



Timor-Leste Newsletter April 2019



As it has been the wet season in Timor Leste I have not visited there since last December but am well into organising for my return later this month. I have been busy with fundraising and report writing whilst Luis and his team have been busy tree planting and planning for the GREEN Games and the water project in Sifin. Good news - now that I have caught up with the mainstream and am using data rather than direct phone calls to connect with GREEN TL my monthly phone bill has reduced dramatically!

World Water Day

WOW what a wonderful but exhausting three weeks I have just had – talking about Global Water issues in schools, (Harbord Public, Ryde Secondary, Epping Boys and Kinma), at Rotary Clubs, National Seniors Club and at Macquarie University and also running a very intensive Sustainable School Management Plan for Balgowlah Heights Public School. In my spare time I worked as an election official for the recent state election. I now need to go back to Oecusse for a rest!

Talking in schools is always an amazing experience – in the last 3 weeks I have spoken to students of all ages from kindergarten through to Masters post graduate students and each time I have been inspired by the care and concern they show to people such as the East Timorese who do not have the basic necessities which we take for granted. When the students see the reality of life for many in Timor Leste, not on the news in some far distant place but in front of their eyes from someone who has been there, they pay great attention and you can see the compassion in them, they are saddened when confronted with the dire situation in which many people live and immediately ask what they can do to help.

How many great schools are there in my local area???



Harbord Primary School



Balgowlah Heights Primary School



Kinma

Harbord Primary, Ryde Secondary and Kinma are currently fund raising for the Oecusse people, the money will go towards clean water and vegetable gardens.

Epping Boys High are organising to put together 100 small boxes with such things as exercise books, pencils, erasers, small toys, school caps and whatever else they can lay their hands on. These boxes will be distributed by Luis and myself to an isolated primary school in Oecusse. They are also sending seeds and other equipment for vegetable gardens in schools.

Narrabeen North PS have donated many hats, jackets and school uniforms to Oecusse, these are very popular and even though they come from a primary school they seem to fit everyone from children to adults in Oecusse!

Blowing my own Trumpet.

I am now going to blow my own trumpet a bit which I don't like doing but after a very busy three weeks with exhaustion setting in this email cheered me up no end:

"Dear Judy,

You won the hearts of the students, they were touched by your humanity, passion and perseverance in working with the people of Oecusse and impressed with the approach to listen and work to help them achieve their goals – a real empowerment of the community and improving their well-being. It is fantastic how you raise money to implement the projects and honour that with so many talks.

Thank you so much for making the effort to come and talk after a long day – it was eye-opening and informative and so from the heart.

Wendy Goldstein

Lecturer and Director Master Sustainable Development

Dept Environmental Sciences

Macquarie University."



Luis and GREEN TL have been keeping busy.

Rain, Rain and more Rain.

By all accounts there has been torrential rain this wet season in Timor Leste - I have seen many pictures of floods, landslides, road closures and so on. Luis has not been able to travel to Sifin where we are going to implement the major water supply project as all the rivers are flooded. I hope by the time I return later this month the rain will have eased off and we can get into the mountain villages.

NGO meeting with the President RDTL (Republica Democratica Timor Leste)

All local NGOs in Timor Leste were recently invited to a meeting with President Lu'Olo so Luis had to make a quick trip to Dili. The President's cabinet includes a Committee for Civil Society and they are putting forward a budget proposal for funds for local NGOs. NGOs will be able to apply for funds up to \$15,000 but as yet there is no budget allowance, no criteria and no schedule but at least it is on the agenda! Always a good beginning.

The Global Grant with Epping Rotary Club, the Water Project in Sifin, is proceeding slowly at this stage but once I get back to Oecusse we will hit the ground running as they say. Planning, financing and village discussions always seem to be slow to take off but once the initial stages are out of the way things will proceed more quickly. When the rain eases off Luis will get up to the village and supervise the construction of two wells in the water soak and a fence to keep buffalo out.

Youth-in-Action GREEN Games 2019

Luis has begun planning for the Games, he has chosen Lifau as the venue this year, a good decision as the village is very close to Oecusse town so there will be less travel over bad roads. He has held discussions with the village leaders and they are very happy to host the games. Luis assures me that there is a good soccer field and volley ball court in Lifau; when I pushed him a little he did admit that they will need some repairs but not as much as in Boaknana! Let's wait and see as Luis' idea of good roads, good soccer fields etc are not necessarily the same as mine!

More fun and games this year!



More bio-sand filtration units



Bio-sand Filtration Units and Vegetable Gardens

Apart from some funding in the Global Grant for vegetable gardens and bio-sand filtration units I also have funding from schools and a small District Grant with Eastwood/Gladesville Rotary to be completed this Rotary year. This will allow us to put in many more water filtration units and several pump systems for vegetable gardens. Boaknana, Lifau, Lela Ufe and Passabe are possible villages for this.

And more pumps to make it easier to water the vegetable gardens.

Composting Toilets

For many years I have been contemplating putting in composting toilets in Oecusse. At last we have found a very reliable model put together by a waste water management company, EcoFlow, in Brisbane and highly recommend by a Manly Sunrise Rotarian who has installed many in villages in PNG. We have



decided on a location for the trial run so all that is needed now is the logistics of getting the toilet to Oecusse – easier said than done but not insurmountable(?)

Fish ponds

I have another plan in mind for helping families in Oecusse but as yet no specific funding for it. The Fisheries Department in Oecusse has recently said that they will provide 400 trout fingerlings to groups who can build a series of fish ponds and provide the necessary equipment to keep them aerated. As the fish grow they are moved into larger ponds and eventually



sold in local markets. This seems to be a great idea as fish stocks in the sea are dwindling (Some years ago the Government gave fishing rights in the seas around Timor to China???) I have seen these ponds in action and so far so good! The first fish stocks should be ready for sale later this year. Luis has suggested at least three families in Oesono, Lifau and Boaknana who would be very capable of looking after a system such as this. Each set up would cost approx. \$US2,000.

Dirty Water more Deadly than Bullets for children in Conflict Zones

A recent report in the Guardian by UNICEF, Global Development Fund, released in time for World Water Day highlighted the plight of children who do not have access to safe water. The article was specifically about children in war zones but with my experience in Timor Leste I would say that the problems highlighted continue long after war is over whilst developing countries are struggling for democracy and peace. Even though there are no bullets any more comments such as the following are applicable still to Timor Leste seventeen years after the Restoration of Independence.

“The reality is that there are more children who die from lack of access to safe water than by bullets. Water is a basic right. It is a necessity for life.”

“Diarrhoeal disease linked to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene kills an average of 72,000 children under five each year, while direct violence from war kills an average of 3,400.

Unfortunately, unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene reaches every household, and will still be demanded by people – if people are thirsty they will drink any kind of water. In Yemen a child dies every 10 minutes and many of those causes, malnutrition, cholera, diarrhoea, are relate to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene.”

In a recent WHO Report, (2016) it was stated that Timor Leste has the third worst rate of childhood malnutrition in the world for under fives – better only than Yemen and Afghanistan – it takes a long time for people in conflict zones to get their living standard back to a basic one. And so I keep returning to Oecusse in the hope that the little I can do makes a difference!

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> If this connection does not work simply hit the donate now button and search for project number 50 years 11/12. (Sustainable Villages Oecusse).

Or via OzGREEN: https://ozgreen.nationbuilder.com/east_timor_donation