

Oriented

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Indonesia. Every year 400 thousands kids got out of poverty and managed to attend schools owing to Veronica Colondam. [1]

+20,000%: Results of a youth NGO

One out of three children drops out of school before they finish their elementary school. They are children who do not have hope, who enter into the drugs network, become underage workers and do street crimes every year. I want to save and educate as many as I can, at least as many as two thousands children in every year. Can you help me?" This is the summary of the e-mail that I received in late 2000 from Veronica Colondam, a young leader of a young NGO. I was stunned with this kind of idea, because I knew that the Indonesian people were weak and unappreciated by the government. Indonesia, a country covering an area of 1.9 million km² (6 times larger than Italy), at that time had more than 220 million people and currently with more than 237 million.

According to the official data, about 2.4 million Indonesian children are working in factories and on the streets, as opposed to being in school which is actually mandatory to the age of fourteen. However, according to some NGOs, the number is closer to 10 million. The Indonesian government which is very sensitive to this problem, does not refer these kids as working children, but as children who are forced to work because of economic demands. The Indonesian Social Department reported on the children working at fishing ports in North Sumatra. When posted there, they must stay for at least 3 months and they suffered physical, verbal and sexual abuses from older anglers. Death due to drowning is a risk that is constantly threatened, as most of the children cannot swim. Nevertheless, the large number of working children in Indonesia is the result of complex social and

economic factors. Most of them working as street sweepers and working in garbage dumps.

Indonesia has made great strides in reducing poverty with impressive result since the 70's. For example, only 15% of the residents who are below poverty line in 1990, compared to 40% below poverty line in 1976. Currently the minimum wage per day is \$1.25, so that for the children, working is the only option for them to survive. As for the other children who grew up on the streets, going to school is not feasible as there are too many rules and no freedom, while they are used to those two things since their childhood. Although the fee for schooling has been abolished, but there's still the so-called voluntary contributions, which function as the identity of the parents and the children themselves. Further there are uniforms, shoes, books, and transport fees that are creating more hindrance and limiting access to these poor children to attend school.

In this complex situation, Veronica intended to save and educate as many as 2,000 children a year, which is about one out of every 100 thousand inhabitants. Like a drop of water in the ocean and nevertheless a very ambitious goal considering the organization named YCAB had only 5 employees and some volunteers. YCAB stands for Yayasan Cinta Anak Bangsa and its tagline is "Child by Child, We build our Nation", (www.ycabfoundation.org).

I was so surprised and concerned by the fact that in Indonesia each eight minutes, one child would drop out of school that I decided to see what was been done by the Foundation in Jakarta and other cities in Indonesia. Veronica established YCAB in 1999, when she was 27 years old and to bring her dream into reality, she looked for help around the world. I then met former president Megawati (daughter of former president Sukarno) and Minister of Social, Political, Security Coordination Bambang Yudhoyono, who later became president. Both made it clear to me that it was a problem that stabbed a country and it was an impossible mission if the government moved alone.

So then, I nominated Veronica to receive the UN Civil Society Award, which is given annually by an international commission together with the city of Vienna for two leaders in innovation of civil society who have great success in the world. One of members of the jury commission called me and expressed his opinion with a sense of surprise: "A very important award for a young woman in a Muslim country? This award has never been given to people with little experience: this woman only has great ideas, but little results. What kind of special thing that she has done?" I replied that I think Veronica has given hope for Indonesian children who are desperate, who previously did not even know what hope is. "Veronica is one of those few people who fight and not give up", I wrote in the letter. Veronica later won the United Nations Vienna Civil Society Award in May 2001 and many Indonesian joined her later to cooperate in her programme. In 2012 YCAB managed to graduate 374,295 young leaders who were to inspire children in 6,258 schools. When the Schwab Foundation in Davos, together with the World Economic Forum chose her as Global Youth Leader, Veronica promised to educate about healthy lifestyle to at least one million Indonesian children who are at the risk of dropping out of school. Until recently, YCAB has reached as many as 1,960,370 children and about 400,000 entered into the program each year. The 2,000 children that Veronica hoped to help from despair in 2000, now has reached to almost 400,000 in 2012. This year the graduation rate the children is 100% and no one has dropped out of school and no one was excluded. Some of the 2,851 children who have finished their studies, become IT technicians.

YCAB currently has a total of 109 young social workers, 500 employees of social enterprises and 3,000 full-time volunteers. The foundation is a renowned and respectable NGO in Indonesia and has opened an office in New York as a UN accredited NGO.

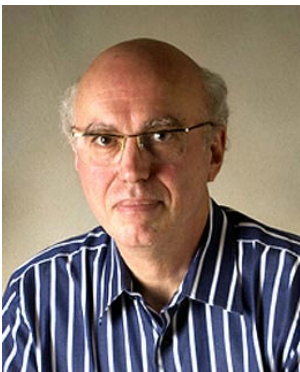
Schwab Foundation helped Veronica's education as a social entrepreneur at John Kennedy School, Harvard University and the London School of Economics. YCAB is also one of the very few NGOs in the world to use 100% of donations to directly help the child's education, because the operational costs and staff salaries are paid by other social enterprises (namely YADA), which uses their profits to pay the administrative costs in YCAB. YADA is engaged in various sectors, including the micro-credit and had profit growth of more than 20% per year.

In 2011, micro-credit program has provided 4,876 micro loans to young women cooperation to the level of 99.37% of the capital returned on the due date. In 2011, she was called to join the board of the world most prestigious social enterprise, INSEAD in France, and she was awarded the world Ernst & Young as Social Entrepreneurs of the Year. Veronica is a Christian. Her passion is to deliver a miracle to children, which then creates the magic for their self.

Notes

- 1 This article is an English translation of the original published in Italian by the Italian Magazine Nuovo Progetto in June 2012

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