

Project No. 1

Providing food, healthcare and education in Timor-Leste

Country Overview and Jesuit History

Timor-Leste is Asia's youngest country and is ranked 123 out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index (a measure of poverty and development, with a higher number equalling higher poverty). Almost half of the country lives below the poverty line and almost 40% are illiterate. This young nation is also characterised by a high percentage of young people (approximately 61% of the total population) and high youth unemployment. The current population of Timor-Leste is 1.3 million.

The country's independence in 2002 came at a great cost for the people. Under Indonesian occupation (1975 to 1999), at least 183,000 died from fighting, disease and starvation. Indonesia's departure in 1999 was marked by violence and destruction that left thousands displaced, hundreds dead, and many buildings, homes and over 90% of schools severely damaged or destroyed. Timor-Leste was left without a government, official language, currency or legal system, and few formally qualified personnel as the nation lost 20% of its primary school teachers and 80% of its secondary teachers.

The Jesuits were present in Timor-Leste in the late 19th century but were expelled, along with all other religious orders, in 1910 by the colonial ruler, Portugal. After some decades of absence, the Jesuits returned and resumed their work in education and formation. In addition to an education project at Kasait, the Timorese Jesuits have ventured over the years into various spiritual, pastoral, and social works. Since 2001 the Jesuits have run a diocesan parish in Railaco with a secondary school, health-care and feeding programs. Railaco is located 21 km south-west of Dili, the country's capital. It is a rural area with many low-income families. The population of the greater Railaco community is ~12,000, mainly subsistence farmers making a minimal income, plus some coffee growers, government workers and small businesses. Railaco has the highest infant mortality rate and incidence of malnourished children in Timor-Leste.



About the project

There are three components to this project:

1. Mobile Clinic
2. Feeding Program
3. NOSSEF Secondary School (Years 10—12)

Mobile clinic

Fr Martin Antonia "Bong" Abad Santos SJ, a Filipino doctor and Jesuit priest, operates mobile medical clinics in 11 remote communities in the Railaco area serving poor communities living outside the reach of local government services. Because of the rugged, hilly terrain and the poor condition of the roads, the Mobile Clinic is the only option that local people have to access medical care. Two trained local assistants accompany Fr Bong in his 4WD and dispense medications. The team is equipped with medical equipment and medications but also knowledge about local people, their medical conditions and living conditions.

The Mobile Clinic improves healthcare access for vulnerable populations in rural areas, bolsters the prevention of some chronic diseases and improves health outcomes.

Feeding program

Established in 2005 by Fr Bong, the Feeding Program aims to provide children with nutritious food to reduce the incidence of malnutrition which is a problem in rural areas of Timor-Leste. The team visits three villages, Cocoa, Caitarahei and Libdodo, each week and provides food for children up to twelve years of age.



The team for the Feeding Program comprises three people. The food is prepared in the Railaco Parish kitchen and includes chicken, eggs and vegetables, as well as rice. The children bring their own plates to be filled with food they would not usually get at home. The team takes advantage of the gathering of the children as an opportunity to impart learning through sharing of the children's stories and dance performances. This helps develop the cognitive, emotional and physical skills of the children. A feeding program would also be welcomed in other villages but funding currently covers only three villages.

NOSSEF (Escola Secundária Católica Nossa Senhora de Fátima)

The Jesuit-run Secondary School, NOSSEF, provides schooling for 380 students from Year 10 to Year 12. The student numbers are fairly equally divided between males and females. There are 18 full and part-time teachers and four administration staff. A school canteen serves nutritious food for a small fee and provides free food to those students who cannot afford it and often arrive at school not having eaten.

The school has dormitories for girls and boys. These students would not otherwise be able to attend school as their villages are many hours travel on mountainous roads from NOSSEF. The girls' dormitory provides accommodation for 31 and is situated on a neighbouring property and overseen by religious sisters. A new boys' dormitory was built earlier this year and is currently providing 41 boys with the opportunity for a secondary education. The dormitory students have to source and prepare their own food. They have vegetable gardens and rear chickens for their eggs and meat.

Over the last few years the school has achieved a 100% pass rate in the National examinations for Year 12 with many students going on to tertiary study. This is an amazing achievement for children from backgrounds of such disadvantage and hardship.

During the COVID-19 state of emergency, NOSSEF was closed just like all the other schools in Timor – Leste but it re-opened in early July with strict health measures in place.



Railaco secondary students

New parish priest

In August 2020 Fr Erik John Gerilla SJ, "Fr EJ", commenced as Parish Priest for the Railaco Parish. Fr EJ is from the Philippines and has been on mission in Timor-Leste for over eight years. His previous roles were Director of Jesuit Social Service, Timor-Leste and Treasurer and Development Officer of the Timor Jesuit Region. Prior to entering the Jesuits he was a chartered public accountant.

Project participants

Whilst the Railaco programs have been impacted by the coronavirus in 2020, the number of project participants has still been maintained. It is projected in 2021:

1. The Mobile Medical Clinic will treat over 6,000 women, men and children.
2. The Feeding Program will continue to feed 215 children on a weekly basis, spread across the three villages.
3. The secondary school, NOSSEF, will educate 380+ students across Years 10 to 12.

Budget

The annual budget for the three programs: the mobile medical clinic, the feeding program and the secondary school is **AUD97,000**. This covers the cost of salaries of teachers and other staff, medical supplies, food requirements and vehicle running costs. Jesuit Mission has some support from other sources for this project.

Program outcomes and measures

Objectives	Target Indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions
To help extend health services to areas in Railaco where government effort is still lacking	Cures in treated patients; less hospital visits and stays	Patients' register	Increased number of patients to clinics
To help children, especially pre-schoolers, have better health outcomes through improved nutrition	Improved well-being of children being fed	Observable health indicators of children	More children are participating in the feeding program
Opportunities for secondary school graduates to seek further university studies or employment	Growing number of Alumni accomplishments	Examination results and teacher reports on behaviour and performance of students	Enrolment numbers are maintained at school

NOTE: COVID-19 will continue to impact Jesuit Mission projects until the crisis passes. It is important to recognise and expect that there may be changes to this project during 2021. If this project is awarded the Pilgrims 100 grant, Jesuit Mission will keep Pilgrims 100 members informed of any major adaptations that are undertaken.

Potential for Pilgrims 100 members to visit

Excluding current COVID-19 travel restrictions, it is easy to travel to Timor-Leste, with daily flights from Darwin. The Railaco Jesuit Mission welcomes visitors and is able to arrange for groups to be involved in the preparation of food for the Feeding Program and travel to the villages. Fr Bong also welcomes people to accompany him on his mobile clinic visits. The secondary school warmly welcomes visitors to their campus.

Case study - Feeding Program



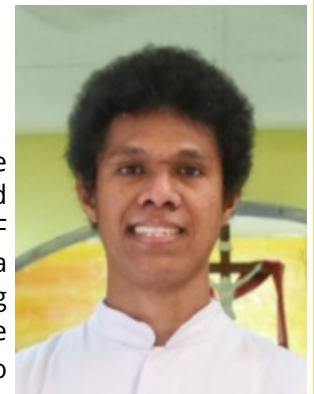
For Natalina the Feeding Program is not only an opportunity to get food, but also a chance to learn songs and dances and play with her friends.

"I am very happy with the feeding program because I get free meals and also I can play with other kids and pray together", said Natalina.

Case study—NOSSEF

Bonifaci Bano Lay Riberiro SJ is a Jesuit scholastic who took his first vows earlier in 2020.

He benefited from the Feeding Program, studied and graduated from NOSSEF before being accepted as a Novitiate and undertaking teacher training at the Instituto São João de Brito (ISJB), the Jesuit Teacher Training College in Kasait, Timor-Leste.



Case study—Mobile Clinic

"There is a lack of accessibility to the clinics and hospitals established by the government. Also, the health care centres provided by the government are located far away from our houses. When this mobile clinic comes to us, we do not have to walk to the hospitals that are located far away, we just have to wait in our homes. It is very accessible and we are grateful for the Railaco Mission of the Jesuits that has been giving us assistance with their medical service", said Alberto Correia, a resident of Fatubesi-Lolo.

