

## Hatobuilico Women's Development

Currently the Blue Mountains supports a suite of contributions to the development of women's lives in the Hatobuilico Sub-District.

We call this initiative the "Hatobuilico Women's Development Project". The project is still forming and changing its shape as does the contribution of the Blue Mountains.

Since we started our relationship with Hatobuilico, we have always wanted to contribute more deeply to opportunities for women. We believe that women are key to local change and saw that women, in a profoundly patriarchal society, get over-looked. In the urban environment, Dili, it was relatively easy to simply focus projects on women – reducing the impact of violence, developing leadership, offering educational opportunities. But in the rural areas, women's secondary position seemed entrenched and immovable. We often tried to "insist" that quota within committees with us would be half women, that women take on roles of responsibility, but we would still find the women making the coffee and not speaking up in front of men. This is clearly a simplistic summary, an attempt to capture a much more complex story.

In 2016/17 myself and Mary Waterford were both working in Timor as volunteers on 18-month stints. Both of us were working for women's NGOs based in Dili who were working on the front line of feminism. During the week we worked with our host organisations and the weekend gave us time to contribute to our bigger passion, Hatobuilico. Our organisations were heavily involved in increasing the number of women standing as candidates in suco elections (like local government) and much effort had gone into affirmative strategies that might keep women engaged and supporting women prepared to put their hands up. Women candidates stood in most sub-districts but in Hatobuilico there were no women candidates. We were not surprised, given our experience, but we thought that ourselves and the Blue Mountains needed to engage with this problem more directly.



*Women attend annual conference in Hatobuilico*

In July 2017 we worked with Timorese women colleagues to organise and hold a day long consultation with women from across the sub-district. A lot of effort was put into contacting women and inviting them and in many ways this was a 'shot in the dark' for us. Women came and they spoke – partly about how the Blue Mountains had let them down by not coming their way.



*Tatiri women's group*

The women all spoke about not getting an opportunity to organise themselves as groups and their desire for economic independence. We then asked women's groups to submit 'proposals' to us for small start-up initiatives and we agreed that we would fund part-time a development worker to assist them. Mana Josefina was brought into the fold. She already worked as a field officer for the Alola Foundation and lived in Maubisse. It was her dream to be able to build the strength of women but her limited role and access to resources were curtailing. Mana Fina has

embraced the opportunity to work with us and the women have embraced her support. Proposals came in and we were a bit heart sick to find them similar – the women all wanted to earn money and do this through opening kiosks or small shops. We had hoped for training, skills in combatting sexism and disadvantage, after school tuition, child care, responses to violence. We had asked and we had promised to follow through – now we needed to respond and we did.



*Hautio women learn to sew*

What happened? What actually happened was much more diverse than we expected. Each group were given a start-up loan (like a group micro loan) and each group then decided how they would share that loan amongst their members. The Alola Foundation provided training in financial management and functioning as a group to manage their loans system. The groups have followed different trajectories but all have succeeded in developing an enterprise and sometimes many. Now, across the groups a range of products have been developed and sold, loans have been repaid

and second rounds are occurring. Products have ranged from baking bread in an electric oven (saving back breaking effort using an open fire), weaving tais (introducing the ancient tradition of weaving into the community), growing vegetables, roasting coffee, crafting ornamental flowers for funerals and formal occasions, sewing bags for children to take to school, raising pigs for sale, embroidering table cloths, selling noodles and coffee to tourists, setting up new communal vegetable gardens ....



*2019 workshop on tourism development*

And more, some groups have identified the need for a place to meet. Women in Mauchiga, survivors of brutal and prolonged sexual assault from the Indonesians, wanted a centre where they could meet to attend trauma healing and assist each other. Working with a Dili based NGO, AcBit, we funded a small centre that is now fully operational. Women from Tatiri are in the process of building a women's centre with funds through us. They plan to hold training,

make products from there, develop their catering business and earn other income by renting out space to government visitors.



*Women's centre in Mauchiga*

In a different vein, the women from Hatobuilico village have been supported by us to gain a grant from the USAID Tourism for All program. They are setting up a café and shop to sell food and local products to pilgrims, tourists and visitors. Training in hospitality, product development and financial management have assisted and just recently they have been supported to apply for registration as an NGO in Timor. Then the sky is the limit for their development!

Each year now the women have come together to share their experiences, learn new skills – some of these are practical and relate to their small businesses and some relate to their emerging confidence, empowerment and leadership.

None of this has been simple or straightforward! The women have had very different aspirations to our dreams but as time has gone on, our paths are starting to be less divergent. We now know that economic security needs to come first and building leadership in small is the best start to growing community leadership in the future. Strong women among the groups are emerging. Community leaders now recognise the women’s groups and invite them into civic events and ask for their opinions on local issues.



*Lesley Sammon with tais and ornamental flowers*



*Jude and mana Rosalina*

The Blue Mountains are deeply proud of their work with women in the Hatobuilico community. We are out there in the forefront in Timor with this work and we are proud to be able to assist with creating new opportunities for the women and their children.

There are over 110 women involved in the set of seven groups that we are currently supporting. This is a lot of families and children who are also benefiting.



*Tais group*