



## Timor-Leste Update October 2020



2020 – What a year it has been and still another 2 months to go! Surprisingly though, even with the lockdowns, border closures, restrictions on travel the year still seems to have rushed by. Bring on 2021 it must be better than 2020!

Looking back at my first newsletter for this year, I began with the following great expectations:

### **“So what will 2020 bring? More of the same or even better?”**

GREENTL has confirmed funding from The Charitable Foundation, the Penn Foundation and private donors. I am organising my usual World Water Day presentations in schools, writing a submission to Northern Beaches Council, who generously confirmed the Friendship Agreement with Oecusse, and several Rotary Clubs have expressed interest in applying for District Grants.

### **Plans for 2020:**

- \*run the *Youth-in-Action* GREEN Games,
- \*install more bio-sand filtration units,
- \*build a water supply project in Oelet
- \*set up a tree nursery
- \*install several fish ponds
- \*facilitate a Youth Leadership program with the local secondary schools.” **However -**  
**“The best laid plans of mice and man often go awry.”**

### **Actual 2020 Covid Style.**

Covid put a stop to school visits and of course my usual trips to Oecusse had to be cancelled. I have really missed Oecusse as it is the first time for 20 years that I have not been there to see friends, help out, push the projects along and generally get in the way! I seem to complain a lot when I am there – the humidity, the rats, noisy dogs, bad roads, dirty water, ants, flexible “timor time” and so on but now that I can’t go I am very put out! Let’s hope that we can get off to a running start early next year and do a major catch up!!!

### **However it has not been all doom and gloom.**



### **Seems ages ago that I put this sign on my garage door**



GREENTL has been kept busy with several successful projects:

### **Food Packages and Face Masks.**

With funds provided earlier this year, GREENTL has, in partnership with Eastwood/Gladesville Rotary Club, delivered food packages and face masks, to several villages. In my last update I commented on the face mask project so will only add here that the face masks were well made, well received and put to good use.

Since then a second covid-related project, Food Aid, with the E-club of Greater Sydney, has been successfully completed. Five villages, Kuat Enes, Kiubukife, Bebo, Oetulo and Mahatta, were given food packages each comprising 20 x 25kg bags of rice, 10 boxes of noodles and 4 bottles of cooking oil. These were very gratefully received by the villagers who sent the following message to me;



*“Thank you very much to the Rotary Club and thank you very much to Mrs Judith Charnaud for helping the people of Oecusse with food. Has helped to provide good health and healthy always.”*

A small village, Tualeca, was provided with a pump which will draw water from the deepest well and this will be used

to irrigate several vegetable gardens



### **Water Storage.**

GREENTL is now working on providing large water storage tanks, pumps and piping to channel water from the mountain springs down to the villages of Lela Ufe and Maunaban. These villages do not have the constant water supply of old, many wells have run dry and with the population increase water storage, especially in the Dry season has become a real problem. The daily trek, usually by the young village girls, to collect and carry water from the few running springs high in the mountains is a real burden for them and it must be fitted in between school hours.

Several larger projects, the Global Grant with Epping Rotary Club and Sustainable Villages with the Charitable Foundation have slowed down due to lack of materials, difficulty of transport and the fact that it is sometimes impossible to control funds from this distance, both bank accounts I use in Oecusse, GREENTL’s and mine, have expired and as I have to sign for the new ones they cannot be reopened until I return! Hopefully that will be sooner rather than later! To make life slightly more arduous for the GREENTL team they have to negotiate the mountain roads on motor bikes as the car has broken down and spare parts are not as yet available.

### **Epping Boys High School Continues its Commitment to Oecusse.**

Epping Boys High began their commitment to Oecusse 4 years ago when Year 7 students decided to take on my Sustainable Villages Project as their annual charity, the intention being to continue this until Year 12.

Amongst other things we had hoped to organise interschool visits between the year 10 groups but of course that has been another victim of the coronavirus. However the Epping Boys have continued with their assistance and have recently put together 50 boxes of school equipment aimed at primary school students.

We hope to get these boxes to Oecusse in the not too distant future and distribute them to a



school in one of the isolated mountain villages. The boxes contain such things as exercise books, pencils, school hats, t-shirts, balls and assorted small toys, all collected and packed by the Epping boys. I invited the Consul General of Timor Leste, Snr Luciano da Conceicao to attend the school to accept the boxes and tell the boys a little about his history, a very interesting one; here is part of his story.

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_asia/article/wj7z59/how-a-swat-from-a-rolled-up-newspaper-was-the-beginning-of-the-new-orders-end](https://www.vice.com/en_asia/article/wj7z59/how-a-swat-from-a-rolled-up-newspaper-was-the-beginning-of-the-new-orders-end)

The boys were very happy with the visit, listened attentively to his talk and asked very pertinent questions. My problem was that I came down with some nasty bug (covid negative but I think a recurrence of dengue fever) and could not attend the talk. Hopefully I can organise to meet the Consul General another time as we have several mutual friends in Oecusse. From all I hear the visit was very successful.

**The gift boxes are transported to storage until such time as they can be sent to Oecusse.**



### Scholarships for Oecusse School Students.

I have sent money to the scholarship students, Liam, who is in class 3 and assures me that he is number one in all his subjects; Ima who wants to sit the National Exam for University entry and Stephanie who has exams to continue into Senior Secondary School. The money has paid their fees, provided uniforms, school equipment and school lunches.

### Covid in Timor Leste and Government Action.

In Oecusse the detrimental effects of coronavirus have not been due to infections, none have been detected in the enclave, but rather due to malnutrition. Borders have been closed which means the usual open trade with West Timor has been curtailed, there is a lack of locally grown foods as markets have been closed and the poor, isolated communities have little or no income. Also due to very low rainfall in the 2019/20 wet season the rice crop was not as plentiful as usual, consequently, a lot of imported white rice, not as nutritious as the local field rice, has been brought in and shipped to Oecusse on the government ferry. There is a severe water shortage, many village wells which have never dried out before have done so this year. Luis tells me that “Oe” in the local dialect, Biaqueno, means water – hence Oetulu, Oecusse, Oelet, Oesono, Oenbaki and so on. When, as a child, he walked throughout the enclave with his grandfather there was plentiful water everywhere and extensive rice paddies, things are not the same anymore!



The Timor Leste Government has done its bit – providing welfare payments to hundreds of needy families, setting up quarantine hotels for returning travellers, closing borders and generally doing a good job of containing the corona virus – no deaths and only a few hundred known cases, all from returned travellers. That said over 80 people have died of dengue fever this year, malnutrition is rife throughout the country and the usual subsistence-living villagers are even poorer than usual due to closure of markets and loss of any paid work.

**Much needed cash welfare payments given to villagers.**

**The recently published 2020 Global Hunger Index report shows the seriousness of malnutrition in Timor Leste;**

*“Timor-Leste’s 2020 GHI score is considered alarming and is the second highest this year, better only than that of Chad in north-central Africa. A number of factors have contributed to chronic food insecurity in Timor Leste. Agricultural productivity is low. People’s food consumption is inadequate in both quality and quantity, and many people depend on single, low-value livelihood strategies. Basic infrastructure for sanitation, clean water, roads, irrigation, schools, and health is poor, and so is the country’s level of financial and human capital. Climate hazards and risks also have negative impacts. Child malnutrition is a major concern, with over half of children estimated to be stunted and nearly 15% of children estimated to suffer from wasting. Timor Leste is one of the most food insecure countries in the world with more than 80% of the population relying on agriculture for both food and income. Increasing climate hazards and the anticipated effects of climate change will contribute significantly to crop loss, crop decline and an increase in food insecurity.”*

A very alarming and disappointing report considering the major improvements which have been made since the gaining of independence.

**One other thing.**

I was very proud to recently receive my OAM Medal for “Services to conservation and the Environment in Timor Leste.” Due to covid the ceremony had been delayed and in the end was limited to ten recipients at a time. The very hard working Governor had to attend three ceremonies a day for several weeks to give out all the awards! It was a wonderful presentation and she made us all feel very special. I feel that my award was deserved by many, not just myself. I could not have done any of this without all the support from family, friends, donors and my great team of helpers in OzGREEN and especially GREENTL.



**So let’s look forward to 2021.**

**The 2020 Youth-in-Action GREEN Games were another victim of the coronavirus – we all look forward to next year when, I am sure, the 2021 Games will be Bigger and Better than ever!!**

We have a lot of plans – let’s hope they all come to fruition!



The people of Oecusse still need our help, anything you can spare will go towards reducing poverty in this neighbouring country.

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](https://ozgreen.nationbuilder.com/east_timor_donation)