



IMPACT STORIES OF THE SCHOOL OF ADVOCACY  
FOR YOUTH ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



I M P A C T  
S T O R I E S



# IMPACT STORIES OF THE SCHOOL OF ADVOCACY FOR YOUTH ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA (SAY-HR-SEA)

One of the ASEAN Youth Forum's (AYF) visions is for young people in Southeast Asia to live with dignity, free from all forms of discrimination, and to be included in policy making. To achieve this, the AYF established the School of Advocacy for Human Rights in Southeast Asia (SAY-HR-SEA) program in 2021. This program has provided an excellent platform for youth in the region to become aware of human rights, practice public speaking skills, influence policymakers, engage in advocacy, and build a network. As Rastra Yasland, the co-creator of the SAY-HR-SEA program, mentioned, the purpose of this program is to equip youth with the knowledge needed for bringing change through advocacy, to bridge youth advocates to duty bearers, to enhance youth advocacy skills, and to connect them with their peers in the region.

After 3 years of implementation, the ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF) interviewed 6 youth participants out of 32 from the 2021-2023 cohorts across the region. The interviews highlighted 3 main impacts: the program's influence on participants' to build community movement, to understand their rights, and to voice their rights. These 6 inspiring young individuals agreed that the program has significantly impacted them personally and has indirectly benefited their communities. They are committed to continuing their advocacy efforts. Through collective action and dedication to advocacy, AYF believes these young people can make a lasting impact on the promotion and protection of human rights.



Min Punia engaged in a tea-time discussion with Prof. Rocky Tuan, the president of CUHK, and non-local student associations, representing the Southeast Asian Student Association of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Min Punia took part in the Curiosity Issue 7 1st Meet-up with Student Writers, Academic advisors, and team members, serving as the organizer/co-editor-in-chief of a CUHK-funded student-run magazine. The magazine features student authors discussing various topics such as science, self-expression, politics, and more.



## “Initiating Social Movements”

Five participants shared how the program inspired them to initiate social movements within their communities and enhanced their ability to manage their existing community groups. Their experiences demonstrate the program’s significant role in empowering young leaders to effect positive change and build stronger, more cohesive communities.

*“SAY-HR-SEA has stimulated my thinking on welfare issues, human rights, advocacy simulation, and youth movements in ASEAN while also allowing me to hear different perspectives from others. Additionally, I learned from the real-life experiences of other participants in activism.” by Claudia Emma*

For Emma, a 22-year-old student from Kuching, Malaysia, the SAY-HR-SEA program has significantly strengthened her capacity to manage her small NGO, “PAD” (Period Poverty Awareness), which she established four years ago. Emma is deeply concerned about the ongoing stigma surrounding menstrual health. Her organization has been actively raising awareness about menstrual health in rural areas and distributing menstrual pads to those in need. Realizing that her social movement needed a more strategic approach to have a more significant impact, she sought out an activism education program. This search led her to discover SAY-HR-SEA through the AYW Instagram page.

As she said, “SAY-HR-SEA has stimulated my thinking on welfare issues, human rights, advocacy simulation, and youth movements in ASEAN while also allowing me to hear different perspectives from others. Additionally, I learned from the real-life experiences of other participants in activism.” For her, the biggest takeaway was that anyone, regardless of age, could start a social movement even when they were young. With their resources and energy, they can bring changes to their community.

*“The content made me realize that age is not a barrier to initiating a community group to address environmental or social concerns. Support is available for those who are genuinely committed.” by Pascoela*

For Pascoela and Ricardo from Timor-Leste, participating in the SAY-HR-SEA program inspired them to establish a digital campaign community named “Gen Z Talk Timor-Leste.” While Pascoela joined the program in the first batch in 2021, Ricardo enrolled in the second batch in 2022. Gen Z Talk Timor-Leste leverages various social media platforms to advocate for mental health, gender equality, and human rights, specifically targeting young people in Timor-Leste. This online community has garnered thousands of followers across the country who appreciate their inspirational content. Recognizing their impact, Oxfam International has provided support with a grant of USD 9,000 for gender equality campaigns. The online campaign continues to offer education and advocacy under their guidance and supervision.

Pascoela was particularly impressed with the program's curriculum. She expressed, "The content made me realize that age is not a barrier to initiating a community group to address environmental or social concerns. Support is available for those who are genuinely committed." Through the program, she learned that strategic actions are essential for a community group to effectively influence change.

Naba, a 22-year-old final-year student at the Law Faculty of the Indonesian Islamic University (UII), has been inspired by the program to establish a youth community. Concerned about the recurring smoke pollution in Jambi, Sumatra, she founded "Climate Tea Time," a youth community dedicated to raising awareness about climate change. Each year, Jambi is enveloped in smoke from peat fires, leading to unhealthy air quality due to the combination of dust and smoke particles.

This youth environmental community is actively advocating for the impact of climate change in Jambi. Through regular discussions on social media under the banner of "Climate Tea Time," more than 30 young people in Jambi can freely share their concerns and ideas on climate change, mainly focusing on the issue of smoke from peat fires. Naba emphasized, "I am deeply concerned about the impact of peat fires on children in Jambi, which can disrupt their education. Therefore, I sought opportunities to learn more about human rights issues and climate change. When I came across the promotion of an AYF seminar, I decided to join." Presently, her community is initiating engagement with critical stakeholders in Jambi to amplify their concerns about peat fires.

Hailing from Laos, Mayu, a young university student, took the initiative to establish a community group for LGBTQ individuals named "Queers and Cheers." Currently, the group boasts over 20 members and is dedicated to providing various forms of support, including capacity building in sexual orientation education, public speaking, safety, digital security, mental health, and overall well-being for LGBTQ individuals across multiple districts in Laos.

*"I am deeply concerned about the impact of peat fires on children in Jambi, which can disrupt their education. Therefore, I sought opportunities to learn more about human rights issues and climate change"*  
*by Naba Hesti*



Naba Hesti Fahma was among the speakers during the SEAYouth Summit 2023 session on Climate Justice.

## “Understanding Youth Rights”

At a personal level, all participants agree that the program has empowered them to understand their rights better. For Emma, the program served as an eye-opener to youth rights, highlighting the marginalized groups in the region that still lack access to their rights. Consequently, she took action by targeting LGBTQ groups in Malaysia with the provision of menstrual pads and raising awareness about menstrual health. Similarly, Pascoela found that the program boosted her confidence in influencing the youth community in Timor Leste, advocating for various youth human rights for educational purposes. Echoing Pascoela’s sentiments, Ricardo also experienced an expansion of knowledge regarding human rights through the program, allowing him to become more innovative in educating youth about their rights. Both Pascoela and Ricardo aspire to reach out to more young people in

*“I was impressed with the content, which made me realize that youth also need to be aware of their rights to initiate community movements.” by Naba Hesti*



Claudia Emma was one of the speakers at the SEAYouth Summit 2023 session on Sexual and Reproductive Health.

their country to raise awareness about human rights, thereby enhancing youth advocacy capabilities and increasing participation in the democratic process in Timor Leste.

For Indonesian participant Naba, the teaching material provided by the program left a strong impression. She expressed, "I was impressed with the content, which made me realize that youth also need to be aware of their rights to initiate community movements." Recognizing her right to clean air in Jambi, she decided to establish a climate community, believing in the support for positive activism. Hailing from Laos, Mayu found inspiration to speak up about human rights from her peers in the program and through social media. She recounted, "I first discovered AYF through social media, where I noticed more and more youth

*"This program has helped me grasp the human rights situation and the political context of the region. I learned that human rights are about equality, not patronage." by Min Punia*



Min Punia actively volunteers as a cultural sharer of Myanmar at a secondary school in Hong Kong.

from my country speaking up about human rights. This prompted me to learn more about AYF activities.” Subsequently, she enrolled in the School of Advocacy in 2022 and remained involved as an alumna in 2023.

Similarly to Mayu, Min Punia from Myanmar found solace in the program amidst the widespread discontent among youth towards the repressive government in his country. Many have felt hopeless, while some have sought assistance from the ASEAN community. The program provided a safe space for Min Punia to understand his rights better. He expressed, “This program has helped me grasp the human rights situation and the political context of the region. I learned that human rights are about equality, not patronage.” For him, the program has effectively fostered collaborative actions and empowered youth in the region to understand and defend their rights.



## Gen-Z Talk with Ana Xavier - "Saida maka Sistema Patriarkal?"

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"Gen Z Talks Timor-Leste" is a community founded by Pascoela and Ricardo.

# “Voicing Youth Rights”

After realizing their rights to a better life, these 6 young individuals continued to advocate for their rights with critical stakeholders, including legislative and high political figures. Emma, for instance, had the opportunity to meet with legislators in Kuching, Malaysia, to advocate for menstrual health. She presented her program activities to them and received a positive response. Similarly, Pascoela and Ricardo successfully mobilized resources by securing support from Oxfam International for their gender equality campaign in Timor Leste. Pascoela acknowledged that the program had enhanced her advocacy skills. She also developed a resolution paper titled “Better Quality Education for Human Rights,” which was presented to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) three months after the program.

Naba, through her climate community, is actively engaging with key stakeholders in Jambi to garner support for their activism. She has raised the issue of peat fires

*“For a community group to bring impact, it should develop strategic actions to engage with key stakeholders, to build network, and to improve strategy on how to influence public” by Naba Hesti*

with the local government in Jambi and hopes to receive more support from them. As she said “ I believe for a community group to bring impact, it should develop strategic actions to engage with key stakeholders, to build networks, and to improve strategy on how to influence the public” this has been part of education material during the program.

This engagement strategy as being taught during the program has been applied by Mayu in Laos who is actively engaged with the key stakeholders. In Laos, Mayu is also actively working with key stakeholders to advocate for LGBTQ rights. Meanwhile, in Myanmar, Min Punia has been selected to speak about human rights at the youth scouting conference in 2023 and will also be part of the ASEAN high-level meeting as a youth representative. He continues to advocate for diversity and inclusion in Hong Kong, where he is currently pursuing his studies.





For more information :  
[aseanyouthforum.org](http://aseanyouthforum.org)

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