# Visit to Timor-Leste by WET President

## Launch of WET-funded Water Supply Project in Taurema, September 2022

During the plane’s decent from Darwin into Dili, the capital of Timor Leste, it became evident to me just how mountainous the island of Timor actually is. It was an eye opener to see the landscape from above. It was mountain range after mountain range, and it was beneficial for me to see this from above because I then travelled across the island on some of the worst roads I have ever travelled on.

Our WET Committee of Management member and head of the Bakhita Water Team, Eddie Da Pina, collected me from my hotel in Dili at 6.00 am in a 4-wheel drive vehicle to drive us to the remote village of Taurema, approximately 150 kilometres away.

The roads outside Dili steadily became worse and worse as the bitumen became less and less, eventually becoming dirt roads. Many potholes within them were deep and wide and in parts the mountainous sides of these roads had given way. The speed at which we had to travel was slow, dangerous, shuddering and often involved sharing the road with cattle, goats, chickens, roosters and dogs!! The journey was bone crunching and took almost 6 hours!!! We met up with local parish priest Father Helio along the way, as Taurema was located within his parish and he was invited to bless the project’s longevity prior to turning on the tap.

Upon arrival at Taurema the village chief and villagers were waiting for us at the entrance to the village. Many had dressed in their best clothes for the occasion, and Eddie had stated that many villagers had not seen a westerner before. I was presented and honoured with a Tais (a Timorese woven scarf) and treated like a dignitary to highlight their gratefulness and gratitude. We were given a warm welcome and introduction to the village chefe, or chief, who walked us around the village and introduced us to the village elders. Thankfully Eddie was with me to translate from Tetun to English, although expressions on faces said a lot and there were smiles al round! It was a joyous occasion!

The time came for the official turning on of the tap of the new water supply.

Father Helio blessed the tap stands and said a few prayers, and following the prayers I spoke on behalf of all Water East Timor members, friends and supporters – in particular Frances and Martin Sheean from Bendigo Australia who provided the funds for this project. I spoke of my deepest pleasure in assisting the villagers to live an easier life by not having to ferry water from a spring kilometers away.

I was asked to cut the rope which had been placed around the main tap stand. I spoke of our good fortune in Australia to be able to access water so easily within and outside of our homes and sincerely hoped that these tap stands within the village will enable their lives to be that little easier. I wished them a healthier life, while Eddie translated what I was saying into Tetun.

The ceremony touched me deeply and I could feel my heart open widely, reinforcing just how fortunate I was to live the life I live in Australia having so much available to me whilst others struggle and exist from day to day. It also reinforced to me personally the importance of continuing to help others less fortunate than us to improve their health outcomes and raise their living standards.

Following the visit to Taurema, Eddie drove to the village of Letefoho to show me the school where WET had undertaken a project which involved improving the facilities within the school toilet block.

Upon arrival a group of 12 school children standing at the main gate greeted us by singing Timorese songs as a welcome. Eddie introduced me as the President of WET and I was welcomed once again with a Tais as a sign of their welcome.

Their sense of community impressed me greatly. Two former students who had attended the school went on to attend University in Dili to study teaching and had come back to their village to teach at the school where they had learnt. A tour of the school followed before leaving for the Bakhita Centre before returning to Dili.

We arrived back in Dili around 8.00 pm! The day was long and the rewards were plenty.

The Timorese people have a strong sense of pride in their culture and independence for which they fought so hard for with many lives lost in the oppression and violence in their history. The country is still a low income and fragile one with pressing development needs. A large part of the population (many in rural and remote areas) face food insecurity and significant gaps in health, education and infrastructure. A sizeable portion of the population still live off the land.

I am proud to be a part of the support WET provides to Timor Leste and having seen all of the above has inspired me to continue to do what I can for a truly wonderful and proud people who can teach us a lot about humanity, belief, resilience and a hard fought independence!

**NOTE:**

*Greta Perry, WET President, visited Timor-Leste and Taurema at her own expense. No WET funds were used for her travel. In-country travel support was provided by Eddie de Pina and the Bakhita Centre.*