

BUILDING FROM GROUND ZERO



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The Valu Sere Community Group literally had to build its eco-tourism venture from the ground up. It took them over a year to plan, to source building materials and to prepare for the construction phase. The construction took another year before the site open up for visitors.

Haburas truck transporting building materials and water to the Valu Sere site everyday throughout the construction period



Men and women of all ages got down to their hands and knees to repair the track connecting the village of Tutuala to Valu Sere



When the community group at Valu Sere picked the site, the track from the village of Tutuala to the beach was in a poor state of disrepair with deep gullies and fallen rocks strewn across it in many places. The Valu Sere Community Group mobilised the entire community and got a 500-person strong workforce to fix the track. Using their bare hands, they shifted stones and rocks from the track, leveled out pot holes and gullies along the track. They laboured on it for about a week on a voluntary basis as their contribution to the tourist project. They were proud of the opportunity to open up Valu Sere and Jaco Island to visitors to promote their rich culture and history.

Bamboo stems used for the construction of walls, doors and floors for the lodges

Another major challenge was the absence of fresh water sources nearby. The closest source was some eight kilometers uphill at the Pitileti spring by the side of the track about two kilometers from Tutuala. There were sites of some disused springs around but they were mostly damaged and dried up through external interventions and interference against local tradition outside of the control of the locals. For several years, fresh water had to be carted down from the Pitileti spring for the eco-lodges. Every day, sea water had to be hand carried in buckets from the sea for the toilet.



Eventually the community group acquired a pump and a bore was dug a few hundred metres from the eco-lodges. Fresh water supply remains a challenging problem because the bore water pump had broken down several times. Repairs could take weeks or even months depending on the extent of the problem as there are no technical service available locally. Often times, a technician has to be called all the way from Dili. The community tourism group gradually learn to improve their management of the water problem and the pump has been working for quite some time now.

The community group worked very hard using their bare hands and basic manual tools utilising bush materials they have collected and prepared in the traditional way. Apart from the building design which was done to suit visitors' need, local skills, craft and knowledge of buildings and construction were put into full use.



Selected timber from nearby bush was manually cut and carried to the site



The septic 'tank' being dug with a shovel.



A local skilled in carpentry using a manual plane to shave the timber



Men and women worked together to weave bamboo strips into panels for walls and doors.

Men and women from different families shared the workload in between their seasonal farming activities and family chores. They worked on a voluntary basis and contributed building materials from their natural resource pool. What they could not obtain from their garden and the forest, they bought or bartered with others in the community nearby.

All of the group members shared the strong conviction that the venture would be a positive contribution to their community in the long run.



The two lodges almost completed with roofs made from coconut leaves fastened with palm fibre

Haburas supported them through facilitating training workshops, help resolved and managed problems and conflicts. Throughout the construction phase, Haburas supplemented the community group with food, drinking water and other basic essentials.

Haburas played a key role in guiding the community group with their financial planning and management.



The frame of two of the lodges made of bush timber and fastened with rattan strings

The new dinning hall was built and funded entirely by the community group in 2013



Being a new venture, there were many challenges and issues to be dealt with. The strong commitment from the community group and their determination to make the venture a success had helped them to resolve many problem constructively. It had taken many years for the community group to become totally self reliant and financially independent. Today, about forty members remained in the the Valu Sere Community Tourism Group. They continued to learn and to improve the venture gradually from their practical experience, evaluation process, training

support and visitors' feedback. The Group has has a healthy bank reserve, a sound system of financial management. It has paid for its own maintenance and expansion from the income generated. The various families that participated in the venture have benefited from the venture. The material improvement and cultural pride are evident in the village of Tutuala from the renovated houses, small businesses that sprung up and the dignity and pride displayed by the people. The tourism venture has made a positive difference for the community.

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