



Deakin Faculty of Health- Timor Partnership news update

Background:

Timor Leste continues to be one of the world's poorest countries, with GDP per capita standing at \$3,949 (2011). It is ranked 147 out of 187 (2011) countries in the UN's Human Development Index. Timor's challenges are a major after-effect of the independence struggle against Indonesia, which seriously damaged infrastructure and dislocated thousands of Timorese. As a direct result of the conflict in 1999, 95% of schools were destroyed. As of 2011, 37.4% of civilians live below the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day and 40% of the population is malnourished. Access to adequate health and education services, clean water and sanitation are major issues for Timor-Leste.

Deakin Timor Partnership history:

Deakin University Professor Damien Kingsbury has a long history supporting the new nation of Timor- Leste. Building on this foundation, Deakin University developed a partnership agreement with the Timor Leste Government through their **Ministry of Education** which was signed in 2014. Professor John Toumbourou (Chair in Health Psychology, Deakin University) led the work to develop the new agreement and has also developed a partnership with **Many Hands International** a non-government organization (NGO) undertaking health promotion across Timor-Leste and community and cultural development work in the District of Lautem. Professor Toumbourou has led the development of a consulting group within the Prevention Sciences Unit, in the Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development (SEED) and School of Psychology. The Prevention Sciences Consulting Group provides opportunities for Deakin staff and students to develop expertise working on consulting projects for Deakin partners. In 2014 and 2015 the Consulting Group formed a Deakin Timor partnership team (led by Chris Loughnan) and diverted some of their consulting profits to support work in Timor Leste.

Through the Deakin partnerships, three Timorese Fellows have been sponsored from 2014 to complete training blocks at Deakin's Waterfront campus. Deakin training has assisted them to further develop their English skills for academic purposes as well as to complete specific Timor related research project tasks under the supervision of the Consulting Group. **Mr Afonso Soares** and **Mr Simao Rosario** (Senior Managers, Ministry of Education Timor Leste) have gone on in 2015 to complete further Deakin University English Language Institute training to prepare them for entry into a Deakin Masters Research program. **Mr Thomas Lopes** (Health Promotion Officer, Many Hands International) has received funding for his work developing a National Tobacco Prevention Plan for Timor in partnership with the WHO and Timor Leste Ministry of Health. He has also been supported to study health promotion units online through Deakin.

Further Deakin-Timor Partnership connections with the Geelong Community:

The Deakin-Timor partnerships are not only making a difference in Timor-Leste: they are also strengthening Deakin links with the Geelong community.

Geelong Friends of Viqueque. During their 2014 and 2015 visits to Geelong, the Timor Fellows have strongly engaged with members of the Geelong Friends of Viqueque network, attending a range of events including their Annual Dinner and Timor Leste Day at St Joseph's College. They were also honoured guests at the Timor-Leste Independence Day Flag raising ceremony sponsored by the City of Greater Geelong (COGG).

The Geelong Kindergarten Association (GKA) has also worked in close collaboration with the Deakin Timor partnership team. During their recent visit, Simao and Afonso attended a GKA Coordinators meeting, presenting an overview of plans and challenges to improve early childhood services in Timor. GKA member kindergartens and families have generously donated boxes of surplus kindergarten equipment to support kindergartens in Timor Leste. This equipment has now been shipped through Rotary and will be transported under Simao's supervision to small village communities, many of whom do not have any equipment to enhance the early learning opportunities for their children. To date, ten boxes of equipment have been packed up by GKA and the volunteer committees of member kindergartens for distribution.

Partnership plans for 2016

Professor Toumbourou will visit Timor in November 2015 to consolidate research projects for Afonso and Simao. Their research projects in 2014 and 2015 identified inequalities in primary school enrolments across the thirteen districts of Timor Leste. In 2015 they completed stakeholder consultations and systematic literature reviews to identify options for increasing primary school enrolments both in the most disadvantaged districts and across the nation. In 2016, planning for the first randomised trial to increase primary school enrolments in Timor Leste will commence.

Planning is also underway to further support Thomas in developing Timor's first National Tobacco Prevention Plan. In 2014 and 2015, Thomas completed key-leader stakeholder consultations that identified strong support for tobacco prevention but poor knowledge of the scientific options. The Ministry of Health has requested assistance from Thomas in 2016 to complete public opinion and consultation research that will contribute to the launch of their first QUIT campaigns. Thomas's training in health promotion will also continue in 2016. In 2016 the Deakin Timor partnership will also investigate the potential to develop training and placement opportunities for Faculty of Health students and staff to assist the projects in Timor.

The Deakin Timor partnership team would like to especially thank the staff of Deakin University English Language Unit for their dedicated and professional expertise in developing the Fellows English for Academic purposes levels. We also acknowledge and sincerely thank the Geelong Community for their generous support to the Fellows during their recent visit. In particular we acknowledge members of Geelong Friends of Viqueque network, Geelong Kindergarten Association staff and Sacred Heart College for providing an excellent accommodation option to the Fellows during their recent visit. Finally a special thankyou to Genevieve Loughnan who has been a mentor, guide and friend to the Fellows during their visits.

Mr Chris Loughnan

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