



Water for the hungry months

Sponsoring clubs: Rotary Club of Doncaster Inc, Rotary Club of Lilydale
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Project Summary

In Timor Leste, rainfall is the main source of water for human consumption, sanitation and horticultural applications for much of the community, particularly in smaller remote villages. Despite the island country being located in the tropics, significant rain events only take place between November and March. The remainder of the year is primarily regarded as a dry or low rainfall period when access to water is confined to surface waters in rivers, occasional dam and similar (scarce) retaining structures and underground springs. The locals refer to this time as the “hungry months”, a time when they face daily food shortages and starvation.

“Water for the Hungry Months” is a humanitarian project jointly run by the Rotary Clubs of Doncaster and Lilydale aimed at providing reliable access to water for drinking and sanitation at a village community level. Clean water is of particular concern in a country where infant mortality is extremely high (4.75%) and life expectancy low (less than 3% of the population is over 65), much of this due to poor hygiene and water borne pathogens.

Previous hydrological survey works have identified the presence of shallow aquifers through parts of the country and preliminary testing indicates that this water is suitable for consumption. This project can provide access to these aquifers by drilling bores through largely limestone and compacted coral upper layers to reach the water bodies. If sufficient water is located, any excess above that required for drinking and sanitation needs may be used to improve agricultural practice and yield, particularly in the dry months. Water for the Hungry Months has a focus on working with smaller, more isolated villages, orphanages, schools, hospitals and institutions for handicapped or disabled.

Location of the drill hole and pump will be on communal land with free access to the site by the villagers. The hole will be cased and secured to practices currently followed in Australia and all steps will be taken to prevent aquifer contamination. Access to the aquifer water will be via hand pumps to keep wastage low, to contain capital and on-going maintenance costs, to ensure effort is input from users and hence a sense of ownership, and to protect the aquifer from overuse.

Of great importance is the need for early involvement of local communities and village leaders prior to starting any works in these communities. Once the need is established and partnership formed, continuing local support is essential to allow free access this water source and ensure local community ownership.

Water for the Hungry Months will to provide access to existing aquifers through a cooperative drilling program with the local villagers and deliver access to a clean, reliable water supply.

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Additional sources of information of interest

<http://www.maf.gov.tl/>

Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries East Timor

<http://www.consallen.com/forager/cable-tool/>

Drilling rig

www.aciar.gov.au/publication/PR113

Aust Government report on weather, rainfall and agriculture in East Timor

