



## East Timor Newsletter July 2016



### As the saying goes – “Doesn’t time fly when you are having fun!”

When I first came to Oecusse in January 2001 I had no intentions of still being here 16 years later. What have the last 16 years been like? Amazing, wonderful, disastrous, trying, frustrating, exciting, tedious, emotionally draining – every adjective you can think of, both good and bad, can be used to describe my time here. I have enjoyed it, hated it, found it inspiring, yet deadly tedious and banal at times but always rewarding, difficult and different. My respect and admiration for the people of Oecusse, especially the women, has grown beyond measure – I do not know how they survive their exceedingly tough life and remain cheerful. It is easy for me to cope in Oecusse as whenever I have had enough of the dirt, dust, lack of water, poor food, the heat and humidity, I can go home to potable water, electricity, clean sheets, decent food, a comfortable house with tiled floor and doors and windows to keep out the dirt, insects, scorpions, neighbours and birds!

These thoughts have been going through my mind as I have sat amongst the communities of Bocosse and Pune for the last week. I look at the women and wonder how they survive, I look at the young people and wonder what they could become if given opportunities, I watch the men work at fixing wells, carrying rocks, mixing cement and all done with good cheer and gratefulness that someone is here helping them. I am forever thankful that I was born in Australia and not in Oecusse – although when I discussed this statement with Luis it led to some heated argument! “Typical complaining malae”, (foreigner) amongst it!



Some faces of Bocosse



Talking about birds, as I was earlier, when I returned to Oecusse in April I found a bird’s nest perched precariously on top of the coat hangers inside my bedroom cupboard! How a bird got in and out of the house and cupboard enough times to build a nest and lay eggs I do not know but it did and of course managed to drop dirt, sticks and poop all over my clothes! What with that and the mess from fixing the house after it was hit by the tree it was certainly a case of “welcome back to Oecusse!”

### House repairs.

Good news - the house and office have been repaired! The tree that fell down and caused all the damage is thriving as it has grown new green shoots from every possible node, it will be interesting to see what shape it takes as the trunk is horizontal to the ground and supported on the tank stand!



During the house repairs we did a major stocktake, cleaning out the office and throwing out all the water damaged gear – lots of it! Who needs paper work anyway?

### On with the village work!

GREEN TL and especially Luis, have been super powered these last few months and we have achieved a lot! Maybe my getting dengue fever and being medi-vaccinated to Dili made them realise that I am not likely to be here for ever and inspired them to get on with it!

Dengue Fever is a very nasty disease and really left me flat for four weeks – still not 100% as I tire easily but getting there!

GREEN TL has two new staff members, they have volunteered with us before so are not really new. Nelis and Felix, both very keen and proving to be very capable workers with a bit of initiative. Our long time staffers Campar and Lafau have recently married, now have pregnant wives so have gone to live elsewhere with family. Both have picked up jobs in their new locations – no doubt using the skills they gained working with GREEN TL.

### Bocosse – what a wonderful story that is!

The first week I was here we visited Bocosse and measured up materials needed to rehabilitate four more wells. Now there are four very smart, painted and, most importantly, clean wells in the village. The villagers had a wonderful time doing all the work, inspired by Luis' commentary, in the local dialect Biqueno so I missed most of it, but the villagers seemed to enjoy and laughed a lot! Another four wells are waiting to be done.



From this → to this!

We have repaired twelve bio sand filtration units which had broken taps and are now in the process of providing another seven to the new families in the village. Now that all the bridge and road work is going on in Oecusse it is hard to find a safe space to collect pebbles and grit from the river as dozens of excavators, (large mechanical ones – not people with spades) are doing the same every day. We were hoping to get into their stockpiles but the grit is not the right size for the bio-sand filtration units.

The really exciting thing in Bocosse is that we have provided a pump, pipes and hoses so the villagers can now irrigate a community garden. They have been very busy preparing the soil, building a fence to keep the chickens and goats out and are now nurturing seeds of a great variety of local vegetables such as pumpkin, tomato, capsicum, beans, bokchoy and eggplant.



Water from a tap! The pipes have since been buried

### **Pune – the beginning of another wonderful story.**

GREEN TL has begun working in the village of Pune which is very poor, very isolated and at the end of one of the worst roads in Oecusse! We have been up there several times to talk to the



**The road through Pune needs repair!**

community and they certainly have many problems to contend with, not the least of which is the lack of water. When I asked Luis why he chose this particular village to work with he said “I wanted a challenge, wanted to choose a village which would be complicated and difficult but needy.” If that is the case he certainly chose well! The road up to the village was built by the Indonesians in 1977 soon after the invasion and nothing has been done to it since – except that nature has taken its course so bumps, potholes, erosion gullies, stones, river crossings, steep gradients, twists and turns are the order of the day. The trip takes about one

and a half hours of bone shattering, joint busting, muscle tearing time and Luis expects me to do it almost daily. Which will wear out first – the car or me? The car is definitely tougher.

The major problem in Pune, as I mentioned, is the lack of water, there are 350 families in the succo ( a collection of villages) – 3000 people, and they only have access to one tank for two hours a day. Apparently the supply tank above the village built by international aid some years ago has broken and the 2 kms of piping down to the village is also broken or blocked.

The local school has over 500 students, 20 teachers and no water. Some of the students walk for up to 2 hours each way, from distant villages, over the bad road I have already described to get to school. Can you imagine Australian students doing that?

### **GREEN Games.**

Given up trying to organise the games for Oecusse town, trying to organise a meeting with ZEESM administration is like trying to retain water in a sieve! I have heard that the Department of Youth and Sport in Oecusse has an annual budget of \$350,000 for sport but so far there has been no evidence of this being put to good use. Wonder what GREEN TL could do with that sort of money?

Another games problem is that there are no useable volley ball or basketball courts in town as the old ones are being replaced by a super new, smart, but ultimately useless, arena. The new arena design is quite poor – the courts are too close to the fence and there is a lack of space for players and spectators. However they look good as most of the playing space is taken up with trees, gardens and monuments!

The great news is that we have decided to hold the Games in Pune. There is a local NGO in Pune, run by a young man, Agustinho Bahan,

whom we know quite well so we have enlisted his help with the games. Teams are coming from the sub-district of Oesilo and the entire district is very excited about the games as they have not been given much outside help over the years. Soccer will be played in two age groups – 8 to 12 years and youth. I am very pleased with that as we have often wanted to get the younger kids involved. Volleyball will be men and women. Agustinho obviously did a google translation of his proposal from Indonesian to English so men and women comes out to be “son and princess” and the two age groups in soccer are Adult son and Little Prince! – priceless! So far 32 teams have registered! These games are going to be worth every cent!

Once the games have finished I will write a detailed report for all donors and other interested parties.



**The soccer field will be hard to play on but a team of people are tidying it up – removing tree stumps and the larger boulders! The players do not share my concern for their safety!**

## Should I talk Politics – East Timorese not Australian??

Political campaigning is threatening to take over everything and everyone in Oecusse. Luis of course is heavily involved as he has been nominated, along with Meta Bano, his cousin, as a Fretilin candidate for national government. The presidential and general government elections are next year so the campaign is going to be long and time consuming! So far we have managed to keep politics and work separate but as the campaign draws closer this may prove difficult - time for me to take a long holiday back home. Luis is of two minds as to whether to accept the nomination as the further he delves into politics the more he realises that a lot of money and kick-backs are needed to “smooth the passage” so to speak. He is not interested in promising anyone anything just to get their financial support – all he will promise is that he will do his best for Oecusse. Another naïve, honest, would-be politician who is realising that politics is just that - “politics”!

The massive development plan run by ZEESM has not really improved, in fact if it is possible things are getting worse. Projects are left idle, payments are not being made, some new infrastructure projects have already been put on the list for destruction as newer plans have been formulated. It seems that District Administration is not good at forward planning! Both access roads into the community where I live have been ripped up so we have to drive across the swamp and paddock to get to the house! A large INGO is currently putting in new water pipes for the entire town which means they have dug up most of the old ones so many parts of Oecusse have not had water for the last three months. I have to take tanks to Luis’ house, (he has a good well) for refills. The locals are not so lucky they have to walk for kilometres to collect their water and then carry it home.

A large dam has been built across the Tono River for irrigation purposes, I wait with bated breath for the first heavy Wet season it has to withstand! Local construction companies are beginning to complain as they are not being given work contracts – all going to Indonesian or Portuguese companies which do not necessarily have any greater expertise and, not being local, are only in it for the money not a sustainable outcome.



The new bridge over the Tono River – my staff doing their excavation work, by hand, for grit and pebbles.

I try to look for positives, there are a few as some amazing progress is being made but to what end purpose – a pie in the sky dream that Oecusse is going to become the next Bali or the next Singapore? The important, unanswered, questions are “Why is Oecusse getting this extremely over-the-top development when basic necessities are still not readily available to the majority of

the population?” and “Where is all the money which has been allocated actually going?”

We have had the most amazing and busy time over the last few weeks – the Games in Pune have been an outstanding success and a recent visit by five Sydney based Rotarians from supporting clubs has been a real eye-opener for them. Lots to write already so another newsletter is on the way even before this ones goes out!

**Thank you** to all the supporters and friends who have helped in many ways over the years – financially, emotionally, giving me the strength to keep going, kind words and sympathy when needed. Am sure this project has helped many thousands of people in many different ways.

Donations over \$2 to the Sustainable Villages project are tax deductible and can be done as per below:

\*Donate online by going to <http://www.ozgreen.org.au/donate.php> and selecting East Timor from the drop down menu

\*Direct debit BSB 032 293: Acc No 113 864.

\* via the Rotary Australia World Community Service, (RAWCS) website. Click the donate button and search for project 50/ years 11-12.