

# Friends of Lolotoe, Castlemaine Lolotoe Visit Report

September 2015



Beautiful Lolotoe: Looking over the mountains to the Indonesian border

In July 2015, Friends of Lolotoe (FOL) Treasurer, Louise Cook-Tonkin, was able to visit the isolated sub district during an in-country work period in Timor-Leste.

Her trip included four nights in Lolotoe and an evening at Encouragement House in Maliana (a supported accommodation home for Lolotoe students who must travel to the District capital for senior secondary study).

The goals of the visit were:

- To reconnect with and determine the status the Friendship Group sub-committee and projects with which FOL is involved
- To look over reports and discuss shared plans for the network over the next 12 months
- To determine internet connectivity and IT resources to support development of a networking model of communication and shared planning between FOL, Castlemaine and the Lolotoe Friendship Group Committee
- To assess potential small agricultural development projects, which Castlemaine 'The Hub Plot' had offered to fund.

## **Groups visited and follow up networking included:**

- **Lolotoe Meetings and visits:** Sr. Luis, Sr. Nicholau, Junior High, Primary and Kindergarten staff and students, Previous FOL committee members' families; two scholarship recipient families (Abilio and Mariano),
- **Agriculture Tours and coffee programs** in Mape and Kampung Baru, Fish projects in Lupal suco. Paul – Agriculture extension worker in Lolotoe – phone contact.
- **Encouragement House and Maliana boarding students,**
- **DILI:** Scholarship students in Dili (lunch together) and Mercy Corps, Oxfam and Carlito from Coffee Cooperativa Timor Leste re support for agricultural development and also Ego Lemos re: Permascouts camp organizing.

## **Status of Shared Friendship Group Projects**

FOL continues to send funds annually to assist twenty-one students, providing accommodation funds for them to board with families in Maliana while attending Senior High School.

The majority of these students stay with families, while six are accommodated at Encouragement House (supported dormitory accommodation). This raised questions as to the greatest impact of these funds.

Encouragement House is a youth development facility, which trains young people in independent living skills and collaborative management of the accommodation venue. It also provides opportunities for English Language learning with a volunteer Australian teacher, interaction with groups of Australian school students who visit to teach English each year, and encourages a strong group spirit amongst the young people. Lolotoe is unusual in having this accommodation, and boarding with extended family members is the usual choice. Many times extended family is the best accommodation option. For some young people, however, the obligation to contribute to household tasks in return for the cost of their board can reduce the time available for study, and be detrimental to this.

FOL committee has decided to explore this issue further with the Lolotoe Friendship committee to evaluate how many students Encouragement House can welcome, any additional needs of young people that may indicate accommodation with extended family is a better option, and other concerns, in order to decide to support both options or only Encouragement House in future. Until the current students have completed secondary studies, no change will be made to the arrangement. Any decision will be made in collaboration with the Lolotoe Friendship Committee members.



Left: Virginia Barros, scholarship recipient, working on the Census in Lolotoe. Right: Louise meeting with students boarding with family in Maliana and Flavia, University scholarship student

Five students currently attend University in Dili on Rotary funded scholarships. Each of the students comes from a different Suco (area) of the sub district, and each was chosen through a process of application to the Chefe Suco, based on the low socio-economic status of their family of origin. The group is comprised of three young women and two young men. All are extremely happy to have the opportunity to study and are progressing well in their studies. Each student receives \$150 twice a

year to cover university fees, printing and computer/internet access and uniform costs. For some this money only covers university tuition.

Current students are:

- Mariano do Ceu graduates from UNPAZ (Peace University) with a degree in Medicine next year. He hopes to return to Lolotoe to work in the small hospital there and serve his community.
- Virginia Barros graduates this year from the Institute of Business with a degree in Accountancy and business management. During the Lolotoe visit Virginia was working for the National Census, conducting research in her home district. She will look for work in the capital next year. Abilio da Costa is studying Agriculture (Animal Husbandry) at the National University of Timor (UNTL) and will also graduate next year. He took on agricultural science from a desire to return to work in rural areas and hopes to find work closer to home after graduating.



Left: Abilio using the microscope in laboratory investigations. Right Mariano and Abilio pose with some friends at the entrance to their National University.

Flavia Mota is studying Education at University Oriental Timor-Leste, specializing in Portuguese language teaching. On graduation Flavia will have to take a position in a District location, but in the long run she would like to teach in Dili for access to resources and information. Adelaide Barros-Moniz is studying Civil Engineering at Dili Institute of Technology and is completing her third year.



Abilio's parents and Mariano's family in Lolotoe

Visits to the students' families in Lolotoe, was a reminder of the importance of these scholarships. As a rural community where few families have employment, and most live by growing all of their own food, even small university fees of a few hundred dollars a year are completely beyond the means of the majority of Lolotoe families. At times committee members feel that the actual money is provided in terms of scholarships is very small. Yet, meeting the families confirmed the reality of extremely small means, and how glad they are of the possibility of further study for their children. In representing the committee that provides the funds, Louise was greeted with absolute honor and reverence. Abilio's father articulated the importance of these funds, when he said, ' We feel that God has visited us, to provide us with help.' Money that we feel is so little, is not necessarily so in their eyes.

The FOL committee would like to express their gratitude to Rotary for providing annual funds for these scholarships to continue.

### **Friendship Committee Lolotoe:**

Sr. Luis da Costa is FOL's main communication channel and he receives and distributes project funds and maintains records on all activities. Sr. Nicholau, the Sub District administrator also communicates regularly with FOL members. These two committee members visited Australia for the 2014 study tour. Both have been very committed and hard working in their voluntary capacity for the committee since 2008.

Other than these key personnel, there is little committee activity on the Lolotoe side. In the light of FOL's plans to improve communication and move towards greater networking with the isolated sub-district, the Treasurer explored the possibility of channels for improving communication. On the practical side, none of the committee members has 3G enabled phone or computer access, and would not know how to use these if provided. To use skype for regular calls would require not only equipment, but also training in its use. FOL can later discuss options for this and consider how funds might be raised.

Active Lolotoe Friendship committee members have dwindled somewhat in recent years. Being that men are the active members, there is also a need to increase representation on this committee. Deolinda da Costa, a previous a committee member, has been requested to address this on his next (September) trip to Lolotoe. We discussed involving members of women's, agriculture, and youth groups in the committee and he will discuss this with individuals during his visit, seeking active participation and better representation.

### **The Hub Plot Agriculture Project:**

Before leaving for Timor-Leste The Hub Plot director suggested funding a small agricultural project in Lolotoe. With this in mind, a visit was organised to local agricultural projects, most of which are supported by a Ministry of

Agriculture and Fisheries (MAP) extension worker Paul. Unfortunately Paul was away during the Lolotoe visit, and was only contactable by phone.



Left: Fishpond awaiting fingerlings.



Right: Coffee Plants nursery at Kampung Baru

Two key agriculture issues emerged from the visit. The first is the need for a Coffee cooperative to ensure local coffee farmers gets a fair price for their coffee (currently they are paid \$1.00US per sack, while ground coffee is sold for up to \$15.00 per kilogram post processing). This means the farmers remain poor and those processing the coffee make large profits. A coffee cooperative existed previously, but floundered due to lack of management. Meetings held later in Dili secured the support of an Oxfam-linked Justice Coffee harvesting and distribution groups. Members of this group will travel to Lolotoe in October and support farmers there to form a cooperative. This task is too large for Hub Plot funds, but may be a venture for which FOL can later provide some networking support.

The second issue that emerged was lack of funds to support positive development initiatives. Under the agriculture extension worker, farmers have created fishponds, but lacked fingerlings to stock them. Without transport, there was no way to get MAP fish stocks to Lolotoe, and no agricultural NGO's work in the sub-district at present. MAP itself had no solution for distribution, despite having an agricultural extension worker in place (this lack of planning is sadly typical of low capacity, low budget, governance contexts in Timor-Leste). This situation is exacerbated by Lolotoe's extreme isolation; the town is literally ignored by NGO's due to the difficulty of working there. Nearby Bobonaro township and Suai have some excellent agricultural projects. Finally, through networking in Dili, a Suai-based NGO has been organised to will deliver the fish to a nearby location and Hub Plot funds will be used to secure a large truck for transport to Lolotoe. Achieving this outcome through networking reflects the difference that can be made through this activity. Isolation and distance contribute to poverty and lack of development. Networking has the potential to reduce this impact.

Before leaving Dili, a chance meeting with Ego Lemos, the director of Timor-Leste's Permaculture and sustainable agriculture NGO, provided the

information that a training camp was up coming in November 2015. The camp will train young people in sustainable agricultural approaches, and inspire them to work for this goal through the development transitions occurring in their local region. Given that many current agricultural development projects encourage unsustainable approaches, a sustainability emphasis is a crucial model to support for Timor-Leste's development. Through discussion with committee members, it was decided to send ten young people to this training. Sr. Luis as a local secondary teacher, and Sr. Paul the agriculture extension worker will also attend. In addition, four Lolotoe students residing at Encouragement House will attend the training with Deolindo da Costa, accompanying that group. Support from these accompanying community leaders will ensure any initiatives coming from the training will have local leadership and support.

FOL committee members would like to express their gratitude to The Hub Plot for generously providing these funds and supporting Lolotoe farmers.



A group of Primary School students gather with their teachers to practice a little English

### **Points for Discussion:**

1. Follow up on Encouragement House or extended family placements for future funding arrangements.
2. We would like to develop better communication process utilizing a strengths-based community development model. The committee will need advice on how best to implement a system allow for more frequent communication with the Lolotoe Friendship committee. Funds for this will also be necessary.
3. Creation of annual plans for the networking approach in which the two groups, the FOL group in Australia and the Lolotoe Friendship Committee, each have a separate, but coordinated and interconnecting plans.
4. Planning for a 2016 Lolotoe field trip to establish the committee and hold participatory community envisioning meetings in Lolotoe.

5. Graduation of our students brings with it new challenges. How to support them to find work? How to ensure their skills are developed? For example, Mariano graduates next year. Health system development is a priority concern for Timor-Leste. The Royal Australian College of Surgeons based at Dili National Hospital have revealed that medicine graduates require additional training to have adequate skills – they provide additional training in one program. Timor Plaza is developing a medical centre that will also provide additional training. Could we support him to attend there? Could we organise an exchange with a local medical clinic to gain extra training? These questions become important in considering the long-term impact of funds we have provided to Lolotoe and how to ensure the best outcome.
6. Consider changes to fundraising arrangements to support a networking approach.
7. Consider organizing tours, and/or volunteers to visit and assist development in the isolated rural area