

## AITo Update, August 2010: Making Conservation Cool

For many of the folks AITo works with in Indonesia, **conservation**—including such issues as deforestation, endangered species, and climate change—is **rather a new thing, something they’ve given little, if any, previous thought.** “**Honestly, I wasn’t concerned about that before I was involved with AITo,**” said Tompotika native Ama Kasim, 16. But the health of our planet—and what must be done to protect it—is an issue that is becoming increasingly impossible for any Earth resident to avoid confronting, and its effects will be felt all the more profoundly as time goes on.

The truth is, especially for the youth of today, sooner or later there will be no escape from thinking about conservation matters. But here at AITo, we want them to think about conservation in a positive way. AITo has a strong presence in Tompotika’s schools, reaching out to children and youth through our Conservation Awareness campaign. And in the last two years, AITo has sponsored two special projects aimed specifically at young people aged 15-19. **These young people are the definers of Tompotika’s youth culture, and the ones that younger children look up to and mimic; how they think and behave holds a special power, now and for the future.**



2009 Tompotika Youth Calendar Project. “It was a really great time, I was so happy.” – Ama, 16 (at center). The 14 youth involved, from all over Tompotika, have kept in close touch with one another in the year since the project.



AITo’s youth ambassadors for conservation (left to right): Clara, Dea, and Logan

In 2009, AITo gathered 14 young Tompotika artists to focus on the area’s rich but vulnerable array of endangered wildlife (as seen in the 2010 Tompotika Youth Calendar).

**This year, the focus was trash, litter, and the problem of marine plastic debris,** and the team of AITo Eco-Service visitors included three energetic—and it turned out, irresistible—youth ambassadors for conservation: Logan Emlet (18) and Clara Summers (18) from the U.S., and Dea Tasirin (19), from Manado, North Sulawesi. **They, along with 8 Tompotika high school students, made picking up trash cool.**

**of as glamorous.** But this August, AITo’s Eco-Service travelers—which besides Logan, Clara, and Dea also included seven other cheerful trash-pickers—made a party out of cleaning up beaches and putting trash in its place. (Read more about the Trash Jamboree in AITo’s upcoming newsletter, October ‘10.) Villagers and visitors of all ages—from 8 months to 80 years—joined together in the effort. But it was the young people who were most visible. **When the teenagers went swimming, all the village children and youth**

**Picking up trash isn’t usually something one thinks**



**swarmed into the water. When they danced, everyone danced. And when Logan, Dea, and Clara joined with the 8 local high school students to make up a skit about maleos, sea turtles, and trash, the entire village—hundreds of people—came out to watch.** Everywhere we go, AIto's task—building support for conservation—is a serious one. But the youth helped ensure that the atmosphere in each village where the group picked up trash was decidedly festive!

In the students' skit, a boy dreams that he turns into a sea turtle and then a maleo bird. In the clever fable they created, careless littering wreaks havoc, but all is well when maleo and turtle eggs are safe from noaching and trash.



A team of Tompotika trash-pickers poses with their prize bags of beach trash.

In this month's event, a lot of trash was picked up. Tompotika's main sea turtle nesting beaches—where mother turtles and hatchlings have had to tangle with plastic bags, abandoned fishing nets, and other hazards in their quest simply to survive—were made clean. That's good news. **But more than that, the people of Tompotika, especially children and youth, are now thinking about proper disposal of their trash—and other conservation matters—for the first time. And doing the right thing, they've come to believe, is cool.** As 16-year-old Ama put it, being involved in AIto projects has been **“one of the great things in my life... It can change [peoples'] habits, especially for the trash problem. But for me, it is not enough yet. I hope I can do more for this planet.”**

*Yes, Ama, together we can and will do more!*

Thanks for your support.

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