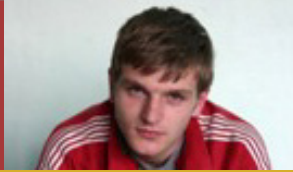


YouthActionNet™
connecting youth to create change



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YouthActionNet Winners Lead Bike Tour for Social Justice in the Philippines

In December 2006, YouthActionNet winners Laiden Pedriña and Jessica Lax rallied community members across the Philippine province of Laguna to dialogue and take action around the theme of sustainable development.

The 210 km tour sought to generate greater public awareness related to environmental and social issues – for example, worker’s rights and the existence of sweatshops, environmentally destructive mining practices, responsible consumption, renewable energy, and animal abuse.

Members of the bike tour – and hundreds of volunteers – made clear that sustainable development need not come at the price of economic development; rather they encouraged NGOs, government leaders, and businesses to collaborate in pursuing just development for all.

Laiden, the founder of the Young Artists Fellowship for the Environment (YAFE) in the Philippines, and Jessica, co-founder of the Otesha Project in Canada, received a collaboration fund grant of US\$3,000 from YouthActionNet to carry out their Youth for Global Justice project. Additional support was received from the Clean Air Initiative-Asia, the United Nations Environment Programme, BPI Foundation, Vegefood Corporation, and the National Youth Commission, among others.

Both Laiden and Jessica were recipients of 2005 YouthActionNet awards and discovered a shared passion for the environment. YAFE uses art as a platform for environmental advocacy, while Otesha carries out education programs and bike tours that teach young people about the impact of their everyday actions and consumer choices.

The two carried out their social justice project via a bike tour to reinforce the notion that every individual has the ability to make a difference through the individual choices they make every day, whether it be through the transportation they use, the clothes they buy, or the food they eat.

“While there are many environmental issues I feel I should get involved in, I also believe that I should be conscious in my own actions, and how my lifestyle, for instance, has an affect on the plight of other people,” said Laiden, who received the Search for Outstanding Volunteers (SOV) award in December, in conjunction with National Volunteer month in the Philippines.

“Social justice is not just a world phenomenon, but also an individual phenomenon.” “It was really inspiring for me,” said Jessica of the experience, noting that many of the tour participants were high school students who had never biked before. “I’m excited to do workshops here [in Canada] to tell students about the issues we explored on the tour.”

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During their weeklong trip, the two, and a dozen or so fellow bikers, traveled to five towns on bikes donated by local mayors and businesses. Given the busy traffic and lack of bike lanes, the cyclists were closely followed by a Red Cross ambulance donated by the Laguna Red Cross. Highlights of the tour included exhibitions of artworks created by YAFE members, evening musical events attended by local youth, a sustainable lifestyle forum, and an International Volunteers Day celebration.

Community members in each town were asked to an action they were committed to taking, or draw a picture of their ideal world on a "Call to Action Tile." Over 1,000 tiles with drawings and commitments were collected during the tour, some of which traveled back to Canada to be used in future workshops. Youth at each tour destination were asked to express their views on various issues (e.g., support for a renewable energy bill, the creation of bike lanes, and concern over fair wages) to be presented to state leaders and legislators.

The bike tour events attracted more than 1,600 people in all and were supported by the efforts of 350 volunteers. YAFE plans to make the tour an annual event and expand it to other areas of the Philippines. For further information, visit: http://www.yafe.ph/temporary/biketour_1.html.

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