



Focus on education Successful new teaching methods
in Bangladesh and Samoa **Schools follow peace**
process in Bougainville Australian Youth Ambassadors

focus





From the Minister

There is universal recognition of the fundamental importance of basic education to development.

Education develops knowledge and skills, and contributes to the strengthening of civil society, national capacity and good governance. It also contributes to the alleviation of poverty through its impact on economic growth. Better educated workers are more productive. The accumulation of knowledge increases the rate of technological change, thus accelerating economic growth.

Australia will provide \$1.6 billion in overseas aid in 2000-01. This is an increase of almost \$100 million on the budget figure for 1999-2000. Australia has steadily advanced the aims of its 1996 education and training policy for the aid program. This financial year, almost 18 per cent of the Government's overall aid budget will be allocated to education activities.

Spending on basic education has increased from a 6 per cent share in 1996-97 to an estimated 21 per cent in 2000-01. Basic education – primary, lower secondary, and adult literacy and numeracy programs – reinforces the gains which are being made through other key sectors of the aid program.

Poverty alleviation is the fundamental objective of the Australian aid program and it is now well recognised that investing in education for girls is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Educated mothers are more likely to send their children to school, thus creating a cycle of sustainability through improved education outcomes.

In May, I joined the Prime Minister of Viet Nam to open the My Thuan Bridge, the first bridge over the Mekong River in Viet Nam. The bridge is a major investment in the country's economic future by both Australia and the Government of Viet Nam, and a giant step toward the alleviation of poverty in our region.

I also visited Siem Reap and Battambang provinces in Cambodia, where 50 mines and unexploded ordnances have been destroyed in the last three months in the villages of Ta Peng and Ta Kut as a result of the Australian Government's *Destroy A Minefield* initiative. The Australian Government matches every \$2 raised by the community for *Destroy A Minefield* with a donation of \$1. The contribution of the Australian community is giving Cambodian children and families the chance to build a safer future.

Australian community organisations taking part in this campaign and in other activities that alleviate poverty and reduce suffering are to be congratulated. Their efforts, and those of the Australian aid program, are genuinely making a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexander Downer'.

Alexander Downer
Minister for Foreign Affairs

contents



9

Education – successful
new teaching methods
in Samoa and Bangladesh



Improving education
in Papua New Guinea
– the Elementary
Teacher Education
Support Project

11

19

Viet Nam celebrates
the bridge of hope



From the Minister **inside front cover** Message from the Director General: Funding education **2** Education – essential for sustainable development **4**
Schools and aid posts follow peace in Bougainville **6** Better learning and teaching in primary years **9** Off to a flying start **11** Research into
ultrasonography **12** Joyful teaching, joyful learning in Bangladesh **13** New schools for Chinese children **16** Aussie teachers volunteer for East
Timor **17** Taro leaf blight in Samoa **18** Viet Nam celebrates the bridge of hope **19** Street kids and slum dwellers – making a lasting difference
in Maharashtra **22** Message on an apple **27** After the floods recede **28** Looking at Laos – practical aid for an emerging nation **29** Clearing
the killing fields **31** Australian volunteer honours an old debt in PNG **33** Off the streets and into cyberspace **35** Australia's Youth Ambassadors
– teaching and learning **36** Minister launches AusAID's new Internet site **38** Finding out what *Focus* readers want **38** Snapshots **39** Business
news **40** Global education **41** Subscription form **43** New on AusAID's bookshelves **inside back cover**



Education is critical for development. In the words of Mr Downer's 1997 statement *Better Aid for a Better Future*, 'Education is development's most basic building block and is vital for alleviating poverty. It will remain a priority for Australian assistance.'

Funding education

The importance of education is well recognised by Australia's aid program. Education receives more support than any other sector – more than health, infrastructure, governance, or rural development. But education inevitably supports development in these other sectors – by providing the health workers or water engineers or administrators or farmers.

Specific examples of the benefits of the Australian aid program's investment in education are covered in this issue of *Focus*. New approaches to education have been supported such as the child-centred primary education approach in Samoa and the greater involvement of parents and communities in the management of local schools in the IDEAL project in Bangladesh. In Papua New Guinea, primary teaching in local languages (over 600 of them) has been developed through the Elementary Teacher Education Support Project. Linkages between peace-building and education in the Bougainville rehabilitation project and the role of education in empowering slum dwellers and women in India are also covered in this issue.

The aid program budget, announced on 9 May, continues the strong emphasis on education, with an estimated \$285 million to be programmed for this sector. A key priority is to assist our partner countries improve access to quality basic education



Revolutionary new teaching practices supported by an Australian aid project are increasing both enjoyment and class participation among poor Bangladeshi children – see page 9.

for their people. Support for higher education remains important, with scholarships in Australia providing the skills and knowledge for people to play vital roles in their countries' development.

This year's overall aid budget was a very positive one for Australia's aid program. The Australian Government will provide \$1,600 million in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2000–01. This is an increase of almost \$100 million over the 1999–2000 budget figure of \$1,502 million, and a real increase of 4 per cent. This

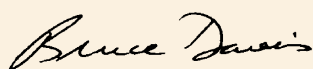
maintains Australia's ODA/GNP ratio at 0.25 per cent – above the latest (1999) average of all donors of 0.24 per cent.

The Australian aid program will continue to have a strong focus on countries in the Asia Pacific region. The promotion of effective governance, including economic, civil and political reform is an increasing emphasis of the aid program in the region. Improving access to basic social services is also important in reducing poverty.

More details on this year's aid budget

are in the Aid Budget Summary sheet included with this *Focus*.

The substantial increase in funding support for the aid program should be seen as a statement of confidence that Australian aid is meeting priority needs in our region. We must continue to match that confidence with performance on the ground. Other donor countries have also recognised the improvements in the quality of Australia's aid program over the last three years, putting Australia in the vanguard of Development Assistance Committee members' aid management practices. We cannot rest on our laurels, however, and must take these gains even further. This year we will strengthen our focus on poverty. Strategies for reducing poverty must be adapted to the situation in each of our partner countries. We need to consider how to further improve our approach towards partnerships and improving governance. New forms of aid delivery may also need to be considered. These are some of the challenges facing us in the year ahead.



Bruce Davis
Director General



Mr Jean-Michel Severino (left), World Bank Vice President for East Asia and Pacific, and Mr Bruce Davis, AusAID Director General sign a contribution agreement for the East Timor Trust Fund. Australia's \$10 million contribution will support a range of activities aimed at rehabilitating infrastructure, education, health and agriculture in East Timor.



Education – essential for sustainable development

Education is a fundamental human right for all people around the world. The Australian aid program has a special emphasis on education because it is a basic building block for development, economic growth and the reduction of poverty.

Many poor countries don't have the money to educate their people. One in five children around the world can't go to school because there is no school within walking distance, or because their parents cannot afford clothes or books or fees. Girls suffer the most. Two out of three of the children who never get to school are girls.

Not only children are affected – one in three adults in the poorest countries can't read or write – that's 880 million people.

Education has many benefits for people across society. It gives people knowledge and skills that strengthen communities and ensure that governments are democratic and accountable to their people.

Education has economic benefits too. If workers are better educated, then they are more productive and able to accelerate economic growth, for example, by adopting new technology.

ACCESS, EQUITY AND QUALITY

The Australian Government believes that we are making significant inroads in educating people in poverty-stricken countries. And to make our assistance as effective as possible, Australian aid focuses on access, equity and quality in education. These are a part of the core objectives of the Australian Government aid program.

The key elements of the education program are basic education for children, vocational and technical education, distance and higher education, and institutional strengthening.

Universal basic education is of fundamental importance to development.

Basic education includes primary education, lower secondary education and adult literacy and numeracy programs.

SPENDING MORE ON BASIC EDUCATION

Since 1990, there has been an increasing emphasis on basic education. This has been reinforced by studies that show that investment in primary education has the highest rate of return of all levels of education.

The Australian Government has steadily increased its spending on basic education under the aid program since the launch of the education policy in 1996, increasing from \$14 million in 1996 to \$51 million in 1998–99. However, our education programs are not just about money – they are about outcomes for children, women and men in the partner countries where we work.

There are no simple solutions in the quest for universal basic education, nor is there a single model of education that all countries can adopt. On the contrary, education programs must take into account the local culture, needs, gender and ethnicity of the people we seek to help.

EDUCATION AID PRIORITIES

The Australian Government aid program therefore has different priorities for education in different countries.

The quality of education is often the key issue for many developing countries. According to UNESCO, 'The quality of education provided in many Third World schools is sometimes so distressingly poor that even pupils who persist in schools for

several years may never achieve an enduring level of literacy.'

In recognition of this reality, widely respected Australian educational expertise is being applied to assist teachers in many partner countries to move from the traditional 'chalk and talk' teaching methods towards child-centred teaching models. Retrained teachers are happy with the results achieved through more active participatory teaching styles. The children are doing better and the teachers enjoy teaching them.

Through the aid program, AusAID employs strategies to increase children's access to primary school. In some instances, it may be effective to provide money to build primary schools, but in other cases it may be more effective to develop education policies to influence the provision of education more widely.

ACCESS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

The aid program not only works to increase access to education, but also to increase equity. Equity is a major issue. Girls and women often miss out on school because their families are poor and expect them to work to supplement the family income.

Investing in girls' education has significant outcomes. For instance, for each extra year of education, deaths of both mothers and infants are reduced. UNICEF estimates that in a country like Pakistan an extra year of schooling for 1,000 girls would prevent the deaths of 60 babies.

The Australian Government aid program is working to improve girls' chances of



Four PNG children who are learning to read and write in their own language thanks to the Australian aid program.

being educated in Bangladesh, India, Laos, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam. Conditions and solutions inevitably vary. Across Polynesia girls are doing better than boys at school, whereas in much of Melanesia girls are significantly under-represented at school.

BUILDING SCHOOLS IN PNG

In Papua New Guinea, an obstacle to girls attending school is the travelling distance to local schools. The Australian aid program is helping the PNG Government to build more schools (see page 6 in this issue).

Local schools also lack teachers and materials. This is compounded by the number of remote highland villages and 800 indigenous languages in PNG. The Australian aid program is supporting the introduction of village-based elementary education covering grades 0–2, which will be taught in local languages.

Australian aid provides the students with 'shell books' – cartoon books that allow local teachers to write the text in their own indigenous languages. Grades 3–6 are also being restructured and the

aid program is providing teacher training and new classroom materials.

In Pakistan, the problem for girls is not always the lack of access to schools. Primary schools may be accessible, but girls' enrolments remain low. Under the aid program, village education committees with women as members have been established. These committees map attendance at school and follow up with family visits when children drop out.

AusAID project officers also found that another solution to help girls stay in school was to encourage female role models and female teacher training.

In Bangladesh, the aid program is helping children, particularly girls, to stay in school by using innovative teaching methods that are student centred and teach students 'how to learn'. The Australian Government also funds an \$8.9 million UNICEF project in Bangladesh called IDEAL which is successfully keeping children enrolled in school.

They are now more likely to finish primary school. This project is helping to stop the 'brain drain' of 6 million children

dropping out of primary school each year (see page 13 in this issue).

NEW SCHOOLS IN RURAL CHINA

Australians are also making a contribution themselves to helping children go to school in countries poorer than our own. The Rotary Club of Crows Nest, Sydney, has built three new schools in rural China for more than 460 students. Rotary also gave books, sports equipment, musical instruments and art materials to the students (see page 16 in this issue).

Above all, the Australian Government's approach to education is to work with local communities to find effective solutions to improve quality and access in education. The Government has made substantial increases in the budget for basic education in the aid program over the last three years.

Australia's experience is that numerical targets and money alone will not guarantee an effective program, but sound project design and Australian expertise will continue to help millions of children to go to school through the aid program. – FD ■

Schools and aid posts follow peace in Bougainville

Peace and security are gradually returning to mainland Bougainville following the Burnham Peace Accord. With the help of the Australian aid program, communities are rebuilding basic education and health infrastructure destroyed during 10 years of civil conflict. Children are returning to school.

The Bougainville Provincial Rehabilitation Project (BPRP), started in October 1997, targeted communities primarily on mainland Bougainville. As well as refurbishing and rebuilding aid posts and double classrooms in community schools the project provided nails, roofing iron, guttering and water tanks, masonite and paint for blackboards – all essential items for the widespread refurbishment of homes and other community assets.

During the first 12 months of the project, an interim emergency package of aid was provided to reward local communities in areas that had supported the peace process.

As the peace process slowly expanded across the province, the second stage of the project expanded with it, tapping into already developing reconstruction activities. The community-based reconstruction process is providing materials and supervisory skills for essential health and education infrastructure.

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

Two community liaison officers are employed to ensure that recipient communities have a say in project planning and that they understand the project's objectives and what they need to do.

The rehabilitation project has been innovative in developing the concept of a community agreement. Under this arrangement, the project pays market prices to the community for timber and lends a 'walkabout' sawmill to mill the timber to the correct specifications, while the



Located in a clearing on the end of a ridge, the isolated village of Sikumone in Siwai District has recently completed its aid post. (Photos: Anne Rigby)

community provides free labour to build the infrastructure.

The project is also providing supervision and the services of carpenters to assist communities to complete specialist tasks.

The project recently helped the Bougainville Division of Education with the reconstruction of a girls' dormitory at the Hutjena High School on Buka after it was destroyed by fire in late 1999.

Dormitories are critical for Bougainville High Schools as pupils are sent from all over the province for their education.

By March 2001, the project will have built 50 double classrooms, and 70 aid posts, as well as assisting hundreds of smaller refurbishment activities. — AR ■



ABOVE: A local child explores the building site at Kakarapaia.

ABOVE RIGHT: School transport to Uruh on Pinepel Island, Nissan Island Group.

RIGHT: High school students wait outside the reconstructed Hutjena High School Girls' Dormitory, Buka.





ABOVE: Student at Uruh Community School, Pinepel Island, Nissan Island Group.

RIGHT: Nearing completion, the Waitabuna aid post in Bana District.

BELOW: The village of Koarei in Torokina District with its almost completed aid post and double classroom. During construction, the site was reached by sea.



Better learning and teaching in primary years

An education project supported by the Australian aid program has helped bring new ideas into primary classrooms across Samoa.

Lilianete Iani, a Year 8 student at Pua Pua Primary School, is enthusiastic about the major change in learning and teaching in Samoan schools brought about through the Primary Education Materials Development Project.

'Since we got the books (developed by the project) the teacher doesn't write on the board. I work with the books. I don't have to spend time copying from the board. Now I can work in pairs and groups.'

Another student, Loreta Losia in Year 7 at Sapapalii Primary School, is also excited by the changes. 'I like the books. They are important for me ... the stories and pictures of other countries and the environment are interesting for us. I take all the books home. When I take them home my sisters, brothers and parents read them. I enjoy school more now that I have these books.'

NEW BOOKS FOR SAMOAN CHILDREN

Since 2000, Samoan teachers have been working on creating workbooks in English, Social Science, Science, Mathematics and Samoan Language for the primary school students in years 4–8.

The books, along with games, songs and tapes for radio, are created in the Curriculum Development Unit and Educational Broadcast Unit of the Department of Education in Samoa where the Samoan officers have been trained and are now working on developing new educational materials.

New materials such as teacher manuals and radio broadcasts, a science kit of basic equipment for experiments, books of readers in English and Samoan mean teachers can vary their presentations so that children can learn through different channels.

As part of the project every primary

school teacher has attended five days of training on using and presenting the new primary education materials.

Australian advisers and Samoan counterparts also spent weeks at the National University of Samoa working with the teacher training staff so that young teachers could gain knowledge and experience with the various teaching materials.

ANOTHER WAY OF LEARNING

Teachers are enthusiastic. Vaituulima Tulia, a teacher at Gataivai Primary School says that it has been 'a great project because it gives us another way of teaching the children and the children get another way of learning – not only from the teacher but by themselves and at home.'

The improvement in children's English literacy skills is one of the unplanned developments of the project. This has been aided by the radio broadcasts. 'I love the different sounds on the radio especially the children's voices, the English language, the overseas people' says Lilianete. 'When I read the readers I try to sound the words like English voices. I like also to read all the Samoan stories.'

VARIETIES OF ACCENTS

People from many different walks of life in Samoa, and from many different nationalities, cooperated in the making of the broadcasts so that first-hand experiences, in a variety of English language accents, could be heard by Samoans.



Samoan children role-play on a plane trip as part of an English language lesson.



NEW SONGS TO SING

The *Sing-Sing* radio program from Papua New Guinea is a particular favourite with students. When it was first heard in a radio broadcast at Sapaplaia Primary School the children started dancing.

The head teacher, S. Mataafi Amani says that 'even now when they come into school first thing in the morning they sing that tune.'

Teachers are clearly enjoying the changed classroom learning environment. 'Before the project, the broadcasts were just talking, talking, talking and the children were just sleepy and bored.

'Now they can act, look at the pictures in the books, talk in groups and do exercises. I can go around and work with those who need more help,' says the Sapaplaia head teacher.

Teachers also point to another benefit of the project – support to schools in remote areas, particularly on Savai'i island. There they have benefited from equal access to the new education materials and teacher training opportunities.

The project will now shift its focus to the infant education level in Samoa, years 1–3, but the work at the primary level will go on.

The Director of Education in Samoa is proud of the achievements and potential of the Curriculum Development Unit and Educational Broadcasting Unit supported by the project.

The Australian and Samoan Governments will continue to strengthen learning and teaching at the infant education levels and apply the lessons learned from the work with primary schools. – LS ■

ABOVE AND BELOW: A variety of teaching methods provide livelier classrooms and different experiences helping Samoan children to learn.

'The program has helped us a lot. We live in a remote area. It has helped the learning experiences of our poor children. We did not expect this much assistance. We were dreaming about it and now we have been given it.'

– *Toyia Tufuga, a teacher at Asua Primary School.*



Off to a flying start

Elementary education in Papua New Guinea can be a complex task, involving 600 languages and remote locations. The Elementary Teacher Education Support Project is helping to reform and improve education in the country.

When Lucy Tsikula sets out for work in the morning she doesn't have far to walk.

Lucy is an elementary teacher at Kawok Memorial Elementary school in New Ireland. She walks the short distance from her home to her palm thatched classroom which is situated midway between Munawai and Lugagun villages on the east coast of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea. Along the way she greets and is joined by children from her Elementary Prep and Elementary One multi-grade class and by parents and

other community members.

Lucy is one of 6,000 elementary teachers in training in all provinces in Papua New Guinea. She is in her final year of a three-year training program. Her day begins when she sets up her classroom to ensure that all is ready for the 36 seven- and eight-year-old children who will be in her care for the morning.

From 8am to 12noon she will implement a national curriculum that emphasises vernacular literacy, mathematics and culture

and community. The language of instruction will be the local language, Nalik.

After school finishes, Lucy will tidy the classroom, plan her program and make resources for the following day. Lucy's school is a two-teacher school so she will also meet and discuss the day's events with her co-teacher.

As a trainee teacher, Lucy will then spend some time in further study on Self-Instructional Units. At least once during each school term, she will be visited by her



With the children in her multi-grade class at Kawok Memorial Elementary School, New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, teacher Lucy Tsikula is making rules for keeping the classroom a safe and happy place.

elementary trainer who will supervise her teaching and assist her with her studies. Through her participation in cluster workshops with colleagues from her district, Lucy will gain further professional knowledge.

WORKING TOGETHER

The introduction of a formal, village-based vernacular education for children aged from six years has prompted a powerful response at the community level.

Lucy, like her elementary colleague, has been chosen by the local community to be the teacher. The community has proudly supplied the land for the school, built the school's classrooms and continues to fastidiously maintain the classrooms and outside play areas and manage the school through a Board of Management.

Community members also help to develop the curriculum and actively participate in the daily program.

Like the other elementary teachers in Papua New Guinea, Lucy is part of an exciting project that is producing impressive results. Since 1997, the Australian Government has been assisting the PNG Government through the Elementary Teacher Education Support Project, to apply the elementary component of the Education Reform Agenda. This agenda aims to increase access to life-long learning, reduce

attrition and provide enhanced gender equity.

Since its inception the project has supported the training of more than 1,000 teachers, the first of whom graduated in March 2000. Another 6,000 teachers are currently in training. As well, 21 provincial elementary coordinators and 144 elementary trainers have completed training and now supervise elementary education in the provinces.

By 2004, it is anticipated that 10,000

elementary schools with 16,000 teachers will have been established throughout the country. These teachers will be instructing children in as many as 600 different languages.

As well as teacher training, this project also includes an infrastructure component that is building houses for provincial elementary coordinators, providing financial training and support and developing curricula. — RG ■



As part of the cultural and language program, a community elder tells stories in the local language to children in Lucy's class.

Research into ultrasonography

CONTINUOUS MEASUREMENT OF CEREBRAL BLOOD FLOW VELOCITY USING TRANSCRANIAL DOPPLER ULTRASONOGRAPHY (TCD) REVEALS SIGNIFICANT VARIABILITY OF DATA IN HEALTHY VOLUNTEERS

*Qiaomei Shen, **Bala Vignarajah, **Jeffrey Lipman, **Adrian Barnett
*Intensive Care Facility, Royal Brisbane Hospital, **Department of Technology

Background

It is well known that the impact of significant variability and the lack of practice on the measurement of transcranial Doppler (TCD) is substantial. However, the variability of TCD data in healthy volunteers is not well understood and the need to standardize TCD data in healthy volunteers is not well understood. This study was undertaken to investigate the variability and reproducibility of the TCD signal.

Methods

Continuous TCD measurements were obtained from 10 healthy volunteers using a TCD system (Colson, Sonotecnica, Belgium). The TCD probe was positioned on the temporal bone of the head and the TCD signal was recorded continuously. The data was then analyzed using a computer program (Sonotecnica, Belgium). The subjects were asked to remain still during the TCD measurements.

Single Patient Examples

The TCD signal was recorded continuously for 10 minutes. The TCD signal was then analyzed using a computer program (Sonotecnica, Belgium). The results of the TCD measurements are shown in the following graphs.

Conclusions

The study has demonstrated a significant variability in the TCD signal in healthy volunteers. This variability is not well understood and the need to standardize TCD data in healthy volunteers is not well understood. This study was undertaken to investigate the variability and reproducibility of the TCD signal.

Dr Qiaomei Shen is one of hundreds of young overseas students who has studied in Australia under the Australian Government's aid program. An anaesthetist, Dr Shen worked at the Beijing Tian Tan Hospital before coming to Australia in 1998 to study. Currently working toward a Master of Medical Science degree, she is researching the reliability of transcranial Doppler ultrasound in the Department of Neurosurgical Intensive Care at Royal Brisbane Hospital. In January she returned to China where she is completing her degree. She is now physician-in-charge in the largest intensive care unit in China, and making a major contribution to a relatively new area in the Chinese health service.

Joyful teaching, joyful learning in Bangladesh

An Australian Government-funded project in Bangladesh is proving that new teaching methods as well as getting parents involved all help to keep Bangladeshi children at school longer.

'Schools like this used to be the Government's responsibility', Shazeda Khatun says looking around her classroom in Kharkhali Government Primary School in Jhenaidah, Bangladesh. 'Now we feel it's ours. It belongs to the whole community.'

Shazeda Khatun was talking about her school's involvement in the IDEAL Project, funded by the Australian Government. IDEAL stands for Intensive District Education for All.

It's about involving parents and the community in the management of their local schools. Parents are more committed to sending their children to school if they are involved in the running of the school, fundraising and other activities.

Shazeda's school is also special for another reason. The IDEAL project employs a new method of teaching that has taken Bangladesh by storm. Called the *Multiple Ways of Teaching and Learning*, this new teaching method has not only been quickly adopted by teachers who have found a new, joyful way of teaching, but millions of Bangladeshi children – particularly girls – are benefiting too.

For many years, Bangladesh has had a legacy of low attendance at school. Out of 142 million children enrolled in primary schools, five million do not attend regularly and almost six million children drop out each year.

This is an endemic problem due to deep levels of poverty, the inability of families to pay school fees and the pressure on children to work to help their families survive on meagre incomes.

Although children leaving school seems to be the only option for poor families, the

impact on society is profound. Education, literacy and numeracy help children in later life to earn a higher income, have smaller families, better health and higher productivity, which in turn help them to escape poverty.

Now there is a chance that these high dropout rates will be turned around.

Children at Kharkhali Government Primary School, and in schools in 64 other districts, are benefiting from the impacts of greater attention to quality teaching and participatory learning.

This revolution in schooling was pioneered in Bangladesh through the IDEAL project.



New teaching methods help children from poor Bangladesh families to enjoy learning and stay at school longer.



New teaching methods were introduced in 1995 and by the end of 1998, 17 of Bangladesh's 64 Districts were using the new methods for children in grades 1-2.

IDEAL has been funded through the Australian Government's aid program since 1998 with an \$8.9m grant over four years. This Australian aid is helping girls across eight districts including Dinajpur, a poor region in the north of Bangladesh.

IDEAL uses strategies to keep younger girls enrolled in school. One strategy is to provide role models for them. The project trains female teachers, increases their status in schools and improves their chances of moving into management positions.

The traditional teaching approach in Bangladesh used to be based on rote learning. Teaching is now becoming 'child centred' with teachers showing children how to learn.

Both children and teachers are enjoying being at school. Children love the new painting and decorating of their classrooms with colourful motifs, numbers and letters. The bottom half of previously whitewashed walls are painted black, so each child has their own personal blackboard.

Tables and benches have been replaced with mats on the floor and the teacher no longer stands at the front of the classroom teaching monotonous lessons. Lessons now use dance, role-playing, stories and drawing,

and children participate in group work.

Teachers use pictures, models, puppets and cards to teach, to complement traditional materials like blackboards and textbooks.

'We enjoy this method of teaching', says teacher Saieda Ahmed, 'even if it does mean more work for us.'

Already there are positive signs that IDEAL is increasing girls' participation – and what is crucial – their retention in school. Children have really taken to the new teaching methods. They want to go to school and their parents recognise the value of education.

The challenge for the future of the project is to continue to expand teacher training in the new teaching methods to continue the good work of IDEAL. This will improve teacher quality and increase the numbers of children who complete primary school. — KH ■



ABOVE: Shamsun with one of her three children.

OPPOSITE AND THIS PAGE: Thanks to a revolution in schooling practices through the IDEAL project, funded by the Australian Government since 1998, children – especially girls – are staying at school longer, and have a better chance in life.



SHAMSUN'S CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL

Shamsun is a poor fan maker who lives with her three children – two daughters and a son – in Dinajpur. She decided to send her son, Nurul, to the government primary school. But Nurul disliked school and refused to go. When Shamsun spoke to the teachers about it, they advised her to wait – a new teaching system called IDEAL was coming. Things would be better.

Then, in November last year, the head teacher invited Shamsun to a meeting to help prepare a plan for the improvement of the school. At the meeting, teachers and parents worked in groups to decide what would make the school a better place.

At the end of the meeting, some of the mothers promised to contribute toward the new activities. Shamsun had nothing to offer, and felt very bad. Then, as if in a trance, she said: 'I would give 10 bamboo fans because the teachers would need them in summer.'

To her great delight, everyone clapped and thanked her. Shamsun came home after the meeting totally transformed. During the evening meal that night, she said to her daughters: 'Jainab, Nasima, both of you will go to school tomorrow.'

The two girls were delighted, and Shamsun felt great. Now all of her children would grow up as educated people. ■



New schools for Chinese children

A small group of Australian Rotarians has been working for more than a year in China, mainly on a volunteer basis, to ensure that children in some of the more remote parts of China have a chance at an education.

Rotarians from Crows Nest, NSW, have discovered that you can change many people's lives with a small grant from the Australian Government's aid program.

The Rotarians are making a big difference to the lives of children and teachers in China's north western Shaanxi Province by building much needed schools for poor children in isolated villages.

China has been struggling to educate poor children in rural areas, but despite gains in literacy during the last 20 years, UNICEF estimates that 130 million children do not attend school – 60 per cent of them girls.

Electrical engineer Bjorn Kolberg, of Crows Nest, is behind the Rotary project in China. He has visited China many times to manage the project, which is funded by a small grant of \$93,000 from the Australian Government.

Since May last year, Rotarians have helped to build two village schools, Xianfeng Village Primary School and Taiguang Primary School in the Hanjia Township. Rotary also upgraded the Yadian Primary School in the remote Beiji Township, which teaches children from two villages – Yadian and Wonping.

Kolberg tells the story of meeting with the local community in planning the building of Xianfeng school.

'We met with the leader of the Hanjia Township, Mr Lan Senlin and found that the old location of Xianfeng school had suffered from heavy rains. After discussions, we planned to rebuild the school in a new location 300 metres south of the old school. This new location was beautiful and was

the highest point of the village.'

Rotary worked closely with the local village people to build Xianfeng school for 70 children in preschool and Grades 1-5. Kolberg says: 'We helped construct a new school for Xianfeng Village Primary School with five classrooms, accommodation and offices for the teachers, with toilets, a kitchen, library and store.

'In addition, we built 30 new benches and desks which accommodated three students each and built desks, chairs and cabinets for the teachers. We also gave the students 952 books, sports equipment, art

supplies and musical instruments to make school life more rewarding.'

Xianfeng school has been open since August last year and is an example of a project successfully completed with the help of Rotary, the Australian Government and the local community.

Rotary provided the same assistance to Taiguang Village by building a new primary school, accommodation, kitchen, library and toilets to serve the needs of 100 isolated children.

Australian funding will help Rotary to build another new school this year. During



The entire village of Xianfeng celebrates the opening of the new primary school.

(Photo courtesy Rotary Club of Crows Nest)

their search for another school to repair in 2000, engineer Bjorn Kolberg came across Yadian Primary School in remote Beiji Township.

Kolberg says: 'This school was in extremely bad condition and in great need of assistance. We found 150 children who were actually standing all day in school because of a lack of desks and benches. Furthermore most of the windows of the classrooms were open and at best were covered with bits of plastic. We found out that eight children had left because of lack of funds.'

Rotary decided to upgrade the school which would help Yadian Primary's 290 children and 11 teachers.

'Within two weeks, 53 new desks with benches were in place for 159 children and we installed 60 square metres of window glass. We were happy to offer funding so that those eight children were able to return to school.'

The good work of Rotary doesn't end there. Rotary also used their Australian aid program grant to provide sponsorship to 133 students from eight schools. This was part of a strategy to encourage families to send girls to school. Girls are regularly denied educational opportunities in favour of boys. More than half of those 133 students sponsored by Rotary were girls.

Rotary also ran a one-week training seminar for primary school teachers in

Binxian County with specialist teachers attending from Beijing. 'Originally we invited 100 primary school teachers,' Kolberg explains. 'When the news spread in Binxian no fewer than 350 school teachers turned up to be trained even though they hadn't been invited. No-one was turned down and the event became a great success.'

Rotary's great outcomes for education in a group of small villages in China have encouraged them: they are back doing it again in 2000. As this issue of *Focus* goes to print, Bjorn Kolberg is in China, overseeing the building of a new school in Shangchuan Village. — KH ■

Aussie teachers volunteer for East Timor

A team of committed Australian teachers have taken leave without pay, quit jobs and left families so they can help East Timorese civil servants develop their English language skills.

East Timor's civil service was all but destroyed following last year's election for independence. Building a new civil service, and improving the skills and knowledge of East Timorese in areas such as administration, language and financial management, will be major tasks.

Working with Australian Volunteers International, AusAID has set up SAPET — the Staffing Assistance Program for East Timor. Under SAPET, seven English language teachers have been contracted to assist mid and senior level civil servants to achieve a functional level of English and supervise the development of East Timorese professionals as teachers of English.

For one of the teachers, Katy Gilkes, the prospect of working in East Timor won't bring many surprises. Katy's husband Simon has just returned from a six-month stint foot-slogging along the western border with

General Cosgrove's Interfet troops. Simon has already given Katy the inside info on what to expect.

Katy says teaching English in East Timor

will give her the 'opportunity to help contribute to the capacity of the East Timorese to help themselves.' — GC ■



Australian volunteer Katy Gilkes, ready for a stint teaching English in East Timor.

Taro leaf blight in Samoa – tackling the problem as partners

A Taro Breeders Club and Taro Improvement Project are two initiatives in Samoa helping farmers to overcome the problem of taro leaf blight. Plant pathologist Dr Danny Hunter and masters student Pelenato Fonoti have been working on the project.

In 1993, the outbreak of leaf blight in Samoa devastated the staple taro crop, decimating farmers' incomes from local and overseas markets.

Traditional taro production in Samoa was relatively simple before the arrival of taro leaf blight, which is caused by the fungus *Phytophthora colocasiae*. The damage was catastrophic because the two most common taro varieties proved to be susceptible to the disease. Attempts to solve the problem using fungicides and changing cultural practices failed.

Subsequently, the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forests and Meteorology has identified taro varieties from Micronesia, Palau and the Philippines that have some resistance to taro leaf blight, but these are not the final answer to improved taro production in Samoa.

TACKLING THE BLIGHT

Tackling taro leaf blight is one of the objectives of the regional Taro Genetic

Resources: Conservation and Utilisation (TAROGEN) project. This three-year project is being implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific and \$2.3 million in funding from the Australian Government.

TAROGEN helps support a breeding program in Samoa by providing the services of a plant breeder/pathologist and by funding masters student, Pelenato Fonoti who is helping the Ministry evaluate taro from existing breeding lines.

A university Taro Breeders Club and Taro Improvement Project (TIP) have established involving university staff and students, the Extension and Research Divisions of the Ministry, and local farmers.

TARO BREEDERS CLUB

The Taro Breeders Club arose from the need to improve the level of leaf blight resistance in the taro types found in Samoa. At present, the club has a membership of almost 50 and is growing rapidly.

One particularly encouraging aspect is the growing number of farmers involved, giving students the opportunity to interact with Samoan farmers on a regular basis. Members learn about the taro breeding process in a practical way, and have opportunities to produce their own cross-breeds and seedlings for field evaluation.

The club represents an innovative approach to teaching and learning and, in an environment of limited resources, ensures there are many hands to do plant-breeding work.

TARO IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Taro Improvement Project aims to give taro growers more options for improving production and managing taro leaf blight. It works as a partnership between research and extension staff from the University of the South Pacific, the Ministry and Samoan farmers.

Currently the project is working with more than 30 farmers on the island of Upolu to evaluate introduced taro varieties. TIP meets monthly at various locations to share information, exchange ideas and evaluate the new taro varieties.

Interest in both initiatives has been overwhelming and plans are underway to extend the TIP project to the island of Savai'i. Although providing immediate benefits to Samoa, both initiatives have important contributions to make to other Pacific Island countries.

Student members of the breeders club will improve the taro breeding capabilities of many countries when they return home, and improved taro varieties will assist other countries to combat taro leaf blight. — DH ■



Close-up of taro leaf blight on a taro leaf.

Viet Nam celebrates the bridge of hope

Viet Nam's bridge for the 21st century, the My Thuan Bridge, will make a major contribution to the economic and social development of the Mekong Delta region, and the country as a whole.

The largest infrastructure project ever funded under Australia's aid program – the My Thuan Bridge – was officially opened on 21 May by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer, and the Prime Minister of Viet Nam, Mr Phan Van Khai.

It seemed as if Viet Nam stood still to watch. A live broadcast brought the event into homes, cafes and shops throughout the country. Thousands of people from neighbouring provinces came to be part of the event.

Families travelled to the bridge, three or four to a motorcycle, in packed buses and on foot. The Vietnamese people had awaited the opening with great anticipation and were determined to celebrate in style.

Performers entertained the crowd on the southern approach to the bridge while the official ceremony was conducted on the northern side. After a spectacular dragon boat race, the bridge opened for pedestrian traffic. It quickly became packed: women with their distinctive conical palm leaf hats, farmers in their Sunday best and old people – all smiling with pride as they walked across their new bridge.

Underlying the festive mood was a strong hope for a better future linked to the improvements the bridge will bring to their lives.

Sixteen million people live in the Mekong Delta and many live below the poverty line. The need for social and economic development is high. The bridge will help bring about this development and thus reduce poverty.



The crowd swarmed onto the bridge after a spectacular dragon boat race.

By linking the rice bowl of Viet Nam to the rest of the country, the bridge will immediately help farmers and other small businesses market their produce faster and more effectively. Lengthy delays caused by ferry crossings, fuel and labour costs will all be reduced. The people of the Delta will also have better access to medical and educational facilities.

In the longer term, the bridge will help develop the Delta's strong economic potential, in the areas of agricultural processing, light industry and tourism. More broadly, development of the Delta will support sustainable development for the country as a whole.

Training of Vietnamese engineers and construction workers during the bridge's design and construction has already had an impact on the rest of the country. Expertise gained by one of the Vietnamese engineers trained has been used to help design a smaller cable-stayed bridge in central Viet Nam.

More than 500 construction workers and 60 engineers participated in on-the-job and formal training programs in bridge design, planning, construction and management. Some of those were trained at Monash

University and by contractors in Australia. Sixty welders were trained to the highest standards by an Australian welder.

Completed ahead of schedule, under budget and with an exemplary safety



Joining the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Downer, to unveil the commemorative plaque were the Minister for Planning and Investment, Mr Tran Xuan Gia (far left); the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Mr Phan Van Khai, (centre); and the former Prime Minister of Vietnam, Mr Vo Van Kiet (far right).



Part of the happy crowd that crossed the bridge. (Photos: Hans Kempf)



A local child captures the spirit of the bridge and what it represents for the future.

record, this world-class bridge represents the latest in cable-stayed technology. Australian companies Baulderstone Hornibrook Engineering, Maunsell McIntyre and the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation worked closely with their Vietnamese counterparts in meeting the engineering challenges posed by the bridge. The Australian Government contributed two-thirds of the cost of the bridge and the Vietnamese government one-third.

The graceful curves of the bridge seem to rise up out of the river as you approach it after the hair-raising drive from Ho Chi Minh City, along the grandly named National Highway One.

A series of roadside cafes had already been set up just two days after the opening. They were doing a bustling trade, serving the hordes of people still flocking to the bridge. Walking or driving, a large number stopped in the middle to

take in the magnificent views and record their visit on film.

The pride and hope in the bridge is perhaps best captured in colourful paintings done by local school children for an exhibition. Every one portrays the bridge as a positive part of their lives, as it overlooks children playing, river life and ships making their way up the river.

Another local artist, an elderly man, also documented the bridge's progress in his drawings, sitting under the same tree virtually every day of the bridge's construction to sketch it. Perhaps he was among the crowds that crossed the bridge on foot, happy that their dream of a bridge across the river had been realised and hopeful about what it would mean for their future. — JC ■



'When I walk accross the bridge every morning, I see the Australian flag on the plaques and remember what a good friend your country has been to Viet Nam.'

Mrs Bay, local cafe owner.

(Photo: Jacinta Cubis)

Street kids and slum dwellers – making a lasting difference in Maharashtra

On a recent trip to the Indian State of Maharashtra, writer and photographer Peter Davis visited several projects funded by the Australian Government aid program. He found plenty of reasons to hope for a better future for some of India's poorest people.

Empowerment is an awkward word. It sounds academic and somehow removed from real life.

Yet it is a word that I heard many times as I met organisers and activists in various development programs in Maharashtra. Sometimes the word was used directly. Sometimes it came via a translator. But it was always used with a sense of conviction and pride.

I heard it from the slum dwellers in Mumbai (Bombay) who struggle to change the way they are perceived by the authorities. I heard it from the youth workers who work tirelessly to give street kids a sense of dignity. Village women who run workshops that encourage other women to become involved in local government use the word frequently. And so do those who work with the women who pick through the grimy waste on city streets.

If there is a common thread running through the projects I visited, it's the attempt to encourage some of India's poorest people to value themselves, to work co-operatively and to take control of the decisions that affect their lives. That's what empowerment is about.

SLUM DWELLERS FIND THEIR VOICE

The slums of Mumbai are so infamous that tourist brochures warn travellers to steer clear. In so doing, they perpetuate the mythology of slum dwellers as social miscreants.

'The reality is very different,' says Sheela Patel, founder director of the non-government organisation, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres



Some people have lived along the railway lines of Mumbai for more than 20 years. Now, Australian Government aid funding is helping them to relocate to safer areas. (Photos: Peter Davis)

(SPARC). 'Slum dwellers are hard working, honest and very organised.'

Eleven million people live in Mumbai. The city generates an estimated 33 per cent of India's income tax revenue and is home to some of India's, if not the world's, wealthiest people. Yet almost half the population are considered slum dwellers.

Slum dwellers are categorised according to the land they occupy. Usually the land is owned by authorities such as the municipality, the railways, ports or airports.

'A large proportion of slum dwellers come from other parts of India,' explains Sheela Patel. 'They come from villages where they have lost their land, where the crops have failed and the economy is depressed. They are lured to the city by

promises of great opportunities.'

The railway slum dwellers create particular headaches for the six million workers who commute in and out of Mumbai every day. Trains passing through slum areas must slow down to 5 km per hour (normal speed is 40 km per hour). This creates serious disruption and disgruntled commuters have often vented their anger on railway property.

'Some people have lived along the railway lines for more than 20 years,' says Mohan Devkule, President of the Railway Slum Dwellers Federation. 'Trains pass by every five or six minutes and almost every day someone is killed on the tracks.'

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, slum dwellers experienced constant harassment



ABOVE: Sheela Patel, founder director of a community housing organisation that helps slum dwellers.

RIGHT: Beneath posters promoting women's rights, sponsored by Australia's aid program, Lata Shelan, Lanhu Abnahve and Shelake Tukaram discuss progress in the education campaign.

BELOW: Two wastepickers of Pune. Wastepickers are able to save money by selling their collections to their own cooperative shop.

from authorities. Slums would often be cleared (bulldozed) with no warning and no consultation. Things began to change in the mid-1980s with the establishment of the Slum Dwellers Federation.

'We work closely with the Federation,' says Sheela Patel. 'To the casual observer, things may look bad but we have begun to change the way in which slum dwellers are

seen by the authorities.'

Sheela Patel and Mohan Devkule refer to the relocation of 900 families to a settlement called Kanju Marg, 25 kilometres north of Mumbai central, as an example of improved relations with authorities.

'These people had to move to make way for a new railway line,' says Mohan Devkule. 'Not long ago their homes would



Asha and Lakshmi

Wastepickers doing it for themselves

Asha Bai is 32 but looks much older. She uses her bare hands to rummage through the putrid waste in a municipal bin. She's looking for anything of value – a piece of plastic, some glass, bits of cardboard or strands of metal. She hauls her find into her sack and then disappears into the chaos of the city traffic in search of the next bin.

Her day begins at 4am. By 5pm, she may have filled several sacks, each weighing around 40 kilos. She collects her payment of 50 rupees (about \$2) from the middlemen who buy waste and then she makes the long journey home to her slum to prepare the family meal. If she's lucky, she might have Sundays off.

In the city of Pune, 250 kilometres south east of Mumbai, there are about 7,500 people, mostly women, like Asha Bai.

'Waste picking is about as low as you can get on the social scale,' says Poornima Chikarmane of the Department of Adult Education at the SNDT Women's University in Pune. The women feel much shame about their work. Yet what they do is one of the most important jobs as far as recycling materials and helping to keep the environment clean is concerned.'

In 1996, Poornima and her colleagues helped the waste pickers establish their own association. 'We've delivered education programs and run awareness workshops to help them become organised. In a short time we have made some significant achievements,' she says.

The issuing of identity cards to each wastepicker has reduced the levels of harassment from police and other authorities. However, a more significant achievement has been the formation of the cooperative store.

Established in 1998 with a seeding grant from the Australian Government's aid program, the store is owned by about 40 wastepickers. It enables them to avoid the

middlemen and sell their waste directly to the buyer. In its first year of operation the store has generated a profit and paid dividends to the wastepickers who belong to the cooperative.

Lakshmi, 27, is one of the co-op members. She has been a picking through the waste of Pune for 17 years. 'Before the store opened, I sold my waste to men who would then sell it to the buyers. Now I bring it to the store and I get paid more because the store makes a profit. My hope is that I can give my children an education so they don't have to do this type of work.'

According to Poornima, the better financial returns mean that the members can increase their savings and have easier access to cheap loans. The store operates from a space under a concrete flyover on the outskirts of Pune. The municipality

owns the space. The wastepickers mounted a successful argument that their work actually saves the city a lot of money and so the space was granted free of charge.

The separation of waste at its source is now a priority for the Wastepickers Association. 'Separation will mean less hazardous work for the wastepickers,' says Poornima. 'However, it will take a lot of public education to encourage people to separate their waste before discarding it.'

'In the meantime, we are concerned with the education of the wastepickers and their children. Our hope is that people like Lakshmi will achieve her goal – that her children will have better opportunities and not have to rummage through hazardous waste. With the success of the co-operative store, that might just be possible.'



Asha Bai sorts waste she has collected prior to selling it to Kashtachi Komai, a cooperative scrap store.

have simply been bulldozed and they would have had nowhere to go. But through our community-based organisations we've forced the authorities to consult with us. We secured this land which is owned by the government.

'It was swamp but all the people worked together to drain it and improve it before moving here. Now everything is better. Eventually these families will move into permanent housing on this same land. And they will purchase that housing with their own savings.'

ATTITUDES TURNED AROUND

The savings scheme organised by SPARC and Mahila Milan (a community based organisation meaning Women Together) has also helped turn attitudes around.

'Many slum dwellers find work in the informal economy' says Sheela Patel. 'Their income may be meagre but they have proved they are able to save.' Through their savings, slum dwellers become eligible for 'soft' – that is, low interest loans. They can use the money to start a business or fix their dwellings. Some people become eligible for more substantial low interest loans through which they can eventually purchase more permanent housing.

'We have a long way to go,' says Sheela Patel. 'We know that slums will never disappear from big cities like Mumbai. But at least we have real community-based organisations through which the slum dwellers have found a voice. And that voice is getting louder.'

WOMEN LEARN TO TAKE CONTROL

In 1994, the Indian government legislated for increased representation of women in local government. Introducing new laws is relatively easy. But encouraging women to take advantage of the new opportunities is another matter entirely.

Illiteracy is a huge barrier to participation. So is attitude. 'Women may be natural participants in community affairs, but they are conditioned to believe that political representation is for men only,' says Maheshkara Aryamita, liaison officer

Empowering street kids



Preparing the meal is an integral part of the rural retreat for these Mumbai street children.

At a rural retreat, two hours from the chaos of Mumbai, four young girls aged from seven to 17 help prepare lunch. They move about the large kitchen area with speed and enthusiasm. As they dice the chilli and stir the vegetables, they sing a Hindi song. *'If you wish to change yourself the world will change with you'* is the song's refrain.

With their bright clothes and cooperative spirits, these girls look for all the world like a group of happy school-children having a holiday in the country. But this is no ordinary holiday. These girls do not go to school. And they have no home. By day, they roam the streets of Mumbai. At night, they curl up at railway stations or in doorways. Sometimes they sing for their supper. Often they just beg. And of course they are vulnerable. Prostitution, drug addiction and violence are common.

But here, at this country retreat, the girls seem like a family. 'We encourage singing,' says Archina Shrivastav, the coordinator of Street Children's Project with YUVA (Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action). 'It helps to build trust and confidence.'

During the three-day retreat, which is supported by the Australian Government aid program, the girls learn about their

rights, build their confidence and share their experiences. After lunch they might watch a video about personal health and hygiene. Sometimes they play structured games and often they just sit and talk, grateful for the opportunity to have an adult willing to listen.

The program is one of many that YUVA initiates for the homeless youth in Mumbai and it's a first for young girls. 'Street boys are much more visible' says Archina. 'But street girls are much harder to track. They are like ghosts in the metropolis. We have no idea how many girls are on the street because we have only just begun to seek them out.'

'Homelessness is a complex issue' explains Archina. 'On the streets their invisibility is their protection.'

Social workers from YUVA roam the streets to establish contact with the girls, get to know them and inform them of programs such as the residential workshop.

'Girls who come on these workshops are given clean clothes and decent meals. But more importantly, we try to give them a sense of self worth.'

'If we find very young girls on the streets we try to place them in a foster home, otherwise, the best we can hope for is that they return to the streets with improved survival skills.'

with Stree Aadhar Kendra (SAK), a community development organisation in Pune. 'Working towards a gender-just society' is one of the mottoes of SAK. And education and awareness programs form a vital part of the organisations' agenda.

SAK operates in towns and villages throughout Maharashtra. At Ranjangoan village, 60 kilometres north west of Pune, it leases a cement house in which local women representatives meet with SAK activists to discuss social and political strategies for improving their lives.

Conditions have improved here since 200 women banded together and destroyed local liquor-making facilities. 'The men aren't bad but the alcohol makes them bad,' says Sunam Bai, who gave up her tailoring work when she won the local election.

In her short time in office, Sunam has instigated improved water facilities. She's now trying to bring about improvements to

the local school. 'I represent 2,000 people,' she says. 'This is a new life for me and I want to encourage other women to become involved because I think we can bring about some real changes.'

On the wall of the house where Sunam discusses her decision-making processes is a series of posters. These are designed as part of an Australian aid program-supported awareness program. Each poster conveys a crucial message on issues such as the importance of equal pay for equal work, the reporting of rape and what to do about violence to women.

'According to our traditions, women are responsible for the kitchen and for children,' says Lata Shelan, a social worker with SAK. 'But things are beginning to change. Women have a right to equal access to education and to decision-making. Our poster campaign is part of our strategy to raise the awareness of women and help them assume the power that is rightfully theirs.' ■



ABOVE Lata is a local government representative in rural Maharashtra and a member of SAK.

BELOW Working for the community based organisations SPARC and Mahila Milan, Lakshmi Naidu collects the savings from the other slum dwellers in her area every morning.



Message on an apple

In Xingtai County in China, local apple producers have come up with a novel way to differentiate their product in the marketplace. They're sending messages on their apples.

As part of an Australian Government funded project – the Hebei Watershed Management and Livestock Production Project – Chinese apple producers have pioneered a new apple identification technique, with very profitable results.

While the apples are still on the tree and before they ripen, they apply special stickers bearing small messages for their potential customers. And the customers love them, paying up to three times the normal price at the last Xingtai County Apple Festival.

The apple marketing technique is just a small part of the five-year project which is working towards sustainable agricultural development using sound watershed-planning approaches.

So far, the project has achieved a total of around 3,000 hectares of watershed developments on the way to a planned total of 4,000 hectares. Irrigated fruit and nut production is an important part of the project funded by the Australian Government and implemented by ACIL Australia in association with AACM International. ■



Chinese project director Zhang Feng Qun and the Australian team leader Phil Wallens display the apples with their messages.



A close-up of the apples – the message between kangaroo and panda reads: Australia and China Friendship Cooperation.

After the floods recede

Rebuilding Mozambique after the recent devastating floods will be a long process. Australia is helping with post-flood demining, disease control, water and sanitation, and disaster management.

Anna Cuinica survived Mozambique's worst flooding in 50 years by tying herself and her three children to a tree.

'They would get tired and fall down, so I ripped up pieces of clothes and tied them to the branches,' she said.

Cuinica and her family stayed in the tree for three days until the floodwaters receded and they could climb down safely. Like thousands of others, she spent the next few weeks in an accommodation camp, thankful to have survived, but anxious about the future.

'My whole life went with the water,' she said. 'I'm alive and I'm fine now, but deep down in my heart, I'm not fine.'

LANDMINE NIGHTMARE

Long after the television cameras have gone, the people of Mozambique will need help rebuilding their devastated country. As if Anna Cuinica didn't have enough to worry about, landmines dislodged by

floodwaters are presenting another nightmare.

Australia has helped conduct landmine surveys and landmine clearance in a number of areas in Mozambique. Mine awareness campaigns were intensified as part of this project to increase people's knowledge about the dangers of landmines.

Australia also contributed \$1 million to the United Nations demining program, conducted in cooperation with the Government of Mozambique's Mine Clearance Institute.

Malaria quickly became the main cause of death and illness in flood-affected areas, with children and pregnant women most at risk. Australia's contribution of \$500,000 has helped the World Health Organisation's malaria prevention and health education program.

Australia is also helping the Mozambique Government with rehabilitation and disaster management. For two months following the floods,

David Potter, an engineer from Bowral, worked in Mozambique helping villagers rebuild their water supplies and sanitation facilities.

'Clean water was a priority after the floods,' David Potter said. 'People had no choice but to drink the dirty water from wells, putting them at risk of contracting diseases like cholera. There was also a real problem with waste disposal. The most effective short-term solution was to build thousands of pit latrines.'

Three experts from Victoria's State Emergency Service drew on their experience and skills to help the Ministry of Health with emergency planning and disaster management. Paul Jerome, Steve Warren and Barry Gilbert worked closely with their Mozambique counterparts so government agencies are better prepared in the event of a similar catastrophe. — JC ■



Looking at Laos – practical aid for an emerging nation

Laos today is a country facing many challenges – rural provinces are gripped by poverty and once-productive agricultural land is littered with lethal landmines. The director of AusAID's bilateral aid program to Laos, Robert Stewart, recently had first-hand experience of how Australian aid programs are bringing hope for a better future. He describes a two-day visit to the provinces of Bolikhamsai and Khammouane.

DAY ONE

We started early, at around 6 am, and it was to be a long ten-hour drive to our destination – the villages of Pong and Napae in the province of Bolikhamsai.

Here, the Australian aid program has provided funding to Save the Children Fund Australia to work with the Laos Women's Union and other local organisations on small-scale rural village development projects. The project, which is focused on around 200 villages in the provinces of Sayaboury and Bolikhamsai, is helping poor, rural communities meet basic needs for food, income and clean water.

For the first few hours of our journey we snaked along a major road which shadowed the Mekong River. Along the way, we travelled through several small villages, all with roadside eateries in full swing offering cold drinks and the ubiquitous suite of rice noodle soups cooked on the spot at very reasonable prices – by western standards.

As we continued our travel, the lush green of the countryside seemed to belie the daily struggle and pervasive poverty faced by the people of this region. Wet rice paddies on the low lying flats, dry land rice farming and other crops such as tropical fruits being grown on higher ground, provided evidence of the subsistence agriculture base of the economy.

At this point we took a slight diversion to the Nam Theun Hinboun hydropower station. Opened on 4 April 1998, the station's capacity is 210 megawatts.

The power generated is used for both domestic consumption and export to neighbouring countries. It has had a controversial history with some international non-government agencies concerned about its impact on local villagers.

When we arrived in Pong, a couple of hours later than expected, the welcoming committee gave us a guided tour around the small village of perhaps 20 or so families. In this village, latrines and gravity feed reticulated water systems have been constructed with Australian help.

The villagers' hospitality was warm and embracing. As we sat with them, they told us how the project had improved the quality of their lives. The water taps meant that the women no longer had to trek to the local water source with buckets – freeing up to six hours of labour a day, per water collector.

The fact that the village now had clean running water also meant that the incidence of common water-borne diseases had dropped significantly – by up to 70 per cent.

By mid-afternoon we had arrived in Napae. Main project activities in this village were weaving – primarily silk but also cotton – and alternative upland cropping such as fruit trees.

I had not realised that our trip to the villages was considered such a special event. The villagers were attired in beautiful traditional dress. We were offered trays of delicious, locally grown fruits. They told us that the project had helped them to improve their silk production and to sell their woven products both in local markets

and in markets across the nearby border with Vietnam.

Their woven production had increased by up to 40 per cent in the last year or so and the village's income had increased substantially. Proudly, the village leaders pointed out a new tiled roof on one of the village's most substantial buildings. They explained that it had been paid for through the village's increased income.

DAY TWO

The next day we headed off for Khammouane Province to visit an unexploded ordnance (UXO) project in the Mahaxay District and a land titling project in the provincial capital of Tha Thack. The Australian aid program has provided substantial funding, through the Laos PDR UXO Trust Fund and World Vision Australia, to undertake UXO clearance work in Khammouane province.

We met the project's Australian team leader, in Tha Thack and headed straight off to a project site in the Mahaxay district. After about a 90-minute drive we arrived at a small district village where we met the project's senior technical adviser, and several locally engaged UXO Laos deminers.

We walked along a narrow dirt track. We were not more than 10 metres from the nearest house, when Craig pointed out the partially buried and very difficult to see UXO that was littered throughout the dense bush. Quite literally, every square metre of bush had at least one or two unexploded

'bombies' lurking on the ground. Each 'bombie' could kill anyone within a radius of many metres.

The magnitude of the task of clearing this menace was clearly enormous. I was shocked by just how close the UXO was to the village. The struggle for a livelihood in this agriculturally based, rural society is hard enough without landmines poisoning the fields the people are trying to cultivate.

I heard many stories of children who had picked up UXO out of irrepressible curiosity, only to end up being killed or seriously injured. This is why other aspects of the project, such as UXO marking and community awareness, are so important.

We left the Mahaxay district and headed back to Tha Khaek, where we had a quick meeting with the local governor. A land titling project, which Australia is co-funding with the World Bank, is operating in Tha Khaek and the governor decided to come with us, along with the local media.

Land titling projects can offer long

term benefits to local people and economies. Secure land tenure is required to mobilise investment resources. The development of a more efficient and equitable land market should result in more efficient and transparent land transactions, less risk in land related investment, mobilisation of financial resources through use of land as collateral and provision of incentives for longer-term investment in land use.

Local people told us that they now had more security and an incentive to invest more effort in the land. There were also fewer disputes over land.

On the long road trip back to Vientiane an impressive thunderstorm was building up on the horizon as the late afternoon began to merge into night. People were escorting cattle back to villages along the road and barefoot children were playing outside their homes. They are among the many vivid images of Laos that will remain with me always. —RS ■



'I had not realised that our trip to the villages was considered such a special event.'

— Robert Stewart in Laos.

LAOS AT A GLANCE

Capital	Vientiane
Area	236,800 square km
Currency	New Kip
Official language	Lao
Total population (1995)	5 million
Life expectancy (years)	52
Infant mortality rate (per 1000 births)	90
GNP per capita	\$580
Total Australian aid (1999–2000)	\$21.3 million

The Australian aid program to Laos PDR is committed to poverty alleviation. Aid programs focus on three key areas: health, rural development and education. The program has a particular focus on supporting women, ethnic minority groups and people in geographically isolated areas.

Laos is the only landlocked country in Indochina. The terrain is mainly mountainous and heavily forested. The Mekong river valley, stretching down the country from north to south, is a major rice growing area. The climate is tropical.

After many years of isolation, political disruption and war, Laos is rejoining the regional and world community. The Lao Government has instituted wide ranging structural economic reforms over the last decade, aimed at opening the domestic economy to greater engagement with regional and local economies. Laos was accepted as a full member of ASEAN in July 1997.

While Laos is strategically positioned within the Indo-China region, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world after many years of war and stagnant economic growth. At present, about 46 per cent of the population live in poverty and there is a particular need for improvements in education and health facilities in the rural areas.

Australia has maintained a very good relationship with Laos and provided aid for more than 40 years. Australia is the only country to have maintained ambassadorial level representation for that period. As a Least Developed Country, Laos receives more aid from Australia per head than any other Asian country.

Clearing the killing fields

Through the Australian Government's *Destroy A Minefield* initiative, the corporate sector, community groups and Australian schoolchildren are working together to help rid Cambodia of landmines.

'It's hard to imagine anything much worse than having to send your children out into the fields every day, knowing that those fields may be mined. The appalling thing about landmines is that long after the war is over they still claim the lives of innocent victims, children and their families, simply trying to get on with their lives.'

Mr Downer was speaking in Canberra recently after inspecting one of Australia's de-mining sites in Cambodia. The Minister visited the village of Ta Peng in Siem Reap Province where de-miners funded through the *Destroy A Minefield* campaign are clearing village land.

Destroy A Minefield is an Australian Government initiative designed to destroy minefields across Cambodia and encourage all Australians to support de-mining.

The people of Ta Peng have only recently returned home after years in exile. During the war landmines were laid in such numbers that parts of the village became uninhabitable. The land around many houses, around the school, around the village water source and throughout the surrounding fields became unusable.

Long after the soldiers have moved on and peace is officially declared, landmines keep killing. And frequently, the victims who suffer most are children playing or working in the fields. They suffer horrific injuries which are often compounded by long trips to the nearest health clinic or hospital.

It is the appalling and random cruelty of landmines which has driven people all over the world to support anti-landmine campaigns.



Senator Patterson tries her skills at hopscotch with children from Werribee's Glen Orden Primary School. Australia's Special Representative on Demining, Senator Patterson joined the children outside the Melbourne Town Hall as part of the *Destroy A Minefield* campaign's national hopscotch-athon in March. The hopscotch-athon, which involved children from all over Australia, was part of a week of activities aimed at drawing attention to the plight of landmine survivors, and to help raise money to clear minefields in Cambodia.

Australian support has now cleared enough of the Ta Peng village land to enable the people to return home. The access road to the village is now open and the people have safe access to their water supply.

But the danger is not over yet. A mine was discovered close to the village on the morning Mr Downer was visiting. To date, 29 mines and 21 unexploded ordnances have been found and destroyed.

Ta Peng is typical of villages throughout Cambodia where 29,000 people have already been killed or maimed

by landmines. In Ta Peng, nine villagers have been killed and five injured by mines.

It is not only those who are killed or injured whose lives are destroyed by landmines. Whole communities suffer where good land is unsafe and people who were once self-sufficient are forced to depend on food aid to survive. Clearing the killing fields not only saves lives but also enables whole communities to regain their land and their livelihood.

Australian community and business leaders are already supporting the *Destroy*

A *Minefield* scheme. At the recent corporate launch in Sydney, entrepreneur Dick Smith pledged his support by donating \$33,000 to the *Destroy A Minefield* campaign.

Mr Smith said, 'Destroy A Minefield is an important cause that all Australians should be aware of and support. Children and families continue to be killed and maimed by mines in Cambodia and I commend the Australian Government for its initiative to destroy these vicious weapons that harm innocent victims. I urge other Australians businesses to give as generously as possible.'

The Australian Government is matching every \$2 raised by the community with a donation of \$1.

Schools, Rotary Clubs and other community groups across Australia are taking up the challenge, but there is still so much more to do. Why don't you consider making a difference by joining with friends and colleagues and clearing a minefield today?

All donations are tax deductible through AUSTCARE. Donations can be made by freecall to 1800 021 103. — FD ■



The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer (left), chats with Mr John Goodfellow, corporate affairs manager for the Macquarie Bank, entrepreneur Mr Dick Smith and Mrs Pip Smith at the corporate launch of the *Destroy A Minefield*. (Photos: courtesy Bay Street)



JOIN TOGETHER TO DESTROY A MINEFIELD

Destroy A Minefield seeks sponsors in the Australian community to clear specifically named minefields. Every two dollars raised will be matched by one dollar from the Government. This is an opportunity for individuals, schools, community groups and businesses to make a direct contribution to solving this humanitarian crisis. We can join together to *Destroy A Minefield*.

Destroy A Minefield is an Australian Government initiative to clear minefields in Cambodia. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer, initiated this project in the belief that Australians want to help.

'The Australian Government has a proud record on helping to end the scourge of landmines,' Mr Downer said. 'Australia is an original party to the

Ottawa Treaty to ban landmines. As a demonstration of its commitment, the Australian Government has allocated \$100 million to demining and related activities in the decade to 2005.

'The *Destroy A Minefield* initiative offers all Australians, through their schools, community groups and businesses, the chance to participate directly in ending the landmines scourge in Cambodia.'

If you would like to make a donation or receive more information please ring 1800 021 103.

FACTS ABOUT LANDMINES

■ 1 out of every 384 people in Cambodia is an amputee largely because of landmine injuries.

■ Australia is now one of the largest donors to demining activities in Cambodia. Australia has committed over \$26 million to demining programs in Cambodia.

■ Australia is one of over 130 countries to ratify the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines globally, with the passage of the *Anti-Personnel Land Mines Bill 1998* by Federal Parliament on December 10, 1998.

Register on the *Destroy A Minefield* hotline:

1800 021 103

or write to:

Destroy A Minefield C/- AUSTCARE
Locked Bag 15

For more information, visit
<http://dam.austcare.org.au>

Australian volunteer honours an old debt in PNG

Following the lethal tidal wave that engulfed villages in Aitape District in north-western Papua New Guinea on 17 July 1998, killing more than 2,000 people, a group of Rotary and Lions Club members travelled to the area to help with rebuilding. Rotarian Gordon Watson, from Chinchilla, Queensland, was one of them. This is his story.

There are many disasters in our world today, some made-made, but others are natural and completely unpredictable. The speed and force of the wave that hit Sissano Lagoon pushed houses, churches, schools, animals and people from the land facing the sea into the lagoon behind, leaving a completely barren strip of land where previously all had lived.

The wave continued inland with a five-metre swell of water for seven kilometres. When it receded, it took with it bodies, injured people and debris.

In August 1998, the Rotary, Lions and Apex Clubs of Chinchilla responded to the disaster by raising more than \$1,500. Rotary Australia World Community Service called for volunteers to help rebuild.

I decided to go to Aitape to help the people rebuild their lives. They certainly helped the Australian service men and women during the last war. This was just a small way of saying thanks.

On 28 March 1999 I met up with my Rotary and Lions team mates at Brisbane airport. Our mission was to fly to Aitape, to build a house and an out-station to accommodate the incoming teams who would then build a school and 12 houses for the Arop people. It would be 8 km from the sea.

We were to be the first service club team in this area and were told it would be rough.

After flying to Port Moresby and arriving at Aitape, we went straight to work planing timber for boats being built by another Rotarian, Chris Ramsay from Dorset, England.



Villagers are well on the way to rebuilding their lives thanks to the help given by volunteers.

(Photos: Gordon Watson)

We were given a Hilux and a Nissan Twin Cab for transport. The roads were so rough you could drive in and out of the metre-deep potholes.

The next day we were given our first major job – building a prefabricated house at St Martin's Agricultural Centre. We each had two local builders to help us, and in three days we had the house complete to lock-up stage.

On Thursday we were invited to a barbecue held by the Aitape Disaster Committee where we met most of the priests, nuns, doctors and many local people. The following weekend was Easter. Since the area is predominantly Catholic, there was no work done, so we were able to become tourists for a few days.

We went fishing in the Bismarck Sea, but sharks lying in wait under the boat took a lot of our catch. We stayed overnight on Ali Island where our Aitape hosts cooked the fish in coconut milk – it was delicious! In our shower on Ali Island we came across monster spiders 15 cm across. We were told they caught birds for food.

Back at Aitape I was adopted by a local family, Justin and Theresa Seroid and their two sons. Justin was one of the builders allocated to help me; he was from the Highlands.

He took me into the jungle to see the Australian Beaufort bombers – 15 in all – that had been shot down by the Japanese during World War II. The planes were in good order except that they had no

engines, removed by the local people.

We also had a look at the old Australian military camp at Tadji. The older people of this area told us about heroic battles that had taken place here, and how two Australian soldiers had won VCs. We found two Bren guns in the jungle and a 303 rifle.

We also visited the Raihu Hospital where Dr Garry gave us a tour of the wards. After this visit I was asked to repair the hydraulics on the operating table and the auxiliary lighting plant. Dr Garry told me he would suggest naming a few baby boys Gordon in appreciation.

On 5 April we loaded our trucks and headed for Arop One, about 50 km from Aitape. It was extremely hot. When we arrived we found our accommodation was a hut on two-metre stilts. We laid down tarps on the wooden slat floor so the snakes couldn't crawl up during the night. Our only luxury was a kerosene light.

There was no washing water, so we had

to travel 4 km to have a bath in a creek after fighting off mozzies and leeches. The toilet was a hole in the ground with banana leaves for privacy.

Our meals were very basic – breakfast was dry biscuits and bully beef, lunch was dry biscuits and luncheon beef, and our evening meal was dry biscuits and tinned stew. The local people gave us some coconuts, corn and wild cabbage, which we appreciated.

The working conditions had to be seen to be believed – mud and water all round the building site as it rained every night like clockwork. The buildings were prefabricated in Wewak and transported to the site. The frames were hardwood, the stumps steel, the floor, walls and ceilings were marine ply, and the roof was galvanised iron.

We completed the project the following Saturday. By this time we had been totally accepted by the Arop people and we had been gathering crowds of 60 or 70 onlookers.

We also had the opportunity of going to Sissano to see the main site of the disaster. The lagoon was still full of coconut trees, buildings and debris. The entire area was completely devastated.

The feeling of the local people was that this generation would not return to the sea. ■

BELOW: Australian volunteer Gordon Watson and Justin Seriod inspect the wreck of an Australian Beaufort bomber, shot down by the Japanese in World War II.

OPPOSITE: 'The working conditions had to be seen to be believed'— mud and water everywhere and a torrential downpour every night.





Off the streets and into cyberspace

Australian aid volunteers often end up in some strange and wonderful situations. Suzanne Dooley found herself teaching English to students at an unusual school that takes handicapped beggars from the streets of Pattaya in Thailand and teaches them computer skills.

Pattaya is a city with a mixed reputation. Today it serves the tourist industry, but poverty and social need are prevalent.

Mahathai is just one of the social projects developed by the Catholic Redemptorist Priests during 30 years in Pattaya. Other projects include an orphanage, the Blind School, the Deaf School, the Home for Elderly Stateless People and the Home for Street Kids. Two 'Fountain of Life' centres for prostitutes are staffed by Good Shepherd Sisters. An Australian, Sister Joan Raper of Melbourne, was one of the founders of this project.

Mahathai was founded in Thailand nearly 40 years ago by Father Ray Brennan, a Chicago priest. He began an orphanage, a blind school and a deaf school in response to need.

Father Brennan explains, 'I became sick of looking at young beggars with one leg or arm. I always gave them money but I wondered if I could do more. I decided to teach them to be computer experts. Have you ever met a young handicapped adult on the street and said, "Come with me. I want to teach you computers"? It is difficult but I did it. Some found computers too hard to learn, so we started an electronics course.'

Today over a thousand severely disabled students have graduated and have jobs.

The principal, a double amputee in a wheelchair, is a graduate. Most teachers are in wheelchairs. Everything at the school is free.

Mahathai has more applicants than it can accept and is considered a model in education for the disabled in Asia. The

school selects students from very poor families. Most have had minimal access to education.

Successful computer learning increasingly requires the students to learn English. Volunteer English teachers are required, as the disabled graduates are not yet sufficiently fluent to teach. That is how I came to Pattaya for two years as a volunteer.

For these students, disability is not a limitation. Some are hoping to take part in the Sydney Paralympics if funds can be found. Great visions inspire even greater possibilities. ■

Australia's Youth Ambassadors – teaching and learning

Another group of young Australian volunteers has left home to become the newest Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development. Their destinations are different but they have a common goal – to improve the lives of people in developing countries.

PRIYA POWELL

When Priya Powell first heard about the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program, she knew she had found a unique opportunity to help improve living conditions in a developing country.

With the support of her employer, Sydney's Burwood Council, she is now working on an urban development and low income housing project in Sri Lanka.

Priya, 27, will spend three months in Anuradhapura, assisting in the preparation of a community development program aimed at gaining more grass roots participation in the resourcing, delivery and management of urban infrastructure.

Her decision to become an AYA follows a family tradition that saw her father leave Australia as a volunteer with Community Aid Abroad 30 years ago and meet and marry her mother in India.

'I think the strength of the AYA program is that it not only makes a contribution to developing countries, but also gives young people the chance to grow at a personal and professional level,' she said.

'I'm really looking forward to working with experts in development communication and using our combined skills to create a strategy which can improve the quality of life for people in Sri Lanka.'

Born in Kenya, Priya grew up in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines before coming to Australia to attend university.

'I've spent most of my life in developing countries and have enjoyed every minute of it. There is so much to learn and appreciate in the way people deal with development



Senator Kay Patterson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs farewells Australian Youth Ambassadors Angela Kerry (left) and Nikii Nguyen, before their departure on postings overseas. The function, held at Parliament House, was hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer.

issues. I expect this assignment to be a humbling experience and a valuable one.'

Before leaving Australia, Priya was a public relations officer at Burwood Council. She has an Honours degree in History and a Masters in Communication Management. The council is a partner in the AYA program and will sponsor Priya's assignment.

MICHAEL WYATT

Bean counting in the Maldives was not the job Michael Wyatt imagined when he started his accounting degree seven years ago.

But in March, Michael left Australia to travel abroad for the first time as part of

the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program.

An accountant with Stanton Partners, Michael is working with the Maldives Audit Office.

'I am becoming familiar with local accounting and auditing requirements and will be involved in training the staff on risk, controls and materiality assessment as well as audit documentation and evidence,' Michael said.

'In addition, I'm helping streamline field work procedures like compliance and substantive testing and reporting'

Michael's assignment follows the conclusion of a 20-month capacity building

project Stanton Partners completed with the Audit Office last year.

'My boss thought it was ideal to follow on from our previous work as it would build on our efforts to enhance the auditing and management skills of local staff,' Michael said.

'In the Maldives, the public accounting system is manual and single entry and there is little by way of accounting or legal framework to control public finances,' Michael said.

'This makes effective auditing in the Maldives an onerous undertaking.'

ALEXANDRA MURRAY

Armed with a Bachelor of Rural Science degree Alexandra Murray is tackling the environmental problems of remote island communities on the North Huvadho Atoll of the Maldives.

As an agronomist instructor, Alex is working with the Kanduhulhudhoo Island Development Society developing environmental management plans for the islands and teaching basic agronomic skills to the local people.

'I will be working alongside local people with diminished capital means, a lack of

agronomic knowledge and a poor resource base,' Alex said.

The northern half of the giant Huvadho Atoll, where Alex is based, is one of the largest true coral atolls in the world. It has a population of 7295 people across 10 islands, with another 83 islands uninhabited.

An ice plant, fish packing works and major fishing enterprises make up most of the atoll's industry, and islanders are famous for their textile weaving and coir rope making. The atoll has some productive agriculture, with 644 acres of arable land.

'That isn't a lot of land to feed so many people so the agriculture needs to be as efficient as possible and I'm determined to make a contribution towards this,' Alexandra said.

ANGELA KERRY

Australian Youth Ambassador for Development Angela Kerry is assisting in the preservation of the Philippines' cultural heritage.

She is spending six months on the island of Bohol, assisting the Centre for Culture and Arts Development to implement their cultural heritage and tourism strategy.

Angela has a Master of Arts and

specialised in legal issues in the arts and artists' rights.

She has worked at the Ian Potter Art Conservation Centre at the University of Melbourne as a research and administrative officer since 1995. The Centre and AusHeritage are sponsoring her assignment.

NIKII NGUYEN

Being a Vietnamese-born Australian, it has always been Nikii Nguyen's dream to enhance the relationship between Australia and Vietnam.

The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program provided the 24-year-old along with 28 other Australians with the opportunity of going on assignment in Vietnam.

One of 14 children, Nikii arrived in Australia at the age of 12. The program has sent her back to Vietnam to work at the National Economics University (NEU) in Hanoi, where she is assisting in the development of better administrative procedures for student enrolment and selection. She is sponsored by Swinburne University which works in partnership with the NEU. — KP ■

WHY BECOME AN AUSTRALIAN YOUTH AMBASSADOR?

Are you between 18 and 30 years of age, keen to share your skills and learn about other countries? Maybe you could be an Australian Youth Ambassador.

The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program (AYAD) is a Commonwealth Government initiative, funded through AusAID, the Australian Agency for International Development. The program identifies and places skilled young Australians on development assignments throughout the Asia Pacific region.

As an Australian Youth Ambassador, you will have the opportunity to use your skills to assist developing countries while building long-term goodwill and understanding between Australia and our neighbours.

The program recruits people who have a specific skill such as a trade, profession or other qualification, for suitable assignments.

Youth Ambassador assignments may be with government, local business, community, education, health, environmental or agricultural organisations. Placements could be located in a business district, an industrial zone or a remote rural area.

A unique feature of the program is the opportunity for Australian organisations from the business, community education and government sectors to nominate young Australians to undertake specific assignments. Through these 'partnerships', the AYAD program encourages the development of linkages and networks between organisations in Australia and

those in developing countries.

The Program provides:

- The opportunity to make a positive contribution to the development of our neighbours
- An invaluable opportunity to broaden your experience and increase your understanding of the cultural diversity and development needs of countries in our region
- return airfare, insurance, medical preparation, a living and accommodation allowance, a pre-departure training program and in-country support.

Telephone 1800 000 656 for an information kit, or visit the AYAD website at www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham/index.html

Minister launches AusAID's new Internet site

We're still at the same address, but www.ausaid.gov.au sports an all-new look and improved access for more users.



The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Downer, addresses an Access AusAID Business Seminar in Adelaide at the launch of AusAID's new Internet site in April. The site gives up-to-date information about the Australian Government's aid program for Australian businesses, students, non-government organisations and others interested in Australia's aid to developing countries.

AusAID has a new Internet site. The newly designed site was launched by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer at an Access AusAID Business Seminar in Adelaide in April.

The new AusAID Internet site runs on state-of-the-art web technology that gives people improved access to the most up-to-date information on the Australian Government's overseas aid program.

The site presents information on the countries and regions where AusAID provides assistance and on the five priority sectors for Australia's aid program – health, education, infrastructure, rural development and governance.

It also provides curriculum material for use by teachers in Australian classrooms as well as useful information on AusAID's Youth Ambassadors for Development program and our scholarships program.

People can also find information on how the government works in partnership with non-government organisations to deliver aid assistance to developing countries.

The site continues to provide Australian businesses with vital information on tendering opportunities with AusAID, advice on how to win contracts under the aid program and a consultants' register that enables consultants to submit their CVs and contact details on-line.

A more powerful search facility, greater accessibility for disabled users and a more intuitive information structure all combine to make the site more user-friendly and effective in fulfilling the objectives of the Government's overseas aid program.

AusAID's new Internet site can still be found at www.ausaid.gov.au ■

Finding out what *Focus* readers want

Health, Asia and education are key priorities for readers of *Focus*, according to initial responses to an AusAID survey.

A survey designed to identify *Focus* readers' areas of interest, included in the mail-out of the December issue of *Focus*, was sent to around 34,000 readers. The questionnaire was sent out again in the March issue of the magazine and responses are still flowing in.

After the December mail-out, more than 1,200 respondents indicated a strong interest in

health; nearly 1,200 were interested in issues affecting the Asian region and a similar number listed education and training as a priority.

Other key areas included the Pacific, Papua New Guinea, the environment, East Timor and women and children. There was also strong interest in Indonesia, Africa and poverty.

The survey is aimed at ensuring that

Focus is providing readers with the information they want. The questionnaire also asked respondents to identify their profession and any aid topics on which they would like more information. By mid-April, nearly 5,000 readers had responded.

A more detailed report on the survey results will appear in a future issue of *Focus*. ■



snapshots

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR MALUKU

Australia is helping humanitarian relief efforts in Maluku and North Maluku provinces in Indonesia, reflecting the Australian Government's ongoing concern about the humanitarian and security situation in both provinces.

After more than 12 months of sectarian violence, more than 440,000 people have been displaced and many homes, schools and public buildings destroyed throughout the two provinces.

Australia contributed \$2 million to the UNICEF emergency program, \$1 million to the work of Action Contre La Faim (Action Against Hunger) and a further \$200,000 to TIRUS, a local non-government agency.

Through UNICEF, Australia is supporting measles vaccination programs, infant feeding for displaced children, trauma counselling for women and child victims of violence and peace education in local schools.

Australia has also contributed food aid for displaced people. Since the civil unrest began 12 months ago, Australia has provided \$2.3 million for humanitarian assistance in the Maluku provinces. Australia has also provided substantial humanitarian assistance elsewhere in Indonesia, including through the World Food Programme and the Red Cross.

AUSTRALIA RESPONDS TO FAMINE IN HORN OF AFRICA

Australia is responding to the humanitarian disaster in the Horn of Africa in an effort to avoid a tragic repetition of the devastating famine of 1984-85, contributing a total of \$3.5 million in emergency food aid. An

estimated 16 million people are at risk of starvation because of severe drought conditions. Australia is also supporting a UN embargo on the supply of arms to both Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The Australian Government support will help the World Food Programme and Australian overseas aid agencies provide emergency food and water, including high-energy biscuits, vegetable oil, wheat and sorghum. Water tankers, storage facilities and the rehabilitation of boreholes will help bring safe water to rural communities.

Senator Kay Patterson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, said that Australia's contribution would also help provide urgently needed health care, such as basic medicines and measles vaccinations for children. Senator Patterson said, 'Millions of people in the region are dependent on livestock. Our support will help provide feed and vaccination for animals, as well as seeds for drought-affected farmers.'

The Government's aid will be channelled through two Australian overseas aid agencies, Community Aid Abroad and CARE Australia, who have extensive experience in the region. \$500,000 will be provided to the World Food Programme, in addition to the \$1.5 million for food aid which Australia provided in April.

URGENT AID FOR COLD, HUNGRY MONGOLIA

Australia has sent urgent assistance to Mongolia to counter the onset of starvation after Mongolia experienced one of its harshest winters in recent history. Almost 2 million animals starved or froze to death during the winter, destroying the main

source of food for 300,000 Mongolian herdsman in 13 provinces.

Senator Patterson said that the latest reports from the International Federation of the Red Cross indicated that the situation in Mongolia had deteriorated. 'It is now estimated that 450,000 rural people are at risk of starvation after harsh snowstorms killed over two million animals, which is approximately 70 per cent of their herds,' she said.

Through the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program, Australia provided \$320,000 to the International Federation of the Red Cross specifically for food, clothing and some fodder for animals. Herders received flour, rice and millet for food. Clothing and candles were also distributed as herders also lost their main source of heating, which is animal dung.

CLEAN WATER FOR FIVE TOWNS

The Five Towns Water Supply Project, a joint initiative by the Governments of Australia and Viet Nam, has now been successfully completed. The project has helped 400,000 people living in five provincial towns in Viet Nam to have a clean, safe and continuous water supply and improved sanitation.

The towns of Bac Ninh and Bac Giang in North Viet Nam, Ha Tinh in the centre and Tra Vinh and Vinh Long in South Viet Nam now enjoy clean water and will continue to do so as the population increases.

The Five Towns Water Supply Project was funded with \$51 million from the Australian Government overseas aid program, managed by AusAID, and \$20 million from the Government of Viet Nam. ■

business news

WANTED: MORE WOMEN IN THE AID PROGRAM

Women are occupying key roles in the Australian Government's aid program. For example, women have influence at the highest levels: Senator Kay Patterson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, has special responsibility for and takes an active role in the aid program.

Women are also team leaders, deputy team leaders and long-term advisers on some of AusAID's more complex and challenging projects in Papua New Guinea, China and Vietnam. In these countries, factors including remoteness and cultural and linguistic complexity present new challenges every day.

To make sure AusAID is familiar with all aspects of the development story, it is essential to involve both women and men. For this reason, more women consultants are still needed for the design, implementation, review and evaluation of aid projects.

The Government's gender equity policies mean AusAID's activities must take account of the different contributions made to society by women and men and ensure that both women and men benefit equally and appropriately.

One education project in PNG that has a woman in a key position is the Elementary Teacher Education Support Project (ETESP). The project is going smoothly under the leadership of Anne Glover. The Basic Education Infrastructure and Curriculum Materials Program (BEICMP) is, like the ETESP, directly assisting the PNG Government to carry out its education reforms through capacity building activities.

Nine years of basic education will become the norm for PNG's children once

the reforms have been implemented.

The program will also look at the distribution systems for curriculum materials in PNG and suggest ways to make sure the materials are available to children as they progress through the new system. BEICMP is being piloted in five provinces and it's likely it will be translated across PNG with Australian aid program assistance.

Three women consultants, in key positions within BEICMP, are working on these very important reforms.

Julie Andrews, the Provincial Adviser in West New Britain, coordinates BEICMP activities in that province and has wide experience in the PNG education system.

Emese Molnar-Bagley is the Community Advocacy Adviser. Emese's tasks include conducting the wide community consultations, which are essential to support the new system.

Maureen Dyer is BEICMP's Gender Adviser and has a strong background in gender issues in education. It is her responsibility to ensure benefits flow to women, men, and children of both sexes.

If you would like more information about AusAID and opportunities for consultancies, log onto AusAID's website www.ausaid.gov.au, or phone Carolyn Brennan (02) 6206 4945, Steve Kaleb (02) 6206 4046, or Kirsten Bailey (02) 6206 4796 in the Business Liaison Unit.

DOING AID BUSINESS IN EAST TIMOR

Australian aid is usually delivered through programs agreed to by the Australian Government and the government of the country concerned. But because East Timor does not yet have its own government,

most Australian aid is currently being channelled through the United Nations.

Australian firms interested in establishing a presence in East Timor should consider formal registration with the United Nations Procurement Division in New York on their web site at www.un.org/Dept/ptd to receive early notification of procurement opportunities.

Much of the United Nations' procurement of goods and services for East Timor is occurring at a field office level. Firms may also like to register with United Nations Darwin offices through the Regional Trade Commissioner, Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) Darwin, Mr Paul Cooney on telephone (08) 8981 8686, or fax (08) 4349.

Austrade is the main point of contact for companies and organisations wishing to obtain information about opportunities for supplying goods and services for humanitarian efforts in East Timor. Firms should contact Austrade's National Manager for Multilateral Procurement, Mr Ken Johnston c/- Austrade, GPO Box 5301 Sydney NSW 2001, to register expressions of interest.

Mr Johnson can be contacted via email at the following address: ken.johnson@austrade.gov.au.

Later, there may also be opportunities for the provision of longer-term reconstruction and development assistance through Australia's overseas aid agency, AusAID. Contracts will be tendered through public advertisement.

For further information on program delivery and business opportunities in Australia's aid program please see AusAID's web site at www.ausaid.gov.au. ■



global education

COMPLETING THE PICTURE — A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Global education teaches Australian students about the world around them. It's intended to help young Australians become informed and responsible global citizens, capable of making a positive contribution.

From an early age, children express an interest in the wider world. As new communications technology brings countries closer, children are being exposed to all parts of the globe — no longer confined to their own community, or even their own country.

Helping students to understand Australia's relationships with the world's developing countries is particularly important, especially with those in our own neighbourhood.

We need to offer positive attitudes to what sometimes appear to be hopeless

global problems. Images of disasters constantly appear on our television screens. We all know about East Timor, the earthquake in Turkey, the East Asian Crisis and the floods in Mozambique.

We see the devastating footage on the nightly news and we read the reports in the newspapers, but often the media coverage stops there. Rehabilitation and reconstruction are just beginning when the journalists leave.

HOPEFUL STORIES OF RECONSTRUCTION

Global education seeks to complete the picture. The reconstruction process is all about ordinary people striving to resume normal lives. Students need to be able to explore the stories behind the news, to discover how people in other countries live

— the hopeful stories as well as the stories of poverty and despair.

Global education promotes awareness and knowledge of global interdependence. It also promotes understanding of the patterns of life in other societies.

Teachers in Australia are responding to increasing globalisation and Australia's geographic location in the Asia-Pacific region. Global education and global perspectives are now part of the Australian curriculum.

AUSAID'S GLOBAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Australia's overseas aid program is a valuable source of information for teaching and learning about developing countries.

The aid program builds positive relationships through assisting developing countries. Australian aid helps people by

improving health, education, water supplies and sanitation, providing emergency aid in times of crisis, building schools, hospitals and larger-scale developments and by providing technology and expert knowledge for agriculture and industry.

All aid projects are designed to promote lasting development, and take into account both the environmental impact and the special needs of women and children.

NEW MATERIAL FOR TEACHERS

Through the Global Education program, curriculum writers create and package material for teachers to use. This material illustrates positive approaches to the challenges and opportunities that the global environment presents. This project provides teachers and students with the chance to investigate local, regional and global issues.

Australia's overseas aid program provides rich and diverse material for schools – in the arts, English, health, mathematics, science, studies of society and the environment, and technology.

One example is the water hyacinth project in Papua New Guinea. It provides a real life study for subjects ranging from studies of society and the environment – the problem of weeds in the environment and how this affects the lives of the people in Papua New Guinea – to mathematics – the area covered by the water hyacinth and how long will it take to get rid of it.

To make the Australian aid program accessible to teachers, the Global Education program has developed a series of materials in conjunction with professional curriculum writers. These are specifically designed for classroom use so that teachers can easily incorporate global education into their classroom teaching.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Global Perspectives is a series of teacher advice and student activity books designed to assist teachers contribute to students' knowledge and understanding of our world and its peoples. The series includes *Look Global* and *Think Global* while a third book, *Go Global*, is in production.

The series is a practical classroom resource for teachers and students. Each book is pitched at a particular level of students and investigates specific global issues. The main issues are highlighted and there is a set of core activities with an emphasis on active, creative and cooperative learning.

GLOBAL EDUCATION WEBSITE

The Global Education website – <http://globaled.ausaid.gov.au> – has ready-to-use teaching materials, including the latest figures, case studies, country information and a directory of useful resources.

VIDEOS

There are a number of videos available covering a range of subjects including landmines, Vietnam and Solomon Islands.



Teachers in Subiaco, Western Australia, learn about how to teach global issues in their own classrooms. Professional development is an important part of the Global Education program.

Global Cooperation is a 26-minute video.

It contains four short segments looking at issues in Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. In PNG it examines the volcanic eruptions at Rabaul and the use of biological agents to control Water Hyacinth weed. The Vietnam video looks at reducing the incidence of dengue fever and the use of iodised salt to reduce iodine deficiency.

The Global Education website has more details on where to get these videos.

POSTERS

Colourful posters are great for the classroom. A new poster series on the theme of water in developing countries has recently been published.

The posters are 'Water for health', 'Water for the environment', 'Water for lifestyle' and 'Water for agriculture'. For free copies of these posters contact books@ausaid.gov.au

ARE YOU A TEACHER IN GLOBAL EDUCATION?

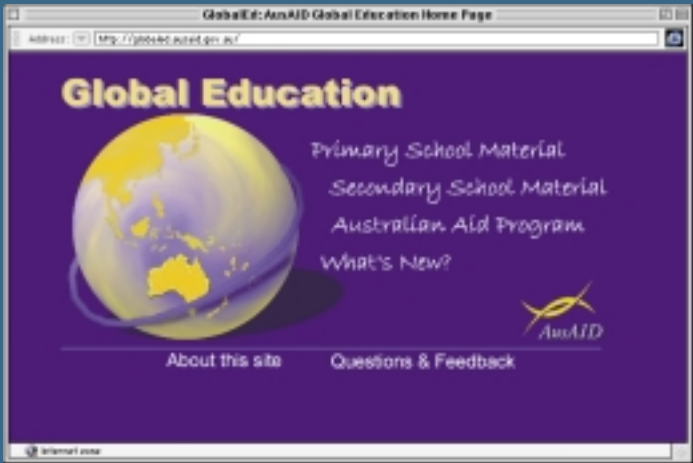
AusAID supports professional development in Global Education in each state for teachers and trainee teachers. This provides a coordinated process for teachers in government and non-government schools to develop the knowledge and skills needed to integrate global education into the curriculum.

Professional development encourages teachers to become committed to implementing the concepts, skills and values of global education in their schools. If you would like to take part in the professional development program, contact an appropriate professional organisation in your state. A list of centres is available at <http://globaled.ausaid.gov.au> or you can telephone (02) 6206 4898

Australia is part of the global community. There are many global issues and relationships to be explored: culture, politics, economics, technology, and the environment connect all countries. Australia is not separate from the rest of the world, but part of it. The Global Education program is helping to increase this awareness in Australian schools.

AUSAID’S WEBSITE

Check out the latest issues, policies, publications, business and general information about Australia's aid program at www.aid.gov.au



GLOBAL EDUCATION WEBSITE

Download ready-to-use teaching materials, including the latest figures, case studies, country information and a directory of useful resources. <http://globaled.aid.gov.au>

SUBSCRIBE TO *FOCUS*

Would you like to be on the *Focus* mailing list? *Focus* is AusAID's free news magazine. Keep in touch with Australian aid program activities. Subscribe today by completing the form below. Mail it to:

AusAID Publications
PO Box 650
Fyshwick ACT 2609

OR Fax it to 02 6269 1212
OR email us at
books@aid.gov.au

Please include my name on AusAID's mailing list to receive *Focus*

Name

Address

State Postcode

Focus is published by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). It aims to increase community awareness and understanding of the Australian Government's overseas aid program, which is managed by AusAID.

The views expressed are not necessarily those of AusAID or the Australian Government, nor do the boundaries and names shown on maps imply official endorsement by the Government. Articles and photographs may be reproduced with permission from The Director, AusAID Public Affairs Group, telephone 02 6206 4960.

COVER

New teaching methods help children from poor Bangladesh families to enjoy learning and stay at school longer.

Contributions are welcome and should be sent to:
The Editor, Dr Susan Nicholls
Focus Magazine
Internet and Publications Section,
AusAID
GPO Box 887
Canberra ACT 2601
Tel 02 6206 4727
Fax 02 6206 4695
Email susan_nicholls@ausaid.gov.au

Editorial Coordinator
Megan Dixon-Child

Contributors to this edition of *Focus* include Rosemary Cassidy, Greg Clough, Jacinta Cubis, Fionna Douglas, Rosemary Green, Kirsten Hawke, Katrina Peach, Liz Stone, Helen Ware. Photography by Bay Street, Jacinta Cubis, Peter Davis, Anne Rigby, and courtesy UNICEF.

Contact the editor regarding proposals for articles. AusAID does not accept responsibility for damage to, or loss of, material submitted for publication. Allow several weeks for acceptance or return.

Design by Griffiths and Young Design, Canberra
Printed by Goanna Print, Canberra

Focus is printed on recycled paper
ISSN 0819-9973

For more copies of *Focus*, or other AusAID publications, contact:

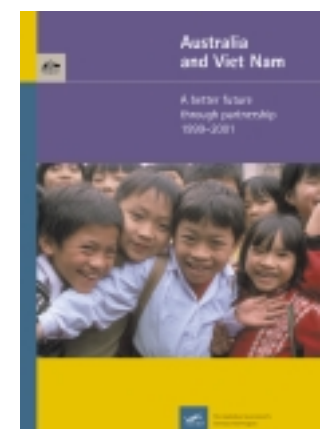
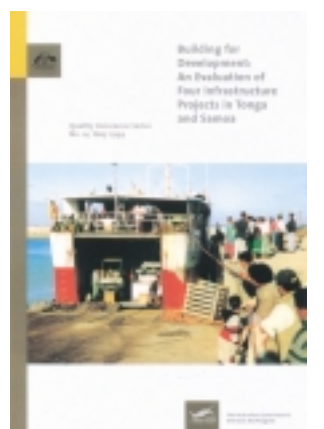
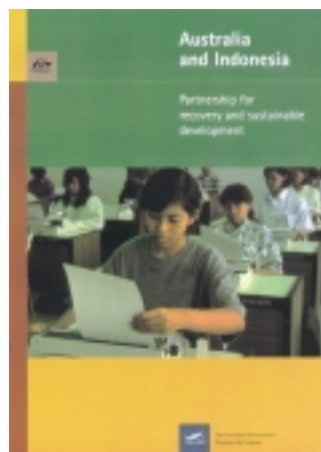
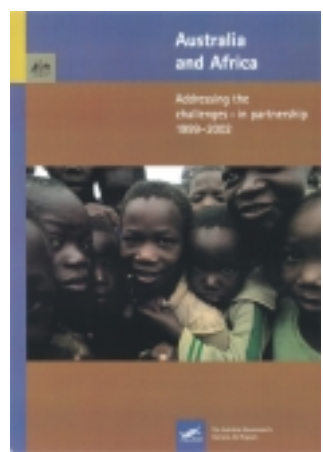
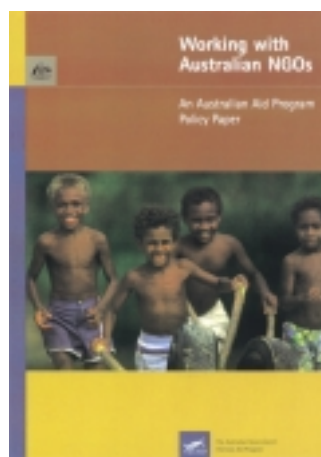
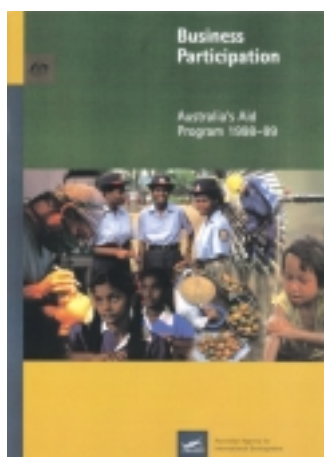
Canberra Mailing Centre
PO Box 462, Fyshwick ACT 2609
Tel 02 6269 1230
Fax 02 6269 1229
Email books@ausaid.gov.au

Most of AusAID's corporate publications from November 1997 onwards are available in full on the Internet at www.ausaid.gov.au





New on AusAID's bookshelves



These publications were recently published by AusAID. They can be obtained from Canberra Mailing Centre, PO Box 462, Fyshwick ACT 2609
Tel 02 6269 1230
Fax 02 6269 1229
Email books@ausaid.gov.au

Most of AusAID's corporate publications from November 1997 onward are available in full on the AusAID Internet site at www.ausaid.gov.au

AUSAID OFFICES

Head office

62 Northbourne Avenue
Canberra ACT 2600
Tel 02 6206 4000
Fax 02 6206 4880

New South Wales

Level 7, North Wing
Sydney Central
477 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Tel 02 9218 5700
Fax 02 9218 5701

Queensland

5th Floor, Anzac House
232 Adelaide Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
Tel 07 3404 2900
Fax 07 3221 5093

South Australia and Northern Territory

12C, 169 Unley Road
Unley SA 5061
Tel 08 8357 7750
Fax 08 8357 7753

Victoria

Level 14, Casselden Place
2 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Tel 03 9221 5599
Fax 03 9221 5419

Western Australia

Level 6, The Griffin Centre
28 The Esplanade
Perth WA 6000
Tel 08 9231 4400
Fax 08 9486 1078