



Timor-Leste Newsletter April 2018



Is it a good idea to begin with Politics?

It happened as predicted – the minority Fretilin government, voted in only eight months ago, had to be dissolved by the President earlier this year as the majority opposition, a coalition of minor parties, refused to pass the government's plans and budget which meant they could not govern. No matter what side of the political fence people sit on it seems a shame that the country is again in full election mode, buckets of money and time being spent and wasted, many new promises being made (sound familiar?) and the government not able to function. If this is democracy there must be a better way as it is certainly not serving the people of Timor leste at this time!

I recently attended a political rally, strictly as an outside observer, as I wanted to see how these events are organised. I must admit it was exciting, noisy, vibrant with the enthusiasm building to a crescendo at times! The rally was in Pune, where we have worked before and



where our next big project will soon begin. Thousands of party supporters from all over Oecusse arrived in hundreds of trucks, cars, motorbikes and on foot; food was provided for all – rice, bread, noodles and watery stew; t-shirts and hats handed out and flags flown from trees, poles and houses. Lots of singing of party political songs and the Timor leste National Anthem accompanied by shouts of Viva (party name deleted as I am apolitical)! Certainly inspiring to all the people gathered there. All political parties throughout Timor leste are currently doing the same so the country is awash in their colours, although Oecusse currently seems to be a one-party district.

Bad roads!

Whenever we are driving over these bad roads of Oecusse I think how lucky (?) I should consider myself to be – some people pay a fortune for adventurous 4-wheel drive holidays and I get to do it all the time as a matter of course!

We have travelled the road to Pune many times over the last few years and I thought it was as bad as it could get but OH was I wrong!! My poor old bones and joints are finding it harder and harder to cope! The heavy rain this year has washed away any semblance of “road” that might once have existed leaving potholes, mud patches, deep ruts, broken culverts and exposed boulders. Whilst we were in Pune a heavy storm fell in the mountains higher up so when we tried to traverse the river on the way home, what had been a relatively



quiet stream in the morning had become a rapid torrent in the afternoon! Along with several other trucks, cars and motorbikes we waited an hour or so for the water level to go down a little and then Luis ventured in! The water was not deep but was fast enough for us to feel the sideways push on the Toyota but Luis cleverly manged to aim upstream and counteract that so we ended up right where we wanted to be on the other side! The next river crossing was much the same – not dangerous as the water was less than half a metre deep but it was certainly exciting and a little bit scary to people like me who are only used to driving though puddles!

Talk about money wasted and bad roads!



Two years ago

During the term of the previous government, led by Xanana Gusmao, many contracts were signed for large scale infra-structure projects such as bridges and roads. The main road from Dili to the border was rebuilt two years ago at great expense, many billions of dollars, and it seems to me



that very little engineering know-how went into it. The original dirt road hung precariously to the steep, geologically unstable, coastal cliff edge, with mountains above and the sea below. It

was always a bit frightening driving along it, especially with Luis regaling me with stories of bus crashes and other forms of death and destruction! The road was rebuilt by an international engineering company with lots of excavation and widening but nothing much else. Every time we drove along this road, having a background in geology, I checked for where the next major rock fall would be and lo and behold that is what has happened. Now it is a disaster – rock slides, wash-aways, road collapse, undermining of the surface, retaining walls buried under landslides, large trees across the road! I wonder who takes responsibility for such a disaster and such an enormous waste of money? Is this the usual practice in developing countries – poor workmanship, lack of competence, lack of government oversight??? OK maybe not just in developing countries!

World Water Day March 22nd.

Anyone can be brilliant at “giving up” things they don’t really need.”

The majority of the world lives like this (without stuff) they are called poor people and generally live in developing countries.

I met a guy once who gave up all technology and lived in a thatched hut. He’d even given up clean drinking water. In fact he never had any of that stuff, he was just another citizen of the developing world.” (From the Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday March 18, 2016. Dave O’Neil.)

With the help of several schools I successfully celebrated another World Water Day. I spoke in three schools and several more have invited me to talk later in the year as term 1 is a very busy time in the school calendar. I really enjoy talking to students, they are keen to hear about other cultures, ask very searching questions and are always quite compassionate when they learn of the lifestyle of people in Oecusse

who are so less fortunate than they are. One of the slides I show has the inspirational words in the box above.

This statement leads to a lot of discussion and deep thinking – it really opens the student’s eyes and minds to the fact that not everyone is as well off as we in Sydney are.

I always appreciate the thanks I get from both students and staff after the presentations.



Harbord Primary School students demonstrate “The Drain is Just for Rain”.



Students from Ryde Secondary College enjoyed hearing the Oecusse story.

Some beautiful stories have emerged of students from Harbord Primary School, who rather than simply asking Mum and Dad for money to donate to Oecusse, held a lemonade stall in the nearby soccer oval, others washed cars, several raided their own money boxes, one donated the money he earned from delivering the local paper.

These young people show such compassion.

Helping students in Oecusse.

Several friends of mine are providing funds to pay for school fees for Oecusse students, as I mentioned in the last newsletter two have now completed their degrees and are working in the local community, two young ones are at the other end of their education and are just beginning their school life whilst several others are in the middle years. Young people in Oecusse are so keen to go to school – they walk many kilometres to attend, try to never miss a day no matter what as they realise the importance and opportunities which arise from a good education. Epping Rotary provided many exercise books for me to distribute in Oecusse. I intended giving some to the children in my neighbourhood but Nando, my neighbour, decided to make this very formal. Early one morning he put a small table in my front garden, piled some books on it and handed them out as students in uniform walked past. The trouble was that the older students had a day off as they had just finished exams but when they heard what was happening they rushed, home, got dressed in their school uniform and fronted up for their books which they accepted with thanks and big smiles. They then rushed back home to get out of their uniform and get on with the days chores, be it cleaning rice, sweeping the garden, washing the clothes, feeding the pigs or keeping an eye on the goats. Just imagine an Australian student going to that trouble just for an exercise book or two!



Epping Boys High School and their commitment to Oecusse.

The year 8 students of Epping Boys High School decided last year to take on Oecusse as their charitable project, a long-term commitment is planned as they will support this project until the end of year 12.



Yr 8, Epping Boys High School with their blue accessories for World Water Day.

Students raised funds on World Water Day which will go towards providing bio-sand filtration units for families in Oecusse.

It is intended that a very strong relationship will be built between students in Oecusse and the boys from Epping. Not only will the students give a

helping hand but they will also build a relationship between cultures, make friends and acquire an understanding of basic human rights, equity and justice.

There are many ways in which Epping Boys plan to support their peers in Oecusse, 35 computers and a data projector have already been sent from their school to Palaban Technical College so the students can at last learn about computing with a computer in front of them rather than a picture booklet!

With help from two very dedicated teachers, Cameron Gordon and Jayne Crawford, year 8 boys are deciding which projects to support over the next 5 years- inter-school exchange, tree planting, the *Youth in Action* GREEN Games and irrigation for community vegetable gardens

Computers from Epping Boys High were donated to Palaban Technical School



Planning, planning!

I was only in Oecusse for 2 weeks this time, hardly got there and it was time to turn around and come back! Luis and I got quite a bit of planning done, visited Palaban school to check on the computers, began discussing a possible SEWAID project, visited Sifin to discuss the water project, spoke to PRADET re their domestic violence program and visited the students who are being supported by friends from Sydney. I then returned home to leave Luis and the team to their election campaigning which will become all time-consuming. I will return the middle of May by which time, hopefully, Timor leste will have a new and stable government and Luis and I can hit the ground running! (Best laid plans of mice and men!)

As part of the water project in Sifin we are hoping to do a feasibility study on the introduction of composting toilets. I have taken advice from a Manly Rotarian who has installed some, very successfully, in a village in Papua New Guinea. I have been thinking about composting toilets for a few years but the designs I have seen all seemed unsuitable for Oecusse; too big, too technical, too difficult to use, not sturdy enough and so on, it will be interesting to see how this idea takes hold.

And of course the ***Youth in Action* GREEN Games**. Luis wants to hold them in Boaknana, the western most district of Oecusse. It is a good idea to move the games around, so more and more young people get the opportunity to take part. It would be good if we could hold them in several districts annually, Passabe and Pune would love to have the opportunity again, but that is a dream / funding problem!



Then there are always more bio-sand filtration units and vegetable gardens to be installed, maybe in a village we have not worked in as yet?

There is always more to be done so if you would like to help please donate as per below.

Occasionally I am lucky enough in Oecusse to get a swim with dolphins.

Donations over \$2 to the Sustainable Villages project are tax deductible:
Donate online by going to the Rotary Australia World Community Service, (RAWCS) website. Click the donate button and search for project 50/ years 11-12. (Sustainable Villages Oecusse)
Or via OzGREEN: [https://ozgreen.nationbuilder.com/east timor donation](https://ozgreen.nationbuilder.com/east_timor_donation)