

**Interview with Simao da Silva Barreto.  
Radio 3CR Interviewer Damaris Baker – Breakfast Program  
Monday 27/08/07**

My name is Simao da Silva Barreto. I am from East Timor - Suai, Covalima which is one of the districts near the border (with West Timor). My background is that I was with the U.N. for six years and I have also taught at one of the secondary schools since 2001. So I take some hours in the school in the morning and in the afternoon I can do my main job as coordinator of the Community Centre which has links with Friends of Suai, Port Phillip. I've come here to Melbourne to present some results of the evaluation that we did there last June.

Basically the livelihood of the people in Covalima is farming. They live in the flat area and some three sub-districts in the hills. The people farm rice and maize in fields on the flat land and also on the hills. Some people have a little experience in doing business in the markets and probably in the future we need more experience and skills in how to run business activities.

The main concern of the people at the time being is the situation in the east - in Baucau, Liquica, Los Palos. But in the districts which are on the border, including Suai, Maliana, and Oecussi, we are very calm and friendly with the Indonesian people. Sometimes we also buy and sell things in markets on the border. So mostly young people in the west side (of East Timor) don't like the disputes between Timorese people and we guarantee that we don't want to, and will not do the same things that are happening in the east side. That's very important.

The relationship that Friends of Suai has with our districts is very helpful because they have already carried out some projects and now have other projects running. That's why I'm here - to present other projects which were discussed in the evaluation last June and chosen to be done in the near future.

The Community Centre, which gets donations from Port Phillip and Friends of Suai, is very helpful for the people because we work with the community on the ground. And in the Community Centre itself we also have sewing projects, computer courses and English courses.

We also have some projects with partners such as local N.G.O.'s (non-government organizations). In Suai we have more than ten N.G.O.'s. So that's very helpful.

In 2000 we had nothing because, as you can imagine, Suai being very close to the border, was easily taken over by the militia people in 1999. They took everything from Suai, even the cemetery, and so that's why we had to start from zero.

**Interviewer**

You had to rebuild the whole infrastructure...?

**Simao da Silva Barreto**

Rebuild all the things - the whole infrastructure - yes.

**Interviewer**

Tell me about the changes that there have been with the younger generation. Your generation has been through a lot in East Timor, and do you think you have a different perspective than the younger generation that's coming through now?

**Simao da Silva Barreto**

My generation has had experience of the last twenty -four years. So we share the same hopes as the next generation. We very much hope that our leaders don't create conflict in our country. We hate conflict because we have had the worst experience of it from colonization. My hope for the future is that we get the best leaders to lead this country. We must also learn how to be the best leaders in the next fifteen or twenty years. So we hope that all East Timorese people will act in a calm and peaceful manner and that bad experiences are not repeated.

**Interviewer**

So do you think the younger generation is impatient? Do you think they want to see more change happen quickly? Do you understand that? Because you yourself have been part of student protest solidarity

**Simao da Silva Barreto**

Yes, I was also very active from 1989 until 1999 when I was at the university. The main thing for me is that we understand and don't repeat our bad experiences. People with education, like me, understand the situation. Some young people don't understand, so they want to change everything in one or five years. But it's impossible; because my understanding is that we are a new country. Actually you can give the example of a baby or child. We start from zero. We cannot do everything in one year, in one time, completely. We cannot imagine that. So, we understand, our generation, that we need to go step by step and we also need to review the process as we go. Everything cannot be finished in a short time. We also trust our leaders - we *should* trust our leaders - to do something. Not all things ...but small things can be done.

Of course you can imagine that in Portuguese times there were not more than five or ten people who graduated from Bachelor degrees. And in Indonesian times we had a lot of Bachelor degrees but in my district there were not more than five. So now we can do many things, but we support education as number one in our country, because without learning we can't rebuild our country. So education is more important than the other sectors.

**Interviewer**

You were part of a community radio station in Suai, but is that closed down now or is it still running?

**Simao da Silva Barreto**

We sometimes don't yet understand the function of the media. Actually radio is very important – the role of any media is very important in a new country. But unfortunately we got funding for the system from the World Bank but no maintenance for running it. So the radio hasn't been operating since 2004. Also we don't have much equipment and some of it was stolen. Hopefully in the near future we'll get some funding assistance from someone else to help us to run the community radio in my district again.

**Interviewer**

Because there are other community radio stations around other parts of East Timor. Do you know anything about those?

**Simao da Silva Barreto**

Yes. The community radio in Same, Ailieu, Ainaro, Ermera and Oecussi. But the staff there at the community centres work voluntarily. 'Voluntary' in East Timor and in Australia is not the same thing. In Australia people who work as volunteers usually have other resources to survive and support themselves in their lives. But in Timor it is different.

**Interviewer**

Yes. Are there any final words you'd like to say?

**Simao da Silva Barreto**

Yes, I want to say thanks, because this is a good opportunity and you ask me to share all information that we have in our country and especially in Covalima. Thanks to the radio here - community radio in Australia – Radio 3 C.R. Thanks very much for sharing information through the radio.