

# FRESH QUESTIONS OVER MONEY SPENT DURING AUSTRALIA'S FAILED WORLD CUP BID HAVE EMERGED, WITH SOURCES IN ASIA SAYING THEY HAVE SEEN LITTLE OR NO SIGN OF THE MILLIONS ALLOCATED FOR FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

It's the balls that he remembers. Hundreds and hundreds of them. Or, more likely, thousands. Each a gift from Australia looking to win friends in Asia as it campaigned for the right to host the 2022 World Cup.

**"There was** a shipment of footballs from the FFA," said Mohamed Basir, then director of education in a football development project being run in Chonburi, Thailand. "It was not a small amount."

**Others involved** in the program, run as part of Vision Asia, a pet project of then AFC president Mohammed Bin Hammam, remember boxes full of training cones arriving from Australia too.

**Football Federation** Australia officially launched their bid for the right to host the 2022 showpiece in June 2009, with world governing body FIFA controversially awarding the right to Qatar in December 2010.

**Australia's largesse** in this period was so great that the AFC handed the FFA its inaugural Dream Asia award in 2010, a prize which recognises contributions to social development through football.

**But finding** out details of how much money was spent - and where exactly it went - has proven difficult.

**The few** remaining reports on either the FFA or AFC websites are short on detail, and repeated requests for more information have been ignored. Even at the time, the FFA was not forthcoming on details.

**FIFA report reveals explosive evidence behind Australia's failed World Cup bid**

**"FFA PR** on AFC awards omits any details of their Dream Asia award...for investing \$5million in O/S football projects in Asia," tweeted one journalist on the night of the event. "Wonder why?"

**Nothing could** be found detailing FFA's involvement in four Vision Asia projects: giving out equipment in Thailand and Vietnam, helping with football development projects in Timor Leste, and a contribution to the construction of a futsal park in Chengdu, China, following the Sichuan earthquake.

**Elsewhere, Frank** Lowy spoke of flying youth teams from Laos and Malaysia to tournaments in Australia, and of a project

in the Philippines.

**All moneys** went to projects in the ASEAN Football Federation countries, which were unofficially represented in the World Cup vote by Thailand's Worawi Makudi.

**While the** ABC's Four Corners program has also reported the \$5 million spend, an FFA report tabled in Parliament shows its contribution in Asia was actually closer to \$1.5 million.

**"The discrepancy** raises questions," FFA whistleblower Bonita Mersiades told The World Game.

**"Was \$5** million paid? If so, from what bucket of money? Has it helped those it was intended to help? If \$5 million was not paid, why did FFA receive a Dream Asia award in November 2010 for a \$5 million donation?

**"It seems** odd that a \$1.5 million or \$5 million donation - whichever it is - was not given greater publicity. Why keep it quiet?

**"It's surprising** that FFA's members (state federations) have never been interested in finding out."

**Whatever the** true figure, some on the ground are questioning where all the money went.

**In Timor** Leste, promises were made to develop the half-island's first national league, to provide introductory training for coaches and to send football administrators to Darwin for development work.

**Almost a** decade later, Australia's closest Asian neighbour is still without a league, and football has been mismanaged to such a degree that the national team has been expelled from the next Asian Cup.

**Egas Alves**, a Timorese academic and campaigner involved in trying to clean up football in his home country is unaware of any spending in Timor Leste, from either the FFA or the AFC.

**"Since my** involvement in the football up to this date, I never heard or seen this football development happening," he said.

**"The public** has no information [about this spending]. Thus it creates a lack of scrutiny from the public which potentially could create a deviation of this funding by the



recipients."

**The recently** released Garcia Report, FIFA's internal assessment of the World Cup bidding scandal, has already raised concerns about Australia's use of development money to curry favour with voting officials (though it did not specifically mention spending in Asia).

**"These examples** of 'football development' reveal a disturbing pattern," the report concluded of Australia's campaign.

**"FFA's approach** to funding development projects in Africa and elsewhere is a further unfortunate example of bid teams using money that should be awarded based upon humanitarian considerations to curry favor with officials eligible to vote.

**"Australia 2022** appears to have reached the firm conclusion that it could best 'demonstrate [its] commitment' by targeting development projects in areas home to FIFA Executive Committee members."

**The FFA** has previously come under fire for a \$500,000 payment made to football in the Caribbean. This is significantly less than

the money spent in Asia.

**A Freedom** of Information request has revealed a number of documents relating to Australia's spending in Asia, though these documents have not been released.

**FFA have** also been approached for a response.

**Mersiades says** development funding has long been an avenue through which favours have been sought and granted in the football world.

**"FIFA has** introduced recent changes to their processes in respect of the funding they distribute in recognition of the fact that there was previously insufficient management and accountability of development funds," she said.

**"Whether these** changes are sufficient remains to be seen."

**One person** involved in a Vision Asia project, who did not wish to be named, said barely any money was seen at ground level.

**"How much** money trickles down to development is a pittance," he said. "You wonder where the rest goes."