

Baucau Timor Leste

Report to Yarra City Council on the recent visit to Timor Leste



Aldo Malavisi
Yarra City Council

Visit to Baucau Timor Leste

28 April – 10 May 2019

Purpose of visit to Baucau Timor Leste

The recent visit to Baucau, Timor Leste was jointly organised between the Friends of Baucau (FoB) and the Darebin Neighbourhood House Network (DNHN). Their main purpose of the visit was to broaden, develop and strengthen friendship relationships between women's groups and organisations in the Baucau district and women in the Darebin community as represented by FoB and DNHN. The visit supported the objective of extending the long-term friendship relationship of mutual exchange, learning and resource sharing in order to improve the wellbeing and capacity of communities in Timor Leste, in particular women and their families in the Baucau sub-district.

Yarra City Council has had a long standing relationship with FoB (from 2000) and the relationship has gone through several iterations though FoB has always been supported by the Cities of Yarra and Darebin. Friends of Baucau became an independent community association in 2011. The current support that Yarra provides to FoB is through Councillor participation on the committee of management (constituted) and the selling of FoB Timorese Coffee through Council's cashiers.

Friends of Baucau and the Darebin Neighbourhood House network planned the visit over 12 months ago and funding for the visit was sourced from: a City of Darebin community grant; Neighbourhood Houses Victoria; the Clifton Hill branch of the Bendigo Bank; and fundraising through the extra sale of FoB Timorese Coffee.

A partnership agreement was signed between Friends of Baucau and the Darebin Neighbourhood House network in 2018. The purpose of the partnership is to identify and work with and through established Women's Networks in Baucau to improve the wellbeing and social welfare of women, children, and whole communities.

City of Yarra's additional purpose

The visit to Baucau organised by FoB and DNHN provided an opportunity for Yarra City Council to support this visit to Timor Leste and continue to build the relationship between Yarra and Baucau. In February 2019 Council approved Aldo Malavisi, Community Partnerships Unit Manager to join the group and further explore ways that Yarra could implement its commitment to the Baucau district through the Municipal/District Cooperation Agreement.

Council in 2014 resolved to sign a Municipal Agreement between Yarra City Council and Timor Leste, District of Baucau. Similar Agreements were signed by several other Victorian Councils at the time with their respective Districts. The Agreement program was developed following negotiations between the Victorian Government (Local Government Victoria) and the Timor-Leste Government as part of a program to further develop its governmental structures and programs as part of the decentralisation of powers to the Districts and Municipalities.

Members of the group who travelled to Timor Leste



Figure 1 Chris, Kim, Alzira from Alola Foundation, Angie, Ursula, Gina, Colleen, Leanne, Chris & Aldo

Chris Dureau – Friends of Baucau
Ursula Harrison – Friends of Baucau
Cr. Kim le Cerf – City of Darebin
Aldo Malavisi – City of Yarra
Chris Lombardo – The Bridge
Gina Wittingslow – Jika Jika Community Centre
Leanne Coughlin – Alphington Community Centre
Colleen Duggan – Span Community House
Angie Davidson – Reservoir Neighbourhood House

All meetings held in Timor Leste

Government

- Antonio Guterres, President of the municipality of Baucau;
- Aderito Manuel Alves Guterres, Director of the Ministério Da Administração dos Municípios, Dili;
- Maria Angelina Sarmento, Vice President Parliament of Timor Leste, Dili

International NGO's and Aid Programs

- Fernando Peres, Director, Caritas Australia, based in Dili;
- Junilda Maria Vilanova, Baucau Area Manager, World Vision, Baucau;
- Florentino Sarmento, Director, Timor Aid, Dili;
- Bernadino Da Costa Pereira, National Project Manager, UNDP, Dili.

Timor Leste NGOs and Women's Organisations

- Alzira dos Reis, CEO, Fundasaun Alolo, Dili;
- Helen Gomez, Director, Alola Esperensa, Dili;
- Marita de Jesus Marques, Executive Officer, Rede Feto, Timor Leste. Dili;
- Marilia da Silva Alves, Director, Fokupers, Dili;
- Femi Belo, Coordinator, UMA PAS, Baucau;
- Teresa Pereira, Director, Centro Feto Human Development (CFHD), Baucau;
- Regina da Sousa, AFEHABAD, Baucau;
- 6 village xefes from Baucau sub-district
- Margy Beck, Marist Teacher Training College, Baucau;
- Marqy da Costa, Louis 'Hos' da Costa, Afalyca Community Arts Centre, Baucau;
- Sister Louisa, Canossian Training College.

Australian Embassy

- Peter Roberts, Ambassador;

- Anita do Santos Silva, Coordinator Development Cooperation, Community development;
- Januario Bere Buti, Political Research Officer

Others

- Emanuel Braz, editor, Dili Times
- Inga, project manager Tomak project

Baucau Visit 1-8 May



Figure 2 Planning meeting in Baucau with xefes and Frineds of Baucau

A planning meeting was held on the first day in Baucau with representatives from women's organisations, several village xefes (leader), and the directors of Afalyca to finalise plans for village visits, cultural exchange, and a two-day workshop.

Visits were made to 6 of the 11 villages in the Baucau sub-district to meet with women involved in community activities such as women's economic empowerment projects, including jam-making, community gardens, machine embroidery and sewing, and tais making. Friends of Baucau has supported many of these programs during the past several

years. In several villages the women prepared traditional food for lunch. The village visits enabled the group to learn of successful projects and the challenges and issues faced in the communities.

Villages visited

- Bucoli (Head of Village (Xefe) & 6 women village Council delegates and 15 university students);
- Triloca (Xefe & 20 women);
- Samalari (Xefe and family, visited the primary school);
- Bahu (Xefe, Village Delegates & 3 young women);
- Buibau (Xefe, Village Delegates & 15 women); and
- Caibada Waimea (Xefe, Delegates & 15 women).

The weeklong visit to Baucau culminated in a two day workshop held with representatives from women's organisations in Baucau, 25 women from village women's collectives, four xefes de suco, and the Xefe Posto Baucau Vila (Baucau sub-district administrator). The first day of the workshop, with leaders of women's organisations based in Baucau, featured presentations from DNNH, and three Baucau women's organisations (CFHD, AFEHABAD, Equality and Inclusion Baucau municipality). The second workshop day was experiential and participatory and featured cultural exchanges with women's organisations and cooperatives and the DNNH. Activities included traditional Timorese cooking, tais weaving, basketry, singing and dancing. The DNNH made pasta sauce, and 'rum' balls, and facilitated a popular jewellery making workshop.

Cultural experiences

We were invited to attend two highly enjoyable cultural performances in Baucau; an evening performance of traditional songs and dances by women students at the Canossian Training College in Baucau and songs and dances with young students from Baucau surrounds at the Afalyca Community Arts Centre. Afalyca also had a display of artwork made by local students.



Figure 3 Afalyca Community Arts Centre is supported by FoB. As a way of being financially sustainable they are developing a cultural experience of song and dance to be marketed to tourists.

In Dili visits were made to the Resistance and Archives Museum, Santa Cruz Cemetery, Chega Musuem and Dare War memorial Museum. Other visits included the Church of Laleia, the Heroes Cemetery, UmaPas Safe House, and Centro Feto Human Development.

In return the group shared two songs from Australia – “I am woman” a feminist anthem, and “Lingmara” a northern indigenous song.

Video

The group made a short video which was shown at the State Conference of Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria on May 9th.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCp5gpbPHoU&feature=youtu.be>

Final Day Workshop in Baucau

The time in Baucau culminated with a day workshop on the 7th May and brought together a group of over 35 people (front cover photo). In preparation for this workshop the Darebin-Yarra group reflected on their overall experience in Timor Leste. Here are some summary thoughts from that reflection.

What did we learn?

There are some key issues in Timor-Leste

- Basic hygiene and health
- Nutrition and food security
- Climate change impacts
- Access to communication
- Basic services (safe roads, waste disposal, water supply etc.), and
- Centralised government.

Issues that women in particular face in Timor-Leste include:

- Economic independence
- Domestic violence and sexual abuse, and
- Maternal and child health care.

What inspiring things did we see?

- Strong people trying to improve their communities.
- Dynamic women tirelessly fighting a patriarchal society.
- Women's collectives working together.
- Savings and loans schemes supporting local projects and the most vulnerable in communities.
- Entrepreneurial women (jam, banana chips, coconut products, embroidery).
- Women xefe's leading communities, some male xefe's enabling women.
- Women proportionally well represented in politics and strong women part of the bureaucracy
- Strong women educating women and men (NGOs in Dili, Teresa).
- Women delivering meaningful and life-changing projects and programs (Samalari, UMA PAS, Alola Esperansa).

Reflections from local women who participated in the final day workshop

“Would like to do these activities (jewellery making) in the future, and make to sell.”

“Respect for meeting together. Learning about doing these things in my community. Thanks to Regina for including women in Baucau in these activities. Important to include all women in Baucau in these kinds of activities. Several organisations focus on women in Baucau.”

“Hope we can gain more skills and do something for our community. Lots of women in rural areas have lots of skills, and they want to show you what they’ve got. There was not much time to organise women, and they don’t have these opportunities. Relationship is important. I did not hear about this meeting – want to have a strong relationship in the future. Hope that we can send some of our women delegates to learn so that they can do something in their communities (Benita).”

“These activities are good for young people. Bring more activities in the future. At the moment I am doing cultural activities” (Sonia Soares).

One of the women spoke about her work at Baucau Buka Hakatene (BBH) and how much she learned from working with the women there. She spoke about one of the women attending the workshop who had been a victim of domestic violence and the challenges that she had overcome for herself and her children. There are lots of challenges for women in Timor Leste. She hopes to continue the friendship and to visit Melbourne one day (Domingas, UmaPas).

Final words on behalf of the Municipal President Antonio Guterres at the workshop

Francisco Ximenes, welcomed and thanked the local xefes, women’s organisations, and women who have come today. Stressed the importance of the friendship between Baucau and Australia, and on behalf of the Baucau Municipal President expressed the hope that it would be a long term friendship working together to find solutions to some of the issues that we face in Baucau.

He expressed the hope that the xefes de sucos could visit Australia and see what is being done there. Even though we live a very long distance apart, we are always together.

Key meeting notes around the Municipal Agreement

Alongside what was primarily a strength based community development visit, the opportunities to listen and discuss how the Municipal/District Cooperation Agreement could be built on was more challenging.

Timor Leste has currently one level of Government which is divided into 13 municipalities, which are then divided into 65 administrative posts (formerly subdistricts). Each administrative post is divided into several sucos, (villages). The suco is the smallest political division of East Timor.

The National Government is in the process of establishing a second level of Government commonly referred to as the decentralisation process. The decentralising process has been slowly progressing for some time though it has currently stalled for what seems to be several reasons. Apart from this it was noticed that the Baucau administration was hamstrung with so many decisions needing to be made by the administration in Dili. E.g. The Municipal Offices in Baucau cannot make any recruiting decisions on their own, they all need to go to Dili for a decision and on another level when a car needs to be serviced or repaired it cannot be repaired in Baucau, it needs to go to Dili.

There were three meetings with Government officials that were extremely beneficial and have assisted in clarifying how the Municipal Agreement can be improved.

1. Meeting with Antonio Guterres, President of the municipality of Baucau

The President of the municipality of Baucau was very supportive of FoB and he praised them for all their community work over the years and was excited by this collaborative venture between the women's groups in Baucau and the Darebin Neighbourhood Houses. He was also appreciative to have met with representatives from Darebin and Yarra Councils and wants to develop a stronger Municipal Agreement between our organisations. He would like to see some clear and reportable actions that would be of mutual benefit.

He expressed frustration with the slow process of decentralisation and highlighted some of the greater needs he was experiencing as the President. The things he mentioned that were of great need were planning especially the lack of something like a municipal strategic plan, waste management and asset management.

2. Meeting with Bernardino (Dino) Da Costa Pereira, National Project Manager, Decentralization Project, Democratic Governance Unit, United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

Dino manages the decentralisation project and he and his team happened to be in Baucau at the same time we were visiting the municipal offices. They were leading a two day strategic planning session with the directors of the local administration. These planning sessions have happened in the past though have not resulted in many tangible actions though this time was different because the planning was based on the consultation they did with the community and other stakeholders over two sessions in late 2018. They were all hopeful that this planning session would lead to some real change because it was based on the consultation.

3. Meeting with Aderito Manuel Alves Guterres, Director of the Ministério Da Administração dos Municípios in Dili. He is the Director of the secretariat for the establishment of municipalities and the Municipal/District Cooperation Agreements.

Since the election in 2018 only half the ministerial positions have been filled and the acting Minister has expressed continued support for the Municipal Agreements with a desire to see more practical outputs and outcomes.

The process of establishing local governments is slow and long though the National Government has already delegated some basic services such as primary schools and health clinics to municipalities. There are three pieces of legislation that need to go through Parliament so that municipalities can be fully established. One is about local government, the second is about the election process and the third is about finance and procurement. The first two laws are currently going through the Parliament with the third to follow.

The new Parliament is in for 5 years and they have a mandate to establish 3-5 local governments by 2021 or 2022. The decision on which councils are to be established first will depend on a performance evaluation.

These local governments will have responsibility for everything except for areas such as defence and security, finance, foreign affairs and major roads. They will be able to generate their own income and the draft currently states they will be able to collect taxes on behalf of the central government.

At this stage the village structures with their Xefes as leaders will remain. Council assemblies will be separate with the direct election of a mayor for 4 years and election of councillors for 4 years as well.

The Director said “Until the laws are passed there is not much we can do though perhaps training and keeping in regular contact. Training of a government person from Baucau would be a good thing to do”. He could provide a job description of a position from the Baucau office and we (Yarra/Darebin) could offer a training experience for the person in that role.

Some reflections on the visit to Timor Leste

As an outsider it seems that one of the main areas that will need addressing is the merging of the two styles of governance. There already exists a level of governance at the village level which seems to be functioning quite well. At the village (suco) level the governance is strong, traditional and functioning. The fact that at this stage the village structures and council assemblies will be separate, highlights that there will be two different governance structures which will need to relate to each other. Without further understanding this situation I’m unable to add anything else other than it seems like there will be a governance structure which has grown out of the community and one which will be introduced to the community.

An ongoing impact of the early work of the FoB, when it was a joint project between Darebin and Yarra councils, was very encouraging to witness. There were three women who had attended classes or were involved at Baucau Buka Hakatene, a Neighbourhood House that was run by FoB. These three women were leaders in their respective villages whilst employed in key roles. Two were employed by the local administration, one in finance and the other in equality and inclusion. The third was employed in a women’s organisation that provided services and a safe house for women experiencing domestic violence.



Figure 4 A business run by women supported by FoB. One of the leaders in this business said that METAC saved her whilst she studied in Melbourne.

I came across several people who had spent time in Melbourne mainly as students or on cultural exchange programs and were appreciative of the support they received from the Melbourne East Timorese Activity Centre (METAC). Some of these people were now community leaders which was heartening to see. This is important to note for Council because METAC was developed in partnership with the then Yarra East Timorese community, the North Richmond Community Health Centre and Belgium Avenue

Neighbourhood House in 2001 with a \$1,000 grant from City of Yarra. Council continues to support METAC through the community grants program and recently funded a Melbourne wide celebration of the 17th anniversary of Timor Leste’s restoration of independence in May. The event was held at the Collingwood Underground.

As we visited the villages and spoke with various groups in particular women’s groups and organisations it was obvious that FoB had made a positive contribution to the life of people in Baucau. The long term commitment has been critical to building relationships and trust with people

in Baucau and if the Municipal Agreement is to have any chance of success then it will be built on these relationships that have been forged over many years by FoB. There is a healthy level of civic participation and civic leadership in Baucau where people are empowered and feel comfortable to express their thoughts and free to challenge and hold decision makers and bureaucracies to account. I felt this was a common community trait between Baucau and Yarra.

The following recommendations are based on the experience of this recent trip to Timor Leste and are mindful of the long-term commitment and work of Yarra City Council and the Friends of Baucau and in particular seek to further develop Council's commitment to the Municipal Agreement.

Recommendations

Strengthen the existing partnership between Council and Friends of Baucau by:

- Improving promotion and marketing of the FoB coffee which is sold at Council cashiers;
- Supporting the Yarra Neighbourhood Houses to partner with FoB because the neighbourhood house asset based community development model is at the forefront of community development practise internationally and neighbourhood houses have unique skills to share in relation to making the grant/aid systems work/deliver for grassroots communities;
- Supporting the mutual exchange between Yarra Neighbourhood Houses and community groups in Baucau because at the community level many issues are shared and there is value in building and strengthening a network for mutual learning and professional development; and
- Promoting the work of FoB through Council's communications channels.

Support Melbourne East Timorese Activity Centre through the community grants program:

- Support local groups such as Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House to develop the capacity of METAC to self-govern;
- Continue to promote Community Grants for community development projects based in Yarra;

Action the Municipal Agreement between Baucau and Yarra by:

- Assigning a Council officer to drive the municipal Agreement;
- Building the relationship between the Municipal Office in Baucau and Yarra City Council by:
 - Beginning regular correspondence, in the relevant language, with the Municipal office in Baucau to keep communications open and provide updates; and
 - Sharing of relevant information that can be easily translated such as pertinent sections of relevant strategies.
- Investigating the possibility of an officer exchange;
- Exploring training opportunities for people in relevant positions in the Municipal Office in Baucau that can be delivered in cost effective and meaningful ways; and
- Continue participation in the Local Government Timor-Leste Partnership Network.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge Ursula Harrison and Leanne Coughlin for their contributions to this report.