

Cyclists set charity wheels in motion

Cycling expeditions to raise funds for those in need gaining popularity

By GRACE CHUA

CYCLING around Timor Leste is something Ms Zhang Tingjun will never forget.

The 28-year-old freelance events presenter took part in the 450km five-day Tour de Timor bike race in 2009 to raise funds for a non-governmental organisation working in health care there. She recounted "riding up a hill, exhausted, when this kid came carrying water in two huge buckets".

"It struck me at that moment that our adventure was their reality," said the former national netball player.

It was that connection - between the fund-raising exercise and the communities one is serving - which spurred Ms Zhang and her team-mates to do it again.

She and fellow co-founders of The Chain Reaction Project (TCRP) are leading seven others to Africa on Feb 13. There, they hope to raise money for the Amani Children's Home, a Tanzanian charity that takes in street children and those orphaned by Aids.

Each member of the group will do at least part of the three-leg Kili(MAN)jaro adventure race, which involves a climb up Mount Kilimanjaro, followed by a bike ride and marathon around the 5,895m peak. The group aims to raise \$25,000, and is sponsored in part by companies like clothing firm Buff Headwear.

Such bicycle expeditions for charity are becoming more popular here, particularly after TCRP's (www.thechainreactionproject.com) first expedition two years ago.

Another group, the Gone Cyclin' Initiative (www.gonecyclin.com), followed in TCRP's tyre tracks when its three young professional co-founders did the Tour de Timor last year.

Cyclists from Bike-Aid (www.bikeaid.org.sg) have also organised charity bicycle rides since 1992, to places like Mersing in Malaysia and Hat Yai in Thailand.

Both Bike-Aid and Gone Cyclin' are set to hold new events this year, such as the latter's plan for a ride from Vietnam to the Thai-Cambodian border in June to raise funds for a women's skills programme in Cambodia.

Gone Cyclin' co-founder Yasmine Khater, 25, said she hopes to recruit 15 to 20 participants for the trip, which is organised through an adventure travel agency.

When they return, they will do a presentation about the trip and a fund-raising event in September or October. The money will go to Carpets for Communities, a charity which gives needy Cambodian women the sewing and crocheting skills they need to support their families, although Ms Khater said Gone Cyclin' does not have a fund-raising target yet.

Often, cycling groups team up with existing charitable organisations. TCRP has the Rotary Club of Queenstown as its fund-raising partner and Gone Cyclin' works with the Rotary Club of Bukit Timah.

Asked if she was concerned about similar bicycle groups competing for funds, TCRP's Ms Zhang said: "We don't care... as long as you find a cause and have an effect, even if you're doing the same race. The more people who are doing it, the better."

Ultimately, she said: "It remains about the cause, not the adventure."



Participants in The Chain Reaction Project (from left) Christine Chin, 38, Niruvashnee Govender, 30, Feli Xiang Woon, 27, Zhang Tingjun, 28, and Weli Chua, 39, training for the Kili(MAN)jaro adventure race in two weeks' time. They hope to raise money for a Tanzanian children's home. PHOTO: TEO POK ZIN