

Peace Camp 4.7: Empowering Young Timorese to be Civically Engaged and Become Global Citizens  
Timor-Leste  
St. Olaf College  
Ariel Mota Alves, Timor-Leste, St. Olaf College '20, UWC Adriatic '16 (Project Coordinator)

## Goals

The project aims to empower young East Timorese to be civically engaged, becoming more proactive in their community, and are aware of global problems. This project is inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that hopes to train learners everywhere in areas of human rights, gender equality, environmental degradation, peace, and conflict resolution.

## Peace Camp 4.7

Despite being the largest among the population, 70%, young people in East Timor are the “forgotten demographic.” Much Timorese youth are unemployed, many live in the wake of conflict and violence, many young girls become mothers before they reach 20, and young people don’t have political representation. The Government annual expenditure allocates less than 10% in education, vocational training or improving health care altogether. In short, young people are still not equipped enough to answer the challenges posed by this globalized world. This essentially gives birth to this project. I believe that when more and more young people are empowered, they can engage in issues affecting their communities, drive changes, and hold their political representatives accountable.

This issue exists because young people everywhere in the world are not included in the conversation of decision making. As the UN envoy for youth said, “too often young people are excluded from development programs, ignored in peace negotiations, and denied a voice and a seat at a table.” Young people in Timor-Leste are not being consulted for policies that are going to directly impact them in both the short and long run, despite their struggles are some of the major problems faced by Timor-Leste.

I choose to organize this project in my hometown, Dili. I am familiar with the city, and moreover, organizations, activists, and individuals that I work with for the Camp are based in Dili. Despite that, 90% of participants come from other municipalities and rural areas in Timor-Leste. This is to get a more representative group and on the other hand, young people living in rural areas do not have access to opportunities such as this compared to the ones living in Dili. Another advantage of organizing this project in my hometown is the support system that I got. I have friends who I went to high school with traveled with me to recruit students for the camp in other municipalities. One person drove the car, some brought food, others contributed tents and other logistical materials, not to mention endless laughter, road trip music, and emotional support. My family also endlessly supported me in any way they could for two months of putting all the projects together.

I admit that I was nervous. Everything worked in my head, but this was a pilot project. In one of the days where we talked about human rights, I invited an LGBTQ activist to talk about the lives and struggles of transgender people in Timor-Leste. I thought the participants are not going to take it well, and I was nervous because this is a very sensitive issue in a 95% Roman Catholic country like Timor-Leste. The same went for sexual and reproductive rights education because there is a lot of taboo about discussing this matter. I was surprised at how participants were receptive and calm, and even though some of them demonstrated disagreements, they were able to do so in a civil manner. The speakers who I invited are also trained and professional in moderating the discussions when discussing on heavy themes.

In conducting my project, I had to make sure that everyone, facilitators and speakers, understood exactly what’s in my head. It all makes perfect sense for me because I designed this project, but it was always challenging to translate them to people with whom I worked with. Although this seems trivial for

readers who are going to read this report, it is something that project coordinators don't anticipate having when conducting their projects. I made sure I was present in every single detail related to this project, whether they are big or small.

What is peace? The meaning of peace means different things for my parents and me. To them, it is the absence of war, as they were born during the occupation, and some of my family members served as members of the clandestine front in favor of freedom fighters. Now that we overcome that, to me, to have peace is to make sure no one is left behind. It is for everyone to be able to live together and accept each other, and to foster a strong sense of community. It is for every institution, governmental or not, to strive to be stronger and accountable, to make sure public policy and decision-making are people-centered.

This project aims to create a learning platform to nurture young people to be peacemakers in their communities, through learning from the works of influential local individuals that I believe will have tremendous contribution and positive impacts to our campers. At the end of the camp, campers were asked to come up with their action plans to be completed in their hometown based upon what they have learned during their stay at the Peace Camp. TLYfP and Peace Project 4.7 facilitators will continue to assist the campers to help to implement their projects. Furthermore, campers were invited to join and become members of Timor-Leste Youth for Peace. As members, they will be able to meet other young peacemakers as well as establish networks for ideas for their projects.

As someone who aspires to pursue a future career in public policy, this project gives me a lot of perspectives on the importance of listening to young people's stories. I was able to sit down and listen to campers' resilient stories and their aspirations, how they navigate their day to day lives, and despite the hurdles they face, they can transcend these obstacles and become role models in their communities. One thing that strikes me is the disparities in opportunities between rural and urban youths. I am able to be where I am today thanks to that fact that I was born and raised in the city, have access to opportunities, and was able to frequent quality English language courses that later allows me to apply for scholarships to study abroad, whilst this opportunity isn't readily available my peers who don't go to schools in the city. This project inspires me to pursue an equitable public policy career that people-centered and work to close the gap of opportunities.

*"I believe in the importance of empowering young people, to not only be changemakers but to also have the courage to demand an opportunity to be part of decision-making, particularly in issues that directly impact their lives. That's why I designed Peace Camp 4.7" - Ariel Mota Alves*



Figure 1 - Students listening to a speaker speaking on LGBTQ+ issues during a session in Human Rights day



Figure 2 - Campers did a mural painting in an Orphanage as part of an activity in Volunteer Day