

# **REPOSITIONING OF THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM OF FUNDASAUN ALOLA**

**AUGUST 2009**

## **1. PURPOSE**

This paper:

- i) Explains the outcomes of a recent review of the Fundasaun Alola's Scholarship Program; and
- ii) Proposes a way of repositioning the Scholarship Program so that the Fundasaun Alola (Alola) can continue to meet its objectives in relation to promoting the participation of girls in education.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Alola was established in 2001 to raise awareness of and campaign against the sexual and gender-based violence inflicted on women in Timor-Leste. Today Alola has grown to respond to many other needs of Timor-Leste women and children, such as advocacy, economic empowerment, education and literacy, maternal and child health, and humanitarian assistance. Alola works proactively in direct partnership with citizen and non-profit organisations from within the country and around the world to achieve this.

Since its foundation Alola has improved the lives of women and children of Timor-Leste by providing a wide range of important support programs. The Education Program continues to be a critical component of Alola's work. This Program has included:

- School Support Officers demonstrating best practice to teachers and children;
- In conjunction with the Ministry of Education, assisting pre-primary teachers to achieve formal accreditation;
- Providing teacher in-service and practical and logistical support to participate in schools;
- Sourcing, adapting and producing resources suitable for school aged children;
- Refurbishing and rebuilding pre - schools needing substantial reconstruction;
- Developing and maintaining relationships between Australia and Timor-Leste schools; and
- Administering an extensive range of scholarships to primary, secondary and tertiary level students.

Alola operates in a context of very limited resources, very significant need, and in a country where there has been an emphasis on improving the lives of all rather than on selected individuals. Consequently, a tension exists around the extent to which Alola should undertake initiatives centred around individual students and schools (often harnessing the goodwill of many overseas supporters) and the extent to which it should concentrate on improving local systems and institutional capacity (thereby building an ongoing ability to improve outcomes for individuals).

Recently Alola has decided to reorientate its efforts in schools so that instead of facilitating links between overseas supporters and individual schools in Timor-Leste, resources are focussed on activities such as improving teacher capability and providing teaching resources.

Consideration is currently being given to whether Alola's scholarship program should be similarly repositioned.

### **3. REVIEW OF EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

#### **3.1 Achievements**

Since its inception in 2003 the scholarship program has supported well over a thousand students to continue in education in over one hundred schools and tertiary institutions across the 13 Districts of Timor-Leste.

The majority of the tertiary scholarships have in large part, through collaboration with supporters such as the Norwegian Council on East Timor, funded students to attend the Dili Institute of Technology and the Baucau Teacher Training College.

Secondary school scholarship received their greatest boost when the University of Melbourne provided assistance to over 200 disadvantaged students over a four-year period. The obligations under this agreement will be acquitted during the 2009-2010 financial year.

A smaller number of scholarships supported by groups and individuals around the world have also been managed by Alola's Scholarship Coordinator.

More recently, the opportunity has been taken when distributing scholarship funds to also conduct educational and life-skills training with students and teachers in various locations.

#### **3.2 Challenges**

While Alola's explicit objectives are to assist Timor-Leste women, it has not been considered possible to limit the scholarship program to female beneficiaries, particularly when individual donors have chosen males as beneficiaries, and when the applicants (particularly at the tertiary level) have included many

males. This has caused some questioning about whether the current scholarship arrangement is the best way to achieve Alola's objectives.

The scholarship program, particularly at the primary and secondary level, necessarily generates a large administrative burden. Only small amounts are awarded (currently three payments of \$US20 for primary school students and three payments for secondary school). These have to be distributed in person to a variety of locations in all 13 Districts across all of Timor-Leste. The overheads in terms of vehicles, petrol, accommodation and record keeping, along with staff time, are inordinate for such small sums.

Implementing the scholarship program presents a health and safety risk to both its administrators and beneficiaries. The absence of any banking system outside of Dili requires Alola staff to personally carry thousands of dollars during long trips into rural areas. Further, when the payment is made to the individual it often represents a significant sum and more than a child or youth would normally handle. The money can only be given in cash with beneficiaries naturally under significant pressure to share their wealth.

It is questionable whether the payments are adequate to support an individual, particularly one from a disadvantaged background required to travel to the senior secondary school in the District capital. The objective of supporting girls' retention in school may not really be being achieved.

Alola is unable to satisfy the wishes of many individual donors to receive information about their sponsored beneficiary. To do so would be not only a further administrative burden, but also represents an intrusion into a child's life that is not always welcome and distorts their normal position in the community.

The dispersed nature of the scholarships, particularly at the primary and secondary level, makes it difficult to promote women's education as a concept and its benefits. There is no readily identifiable and distinct group of individuals whose progress can be monitored and reported upon.

#### **4. PROPOSAL TO REPOSITION THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

##### **4.1 Proposal**

It is proposed that the school scholarship component of the scholarship program be repositioned so that it more realistically supports girls from remote areas to continue to study at secondary school, and also provides a mechanism to promote ongoing awareness in Timor-Leste of the value of women's participation in education.

Called the "Alola Women's Participation in Education Award", this proposal would commence operation in 2010 with three girls from each of the 13 Districts receiving significant scholarships that would allow them to attend the full three years of secondary school.

## **4.2 Implementation**

Nominations for the new scholarships would be encouraged to be made in each District by:

- Alola District personnel
- NGOs in the District
- Local administrators such as the Suco Council
- Ministry of Education Sub-District offices

The Education Team of Alola would determine scholarships, with applicants assessed on:

- Academic potential
- Academic performance
- Need in terms of remoteness and vulnerability

Successful applicants would receive \$500 each year. This would cover food (approximately \$200); accommodation (\$180); transport (\$40); books and expenses (\$50); and clothes and personal items (\$30).

The first year of the new scholarship program, involving 39 students, would cost a total of \$22,500 (comprised of \$19,500 for scholarships and \$2,925 or 15% for salary and administration). The total for the second year, when additional scholarships have commenced, but with some shared administrative costs, would be approximately \$45,000. This would amount to a full operating cost after 3 years of \$67,000

To effect this repositioning of the scholarship program there would initially need to be a public announcement, including on Alola's website, and advice provided to existing donors and key stakeholders. This would be followed by opening nominations for the scholarships and distributing relevant information and forms to potential nominators and applicants. The announcement of successful applications should occur in time for students to plan for and enrol in school, although the first of a biennial payment need not be made until the commencement of the academic year. The end of the first academic year would provide a significant opportunity for promoting the value of the program and women's education generally.

## **4.3 Relationship to other programs**

The new scholarships program could be introduced with no disruption to the current beneficiaries. Commitments made to these beneficiaries would be met, with most finishing in 2010, and the few remaining finishing in 2011 and 2012. Money for the 2010 scholarships has already been allocated in the budget. No additional scholarships under the current primary or secondary school arrangement would be awarded after 2009 and instead the new secondary scholarship program would be introduced in a staged manner.

No change is proposed to the current tertiary scholarship program. The Scholarship Coordinator will be in a position to oversee the Tertiary

Scholarships, the phasing out of the current primary and secondary scholarships and the introduction of the new Secondary Scholarships.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

It is proposed that the school scholarship program be reorientated to phase out the current primary and secondary scholarships and replace them with a new program that assists the retention in secondary school of girls from remote and disadvantaged backgrounds. This would reduce the administrative burden of the program, allow targeting of scholarships to girls, and in particular those facing the added challenge of remoteness. Such a change is consistent with Alola's objectives of promoting the retention of girls in education and result in having clearly identified scholarship holders (available in Dili on a bi-annual basis and able to be contacted subsequently) to raise awareness in relation to the value of women's education and their successes.

The desire of donors to assist Timor-Leste students through scholarships can still be put into effect, while reducing the individualised person-to-person approach. Donors can be confident that awardees have been selected on uniform criteria and will have available to them regular information on beneficiaries as a group and their progress.

Consequently, this recommended modification to the scholarship program will more effectively achieve Alola's objective of promoting the participation of girls in education.