



Yosua finds his voice

By Cory Rogers, Communication Officer

Last year, Yosua watched as, one after another, his friends began dropping out of school

Erratic rains were causing rice crops either to wither, or to drown, and with the drop in yields, many families could no longer afford school fees.

“My father said we had to fight for my education,” Yosua says in his home village of Panggungrejo in southern Sumatra Island. “So I stayed in school.”

Yosua is no stranger to hard work – or hardship. For years, he’s been getting up at dawn to help his father with livestock, returning after school to tend to the paddies. And when his mother died of cancer a few years ago, he even took on some of the cooking duties. But while these experiences leave him strong-willed and independent-minded, he is shy and, at times, unsure of himself in groups.

When Yosua heard about ‘Adolescent Circles’, a project focusing on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change, supported by UNICEF and implemented by ChildFund and local partner LPAMAS -- he was intrigued.

“I want to help fix the environment here,” he says. “And to become more confident...I want to become a changemaker.”

About a year since the Circle began, he is well on his way.

The Adolescent Circle offers a space for young people to build core competencies like problem solving, stress management, self-esteem, and empathy, all while brainstorming solutions to problems they deem pressing; then, it provides a forum for these young people to present their prototype solutions to community members. Across Indonesia, there are 58 Adolescent Circle groups both in and out of schools, all of which aim

to empower young people to speak up and be heard.

The 20 adolescents in Yosua’s Circle quickly identified climate change as the most disruptive force in their community.

“With the rice harvests dropping, many families don’t have enough money. They can’t support their children’s education,” Yosua explains. “We want to make sure all children can go to school.”

The group began pulling together ideas, and Yosua emerged as one of the more vocal participants. Months of work culminated in a documentary that captured their anxiety about the future. The film set the tone for the unveiling of a prototype they had devised.

Yosua delivered the group’s solution at a village-level development forum: Why not use village funding to build a rice storehouse? That way families could store some as insurance for hard times.

“If a family needs money to keep their children in school, they could sell some of the rice stored there,” he says. “And if there is an economic crisis, we would have some backup.”

Yosua is hopeful the rice storehouse will be considered. And indeed, there is growing interest in listening to young people, even at the highest levels of local government.

“We ought to start seeing children as the subjects [of policy], not just objects themselves,” says Sujadi Sadaat, the regent in Pringsewu, Yosua’s home district.

“Criticizing us [adults] is an important part of their development into adulthood.”

Today, Yosua is more sure of himself, and looks people in the eye. He is broadening his ideas and thinking about something else that could improve the village.

“People always say that books are the ‘windows to the world’, but we don’t have a library in Panggungrejo,” he says. “We don’t have any windows.”

“We really want a library.”



Yosua (top right) and three of his Adolescent Circle peers meet with their two youth facilitators (kneeling) in Panggungrejo © Cory Rogers / UNICEF / 2017.

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