



Connecting You with
the People of East Timor

FRIENDS of BAGUIA

A community group formed to foster friendship, support and cross-cultural exchange at a grassroots level with the people of Baguia. The Friendship Agreement with the Sub-district of Baguia in Timor Leste (East Timor) was endorsed by a City of Stonnington Council resolution in September 2004.

WHERE IS BAGUIA?

Baguia is a sub-district composed of 10 small villages in a remote mountainous area of East Timor. Situated in the Baucau district, Baguia is 70 kms from the town of Baucau, but it is still a laborious four hour journey by the daily truck due to poor roads.



LIFE IN BAGUIA

The population of Baguia sub-district is 10,000. Communication between Baguia town and the ten main villages is difficult, as there is no phone or postal service and for much of the year roads are impassable. Walking is the usual mode of transport and the villages higher up the mountain have no road access at all.

In Baguia town a diesel generator provides electricity for only 5 hours at night, but there is no electricity in any of the surrounding villages. Most people live in simple bamboo huts with thatched roofs and survive solely on subsistence agriculture. Rice is grown in terraces and on the steep mountain slopes corn and sweet potato are planted. They also grow pineapples, bananas and mangos in their home gardens.



OUR PROJECTS IN BAGUIA

We support the following key projects, (and other similar projects) which were suggested by the people of Baguia. Education has a prime emphasis, as the Timorese consider this of key importance to enable their children to achieve a better life, as they establish their new nation.

1. Provide breakfast to 50 children in Baguia Orphanage. This also provides jobs for two women, who bake the bread, and several children who deliver the bread and collect firewood. Cost \$A6 per day.

2. Concrete floor and equipment for Rufagua Primary School. This remote mountain school, over two hours walk from Baguia town, has been built by the parents of the 70 students on a volunteer basis.

3. Salaries for two teachers at Osso Huna Community Junior High School. Situated one and a half hours walk from Baguia town. There are 7 teachers and 80 students at the school and it relies solely on donations for survival.

4. Scholarships at three Junior High Schools (Years 7, 8 & 9) in Baguia district. There are 390 students in the three schools. Fees and books cost \$A70 per year for each student. Over 40 scholarships are provided each year.

5. Women's literacy program. Many adults are illiterate due to interruption of schooling during the early Indonesian occupation, or lack of access to schools. This prevents them from

participating on village councils, starting a small business etc.

6. Sporting equipment for schools. There is no TV, so sport plays a vital role at school and in the community. Volleyball and soccer are really popular in Baguia, culminating in an annual inter-village Volleyball Grand Final. Balls are quickly destroyed on the rocky-earth playing surfaces.

A TUMULTUOUS HISTORY

The Republic of Timor Leste rose out of the ashes of a violent past after 450 years (1515-1974) of Portuguese colonisation, interspersed with Japanese occupation, and 24 years of Indonesian domination (1975-1999). East Timor finally gained its independence after a violent and bloody upheaval following the referendum of 1999. The Democratic Republic of Timor Leste was formally recognised on 20th May 2002.

The cost was high - one third of the population perished in the years following the Indonesian invasion. 78% of the population experienced the loss of at least one relative. 90% of the infrastructure (schools, libraries and other public buildings) and nearly all public records were deliberately destroyed during the final days of the Indonesian occupation.

Many of the teachers and health workers were from Indonesia, and fled when the military withdrew, leaving huge gaps in the fields of education and healthcare.

RELATIONS WITH AUSTRALIA

Australia has a long association with East Timor, which goes back prior to the military and aid assistance provided to achieve Independence in 1999. The friendship was forged in the darkest days of the Second World War, when Timorese villagers aided Australian soldiers. After the Australians had been evacuated and Japan assumed control of the island, 40,000 Timorese paid the price for this support with their lives.

WHY SHOULD WE HELP and HOW?

Following the evacuation of our soldiers in 1942 the Australian Government dropped thousands of pamphlets declaring 'Your friends will never forget you'. Let us keep that old promise and become involved. Show your friendship and gratitude by joining the Friends of Baguia and giving your time and/or your financial support.

Becoming a 'Friend' of Baguia is free. You will not only assist in building a new nation, you will also receive our newsletter and have the opportunity to participate in many fun events.

For more information on **Friends of Baguia**
www.baguia.org.au

Or contact: Lisa Stafford on (03) 8290 1333
City of Stonnington, PO Box 21, Prahran, 3181
LStaffor@stonnington.vic.gov.au

Make donation cheques payable to:
City of Stonnington - Friends of Baguia

Donations are tax deductible

FACTS ABOUT TIMOR LESTE

- Timor Leste is our nearest neighbour and has a population of 930,000.
- 48% of the population is 17 years or under.
- Life expectancy (in 2001) was 57 years.
- It has the highest infant mortality rate in the Asia-Pacific region - 82 per 1000 live births.
- It is the poorest country in the region: 42% of Timorese live on only \$US55 cents a day.
- 80% live in rural districts, and 94% of these people rely solely on subsistence farming.
- Most have limited access to clean water and health services. Many have poor sanitation. Transport is very limited and roads are in poor condition or non-existent.
- Today 46% of adults have had no schooling at all. **Lack of education and jobs are two of the biggest problems facing Timor Leste.**

