

WORKING TOGETHER TO FIGHT POVERTY

The Millennium Development Goals in our lives

In the year 2000, world leaders agreed that we should all work together to fight income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion - while promoting gender equality, education, & environmental sustainability. They agreed on eight global objectives, now known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Every day, ordinary people are involved in development and are working to help Timor-Leste create a better future. In this series, we meet farmers, fishermen, market vendors, tais-weavers, nurses, journalists, local NGO's, and politicians (to name only a few), who are working together to help Timor-Leste achieve its development goals.

THE GOALS

*Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
Achieve universal primary education
Promote gender equality and empower women
Reduce child mortality
Improve maternal health
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
Ensure environmental sustainability
Develop a global partnership for development*

Father Locatelli, priest, educator, agriculturist, in Fatuamca, Baucau

He may not be Timorese by birth but Father Locatelli has spent more years living and working in Timor-Leste than most Timorese. Some of the country's best-known faces are alumni of Don Bosco Technical School in Fatumaca. After 40 years during which he has done seminal work in educating and feeding his flock -and protecting them during the years of Indonesian occupation - the Father is highly respected and loved, most of all by the youth in his district who remain the focus of the Don Bosco philosophy.

Little could the young theology student Eligio Locatelli have imagined what destiny had in store when he was asked to proceed to East Timor in 1964. If anyone had told him then that he would not just be a Silesian priest and an educationist but also an agriculturalist, supporting farmers and feeding communities from eight villages, he would have been surprised. But all that lay way ahead in the future when he arrived in Fatumaca in '64.



The busy secondary school with 200 boarders and 50 day students, the Technical school built in 1980 which offers four courses in carpentry, electronics, electrical and mechanical studies and graduates 60 students a year - all this began from a straw hut made with palm leaves. "There was nothing there when I arrived and we started an elementary school in a hut," recalls the father. It was only in 1968 that the school was built and he embarked on the education program that was to make Don Bosco, Fatumaca, one of the leading secondary schools in the country. As its reputation grew so did the demand and children from rich families became its well-known alumni. But things changed in 1975 and a new chapter began in the life of Father Locatelli with the arrival of the Indonesians.

The poor, if anything, seemed to become poorer and hunger began to spread as the Indonesians confiscated their land and their cattle. The Father had to change focus from

education to food as he responded to the oppression of the people. The suffering caused by the excesses of the Indonesian regime appalled him and like other churches in the country, he too, supported the struggle for justice. Careful of his priestly calling, he could not join the fight for freedom openly so he turned his attention to the oppressed and took up the challenge of feeding the hungry. "The soil in the south is rich but not in the north. Even if people have land, the dry season - which seems to be drier as the weather has changed over the years - usually means hunger for many families. In parts of the country it is, in fact, impossible for a family to subsist on the produce of its own farm throughout the year."

With the help of aid from several sources, the Father slowly accumulated 12 tractors, which he now lends to farmers in the eight villages he has adopted. In exchange, they give him a third of their crop and he uses it to feed the boarders at the secondary school who pay US \$20 a month. "Its very hard to feed growing boys on that much money, they are always hungry," laughs Locatelli. In addition, every year, there are some 1,500 to 2,000 people who turn to the Father for help in the time of hunger. "I feel responsible for some 25,000 people in these villages," he says, "We need seeds and pesticides to improve the crop yields and quality and it's become difficult over the last couple of years to raise resources." Nevertheless, the effort in education continues. "We now have eight elementary schools run by the mission," he says.

The school is run by a faculty of 22 Timorese teachers and an Italian brother who teaches mechanics. From a dream in a straw hut to a bustling educational and technical school, Father Locatelli has journeyed a long way with the people of Fatumaca. At 67, an age when most would be thinking of hanging up their boots, he is actively working on new plans to educate and feed the growing numbers in his adopted villages - ones that have, in turn, adopted him as one of them.

