



Timor-Leste Newsletter April 2021



Coronavirus; Floods; Famine; Paedophilia.

Timor Leste is in the news for all the wrong reasons at the moment. But there is some good news to come out of it!

Cyclone Seroja.

Due to cyclone Seroja, the same cyclone which later swept through Western Australia, heavy rains fell on the island between 29th March to 4th April with several days of non-stop rain. This resulted in landslides, floods, destruction of major infrastructure, over 4,300 homes washed away, 12,378 people currently in evacuation centres and a death toll of 46. Add to this the spread of covid which had been occurring prior to this disaster and now with so many people in evacuation centres the likelihood of a covid surge is high.



Flooding in Dili is a recurring event. There is a lot of talk about why this flood was so damaging – climate change, poor urban planning, the inadequacy of existing



infrastructure, allowing people to build on flood prone flatlands which were once used as water retention sites, (sound familiar Sydney?) and the fact that many people, out of necessity and poverty, have built ramshackle houses in very precarious positions such as on steep, bare hillsides, along river banks and even

over large stormwater drains.

Thankfully no deaths were recorded in Oecusse but it had its share of disaster. Roads washed away, electricity poles and wires destroyed, houses filled with mud, possessions lost, water sources contaminated and of course this on top of a few new cases of covid. If there is any good news to come out of all this it is that governments of many countries, including Australia, have donated funds to help in the rebuilding and of course private Australians, who have quite an affinity with the Timorese, have donated as well. Most of this money is being sent to Dili to be handed out by the larger INGOs still in residence.

I have sent funds to GREENTL in Oecusse to help in the repairs and to provide rice and other food stuffs to needy families. Most of my GREENTL staff and volunteers plus many of the villagers we have worked with, have needed help which thankfully I have been able to give due to donors such as Rotary Clubs and my many wonderful, supportive friends.



Luis and the team have been busy organising trucks to deliver food to the

isolated villages in the mountains and along the coast, whenever and wherever access has been possible.



He has helped friends clean out their houses and now is trying to replace some of their lost possessions. I have assured him that the bio-sand water filtration units we have delivered will still work but as the well water is so muddy it should be filtered through a piece of cloth first otherwise the units will clog up very quickly. He is passing this information on to the villagers.



I am so grateful that we have been able to

help. Each of the villagers send their thanks to you all. **That said of course more funds are needed as this is going to be a long slow road to recovery.**

The Oecusse Regional Administration, (RAEOA) has been very busy repairing infrastructure, washing mud from roads, buildings etc and providing government handouts of food and cash but plenty more is needed.



Story of a non-Christian Priest.

In other bad news the case of Richard Dasbach, the confessed paedophile priest, continues. In March he was brought to Oecusse court to face charges, surprisingly accompanied by Xanana Gusmao who seems to be causing a few major incidences at the moment. (I will not speculate as to why but many in Timor Leste are wondering this same thing.) This terrible case is on-going and causing much distress in Oecusse as Dasbach was a revered figure in the enclave and many people find it hard to believe the awful stories now being exposed. The case, which first came to light in 2018, has been adjourned once again until May. The poor, brave, young victims have to confront the court and retell their horror stories over and over again even though Dasbach has confessed to being a paedophile. As he said to one of his many Australian donors, *"Yes that is what I am, that is what I do."* Now that he realises a jail term is likely he seems to want to change his mind as to the confession. Meanwhile the victims have to relive their horror stories.

PRADET (Psychosocial Recovery and Development in East Timor)

A wonderful, local NGO in Oecusse, PRADET, which looks after victims of domestic violence and sexual assault has been helping many victims with counselling and a secure place to stay. According to a recent, (2021) UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund, report, "World Population Dashboard", as many as 35% of families in Timor Leste experience domestic violence.



I have managed to send a little funding to PRADET to help the many people who come to their safe house seeking refuge. Obviously more is needed to purchase food, clothing, toiletries and white goods for the safe house and to set some of the women up

in a small, local business so they can become independent with a liveable income for themselves and their children.

Water Projects.

Once things get back to normal, (whatever that means) in Oecusse GREENTL is planning a few water projects. Seems a bit ironical after the flooding they have received but now that the ground is soft and the springs are running well it is an easier time to dig and clean them up. Two projects, one in Oetulu and another in Oelet, (note the term "oe" means water in the local dialect) are in the planning stages and have been for quite a while! In each case we hope to provide a pump and piping from the spring to a tank which will be built closer to the villages and so provide a more consistent water supply even in the Dry season.



There is a spring high in the hills behind this village. We want to provide pump and pipes to run water to a tank closer to the homes.

This of course depends on borders reopening, goods being available and free travel throughout the enclave becoming normal once again.



I received my first covid vaccination last week and the rollout has begun in Timor Leste so I feel one small step closer to getting back to Oecusse!

How long will it be until things get back to such a "normal" that we can hold the Youth-in-Action GREEN Games again???

Meanwhile keep these people in your hearts and minds. They are doing it tough at the moment as are many others throughout the world.

Donations over \$2 to the Sustainable Villages project are tax deductible:
Donate online by going to the Rotary Australia World Community Service, (RAWCS) website.
<https://donations.rawcs.com.au/Default.aspx?ProjectID=592&ReturnTo=4> (Sustainable Villages Oecusse)
Or via OzGREEN: https://ozgreen.nationbuilder.com/east_timor_donation