

Update on Ainaro 2014

Welcome to your annual report on Plan's work in **Ainaro**, the area where your sponsored child lives. We wanted to share with you some of the work that you are helping to make possible through your child sponsorship contributions. Plan staffs have written this document with the help of children from Ainaro District. Thank you for sponsoring a child with Plan.

Profile of Ainaro

Ainaro District lies south of Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, running from high rugged mountains in the interior down to the sea. The entry to Ainaro District is located a 3 hour drive in a 4WD vehicle from Dili, and it can take an additional 2-3 hours to cross through this district. The distances aren't great (65-120 kms/40 – 75 miles) but the "main road" is narrow, with deep potholes. It twists across high mountains, and is often blocked by landslips in the rainy season. Access to villages away from the road is even more difficult.



Ainaro Landscape

In late 2013 Plan started work in Maubisse Sub-District, located in the mountainous interior. This is a stunningly beautiful area with a cool, cold and wet climate, often unexpected in a tropical climate. Many parts seem like the foothills of the Alps or the Highlands of Scotland, dominated by Timor Leste's highest mountain, Ramelau, (2963 metres/6440 feet).



Children in Ainaro having a break from classes.

But, while they appreciate its beauty, the 60,000 people of Ainaro know from experience how hard life can be there. It's one of the poorest parts of Timor Leste, itself one of the poorest places in South East Asia/Pacific.

The community is mostly subsistence farmers, eating what they grow, or earn an income working on government "cash for work" schemes. Many rely on money being sent back from family working in Dili or abroad. Mambae is a common language in people's homes, though the majority also speak Timor Leste's national language, Tetun. Catholicism is the dominant religion but this is mixed with much older

animist beliefs and practices, and large traditional "uma lulik" spirit houses co-exist peaceably with churches.

How did Plan start working in Ainaro?

In mid-2012 we received the very good news that more Sponsors would start to support Plans work for children here in Timor-Leste, in addition to our existing working area in Aileu District. We therefore had to decide which District we would expand Plan's service to.

The first step was to examine the data on child poverty around the country, with special attention to issues such as education, health, nutrition and access to water and sanitation. We also met with other international agencies to discuss where they are working and intend to work to avoid any duplication of funds. We found two Districts that stood out as amongst the worst in the country for children: Ainaro and Ermera. These both border Aileu District.



Plan staff and residents attend a sponsorship meeting

Plan then sent teams to the two Districts to talk with people – children, village leaders, District and Sub-District Administrators, Education and Health officials – and it was clear that Plan, which has a strong reputation in Timor-Leste, would be welcome in both areas.

Staff also looked at logistics – the time and costs of travelling from Aileu. Finally, putting together all these factors, we decided to expand our programs into Ainaro starting in the largest Sub District, Maubisse. Ainaro and Ermera are equally poor, but Ainaro is more easily accessible from our existing unit in Aileu, keeping costs down. Plan staffs in Maubisse are currently managed by the Aileu District Manager, Emelita da Cruz.

The next stage, starting in mid-2013 was for a small team of Plan staff to hold a “launch” meeting with village heads, education and health officials and local government. The team then moved slowly through villages and hamlets, holding discussions with children and parents to introduce Plan and how child sponsorship is intended to serve all of the children in the area.

The first Plan project activities in Ainaro began in 2014 with Child Protection and Youth Empowerment. Boys and girls taking part in these activities also gave ideas and comments for this Update.

Child Protection Program



A Plan staff member teaches a dance to members of the children's club.

All children have a right to be protected, and from April 2014 Plan has delivered child protection training to over 100 children in 4 villages in Ainaro. This training ensures that children are aware of their rights to protection, participation, development and survival. Children who received this training were encouraged to discuss what they learnt with their families, friends and peers.

Seventy-five parents, carers, teachers and local authority figures also received child protection training that included a discussion of what child abuse is and how to report cases of abuse. A child protection focal point has been established in every village.

A children's club has also been established in Ainaro and this is a place for children to learn about their rights and increase their participation in their villages. In rural areas of Timor-Leste children are often left out of the

decision-making process so this club has been introduced to help children to speak out about issues and their goals for the future.

Sonia is a 13 year old coordinator of one of the children's clubs and says that "we've never had an international organisation visit our school before to share information with us about our rights and child protection. I feel happy to learn about the 4 fundamental rights of children and I hope that my club will get more lessons about this in the future."

Improving youth social development through life skills training

Youth in rural areas are often shy and don't feel comfortable taking on leadership roles within their villages. Plan's Youth Empowerment and Sustainability Development program has provided life skills training to improve the self-confidence, knowledge and leadership skills of 85 male and female teenagers from two villages. The aim of this program is to encourage the future leaders of Timor-Leste to take on more active roles and participate in village decision-making processes.

For 18 year old Marcelino the life skills training will be beneficial not just for him but for his village as well. "This is the first time I have attended this type of training and I have already learnt a lot of new things and gotten some new ideas. When I learn a lot I will be able to help my family, my friends and my community. This training has given me hope and I have felt really happy while studying here," he says.



Marcelino and his classmates attending life skills training

The life skill training is held over 5 days and includes methods for improving communication, self-awareness, coping with stress and emotions, problem solving, alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. From this training young people will gain skills that can be applied in their daily lives and future careers.



Students lining to sing the national anthem before school in Ainaro District.

Planned activities for the coming year

With your support we are committed to expanding our work in Ainaro District in the year ahead:

- The Early Childhood Care and Development Program will help villages to establish pre-schools, and members of a local organization will run parenting skills classes for fathers and mothers
- Through the Youth Engagement Strategy, we will encourage young people for them to identify the needs of their villages and how they themselves can act to improve conditions. We will also support government employment services to

tour the area to inform young people about opportunities for vocational training in government centres, and expand life skills training

- We also aim to set up more Children's Clubs which are not only fun, but help children learn about their rights, and the rights of other children.



Ainaro.

Message from the District Manager of Ainaro District and Aileu District

I and my colleagues on the Plan team, and especially your Sponsored Child and parents, would like to thank you for your commitment to our work for children in Ainaro District. Working together we can all make a difference to these children's lives.

Thank you for your continuous support.



Emelita da Cruz
Ainaro District Manager