



Ours & Theirs...Linked By Generosity.

Timor Leste *Young Farmer Scouts:* Young People Building a Young Country

Timor Leste, Asia's newest country and one of its poorest, takes up half of a small island 400 miles off the North West coast of Australia. It became an independent country in 2003 after 20 years of violent struggle. Rebuilding the country after so much violence and bloodshed remains a huge challenge.

The average annual income in Timor Leste is only \$500 US, and food security is still a major concern for the majority of its citizens. A predominately rural country, more than eight out of ten people earn their living through small-scale farming.

However, farming has not always been valued young people in Timor. Many of them are eager to their villages for the capital city where, sadly, there are few jobs.

To tackle this problem USC Canada Timor-Leste established the Young Farmers Scouts movement, a youth participation and training program for young rural men and women. The movement's goal is to help young people acquire the agricultural and leadership skills they need build their local communities. In the six rural villages in which we work, young people are being trained in sustainable farming techniques and are working together to restore their deforested and eroded lands.

The Young Farmer Scouts are now building hillside terraces to stop erosion and restore soil fertility. With the help their parents and grandparents, and our agricultural field staff, they are learning to prepare the ground for growing vegetables and popular staples like maize, peanuts, and cassava.

Thanks to the Scouts movement, many young people are now playing a leadership role in their communities. They are helping to bring their own family farms back to life and are lending helping hands to the residents of neighbouring villages.

But the Young Farmer Scouts program is not all work. Every December an annual gathering is held in one of USC Timor Leste's six villages. For many of the young people, it is the first time they will have ever traveled so far away from their home.

These annual Scouts gatherings bring young farmers together to participate in agricultural workshops and leadership training; but it is also time for fun! The

Scouts spend the mornings building terraces and learning more about farming, and in the afternoon they play soccer and volleyball. In the early evenings they receive spiritual guidance and then the rest of the evening is saved for playing guitars and singing. For the young farmers it is a chance for them to share their challenges and celebrate their achievements.

As Xisto Martin explains, "At the end of each year, I can see confidence growing in these young people and also a deep pride in the important work they are doing. They have learned how to farm, and they have made friends. But the most important thing they have gained is their dignity – you can see it. They are proud to be Timorese, and proud to be farmers".

We are asking Two Villages, and the young people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to raise \$10,000 this year to sponsor another year of the Young Farmers Scouts program in East Timor. This money will be used to cover the costs of running the Young Farmers Scouts program for the next twelve months.

Xisto Martins
Country Director
USC Canada - East Timor



As supplied by USC Canada.