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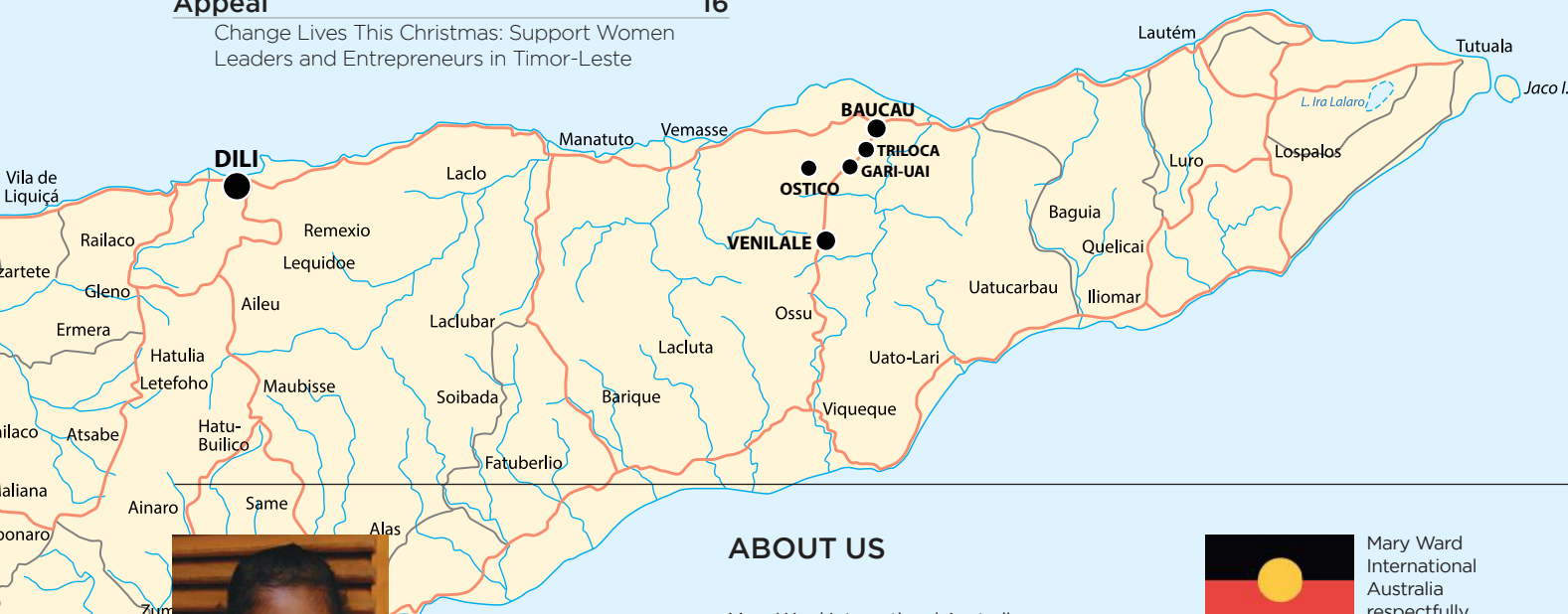
Sustain



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Change Lives This Christmas: Support Women Leaders and Entrepreneurs in Timor-Leste



COVER*

Loreto Pre-Primary School in Gari-uai, Timor-Leste.

**Consent for all imagery of children and young people used in this publication has been received.*

Reflection

Rosalina Belo IBVM

My name is Rosalina Belo. I come from a mountain area near Baucau called Matebian. I made my first profession on 15 August this year and am the first Timorese Loreto Sister.

The presence of the Loreto sisters in Timor-Leste is very important for us because many women and girls have no freedom to speak up for what they need. I trust that the Loreto Sisters, inspired by the spirit of Mary Ward, will make a great difference.

As Mary Ward said, "There is no such difference between women and men, that women too can make a difference". I am so happy to see that some women are now making a difference in many areas of life, and to see groups of women having the courage to start new initiatives thanks to the support of Mary Ward International Australia and the Loreto Sisters.

I thank God for the Loreto Sisters in Timor-Leste and pray that they continue to inspire many communities with the spirit of Mary Ward.

ABOUT US

Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA) is a registered charity and is the Australian and global development organisation of the Loreto Sisters. Our Mission is to support the Loreto Sisters and the broader MWIA network as we work with women and communities to transform unjust structures and reduce poverty and oppression, primarily through formal and non-formal education.



Mary Ward International Australia respectfully acknowledges

all Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of Australia. We pay respect to their Elders, past and present, and young leaders of today and the future. Mary Ward International Australia commits itself to the ongoing work of reconciliation with our First Nations families and communities.



Message from the EO

A Courageous Journey

In 2002, Sister Mary Wright, then the global leader of the Loreto Sisters, issued a call to action - the 'Courage to Move.' This initiative implored every Province to assess the needs of their neighbouring disadvantaged countries, urging Loreto Sisters worldwide to transcend borders and reignite their missionary spirit.

Central to this call was the Mary Ward charism, which aims to create a more just world that upholds dignity and equal opportunities for all, especially women and children. This vision led to the establishment of new roots in countries like Zambia, South Sudan, and for our Province of Australia and South East Asia, Timor Leste.

Fast forward two decades, and Loreto Sisters from Australia, Vietnam, and India continue their unwavering service to the people of Timor-Leste.

Mary Ward International Australia, alongside our philanthropic-minded Loreto schools and supporters, has been an integral part of this journey. Together, we've successfully constructed a thriving preschool and a community development centre in Gariuai. In neighbouring Ostico, we collaborate with the local community to ensure access to clean water, fresh food, and small business opportunities.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of visiting Timor-Leste for the first time, accompanied by our Projects and Partnerships Manager, Kirstin Del Beato. Despite the backdrop of political campaigns leading up to national elections, it became evident why the

United Nations ranks Australia as number 5 in the world and Timor at a concerning 140 in terms of human development indicators, including life expectancy, literacy, and per capita income. Our visit to this beautiful land left us resolute in our commitment to bridging this significant gap.

Upon our return, it was clear that we needed to forge stronger partnerships with existing women's collectives, enhancing their capabilities and ensuring sustainability through purposeful education, income-generating activities, and community development programs.

We firmly believe that strong women equal strong communities, and further investment in education will help individuals reach their full potential. Improving education will drive economic growth and create employment opportunities, ultimately leading to healthier families and communities.

This edition of *Sustain* narrates the stories of Loreto and Mary Ward International's journeys in Timor while sharing our aspirations to continue being a part of its future as an independent nation.

We hope these accounts inspire you, just as the resilient people of Timor-Leste inspired us.

Hannah George
Executive Officer, MWIA

MARY WARD INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

PO Box 4082, Auburn South, VIC 3122

Ph: 03 8832 0411 **E:** mwiaustralia@loreto.org.au

www.mwia.org.au



Executive Officer: Hannah George

Ph: 0448 393 479 **E:** hannah.george@loreto.org.au

ACCOUNTABILITY & ACCREDITATION

MWIA is a full member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). We are committed and fully adhere to the ACFID Code of Conduct, managing our work with transparency, accountability and integrity. MWIA is an approved organisation under the Overseas Aid Gift Deduction Scheme (OAGDS) and endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient.





Forging a **Future**

Sr Diaan Stuart ibvm

From the sisters who volunteered to go to Timor-Leste, three sisters; Anne Byrne, Anne Kelly who had previous experience in war torn Uganda, and Diaan Stuart were missioned.

Anne Byrne and Diaan went to work in the Catholic Teachers' College in Baucau while Anne Kelly remained in Dili engaged by local agencies, such as *Fundasaun Alola* that focused on promoting women's rights to good health, education and employment. Anne travelled across the country offering support and resources to teachers, most of whom had never been trained.

In her final two years she was employed as an English teacher by various NGOs and government ministers. Anne Byrne used her musical talent teaching music for two years, while I was responsible for the professional development of staff at the College for eight years, before moving to the village of Gari-uai and opening the preschool there.

In early 2006, our plane from Darwin was a nineteen-seater with a packet of chips, a Mars bar and a can of drink for breakfast. Flying over Timor we saw that the country consists of high mountain ranges bisected by rivers forming deep valleys that are spectacular and which contrasted on landing with the devastation of Dili.

In Dili many charred buildings were a legacy of the Indonesian retreat. The road to Baucau was appalling and I remember thinking that I never wanted to travel that road again. Little did I imagine that I would be driving it regularly in a manual, four-wheel drive Hilux ute.

We discovered that the Indonesians had even removed the wires from the electricity poles and when we settled in Baucau, that they had also destroyed the water system. All the villages along the route had suffered major damage, some worse than others.

Other first impressions were the beginning of reconstruction, very gradually replacing the bamboo, grasses and reed homes with home-made concrete bricks, but retaining the outside cooking area. Women and children carried water in plastic bottles and washing on their heads to the stream. Children walked long distances to school while some school-aged girls missed an education as they cared for younger siblings while their mothers worked in the fields or markets. One child I passed each morning often used me as a distraction for her crying baby sister.

Food was seasonal, scarce and bought from the footpath market in the centre of Baucau. There was no running water apart from the springs and in the beginning, electricity came on between seven and ten if we were lucky. There appeared to be high unemployment especially among the youth yet despite this, we found the people were very friendly and so happy to have achieved independence but at cost.

Religion was important to the people and the Catholic Church was influential in all levels of society.

A strong head start

Kirstin Del Beato

MWIA Projects & Partnerships Manager

Loreto Sisters Margie Bourke and Diaan Stuart first took up residence in Gari-uai in August 2014 after consultation with local community leaders eager to improve educational standards for the youngest members of their community.

With the support of Sisters Natalie Houlihan and Francine Roberts living in nearby Baucau, Loreto quickly went about establishing a preschool, initially housed in the community hall until the new, purpose-built school was completed in late 2017 in the heart of Gari-uai.

Since it first opened its doors in 2015, the preschool, Centro Loreto, has played an important role in the community. While its core function is to educate the children of Gari-uai, the attached community centre also provides a place for adults to gather and participate in non-formal education and training.

Today, Centro Loreto still operates under the guidance of the Loreto Sisters Australia and South East Asia, but over the past few years it has successfully transitioned to a local leadership model, with a Timorese director at the helm and local teachers in each classroom.

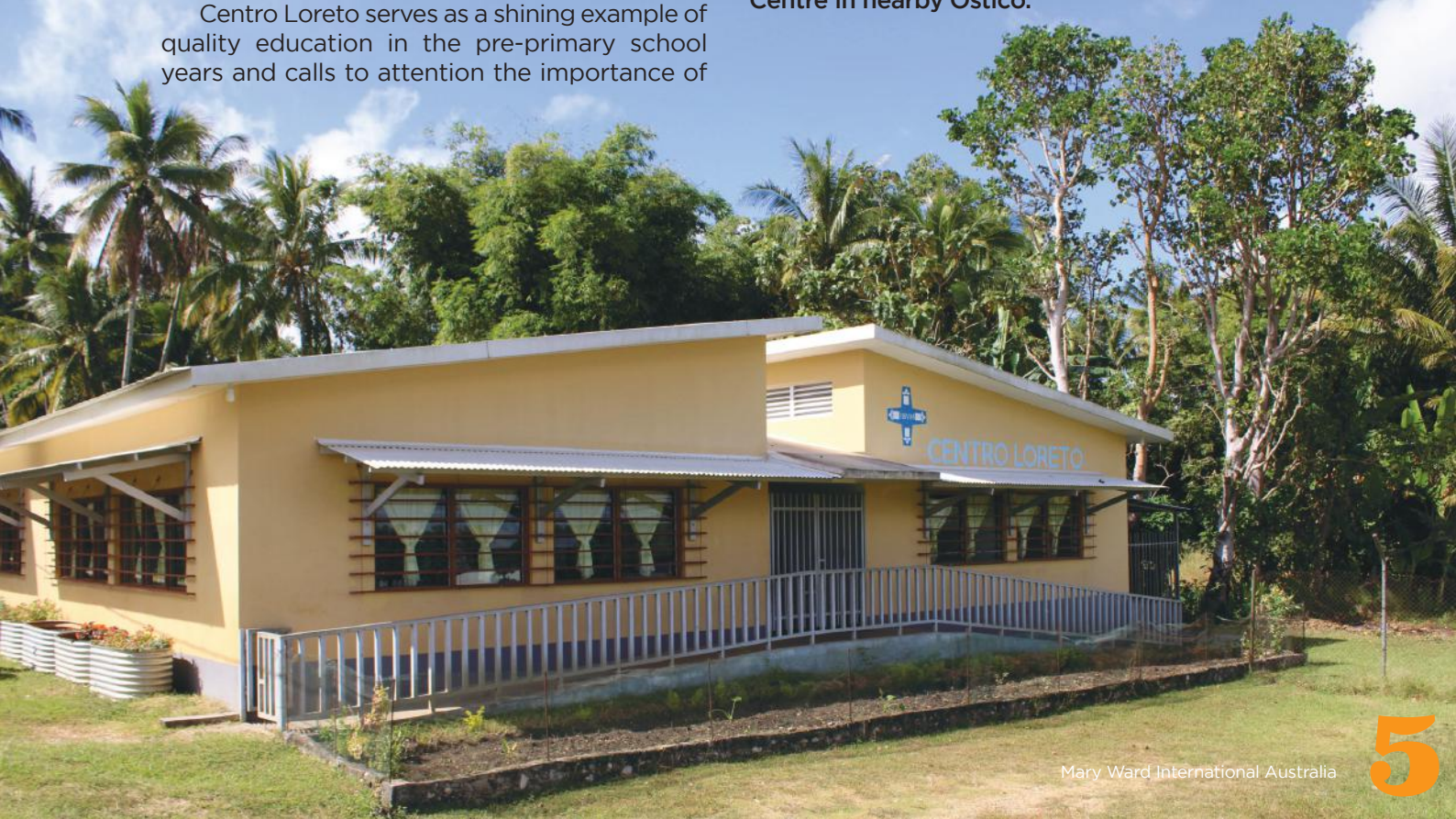
Centro Loreto serves as a shining example of quality education in the pre-primary school years and calls to attention the importance of

school readiness. Each year, 70 children attend the preschool. Those graduating do so with a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy and well-developed social and emotional skills, ready for the academic journey ahead of them.

The Loreto Sisters continue to support local staff to conduct quality adult education programs at the community centre and in the past few years, Centro Loreto has served as a hub for the delivery of sustainable livelihoods and health programs. Over the coming year English lessons and sewing workshops will be held, in addition to more wide-ranging health education classes.

It is with great anticipation that we look forward to Centro Loreto flourishing under local leadership, while remaining grounded in Loreto values and a fundamental desire to create just and sustainable change with women, children and communities.

Mary Ward International Australia and the Loreto Sisters extend our sincere appreciation to the Noel and Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation for funding the construction of Centro Loreto and the Loreto Community Centre in nearby Ostico.



On the road with

Mary Ward International Australia

Follow Hannah and Kirstin's recent journey to Timor-Leste. Amid the hustle of national elections, they embarked on a remarkable road trip to visit MWIA-supported communities and meet the inspiring people behind them.



MWIA Projects & Partnerships Manager, Kirstin Del Beato and Executive Officer, Hannah George in Timor-Leste.

Day 1 - MELBOURNE TO DILI

Early morning Melbourne-to-Dili flight via Adelaide and Darwin. Lots of election observers on the flight – getting ready for the highly-anticipated Presidential election on Sunday. Met our driver and translator extraordinaire Zu at the airport. Grabbed supplies and then headed off via road from Dili to Baucau ... arriving just as the sun set. Thrilled to finally be here. Looking forward to meeting the strong women working in their communities across this part of Timor-Leste.



Day 2 - DILI TO BAUCAU

A quick stop by the market in Baucau's old town before meeting with some of the area's women shifting attitudes, creating opportunities for independence, and amplifying female voices. Initial briefing / planning meet with Regina de Sousa (pictured bottom right), Director of the *Servisu Asaun Sosiál Munisípiu Baucau* (Baucau Municipal Department of Social Welfare) and

Teresa Pereira, Executive Director of *Centro Feto Haburas Dezenvolvimentu* (Centre for Women's Development), before heading off to learn more about the great work being led by organisations such as *Uma Esperansa* (House of Hope), *Uma Pás* (House of Peace) and *Lafaek Diak* (the Good Crocodile).





Journey of Joy and Connection: Loreto College Coorparoo's Timor-Leste Immersion Experience

By Audrey Chrismas

Year 11 Student - Loreto College Coorparoo

Fifteen students and three staff from Loreto College Coorparoo travelled to Timor-Leste in September this year to learn more about the country's people and culture as part of the College's immersion program.

The group spent time in the Loreto communities during this time, learning from and connecting with the Loreto sisters, school communities and their broader networks.

We visited the Loreto preschool in Gari-uai, where we were warmly welcomed by the students and teachers. The Coorparoo teachers allowed us to take reign of the class, where we had fun teaching the children songs, dances and games. It bought joy and felicity to everyone as we played Duck Duck Goose and watched the children running around while laughing. The children enthusiastically engaged in the songs and activities including learning the alphabet song to singing and dancing to Heads, Shoulder, Knees and Toes. Despite the language barrier, the children communicated with us through their huge smiles whenever we walked into the room and the sounds of laughter that filled the room during our lessons.

In Ostico, the group was again privileged to teach at the local primary school in the company of the Loreto Sisters. While at the school the group witnessed the kind and caring manner of the sisters' interaction with the children. The Loreto Sisters demonstrated hospitality and generosity to us as they welcomed us into their home and showed us around their beautiful village. While making bracelets, we learned about the amazing work they are doing in their community. It was obvious they are living the charisma of Mary Ward in all they do.

Travelling to Timor-Leste gave us the opportunity to see the life-changing work that Mary Ward International Australia is doing, reinforcing the admiration we have of organisation and the Sisters, and made us even prouder of being members of the Loreto community.

Day 3 - BAUCAU TO VENILALE

The roosters ensured we were up bright and early. Only a few more days before Timor-Leste's Parliamentary elections and truckloads of political campaigners are out in full force. Drove south to Venilale to visit women's co-operative *Group Tais Buka Moris* (Livelihood Weaving Group).

All the women members are widows. The leader is Josefina Soares Guterres, whose father and brother were taken by the Indonesian military in the 1980s during the occupation. They were never heard of again.

The women weave traditional cloth into *tais*, using methods passed down through generations of women. Income generated from the sales is divided into three – one-third reinvested to buy new materials, one-third to cover household expenses, and one-third on their children's education.

Morning tea was green banana and sweet potato and a fresh salsa made of tomatoes, chillies, onion and coriander – all from their local garden. The coffee was incredible and was

made with their own beans, dried naturally in the sun – we could see a pile drying when we walked in. Tree to cup AND no food miles.



Day 4 - VENILALE TO GARI-UAI

Off to Gari-uai to see the preschool school and community centre. What a great example of raising educational standards. We were treated to a special performance by the children, who were clearly thriving in their surrounds.

We said a quick hello to Sister Selvi and a group of local women she was meeting with in the attached community centre before getting ready to head back to Dili for the long weekend.



Day 5 - GARI-UAI TO DILI



A temporary farewell to the wonderful women and smiling faces of Baucau. Back to Dili we head, amid the final hours of campaigning to be greeted by this nation's young celebrating 21 years of the birth of Timor-Leste.

Day 6 - RESTORATION OF INDEPENDENCE DAY IN DILI

Timor-Leste celebrates its Restoration of Independence Day! This day has special importance to the people of this young country because of the decades long, bloody conflict it took to finally achieve independence in 2002.

On 20 May 2002, Timor-Leste became the first new sovereign state of the 21st Century. This calls for a long walk around Dili – topped off by a chance photo opportunity with the nation's President, José Ramos-Horta!





Lifting spirits through opportunity

Sr Margaret Mary Flynn ibvm

Having moved in March this year to our new formation house in Ostico, we are delighted that, thanks to the very generous support of the Noel and Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, the building includes spaces for the wider village community to gather and engage in development opportunities.

As well as a training/meeting room, we have a wonderful, open, very welcoming space for the community to join us for planning conversations, larger gatherings or just to 'drop in' for a more relaxed chat.

All this has proved such a blessing for us, as so quickly we have been welcomed into the Ostico community and feel so very much part of it.

So far, we have had a variety of planning meetings with the farming community to discuss their needs and agree on plans for ongoing agricultural development; with community leaders and a Timor-based company regarding an Australian Government tender for using off-grid power to pump underground water to a village and its surrounding farms; with other NGOs based in the Baucau area; and with local Parish leaders and members.

The meeting room also has weekly English classes echoing off the walls, plus the voices of young children who come twice a week to sing songs mostly in English (a great way to start to learn a new language!), and it is soon to host sewing classes offered by World Vision to a group of local women, and workshops on health and nutrition.

We have also been delighted to host 15 women who are part of a government-appointed group to evaluate government decisions in terms of justice for the wider community. They were very moved when they realised their values aligned so strongly with Mary Ward's!

The larger space has offered hospitality to groups large and small, including the village celebration of Mary in the month of May; a group of students and teachers (20 in all) from Loreto College Coorparoo for a meal and lively dancing the Timor-Leste way; and a shared celebratory lunch for 150 following the first profession of our first Timorese sister, Rosalina Belo – all cooked by members of the Ostico community.

We are so grateful to be here in Ostico – in a beautiful setting, a house offering so much opportunity and a local community that has so warmly embraced us into their lives. We trust our presence will help to lift the spirits, capacity and livelihoods of many members of this simple, impoverished, warm and welcoming Ostico community.

Interested in volunteering in Timor-Leste?

Please email mwiaustralia@loreto.org.au with your CV and an expression of interest detailing your skills, experience and availability.



Day 7 - ELECTION DAY IN DILI

Election Day! After centuries of colonisation and occupation, the people of Timor-Leste celebrate the opportunity to head to the polls - proudly holding up their ink-stained fingers as a symbol of freedom.

Day 8 - DILI TO GARI-UAI

Met with our Jesuit friends as well as the Caritas team in Timor Leste, headed by the wonderful Fernando Pires. The team shared they use an accompaniment model of work, focusing on localisation, local ownership and capacity-strengthening.

Much to learn and ponder from our in-country colleagues as we head back east to Gari-uai and Ostico.





On the path to prosperity

Kaithlyn McNab
MWIA Administration Officer

LIFE-CHANGING WATER ACCESS

Every day, the women and girls of Ostico endured the task of lugging dozens of plastic bottles to a contaminated stream. The journey was only the beginning; once they returned home, the water had to be boiled before it could be considered safe to use. It was a relentless process that consumed their time and energy, forcing them to walk many kilometres each day.

But this resilient community recognised the urgent need for better quality, more accessible water, not just to ease their daily toil but also to enhance their overall quality of life. The initial hurdle was locating a reliable water source as Ostico sits atop a limestone plateau, making it difficult to tap into the water supply flowing beneath them.

Undeterred, the community pressed on. They surveyed the women to better understand their needs. Once the elusive water source was discovered, Mary Ward International Australia funded the construction of a bore and a network of tanks to distribute clean water throughout the entire community. The construction of underground pipes, a collaborative effort with the community, delivered bore water to a towering reservoir, which in turn supplied smaller tanks and farmlands.

The transformation meant that approximately 500 families in Ostico no longer had to cart dirty water from a distant stream; instead, they enjoyed access to uncontaminated water year-round. These modest tanks, nestled within the village, became beacons of hope for the women who had long endured the burden of fetching water for their daily cooking and washing needs.

The construction of an external laundry facility eliminated the need for women to transport water for washing – not only enhancing their daily lives but also provided a gathering place, fostering a sense of community and improving overall well-being.

In Ostico, the journey from carrying plastic bottles to a contaminated stream to enjoying the benefits of clean water and enhanced opportunities embodies the remarkable transformation of a resilient community determined to uplift its members and embrace a brighter future.

THE ANSWER TO AGRIBUSINESS

In Ostico, an agricultural co-operative of 13 families spearheaded by local farmer Juliano, has also proved transformative for the community.

This endeavour, nestled within fertile land, recognised the power of joining forces. Individually, each family yielded limited produce, and the prospect of working the fields alone didn't appeal to many.

Recognising the potential for collective economic opportunity, Mary Ward International Australia supporters covered the cost of a new tractor, revolutionising the farming landscape by enabling the families to plough expanses of land previously untapped.

Crops sown on the newly enlarged farmland have generated bountiful harvests. The farm also thrives from a regular supply of water provided by the new water infrastructure funded by MWIA, enabling crop rotation and yielding a wider variety of vegetables.

The diversity of crops cultivated is inspiring, offering both sustenance and variety to the community. From tomato and cucumber to chili, pumpkin, sweet potato, watermelon, lettuce, papaya, choko and cassava, the harvest is a testament to Ostico's agricultural capability.

The impact has been profound. Families have not only secured a reliable source of food but also a surplus to generate income through sales at markets from nearby Baucau, all the way to the capital Dili. The families then reinvest these earnings into their co-operative, ensuring its sustainability and growth.

Francisco, the farm's coordinator, is equipped with an agriculture degree. He explores innovative and modern farming techniques that could be applied in Ostico, further enhancing productivity.

This initiative is a family affair, with dedicated members contributing their time and expertise. Their collective pride in their accomplishments fuels their desire to achieve even more. It not only nourishes bodies but also nurtures the community spirit, setting Ostico on a path of enduring prosperity.

Day 9 - OSTICO

Ostico here we are! After over two years of watching the challenges of construction during a global pandemic from afar, it was amazing to finally be standing in the centre, walking through its cooling and calming corridors, sharing our adventures and laughs with the Sisters over delicious local fare, and drifting off to sleep to the sound of crickets through open windows.



Day 10 - OSTICO

Early morning adventures in Ostico. Joined by Sister Margaret Mary and Loreto novices Athy and Octa, we embarked on a mission to discover the achievements and needs of this incredible community.

We witnessed the potential of Ostico's agribusiness – talk about MWIA supporters cultivating growth! We were inspired to help them flourish and expand their market reach. Supermarkets await!

Then on to see the new bore water system embraced by the locals. With the help of MWIA supporters, the community now has clean, accessible water – plus two simple outdoor laundries!

Water is life, and the community is now seeking expert advice on using off-grid power to collect and store this vital resource and to ensure a reliable water supply for future agricultural endeavours.



Day 11 - OSTICO to TRILOCA

First stop – Hamelale, where 11 inspiring women have formed a cooperative that radiates unity. Sporting matching t-shirts, they are definitely making waves in the community. By funding the construction of a new chicken coop and incubator to boost production, we can be part of ensuring their small business enterprise, and therefore financial independence, is a success. Let's celebrate the incredible power of these women.

Next we called into HAFUCO, a cooperative located in Triloka and run by Maria Tilman. Here they make for sale banana and sweet potato chips from their own-grown produce. We learnt that many in the wider community and region visit to learn from the group about setting up their own cooperatives.

That and Maria's sessions on nutrition for new and soon-to-be mothers means they are a busy group.

Strong women equal strong communities indeed!

Ready to make a difference?

Join our movement to create lasting change and empower this vibrant community. Together, with the support of MWIA and compassionate individuals like you, we can transform dreams into reality.



Women leading the way

HAMELALE, SUCO OSTICO

In Timor-Leste, a highly patriarchal society, the opportunity for women to engage in any form of economic activity is constrained by the expectation that they will prioritise child-rearing duties and household chores more than anything else.

But many women in Timor-Leste are ready to change the power dynamic in pursuit of their own financial independence. It was from this desire that the idea of Hamelale grew. What began two years ago as a few friends attending a business workshop together, has now become a small-scale farming cooperative located in Ostico.

Hamelale, meaning 'through the long grass', is a group of 11 emerging female leaders in the region who already serve as role models to those around them. The women currently run a poultry farm, a small food production business, and a savings and loan scheme. They are keen to scale-up their business to further support themselves and their community.

Kirstin Del Beato

MWIA Projects & Partnerships Manager

Mary Ward International Australia is committed to working with Hamelale as they expand their business, specifically by funding the construction of a new chicken house to increase poultry production and maximise their wholesale and retail opportunities. In addition, MWIA will support Hamelale with business skills development training to strengthen their growing organisation.





HAFUCO, SUCO TRILOCA

In a society where men are generally viewed as the decision-makers, it was refreshing to meet with Maria Idalina da Costa Tilman, a local entrepreneur and leader of HAFUCO (*Haburas Futuru Comunidade* - Growing the Future with the Community group).

Since HAFUCO was established over a decade ago, it has supported women to improve the economy, education and health of the community. While HAFUCO's activities include agricultural production and the manufacture of vegetable chips and noodles, they also deliver maternal and child health training. As almost 50

per cent of children under five years of age in Timor-Leste suffer from some form of malnutrition, the importance of this training should not be underestimated.

Mary Ward International Australia's commitment to HAFUCO over the coming year will focus on supporting the construction of a purpose-built training facility. This will help Maria and the group deliver vital health and nutrition training to a wider audience, including students from various Timor-Leste universities who visit HAFUCO as part of their field work.





Change lives this Christmas:

Support Women Leaders and Entrepreneurs in Timor-Leste

In the heart of Timor-Leste, remarkable women are paving the way towards a brighter future. They are striving to overcome poverty, create opportunities, and build self-sufficient communities. However, the path isn't easy. Poverty, inequality, and limited access to education and work opportunities are daily realities for many women in Timor-Leste, particularly in rural areas.

Yet, these women are not deterred. They are the change-makers, the leaders, the trailblazers of their communities. With your support, we can empower them to overcome barriers, earn a fair income, and lead their communities out of poverty.

Whether you can give a little or a lot, your contribution will make a significant difference. A donation of \$50 could fund business skills development training for one woman, while \$500 could contribute to the construction of a new chicken house, boosting poultry production and community income. Your support is not just a donation; it's an investment in women's potential. Together, we can create a ripple effect of change that extends beyond individuals to whole communities.

Here is my special Christmas gift of:

☐ \$50	☐ \$100
☐ \$200	☐ \$500
☐ \$1000	
Custom Amount ☐ \$	

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CHEQUE: ☐ My cheque/money is enclosed, made payable to MWIA.

CREDIT CARD: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

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☐ I wish to receive future correspondence by email.

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Thank you for supporting communities in Timor-Leste.