



Poverty reduction through Water, Sanitation

and Hygiene (WASH) Projects

FEBRUARY 2024 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our February Newsletter and on behalf of our MiVAC Board and Executive Committee, I wish you and yours a very happy and safe 2024.

OUR NEW TREASURER

Sadly our previous Treasurer asked to retire at our last AGM. Merv Hains did a great job as our Treasurer, and we wish him well in the future.

I wish to welcome our new Treasurer – Mr Morrie Evans. Morrie joins us with a wealth of experience in senior military and civilian management roles, and has a sound financial background. I will ask him to pen a short bio of himself for our next Newsletter.

POSSIBLE NEXT PROJECT

The MiVAC Board and Executive Committee have whittled down our list of possible new projects to helping supply water to villages in and around Balibo, in Timor-Leste (T-L).

And why Balibo? Read on!

Balibo – A Brief Background

Balibo is a town in Timor-Leste (T-L), located approximately 10 kilometres from the Indonesian border¹. The town is home to a 400-year-old fort, which was the scene of several battles during the Indonesian invasion in 1975. Balibo is also known for the killing of five Australian-based journalists, now known as the Balibo Five. The reporters from Channels 7 and 9 were killed on 16 October 1975 by Indonesian Special Forces, to prevent information about the invasion from being released. In December 1975, another Australian reporter, Roger East, who was investigating the deaths of the other five, was reportedly seized by Indonesian soldiers, and then shot by a firing squad.

The town has been reconstructed since the militia violence that preceded the vote on East Timorese independence in 1999. The house where the five journalists had stayed has been renovated to serve as a creche, library, and vocational training center. International aid organizations have also been involved in other reconstruction work in the town, such as the rebuilding of a dormitory for schoolchildren from remote communities that had been razed during the militia attacks.

Balibo is affected by water shortages in the dry season, flooding in the wet season and overall poor water quality. The main barriers to addressing the water problems are the cost of infrastructure, inadequate governance and poverty. Water taps, wells and pipes that deliver water are not always maintained, accessible or affordable.

Unfortunately, the lack of access to safe drinking water in homes, and at schools and kindergartens in Balibo is a sad reality.

Safe drinking water is essential for oral health because it prevents plaque build-up. Studies also show that safe drinking water will help children improve mental and physical health – improving cognitive clarity, muscle function, blood circulation, food digestion and maintaining body temperature.

Possible Works in Balibo

You may recall I visited T-L two years ago with Veterans Care Association, with my main aim to examine water supply issues there. Since then, we have been holding discussions about possible projects with Terry Bracks (Chair of the Balibo House Trust and wife of former Victorian premier Steve Bracks) and Michele Rankin (a long-term volunteer who is coordinating many projects in and around Balibo).

Works and tasks which we plan to undertake include:

- installation of Sky Hydrant water purification kits in about 5 villages
- formal training on construction, operation and maintenance for villagers by a Sky Hydrant technician from Australia
- extension of water tank holdings in 2 villages and a school
- extending the water supply system through Balibo
- sinking a bore, and installing the pump, tank and piping
- training and awareness on the operation and maintenance of the works, and
- setting up maintenance funds into which the villagers can contribute, thus providing the funds for purchase of repair materials

I plan to travel to Balibo next month to conduct the designs and costings of these works, and I will be assisted by an ex-Australian Army plumber who now lives in T-L, and who is keen to volunteer with MiVAC.

Once we have a good understanding of the works, the funding required, and the sources of that funding, our MiVAC Board and Executive Committee will then decide on the extent of our assistance, and the timings. The current concept is that the works will be completed over the next 12 months.

Most of the projects listed above will have a duration of only about 2 weeks **each**. We believe these shorter duration projects will be more attractive to our members to volunteer to assist with, and we will soon be calling for volunteers to register their interest.

I will provide more information and detail in our next Newsletter.

HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP



Lee Uebergang (L) presenting my Life Member Certificate

That's all from me for the moment. Please stay safe out there. Until next time ...

With kind regards,

Brian

Brian Boon, MCS
Chairman

"You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that we truly give." Kahlil Gibran