

Village Lighting Project for Remexio, East Timor

The purpose of the Village Lighting Project was to improve the living standard of the people of the Remexio district of East Timor. Kangaroo Valley has had a village-to-village partnership with Remexio since May 2000. The Village Lighting Project has been the most ambitious project for KVRP.



As a result of the Trek for Timor challenges in 2009 and 2011, KVRP was able to fund 1024 lighting systems. We installed these lights in four communities in the Remexio region and the 2013 Trek and subsequent Crowd Funding campaign in 2016 extended the Village Lighting Project to 1506 households, involving eight communities in Remexio. The VLS project in Remexio has been realized through the partnership between KVRP and the participants of three Trek For Timor events from 2009 to 2013.

A representative of Kangaroo Valley who participated in the roll-out of the project in mountain-top communities described the experience as inspiring - " When we visited one of the remotest houses in one of the remotest villages in Fada Rasa, we saw one of the solar lighting systems lighting up the house. The owner of the house beamed at us when he found out who we were, and told us the lighting system had made an

enormous difference to his family. He no longer spent a number of days travelling into Dili to purchase expensive kerosene, and therefore leaving his farm and family. The lights were cheaper to run and provided his family with good light to cook by, for his children to study by and economic opportunities as well."

Few other aid groups work in this area, and only a handful of people visit these communities in the wet period. Houses in the village are traditional in design, with a single door and no windows, so they are very dark inside. The Lighting Project replaces inadequate and polluting light sources with solar-powered lighting. Currently, and only if householders can afford it, houses are typically lit by kerosene in small discarded paint tins, or sometimes candles, producing a flickering light, which causes eyestrain and produces particulates. Adequate lighting makes a real difference to the lives of everyone, especially students.

Each household received a system consisting of **solar panels, a controller, batteries and three energy-efficient lights bulbs**, in return for which they contribute to a community fund for the system's upkeep. Maintenance training and skills transfer are essential elements of the scheme. The cost to recipients is about a quarter of what they currently pay for kerosene. This is significant in a country deemed the poorest in Asia. Our partner organisation is a not-for-profit NGO called Alternative Technologies Association (ATA). ATA designs the solar systems for Kangaroo Valley, at cost, and using volunteers from Australia, trains local Timorese from the villages to install and maintain the systems. Together with KVRP, ATA has successfully introduced the systems into many villages, with very positive feedback (for instance, women are freed from other tasks during daylight hours, no longer having to complete all their indoor work before the sun sets and allowing children to study at night). Since the first installation of systems in 2009 ATA has improved the components and capacity of the systems, providing better light and longer duration of light. For example the most recent installations included a security light for houses, lighting up the external area of the house as well. Larger sized panels and battery power were also a feature of later system design.

The communities have accumulated funds over the last few years, which has been banked and can be harnessed using a cooperative structure to provide small loans to support community capacity building projects. KVRP continues to work with the communities to support this legacy of the project.

Our target for the Trek was to ensure every remaining household in Remexio currently without lights (and unlikely to benefit from the government sponsored electricity roll out) received a solar system. With the help of our supporters in Australia, who participated in the Treks for Timor and together with their families and friends raised over \$260,000, this project has been an extraordinary success. We have also received support from Australian Volunteers International, Friends of Aileu and the Aileu District Administration, all of whom have worked with us here in Australia or on the ground in Remexio to make the project work.

A full evaluation of the Village Lighting Project will be available by the end of 2017.

