shown in Kharwal just before the monsoon, and Subhash and Pushpatai took the lead in mobilising the community. They even invited block-level government officials to the screening. Showing films in villages with low infrastructure is not without its challenges, particularly for the inexperienced. Reaching out to people was easy enough, but the logistics of arranging trans-

port to and from different hamlets – particularly in the evening – and hiring power generators required plenty of planning, cajoling and negotiation.

Convincing the Block Development Officer (BDO) to attend was a major achievement. Not only did the BDO attend the screening along with other members of the village council (*Gram Panchayat*), but he also took an active part in the subsequent discussions. The BDO, who admitted that he had never visited the village before, was moved by the crisis and promised to take action. The screening was attended by nearly 250 villagers, none of whom had ever witnessed the entire village coming together to deliberate and take definite action on such issues. Previously, their community had been divided into smaller groups who were only concerned with their own survival. But change has a way of snowballing and it would soon become an avalanche.

The discussion that followed the screening was historic. When Subhash stood to address his fellow-villagers, he realised that it was easier to speak to outsiders than to address his own people. He spoke about unity and the collective efforts needed to resolve any issue. His speech was simple, moving and straight from the heart. People were amazed by the energy. That night they witnessed the emergence of a leader, or rather a group of natural leaders. Subhash had sown the seed. Monsoon season or not, the soil was ripe for transformation. The village was galvanised. The struggle to solve the water crisis by their own efforts began to take shape.

The villagers sensed that Subhash had the potential to become the next *Sarpanch* (Council Chairperson). In another meeting about the water situation, the people decided to take action. With the parliamentary general elections approaching, Subhash saw an opportunity to provoke po-



Learning the technique of camera operation

litical leaders into addressing the water issue. After the meeting, the villagers decided to inform the politicians that they would not vote unless the village was provided with water. This decision created much debate, and anxiety, but the idea proved to be decisive and powerful.

A member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (MLA), Ms Nirmalatai Gavit, heard about the village's response to the film. During the election campaign, Ms Gavit, who belongs to the indigenous *Adivasi* or tribal community, promised to provide water-supply facilities to Kharwal and its nearby villages and to discuss the issue in more depth. But there was no follow-up. Once again, Subhash and ten members from the village went to meet the MLA. Ms Gavit helped them seek advice from the tribal development commissioner's office in Nashik, which enrolled the village in a scheme for the construction of water pipelines. However, the contractor entrusted with the project failed to carry out any of the work. Two letters of complaint sent to the contractor by Subhash and his team were duly ignored. While rural communities in India are known for their 'silent culture', this time the murmur of complaint swelled to a clamour and the contractor was summoned before the assembled villagers, where he was made to declare that he would return all the money to the village and resign from his post. Following this, the villagers lobbied the commissioner's office to appoint another contractor, who would guarantee the pipeline's completion.

The actions that followed in the wake of this project are significant: the power of a community in resistance is immense. The community showed great courage and resilience in deciding to boycott the general elections. Their actions can gain momentum and spread to other villages if properly facilitated. Community organisations active in the area can build on this momentum and lead a social movement that will force elected leaders to change the political discourse.

Film-making can also initiate other important processes within a community and its external relations. It is an empowering process as it lends individuals with inherent leadership qualities, like Subhash, the confidence to voice their concerns. Projects of this kind enhance the self-respect and collective spirit of the community. Story-telling is not a one-time process. As the community continues to meet, to debate and to express its views on other issues, other community members can step in and take the lead. Community film-making leads to numerous other small initiatives, ranging from visual story-telling to other affirmative actions. Subhash and his team are not sitting



Writing the script of the community video on the water crisis

idle. In addition to their ongoing activism, they have begun to regenerate the groundwater level in their village by launching a *Pani Adva Pani Jirva* (rainwater harvesting) scheme, and have set up water harvesting systems at six locations in the village.

Community film-making enables marginalised and vulnerable communities to break the silence and share their own stories through the medium of film. While many film-makers advocate for the struggles of vulnerable communities, the idea of marginalised people producing their own media is a powerful concept. The weight of the story and the issue multiplies considerably if the story is created, conveyed, and advocated by the community itself. Community film-making seeks to shift the balance of power to the community by empowering them to become creators rather than passive receivers. Equipping communities with the skills to share their story with the world increases their bargaining power significantly. It is a tool which enables communities to engage with civil society through public screenings, dialogues with audiences, and so on. The process of identifying an issue, producing a film, and generating dialogue with the outside world is an act of self-advocacy and a powerful process of leadership development that deepens democracy and promotes active citizenship.

The water pipeline is yet to be completed, but it is no longer a pipe dream. The villagers are optimistic, knowing that their efforts have been meaningful and that the solution is just around the corner. Perhaps more importantly, the village of Kharwal has found in Subhash, Pushpatai and their youth brigade a new and vibrant leadership with a vision for a better future and the skills to make change a reality.

LIVING HER DREAMS

My name is Sifa Humaeroh. I was born and raised in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. I live in Tanah Tinggi, a slum district in central Jakarta, with 48,952 inhabitants per square kilometre possibly the world's most densely populated urban area. Tanah Tinggi is a well-known 'Red Zone' in Jakarta, with high levels of crime and gang violence. Early marriage, prostitution, early school leaving and drug abuse are among the social problems that affect its population.

Luckily, my mom cares for me lovingly. She believes in discipline, and that has made me strong. She has always encouraged me to be an achiever at school. Why school? Because she knows that it's the only place where I can gain an education and, through that, a better life. Unfortunately, we have to pay for my education. Mom is a single mother and the only breadwinner in the family. She



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A sapu lidi, or stick broom

works in a small factory that makes underwear. The employees at the factory don't even have health insurance. Her salary is not enough to cover our daily expenses for food, electricity and water, or other expenses related to my schooling, such as uniforms, school fees, books and other supplies. Putting me through school was very difficult for her.

In 2001, when I was in the third grade at elementary school, my teacher suggested that my mother apply for a scholarship from an organisation called *Yayasan*

Aulia (YA). My mother had already heard about YA, but didn't know how to join. With the help of my teacher, Ms Agustina, Mom submitted an application form to the NGO. I still remember when YA visited our house and interviewed my family and even some of my neighbours. I didn't understand then why they had to interview my neighbour. Now I know that it was to verify information about me – they were that strict! My first social worker, Kak Ria, was so friendly and warm; she helped me a lot. I passed the assessment and got the scholarship. How happy my mom was!

“MY SCHOLARSHIP CAME WITH LOTS OF OTHER BENEFITS, SUCH AS FREE ACCESS TO READING BOOKS.”

My scholarship came with lots of other benefits, such as free access to reading books. Thanks to their mobile library, I could read as much as I wanted. I also joined their study club. They gave lessons on morals, ethics, health, handicrafts and painting. If I had any problems with my school lessons, I could ask for help. It was like having a new family.

Time went by, I still lived in the slum, but now I had the support of YA. After graduating from elementary school, I joined *Remalia* (*Remaja Aulia* or 'Aulia Youth'), an organisation for YA scholars from the slums where the organisation is active. I made friends who were poor like me, but we were not ashamed of our situation. Together, we built up each other's confidence. It is like a *sapu lidi* (broom); you cannot sweep using just a tiny stick. But if we are united, we can move everything.

Like other organisations, *Remalia* has an annually elected board of officers. I learnt about democracy in *Remalia*; it's an important concept which we can also apply to our national leadership system. The board drafts annual plans for activities like campaigns for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and reproductive health, visiting industries, art performances and camping.

Camping was the first activity that I undertook with *Remalia*. It was my first time away from my mom. We

went to Cibubur, a town between Jakarta and Bogor. Camping taught us to become independent, responsible and disciplined. We slept in tents, cooked our own food, and learnt how to survive in nature. For the first time in our lives, we felt the cold at night. We were out of the box. Our cosy box! With new friends, we helped each other to adapt. Our camp had a theme: 'Say No to Early Marriage'. We had an idea what it was about. In my neighbourhood, some girls as young as 17 years engaged in free sex and, if they got pregnant, they had to get married early. This happened to more than 10 of my friends. Indonesia is a religious nation, so if you have a child without being married, you will be ostracised. Young girls who are not physically mature enough can die during pregnancy. Besides, young people are not emotionally ready for marriage, and this can lead to divorce and broken homes, abandoned children, or child abuse. I saw this in my neighbourhood, and I promised I wouldn't let it happen to me. I am a fish in the ocean, but I am not salty like its water. Now I can say: I'm not easily contaminated.

After that, I became more involved in the group's activities. I joined campaigns and attended workshops on topics such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and drug abuse. When I was in my second year of high school, I was elected to the group's board of officers. I was excited and nervous. Despite my young age, I offered to lead *Remalia*. I felt so appreciated, talking in a forum, discussing issues, and being heard. My slogan for the election was 'Build a Better *Remalia*' – simple but real. I didn't win the post of president, but I was proud to be elected treasurer of the board. As the treasurer, I would manage the organisation's funds; this was a big responsibility. The other members of the board came from different locations. We were a team.

"TIME WENT BY, I STILL LIVED IN THE SLUM, BUT NOW I HAD THE SUPPORT OF YA."

We had good times and bad times together; like waves, we had our ups and downs. Planning events like camping was a complicated process. We debated and argued. We also had difficulty with the budget – where could we get more money from? We had to think creatively, put our heads together. So we started to collect used clothes that were still in good condition and held a flea market in our neighbourhood. We also sold snacks, chocolates and pens. All of our members were involved in our fundraising activities. The fundraising coordinator and I monitored our progress and drew up a financial report. Despite our efforts, we still lacked sufficient funds. Our contact at YA suggested that we submit funding propos-

als to some institutions. We knew it wouldn't be easy, but nothing is impossible, right? We checked back with the social worker from YA over and over again. Is this correct? Is this? We made so many mistakes. We revised our proposal several times. Then we practised how to present it. Eventually, with the support of YA, we submitted our proposal. We were so happy when we heard the good news that one of the institutions had accepted our proposal! All that hard work had paid off!



Sifa Humaeroh leads a meeting with parents

It wasn't always easy. Sometimes our friends didn't turn up to meetings. But we understood why some members could not attend every meeting. You needed money for transportation to come to a meeting and we were all from poor families. As I said, we had to be creative. We had to find a solution to this problem. Others' parents were afraid that our involvement in *Remalia* would affect our grades in school. We had to prove them wrong by maintaining our grades.

In 2002, *Remalia* published a book titled *Aku Anak Dunia, Tell Us About Child Rights*. The book was a fantastic achievement and we are very proud of it. It has since been reprinted three times. Anyone can ask YA for permission to print the book, which was produced for non-commercial use. The book aims to spread information about child rights. It is simple and easy to use, even for children. The authors hope that facilitators all over Indonesia can be guided by the *Aku Anak Dunia* (AAD) book. Nowadays we use the AAD book to campaign for child rights from *kampong* (sub-district) to *kampong*.



Sifa and children visit the Planetarium (astronomy museum)

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I am now an alumnus of *Remalia* and have many sweet memories of my time with the group. I am so grateful for all the kindness that I experienced there and I want very much to pass that gift on to others around me. Two years ago, I was offered the chance to work for YA as a social worker in their education division. I teach kids about children's rights. I teach them, like the social workers used to teach me a long time ago. Parallel to this, I am continuing my studies at university, where I am majoring in English.

"MANY THINGS HAVE HAPPENED THROUGHOUT MY LIFE'S JOURNEY – BOTH GOOD AND BAD."

My studies – now that was a hard struggle arguing with my mom. She said, "Please do not continue your studies, high school is enough. Going to university is only for rich people." I knew that she was afraid of the expenses. I understood her. But I believe in my heart that, with education, we can improve our quality of life. It doesn't mean that I have to be rich, but I want to do something that will benefit my surroundings, to make a contribution to the nation. If you are able to fix what lies within your reach, then fix it. The lessons that I learnt in my time with YA have proved useful. We believe that the more youth are empowered, the more Indonesia will progress. It took years to convince my mother that I can continue my studies without being a burden to her,

and I proved it. In the end, my mother understood and supported me.

In early 2014, I had the opportunity to visit Hong Kong to attend a short course on becoming an agent for change. It was my first journey overseas. Who would have thought that one day I would fly to Hong Kong? Thanks to the Almighty!

As part of the course requirements, I submitted an essay about the poor conditions experienced by young people in my neighbourhood. In my essay, I wrote that I dream of changing the conditions in our neighbourhood and that I need help in pursuing this dream. The course was attended by students from around the world. We learnt to identify problems that must be resolved quickly and to bring positive change to people around us. I shared my experiences and met many remarkable young people. Our resource persons were inspiring, and I took home with me everything that I learnt there.

Many things have happened throughout my life's journey – both good and bad. But all these experiences have helped me as a youth in search of my identity. I have been fortunate to meet people who supported me along the way. Many other children have not been as lucky. This is why I want my life to be useful to others.

KO WAI AU? KO AU HE TOA RANGATIRA! WHO AM I? I AM A YOUNG WARRIOR!

Every morning when he wakes up and looks in the mirror, he sees a young Maori-Hungarian teenage male. He is the heir of two very different cultures: a mother whose ancestors migrated from Hungary and a father whose ancestors migrated south from the indigenous tribes of Taranaki to settle in Wellington, *Aotearoa*, New Zealand.

Centuries before them, people of much fairer skin and from further away also migrated here, seeking prosperity and security. They signed a treaty with the *Tangata Whenua* (people of the land), the Māori, on 6 February 1840 at Waitangi, and then settled in the land as citizens. However, the words in the treaty were not always the words in the hearts of the men who governed the nation. This led to conflict, bloodshed and colonisation.

Since then, our nation has come a long way. Though it is relatively young and small, it is known around the world for its rugby team, the *Lord of the Rings* films, its dairy products and popular Kiwi foods such as bacon and cheese pies, its beautiful landscapes and the grace and wonder of its native people. However, much healing is still required. The manipulation of the treaty resulted in great crimes against the

Māori people, including land confiscation and the near eradication of their culture and language. Mass urbanisation disrupted *iwi* (tribe), *hapā* (subtribe) and *whānau* (family) values. These are wounds that cannot be healed through reparation, compensation and government apologies alone; they will take generations to heal through discussion and understanding.

This tale is about the journey of a normal young man who has had to answer that gigantic question: who am I in this world of broken treaties, of broken promises?

The echoes of these broken promises resonate and reverberate throughout our society and dictate the development of whole communities, families and individuals. How do they guide the actions of our *rangatahi* (youth)? Are our youth equipped to survive in a world that requires more than mathematics, English and science to navigate the complicated maze built by their ancestors? Though these historical events were sown over a century ago, the produce is ready, and this young man is of the generation reaping the harvest, both the ripe and the spoiled. Past deeds fertilise the seeds of his identity: his self-awareness, confidence, sense of purpose and direction, his world view. They impact how he absorbs and projects knowledge, influencing his learning in both formal and informal education environments. The sweat and blood of his unknown forefathers saturate the roots of his *tārangawaewae* (the place where he stands, where he belongs), and he is uncertain of how to participate in his own confusing life, let alone the wider world.

When he wakes in the morning, he is Māori (his Hungarian identity is as alien to him as the country itself); when leaving the house and travelling to school, he is Māori; when entering the school classroom, he is a Māori from a poor family that either can't afford the stationery or doesn't care enough to do so, yet he is forced to be there, to think and behave and participate in this Western construct of learning. He feels powerless,



© Brooklyn Emery

ashamed and shy, unable to understand why he needs to listen to this stranger, angry when he feels the stranger is speaking down to him and forcing him to learn things that have nothing to do with his real life. He is bored. Instead of asking for help, which would make him look weak to his peers, he plays the fool to make them laugh. He picks on the smart kids who think they are cool because they know more than him. He threatens people when they try to tell him what to do. He scribbles on books he can't read or understand. He is silent and unfocused when given an individual task, but creates a scene to cover up his lack of understanding when made to work in a team. He has no knowledge of the past that created his present environment, and no aspiration for the future, for next year or even next month. Actually, he has no plans beyond the lunch break, which is his sole purpose in coming to school at all.

Due to his upbringing, he is not a 'true' Hungarian or a 'true' Māori. He is Māori by blood, but he doesn't know its *tikanga* (customs) or his *whakapapa* (genealogy). To him, Hungary is just a distant nation somewhere in Europe. He is a New Zealander, a Kiwi boy; he knows the national anthem and eats Weetabix for breakfast, but that's about it. Neither of his parents spoke *Te Reo* (Māori language) or practised *tikanga*. He feels he merely exists – with no past to anchor him, no present support to guide him, no future to inspire him. The only culture, language and customs he knows are those of low socio-economic urban Māori – poor Māori, disconnected, disempowered and disliked due to the stereotype of Māori as violent, alcohol-consuming, drug-taking, gang-affiliated, uneducated, unclean and unemployed that is imposed by New Zealand's white upper class.

Colonisation triggered a cycle of suffering that affects Māori even today. Nationwide, there are conversations to develop strategies to redress past wounds, to empower Māori to improve their education achievement, health outcomes and civic participation, even while decreasing crime rates, unemployment and domestic violence. These wounds exist due to strategies used decades earlier that disempowered the people – for example, the prohibition of the Māori language and instruction in *tikanga*. Land confiscations sparked the mass migration of rural Māori to urban areas, disconnecting them from historical support networks and their cultural identity. With whole generations of *iwi* removed from their cultural systems and ancestral homes, they quickly became marginalised in the urban setting, aliens in their own homeland, and foreigners to the colonial system. Disenfranchised and

disempowered, the urban Māori communities were affected significantly by crime and violence, poor housing and gang culture, as well as alcohol and substance abuse. The green environment was replaced with concrete complexes, *tikanga* with welfare policies, and a life of *mana* (pride) with an egocentric struggle for survival. This is the world that young urban Māori were born into, their identities lost from day one.

KO WAI AU? E AUA! – WHO AM I? I DON'T KNOW! – THE VALLEY OF DARKNESS, CONFUSION, AND LONELINESS

Brooklyn Emery's early years were golden. His voice is warm as he recalls childhood scenes with a loving mother. Yet this tranquil moment is interrupted when he starts to describe his memories of domestic violence and abuse: furniture being used as tools for painful discipline, the verbal onslaughts delivered when a piece of cutlery was out of place, the physical contact comprised never of hugs, but always of fists.

His eyes are now stern as he remembers his mother leaving when he was four years old. His confusion and sense of abandonment, his home life changing, the cold relationship with his father and the coldness of home are reflected on his now pale, cold face. He seems lost in thought but strangely not hurt. He seems almost emotionless, as though he understands that although his childhood wasn't great, there's no point in being sad about it anymore. He shared adventures with an older brother at the local swimming pool and parks, but he grew up lonely, tainted by fear of neglect and abandonment. He admits that he was always seeking belonging and love. Later, he found this love in his grandmother, his father's mother, who became his mum and his friend; she was nurturing yet firm. His sense of place and purpose began to come back, and an air of peace returns now to his face and his words.

I have known Brooklyn for a few years now. This is not the first time I have heard his story. But hearing how empowered he was by his grandmother makes me uncomfortable, knowing what I would hear next. His grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and given a short time to live. Within days of hearing this news, he learnt his uncle would be imprisoned for attempted murder.

Looking at him, I am amazed he has come so far and survived these challenges. Knowing this story allows me to empathise with him, understand why he was the way

he was, both at school and in his community. But the question lingers: who is Brooklyn Emery, and how did he get out of this pit?

Brooklyn Emery was unable to speak or clearly understand Te Reo. His English literacy level was well below the national average; even now he finds spelling difficult. He was lost between two worlds, unable to participate in special learning programmes for Māori due to his lack of affinity and understanding of his heritage, and totally disillusioned with the mainstream education system. At age 13, he lost his only pillar of support when his grandmother died; his already spotty academic record quickly deteriorated, and his first year of high school can be described as absent, difficult and disruptive. In short, Brooklyn was a teacher's nightmare: he was disrespectful, unable to engage with in-class learning assignments or homework, and constantly required discipline due to his offensive behaviour towards both peers and teachers.

Known to carry weapons and use furniture when angered, Brooklyn's temper was short and unpredictable. Entertaining and endearing when happy, he could also be abusive and egotistical. He was expelled from one school only to continue this pattern of behaviour at another. At

and giving, capable of absorbing and understanding large amounts of information, memorising this and conveying it back, able to analyse how a situation benefits him, able to connect with people to meet his needs. These attributes served him well on the street, and he became a younger brother to other street kids. He was marginalised in the wider community, by his own culture, in the classroom and in his family, but on the streets he found who he was and where he belonged. The problem was that each day brought a repetitive cycle of drugs, alcohol, violence and loneliness.

In 2010, at age 13, Brooklyn entered the local youth centre, 'Secret Level' and was initially offended by the youth worker on duty, who seemed quite rude and overly direct. However, he was attracted to the worker's youth-centric approach and quickly got used to his honesty; he even began to like his straightforward manner. Brooklyn became one of the centre's most frequent users. The centre was open every day after school and had resources from computers to games tables, a dance floor and a radio studio – the place had positive vibes and he would rather be here, where he felt safe, than outside on the cold streets. At the centre, he met many other young people, youth workers and people from the wider community. Brooklyn eventually became a volunteer and a regular participant at events staged there, as well as those of other organisations. He completed an internship for a self-expression art programme and a barista programme that equipped him with real-life skills in customer service, handling money, health and safety, hygiene, food preparation and cleaning. He also gained a sense of pride in his achievements.

Matthew Renata, a youth worker and church pastor, joined the centre in 2011. At first Brooklyn took a dislike to him due to the trust and abandonment issues in his past. Matt connected Brooklyn to a number of informal programmes and to positive people in the community. As his relationship grew with this self-assured and inspiring Māori, Brooklyn became more aware of his own choices and skills, and felt more confident about his ability to be something other than the stereotypes. He decided to take advantage of opportunities offered by this new world and got involved in four different informal programmes: Youth Infusion, Jacket Boys, Life Skills Camp, and Chosen.

YOUTH INFUSION

I met Brooklyn when I was a Youth Development Advisor for the local government authority and he was ap-



Brooklyn as a member of Youth Infusion standing next to the Mayor Ray Wallace (in red)

age 11, he was introduced to alcohol by a friend involved in a youth gang and became immersed in the life of the street. The gang mentality and his street reputation became more important than education. Gaining acknowledgement from older street youth led to burglary, participating in drugs, and enjoying acts of violence and hatred.

Brooklyn is not an unintelligent and selfish person, in fact he is the opposite; he is witty and smart, compassionate

plying to join the Hutt City Youth Council, Youth Infusion. Youth Infusion is made up of young people aged from 12 to 24 years, who engage, consult and advocate for young people to local government decision-makers (elected representatives), and ensure they are meaningfully involved in the development of their communities and the wider city. On Wednesday evenings they would meet for three hours to discuss local affairs as well as national events impacting youth, share their views, and decide on suggestions to the Hutt City Council. They also planned and facilitated community activities ranging from environmental clean-ups, community forums and workshops to a ball for young people with disabilities. Brooklyn's horizons broadened when he met people from very diverse backgrounds with equally diverse opinions. He learnt his value as a citizen of his local community, city and nation; that his voice did matter, and that, as a resident with rights, he could contribute positively and change systems that marginalised and discriminated against him or against those he loved.

Brooklyn grew more confident as his leadership skills grew. His past views of a dog-eat-dog world were challenged by this new philosophy that personal rights come hand-in-hand with responsibilities to others. Basic skills such as social etiquette, communication and appreciating others helped him develop a positive attitude and to understand the whys of his environment, empowering him further to change it.

As he became increasingly aware of his surroundings, Brooklyn became more vulnerable and fragile. As he puts it, he was okay with his past life because it was all he knew; he was surrounded by alcohol and drugs and violence, so it was normal to behave as he did and neglect his education. But when the light was turned on, it all changed: he had no idea that he was in the valley of darkness until he caught a glimpse of the other side. Now fully aware of his iniquities, Brooklyn felt a tug-of-war between the comfort of accepting where he was and the desire to be somewhere better in the future. He knew how to change things in his community, but was unsure about changing himself – becoming more disciplined, controlling his anger, and using his willpower to achieve positive goals.

VIBE JACKET BOYS

Brooklyn next joined the Vibe (Hutt Valley Youth Health Trust) Jacket Boys programme, which was developed by Fati Tagoai, a youth worker who lost his father as a boy

and grew up with different male role models. Fati realised that many boys faced a similar challenge: what does it mean to be a good man if the men around you are not great role models? The programme helped boys explore who they are, where they have come from, and what type of men they want to become.

With the help of Vibe, Brooklyn was one of a group of 12 teenagers who were taken through six months of intensive learning and activity, including a week-long retreat. Throughout the programme, a team of 12 male youth workers and positive male role models from the community facilitated workshops and activities where the young boys worked in teams. In addition to their team meetings, the boys met once a week as a whole group. They were given specific challenges to complete and problems to solve, such as community service and fundraising for a charitable organisation. They were also provided with counselling support and guidance to set goals for themselves, their friends and their family. Together, the participants explored what it means to be a good man, the challenges they would face in becoming good men, and the tools and techniques to achieve this goal.

Some of the boys came from a similar background as Brooklyn's. Others had their own crises of belonging: boys from gang families, some with abusive parents, others who lost loved ones, young boys rebuilding relationships with fathers or starting new ones with a girlfriend, struggling with substance abuse, bullying, peer pressure and sexuality. Brooklyn found safety in exploring and expressing his own story. At the group's sacred space, a camp fire where participants met to reflect and share, Brooklyn shared for the first time his grief at losing his grandmother and the challenge of turning over a new leaf when everyone expected the worst from him. This disclosure was met with encouragement from his peers and older guardians, and he became more willing to seek guidance to overcome other issues.

Throughout the six-month programme, Brooklyn learnt how to resolve conflicts without using his fists, to appreciate that a man can be gentle and yet strong, to develop positive relationships through communication, to focus his willpower and achieve through goal-setting, to identify his own strengths and weaknesses and utilise these to the best of his ability. He also realised that much of the family struggle he went through was not necessarily his fault or the fault of his father and others in his family. He came to understand why things were the way they were, and began to appreciate the amount of work his

father did to support him and why his mother had left. Ultimately, he identified the cycle of pain in his *whānau* and began to focus on how he could change it, starting with changing himself.

POLICE BLUE LIGHT LIFE SKILLS CAMP

In 2012, Brooklyn was awarded a scholarship to attend the Police Blue Light 'Life Skills Camp' facilitated by the police, the Department of Defence, and the Ministry of Social Development. For a full week, he experienced the strict regime of a young recruit and learnt to shower in 60 seconds, speak with respect, be disciplined and organised. On day one, all was quiet in the room where he and 30 other recruits awaited instructions. An older Māori man entered, looked at them and screamed at a boy to remove his hat, then ordered them to take their gear outside and open the bags. While the bags were being searched, the recruits were forced to run laps around the camp field at sprint pace. Brooklyn, who takes considerable pride in grooming himself, had turned up in a pair of tight jeans, brand-new Converse sneakers and an

members of the defence forces opened his eyes to their humanity and purpose. He began to appreciate their work to uphold the law for everyone's safety and how his hatred of them in the past was fuelled by his lack of understanding. Brooklyn is now considering joining the police force to help his community and prevent the suffering caused by crime.

THE CHOSEN

That same year, Matt Renata and I began exploring ways to empower young people from broken backgrounds like Brooklyn. For us, this meant sharing the principles and values of our Christian faith. We developed the 'Chosen' programme, later adopted by local Hutt City Baptist Church. Brooklyn's journey and learning were the basis for the programme, which drew on his experiences and our experience in supporting him. Our programme enabled young people to be the primary decision-makers in their life journeys and to receive positive support so they produce positive outcomes. Brooklyn was supported by a whole church community. He formed very strong relationships not just with men but also with women of compassion and courage, like Jane Gillingham and Del Humphrey. Brooklyn was now exploring his relationship with the opposite sex. Growing up in a male-dominated environment meant he could be rough and domineering. These church women provided the motherly support that he lacked. Their gentle influence must have been like waves on a boulder, slowly polishing him down. His spiritual and personal discovery went very deep. While struggling with this level of self-reflection, he slowly learnt the values of patience, insight and appreciation. During his time with Chosen, he explored many parts of his community and New Zealand through conferences and camps organised by the Baptist Union. More and more, he was giving up his old habits and negative relationships and replacing these with people of *mana*.

© Brooklyn Emery



Brooklyn at Taita College

Adidas hoodie. By the end of this first activity he was dishevelled and shocked. A whole week of screaming officers, hurried cold showers, a heavy exercise routine and hours of forced marching – and he loved it. Through workshops and activities, the recruits were taught how to focus their minds on their school work, the importance of presentation, and how to set goals to secure future employment. Probably the greatest lesson that he learnt was to respect authority – something he had struggled with for a long time and continues to struggle with today. However, being around police officers and

TAITA COLLEGE

At Taita College, his anger-fuelled outbreaks grew less frequent as his attendance rate stabilised; his quality of work and commitment to his studies improved, as did his treatment of peers and teachers. Brooklyn developed a thirst for knowledge and is known to ask a hundred questions about topics that interest him. He still struggles to stay focused – but what teenager doesn't? Given his previous trajectory, Brooklyn should have failed and dropped out of formal education two years ago. Yet here he was, passing his first year of assessments.

“WHEN HE WAKES UP, THE QUESTION IN HIS HEAD IS NO LONGER: SHOULD I GO TO SCHOOL, BUT: HOW DO I GET TO SCHOOL? NO LONGER: SHOULD I SPEND MONEY ON ALCOHOL OR DRUGS, BUT: WHAT SHOULD I HAVE FOR LUNCH.”

His interest in learning his own culture has also been ignited, and in 2013 he received a certificate for Māori traditional carving from Whitireia Polytechnic. Much of the life skills and personal development that occurred in those programmes motivated him, growing his confidence to participate in class and even enjoy learning.

Equally important is the support of Principal Emma Henderson and an amazing group of teachers, who nominated Brooklyn for the Police Blue Light Camp and ensure that he feels both safe and included during class time. His English teacher Janice Wilson and form teacher Fiona Pampalone have consistently made it clear to Brooklyn what the objectives are and how to achieve them, engaging him when there have been conflicts, discussing how to resolve these, while also ensuring he understands the consequences. These teachers enhance the learning environment through innovative techniques that inspire students to participate and contribute. Principal John Murdoch has been an inspiration for Brooklyn, who attests he is the best Principal in the city because he genuinely cares about his students and actually knows who they are and what they need. Mr Murdoch takes time to engage him and discuss what is happening at school – small talks help a student go a long way. These teachers help Brooklyn to utilise his new learning and confidence, and to see what he can achieve academically. They are dedicated to en-

suring that he and his support network are meaningfully involved in his education. This network granted Brooklyn all the resources and inspiration to be a fully participating student and a young man who feels he is in control of his future.

“HE HAS DEVELOPED HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH POSITIVE PEOPLE IN HIS COMMUNITY AND GROWN INTO A CONFIDENT YOUNG MAN WHO IS SUPPORTED BY HIS PRINCIPAL AND TEACHERS.”

When he wakes up in the morning he is a young Christian Māori man, proud of his heritage and excited by science and history. Brooklyn is now 16 years old and has achieved NCEA level 1, the first tier of New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement. He is liked by many of his teachers and has been cited in local media for improving his attendance, behaviour and education achievement. When he wakes up, the question in his head is no longer: should I go to school, but: how do I get to school? No longer: should I spend money on alcohol or drugs, but: what should I have for lunch. He has developed healthy relationships with positive people in his community and grown into a confident young man who is supported by his principal and teachers. He has worked alongside the city mayor, members of the police, youth workers, and elected members of parliament.

In the last three years, he has turned himself around and now supports other young people to fulfil their potential and take *mana* in who they are as individuals, regardless of their background. Using skills developed through informal education programmes, he is a young warrior who aspires to empower others.

RETURNING TO MY ROOTS

My name is Carol Doyanan. I am the youngest child of Luvimin Doyanan and Amelia Doyanan. My father is a farmer, while my mother is a former literacy-numeracy facilitator. I have three older brothers.

I am one of the 15,185 Aeta people living in Botolan, Zambales. There are many Aeta sub-tribes: Aeta Magantsi, Aeta Botolan, Aeta Mag-indi, and my tribe, Aeta Abellen. Our ancestors were among the first inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago. They settled at the foot of Mount Pinatubo, which we believe is a sacred place of *Apo Namalyari*, the supreme God.

According to our elders, our people had well-developed indigenous knowledge systems and practices before the arrival of foreign invaders. Colonisation devastated our indigenous ways of life. Because our ancestors did not adopt the foreign lifestyle and culture, we came to view ourselves as a lower class within society. Our sense of

interconnectedness with the divine spirits and the rest of the creation was challenged and even condemned. We lost most of what our ancestors treasured, and we also lost a part of our identity.

A more recent tragedy that befell the Aetas was the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991. The community where I was born is now buried under tons of volcanic mud known as *lahar*. The school buildings, churches, clinic and many other communities were also buried. With every downpour, the *lahar* threatened to cause more damage. Eventually we were forced to relocate. We had no choice but to accept our fate.

Our organisation, *Lubos na Alyansa ng mga Katutubong Ayta ng Sambales* (LAKAS, Alliance of Indigenous Aetas in Zambales), moved many times until we found an area where we could start our lives over again. We had lost our land and livelihood, and the disaster had scattered our family. Our future seemed uncertain, but we kept our faith that Apo Namalyari was with us.

As we grew older, our parents sent us to a school where we were discriminated against because of our culture and identity. This discrimination drives many of the young Aeta girls to drop out of school and marry. When we wore our traditional clothes, for example, some of the drivers in town would stop and ask, "Where are you going to perform to earn some money?" The drivers were unfamiliar with Aeta culture and thought that we were wearing costumes. We just ignored them. Fortunately, our community elders and leaders continued to foster our culture.

At that time a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) offered scholarships to Aeta students from Zambales and Bataan provinces wishing to gain a Bachelor of Secondary Education, majoring in Technology and Livelihood Education. I was among those selected for the scholarship programme. The NGO also held workshops on gender equality. These workshops not only helped to change attitudes among women, but also encouraged parents to treat their daughters and sons equally.

© LAKAS



Carol Doyanan climbing three mountains to gather information on students

Immediately after graduating in 2008, I was approached together with a fellow graduate by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and offered a position as a teacher at a school that they had established in 1997. The Indigenous School of Eastern Botolon (*Katutubong Paaralan ha Baytan*) was located in the hills around Mount Pinatubo, an area with a large Aeta population. The Aeta were frequently victims of unfair business transactions in their dealings with outsiders. Their poor literacy skills, for example, meant that they were unable to deal with documents relating to land ownership. The school's literacy-numeracy programme had already proved that it was able to raise literacy among the Aeta people and many leaders – some female – had emerged from the programme to help our tribe take steps to achieve self-determination. Parents had come to recognise the value of their culture and of integrating their knowledge and skills in today's world. It was their desire that their children be able to attend a school especially for the Aeta. This was why we responded to the call to serve our tribe.

“I WAS 21 YEARS OLD WHEN I RETURNED TO THE PLACE THAT I HAD LEFT AT THE AGE OF THREE.”

I was 21 years old when I returned to the place that I had left at the age of three. For five hours, we travelled by buffalo cart. We were a bit scared as it was dark and we had to cross the river in the rain. The cart driver was just a boy and the buffalo was small, so that water came up to our seat, but in that instant I realised that *Apo Namalyari* had blessed us by calling on us to serve our people. Indeed I felt blessed because I was coming home to my ancestral land, the home of my tribe.

© LAKAS



With students on a research trip

Even though we spoke a common language, I found it hard at first to establish a rapport with the Aeta children. My teaching style and the content of lessons that I prepared were not appropriate to their classroom. Fortunately, the school sent us to a series of training courses on indigenous people's (IP) education delivered through the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples. There, I learned how to teach in a manner that resonates with our culture while integrating formal school competencies.

The school building, which was similar in design to an Aeta house, was made of local materials such as cogon grass and bamboo. It was built and maintained by the students' parents. We had four classrooms on each level, a school hall, library, kitchen, and a house for the facilitators. A private organisation provided the resources that enabled us to offer students snacks and lunch meals, which the students' mothers took turns cooking. Sometimes, our students brought vegetables from their families' farms. When the food was ready, we would ask students to count the total number of students attending that day – an activity that supplemented their maths class. Twice a month, the other facilitators and I went down the mountain to get food and school supplies.

Unlike most Philippine schools, our school year was organised around the arrival and departure of the southwest monsoon. Entering Baytan during the rainy season is extremely difficult as the flow of *lahar* is very strong at this time, making the roads unsafe for travel. This arrangement also allowed students to help their families with land preparation and planting activities.

We each had our own style of teaching and used our mother tongue as a medium of instruction. As I immersed myself within my teaching practice, it became clear to me that we could have our own IP education system, one that empowers us to be who we truly are. We needed more education in order to build the strength necessary to protect our land from irresponsible mining and land-grabbing by rich and powerful people.

My colleague and I came to recognise the importance and richness of our culture. Our elders and community play a significant role within this context as the bearers of our sacred story. Our legends and history are guided by our spirituality, our relationship to our Creator and the rest of creation. We invited our elders to become resources within our classrooms and to demonstrate traditional methods of planting, fishing and hunting as well as forms of celebration and various rituals. In doing so, we ensured

that these indigenous systems of knowledge and practice were passed on to our students.

As a facilitator working in a culture-based school, I had to immerse myself in the life of my students' tribe and the wider community. We encouraged students to take their classes into the outdoors and to engage with their community on contemporary issues such as environmental matters. Together with our students, we participated in various community activities, including planting. From Mondays to Thursdays, we held regular classes, while Friday was reserved for research on various aspects of Aeta culture such as parenting and discipline.

“IT IS HARD TO TEACH WHEN WE HAVE NO FACILITIES, LEARNING MODULES, OR SCHOOL SUPPLIES.”

This was my life in Baylan. During the three years that I lived and taught there, I learned much from my students and the community. All this made my first teaching experience even more meaningful.

In 2010, we finalised a curriculum for use in IP education, together with teaching modules spanning three levels of literacy and numeracy. The scope of the modules included literacy/numeracy skills, agriculture, culture, flora and fauna, and stories drawn from the community. We developed the modules together with tribal elders and other IP-facilitators, based on our studies, training courses and experiences. Upon completion, all of these materials were registered with the Philippine National Library. After evaluating the materials, the provincial Department of Education recommended using them in all IP schools in the province.

On a higher plane, our work and advocacy contributed to the development of an IP education system in the Philippines. Along with other IPs, I attended trainings, conventions and consultations. Our advocacy paved the way for the issuance of Department of Education Order No. 62 on 8 August 2011, adopting the National Indigenous Peoples' Education Policy Framework. This milestone has raised our hope that the following generations of indigenous people will enjoy a brighter future. We are grateful to the national government and the international community for recognising our rights and independent status.

Some years later, when the religious sisters assigned to the area were nearing retirement, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary decided to close the school. The



Planting indigenous trees

formal closing ceremony in 2013 was a sad affair and was attended by the provincial head of the religious order, various sisters and priests in Botolan, as well as village officials. Fortunately, we were able to lobby local government authorities to establish a formal school for Aeta children who wanted to pursue education. We then facilitated our students' move to their new school building.

Today, I teach Aeta youth in the community where we resettled. Our learners include youth from nearby Aeta communities as well. As we are a newly established school, our expenses are not covered by the national education budget. It is hard to teach when we have no facilities, learning modules or school supplies. Our students come from poor families and are sometimes unable to participate in school events. As our school is far from the town centre, our principal does not visit us often. It feels as though we are on our own. We cope with the support of teachers from other schools, who lend us learning materials, and the generous donations of our friends. We will not let these challenges stop us. We will continue to collaborate with the government, NGOs, private organisations, Aeta elders and leaders, and other indigenous communities in developing an IP educational system.

I dream that my fellow Aeta youth will complete their studies up to college level so that they can hold permanent jobs. As they grow, I hope they will not forget who they really are. I dream that IP education will be widely recognised, just as we, the Aeta people, are recognised.

A ROLE MODEL FOR TIMORESE YOUTH

Fonseca was born in 1987, in the small town of Teda located in the Covalima district of Timor-Leste. He is one of six children – three sons, followed by three daughters – born to Constancio Caetano and Josefa Goveia Leite. The family lives in a remote mountain village with no electricity. To reach the nearest city, they have to either ride a horse or walk for many hours.

The primary school which Fonseca attended in Teda lacked many basic facilities. The school's few classrooms did not have enough furniture for the pupils and there were no toilets. Fonseca then moved to Beco, a town in

In 2007, he moved to the city of Suai, on the border with Indonesia. He lived there with relatives for three years, eventually finishing senior high school.

Fonseca's parents could not afford to send him to university. Instead he took an eight-month course in English and computer studies at the Science of Life Academy in Covalima, after which he tried to find work in the capital, Dili. His efforts to find work were hampered by his lack of fluency in English and limited IT skills. With little to back him up, he was forced to work as an assistant builder in a local construction company. Most of his daily wage of \$5.00 was sent home to support his younger sisters, who were still in primary and secondary school. He stuck to his job for a year before quitting, unable to bear the physical demands any longer.

“IN TIMOR-LESTE CHILDREN FROM POOR FAMILIES GO TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS WHERE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IS EQUALLY POOR.”

In 2013, Fonseca's friends told him about a training centre for youth in Beco. The Action for Change Foundation (ACF) had its main office in Dili, but set up a training centre in Beco to cater to the large numbers of disadvantaged youth in rural areas.

In Timor-Leste children from poor families go to public schools where the quality of education is equally poor. This is not surprising, given the inadequate school infrastructure and facilities. There are many other challenges. With every change of government, the curriculum is adjusted, resulting in constant upheaval. Learning is also complicated since the medium of instruction, *Bahasa Indonesia*, is very different from *Tetun*, the language that children normally use at home.

Those who persist in studying beyond primary school have to go a long way from home. Beco, for example, has just one junior high school; most senior high schools are located in Cova Lima, one hour away by car. Higher education is



Fonseca Goveia Leite with his trainees

Cova Lima district, for junior high school. Beco had better roads and transport, but the school's facilities were similarly poor. In Beco, Fonseca lived with his sister, who had married early. Her house was close to the school, which was convenient, but Fonseca was expected to help with various domestic chores after school. Tending rice fields and feeding farm animals meant that he could not focus fully on his studies.

even more inaccessible. There is no university in the entire district; the few students who can afford to attend have to travel all the way to Dili. Likewise, most vocational and non-formal training centres are located in Dili.

As a result, rural youth have very limited options; they must either marry early and remain farmers, like their parents, or settle for low-paid jobs. Either way, they end up even more vulnerable and disadvantaged. Of the estimated 15,000 students who graduate from high schools every year in Timor-Leste, half are unable to find employment.

These are the disadvantaged youth targeted by ACF. The training centre in Beco was set up in 2012 upon the invitation of local authorities. Under a formal agreement, the local authorities, youth representatives, school teachers and parents contributed training facilities consisting of three rooms for ACF's classes. They also agreed to cover the cost of electricity and water, and to provide additional land if ACF needs to expand its facilities. These contributions were actually investments: ACF had a good reputation, and the community knew that rural youth could benefit tremendously from vocational training and non-formal training activities that would boost their chances of gaining access to the labour market.

Although young people, especially women, are given priority, there are no restrictions on access to ACF training courses – all members of the community are welcome. The course offers at the training centre include English, Computer Software, Management, Business Skills and Leadership. The training package also includes job-seeking guidance and a two-month internship with a local company, organisation or government district office.

THE COURSES AIM TO HELP RURAL YOUTH TO:

- > Develop positive attitudes and social skills;
- > Develop effective English communication skills;
- > Learn how to think critically and make sensible decisions;
- > Develop positive work ethics and skills in organising, goal-setting, and time management;
- > Identify and pursue career pathways and learn employment seeking and job interviewing skills; and
- > Understand their purpose and potential in their communities, participate in community life in a positive way, and become community leaders.

Fonseca applied to work as a volunteer teacher for children, young people and adults at the ACF Training Centre and was very excited when he was accepted. It was out of



Group photo in the ACF training centre

commitment, he said, that he volunteered. But Fonseca also gained from the experience. As part of his preparation for his role as an English teacher, ACF sent Fonseca on a two-week course in Dili, where he learnt professional skills such as lesson planning, teaching methodologies and customer service. He also studied the training manuals that he would be using in class.

As a volunteer teacher, his role extended beyond the classroom; Fonseca liaised with local authorities, other school teachers and the youth centre's manager, and submitted monthly progress and financial reports to the ACF programme manager in Dili. In all his tasks, he looked for ways to collaborate with other teachers and training staff to provide better services and quality teaching to the students. He helped some 75 students through his classes.

Fonseca's English improved, and even the village chiefs gave positive feedback on his work. In fact, his performance was so good that ACF took him on as a paid member of staff after just three months.

Fonseca continued to excel. He represented ACF at the International Policy Forum on Literacy and Life Skills Education for Vulnerable Youth through Community Learning Centres in Jakarta, Indonesia. This was his first journey outside Timor-Leste, and he was excited to share experiences with young people from other countries who were also involved in empowering marginalised youth.

Upon returning to Cova Lima, Fonseca was asked to head ACF's district office. In addition to the Basic Skills Training Programme for Marginalised Youth, Fonseca's responsibilities also included implementing the Sport for Peace



Plácido Soares © ACF

Fonseca giving a presentation

Project, in partnership with UNICEF Timor-Leste and the Peace and Sport Organisation of Monaco.

ACF's Sport for Peace Project is an innovative approach to engaging youth. ACF believes sports are not simply fun games. They give children and youth an opportunity for healthy, natural self-expression, helping them to build self-confidence and relieve tension. They facilitate social interaction and integration, and teach the spirit of solidarity and fair play. Children and youth are the future of Timor-Leste, and investing in them now is essential in building peaceful communities and encouraging growth.

Through ACF's Sport for Peace Project, football, badminton, and table tennis (ping pong) have become tools for peace education and conflict prevention in neighbourhoods and schools throughout the district. They also introduce participants to practical physical education, through which they can develop and practise discipline, morals, tolerance, self-respect, and respect for others. Although the project may eventually contribute to increased interest and ability in the sports themselves, that is not the primary objective of the project. ACF wants to use sports as a tool to promote and develop values that lead to peaceful human relationships at the community and grassroots level.

For ACF, Fonseca is a logical choice as the leader of its programmes in the district. He is very passionate and intelligent, and highly committed to supporting the development of his peers. Above all, he has a sound understanding of the needs of young people in the villages

because he grew up as one of them. He is a role model for other Timorese youth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SPORT FOR PEACE PROJECT:

- > To instil positive skills, values and behaviours in participants, in order to enable them to practise peaceful, non-violent relationships and participate more constructively in their community;
- > To expand the opportunities for vulnerable children and problematic youth within the District of Covalima and youth in the border region to access peaceful and cooperative recreational activities;
- > To provide peace education to children and youth within the district by using sports as an innovative teaching tool;
- > To develop participants' confidence and abilities in various sports;
- > To showcase the value of sports to the wider community and to provide an opportunity for participants to demonstrate their new talents and skills to their community, through a *Game for Peace* tournament; and
- > To promote gender equality and understanding by providing female role models in sports education, facilitating co-educational opportunities for boys and girls, and providing opportunities for girls to participate in organised sports.

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THE EMPOWERING PROGRAMMES FEATURED IN THIS PUBLICATION ARE RUN BY THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS

Bangladesh – Dhaka Ahsania Mission
<http://www.ahsaniamission.org.bd/>

India (Shanti) – Azad Foundation
<http://www.azadfoundation.com/>
Sakha Consulting Wings
<http://sakhaconsultingwings.com/index.php>

India (Subhash) – Abhivyakti Media for Development
<http://www.abhivyakti.org.in/>

Indonesia – Yayasan Aulia (YA)
<http://www.aulia.org/>

New Zealand – Youth Infusion, Hutt City
<http://www.huttcity.govt.nz/en/Your-Council/About-the-council/Youth-infusion/>

Philippines – LAKAS Alliance of Indigenous Aetas in Zambales

Timor-Leste – The Action for Change Foundation (ACF)
<http://www.actionforchangefoundation.info>

