

# AUSTRALIAN AID TO EAST TIMOR

Stories by Geoff Adlids, AusAID  
Photos by David Haigh

**E**ast Timor is poor. The Government of Indonesia recognises it as one of the archipelago's particularly disadvantaged areas that requires special attention.

While the Government has invested heavily in infrastructure such as roads, health clinics, schools and electrification schemes, infant mortality rates remain relatively high and incomes are low, especially for the indigenous Timorese who form the vast majority of province's 750 000 population. Two thirds of the people are illiterate and 60 per cent of over 15 year olds have never been to school. The widespread incidence of basic health problems like diarrhoea, worms and skin diseases is directly related to the lack of adequate water and sanitation facilities.

In development terms, East Timor shares the problems of poverty found throughout the developing world. But the former Portuguese territory presents a unique environment. The social dislocation wrought by the years of

war and civil unrest that followed Portugal's departure adds to the development challenge.

Australia, the island's closest neighbour, is also the main aid donor to East Timor. Over the past twenty years, AusAID, which administers the Australian Government's official aid program, has funded activities worth a total of \$30 million. This year expenditure is expected to be \$4.6 million.

Three major projects employing resident Australian advisers — a fourth is currently being planned — and small grants to local church and community groups are focussed on alleviating the poverty and improving the welfare of the East Timorese people. As well, AusAID provides student scholarships and is a major contributor to the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

AusAID activities in East Timor are a key component of the Australian aid program's focus on the poorer eastern islands of the Indonesian archipelago. Major bilateral projects (agreed between

the two governments) got underway soon after the 1989 declaration by the Government of Indonesia that East Timor was an 'open' province.

Even before the opening of the province, Australia had provided approximately \$10.5 million in humanitarian relief assistance through international organisations such as UNICEF and the ICRC.

The first resident Australian adviser arrived in mid-1992 to start work on the East Timor extension of the Eastern Islands Veterinary Services Project. He was joined later that year by the first of the East Timor Water Supply and Sanitation Project team and, in early 1993, two Australian agricultural experts arrived to start the Agricultural and Rural Planners Project.

"Australia's development assistance is very important," Mr Soedarto, the Chairman of the Regional Development Coordinating Board (BAPPEDA) told FOCUS. "It's very useful because all the projects are designed in such a way as to directly benefit the community." Mr Soedarto says he expects the systems installed under the water supply project will provide models for use across the province. And, he says, the agricultural and livestock projects are valuable because nearly eighty per cent of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

As FOCUS discovered in a recent visit, the presence of Australian aid advisers, and the work they are doing in difficult circumstances, is strongly supported by the people of East Timor...

# CLEAN WATER FOR TOWN AND COUNTRY

*An AusAID project in East Timor is rebuilding the water supply system in the capital, Dili, and is providing small community water systems to scores of rural villages.*

*Dili and Covalima, two of East Timor's 13 districts, are the target of the East Timor Water Supply and Sanitation Project. Over 100 000 people will have accessible clean, safe water. But the project, now entering its fifth and final year, aims to do much more than install tanks, pipes and taps.*

Describing it as a construction project draws sharp rebuke from the Australian project team leader. "This is a health project," says Lansell Taudevin who came to the job in the middle of the year as the rural community side of the project moved into full swing.

"The easiest thing in the world is to provide water and build toilets," he says. "The hard thing is to maximise the downstream impact: having people properly using the water, maintaining the systems, promoting improved health practices and encouraging horticultural activities to do something about the nutritional imbalance in East Timor."

With four Australian advisers, several short term advisers, over eighty local staff and a five year \$13 million budget, the AusAID Water Supply and Sanitation Project is the biggest foreign aid project in East Timor. It is managed for AusAID by a joint venture of consulting companies CMPS&F and Coffey MPW.

Town supplies are being put into the capital Dili and the small town of Suai in the Covalima district on the other side of the island. As well, community water and sanitation systems are going into some eighty villages throughout the surrounding countryside.

Although building sustainable water systems is the common goal in town and in the rural communities, the approach is quite different. Town supplies are run by the government, so ensuring sustainable management requires training and support of the water authority, especially in helping to build an ongoing revenue base. In the villages, community level management systems are fostered.

Rebuilding and expanding Dili's system was the first task that the project tackled and it proved to be far more than an engineering challenge (see 'Turning Dili's taps back on'). Four years on, Dili and Covalima have functioning water supplies and local water user groups are in business in scores of villages.







## WATER FOR THE VILLAGES

*The mountainous terrain and porous soil structures combine to make water a valuable commodity in East Timor, especially on the dry northern side of the island around Dili. The lack of accessible clean water is a major contributor to basic health problems like malnutrition, diarrhoea, worms and skin diseases which are widespread, particularly in the rural areas. The relocation of villages since East Timor's integration into Indonesia has also had an effect: new water sources have had to be found and new gardens established.*

The key to the project's success in rural areas is not so much tackling the technical water problems, it is the development approach adopted by the team. Aleixo da Cruz, the manager of community programs, says that the first vital step is forming a water user group in the village.

"It's essential that the community is wanting to work themselves for the project, otherwise you'll find that it won't be maintained," says da Cruz.

"We involve the community right from the beginning so there's a sense of local ownership.

"Our experience is that if not all households join the group at the start, once a supply is connected and they see the advantages, they all want to join.

"We give them some guidance but each water user group is organised according to principles which they themselves determine. For example, they might decide that there'll be a collection once a month and each household is to contribute 1000 rupiah (60 cents Australian)"

Lansell Taudevin is adamant that the project team doesn't do anything until the community has agreed to pay for it and do the work themselves.

"It's absolutely essential because not only do they then do it, but they set up the wherewithal for it to be sustainable," he says.

"Sometimes it can take six months of consultations and planning discussions before a shovel hits the ground.

"If people manage, construct and maintain it themselves, then you've got a chance it will continue. But if you just construct it and leave, they won't. They'll complain when it breaks down and expect someone to come and fix it."

The project offers basic materials like pipes, taps and cement, and works with the villagers to identify suitable natural water sources, often some kilometres away. But the initial approach is all about community development, with health and nutrition the main focus.

"We have a social marketing health team made up of locals with a community health background," explains Taudevin. "Their sole focus is to identify and discuss everything from kitchen hygiene, to things like keeping animals out of waste water, and clearing stagnant water to reduce malaria.

"In selected pilot villages we're showing what can be done with proper waste water management. Things like growing green leaf vegetables and local plants with medicinal value — setting up a living herbarium."

Once a water user group is established, it sets the agenda and determines priorities. Importantly, it is the local community that does all the labour.

Follow up assistance helps communities to maximise the advantage of their new water supplies by facilitating small income generating schemes like vegetable production and goat and chicken raising.

## AND THEN COME THE TOILETS

This year the project team has turned their attention to sanitation. About 80 toilets have already been installed in villages where the water supply is established and the water user group is functioning well.

"We build toilets in a few key villages. People come to see them and, if they're interested, they work through their local water user group to get one put in at their place," explains Taudevin. "When a group decides they want to do it, we locate one of our staff permanently in the village to advise them during construction."

The model is a basic twin leaching pit system which enables the waste to be recycled as fertiliser. As with the initial water supplies, AusAID provides some materials, like pipes, bricks and squat plates. The user groups provide local materials like sand and rocks and, importantly, raise their own funds and provide the labour. Credit schemes managed by the water user group enable villagers to pay the costs over two or three years and revolving funds help pay for toilets for poorer families.

Lansell Taudevin estimates it could be another four or five years — long after the AusAID team will be gone — before there are toilets through all 80 of the villages where the project is operating. But he's not in a hurry.

"Some people say: 'why don't you go in and build the whole lot'. But if you do everything, they don't understand, and they'll never understand how, to do it.

## TURNING THE TAPS ON ... PAIOL

At Paiol, a village on the slopes of the southern fringe of central Dili, men, women and children are busy building a public tank. With cement, pipes and fittings provided by AusAID — along with expert advice on the system's design — the community has pulled together to provide labour and locally available raw materials such as sand and rocks.

There are 198 households, over 1000 people, in this village the secretary of the local water user group, Anibal Tilman Pires, explains as he shows me around the site.

Until now the task of getting water has been a major daily preoccupation, most of it carried by car or hand from the public taps in the city centre.

When the community water team first visited Paiol there was great enthusiasm for the project. The villagers soon set up their water user group and each household was asked to contribute some cash. The group decided that civil servants should contribute 15 000 Rupiah (A\$8.30) and others 10 000 Rupiah (A\$5.50). They raised over one million rupiah — more than enough to cover the cost of a *pesta adat*, the traditional ceremony which in local custom precedes any major community project. A pig, a goat, a dog and several chickens were killed and other food prepared for the ceremony.

Now construction is in full swing: a spring source has been protected, over four kilometres of transmission pipe laid and two break-pressure tanks constructed. With the first two public tanks almost complete, the people of Paiol will soon no longer have to trek into town for the most basic of life's necessities. The community plans to put 11 public taps around their village.



*Pitching in ... the people of Paiol doing it for themselves under the watchful eye of the Paiol Water User Group Secretary, Anibal Tilman Pires (centre, with glasses). Setting up a water user group is the first essential step when putting in a village community water supply system. The community provide local materials and the labour for construction.*





## SPREADING THE BENEFITS

The East Timor Water Supply and Sanitation Project is scheduled to wind up at the end of 1997. Already moves are underway to enable the community work to continue and spread to other districts across the island. The project's community water team members are forming themselves into a registered non government organisation known as Bia Hula. The plan is to continue their work beyond the end of the AusAID project.

A twelve month strategy for achieving Bia Hula's independence is now in train. Bia Hula has already assumed responsibility for all of the project's community operations. With further organisational and management training planned, full independence is expected to be a reality from October 1997.

"The difficulty for them is going to be coming to grips with funding after the AusAID project is over," says Taudevin. "While we've been efficient in our expenditure, the reality is that AusAID has been behind them. They may have to adjust to being a shoestring operation, although we are helping them to identify other sources of finance.

"Bia Hula's job is to take the integrated health program we've developed and extend it to other districts," explains Taudevin.

As word spreads of the successes in improving health and nutrition in the villages where the project has focussed, it is hoped that more and more villages will see the advantages and set up their own water user groups to organise their own systems.

In this way, the impact of AusAID's five year water supply and sanitation project will be felt across the island for many years to come.

"These people are doing it for themselves and doing it to their own design. I think that's very important. Many have elected to build a combined bathroom and toilet. That's their prerogative. It all adds up to improved sanitation and health.

"You don't go into a village and say, 'right, you're all being taught

to build a toilet'. You have to appreciate that not everyone wants to be a bricklayer. People have their own culture, abilities, interests and preferences. You've got to respect people's choices. It starts not with telling or giving but with asking, exploring and discussing options with people."

## TURNING THE TAPS ON ... MOTA ULUN



*There are now four public water taps in Mota Ulun. Locally produced posters displayed nearby encourage healthy habits as part of the AusAID project's public health focus.*

On the steep rocky hills to Dili's east, the people of Mota Ulun are already experiencing the benefits of their new water system. It was one of the first community systems to be built by the project. Posters from the health education campaign are displayed near each of the four public taps spaced through the village. Basic leaching pit sanitation systems have been installed and seven toilets have already been built by the community. While the project team provide materials and advice on the underground design, everything above the ground is the responsibility of the locals and as more families see the benefits of access to a toilet, demand is growing.



A natural spring five kilometres farther up in the hills provides water to four 20 cubic metre tanks at central locations through the village of 77 households. The local water user group decided that each household needed to contribute 1000 rupiah (\$A0.60) a month to a maintenance account. It will be used for replacing and repairing pipes and taps.

"We are very thankful for the project, it answers our sufferings of before," said Aquilis da Cruz, the chairman of the Mota Ulun water user group.

"There is no natural water nearby and before, fetching water was one of the main tasks."

Women and children would walk down the valley and climb the opposite hill to fill containers from a spring — a four kilometre round trip along winding steep paths that was repeated several times each day.

"Now we have the tanks and public taps, life is much better" said da Cruz. "Many houses now have small gardens growing food crops. Before the water supply we couldn't do this."

The water user group sets priorities for water use in the community. At Mota Ulun, the spring source provides less water in the dry season; so to preserve it, the group decided to ban household gardens during those periods.

*With their new water supply, the people of Mota Ulun can now grow small food crops in the village - supplementing their diet and their incomes.*



# TURNING DILI'S TAPS BACK ON

In the days of Portuguese rule in East Timor, Dili had one of the best reticulated water supplies in the region. But the years of war and social upheaval that followed Portugal's departure and Indonesian integration in the mid 1970s took its toll. The system ran down, only minimal maintenance was done and it wasn't long before turning on the tap was a futile exercise. The little water that occasionally trickled out was untreated and unreliable.

When the small team of Australian technical advisers arrived in Dili at the end of 1992, they found the town water supply had all but collapsed. The water treatment works weren't operating and even locating the reticulation pipes that lay beneath the town's streets and buildings proved a major task. No plans of the Portuguese system were ever found.

To add to the task, the town's population is growing dramatically. Dili has grown from under 30 000 in 1975 to over 100 000 today.

Reconnecting the town supply was to prove challenging. But today most households, businesses and public buildings are connected. New water sources have been tapped, storage tanks installed, treatment plants recommissioned and leakage repair teams are cruising the streets fixing the pipe bursts that come with the increasing water pressure. The leakage team has already dramatically reduced the amount of water lost from the system.

"For the first two and a half years we concentrated on the town water supply," explains John Wilkinson, the original Australian team leader who arrived in Dili in late 1992.

"There are basically three steps, although we addressed them simultaneously: the raw water supply, the treatment plants and then the reticulation system to deliver it to the consumers.

"The reticulation system is most complex because there are hundreds of kilometres of pipes running all over the place and without the plans showing where they are, it's like finding a needle in a haystack. We spent a lot of time developing diagrams of where the pipes are and might be.

"We've now got a pretty good indication of where everything is. But just developing that knowledge base was a major activity — and it's an ongoing program."

Major engineering works are almost complete. They included proving new water sources, building reservoirs and storage tanks, repairing and commissioning treatment plants and pumping stations. Over 1500 Australian supplied water meters have been installed and technicians and maintenance crews have been trained. Two large prefabricated 'Southern Cross' water tanks are in place in the hills on the edges of town.

The project team also tackled Dili's drainage system. In cooperation



*A familiar sign in the streets of Dili as the local water authority make repairs and maintenance teams apologise for supply disruption while they fix water pipe leak. With assistance from the AusAID project, the leakage repair teams have dramatically reduced water loss from the town system. The sign reads: Sorry, we are digging up the water pipes.*

with the responsible urban authority, an operations and management plan was devised, maintenance crews trained and a new water jet cleaner put into operation.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is in helping to set up the management systems to run the water supply. Responsibility for Dili's water system is in the process of being transferred from the central Department of Public Works to local city authorities.

"In the long run, they have to learn to do it efficiently and on their own," says Wilkinson.

"The management of a supply system for a place like Dili is quite complex and stretches the capacity of the local institutions. So we've had an adviser focusing on improving the capacity of the water authority to manage the administrative and financial aspects of running a system.



*A leakage detection and repair team in action under the streets of Dili. They play a crucial role in the operation and maintenance of the Dili water supply. Since the formation of the team - a joint effort by the AusAID project and the Dili water authority - over 300 major leaks have been repaired saving hundreds of thousands of litres of water.*

“We’ve more than doubled the water revenue since we got here. The rule of thumb in these operations is to have two months operating costs in the bank. They’re satisfying that rule at the moment and they’ve never done that before. In the past it’s been crisis management.”

Establishing a water system in a rapidly expanding town is a major engineering feat in any circumstance. Wilkinson says that his team faced particular problems in Dili that made the task even more complex.

“Up to 1975 the town had a reasonably good water supply and a very much smaller population so there’s an expectation on the part of the locals that water should be there. In other parts of Indonesia water supplies have come in slowly and people are extremely grateful and understanding of the problems of providing a water supply.

“Here in Dili, there was one in 1975 and everyone had water so there’s a



*(Above) A new 1000 cubic metre reservoir was installed at Comoro in the hills above west Dili. It is one of two Australian-made prefabricated ‘Southern Cross’ tanks installed by the AusAID project to ensure an adequate water supply for the town.*



*Bendito Sarmento, the Bemós water treatment plant operator, regularly tests the quality of the water that flows into Dili’s system. The AusAID project recommissioned the idle water treatment plant, including providing new testing equipment for the on-site laboratory*

real problem now of acceptance of technical and management needs. As a result there’s a lot of sabotage of pipelines. People just go along with their hammer and chisel or — if they belong to the army — their rifle, and provide a connection for themselves from the main pipe. We have thousands of examples of this.”

Political and social tensions in the province can make the task even harder.

“At the back of everybody’s mind there’s always the possibility that things will flare up again and no one wants to get involved in something that might aggravate emotions, including normally simple things like cutting off people’s water supplies because they haven’t paid their bills, or they’ve connected illegally.”

No one denies the difficulties of development work in Dili. In 1994 a number of the project team and their families were evacuated to Kupang in the neighbouring

province during one bout of unrest in Dili.

Dilemmas abound, such as how to deal with illegal connections.

“In cases where it’s delicate and we can’t necessarily get people to start paying for water and accept a metered connection, the very least we should do is transform their makeshift illegal connection, which is spewing water all over the place, into a proper connection,” explains Mike Beauchamp, the project’s water engineer.

“Because even an illegal connection is a water demand, it’s satisfying somebody’s need for water; and water leaked into the ground is completely wasted.”





## HEALTHY ANIMALS

"The big picture is to improve animal health services," explains veterinarian, Steve Dunn, the Animal Health Adviser based in Dili under AusAID's *Eastern Islands Veterinary Services* project (EIVS).

"We have three major thrusts," Dunn says. "Helping develop the animal health outposts; surveying and identifying animal health problems; and providing technical advice in policy development and

training for the Government's campaign to control the brucellosis disease."

The EIVS project began in the adjoining provinces of Nusa Tenggara Timur and Nusa Tenggara Barat in 1989. It was extended to East Timor in mid 1992 with assistance through the supplying of equipment, training and technical advice.

*Joni of Bukoli village in Baucau district shepherding his goat herd. Livestock is a key source of nutrition and income for the predominantly rural East Timorese. AusAID's project is helping to increase livestock production through improved animal health services.*

As part of the project, AusAID supports 12 students each year from different parts of East Timor to study at Agricultural High School in Los Palos in the east of the island. As well, Timorese veterinary science students are sponsored to train at Indonesian universities. Work has begun on building two of the four planned new district animal health outposts.

The project is managed for AusAID by NSW Agriculture.



*"We're working to strengthen the links between the laboratories and the field," says Animal Health Adviser, Steve Dunn, pictured at rear with field assistant, Yosua. At the microscope is veterinarian, Dr H. Dewi Wayudari*



The vast majority of East Timorese earn their living from farming. It is not an easy job. The north side of the island falls in a rain shadow and suffers a lack of water and poor soil fertility. On the more fertile south coast, the wet season delivers heavy rainfall and transport problems restrict production opportunities. The steep terrain of the central mountain range limits opportunities for sustainable farming.

To help lift agricultural productivity in East Timor, the Agricultural and Regional Planning Assistance Project (ARPAPET) is working with regional government agencies to improve their capacity to plan and implement sustainable agriculture projects. Importantly, it is also working directly with village farmer groups helping them to establish new ways of improving productivity.

“Improving the welfare of the East Timorese - that’s what the objective (of the project) really is,” says David Boyce, an Australian agricultural scientist who has worked on the project since its start over three years ago. “Whether it’s in terms of cash flow or in terms of better nutrition for the farming families by diversifying their crops, improving welfare levels is the essence.”

*Aurelio Guterres, the ARPAPET Community Development Adviser, discusses the advantages of the trial incubator with farmer group leaders from villages in the surrounding Liquica district.*

Unlike, for example, a water supply project where at the end of the day a new tap is providing clean water, improving regional planning and agricultural productivity is a long term task and, at the wider level, the impact is not immediately obvious.

Over the last three years, much of the effort of the two Australian advisers working on the project has been providing informal and specialised training to upgrade the skills of provincial and district government officials in planning and agricultural agencies.

New planning tools were also developed. For example, the province was divided into agri-climatic zones and reports on each prepared to help determine appropriate crops for different areas. As well, new approaches to development planning have been introduced.

While the broader impact of planning assistance may take some years to bear fruit, another part of the ARPAPET project is already improving the lives of East Timorese farmers.

Model sites have been set up in cooperation with local farmer groups, non government organisations and departmental field staff in five particularly disadvantaged districts. Working closely with villagers new approaches to raising agricultural productivity are being trialed.







## WOMEN TRIAL NEW CROPS AND COOPS

The women of Ulmera village on the coastal plains of the Liquica district west of Dili formed a self-help group with assistance from the ARPAPET project. They are trialing new ways of vegetable growing and chicken raising.

“We are used to raising chickens,” explains Augusta Pereira, the vice-head of the 21-strong group. “But before we just let them run around. Now, with a better system, we get more and bigger chickens.

“Some are for our own consumption and some we sell.

“We started two years ago with ten chickens to each family. Once a month we harvest some and today we’ve got 400 chickens.”

At the end of the village the women have built a communal garden. They are trying new ways of tending different vegetables. The sign on the gate explains their project. It reads *Sekolah Lapang Diversifikasi Pangan dan Gizi* - Field School for Food Diversification and Nutrition.

*Augusta Pereira, with one of Ulmera village's growing chicken population and with another member of the women's self help group in their new field school garden.*





"First we do a problem census and from there consider alternatives and priorities," explains the ARPAPET Community Development Adviser, Aurelio Guterres, an East Timorese graduate in community development from New Zealand's Massey University.

"It's for the village people to make it on their own," he says. "We just provide some simple assistance but right from the start in identifying the problems, it's the people who are doing it."

In the Liquica district three farmer groups have joined forces to trial incubators. Already they are seeing more than a doubling in the rate of hatching. And with training in basic marketing and in budgeting to establish the cost-effectiveness of using electricity, the farmers have high hopes for their fledgling chicken enterprise.

**At Rairobo village in the dry hills of the Bobonaro district, a farmers group is trialing new agricultural methods. In a fenced field above the village, they have**

**planted rows of local *gamal* and *turi* trees across the slope. It is a technique known as green fencing. The trees have the twin function of improving soil fertility and providing fodder for animals.**

"Before we did this the rains would wash the good soil away," explains Celestino dos Santos, the farmer group coordinator.

"We didn't realise that these trees could be used to save the soil as well as feed the animals. We just started one year ago but already we noticed that the quality of the maize was better where it grew next to the *gamal* trees."

"It's a small project," says Guterres. "But it serves as an example to other villages. People can see the results and it's simple, not sophisticated but simple things that they can do themselves."

"Before they didn't have much idea about soil conservation and traditionally they left the cows, buffalo and goats to wander in the bush. Now they can keep them close by and feed them the leaves from these trees. And as well, the trees are helping to conserve the soil."

The results of the crops have been good. Now we have to expand it to other villages."

The approach of working with focal villages is about to be extended to 10 of East Timor's 13 districts under a second phase of the ARPAPET project which will see the focus shift down from the provincial and district levels. Over the next two years AusAID will be supporting efforts of local people in villages and sub-district officials across the island to improve agricultural productivity and their role in official development planning.

"You can't do it the other way around," says Boyce. "You've got to train the senior government people first so they know what's coming to them."

*Celestino dos Santos (third from right), the coordinator of the Rairobo farmers group, says the green fencing technique has already improved their maize crop.*





# THE ICRC – PROMOTING HUMANITARIAN LAWS AND VALUES



*One of four new water taps installed at Riattu by the PMI/ICRC Operasi Water team.*

*Australia is one of the largest contributors to the East Timor operation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), an independent humanitarian organisation. Since 1982 AusAID grants have totalled \$4.6 million. In April, one of the first decisions of the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, was to authorise a grant of \$300 000. "I am committed to pursuing humanitarian issues internationally," Mr Downer said. "And AusAID's support of the ICRC is part of this ongoing commitment".*

The International Committee of the Red Cross spans the globe assisting victims of conflict and promoting international humanitarian law and values. Its strict adherence to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality mean that much of the ICRC's work goes unreported in public. The valuable behind the scenes work of ICRC officers — such as protecting victims of conflict, monitoring the treatment of political prisoners and providing lines of communication between prisoners and their families — depends on maintaining

professional relations with local and national authorities.

The ICRC first operated in East Timor in the late 1970s. At various times its work has involved distributing emergency relief supplies to victims of famine, liaising between military and state authorities and civilians, ensuring the proper treatment of security detainees and disseminating information on international humanitarian laws and principles.

In recent years the operation has grown and the ICRC now has a permanent office on the harbour front in Dili. It is home base for the five expatriate and over thirty Timorese staff.

When FOCUS visited the office, two of the staff had just returned from the town of Baucau where, days earlier, police and military personnel had clashed with protesters. The ICRC delegates reported very good cooperation from the authorities. They were able to visit privately with detainees and move freely around town to collect any stories of excessive behaviour and report them back to the local military

authorities. The first priority is always to ensure that any injured innocent civilians have access to medical care. Their visit to the hospital confirmed that all injuries had been treated. They also visited the prison to check on conditions there.

No details are provided. Simple questions — what had happened? how many detainees? what injuries? any excessive behaviour? — are met with polite, but silent, shrugs. Confidentiality is a key principle of the ICRC's operation.

Today, while the education, prison visits and civilian protection work continues to be important, the majority of the ICRC's resources in East Timor are devoted to development — public health and water services.

The development work is intertwined with the civilian protection functions. As the water and health teams move between projects in remote parts of the province, their public profile — the vehicles are prominently marked



*Nurse, Macario Faria da Silva, measuring the arm circumference of a child - a basic test of nutrition. PMI/ICRC health teams work closely with the water teams to monitor health conditions and deliver basic public health education in the villages.*

with the distinguishing red cross symbol — offers a form of passive protection and maintains a village-level communication network. The positive impact of the development projects also helps raise the reputation of the ICRC and presents further opportunity to promote humanitarian values.

## OPERASI PMI/ICRC

The ICRC's efforts in providing basic water systems in remote villages is a joint project with the Indonesian Red Cross (known by the Indonesian acronym, PMI).

Jean Vergain, the ICRC water technician, coordinates the work of 24 local staff who are organised into six teams. He also works closely with the nurses in the ICRC's public health program who

monitor the impact on communities and carry out education programs to maximise the benefits of the water systems.

Each PMI/ICRC water team has its own utility vehicle and basic equipment. When a water project has been identified, the team moves into the village and lives there until the project is complete, returning to Dili every couple of weeks for training and consultations.

"The water projects started in a small way in 1989," explains Vergain. "Today we have completed 42 projects and have another three under construction. Depending on the water source we use either small hand pumps or, in the hills, gravity-fed systems from natural springs."

The projects have a strong community and health focus.

"The first requirement is that the community requests our help," says Vergain. "The health team do an assessment of things like nutrition, scabies and diarrhoea and I do a technical evaluation based on the current availability of water, distance from a permanent source and so on.

"We work in small communities and have a particular focus on very remote villages.

"The main point is that it is the local people who make the project. They provide a house and look after the water team and they do the labour."

The PMI/ICRC provides the basic materials — the cement, pipes and fittings — and leave behind some simple tools and maintenance supplies. As well, a local community member works as part of the water team during construction — equipping him for the continuing responsibility for maintenance and repairs.



*The PMI/ICRC water team discussing a possible spring source for a new village system with the Kepala Desa (village head), Carlos Lemos, Estado village.*



## OLD STORIES FOR NEW WATER



*Maukua, the traditional 'king' of the kampong recounts ancient stories about water at an impromptu inauguration ceremony for their new water centre, Riattu village.*

We had taken the obligatory group photo of the water team and a throng of enthusiastic villagers and were preparing to say goodbye when a woman started beating on a small hand drum and singing. She was soon joined by another drummer and a young woman with a gong. Old men, traditional leaders of the *kampong* (small village), joined the women around the new water centre. A supply of betelnut and its accompanying lime powder and pepper leaves appeared and over the beat of the drums, one of the men addressed the crowd.

Seeking a handle on what was unfolding, I was told that 'the king' was telling traditional stories about water. Throughout his emphatic speech his gaze kept returning to a distant mountain.

Riattu is a small village of about 500 people, high in the mountains of Ermera district of central East Timor. We had arrived with Jean Vergain, the ICRC water technician. He was here to do the final water quality tests on the recently completed small gravity fed system. As expected, the water was fine — salinity levels and the flow rate proved positive.

The four man PMI/ICRC team — a leader, driver and two workers — are packed and ready to leave. They have been living in the *kampong* for the past five months, returning to Dili every second weekend. Vergain has visited every few weeks during construction of the water system, although he was here every day when they were putting in the headworks at a small natural spring over a kilometre away in the hills.

"It's the most critical part," explains Vergain. "It's fairly easy to wreck a natural spring when poking around."

They had dug a 28 metre trench across the face of the spring and put in place a perforated PVC collection pipe before back-filling with clean sand and gravel and protecting it with a concrete slab. The trench has lifted the flow rate from 2 litres a minute to over 110 litres per minute.

A sedimentation tank was built nearby. From there the water flows through 1.2 kilometres of steel pipe and a couple of flow regulation tanks before reaching the village where four public taps and a water centre including a laundry area and washrooms for men and women were constructed.

It has taken the best part of six months to finish the job. Today it is time for the final consultations with the landowner at the source — he was particularly happy with the extra tap installed near the sedimentation tank so he could wash his coffee beans — the *Kepala Desa* (village head) and traditional leaders.



*ICRC water technician, Jean Vergain, tests the quality of water from a natural spring which may be the source of a new water supply system in a nearby village.*

A walk along the pipe route through the coffee plantation confirmed that the concrete pipe supports are solid, the flow regulation tanks are doing their job and, at the other end, clean fresh water is flowing.

The water team is pulling out. The local young man who worked with them right through the planning and construction is ready to take over responsibility repairs and maintenance. With some basic tools left by the team, and his intimate knowledge of the system, he is well equipped for the job.

Soon nurses from the PMI/ICRC public health team will visit Riattu again. They will bring their message about basic cleanliness and check on the incidence of skin disease and other health indicators. As with other villages where a basic water system has been installed, they expect to find a quick decline in scabies and other diseases related to poor sanitation.

Even before the water distribution centre was finished — when the pipe was spilling water direct from the source — the health team had started educating the people of Riattu about the benefits of simple things like washing children and drying their clothes in the sun. Already they report a reduction in the incidence of scabies from 60 per cent of young people to 20 per cent. It is further proof that accessible clean water and some basic health education can radically improve lives.



*Inez Soares (left) and Leopoldina Faria test out the laundry facilities at the new water centre. In the foreground, PMI/ICRC water team members Augustino Maia Faria (left) and Angelino das Neves lend a hand to give Leoborio Martins a healthy scrub.*



## SMALL GRANTS ... BIG IMPACTS



*A small AusAID grant supported Carlos Tilman to be trained in the skills of specialist shoemaking at a rehabilitation centre in Java. He has now returned to Baucau where he makes shoes for lepers. His small workshop at the Leprosy Clinic run by the Sisters from the Congregation of the Infant Jesus was also equipped using funds from AusAID.*



*"These beds are courtesy of AusAID," said Sister Marlene, pictured here with AusAID officer Hilda Winarti in the dormitory of the Salesian Mission's vocational girls school at Venilale, in the hills of the eastern part of the island. The school, part of a complex including an orphanage and clinic, takes girls from all over the province and equips them with skills for work in the hospitality and clothing industries. Since 1990, AusAID has supported the Salesian Sisters with a number of small direct grants.*

*The Training Centre for Self Reliance Farmers at Dare Village in the hills above Dili is one of the beneficiaries of small assistance grants provided by AusAID to local community, church and non government organisations throughout East Timor. One grant was used to purchase cows which provide milk for the live-in staff and trainees, and for sale, generating a small income for the Centre. Young women and men, nominated by local churches, spend six months at the Centre learning techniques for self-reliant organic farming before returning to their home villages to put their skills into practice.*



*Angelina Lelo, with the help of a A\$500 loan and some small business training, has graduated from selling vegetables to the more prestigious and more lucrative work of running a small variety store at Bekoro Market, Dili. BSL Foundation field workers, Lily Benusu and Sebastiana Alves (right), make regular visits providing on-site continuing training and support. BSL is supported by the Australian non government organisation, Opportunity Foundation, which specialises in microenterprise development. An AusAID grant of \$5500 to BSL helped Angelina Lelo and other East Timorese by giving them a chance to set up small businesses.*

