

East Timor's School System still struggles with the basics

This is the title of an article published this September in *UCA News* [see <http://ucanews.com/news>]. The writer draws attention to the 'major problems of poor infrastructure, teacher quality, and language'.

Jose de Jesus, national co-ordinator for Education in Timor Leste comments that the issue is solvable if the recommendations of this year's World Education Forum in Korea were carried through. These include allotting between 15-20% of public expenditure on schooling. However, this year the Timor Leste Government set aside under 7% - less than Indonesia (18%), Thailand & Singapore (20%) Vietnam (21%) and Laos (15%).



A classroom in the Primary School of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ermera



Students sponsored by The Peter Trust at the Parish High School in Railaku with the Principal Fr Bert SJ, and PP Fr Bong SJ.

According to the World Bank the number of students enrolled in Timor Leste schools reached 364,000 in 2014 – a 50% rise since full political independence was achieved in 2002.

Eladio Faculto is a member of the parliamentary commission that oversees health and education matters. He remarks that, ideally, rising enrolment figures should be matched by improvements in infrastructure and services for students. 'But thirteen years after independence our education sector is still struggling with basic issues such as old and outworn infrastructure, teaching methods, and school facilities. In some villages elementary students are studying under trees, many school buildings across the country are in a dilapidated state, often without desks or chairs. Even in the capital

Dili a number of schools are old and in need of renovation and furnishing. Basic communication has become an issue: many teachers were trained under a system put in place by Indonesia which annexed the country after invading in 1975. They cannot teach in Tetum or in Portuguese, Timor Leste's official languages, and many students are demanding to learn (and be taught in) English – the most widely used language of commerce and international relations'.

The Catholic Church in Timor Leste provides the best education at all levels - but is not significantly assisted by the State. In August this year a Concordat was signed by the Government of Timor Leste and

Peter Trust Priorities

From its inauguration in 2001 *The Peter Trust* has prioritised projects in health and education. In this issue of *Update* we look at the continuing need in East Timor for our assistance in these areas.

the Vatican which, it is hoped, will have a positive effect on the country including its education sector.

Agustino dos Santos Goncalves, director of the Christal Foundation (one of the largest Catholic education institutions in Timor-Leste) has stated that 'if the government wants quality education it will have to give more opportunities and support to the Church'.

Since 2001 *The Peter Trust* has been giving direct support to teaching and learning from primary to tertiary levels of Church-organised education. It has provided significant funds for the purchase of teaching materials, classroom furniture, building repairs, and necessary improvements to sanitation arrangements. It has awarded many scholarships to

youngsters from the poorest families or the remotest villages so that they can access good quality education in Church schools, technical colleges, and other institutions of higher education. The need for our help very much continues and is of pressing importance. ■

Youngsters with Disability

The special needs of children and young people who suffer from physical disabilities or learning difficulties have also been addressed by *The Peter Trust* from its very beginnings. This has been a priority because the experience of those with physical or mental handicaps in Timor Leste is one of considerable neglect.

Such disabilities result from genetic factors, illnesses, and accidents. All too often the necessary care is lacking because many families are ashamed of their members who are so afflicted, or consider their condition to be the consequence of sinfulness - or of God's disfavour.

The latest (August 2015) Annual Report by RHTO (*Ra-es Hadomi Timor Oan – Care for Timorese Disabled Children*) > <http://dpo-rhto.wix.com/timor>) states:

'Timor Leste's Constitution explicitly provides for non-discrimination and equal treatment for persons with mental or physical disabilities. But in many communities around the country, stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities remains common.

Negative terms commonly used include *aleijadu* (crippled) and *ema bulak* (crazy person). This leads to people with disability feeling left



out and scared to participate in society. A study has found that such people may be shunned, ignored, driven from their communities, imprisoned in rooms or chained to objects to keep them out of sight.

'There is evidence that violence and neglect of children with disabilities is widespread in Timor Leste. There are examples of shackling ... and of children with disabilities being left in the family house all day without supervision, food, water, or means of communication.

'There are multiple barriers

ALMA Sisters with some of the disabled youngsters at their Hostel in Dili.

that prevent birth registration of children with disabilities – and an inability to get identity cards leads to major problems when children want to enter the school system.

'The latest published Census (2010) reported that 72% of people with disability in Timor Leste had never attended school. A 2011 Report identified a number of barriers to disabled children: inaccessible infrastructure, lack of assistive devices, and lack of training on

disability for teachers (and parents).

‘Children with sensory impairments such as those who are blind or deaf face particular difficulties in learning. Schools are not equipped to provide Braille materials or sign language interpretation and are not able to teach in these formats’.

For all these reasons *The Peter Trust* has, for over ten years, given special support to the dedicated work of the ALMA Sisters and to the Ahisaun Foundation established by Fr Adri Ola, a Diocesan priest who is now also the Director of Caritas Dili.

The ALMA Sisters specialise in care of those with disability and have established a large hostel in Dili which provides medication and therapy to afflicted children, and tuition for their families on appropriate care, and - importantly - a sense of personal worth and dignity to both the parents and their offspring.

The Ahisaun foundation provides a



Some residents, with Fr Adri Ola, at the Ahisaun Hostel for Disabled Young People in Dili.

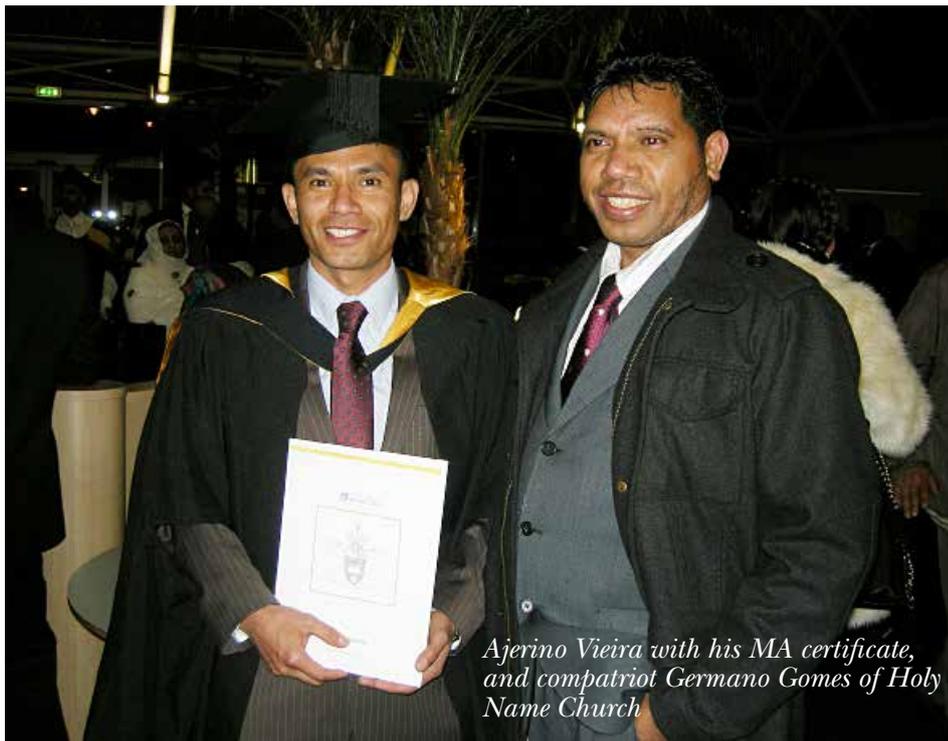
residential facility for handicapped teenagers and young adults with opportunities there for them to learn (and teach) Information Technology, shoemaking/repair, the organisation of a small general store or kiosk and, in the hostel

grounds, to cultivate fruit and vegetables for their own meals. The residents also undertake a spiritual ministry in a specially-appointed chapel within the premises, praying for and with anyone who has any pressing personal needs. ■

Peter Trust Agent in Timor

The Trustees have recently appointed a local Agent, Ajerino do Carmo Vieira, to report on our projects in East Timor, and to assist Timorese in making applications to the Trust for our support. Ajerino has himself been a beneficiary of Trust funds as we supported him during his studies at the University of Bradford. In 2013 he was awarded a BA (Hons), and then in 2014 an MA, in Peace and Development.

Ajerino returned to Dili last December, seeking appropriate work with the Timor Leste Government, the United Nations, or a Non-Governmental Organisation. Besides working for *The Peter Trust* from this September, Ajerino is also currently giving lessons in basic English to his compatriots. ■



Ajerino Vieira with his MA certificate, and compatriot Germano Gomes of Holy Name Church

East Timorese in Leeds & Bradford

More young Timorese have come to live in Leeds this year - about 50 are known to us - and there are also now two small groups – twelve persons in all – in Bradford.

They have come here seeking work to provide for their families because in East Timor there are diminishing opportunities for employment due to the high birth rate and lack of local industry and commerce.

We are grateful to parishioners of Our Lady of Kirkstall for their help in finding work for these young men and for assisting them to register with the NHS and for National Insurance, with the setting up of bank accounts, and in the provision of dental care.



East Timorese now living and working in Bradford



Many thanks to all our donors!

The Trustees, pictured opposite, express their deepest appreciation to all who have contributed and are contributing to the Peter Trust funds.



l-r (back) Eddie Lumley; Kevin Grundey (Treasurer); Michael O'Donnell; Fr Pat Smythe (Secretary); Simon Myers (Chairman); Philip Stewardson; l-r (front) Norah Small, Laura Lumley; Philomena Moreland

Despite some creditable developments East Timor remains the poorest country in SE Asia and one of the four poorest in the world - so a little financial help goes a long way.

- Every donation of whatever amount significantly improves conditions for the people.