



focus

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WOMEN'S WORTH

ABOUT 1.3 BILLION PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD LIVE ON LESS THAN \$2 A DAY. THE MAJORITY ARE WOMEN AND A LARGE PROPORTION LIVE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION.



FROM THE MINISTER

Many women in developing countries have little control over their lives and are largely at the mercy of wider social and economic forces. Through its overseas aid program, Australia creates opportunities for many of these women so that they can play a greater role in shaping their communities and their countries. As it is, there are too many women in the most needy sections of communities and too few in positions of power that drive positive change.

As I enter my fourth term as Minister for Foreign Affairs I am encouraged by the aid program's efforts to advance the status of women in our region.

We are helping girls and women gain access to basic education and health services. Educated, healthy people can participate more fully in society.

They help drive local and national economies. This has profound implications for human development.

I am also encouraged by the aid program's work to help free women from the shackles of poverty. When women gain access to resources and employ them to generate income they are able to add to household earnings and gradually bridge the traditional divide between the genders. Women usually spend their earnings on the family – on food, education and improved health care for their children.

In countries where civil unrest has hindered development, women are playing a vital role in building peace. I am proud of the support Australia has given to women in Solomon Islands and Bougainville. Women here have put in place measures to promote and restore

peace within their communities. Their courage is amazing. Some women have literally stepped between warring factions to stop the fighting.

In Afghanistan we have funded back-to-school programs for girls once denied an education. In Iraq we have helped restore basic services, such as water supply and sanitation. We have also provided in Iraq assistance through the United Nations to women's groups so women will take part in national elections.

But one issue having a devastating effect on women is HIV/AIDS. More than half of the estimated 38 million people living with HIV/AIDS around the world are women and the figure is growing. Unless the virus is checked, women more than men, in the Asia-Pacific region will bear the brunt of the physical, social

and economic effects of this frightful disease.

There is no doubt that women are pivotal to human development. I am confident that our focus on activities benefiting women in developing countries is an investment in nation building. That's something from which everyone in the community can benefit.

Alexander Downer
Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, arrives at a meeting of senior officials of the Bali Process. Australia is contributing additional funds to combat child sex tourism and to assist the return and reintegration of trafficked and other vulnerable women and children in the Asia-Pacific region.
Photo: Tony Phillips/AAP

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Government aid in focus The Australian aid program is committed to reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development in the Asia Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Australian businesses and people play a major role in delivering the aid program. Australian expertise, Australian experience and Australian resources are used to tackle poverty. And by investing in development Australia is investing in its future. In 2004–05 Australia plans to spend almost \$2.133 billion on development assistance. The aid program focuses on promoting regional peace, stability and economic development through several hundred large and small-scale projects. Countries to which Australia is committed include Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu (the Pacific region); Indonesia, East Timor, Vietnam, Philippines, China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Thailand, Lao PDR, Burma (East Asia); Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives, Bhutan (South Asia); and Africa and the Middle East.

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COVER: A hill tribeswoman from the northern part of Laos. Photo: Chris Stowers/Panos Pictures

IN BRIEF

UNIFEM – WORKING FOR WOMEN

UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, works for women's empowerment and gender equity. It receives financial assistance from AusAID.

UNIFEM has been a driving force behind Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Australia strongly supports the resolution.

In its latest report, UNIFEM found that by the end of the 1990s women

- > held 30 per cent or more of the seats in national parliament in only 8 countries
- > occupied 30 per cent or more of administrative and managerial jobs in only 16 countries
- > provided 70 per cent of the unpaid time spent caring for family members.

The need for women to be fully represented in society was reiterated by Noleen Heyzer in a recent lecture dedicated to the memory of Dag Hammarskjold, a former Secretary-General of the United Nations. She said, 'If we are to find just and equitable responses to the great challenges of this era and increase all forms of human security – economic, political and social – then those who are the most affected by insecurities and injustices must be involved in finding solutions.

'Decision makers must take into account current problems of injustice at every level, as well as people's own solutions to them. Because some of the most entrenched social, economic, political and cultural injustices are

endured by women, half of the world's population, it is necessary to make their voices heard, their perspectives visible, and their solutions legitimate; they must become leaders of communities and institutions, with the power to shape policies and agendas.

'In an increasingly insecure world, the vision of women who advocate for peace and justice must finally come to the fore as the dominant, rather than the alternative, perspective. Unless we take seriously the theme of the United Nations Women's World Conferences, "Equality, Development and Peace", we are going to lose out on the possibility of long-term peace and stability.'

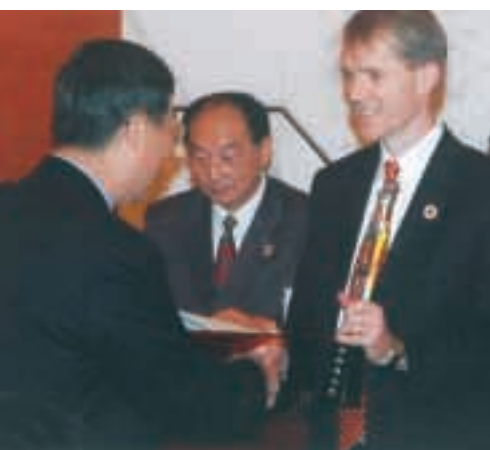
Women must make their voices heard.

Photo: Karen Robinson/Panos Pictures



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IS ON 8 MARCH 2005

AWARD IN CHINA



China has recognised AusAID's efforts over the past 20 years in helping it to reduce poverty. Graham Fletcher (right), from the Australian Embassy in Beijing, accepted an award from China's Vice Premier, Hui Liangyu, on behalf of the Australian Ambassador to China, Alan Thomas. The ceremony was held on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

This is the first time the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation has included an international cooperation category since the awards began in 1997. Photo: AusAID

GOVINDA WINS

Australian Development Scholarship recipient, Govinda Raj Poudel, attends the University of Technology, Sydney. He's completing a Bachelor of Engineering degree, with sub-majors in forensic engineering and computer systems.

Govinda has just received the Young Biomedical Engineer of the Year Award for his paper titled, 'Bio-impedance Spectrometer for Tissue Impedance Analysis'. The award recognises the talent and dedication he has shown throughout his course.

Govinda's special interest is in medical and information



technologies and he sees tremendous opportunities in applying them. For example, he'd like to explore ways a combination of these technologies could deliver medical treatment to remote areas in his home country of Nepal.

Govinda Raj Poudel (left) receiving his award from Bruce Morrison, Chairman of the Australian College of Biomedical Engineers. Photo: Adrian Richard/CBE

PEACEKEEPER COINS

The Perth Mint has issued a limited release of silver coins in honour of Australians who have served as United Nations or Multinational Force peacekeepers in world trouble spots.

The coins depict members of humanitarian aid teams, the army, navy, air force, and police at work.

As peacekeeping missions become increasingly complex and multi-dimensional the operational role of Australian peacekeepers has changed. Peacekeepers now train local police, provide electoral support, restore law and order and rejuvenate local justice systems. They also undertake humanitarian activities, such as de-mining and monitoring cease-fire and peace agreements.



The Australian Government's overseas aid program underlines Australia's commitment to peace and regional stability. Each year the work of AusAID reaches millions of people in difficult circumstances. By reducing poverty, relieving conflict and building stronger communities, AusAID is helping to improve lives.

The release of the coin set coincides with the 60th anniversary of the formation of the United Nations.



LEFT: A set of five 2005-dated coins commemorates the personal efforts of Australians who have served as peacekeepers. Photo: Perth Mint

ABOVE: The AusAID coin showing humanitarian assistance. Each of the five Australian peacekeeper coins is struck from 2 ounces of 99.9 per cent pure silver in proof quality. Photo: Perth Mint

For further information see
<www.perthmint.com.au/gc>

EXTRA

IRAQ FREE FROM DEBT Australia has joined with other governments to forgive 80 per cent of Iraq's debt.

Under the agreement, Australia will forgive \$1.1 billion.

Once it is relieved of much of its debt, Iraq has the potential to become a stable partner for Australia in the Middle East, providing new opportunities for Australian exporters and investors. This includes in the market for wheat, which has long been Australia's largest export to Iraq.

Also ETHIOPIA The Australian Government has forgiven Ethiopia's debt to Australia of \$7.9 million. The decision was taken after Ethiopia successfully prepared comprehensive, poverty-reduction strategies. Ethiopia will devote resources freed up by the waiving of its debts to such areas as health and education and investment in the country's infrastructure. Earlier this year, Australia forgave Nicaragua's bilateral debt of \$5.4 million.

CHURCHES PARTNERSHIP A new, five-year churches partnership program has been launched in Papua New Guinea. Through AusAID, Australia will provide \$2.9 million in the first year to help improve basic services.

Churches have a long history of supporting development in Papua New Guinea. With extensive networks in remote and isolated areas of the country, it has often fallen to them to provide basic services. The Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventist and United churches, as well as the Salvation Army, have joined the partnership program.

WATER QUALITY GUIDE

AusAID's Water Safety Guide is due for release in May 2005. It takes a risk management approach to water quality (pioneered in Australia) and adapts it for use in developing countries. It has been developed in partnership with key organisations, including the World Health Organization.



BANGLADESH: Collecting arsenic-free water from a rainwater tank provided by AusAID. Photo: Simon Buckley/AusAID

VOLUNTEER POLICY

The Australian Government has assisted more than 9,000 volunteers to take part in overseas development activities since the 1960s. Volunteers help build skills and resources in countries where these may be lacking.

As individuals, volunteers benefit by learning about another country and culture and acquiring knowledge and new skills. Collectively, they add value to the human dimension of the aid program, showing the positive difference that Australians can make to sustainable development, skills and cross-cultural understanding.

In order to keep the volunteer program relevant to the changing needs of countries, AusAID has in



place a new volunteer policy, *Volunteers and Australian Development Cooperation*.

The policy is on the AusAID website at
<www.ausaid.gov.au/publications>
or can be ordered from
<books@ausaid.gov.au>



A girl from the Musahar caste learns how to use a sewing machine in a village near Patna in Bihar Province, India.
Photo: Ami Vitali/Panos Pictures

THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
ESTIMATES THAT 70 PER CENT OF THE 1.3 BILLION
PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY ARE WOMEN AND AMONG
THE WORLD'S 900 MILLION ILLITERATE PEOPLE, WOMEN
OUTNUMBER MEN TWO TO ONE. THE FEMINISATION OF
POVERTY IS A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF WOMEN'S
UNEQUAL ACCESS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES.

WOMEN'S WORTH

FAIR CHANCE

FOR ALL

The best way to sustain democracies, reduce conflict and achieve human development is to involve both men and women in decision making.

In most low-income countries, women work much longer hours and are less likely to hold title to land than men. Girls are often kept out of school to help at home and in the fields. Overall, girls have lower quality nutrition, less health care and poorer education opportunities than boys. Yet, there is ample evidence that when women and men have relative equality, economies grow faster and there is less corruption. Children's health also improves and population growth lowers.

While poverty is about lack of resources – it's also about lack of empowerment, opportunity and security. Removing inequalities give societies a better chance of developing.

Women in developing countries are effective agents of change. Australia's aid program recognises this and ensures that women are included at the earliest possible stage of development activities. 'Women and girls tend to see longer term project benefits. They are more persistent and are likely to invest greater effort into their children's future,' says Nescha Teckle, AusAID's gender adviser. 'Support women and you support the community.'

It is critical that women as well as men benefit from development.



THERE IS NO TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS.

Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General



EDUCATION

Jirmira is a nine-year-old girl from a poor family living in a remote village in one of the world's poorer countries. It could be almost anywhere in the Asia-Pacific region.

Where she lives girls sometimes go to primary school but, more often than not, they stay at home to look after younger siblings, to fetch water, cook and wash. When Jirmira turns 12 she will marry, possibly someone much older, and go to live with his family. By 14 she will have the first of many children. For the rest of her life she will carry out domestic chores and care for the family, including sick and elderly relatives. She will have few choices. If she also has a job outside the home it's unlikely she'll earn much. She'll never earn as much as her husband. At 30 Jirmira will be old and worn out. But when she has daughters they too won't go to school. And when they turn 12 they too will marry – and so the cycle continues.

One of the most powerful means by which women can improve their circumstances is through education.

UNICEF estimates that there are 121 million primary age children around the world who don't go to school. The majority are girls, which reflects both the limited access and lower parental demand for female education. Although female adult literacy rates have improved in recent years, more than two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women.

Many families simply cannot afford to educate their daughters because their labour is needed at home or in the fields. There's also a concern in some societies that education may change the attitude of girls and make them less desirable for marriage. But there are other factors too. For instance, the worry parents feel about separation from their daughters and the availability of safe transport to and from school, especially when significant



distances are involved. These concerns can seriously affect attendance rates.

Yet, it is well understood that women who receive little basic education and who have poor literacy levels are unlikely, if not totally unable, to take part in vocational education programs later. Education prepares children for greater employment opportunities and, consequently, higher incomes. Because women usually spend their incomes on their children, on health and education, increasing the earning power of women benefits the whole family.

ABOVE: A dry fruit vendor waits for customers on a roadside stall in Karachi. Women street vendors are often the major contributors to household incomes among poor families in Pakistan. Photo: Akhtar Soomro/EPA
LEFT: Vietnamese girls happy to be at school. Photo: Suzette Mitchell
FAR LEFT: Mary Koete from the Community Peace and Restoration Fund speaking at the opening of Borohinaba Health Clinic, Central Province, Solomon Islands. Photo: Peter Davis/AusAID

Since 1999, Australia has trained about 45,000 primary school teachers and built or refurbished at least 1,200 schools and education centres in the Asia-Pacific region. Australian development assistance is providing over 50,000 people with vocational training and making it possible for more than two million children to go to school.

Australia is paying special attention to girls. For example, in Papua New Guinea the drop out rate for all students, but particularly girls, is alarming. Almost half of the children who enter primary school drop out before they reach grade 6. Thirty-five per cent of children who started grade 1 in 1994 completed grade 8 in 2001.

By improving facilities in schools and working with teachers on relevancy of the curriculum, the aid program is both lifting education standards and persuading students to stay on. Similar 'educational upgrade' programs are in place in other Asian and Pacific nations. In Vanuatu, for example, girls are learning non-traditional skills, such as car mechanics, boat building and electrical engineering (See *Education: Up to the Job* page 30). Skills in these areas translate into jobs.

Australia's overseas aid program has always acknowledged that education can lift individuals and families out of poverty. It is the key to development. And, as the research shows, empowering women as agents of social change must go hand in hand with education.

So crucial is education and health to development that in 2004-05 Australia is investing more than \$500 million in the two sectors, mainly in the Asia-Pacific region.



Women who have benefited from an education have greater understanding of nutrition and disease prevention. Because they are more able to exercise this knowledge it has a flow-on effect to their families.

But advances in basic health are being undermined by the disturbing advance of HIV in the region. 'Women are becoming increasingly susceptible to the disease,' says Annmaree O'Keeffe, Australia's Special Representative for HIV/AIDS. 'This is happening for several reasons. In remote areas of some countries, many women still have not heard about the disease, or have only scant and possibly incorrect information about it. Elsewhere women are fully aware of the disease and understand how it is transmitted but they may be culturally powerless to stop it infecting them. For example, a woman rarely commands enough status to insist her partner be monogamous or use a condom. Other times very young girls are contracted in marriage to older men who already have HIV. It is only a matter of time before they too become infected.'



Women again bear the greatest economic burden brought by AIDS on families. Grandmothers frequently end up caring for grandchildren if parents are too weak to work or have died. Young women, even girls, end up as sole carers and breadwinners.

ABOVE: Women working in a rubbish disposal and recycling plant (with a male overseer) in Nepal.

Photo: Piers Benatar/Panos Pictures
TOP: Student and teacher in a peace education class at school in Badakshan, Afghanistan. **Photo:** Robert Knoth/Panos Pictures

FAR RIGHT: Tofu market sellers in north Vietnam. **Photo:** Chris Stowers/Panos Pictures



WOMEN KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE DISPLACED, TO BEAR HIGH RATES OF MATERNAL AND CHILD MORTALITY AND LOW RATES OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE. THEY KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE EXCLUDED FROM PUBLIC LIFE, AND NOT BE RECOGNISED AS FULL CITIZENS.

Noeleen Heyzer,
Executive Director UNIFEM

There are already about 7.3 million people living with HIV in the Asia-Pacific region. Through the aid program Australia is working with all sections of the community to try to contain and slow the spread of the disease. Again education is the key. 'Education and knowledge empower women, especially when they get together and collectively lobby for change,' says Annmaree O'Keeffe.

ENTERPRISE

High in the mountains there is a flurry of activity around a new portable rice mill. Women are learning how to operate the machine that represents for them a dramatic turning point. No longer will they have to pound rice stalks by hand to separate grains – an arduous, repetitive and time-consuming task that leaves them exhausted and covered in dust. The portable rice mill, bought with a microfinance loan, will do this now. Their job will be to maintain it.

They'll be able to produce surplus rice now which they will sell to non-rice-growing villages. This will generate a nice income for the

women. For the first time they will have a measure of financial independence, a less physically demanding working day and, perhaps, even some spare time.

In addition to domestic duties and childcare, poor rural women are frequently responsible for agricultural production. Such responsibilities place heavy demands on a woman's time, especially if she is also running a small enterprise – such as selling excess vegetables – to supplement the family income.

For many women there is virtually no possibility of expanding home enterprises for reasons that range from

insufficient product to a lack of basic market knowledge, or poor literacy and numeracy skills.

Yet, for other women, lives can be revolutionised by access to relatively simple labour-saving technologies. These – such as a portable rice mill – free up time to allow women either singly or in groups to build up their micro-enterprise activities. It can be a boon for the whole community.

Australia’s overseas aid program recognises training and support is needed for micro-enterprise projects in both the microfinancing (management of savings and credit) and micro-enterprise development (small business and technical training) areas.

In recent years, microfinancing for women’s small enterprises has been an effective way to promote women’s self employment and access to credit. Such initiatives are an important means by which

women increase their productive capacity and are able to break out of the relentless poverty cycle.

It must be acknowledged that women entrepreneurs play an important role in local economies, and a large percentage of micro-enterprises in developing countries are undertaken by women. Women have the incentive and persistence for making businesses work very successfully.

DECISION MAKING

In the heat of the afternoon a group of women is listening intently to a community lawyer. It’s a women’s meeting and the topics covered are wide ranging – human rights, domestic violence, local politics. Some of the women are shy but others speak up – they’re gaining confidence as they find their voice. These women may be tomorrow’s decision makers.

IGNORING GENDER DISPARITIES COMES AT GREAT COST – TO PEOPLE’S WELLBEING AND TO COUNTRIES’ ABILITIES TO GROW SUSTAINABLY, TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY, AND THUS TO REDUCE POVERTY.

James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank



ABOUT GENDER

WHAT IS GENDER?

Gender refers to the roles and relationships between women and men. These are learned, change over time, and vary within and between countries and cultures according to race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, religious, historical and economic factors. Gender contrasts with sex, which describes a set of biological differences between men and women.

WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY?

Gender equality means women and men have equal opportunities

to contribute to the full realisation of their individual and national development and to benefit equally from such development. To achieve gender equality it is necessary to incorporate the priorities and values of all members of society – women and men – into all social institutions. This does not mean that women and men become the same but that they are valued as equal and that their opportunities are equal. It also means that existing inequality must be eliminated. In other words, women and men must have equal status.

It's widely accepted that the best way to sustain democracies, reduce conflict and achieve human development is to involve both men and women in decision making. For this reason Australia is encouraging women in developing countries to take up public positions. Australia is also helping to strengthen networks and organisations to give women a platform for future leadership (see *Peace and Power* page 14).

Australia's efforts to protect and promote human rights, especially in situations of domestic violence, have also led to cooperation with women's organisations and law enforcers. In Fiji and Vanuatu, for example, Australia supports the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (see *Safe Haven*, page 12) and various advocacy programs.

In East Timor, Australia's aid program has funded the

Community Empowerment and Strengthening Human Rights Project, which has developed training programs and materials in civic education, human rights and reconciliation. AusAID has also worked with East Timorese non-government organisations to help build community groups to work in these areas. AusAID continues to help with advocacy work and campaigns at a national level to stop violence against women and to improve the economic rights of women.

For further information see
<www.aisaid.gov.au/keyaid/gender.cfm>

FAR LEFT: Returning from market – in the rain, Vietnam. Photo: Suzette Mitchell
LEFT: A poster campaigning against domestic violence, Cambodia. Photo: Sean Sprague/Panos Pictures

DOES AUSTRALIA HAVE A GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY?

Yes. Australia's aid program supports equal opportunities for women and men as participants of development.

Policy objectives include:

- > improving women's access to education, health and economic resources
- > promoting participation and leadership in decision making at local and national levels
- > promoting human rights of women and eliminating discrimination against women.

AusAID's Peace Conflict and Development Policy recognises that women and children represent a significant proportion of populations displaced by conflict. The policy emphasises the critical role that women play as peace-brokers in conflict situations. The Humanitarian Action Policy also recognises that gender considerations must be incorporated into humanitarian responses.

For further information see
<www.aisaid.gov.au/keyaid/gender.cfm>



PLAYING FOR LIFE

AFGHANISTAN: A large crowd surrounds the two opposing groups. The rival sides glare at one another, waiting for the attack to begin. A teenage girl dives into the dust, the crowd roars. She has returned the serve and the game is underway.

The game is volleyball, a sport that is growing in popularity among the young women of Aschiana. This battle on the volleyball court is a metaphor for the battle the women face in life. They're challenging societal attitudes that deny them full participation in the community. It is in this second battle that the staff of Aschiana provide support and opportunities for young women.

Aschiana is an Afghan non-government organisation in Kabul. It's here that I spent the past 12 months as a volunteer under the AusAID–Australian Volunteers International Afghanistan Capacity Building Project. Aschiana offers many opportunities for education and training for woman, including literacy, numeracy, tailoring, hospitality, hairdressing and beauty therapy. It also has a strong recreational program giving women a chance to try non-traditional activities, such as sport, drama, music and art. The drama program has produced Marina, one of the stars of the film *Osama*, winner of the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film.

The positive effects of the Aschiana program can be seen on the smiling faces and heard in the uninhibited laughter of the young women as they interact with their teachers. The memories I have taken away with me are of happy young girls. Once too shy to speak without hiding behind their veils they now stand up and voice their opinions at meetings. I remember a 12-year-old girl reading her poem about what she will do when she is President of Afghanistan. I see a classroom of young women, each with a dream for her future.

But the most vivid memory of all is the girls' volleyball games – the great pleasure of watching the young women respond proudly and confidently to the cheers and support from the sidelines.

Bianca Murray was a volunteer through Australian Volunteers International (AVI). This organisation is supported by AusAID.

For further information
<www.aschiana.com>

ABOVE: Overlooking Kabul – a city scarred by years of war. Photo: Andrew Testa/PanosPictures

FOCUS ON THE PACIFIC

Despite their diversity, many Pacific nations share similar development challenges. Australia's aid program in the Pacific emphasises law and justice, democratic institutions and conflict resolution. It also supports economic reform.

SAFE HAVEN

Fiji: Once considered a private matter, violence against women is becoming a very public issue and one which the Government of Fiji is keen to address.

Vasemaca's story is typical of women who come to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. She married Joe at 16 and for the first few years the young couple lived happily with Joe's family. Joe worked as a plumber and they had enough money to get by. When Vasemaca became pregnant with their first child, Joe began to drink heavily and sometimes slapped and punched Vasemaca. He would tell her she hadn't prepared his food quickly enough, or that he had seen her speaking to another man.

A few weeks after the baby was born, Joe was drunk and chased Vasemaca out of the house. She and the baby slept under an umbrella in the rain. Vasemaca says, 'My relatives ignored what was happening because they feared my husband's aggressive ways. Everyone tried to act as normally as possible the next morning.'

Violence against women and children is a serious problem, not only in Fiji but around the world. In many Pacific countries it is a major

constraint to development, limiting women's access to education, health services and labour markets. Until the 1990s, domestic violence was ignored by communities and silently condoned by government agencies, including justice systems. In Fiji this is no longer the case and other island nations are following suit. Women like Vasemaca are able to receive help in starting new lives, free from fear and violence.

Vasemaca stayed with Joe for another nine years. By this time she had three children. They all dreaded Saturday nights and the children would hide when they heard their father coming home. One Saturday, Joe was drunk, picked up the baby and began to punch the walls, threatening to burn down the house. Vasemaca persuaded him to sit down and eat when the baby he was holding began to cry. As Vasemaca approached him to take the baby, she says, 'He yelled at the baby, shouted that I was spoiling the children and ordered me to leave



the house.' This was it for Vasemaca. Much later, she crept back into the house to fetch the children and went straight to the crisis centre.

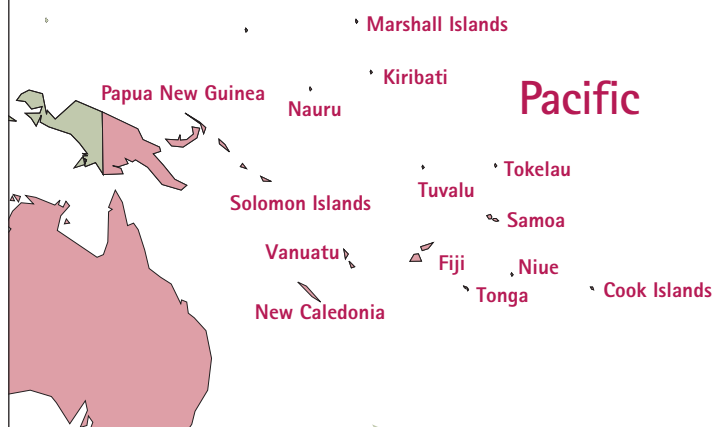
The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre offers safety. An old weatherboard building in downtown Suva, it provides legal advice and helps women through negotiations with police and government agencies. For example, the crisis centre staff help to get protection orders and child maintenance payments. Trained counsellors work with women who may have been beaten for years to overcome their fear and recover their independence. It's often a long process.

It's been hard but Vasemaca is

getting by quite well now. With all her children at school age, she's able to get a job, and with the crisis centre's help, housing assistance from the government. She's also learnt to no longer blame herself for Joe's violent behaviour.

Shamima Ali is the crisis centre's coordinator. She has worked at the centre for 20 years, beginning, like many of the staff, as a volunteer counsellor. She leads a program which provides help directly to women across Fiji, advocates tirelessly against gender-based discrimination and provides an extensive training program in the Pacific region.

'Our key achievement has been to show that domestic violence is



AT THE HEART OF THE MATTER IS CHANGING PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

not a private matter. Violence against women is now a public concern and the Government of Fiji accepts responsibility for addressing it as an abuse of human rights,' says Shamima.

The government's serious attitude to violence is borne out by the fact that the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre trains police and military officers in women's human rights. Crisis centre staff are also invited to provide training in counselling, advocacy and organisational administration in many neighbouring countries.

At the heart of the matter is changing people's attitudes about violence against women. Crisis centre staff conduct workshops in villages and awareness raising campaigns at the community level throughout Fiji. Staff members visit schools, hold public discussions and run advertising campaigns. They also fearlessly contest appeals to culture and tradition which try to justify acts of violence against women and children. They work with community leaders who often ask

for their help in resolving domestic violence issues through traditional justice systems.

And the efforts of the crisis centre are working. Positive results show in the way police respond to cases of gender-based violence, the way judges reach decisions in such cases and comment from the bench, and the way the Fijian media reports incidents of violence against women.

It's encouraging but there is still a long way to go before violence is off the agenda.

The Australian Government through AusAID is funding the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre for the next five years at a total cost of \$3.4 million. It has funded the crisis centre since 1991.

For more information see www.fijiwomen.com

LEFT: Shamima Ali, Coordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (left) with Edwina Kotoisuva, the Deputy Coordinator. Photo: Susan MacDonald/AusAID



MEN ADVOCATE AGAINST VIOLENCE

VANUATU: Sixteen men from the Vanuatu security forces graduate from a male advocacy workshop.

Run by the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the workshop is part of the program to help men become advocates for eliminating violence against women and children. During the week-long course the men discussed gender awareness, the law, human rights, domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment – and much more.

'We felt it was important members of the forces strengthen their understanding of gender issues, so that they can better deal with cases of violence against women,' says Marilyn Tah, Coordinator of the Vanuatu Women's Centre.

Shamima Ali, Coordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, recognises the cultural and religious barriers around domestic violence. She says the issues discussed at the sessions are a challenge to most men.

'I salute the participants who represent institutions which are

often considered male bastions of power allowing themselves to be challenged on generations of beliefs about male and female roles,' she says.

At the close of the workshop, Sergeant David Elison of the Vanuatu Mobile Force admitted the week was tough. He also said the course encouraged him to review his previously held views and his new understanding was a big 'stepping stone' towards combating gender violence.

As part of a coordinated regional approach, the male advocacy workshops are funded by the New Zealand Government through its international aid agency, NZAID.

ABOVE: The graduation class – 16 members of the Vanuatu security forces after their week-long male advocacy workshop, with coordinators, Shamima Ali (seated fourth from left) and Marilyn Tah (seated third from right). Photo: AusAID

THE RIGHTS DREAM



TONGA: When Betty Blake took on the role of Legal Rights Training Officer seven years ago it was her dream to build up a core group of community human rights advocates.

A teacher for over 30 years and the matriarch of a network of legal rights training officers, Betty Blake is a great source of advice for new recruits working for the protection of people's rights, not only in Tonga but also across the Pacific.

According to Betty, who coordinates the Catholic Women's League's Legal Literacy Project, one must have passion, knowledge and commitment. 'As I grow older I look at Tonga and I feel a need for more social justice,' she says.

When Betty began her work she was daunted. 'For a layperson like me it was very difficult to look at the law. But once you understand how the law works it is a tool for lobbying and change,' Betty explains before going on to say, 'When you look at culture, it is always changing and you realise it can be modified. It can be modified to deal with issues, such as domestic violence and gender inequities. Because Tonga has such a strong hierarchical structure we need to re-look at things.'

Thanks to funding from the Australian, New Zealand and British High Commissions in Nuku'alofa, Betty's dream is becoming a reality. Helped by the Catholic Women's League and the Suva-based Regional Rights Resource Team, Tonga's first ever Community Paralegal Training Program is up and running. It was officially opened by the First Secretary of the Australian High Commission, Bob Gardner.

The Community Paralegal Training Program covers areas such as good governance and democracy, international human rights law, gender discrimination and family law, as well as development and poverty reduction. Participants learn skills in advocacy and human rights support.

Already some of Tonga's community paralegals-in-training are making a difference.

For example, some are assisting a single mother of eight children with laying domestic violence charges against her former partner and helping her with claims for child maintenance. Community paralegals are also working on finding a suitable and safe home for this woman and her children. With the Catholic Women's League they are trying to raise funds to set up a refuge for women and children in similar circumstances.

With assistance from regional partners like the Regional Rights Resource Team and AusAID, the hard work on the ground by people like Betty Blake and her community paralegals, the Legal Literacy Project and the Catholic Women's League, will continue. And this important work will help ensure the women of Tonga live safer and more productive lives.

Hannah Harborow is from the Regional Rights Resource Team which is a United Nations Development Programme project.

ABOVE: Betty Blake understands that the law is a tool for lobbying and change. Photo: Hannah Harborow/RRRT

PEACE AND POWER



SOLOMON ISLANDS: The armed conflict in Solomon Islands from 1999 to 2001 displaced about 30,000 people and caused the collapse of essential services. While law and order is restored following the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), hard work lies ahead to secure a safe future. One of the main challenges is to build sustainable communities in which women and men enjoy equal status.

With peace restored to Solomon Islands, women across the country are determined to improve their status. Women played a significant role in resolving the recent conflict and now want an equal say in shaping the country's future.

Traditionally, there are not many choices for Solomon Islands women. They often miss out on education and have few opportunities to join in community life. Domestic violence is largely ignored, and many people believe its incidence increased with the conflict. During this time, weapons were widely available, incomes declined and excessive drinking increased. With few support services available, women have limited means to take domestic violence cases to court.

In post-conflict Solomon Islands, it's time to improve women's status and the quality of their daily lives. A new community-based program is working with women to raise their confidence and give them a voice in their communities.

One of the ways is through 'learning circles'. These are discussion groups of about 10 people, a mix of men and women, which concentrate on different issues, such as decision making, advocacy and networking.

'Women can contribute to positive change here in this country,' says Jennifer Tugunau, one of the project coordinators. 'They have been recognised for their initiative in bringing warring parties together during the ethnic unrest. Without them, peace would not have come so soon.'



ABOVE: Project coordinator Jennifer Tugunau. Photo: Joanna Mott/IWDA
LEFT: About to start community consultations. Photo: Elise Howard/IWDA

Jennifer Tugunau hopes that one day Solomon Islands society appreciates the important role of women. She says, 'Life for most here is still determined by the male members of the family. A common saying is "Women should be seen but not heard" and I would very much like to see that change.'

By making peace within and between communities stronger there is hope that women will be both seen and heard – not just locally but also, before long, in the Solomon Islands Parliament.

Adapted from an article by Leonie Duncan and Joanna Mott from IWDA

This program is funded by AusAID and managed by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and the Australian aid agencies, Live and Learn Environmental Education and Union Aid Abroad—APHEDA.



AN E-CHUTNEY EXPERIENCE

FIJI: In a house in Navua, about one hour's drive west of Suva, a group of women takes turns stirring a large pot over a stove. They're making chutney from tamarinds which grow in profusion on large trees under the tropical heat.



Until now the women have been selling their chutney, jams and marmalades in local markets and on the streets of Navua. They've been making a tidy profit but sales are set to jump. The women are expanding their sales pitch well beyond Navua and entering the world of e-marketing.

With help from Pauline Chia, an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development, the women are using email to sell their products. During a recent pilot run, they received orders from Suva for nearly 400 bottles of tamarind chutney.

'The women are so excited at their success because they have never had the opportunity to sell their products to such a broad base of customers,' Pauline says.

This would not have been possible without Navua's new telecentre. The telecentre is a communal facility set up by the Fiji Government to give people in rural areas access to modern telecommunications. Pauline is training the women to use the facilities so they can promote and sell locally-produced goods and services.

'Navua is quite a poor area so it's good that the women now have the chance to expand their market base. The telecentre means the women can learn new skills and have instant contact with people everywhere,' explains Pauline.

'Once the women are fully trained and confident about e-marketing, the opportunities for

them to sell their products are endless. Eventually it may be possible to have customers order over an Internet website,' she adds.

For more information see
<www.itc.gov.fj/echutney>

For further information about the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program contact
<www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham>

ABOVE: Members of the cooking group with samples. The women are on the brink of expanding their market. Photo: AusAID

TOP: Pauline Chia, an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development, shows one of the excellent homemade products. Photo: AusAID



Angelique and Dative.
Photo: Alison Preston
Alison Preston: 'HIV/AIDS was spreading rapidly alongside the violence and rape in Rwanda in 1994. Angelique and Dative's parents survived the war but not HIV infection. These resilient young women are now growing enough food for themselves. Economic independence and greater stability in Rwanda will lessen the risk of sexual violence for Angelique and Dative. Their joy is a fruit of peace in Rwanda.'

WOMEN'S EYE ON PEACE

WOMEN FROM AROUND THE WORLD GAVE IMAGES FOR THE RECENT *WOMEN'S EYE ON PEACE* EXHIBITION PROUDLY SPONSORED BY AUSAID AND ORGANISED BY THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AGENCY. HERE IS A SELECTION.



Lotus Lady, Cambodia. Photo: Lee Grant

Lee Grant: 'This photograph was taken on Christmas day in Phnom Penh. Although spending Christmas without my children was a little difficult I resolutely decided to enjoy the day. As I was on my way to see a friend I decided to stop to buy some flowers from this lovely woman. No words were spoken during our encounter but her smile never wavered and she kindly gave me more flowers than she probably should have. This caring, almost grandmotherly gesture meant a lot to me. Despite being agnostic, Christmas is still special, and her kind offering instilled in me a sense of peace and love that bridged age, culture and experience. I think about this woman often and I imagine her still selling flowers by the Mekong. To me she's a woman at peace with the world around her.'



Soi Rul in Afghanistan.

Photo: Roby Kennedy, World Vision

Roby Kennedy: 'On 29 January 2002, I travelled from Pakistan to Kabul to take part in an emergency food aid distribution. September 11 was just four months ago, the United States bombing was well underway, and people were living or existing in a climate of fear. There was no food or shelter and desperation was evident. I was shocked to see thousands of men and women and children, able bodied and disabled, lined up to receive aid. It was 7 a.m. and people waited, cold and patient. Snow was just beginning to gather on the ground.

'Soi Rul had not been assessed in the previous days to receive aid so she was not on the recipient list. There were only so many food aid parcels to share. She waited patiently all day and we talked. We

talked of our shared situations – we were both grandmothers, she to seven children, me to two. We cried together as we talked of our common visions for our families – peace, food on the table, education and family harmony. We were so much alike.

'At the end of the day we had a few bags left. We shared the contents with those still waiting. It wasn't a lot, a little tea, some sugar, beans and oil and some rice. Soi Rul received her bag, we said our goodbyes and as she turned to leave she reached up under her burqa, I thought to pull the fabric down and to cover her so that she could walk into the street, but it wasn't for that. She reached into her grey plaited hair and removed two simple hair clips – all she had – and placed them in my hand. They were everything she had and she gave them to me. No words but a bond that will bind me always.'





[1] Tibetan nomads of Amdo. Photo: Ambre Murard
 Ambre Murard: 'It's sunset. Tashitsuo, the mother, is collecting cow dung for combustible heat while her children play in the background. Her inner peace is reflected in her lightened face and is echoed in the infinite space.'

[2] A beginning, East Timor. Photo: Julie Buxton
 Julie Buxton: 'Nothing symbolises peace more to me than the smiling and carefree faces of children. These belong to a new generation. They have no memory of the conflict that their country has endured. Now they have the chance to grow up in a free and independent East Timor. The photo fills me with optimism.'

[3] Prayer wheels, Outer Mongolia. Photo: Hayley Anderson
 Hayley Anderson: 'The place is Buyandelgeruulekh Khiid Monastery in the town of Testerleg. In Outer Mongolia many Buddhist temples were destroyed and monks murdered by the puppet Stalinist government in the 1940s. Now the local people come again to turn their prayer wheels and say their prayers for peace.'

For more information see <www.iwda.org.au>

DARFUR

UPDATE



More than 1.6 million people in the Darfur region of western Sudan have fled their villages and farms because of the terror waged by armed militia gangs. Another 200,000 Darfuris have fled across the border into neighbouring Chad.

Humanitarian aid – shelter, food, clean water and health care – is vital for survival. The Australian Government has contributed \$30 million in emergency aid, which it is distributing through several agencies, including UNICEF, ICRC, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, Care Australia, the World Food Programme and World Vision Australia.

AusAID humanitarian advisers Jill Bell and Steve Darvill recently returned from refugee camps in Chad and Sudan. Here is Jill's account.



With our hosts from the World Food Programme we set off from Abeche in Chad. We cross sandy windy roads churned up by humanitarian supply trucks forging their way to the refugee camps.

Because of the large numbers of displaced people from Darfur now in Chad, many of the local communities have tripled. The local people share whatever they have with the refugees but their resources are also low.

With help from AusAID, UNICEF and Oxfam are working to ensure there is enough clean water for camp residents.

Ingenuity helps. An Oxfam water engineer in Treguine camp in Chad has devised a way of drilling into a dry wadi (river bed). Collected water is piped into a storage tank before it's pumped up a slope to the camp. Though it is a temporary measure – the wadi will run dry before the next rain – it's providing a breathing space before longer-term water solutions are found.

In Farchana camp, also in Chad, we visit a 'mixing' tent. This is where refugee women mix a special high calorie food for a supplementary feeding program delivered by the World Food Programme and World Vision. The

special food is distributed to all the camps in Chad to improve the poor nutrition of children and pregnant and breast-feeding women. The program is making a big difference – camp children are noticeably putting on weight.

Our next visit is to Nyala in Darfur, western Sudan. From the air we can see Kalma camp, a vast sea of plastic sheeting, housing 104,000 people. With the malaria season just starting, World Vision is running an intensive anti-malaria program. One of its most important preventive measures is making sure each family is given a chemically-treated mosquito net.



In Nyala town, at CARE Australia's feeding centre, severely undernourished children are receiving attention. When they're well enough to go home they'll take with them a few months supply of special high calorie food. This is so they can stay healthy.

As conditions in the camps improve the number of very sick

children is decreasing. But psychological trauma remains. We look at a boy's drawings on an old school notebook. It shows aircraft bombing his village, attack vehicles mounted with ground-to-air missiles and the different types of guns carried by the militia, including the infamous AK47.

While most displaced people in

Darfur are receiving humanitarian assistance, the ongoing fighting in some areas is making it very difficult for agencies to reach certain groups. Despite the unpredictable security, some agencies, like the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), are slowly getting through difficult areas and providing the displaced with shelter, household items and basic health care.

Without any significant change in the conflict over the past few months, those displaced have little hope of returning home soon. But there is optimism that by expanding the African Union Ceasefire Commission to 4,000 troops, the current attacks against the Darfuris will stop.

OPPOSITE: Distributing grain.

TOP LEFT: A child drinks special high calorie milk at the therapeutic feeding centre at Nyala.

CENTRE: AusAID's Steve Darvill (centre wearing sunglasses) discusses the water supply with government officials and aid agency representatives from UNICEF and the World Food Programme.

LOWER LEFT: Boys squint in the harsh dry conditions – there's nothing much to do.

LOWER RIGHT: Refugee camp from the air shows the makeshift accommodation constructed mainly from plastic sheets.

Photos: Jill Bell/AusAID





BIOGAS

SOLUTION

CHINA: Lipai village lies in the Longsheng Minorities Autonomous County in the northeast of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It is a poor rural area where living conditions are basic.



The traditional dwellings of the local people are wooden houses projecting over open pig and buffalo pens and toilets. Villagers grow up with the stench of animal and human excreta. More serious are the health problems. It is not uncommon for waste to contaminate the village water supply.

Through a simple intervention – biogas – this situation is changing. Biogas systems are now in 130 households.

What is biogas? Biogas is generated when bacteria degrade biological material in the absence of oxygen. It's a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide that turns into a renewable fuel, suitable

for cooking and lighting. Not only this, biogas reduces the volume of human and animal waste, eliminates odour and produces a nutrient-rich, sanitised compost. For a rural community this is a great bonus.

The advantages of biogas are for all to see in Lipai and, not surprisingly, the villagers are very happy. Their annual electricity bill is well down. The water supply is no longer polluted by waste. Health and general hygiene are improved. And life is just a little bit easier.

The women of the village no longer have to collect firewood from the nearby forest for their heating and cooking needs. In theory they have some spare time

but the evidence suggests they're spending that time on farming. Fruit production is increased by 30 per cent and rice production by 20 per cent.

To promote ecologically friendly agriculture, the local government is training farmers in fruit growing and animal breeding techniques as well as how to use and manage methane-generating pits. Between 1999 and 2001, the average annual household income increased from \$110 to \$162.

The biogas project in Lipai is an example of how a small poverty reduction scheme can make a big difference to a rural community. Lipai is one of 245 small activities that AusAID funds in China in the areas of rural development, education, health, water supply, sanitation, and community and women's development.

ABOVE: Local women tell AusAID's Iris Yam (third from the left) that the quality of village life has dramatically improved since the introduction of biogas.

TOP LEFT: The pig and buffalo pens and open toilets lie beneath a traditional house in Lipai village.

TOP RIGHT: Ecologically friendly agriculture production has improved around Lipai.

Photos: AusAID

LITTLE INTEREST IN LENDING



VIETNAM: Anh lives in District 8 in Ho Chi Minh City in one of the hundreds of slums that sprawl along a heavily polluted canal. Anh's family is among the poorest of the poor – but for the first time she and her husband have a means to improve their circumstances.

Anh has joined the Capital Aid Fund for Employment of the Poor, a microfinance program which provides loans to help generate employment opportunities.

'We used to borrow money and a motorbike from a lender,' Anh explains, 'but the interest rate was high and if we didn't repay in time, we were abused and scolded.'

The capital aid fund offers a fairer alternative. 'Since taking out a loan from the credit branch for the poor, things are much better. We bought a motorbike which my husband uses as a motorbike taxi and he now brings home more money,' says Anh.

The capital aid fund meets the needs of those not reached by the Vietnamese Government's poverty reduction program. It currently has 14 branches throughout Ho Chi Minh City, half of which are funded by the Australian Government. The main activity is small credit. The maximum loan is \$600 and the flexible loan term is up to 10 months. Loans can be repaid daily, weekly or by installments – whatever suits the client best. For, as Nguyen Thi Hoan Van, the capital aid fund's project manager, reminds clients, 'The fund lends, it does not give out free.'

About 60 per cent of poor households obtain loans for small



The United Nations International Year of Microcredit.

There are two objectives for the United Nations International Year of Microcredit. The first is to raise awareness about the importance of microcredit in eradicating poverty. The second is to enhance existing microcredit programs that support sustainable development.

businesses, 14 per cent for breeding animals, such as chickens and ducks, while other loans may be used for enterprises like garment making or waste recycling. About 80 per cent of the fund's clients are women.

Anh's loan has made a big difference to her family. Instead of hiring a motorbike at high cost, Anh's husband drives his own motorbike taxi each day. Apart from the small monthly repayment to the capital aid fund, his earnings go straight to the family. This new way of working is so much better than the old. Anh remembers some days when her husband didn't make enough to cover the motorbike's rental – he was, in effect, working for nothing.

These days the motorbike taxi is becoming quite a successful venture. With it on hand all the time Anh's husband is able to pick up more fares. It's now the family's main source of income. Not only is repaying the 1 per cent monthly interest on the loan manageable, but there's money left over. 'We have saved \$50 for the family,' says Anh proudly. 'It means we can pay for our second daughter to go to school.'

ABOVE: Counting money.

Photo: Mark Henley/Panos Pictures

What is Microcredit?

Microcredit, also known as microfinance, offers loans to poor people who otherwise would not be able to borrow money. The interest rates are generally much lower than those offered by traditional money lenders.

Microfinance projects supported by AusAID help tens of thousands of poor households. AusAID funds microfinance programs in Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Women are often the largest group of beneficiaries. The research shows that women improve their social status, employment opportunities and incomes as a direct result of sound microfinance programs.

The Capital Aid Fund for Employment of the Poor (CEP) in Vietnam is an example of a successful microfinance program.

- > It has exceeded its performance targets with a net increase of more than 17,000 members half way through its 5-year \$5.5 million program. (An increase of 15,000 members was expected for the entire program.)
- > It has good prospects for sustainability.



FORAGE IS THE ANSWER

LAOS: In a hewn-wood classroom decorated with identification posters for UXO (unexploded ordnance), the farmers of Ban Ta in the uplands near Kieng Khouang – home to the fabled Plain of Jars – report their progress with forage trials.

Generally everyone is pleased, mainly because they are earning good margins from the sale of animals – principally buffaloes and pigs – that they are buying skinny and selling fat. What's even better is that in the process of fattening up the buffaloes they're able to get good value from them as draught animals.

It is a meeting in which everyone has an equal say, although it soon emerges that one of the driving forces behind the village's enthusiasm for its new forage system is a woman, Pa Heu.

Pa Heu has been taking forage production to a whole new level, diversifying into a range of forage crops. She reports that she is overcoming the problem of low soil moisture in the dry season by

planting mulato (a *Brachiaria* hybrid) around her fish pond. The high soil moisture adjacent to the pond is providing a vigorous year-round forage crop.

Like many farmers in Ban Ta and surrounding regions, Pa Heu has entirely changed her approach to agriculture. She is no longer a 'shifting cultivator' but a 'forager'. In other words, she's given up the age-old practice of constantly moving on when the soil near her home is depleted.

Through the AusAID-funded Forages and Livestock Systems Project farmers like Pa Heu have learnt how they can farm close to their homes and grow new forage crops for their animals. Before animals would roam the forests looking for feed but now they are kept safe nearby. They also provide

a convenient supply of fertiliser which farmers use to improve the quality of their rice fields.

Pa Heu says the pigs are thriving on the sweet potatoes, which she is also supplementing with legumes. Her buffalo is responding so well to her hand-feeding with mulato that it's bound to boost the family's income when it's sold (and replaced by a cheaper, malnourished beast which will be similarly improved). For Pa Heu's family this fattening up process is a viable way out of poverty.

Peter Horne from the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture says that since the Forages and Livestock Systems Project started in 1998 the number of farmers in Ban Ta who have changed to forage-based livestock production has increased from eight to 24, from a total of 36 households. This increase is due to the example set by early adopters of the new approach – people like Pa Heu.

The obstacle for households that have not yet joined the project is simply that they don't own any livestock and their crops don't earn enough money to buy a buffalo or a pig. It is a reminder of the enormous risks that the early adopters took. If they had lost their only cattle or buffalo it could have set them back for years, if not for life.

Brad Collis is a writer for ACIAR (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research). ACIAR operates as part of Australia's aid program

LEFT: Talking about forage crops in the classroom in Ban Ta.

CENTRE: Pa Heu, a successful forager, with her fattened buffalo and **RIGHT:** showing visiting project staff her new sweet potato plot.

Photos: ACIAR

FEMALE DE-MINERS



CAMBODIA: In a ramshackle market in a remote corner of northwestern Cambodia, Leath Chumbory sits on a wooden bench and hurriedly eats her breakfast. The first light of day is beginning to seep between the gaps in the bamboo roof and she is keen to begin work. Leath Chumbory's job is searching for landmines in one of the most heavily mined areas in the world.

AUSAID HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH DE-MINING PROGRAMS IN CAMBODIA SINCE 1993.

The 2003 Landmine Monitor Report says:

- > 5.1 million people in Cambodia are at risk of being injured or killed by landmines.
- > 6,422 villages in an area of 4,466 million square metres in Cambodia are affected by landmines. About 1,640 villages, approximately 12 per cent of all villages, have a high contamination of landmines and unexploded ordnance.
- > Mines or unexploded ordnance may contaminate as much as 2.5 per cent of the country's surface area.
- > Since organised mine clearance operations began in 1992, a surface area of more than 200 million square metres has been de-mined.
- > 61 per cent of the suspect areas are concentrated in the five provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear, and the Pailin municipality, in the north and northwestern parts of the country.

RIGHT: Ready for work – the all female team. Photo: Daniele Mattioli



The landmine problem is particularly acute in the northwestern province of Battambang. The area was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting between Pol Pot's genocidal Khmer Rouge regime and Vietnamese and Cambodian government soldiers. During the battles of the 1970s and 1980s, landmines were an everyday weapon of war. Pol Pot called mines his 'perfect soldiers', so effective were they at causing death

and injury to his enemies.

Like so many people in Cambodia, Leath Chumbory lost most of her family during the Pol Pot regime. Her life since has been a struggle and especially so after the death of her husband. By 1996, she was poverty-stricken and desperate.

But then her life changed.

Chumbory replied to a newspaper advert placed by the British-based mine clearance charity, the Mine Advisory Group,

inviting women in difficult circumstances to train as de-miners. She was selected and, after undergoing training in de-mining techniques, began working with a 15-strong female mine action team.

Chumbory's motivations for working in such a dangerous environment are a mixture of humanitarian and financial. She's proud she's helping to clear fields, villages and wells so that those living nearby are free from the threat of explosions. She's also



grateful for the good salary, which is almost 10 times Cambodia's national average. It means that she, like the other de-miners, are able to support not only themselves but also large extended families. In Chumbory's case, she's supporting her sister's five children.

Cambodia has only one all-female de-mining team. It's currently working in the village of Svay Sor, 60 kilometres from the provincial capital of Battambang Town.

The women search the land methodically, first with a metal detector and then on hands and knees. Each safely destroyed mine leaves a deep crater, into which a yellow wooden stake is placed, marking the spot like a tombstone.

Seng Somala, the team leader, concedes her team has come under closer scrutiny because it is made up entirely of women. She has no doubts, however, that her de-miners can match their male counterparts.

'Men are stronger and sometimes quicker than the women de-miners but women are

more patient and they try harder,' she says.

Seng Somala believes the pilot all-female team has been a model for the whole of Cambodian society, empowering the women and encouraging strong bonds between them. 'They take care of each other and are more confident and vocal,' she says.

'This is a real example of what women in Cambodia can achieve. It will improve the profile of women and promote our position in society.'

As the sun begins to cool on the dusty fields of Svay Sor, the women start packing up their metal detectors, flak jackets and safety helmets and prepare to return to the barracks they share during the week.

Adapted from an article by Stuart Hughes, Patron of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG)

AusAID through World Vision supports the work of the Mine Advisory Group, which is based in the United Kingdom.

ABOVE: Leath Chumbory. De-mining requires painstaking care and concentration. Photo: Daniele Mattioli



BACK ON THE SILK ROUTE

CAMBODIA: While governments, aid agencies and other organisations play an overwhelmingly important part in reducing overseas poverty, sometimes it's the efforts of an individual that make a difference. Kikuo Morimoto is an example. He's reviving the ancient Cambodian art of silk making and he is also giving poor women a dignified means of making a living.

When Japanese silk expert Kikuo Morimoto chucked in his job as senior executive in a big international company, he knew he was about to embark on something important. His life is now dedicated to restoring the traditional Khmer silk culture before it vanishes.

Traditional Cambodian silk production was one of the casualties of war. The Pol Pot regime all but eliminated a generation of silk workers. The 1200-year-old craft, along with the forest that furnished the raw materials, was almost destroyed.

Morimoto's 'Wisdom from the Forest' project embraces the entire silk-making process, from replanting the ruined forests and

barren countryside to constructing self-sustaining silk workshops.

In Siem Reap, close to the majestic temples of the ancient Khmer capital of Angkor, 300 Cambodians are learning silk weaving and dyeing techniques under Morimoto's instruction. Many are young women who would otherwise end up begging from tourists or becoming prostitutes.

Morimoto is no naive utopian. He's been a company manager, a refugee worker and UNESCO consultant. His understanding that 'neither art nor hope can exist on an empty stomach', led him to quit his well-paid job to study the economics of cottage textile



FAR LEFT: Babies often accompany their mothers or grandmothers to work in the silk factory, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

LEFT: Weaving silk threads.

Photos: Xavier Lecoultrre/Rolox Awards



Morimoto in front of swathes of silk. Cambodia. Photo: Xavier Lecoultrre/Rolox Awards

industries. In 1996 he started his own non-government organisation, the Institute for Khmer Traditional Textiles, in Phnom Penh. His driving force is to save the craft of silk making.

Realising that traditional skills are about to vanish, Morimoto is working fast. In 2000, he moved his workshops from Phnom Penh, to Siem Reap, so as to learn the ancient art from the few surviving 'silk grannies'.

During Cambodia's ruinous wars, the mulberry trees that fed the silkworms were cut down. Indigo and other plants used for dyes, and even the trees where lac insects make their nests are virtually gone. (Lac insects, when crushed, provide the classic Cambodian royal ochre dye.) Although reforestation is now occurring it's a dangerous process in Cambodia because of landmines.

Khmer silk culture dates back to at least the 8th century, as recorded in the sculptures that adorn the

temples of Angkor. The best Cambodian silk fabrics are made from individually dyed threads, an expensive, labour-intensive process called 'ikat' that no machine can duplicate. At one time, Morimoto says, 'Cambodia's ikat silk was superior to that of Japan or China and silk products held pride of place in the national culture.'

The loss of traditional skills and the mass sell-off of silk treasures during the war, have meant younger generations know very little about this aspect of their cultural heritage.

By resurrecting the silk industry, Morimoto is laying the groundwork for a larger rejuvenation of his adopted country. 'It is crucial,' he says, 'for humanity to learn to live in total harmony with nature. This is as much a universal economic necessity as it is a common spiritual desire.'

Julian Cribb is a freelance writer

AUSTRALIA'S ASSISTANCE TO CAMBODIA

Australia's assistance to Cambodia is in three main areas – strengthening the rule of law, increasing the productivity and incomes of the rural poor (particularly in the agriculture sector), and reducing the vulnerability of the poor to natural disasters. Australia's estimated total overseas development assistance to Cambodia 2004–05 is \$41.4 million.

FOR HUMANKIND

Morimoto is a 2004 Rolox Award for Enterprise recipient. Rolox awards are presented every two years for projects in almost any kind of field of endeavour, provided it contributes to the betterment of humankind. The awards aim to encourage a spirit of enterprise in visionary individuals, and give financial support for projects that advance human knowledge and wellbeing.

Anyone of any age, from any country or background is eligible to apply for an award. Applications for the 2006 Rolox Awards for Enterprise are now open. Australian applications are sought.

For more information

<www.roloxawards.com> or

tel: (02) 9251 8988 for an application form.

SHARING THE CARE



THAILAND: Contrary to the stereotype that only women are carers in society, a group of men in Bangkok show what it really means to look after the children.

THAILAND: Ploy is six years old and has cerebral palsy. Her condition means she can't walk, talk, sit or eat by herself. Yet Ploy is luckier than many children. For thousands of children born with a disability in developing countries the outlook is grim. Ploy is fortunate because she has a loving family and the support of Bangkok's Foundation for Children with Disabilities.

For over 20 years, the foundation, a small non-government organisation, has been helping families of children with severe disabilities to gain skills and confidence to care for their children

at home. It's a harsh fact that many hundreds of Thai children with disabilities are abandoned each year to government institutions. The main reason is parents simply can't cope with the physical and financial demands of special care. Many parents also can't take the stigma that still surrounds disability in much of the developing world.

'The foundation has helped me to learn how to care for Ploy and to give her a good life,' says Chart Sangsri, Ploy's grandfather and one of her primary care-givers. He is among the growing number of fathers and grandfathers who participate in the inclusive, peer-support program run by the foundation.

Despite having limited formal education, Chart Sangsri is proud to be recognised as one of the group's experts in Thai massage and Japanese Do-sa-Hou therapy. Both these techniques aid the physical development of children with cerebral palsy. He is also pleased to have achieved a certificate in disability health care following his recent training at the foundation given by CARA (Community Accommodation and Respite Agency), part of the Spastic Centres of South Australia network.

CARA has been working with the foundation in a partnership project funded through AusAID's Community and Professional Development Scheme. Together the two agencies are introducing new disability service models in Thailand. A crucial part is empowering parents and grandparents to take pride in their strengths, recognise their own needs and advocate for their children's rights.

As in other parts of the world, women in Thailand traditionally have responsibility for the care of children and other vulnerable family members. When a child in the family has special care requirements, greater demands are placed on women. For women in these circumstances, work outside the home or educational opportunities are no longer possibilities. The Foundation for Children with Disabilities and CARA are turning this around. By actively encouraging fathers and grandfathers to contribute to the care of their disabled children, they are helping to raise understanding, change attitudes and expand the options for both men and women.

'Parent empowerment is the philosophy of the foundation,' says social worker Salotorn Muangklieng. 'It is good to see Thai families using their friendships and new skills to provide respite care for one another's children. They are also helping their communities to learn about the rights and needs of people with disabilities.'

Disability cuts across all social groups and is a major contributor to poverty in the developing world. United Nations statistics show mortality rates of children with disabilities as high as 80 per cent in countries where overall mortality in the under-five age group is below 20 per cent.

Margaret Gadd is from CARA (Community Accommodation and Respite Agency), part of the Spastic Centres of South Australia network

LEFT: Chart Sangsri helps his granddaughter Ploy at lunchtime. Photo: CARA

VOLUNTEERING



LOVE AND LAUGHTER

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: No one imagined – least of all Karen Borschmann – that a party conversation in suburban Melbourne would take her on the journey of a lifetime.

Five years later, she's in Waromo, a village in one of Papua New Guinea's most isolated and poorest provinces on the Indonesian border.

Karen is a physiotherapist. She's also a volunteer spending 12 months at the Waromo-based Senta Bilong Helpim ('Centre for Help') to work with children and adults with physical and intellectual disabilities.

'This is such a rewarding place to be,' says Karen, who is part of a team of 20 local volunteers. 'We start every day with a song, a prayer and a game with all of the kids and volunteers before breaking into small groups to begin therapy and class sessions.'

The idea is to teach independence. 'We are trying to help the children to enjoy a better quality of life,' explains Karen, 'but it's a place not just for therapy and treatment; it's a place for love and laughter.'

Karen's main job is to pass on her skills to the rest of the team so that they can run the daily therapy sessions. 'It's a very practical process and we learn together. A big focus of the volunteer training is developing understanding and skills. We want to be able to progress rehabilitation programs to achieve the best mix of exercise, treatment and care.'

Doctors and specialist surgeons from Monash Medical Centre in

THE IDEA IS TO TEACH INDEPENDENCE. WE ARE TRYING TO HELP THE CHILDREN TO ENJOY A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE.

Melbourne are also regular visitors to Senta Bilong Helpim. They assess the children and refer those who require further treatment to either a local or international medical facility.

Karen tells some amazing stories. Last year a man who heard about the centre on the 'coconut wireless' walked for eight hours with his two disabled children. He piggy-backed his four-year-old daughter who has physical disabilities while his eight-year-old son who has intellectual disabilities walked beside him. The centre continues to help the children.

Tim, a patient with a spinal injury, spent nearly a year in hospital. With the help of his wife, he slowly taught himself how to walk again. Within a couple of weeks of further training and muscle strengthening exercises at Senta, his balance and hand control is much better. He is now independent in all self-care tasks and can walk along the beach.

'I have an easy job working with Tim – he has some of the highest motivation I've seen in rehabilitation. I show him an exercise once and then he'll work at it all afternoon with the rest of his program,' says Karen.

It is these success stories that really inspire Karen, who has come

to Papua New Guinea under the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program. She's always wanted to experience life in another culture as well as do something to make a difference to people's lives.

The 35 people she works with every day at Senta Bilong Helpim say she's certainly doing that!

For further information about the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program contact <www.aid.gov.au/youtham>

LEFT: Australian Youth Ambassador for Development Karen Borschmann (second from left) with some of the volunteers and children at Senta Bilong Helpim. Photo: AusAID

EDUCATION



LEFT: Practising new skills in the woodwork class. Photo: Vanuatu Institute of Technology

UP TO THE JOB

VANUATU: In the classrooms of the Vanuatu Institute of Technology a quiet shift in the traditional male trades is taking place.

It's a car mechanics lesson – students have their heads under car bonnets. Everyone is working intently. What's interesting is that some of the most willing students are female. In the electrical wiring and woodwork classes it's the same. Women are applying themselves to what used to be considered male trades – and they're getting results.

The women in these classes are

the recipients of equity scholarships, awarded by the Australian Government. The scholarships are highly prized, for they represent a passport to a job and a way of earning a living. The full significance of this is understood when it's also realised that only 500 new jobs are generated in the formal labour market each year.

Another reason why the scholarships are highly prized is because education in Vanuatu is not a given. Of the 6,000 students who sit exams in grade 6, only 1,400 are awarded a place in the formal education system. The reason is Vanuatu has too many

students for its limited resources – there's simply not enough places at schools, or teachers, to meet the demand.

Many of the children who do not make it into high school work in home gardens or migrate to town in the vague but usually vain hope of finding work.

At any one time the Australian Government supports 10 new and 10 ongoing scholarships at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology. Scholarship holders are young women, students with disabilities or boys from very disadvantaged backgrounds. They may be aged about 16 or they may be mature age but each will have his or her

fees paid for the duration of the two-year courses.

When students receive equity scholarships, there's more than a strong chance that they will be employed at the end. 'By and large, all hospitality and tourism students get jobs even before they graduate,' says Tracey McMartin from AusAID's Vanuatu section.

So far Australia has awarded 165 scholarships. Graduates are now working throughout Vanuatu as mechanics, electricians, refrigeration technicians, builders, furniture makers, secretaries, tourism officers and cruise staff.

'Doubters thought that even if the girls survived the hard, physical conditions in the classroom and the academic demands of study, they would not be welcome by employers. Fortunately the doubters are wrong. Employers are happy to employ capable young women. No one is much worried about the trades becoming less of a male preserve – it's more a question of who's up to the job,' says Tracey McMartin.

For more information see
<www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar>

PEACE AND SECURITY

Suzette Mitchell is the Executive Director of the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) which this year celebrates its 20th anniversary. Here she shares her thoughts about the role of women in building peace.



Involving women in ways to resolve conflict is not just an exercise in gender equality, it's a key strategy to improve the chances of peace. The evidence shows that the more involved women are as peace-builders, the greater the likelihood of lasting peace. Women need to be key players in conflict prevention and peace-building, conflict management and reduction, and post-conflict recovery.

Helen Hakena, from the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency in Bougainville explains, 'Women worked [during the war] and collected all the pieces and put those pieces together but in peace

we are not included... Women are not passive victims, we are contributing actively to peace-making. Imagine what more we could do if we women were able to take an equal place at the negotiating table.'

Men and women experience war differently. This 'gendering' of war is apparent with the widespread use of rape as a weapon. In Darfur, Sudan, for example, women of all ages have been raped or experienced sexual violence, with family members often forced to witness their humiliation and distress. Darfuri women risk rape and violence not only when fleeing their homes, but also in some cases when collecting

firewood or water in and around refugee camps. It is an irony that these camps that exist to protect refugees often become sites of further violence.

Women, as mothers, wives, grandmothers and daughters bear most of the burden for social security within the household and community. Women and children also comprise the majority of the civilian casualties of war – they make up over 80 per cent of the world's refugees. Yet it is essential that women are not seen only as victims of war, but also as the decision-makers in peace-building.

'The issue of equal participation by women is not simply an issue of gender equality and human rights but could represent the decisive factor in maintaining peaceful development in a troubled region,' says L.Seyoum from Eritrea.

Promoting women's roles in leading community reconstruction is advocated by the United Nations in the Security Council Resolution 1325 which 'reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peace-building and equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.'

In response to the current crisis in Darfur, the International Women's Development Agency is seeking to help the wider development community to integrate gender considerations into emergency operations. Areas that have been addressed to date are firewood and fuel collection;

the psychological effects of gender-based violence, and reproductive health. These gender considerations can be found on the IWDA website and can be used freely. Any feedback is welcome.

Unfortunately, the issue of conflict and reconstruction look set to increase over the next decade. Let's hope we can use our skills, knowledge and technological advances to assist women and their families maximise their roles as peace-builders in the reconstruction of their communities.

The International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) is based in Melbourne. It works with grassroots women's organisations in developing countries. It has also worked with AusAID in developing a concept paper on women's active role in peace-building. For more information <www.iwda.org.au>

VIEWPOINT is a forum for readers to express their ideas and perspectives on overseas development issues. Views do not necessarily reflect the ideas and policies of the Australian Government. Readers who would like to contribute should send their articles (not exceeding 500 words) with full contact details to the Editor, Focus, Public Affairs Group, AusAID, GPO Box 887, Canberra ACT 2601 or email focus@ausaid.gov.au

LEFT: Suzette and Tsai in northern Vietnam. Photo: Suzette Mitchell

OUT AND ABOUT

THE BUS GOES ON



Wherever it goes, AusAID's *positive.negative* travelling photographic exhibition is well received. It shows how Australian aid is helping to fight HIV/AIDS in the Asia-Pacific region.

About 9,000 people in rural centres in New South Wales have seen the display since it began touring four months ago. Exhibition managers Julie and Simon Goode are encouraged by the response.

'We have met some incredible Australians on our travels from all walks of life, including volunteers. Many have worked either in Australia or overseas helping to combat the AIDS pandemic.'

Although HIV/AIDS is far more prevalent in developing countries, it also touches the lives of many people in Australia. More than once Julie and Simon have offered comfort and a friendly ear to people who are HIV-positive or who have lost family and friends to AIDS.

'You can't help but be moved by the exhibition. Some people are deeply affected. Tears are not uncommon,' explains Simon. 'Others are inspired by it. People are leaving the exhibition better informed about HIV/AIDS and are more prepared to think about the terrible impact of the disease.'

WONDERFULLY MOVING.
SO PLEASED TO HAVE THIS
EXHIBITION IN BATHURST
from the visitors book

The positive.negative photo exhibition continues around regional Australia. The Queensland tour begins on 9 February 2005 on the Gold Coast. For more details see <www.positivenegative.net.au>

TOP LEFT: Ready for the next leg of its tour around regional Australia, the exhibition bus outside AusAID's central office in Canberra.

TOP RIGHT: Young people are particularly interested in the travelling photographic exhibition.

FAR RIGHT: Many sign the visitors book.
Photos: Sonja Baran/AusAID

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE HIV/AIDS?

About 38 million people worldwide have HIV/AIDS. About 7.4 million of these live in the Asia-Pacific region.

WHERE HAS HIV/AIDS HIT HARDEST?

Sub Saharan Africa is hardest hit by AIDS accounting for 66 per cent of global HIV infections. There is grave concern however, that if the virus is not checked in the Asia-Pacific region, it will become the next epicentre. Papua New Guinea reports the highest rate of HIV infection in the Pacific. It's estimated that more than 50,000 people in Papua New Guinea are living with HIV.

HOW DOES AUSTRALIA HELP?

Australia is fighting the spread of HIV infection with prevention, treatment and care programs. It's helping neighbouring countries to

build resources to combat the disease.

Australia supports programs that help change attitudes and behaviours, including HIV transmission associated with injecting drug use. It also supports treatment and care programs. For example, Australia is helping Papua New Guinea implement its National AIDS Plan where information about HIV is built into everyday activities. Australia supports Indonesia with its AIDS programs, including assistance for vulnerable groups, such as injecting drug users and commercial sex workers. In China, Australia is helping administrators in the Xinjian Autonomous Region with policy development, health promotion, diagnoses and better hospital and home-based care.

GLOBALEDUCATION

CLASSROOM PLANNERS

Manager of AusAID's Global Education Program Luigi Soccio spent a morning with a grade 6 class. Students from St John the Apostle Primary School in Canberra, with support from teacher Berna Simpson, were thinking about a development plan for a village in Fiji.

After watching a video about Torika, a Fijian girl, students compared Fijian village life with Australian suburban life. A range of thoughts and opinions emerged.

Was Torika happy living in a village without the luxuries of modern technology, such as electricity, hot showers and the Internet? Although Torika and her family weren't wealthy they lived in a place without traffic or pollution. There also seemed to be more freedom for children to swim and play. And while Torika's house was basic and didn't have running water, the tropical surroundings looked pleasant. One student thought the conditions looked perfect for tennis. Should their development plan provide a tennis court for the village?

Another student noticed Torika was barefoot – what about providing shoes?

The lively discussion threw up lots of options but students quickly realised aid is not simply a matter of sending goods to poor countries. It's about 'sustainable

development' and reducing poverty, both key AusAID objectives.

The complexities and challenges of aid delivery are many, yet the students were quick to grasp them. In short role plays they showed Australians working in partnership with communities. It was very important, they said, that Australian aid met local needs. This required listening to local people.

One student commented, 'I realise how lucky we are to live in Australia and that we should help children in poorer countries so that they can have a better life.' And another student said, 'I think it is sad that there are people living in poverty.'

Students were happy to learn that the Australian Government's overseas aid program is helping to reduce poverty in the Asia-Pacific region.

After more discussion and sharing of ideas, the morning's development session ended. Luigi said, 'Young students are capable of sophisticated analysis and problem solving and, if given sufficient information, can produce quite perceptive solutions.'

Luigi looks forward to meeting the students again when they present their final development plan to the experts at AusAID.

The Global Education website provides information and case studies on line at www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au



Globalise Me! A Student's Guide to Globalisation is a new resource book for upper secondary students. It presents a broad collection of written and graphic resources that highlight the variety of attitudes towards globalisation and its effects. Among key themes are: people, culture, economy, trade, development, technology, politics and the environment. There is an attached CD which includes the whole book, student worksheets, supporting teacher professional development material and curriculum links for each state and territory.

The first 50 teachers who complete the online survey of AusAID's Global Education website www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au will receive a choice of one of the following:

- Globalise Me! A Student's Guide to Globalisation*
- Think Global* (lower primary)
- Look Global* (upper primary)
- Go Global* (secondary)

ABOVE: Students from St John the Apostle Primary School in Canberra show off their handiwork. With teacher Berna Simpson (top, second from right) they have been learning about Fiji. Photos: Luigi Soccio/AusAID





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