



Alliance for Tompotika Conservation Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika

NEWSLETTER

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COVID-19 in Tompotika: Protecting the vulnerable, facilitating long-term change

Just as AITo wrapped up its biennial Festival activities at the end of February, the first cases of COVID-19 were being reported in Indonesia. As the virus spread during March and April from the capital in Jakarta to the far-flung islands of the archipelago, the Indonesian government mobilized to slow the spread, but the AITo team began preparing for the worst. AITo's response to COVID-19 is multifaceted: while taking practical steps to help people immediately, we also aim to help point out and heal the destructive root causes of disasters like this one.

Keep Everyone Healthy

Even before it became government policy, to keep our staff and villager partners safe and healthy, the AITo team adopted handwashing, mask-wearing, and social distancing in all our projects and activities. We created handwashing facilities, and provided hard-to-come-by hand sanitizer, *(continued on p. 2)*



Wash those hands! Access to soap and water is not easy for many Tompotika residents. Outside the AITo office in Luwuk, a station with running water and hand soap was made available to anyone passing by; the Head of the local borough liked it so much that he ordered it replicated elsewhere.

Festival: What kind of world do we want?



Shall we Dance? AITo's Festival is all about joyfulness and celebration—but there's a potent message behind the festive spirit. Many of our human habits are destructive to our own well-being and that of the natural world of which we're a part. It's time to change our ways; Festival helps highlight how. *Photo: Acca*

Arts, and community. It's a demonstration and a celebration of many of the kinds of activities and relationships that we want to build and affirm as we work toward a healthier future for all living beings.

Festival 2020, AITo's fifth ever, was a day-long event held in each of six different Tompotika villages and the gateway city, Luwuk. The first half of each day is devoted to games, booths, and workshops: a juggling workshop, with balls shaped like baby sea turtles; a display of nature photography; large-group physical games; information on Sulawesi wildlife; maleo-por-trait selfie booths, and much more. The entire village is invited—all ages, all comers, all for free. Then, in the evening, audiences are entertained with conservation-themed music (see *Jackoustick*, p. 2) and drama. Performed by a company of Tompotika high school students whom AITo has assembled in the weeks prior, and led by a *(continued on p. 3)*

Throughout the month of February, while coronavirus stormclouds were gathering in China and beginning to spread, folks in Tompotika were celebrating. AITo's biennial Tompotika International Maleo and Sea Turtle Festival is a celebration of Sulawesi's natural heritage, sustainable living, the



Bersama Kita Bisa! (Together We Can!) As part of a collectivist culture, Indonesians are highly accustomed to thinking in terms of actions we all can and must take together to improve life for all. Festival helps people act out and experience this truth in a variety of fun, illuminating, and entertaining ways.

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COVID-19 in Tompotika: AITo's response (continued from p.1)

free to all staff. All staff were also provided with cloth masks, and instructed to start practicing social distancing, even before the coronavirus was recorded in the region.



Lock Don't. While the government has done a lot to curtail travel throughout Indonesia, this village took their own steps to discourage outsiders. It appears to be working: so far, no COVID-19 cases have been officially reported from the Tompotika area. However, many worry that with the approach of Ramadhan and the Islamic holidays, the virus will be brought to rural areas as city-dwellers observe the tradition of *mudik*—going home for the holidays.

Prevent the Spread

AITo staff come from several Tompotika villages as well as the gateway city, Luwuk, so we immediately partitioned our teams geographically to prevent asymptomatic carriers from unwittingly bringing the virus from one part of the region to another. In some AITo projects, such as sea turtle patrols, villagers carry out the work independently in their own villages; these have been allowed to carry on relatively unchanged. However, in locations where villagers would have been working alongside team members from other regions, they've been asked to stay home for now, while still collecting their wages. Tasks have been adjusted, and AITo's dedicated staff are receiving a hardship pay increase.

Relieve the Suffering

As of this writing, no COVID-19 cases have yet been reported from the Tompotika area, and the government has pledged to help any who fall sick at no charge. But the economic consequences of the virus have already been devastating, with farmers and fisherfolk unable to market their products, as well as many other effects. As part of the community, AITo wants to help. So, in addition to continuing to pay villager wages, AITo is obtaining and delivering free rice for any who need it in our partner villages.

Work for Long-term Change

As devastating as the COVID-19 pandemic is, it was not unexpected to those paying attention to the effects of human activities such as accelerating destruction of natural areas and growing wildlife trafficking. Even as we work in a small way to soften the effects of the pandemic, AITo will continue to work even harder to heal the broken relationship between humans and the rest of nature, aiming to help to change destructive human practices and to prevent disasters like this from happening in the first place. ~

The Alliance for Tompotika Conservation/ Aliansi Konservasi Tompotika ("AITo") is dedicated to conserving the unparalleled natural and cultural heritage of the lands and waters of the Tompotika Peninsula, Sulawesi, Indonesia. Effective, creative, and efficient, AITo protects endangered species, tropical rainforests, and coral reefs while promoting the dignity and self-sufficiency of local communities in a changing world. In Tompotika and everywhere, AITo believes that the quality of our human lives is bound up to the health of our natural environment and our relationships to it.

AITo is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States and a registered Yayasan in Indonesia, made possible by your donations. Thank you for your support!

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Ipan Djano

Jackoustick! Music for Conservation contest bigger than ever

When inspired to compose and perform music celebrating Nature, what do the voices of local Tompotikans sound like? The Jackoustick Music for Conservation contest, established in 2016 in memory of conservationist, musician, and AITo champion Dr. Jack Barbash, offers a chorus of answers to that question. Held as part of Festival, Jackoustick provides microphone, audience, and prizes; local Tompotikans bring the creativity and talent. Jackoustick 2020, our third, was held in two separate districts, and included over a dozen contestants—more than ever before.

Forests, birds, maleos, sunrise, sea turtles, peace, beauty,—many of the things we love most about nature were



common themes in the original songs composed and sung for the occasion. But there were other common themes as well: human thoughtlessness, destruction, selfishness, and greed.

Jackoustick may be a brief event, but the music lives on: days later, catchy tunes could still be heard on villagers' lips: "Wake up, wake up... Care about our wildlife. Care about our country." ~

Festival (continued from p.1)



team of Indonesian and international coaches, each Festival year has a different specific conservation theme around which the drama is created; this year's theme was human overpopulation. The Indonesian government has long had an active campaign to slow human population growth in the country—the *Keluarga Berencanaan* (Family Planning) or "KB" program—and AlTo's goal this year was to spotlight the program and the many environmental and social benefits to be gained from fewer human numbers and smaller families. The government slogan for the program, seen on stickers and billboards across the country, is "*Dua Anak Cukup*." ***Dua Anak Cukup — Two Children is Enough***

This year, the drama company opted to explore the overpopulation theme through a series of short dramatic sketches. In one sketch, an aging farmer ponders how to divide his land amongst several children; in another, a sick "Earth" goes to the doctor to get a prescription for wellness. In another sketch, shadow-puppets depict what happened when the world changed from few-people-many-animals to few-animals-many-people; and in another, the audience participated in a demonstration of what exponential population growth looks like. For another sketch, the high school actresses interviewed village women about their lives and families, and told their stories onstage. "Yes, two children is *enough*," remarked one woman, nodding vigorously while watching the show.

For hundreds of festival-goers of all stripes, —schoolkids and grandparents, policemen and housewives, teenagers and bigwigs—the day was pure enjoyment. Said Rino, (8), "Can we do this again tomorrow?" Said Dasi (50), "Very entertaining! And also educates the kids! Entertainment that's so educational. This is good, this AlTo...Thank you." ~



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The Faces of ALTO: Focus on Women and Girls



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"I wanted to go to middle school, but both my parents got sick, and I had to stay home to take care of them. When I got older, I married my first love, and he wanted us to have lots of children. So we had eleven." Thus Ina, 61, a resident in one of ALTO's partner villages, described her life. "Two of my children died. Nowadays I am always sick, but my daughter takes care of me."

Human overpopulation and overconsumption are the twin drivers of much of the degradation of our planet; the Indonesian government's "KB" (family planning) program has also long aimed at reducing overpopulation to improve social wellbeing. But around the world, it's well-documented that a key to slowing human population growth is educating and empowering women

and girls; when given the opportunity, women generally choose smaller families. In ALTO's Festival 2020, girls and women were front and center, forming a majority of the high school actors, Festival facilitators, and audience members. Thus, the educational messages of Festival, though aimed at all community members, were focused on, shaped, and delivered largely by girls and women. "Until now, I never understood the connection between big families, human population growth and environmental destruction," said one teen, "and I never realized how hard it was for our mothers and grandmothers." "We can have education and careers, as well as marriage and families," said a chorus of girls in a self-created drama. "We just need the opportunity." ~



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Keith Brofsky

As some of the teen actresses acted out their love of nature, others created dramas drawn from the life stories of their neighbors. Audiences loved it.