

# focus



THE MAGAZINE OF AUSTRALIA'S OVERSEAS AID PROGRAM

VOLUME 21 NUMBER 3 » SEPT-DEC 2006

RURAL COMMUNITIES

AUSTRALIA'S AID PROGRAM IS ABOUT HELPING THE PEOPLE OF OUR REGION, OUR NEIGHBOURS, LIFT THEMSELVES OUT OF POVERTY. RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURAL REFORM ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO ACHIEVING THIS.



## FROM THE MINISTER

Remarkable inroads have been made into reducing global poverty. In just four years, from 2001 to 2005, the number of people living on less than \$2 a day in East Asia fell by over 280 million. However, across our region there are still 700 million people living on less than \$1 a day. Put bluntly, there are many economies of the Asia-Pacific region simply not growing fast enough to keep pace with population increases.

Economic stagnation contributes to unemployment, poverty and civil unrest. The region is already home to a number of 'fragile states' – countries that are cause for concern not only because of their inability to provide basic services for their people but also because of worrying destabilising effects on neighbouring countries.

On 26 April this year I released the first ever White Paper on Australia's overseas aid program. Combined with the generous increase in the aid budget, Australia is now quite literally doubling its efforts to fight poverty and to help the region prosper.

Stimulating economic activity is a vital part of this fight – for we know, no country has ever succeeded in reducing poverty without first achieving economic growth.

I am concerned that, although most people in the Asia Pacific depend on agriculture, farming is still at a mainly subsistence level and hardly contributes to national economies.

More efficient agricultural industries and more innovative off-farm activities could see many farmers shifting from subsistence to the cash economy. But for this to happen it is first essential to create an 'enabling' environment for economic progress. We have learnt this from the past.

Currently, the aid program allocates more than \$217 million to rural development programs each year, and much more indirectly through health and education programs and infrastructure support. The aid program is already working hard to bring about advances in agricultural technology and research to increase yields and

raise farm incomes. The aid program promotes community-driven small-scale infrastructure – such as making and maintaining roads – so as to provide easier access to markets and generate employment. Communications, electrification and water supplies will also continue to be improved.

With the initiatives in the White Paper, the aid program is strengthening efforts in rural development and agricultural productivity. This is geared towards increasing incomes and savings, stimulating development of the non-farm economy and generating employment opportunities where they are most needed – in rural areas where the majority of the poor live. We are also helping Pacific Islanders examine how to improve land tenure arrangements.

Australia is keen to work with countries in its region to help them find solutions for reducing poverty and to create prosperity. We have been working with people and governments across the Pacific on a process of debate and analysis about how

to create economic growth. I am encouraged by this process, called 'Pacific 2020', which has brought together hundreds of people from all over the Pacific to examine and contest policy options for maximising social and economic opportunities.

The way ahead is challenging but, with the White Paper, a firm course has been set. Combined with a deep commitment to the region, I am confident we will continue to make great strides in reducing poverty.

Alexander Downer  
Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, with Julie and Simon Goode, tour managers of the travelling photographic exhibition *positive. negative* which is promoting HIV/AIDS awareness around regional Australia. The exhibition is a joint venture between *The Australian Women's Weekly* and AusAID. Over two million Australians have seen the exhibition. Photo: AusAID

# Contents



4



15



22



26



**Government aid in focus** The Australian aid program is committed to reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development in the Asia Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Australian businesses and people play a major role in delivering the aid program. Australian expertise, Australian experience and Australian resources are used to tackle poverty. And by investing in development Australia is investing in its future. In 2006–07 Australia plans to spend almost \$2.946 billion on development assistance. The aid program focuses on promoting regional peace, stability and economic development. Countries with whom Australia is working include Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa, Nauru, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu (the Pacific region); Indonesia, East Timor, Vietnam, Philippines, China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Thailand, Lao PDR, Burma (East Asia); Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives, Bhutan (South Asia); and Africa and the Middle East.

cover: Burma (Myanmar). Tanaka powder protects the face from the harsh sun during a hard day's work in the paddy fields. Photo: Jean-Leo Dugast /Panos Pictures

(inside front cover) From the Minister

- 2 In brief
- 4 Rural communities in the Pacific and East Timor  
Hard work making a living
- 12 Growing food businesses  
Philippines: Benefits of agrarian reform
- 14 Village life  
GLOBAL EDUCATION  
Photo essay: A South Asian village experience
- 18 Connecting communities  
Bangladesh: Improving sanitation
- 22 Humanitarian and disaster relief  
Indonesia: Earthquake and tsunami  
Middle East: Conflict  
East Timor: Civil unrest
- 26 The Great Grain Gain  
Cambodia: Increasing rice yields
- 28 VOLUNTEERING  
Cambodia: Reflections of an AYAD
- 30 EDUCATION  
Raising girls: Interview with Dr Cliff Meyers, UNICEF
- 32 HEALTH  
Nauru: Less wealth better health. Fighting obesity, diabetes and heart disease
- 33 GENDER  
Solomon Islands: Stepping forward. Women working together

# IN BRIEF

## PLAYING FIELDS NOT MINEFIELDS



Guests at the launch of AUSTCARE's 'Playing Fields not Minefields' campaign discovered 'there's no such thing as a free lunch' as they negotiated a minefield to reach their dining tables.

Fortunately, some Australian Army engineers were on hand to clear the way, so all guests made it safely. A stunt perhaps, but the simulated minefield was a thought provoking reminder that landmines pose deadly hidden hazards for many communities across the world. Thousands of people going about their daily business simply don't reach their destinations. Whether growing, making or transporting food – or fetching water – about 20,000 people each year become victims of landmines.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Teresa Gambaro, who is also the Government's Special Representative for Mine Action says, 'Non-government agencies and the Australian public have a critical role to play in enhancing the Australian Government's commitment to addressing the scourge of anti-personnel landmines.'

The Australian Government has recently developed a mine

action strategy for the aid program which is underpinned by a five-year \$75 million commitment. As landmines significantly hamper development, rebuilding the livelihoods of mine-affected communities is a priority.

AUSTCARE's \$2.6 million program in Cambodia combines mine clearance with community development. It's restoring the lives of thousands of poor farmers in Banteay Meanchey Province by making land safe for cultivation. This is critical for the future prosperity of the area but so too is accessing a safe water supply, agricultural training and literacy classes.

It is bad enough that there's a high risk of landmine explosions laying waste to scarce agricultural land, but living in constant fear of stepping on a device also robs people, especially children, of their freedom to play and enjoy games and sport. The 'Playing Fields not Minefields' campaign urges Australians young and old to join their local sporting and community networks in the fight against landmines and poverty.

AUSTCARE's chief executive officer, Major General Michael Smith (retd), says the campaign is a fine example of Australian



cooperation. 'This campaign is an excellent illustration of how the Australian Government – including DFAT, AusAID and the Australian Defence Force – and the Australian corporate and community sectors, can come together with an Australian non-government organisation, like AUSTCARE, to help put an end to the impact of landmines and rebuild the lives of affected people.'

ABOVE LEFT: At the 'Playing Fields not Minefields' campaign launch (left to right) AUSTCARE Director Trevor Fearnley, Special Representative for Mine Action Teresa Gambaro, AUSTCARE Ambassador John Rodsted and AUSTCARE President, the Right Honourable Ian Sinclair. 'Land cultivation is almost impossible due to landmine contamination, and communities can be faced with the long-term burden of caring for survivors,' says Ms Gambaro. ABOVE RIGHT: Michael Milton (third from left) with de-miners from the Australian Army School of Military Engineering and AUSTCARE's Shelby Burns at the 'Playing Fields not Minefields' launch. Michael Milton, Australia's fastest skier and AUSTCARE Ambassador for People with Disabilities, was a guest speaker. Photos: AUSTCARE

## REACHING OUT



Capitalising on the momentum and interest stirred by the release of the Australian Government's first ever White Paper on aid, AusAID has conducted a series of public forums, entitled *Reaching Out to Our Region*.

In five state capitals, Australians were invited to a White Paper

### ABOUT FOCUS

*Focus* magazine is published three times a year. Each edition takes a different theme – this one (September to December 2006 vol 21 no 3) is 'rural communities' and the next one (January to April 2007 vol 22 no 1) is 'partnerships'.

Current distribution is 60,000 copies. *Focus* may be viewed and downloaded at <[www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/focus](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/focus)>

presentation and an opportunity to pose questions to an expert panel. Many of those who attended were participants in the open forums conducted by AusAID in 2005, which helped inform the White Paper core group recommendations report.

The 'reaching out' forums were an ideal platform for AusAID to 'report back' to Australians on the final form of the aid program policy. The series of forums also provided the chance to discuss and clarify key elements.

Panel members included the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Teresa Gambaro, AusAID staff, and spokespeople drawn from aid agencies, universities, policy institutes and the private sector.

'The White Paper is a very ambitious agenda but it's a sound agenda, and one which we can confidently pursue,' says Ms Gambaro, who opened the first

and second forums in Brisbane and Sydney. 'It is a really exciting time for AusAID and Australian agencies who are delivering aid overseas.'

Entitled *Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability* the White Paper provides a framework for direction and delivery of overseas aid for the next 10 years. Identified priorities are:

- » accelerating economic growth
- » fostering functioning states
- » investing in people
- » promoting regional stability and cooperation.

For more information  
<[www.aisaid.gov.au/white paper](http://www.aisaid.gov.au/white%20paper)>

LEFT: 'The next steps will be in planning and doing the design work so we can deliver on the agenda,' says Ms Gambaro at the opening of the White Paper public forum in Brisbane.

## SCHOLARSHIPS



At the launch of the White Paper, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, said, 'I am delighted to announce a major new initiative "Australian Scholarships" doubling to 19,000 the number of scholarships offered by Australia to students from the Asia-Pacific region over the next five years at a cost of nearly \$1.4 billion.'

The White Paper places great value on scholarships. There is universal agreement among aid experts that providing the means to study in Australia will help build much needed skills in developing countries and strengthen links between institutions and people.

The new program, implemented by AusAID and the Department of Education, Science and Training, is:

- » targeting future leaders from a wide cross-section of society and is focusing on areas such as infectious diseases, health, governance, education, transnational crime, trade and clean energy
- » strengthening regional networks on key issues with strong links to Australia.

Contributing to the education of the region's future leaders is both

in the interest of countries in the Asia Pacific and in the interest of Australia.

Australian Scholarships recall the success of the Colombo Plan which, in the 1950s, saw a whole generation of regional leaders educated in Australia. Not only will many more of the region's future leaders learn their skills in Australia but there's every reason to expect they will also develop a warm affection for the country.

For more information  
<[www.australianscholarships.gov.au](http://www.australianscholarships.gov.au)>

ABOVE: Ready for departure. Post-graduate scholarships were recently awarded to a group of Pakistani professionals to study in Australia in the areas of health, governance, education and the environment. The Australian Government, under the Australia-Pakistan Scholarships program, will provide 500 scholarships over five years for Pakistani nationals. At a pre-departure briefing the High Commissioner for Australia, Zorica McCarthy (centre), expressed her confidence that the experience of studying in Australia will provide the students with the skills they need to contribute to their country's development. Photo: Mohammad Mehdi/The Nation



Editor-in-chief of *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Deborah Thomas, continues her support for the Australian Government's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in the Asia Pacific. While in Vietnam and China Deborah Thomas met with AIDS patients and carers, HIV-awareness workers and others whose lives have been affected by this terrible disease – see *Containing the Virus* on page 20.





WE HAVE A YOUNG AND FAST GROWING POPULATION. THIS MEANS MANY MOUTHS TO FEED AND BODIES TO CLOTHE AND TAKE TO THE CLINIC. WE HAVE ONLY SO MUCH LAND FOR FOOD GARDENS AND OUR FORESTS ARE DECLINING FROM OVER-LOGGING. WE CAN CHOOSE TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE, OR WE CAN TRY TO GO BACK TO THE OLD WAYS THAT LED TO FALLING PROSPERITY AND VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTION OF THE ETHNIC TENSIONS ... THE ONLY WAY UP IS FOR THE ECONOMY TO GROW.

Peter Boyers, the former Minister of Finance in Solomon Islands

# RURAL COMMUNITIES

IN THE PACIFIC AND EAST TIMOR

ABOVE: East Timor. Selling fruit. Photo: Bronwyn Coles/AusAID

LEFT: Tuvalu. Naseli Kaitu, chief and elder of the Funafuti people, goes fishing almost every day since his retirement as a carpenter. In many parts of the Pacific, the chiefly system is still very much part of community life. With their knowledge of customary law, chiefs and elders are called upon to maintain social order and uphold traditional values. Photo: Jocelyn Carlin/Panos Pictures

## HARD WORK MAKING A LIVING



The Pacific island countries are culturally diverse and scattered over an oceanic area stretching across 10 per cent of the Earth's surface. Nauru has a land mass of only 21 square kilometres and a population of 10,000. At the other end of the scale, Papua New Guinea is 463,000 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 5.9 million people.

While there is a growing trend towards living in towns, the vast majority of Pacific Islanders still live in rural communities where produce and possessions are largely shared. With little in the way of government-backed social security, individuals look to their families and communities for growing and selling food, building

shelters, caring for children and so on.

No other sector affects the lives of more people in the Pacific than agriculture. It is the main source of livelihood. As much as 80 per cent of the workforce in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands is on the land. But despite fertile soils in several Pacific nations and good rainfall, farming is mainly at a subsistence level and does not significantly contribute to national economies.

If only productivity could be improved, the benefits would be substantial. The question is – why isn't it – or, why can't it be? There is immense capacity to generate surpluses that would help shift farmers from subsistence to the cash economy. This would

lead to increases in income and savings which would fuel growth in other sectors, such as housing, trading and small to medium-size business enterprises. Yet agriculture is operating at well below potential.

Total agricultural production in the Pacific island countries, as a group, stagnated between 1990 and 2003. The problem is not a scarcity of opportunities. Chances exist to supply both a domestic market (towns and tourist centres) and an export market. There's also overseas demand for traditional tree crops and new horticultural and spice products.

And it's not as if the region hasn't shown it can compete globally. Copra and cocoa is exported from Melanesia,

coffee and vanilla from Papua New Guinea, squash and fish, particularly tuna, from Tonga, horticultural products, including root crops, from Fiji and other Polynesian countries.

But more consistent, evenly-spread and sustainable results are required. Pacific island policy-makers and external aid donors, like AusAID, need to help create the right conditions for Islander people to improve their productivity, particularly in high value crops. In short, they need to recognise small-scale farmers as part of the private sector and help them not only to identify market opportunities but also to take advantage of them.



LEFT: Papua New Guinea. Dana Bariga, a villager from Lake Murray, Western Province, fashions an oar. Papua New Guinea boasts the largest continuous tracts of ancient forest in the Asia-Pacific region and is extraordinarily rich in unique species of flora and fauna. Photo: Natalie Behring/Panos Pictures

## VISION FOR PACIFIC GROWTH

**P**acific 2020 is a project that is funded and facilitated by Australia to develop ideas and actions to support accelerated economic growth in the Pacific and East Timor.

Over the past year, the project has brought together more than 130 experts – mostly drawn from Pacific island governments, the private sector and civil society – in a series of roundtable discussions on nine critical growth areas: private sector investment, land, labour, political governance, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mining and petroleum, and tourism.

The roundtable discussions have formed the basis of a report. *Pacific 2020: Challenges and Opportunities for Growth* provides practical policy options to manage the constraints and realise the opportunities for growth in the nine areas. It is a resource for the governments of the region, and for all those who want to promote a prosperous future for the Pacific.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, launched the report at the Pacific 2020 conference in Sydney which brought together over 140 regional decision-makers. The conference initiated dialogue in the region on the reforms and initiatives which are needed to increase economic growth.

AusAID is working in partnership with regional governments, organisations and academic institutions to take the messages of Pacific 2020 forward. Forums and meetings are taking place at both a leadership and a community level to discuss key findings.

In a recent speech in Queensland, Papua New Guinea's then Foreign Minister, Sir Rabbie Namaliu, referred to the Pacific 2020 Project as setting 'a precedent worthy of careful consideration' as the 'the process was open, mutually receptive, and, obviously, productive of good, shared ideas'. The Pacific 2020 report is also gaining recognition as an important policy document. The Governor of Solomon Islands Central Bank, Rick Hou, referred to it as 'a critically important reference point for planning purposes and other policy decisions'.

For more information on Pacific 2020, including the consultation process, background papers stemming from the roundtable discussions, conference, and the report itself see <[www.ausaid.gov.au](http://www.ausaid.gov.au)>



ABOVE LEFT: Papua New Guinea. The local market is at the heart of rural community life. Photo: Lloyd Jones/Panos Pictures

ABOVE: Fiji. The holiday brochure view of the Pacific. Tourism is a source for foreign revenue and an obvious area for economic growth. Photo: Torsten Blackwood/AFP

## THE GROWTH CHALLENGE

Since 1990, the average income of many Pacific island countries has not risen at all, and several have actually seen declines. It is this absence of growth that keeps the Pacific poor and gives rise to many of the problems which the region faces today. Joblessness, high rates of youth unemployment and unsustainable population increases are all factors that unless halted will see the Pacific slide further towards poverty, frustration and social unrest.

Perhaps more so than other regions, the Pacific has an array of complex challenges. Several countries face acute health issues – most notable, the spread of HIV/AIDS but also heart disease and diabetes. There are grave environmental concerns, including the occurrence of more intense and frequent natural disasters, such as cyclones. Some are also dealing with increasing urbanisation and overcrowding.

While economic growth will not cause these problems to disappear, one point is clear. Without growth the Pacific countries will not be able to cope. As independent nations they will be at a loss to provide adequate administration, including law and order, and basic services, such as health and education.

No country has ever succeeded in reducing poverty without first achieving economic growth.

So, is faster growth in the Pacific possible?

Several clear messages emerged from the extensive Pacific 2020 investigations (see *Vision for Pacific Growth* page 7). The ways to accelerate growth in the region include good governance, strong infrastructure, regional



cooperation and integration, and, above all, better implementation.

**Good governance** is the foundation of national prosperity. Yet in the Pacific, most countries have poor governance and consequently weak public institutions – which is a major constraint to economic progress. Take, for example, fisheries. Serious weaknesses in national governance have prevented the region from improving revenue returns from fish stocks. The list of governance-related problems is long but includes corruption, poor communication between government and industry, and inhibiting protective policies.

Improving governance is a long-term but not impossible task. Samoa is a good example of a Pacific country that's succeeding. It shows a decline in corruption and comes out in international

comparisons as among the best in terms of governance indicators. The International Monetary Fund reports, 'Over the last decade, Samoa has transformed itself into one of the best managed economies in the Pacific island region.' It's telling that Samoa enjoys political stability and continuity (the same party – largely female – has been in power since 1982).

**Strong infrastructure.** One of the major impediments to rural growth is the fact that the region is crying out for better infrastructure. It needs reliable telecommunications and market facilities so businesses can become competitive and farmers can receive quick information about, say, market values or guidance on treating pests in crops.

It also needs better roads and affordable means of transport.

In the 1990s in the Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, a stretch of road – about 15 kilometres – leading off the Highlands Highway was upgraded by the provincial government. A previous gravel road had become virtually impassable. People carrying large bags of coffee and other produce from their communities in the valley to the highway found it all too much and eventually gave up. Denied access to the highway they were also denied access to buses and larger markets.

But when the road was sealed, the valley communities were transformed. People were suddenly motivated, they tended their gardens, grew and harvested quality produce and they looked forward to market days.

With the better road, public buses came down from the highway into communities to



MOST PEOPLE IN THE PACIFIC STILL DEPEND ON AGRICULTURE (INCLUDING FISHING) FOR THEIR LIVELIHOODS. IF THEY ARE TO EXPERIENCE HIGHER INCOMES, AGRICULTURE MUST BE IMPROVED.



ABOVE LEFT: Fiji. Levi (*left*) and Malato outside their house. Inadequate infrastructure in the Pacific is a big problem. Not only is poor quality housing a concern but if there are no roads, agricultural produce doesn't get to market and if transport (including planes and boats) is infrequent, difficult to arrange and expensive, tourists won't come. While there are inherent complexities involved serving a widely dispersed population, better infrastructure policies – in particular

more competition – would go a long way to improving the region's overall performance. Photo: Torsten Blackwood/AFP

ABOVE RIGHT: Solomon Islands. Typical village on the Weathercoast. Photo: Michael Cavanagh

ABOVE: Papua New Guinea. Perfect grazing country, Markham Valley, Morobe Province. Agricultural scientists see great potential for cattle farming by small landholders. Photo: Lloyd Jones/AAP

pick up and drop off passengers. Tax collections almost doubled. Local businesses flourished, and everyone benefited.

But the road was not maintained – which is what happens all too often in the Pacific. Reasons are not always straightforward but sometimes promising starts are too easily eroded by a lack of administrative capacity to follow through – that is, to protect what works well and to keep it going.

The road leading off the Highlands Highway is a classic example. Now full of potholes buses can no longer travel along it. The ripple effect is many rural communities are cut off from markets and there is a slump in the local economy. Not much money these days circulates beyond Mount Hagen.

**Regional cooperation and integration** are not so much options as necessities. Because Pacific island nations are small and remote,

pooling resources may be the best way to reduce the cost of providing basic services. While not practical for all, some services, such as the implementation of quarantine regulations and the provision of air and shipping transport, might be candidates. Another is education. For example, by providing tertiary education through a regional university – such as the University of the South Pacific – governments are free to focus on primary and secondary education.

Removing unnecessary market barriers between neighbouring countries will also make doing business in the Pacific much easier. Barriers, such as restrictive quarantine measures, burdensome import taxes and passport requirements, strangle potentially good entrepreneurial ideas. Furthermore, harmonious regional integration can bring about large economies of scale, reduce prices and make a diverse range of goods more freely available.

## LAND

Then there's the question of land. This is a particularly sensitive issue but there is a growing view that land ownership systems in many countries need to be strengthened.

Yet any changes to the land system must protect customary ownership. At the same time, secure forms of leasehold need to be developed so that both individuals and organisations can invest confidently in land for social and economic reasons.

Such changes are likely to happen only slowly, and will rely on the voluntary participation of Pacific communities. It is well understood in the international community that land forms the basis of culture, identities and livelihoods for Pacific peoples. But equally it is recognised that land laws have not kept pace with growing populations and pressures of modernisation.

Land ownership systems often fail to marry the demands of social and economic development with the needs of customary forms of group ownership. This means that land often becomes a source of conflict and a hindrance to development aspirations.

## THE FUTURE

There are enough success stories in the Pacific to show that even the smaller countries can prosper, given effective economic management and sound policies. The economies of Tuvalu, Samoa and the Cook Islands, for example, have been growing at a modest rate for the past 10 years. Relatively low population growths as well as good governance and making the most of opportunities through

aid, tourism and migration – all of which, incidentally, keep down unemployment – seems to be their secret.

Much work has been done by AusAID and others to pave the way forward. *Pacific 2020: Challenges and Opportunities for Growth*, which is the product of extensive research and analysis from leaders and experts across the region, discusses viable policy options for the future.

The recent White Paper on the Australian Government's overseas aid program also places immense importance on accelerating economic growth in the Pacific. It is committed to working with its Pacific partners to:

- » promote regional cooperation and economic integration
- » strengthen land ownership systems
- » help Islanders to improve their work skills.

Australia stands firmly by the Pacific as the region negotiates a brighter, more prosperous future. As it undergoes the challenging, sometimes painful, process of reform Australia will continue to offer support, guidance and friendship. No one denies the beauty and untapped potential of the Pacific – it has a great deal to offer. But, ultimately, its success in generating growth will depend on the decisions of Pacific island governments and the reforms they implement.

## SEEDS OF LIFE



**EAST TIMOR: Activities such as AusAID's agricultural program Seeds of Life are helping to bring food security a step closer for one of the world's poorest nations.**

For Rob Williams, team leader of AusAID's Seeds of Life program, putting food in bowls is what matters. 'East Timor has three seasons, a dry season, a wet season and a hungry season,' he explains. 'The hungry season can last up to five months. Seeds of Life wants to eliminate it.'

On average, each farmer in East Timor has about a hectare of land, often on a steep slope. Maize, sweet potatoes, peanuts, cassava and rice are the main crops which are usually harvested using the customary *katana*, a large knife. But such traditional farming is inadequate. A hectare of land currently doesn't produce enough cereal to last a family for a year.

And as the population increases – following current trends it will double to two million in 25 years – the struggle for East Timor to feed itself can only get harder.

In 2000, ACIAR (the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research) stepped in to help the country's ailing rural sector. It put out the call around the world for newer, high yielding seed varieties to replace those destroyed or lost during the struggle for independence. Seed centres responded and, in East Timor over the past few years, exhaustive tests have been run to establish the most promising seed varieties for local conditions.

It's time now for the next stage – on-farm trials, which rely on the cooperation and goodwill of rural communities.

'We have spent a lot of time on farms, listening and talking to farmers. We're slowly introducing the idea of growing new varieties of familiar crops. This way the change isn't so great,' says Rob. 'The idea is to persuade farmers to test new varieties not coerce them.'



Seeds of Life is employing 11 young local agricultural graduates to help with the on-farm trials. 'We give them each a motorbike and send them off with packets of seeds to invite farmers to test the new varieties. So far the results are encouraging,' says Rob.

Domingo de Silva, who works a farm on a steep slope near Liquica, is one of the many converts. He couldn't be more pleased with the new seeds. His last corn harvest was nearly twice as much as usual. 'Soon I hope to sell some of my higher yields and use the money for other things,' he says. He's also found the new varieties of sweet potato can be grown in half the time as his old varieties.

'Some families using the new seeds are already bringing in a healthy surplus,' says Alex Dalley, a former Australian Youth Ambassador for Development who now works on Seeds of Life. 'They have enough to eat and there's some produce left over to

sell. The extra money is sending children to school.'

The Seeds of Life program, which is active in four of the country's 13 districts, is a quiet example of how rural communities are able to make real improvements in their lives. It's also demonstrating how East Timor can take fundamental steps towards feeding its growing population itself.

**LEFT:** Farmers Luis Almeida (*left*) and Domingo de Silva discuss with research adviser Alex Dalley the new seed varieties growing on Domingo's farm, near Liquica.

**CENTRE:** Seeds of Life team leader Rob Williams and local farmer Luis Almeida inspect a bountiful crop.

**RIGHT:** More corn, more pounding – Joanna da Costa on her farm in Loes. Photos: Elizabeth James/AusAID

THE WORLD BANK ESTIMATES OVER 40 PER CENT OF THE EAST TIMORESE POPULATION LIVES IN POVERTY.



## SCIENCE BODY

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research – commonly referred to as ACIAR – is an Australian Government statutory authority that operates as part of the Australian Government's overseas aid program, within the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio.

It shares the overseas aid program's objectives of advancing Australia's national interest through poverty reduction and sustainable development.

ACIAR's broad-ranging activities include:

- » encouraging Australia's agricultural scientists to use their skills for the benefit of developing countries and Australia

- » commissioning research into improving sustainable agricultural production in developing countries
- » funding project-related training and communicating the results of funded research
- » administering the Australian Government's contribution to international agricultural research centres.

ACIAR's work is in the Pacific islands, South-East Asia, North Asia, South Asia and Southern Africa. Research is also allocated across regions through funding to the international agricultural research centres.

See <[www.aciar.gov.au](http://www.aciar.gov.au)>



# GROWING FOOD

**PHILIPPINES:** In the far-flung municipality of Prosperidad in Agusan del Sur in Mindanao, a group of women earn a living by producing sweet *kaong*, a popular local delicacy. In Mainit, Surigao del Norte, also in Mindanao, women are turning ‘white goby’ or *pijanga* into first-class dried fish which is sold in the supermarkets of Manila. In Guindulman, Bohol, in the Visayas, people from the village of Guio-ang are producing organic bananas for export to Japan. AusAID has a helping hand in each of these activities.

Redistributing land to the poor, and promoting the subsequent economic development of that land, has been part of the Government of the Philippines agrarian reforms.

AusAID is supporting communities who’ve received land by assisting local planning and funding economic opportunities. Specialised farming operations and off-farm businesses are springing up everywhere, providing choice for poor rural Filipinos and better ways to earn a decent living.



## SWEET DESSERTS

The women from an agrarian reform cooperative in Prosperidad are working in harmony in a large purpose-built plant. All are experts at producing sweet *kaong*, a type of dessert made from sweetened fruit of a local palm tree. *Kaong* processing has become a key enterprise in the area.

The thriving business owes its start to a particular program – PATSARRD (the Philippines–Australia Technical Support for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development). In 2003, it helped conduct a food processing workshop for all agrarian reform communities in Agusan del Sur.

‘We gave the women a small grant to buy ingredients for the hands-on training,’ explains

PATSARRD’s national director Edgar Guardian, ‘and the cooperative shared the cost of the ingredients.’

Now with the learning stage well and truly behind them, the women are making a handy living. They’re well organised and have the production process down pat. One group produces the *kaong* while another sells. Members of the retail team – five women – each sell a quota each week by calling at homes, schools and offices.

Nang Ising, general manager of the cooperative says, ‘We’re gearing up to produce 1,500 bottles a month, more than double the current rate, to meet increasing orders from Manila, Davao and other major cities.’

Each time *kaong* is promoted at regional food and trade fairs the demand for the product jumps.

The future for the Prosperidad women’s cooperative looks sweet indeed.

## FISHY ENTERPRISE

In Mainit in Surigao del Norte, a group of women are thankful for the abundant supply of *pijanga*, a freshwater fish perfectly suited to the conditions in Lake Mainit.

This fish and a proven business strategy are giving 18 women, recently trained in fish drying technology and project management, a chance to secure a better future. With some technical assistance from the Surigao del Norte College of Agriculture and Technology they’ve been able to enter the dried fish processing business.

Support has also come from the Mainit agrarian reform community of which the women are all members, and PATSARRD. Their winning selling strategy owes a great deal to Upland Marketing Foundation, a non-government organisation that specifically helps rural people.

The women sell their products in seaports, bus terminals, public markets and supermarkets – and they already have over 100 retail outlets in Metro Manila and Central Luzon through the Upland Marketing Foundation network.

Earnings are equivalent of about \$37 a month each, which, in the Philippines, goes a long way to augment a family income derived from rice and coconut farming.

And as sales increase and the business expands, so too will incomes – perhaps to an

# BUSINESSES



extent where the women will leave rice and coconut farming altogether. When this happens they'll also be looking for more workers. This in turn will create more job opportunities for the farming community and contribute to the wider economic growth of the region.

## GOING BANANAS

In Bohol, the Guio-Ang Multi-purpose Cooperative in the town of Guindulman is competing with large commercial farms exporting bananas. The feeling among members of the cooperative is they have the edge. Their bananas are organically grown.

Some of the cooperative's farmers till and tend the crop while others pack and look after

off-farm activities, such as the export side. A recent shipment to Japan was just over 600 kilograms – small compared to the exports of large companies but not bad for a group of 20 farmers benefiting from agrarian reform.

Again, this business was started with the assistance of PATSARRD. The People's Fair Trade Assistance Centre, a non-government organisation, also played an important part as did the Philippines Department of Agrarian Reform. It was through the latter the farmers learnt about project management.

'We're feeling quite optimistic about the future,' says Mang Adong, one of the cooperative's farmers. 'The Japanese probably have the highest standards for quality food in the world so if we can continue to meet their

requirements I think we can satisfy the demands of many other countries as well.'

Every care is taken to ensure the 100 per cent organic status. The farmers use only organic fertilisers. They mulch and weed by hand, and use botanical herbicides and pesticides. At the farm, they wear gloves when handling the bananas and take meticulous care during packing.

With these standards and an excellent product the Guio-Ang farmers are headed for success.

Source: Rolly Inciong, AusAID Manila Post

LEFT: Boxing the highly-prized organic fruit is a delicate art.

CENTRE: Team effort – packaging the dried fish.

RIGHT: Demand for sweet *kaong* is increasing.

Photos: PATSARRD.

The Philippines–Australia Technical Support for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (PATSARRD) assists farming communities to benefit from agrarian reforms. Success in each community is due in large part to finding a marketing niche, a local partner, a strong community organisation – such as a workers cooperative – and government and private sector support.

As a result of the efforts of PATSARRD and other supporting organisations, poor rural Filipinos have an opportunity to earn extra income through off-farm business ventures. More than this, the spirit of self-reliance and sustainability, learnt and achieved through partnerships with government and the private sector, is proving a prime motivating factor. The PATSARRD business ventures show clearly the contribution of Australian aid – making it possible for the poor to help themselves.



Bangladesh. Village girls, Chittagong Province.  
Photo: Karen Robinson/Panos Pictures



LEFT: Bangladesh. Spreading grain to dry.

BELOW: Bangladesh. Enjoying a joke amid the jute crop.

Photos: Karen Robinson/  
Panos Pictures

# VILLAGE LIFE



# A SOUTH ASIAN VILLAGE EXPERIENCE

It's recess and the students of South Australia's Kidman Park Primary School are happily at play – on the basketball courts, walking around, some are huddled in small groups chatting.

Further along, it's an equally happy but quite different scene.

Visitors may be forgiven for thinking they're somewhere in South Asia. There's a bustling market. The air is filled with the cries of chapatti sellers and the rhythmic cadence of children beating dirty washing against large concrete blocks.

The South Asian Village, set in the grounds of Adelaide's Kidman Park Primary School, is a cluster of four mud-brick and wooden structures built in a style typical of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Parties of schoolchildren from all over South Australia visit the village as part of their studies on the rising importance of this part of the world.

A visit to the South Asian Village usually begins in the exhibition room where students learn about the geography, population and economic growth of the region, and the different ways people live.

Students then go outside to experience firsthand South Asian village life. They're divided into four groups, representing Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and each student is given a new name, a village identity and clothing. Once in character they're free to discover for themselves what daily life might be like in one of these countries. What it's like, for instance, to be self-sufficient in food, water and shelter – and what it's like making a living from buying and selling in the market.

The groups rotate through the four village houses. One group may be making paper bangles, another puppets from cotton and sticks, a third may be grinding spices, such as cardamom, while

## THE SOUTH ASIAN VILLAGE EXPERIENCE EMPHASISES KEY GLOBAL EDUCATION CONCEPTS OF INTERDEPENDENCE, VALUING CULTURAL DIVERSITY, CHANGE, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES.

a fourth cooks chapattis. They also practise drawing water from a well, carrying it on their heads and then using it sparingly to wash clothes.

Visits to the village follow a set program lasting about three hours which culminates in a re-enactment of a vibrant marketplace where both students and adults (teachers and parents) engage in the give and take of bargaining and bartering. Equipped with small metal tokens, students must work out how they should spend their 'money' and which homemade items they should swap for something they may need – a paper bangle for a chapatti perhaps.

'The South Asian Village is an intrinsic part of our school life,' says Kidman Primary School Principal Meryl Davidson, 'It's necessary to equip children to be

good world citizens. Our students and those that visit us leave feeling confident they belong to a global village and confident to begin interacting with other cultures.'

The students bear this out. 'I didn't know much about how people in South Asia live before,' admits Brock.

'Sometimes it seems like they don't have very much fun – they have to spend so much time working just to stay alive,' comments Mitchell.

But Stephen is quick to interject, 'I'm not so sure that's true – I think they just have a different type of fun. They learn to have fun while they're working and looking after their families.'

'And,' adds Arujuna, 'they know how to make really good curries!'

'The South Asian Village Experience' enriches students' classroom learning across the curriculum but particularly in Asian studies and global education.

If the smiles on the students' faces as they munch on freshly cooked chapattis are anything to go by, it's a great way to learn!

'The South Asian Village Experience' is a joint partnership, supported by AusAID, between the Department of Education and the Global Education Centre. For more information contact Kidman Park Primary School (08) 8353 2444.



AUSAID'S GLOBAL EDUCATION PROGRAM HELPS STUDENTS TO EMPATHISE WITH THE WORLD VIEW OF OTHER CULTURES AND COUNTRIES.



The South Asian Village is visited by around 10,000 primary school students each year. Students, teachers and accompanying parents learn about village life and the culture of South Asia through a range of activities.

- [1] Dressing in authentic clothes and taking on a village identity is an important part of the program.
- [2] Sampling freshly made chapattis – teacher Pauline McCarthy with Jessica (*left*) and Julia.
- [3] No wasting – left over water is used on the village plants.
- [4] Jasmine (*left*) and Jenna show their puppets made from sticks and pieces of cotton.
- [5] Washing clothes with gusto!

Photos: Philip Martin

# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

**BANGLADESH:** An excellent example of regional cooperation is improving sanitation for millions of people living in rural communities.

In early 2000, the inhabitants of Mosmoil, a quiet, sleepy village in northern Bangladesh took a stand. Persuaded by a local non-government organisation, it was time, they said, to end the age-old practice of open defecation.

Rather than waiting for external help, the villagers started constructing their own latrines. Various models were tried – some quite basic but all effective, affordable and following the minimum requirement of confining excreta. Sensing an opportunity, the private sector joined in, offering plastic pans and pipes, and concrete rings for lining pits.

Within a short time every household in the village had a sanitary latrine, not through the usual hardware subsidy but entirely through a new approach – ‘community-led total sanitation’.

When the members of the World Bank’s water and sanitation program learnt of Mosmoil’s astonishing achievement they immediately recognised its potential. Such a model could be used to promote sanitation across South Asia. In February 2002, the program organised a regional workshop in Bogra, Bangladesh, which included a visit to Mosmoil.

In the cool spring morning villagers were surprised to see so many high level visitors, some from as far as India. But when they



A typical Bangladeshi village. Photo: Karen Robinson/Panos Pictures



LEFT: A field transformed, Mosmoil. Villagers built a sanitary latrine on a site that was once the defecation field and a terrible source of disease transmission. 'People understood they could no longer defecate in the open without the fear of getting caught. Eventually this practice among the people stopped,' says Zafiruddin Shah, an early convert to 'community-led total sanitation' and a keen campaigner. Photo: Shafiul Azam Ahmed

heard the visitors had come to see the village's sanitation success, they were only too pleased to show off their latrines. They were, after all, proud possessions.

The visitors were impressed and soon quite caught up in the villagers' enthusiasm. By the time it came to leave, the workshop party was in no doubt about the simplicity and effectiveness of 'community-led total sanitation'.

This single visit to a sleepy village has inspired a sanitation revolution, but it's also a textbook exercise in regional cooperation. Following a series of exposure visits across South Asia, large-scale sanitation projects are now in progress.

Learning from Bangladesh, India is redirecting its attention to collective action. In many states, the Government of India no longer distributes free latrines or gives hardware subsidies to individual households. Instead, it's starting programs in rural communities which reward villages for achieving 'total sanitation'.

In turn, Bangladesh is learning from India. Bangladesh's national target of achieving 'sanitation for all by 2010' was proving elusive until it adopted the Indian model of 'reward and recognition' for

communities achieving 'open defecation free status'.

In 2004, the Government of Bangladesh earmarked 20 per cent of the annual development budget to promote sanitation awareness. New policy guidelines – including the Bangladesh National Sanitation Strategy – are also now in place.

The result of these initiatives is stunning. In three years the sanitation coverage in Bangladesh surged from 33 per cent of households to over 70 per cent. This achievement is much higher than required to reach the sanitation target of the Millennium Development Goals.

As more states in India join the sanitation revolution and 'community-led total sanitation' catches on in Pakistan – and even further afield in Indonesia – increasing thought is going towards sustainability.

With funding from AusAID, the water and sanitation program earlier this year organised another exposure visit for Bangladeshi government officials, elected representatives and members of non-government organisations. The visitors observed how rural communities in the Indian state of Maharashtra were sustaining

and expanding sanitation through building drainage, public toilets and compost plants. Similarly, they saw efforts to promote urban sanitation for slum dwellers in Mumbai.

Such meetings and visits between communities are far more than learning events. They open minds and connect communities. They also open avenues for regional cooperation.

In a most fundamental way, the water and sanitation program is connecting communities of South Asia.

Source: Shafiul Azam Ahmed, Water and Sanitation Specialist, World Bank

**AusAID's grant to the Water and Sanitation Project (South Asia) is helping institutional reform in South Asia. The grant also supports selective cross-border activities to assist collaborative learning and implementation between South Asian agencies.**

For more information about the World Bank's water and sanitation program and 'community-led total sanitation' see <[www.wsp.org](http://www.wsp.org)>. To receive a copy of a 24-minute film, *Awakening: The Story of Achieving Total Sanitation in Bangladesh* contact <[wspsa@worldbank.org](mailto:wspsa@worldbank.org)>

## HEALTH BENEFITS

Total sanitation and better water facilities are improving the health and wellbeing of rural communities. A study undertaken in Bangladesh reports:

- » diarrhoea is reduced by 99 per cent, dysentery by 90 per cent and other stomach-related problems (for example, intestinal worms) by 51 per cent.
- » monthly medical costs for common illnesses decreased by 51 per cent. Working days lost due to illness fell from 77 to 35 per year.
- » school days lost due to illness fell from 16 to 7 days per year.

# CONTAINING THE VIRUS



***The Australian Women's Weekly* and AusAID have a long association with bringing to public attention the deadly impact of HIV/AIDS.**

In 2003, Deborah Thomas, editor-in-chief of *The Australian Women's Weekly*, commissioned, with AusAID's support, five of Australia's leading photographers to go to Vietnam, China, Indonesia, Thailand and Papua New Guinea. They were to see AusAID assistance programs in HIV/AIDS care and awareness, and to capture the faces and real life stories behind the appalling statistics.

The result was a powerful six-page spread in the December 2003 edition of *The Australian Women's Weekly* (circulation of 2.9 million copies) with a foreword by top-selling author Bryce Courtenay.

'Like many Australians,' Deborah Thomas says, 'I was unaware of just how big this problem is. When I heard about it, I thought our readers needed to know.'

The images are also part of *The Australian Women's Weekly*–AusAID travelling exhibition *positive.negative* which has been touring metropolitan and regional Australia for the past two years. When it finishes in Tasmania in October 2006, the exhibition will have informed over two million Australians about the spread of HIV in the Asia Pacific and the awful plight of AIDS sufferers.

Continuing her support for the Australian Government's efforts to combat HIV infection rates, Deborah Thomas was recently in Vietnam and China to meet with carers of AIDS patients and HIV-awareness workers, as well as those whose lives have been torn apart by this terrible disease.

In both Vietnam and China, HIV is largely spread through

injecting drug use. Sharing needles means sharing the infection – but there are other ways too.

'In Hanoi we met a woman, 27 years old, living with HIV. Infected by her husband, an injecting drug user just a few years into her marriage, she was kicked out of the home by her mother-in-law. Her child was not kicked out but kept by the mother-in-law and husband. So now she works to support her child whom she is not allowed to see, who is kept in a house she's not allowed to be part of by a husband who's repaid her faithfulness with a death sentence,' says Deborah.

In China, local *imams* (religious leaders) spoke about a woman who was married off by her parents but subsequently ordered to divorce when they discovered after a year



ABOVE: Making plaster figurines. Productive activity is an important part of rehabilitation for former heroin users, Vietnam. Photo: Lorrie Graham



**FAR LEFT:** 'I'm letting readers know the good things AusAID and others are doing to prevent the spread of HIV. Our readers care about what's happening to families in our region,' says Deborah Thomas, editor-in-chief of *The Australian Women's Weekly*.

**LEFT:** Family and friends of HIV-positive people, while not infected themselves, want to know as much as they can about the virus and how to care for their at-risk or infected loved ones. At the Yining needle exchange and education program, part of AusAID's Xinjiang HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project, China, mothers, sisters and wives listen intently to HIV-awareness experts. Education sessions are also a chance to ask questions and provide mutual support. Photos: Lorrie Graham

of marriage that the husband was an injecting drug user. She remarried and fell pregnant. When her baby was born, he was sickly and failed to thrive. He died before turning one. It turned out her baby was HIV-positive. So was she. So was her new husband. All infected, in turn, by one man.

## THERE ARE 8.3 MILLION PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN THE ASIA PACIFIC.

'As a mum,' says Deborah, 'I find it devastating to hear about women who have unknowingly passed HIV to their babies. Their stories are heartbreaking.'

But there are signs the disease can be contained. For example, AusAID's Xinjiang Regional HIV/AIDS Project, operating in far north-west China, is making a big difference to people's lives.

Very much owned and accepted by the community, one of its activities – the Yining needle exchange and education program – is making incredible inroads into increasing safe needle usage, a fact recently recognised by the World Health Organization as world best practice. As a result, the project is reducing the spread of HIV and protecting lives.

'As confronting as many of the stories are, I actually left China and Vietnam with a sense of hope,' says Deborah Thomas. 'AusAID, in partnership with local people and the governments of Vietnam and China, is doing good things to prevent the spread of HIV and to care for people with the disease.'

**Deborah Thomas writes about her visit to Vietnam and China in the September 2006 edition of *The Australian Women's Weekly*.**

## BIRD FLU



**T**he rapid spread of the H5N1 (avian influenza) virus in the Asia Pacific continues to threaten lives and livelihoods. While survival rates for the virus are improving, the rate of infection is growing. More than 150 million birds have died or have been culled since the first outbreak in 2003. More than 120 people have died.

Australia has already committed \$41 million to assist the efforts of regional governments to detect and prevent the spread of the disease. Over the next three years, Australia will spend a further \$100 million supporting projects aimed mainly at the village level.

In the Mekong region, which to date has been the epicentre of the disease, Australia is funding CARE Australia's local risk reduction initiative. In Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Burma (Myanmar) the control of the virus is critical to food security of the rural poor. CARE Australia's program is working with local governments and rural communities to raise awareness of the disease and to help mitigate its impact.

**ABOVE:** Vietnam. No longer a common sight. The sale of live chickens has been banned – a measure to prevent the spread of bird flu. Photo: Lorrie Graham

## EARTHQUAKE

**INDONESIA:** On 27 May 2006 an earthquake of 6.3 magnitude on the Richter scale occurred, killing an estimated 5,760 people and injuring more than 37,000. The most affected districts were Bantul in Yogyakarta and Klaten district in central Java.



About 157,000 homes were destroyed and 202,000 were damaged, leaving between 600,000 and a million people homeless. Many public buildings and infrastructure were also damaged.

Australia, through AusAID, sent 80 disaster experts to Yogyakarta and committed \$7.5 million for urgently needed medical care, food, water and shelter.

Sudarno, a 65-year-old man from Tulong Village in Pundong District, Bantul, was asleep when the earthquake happened.

'I felt the quake and before I could get up from my bed, the wall in my house fell on my body. I couldn't move. I was covered in bricks. My son helped me out. I didn't realise I had hurt my hand but later I was in such pain my son took me here and now I have some stitches.'

Sudarno was taken to a medical field clinic set up in Pundong Village where Indonesian and visiting Australian medical teams attended the injured. 'We have seen a lot of broken bones and infected

wounds from falling debris, and there have been quite a few cases of tetanus,' says Dr Rob Edwards, an emergency medicine specialist. 'Nine days after the earthquake we saw a woman who had a fracture in her leg and hand but firmly believed, even though she had trouble walking, there was nothing wrong. Others simply didn't want to leave their homes or families. They had to be persuaded to go to hospital for treatment.'

Many of the injured were flown by helicopter to a temporary field hospital set up in a basketball stadium in Yogyakarta. Others were taken directly to local hospitals. 'People came in with rudimentary splints and some were in a lot of pain,' says anaesthetist Tim McCulloch. 'They'd lost a lot of blood either from cuts or bleeding into fractures. Some may have been anaemic already, which complicated matters.'

Although the earthquake has left thousands of people without homes, the Government of Indonesia is encouraging them to stay in their villages. Instead

of establishing camps elsewhere, emergency shelters – tents and plastic sheeting funded by AusAID – have been distributed while rebuilding gets underway.

'People could be in temporary shelters for up to six months,' says Lockton Morrissey, AusAID's disaster coordinator. 'We are giving villages, or groups of families, lumber, corrugated iron and carpenters kits to help them rebuild. 'We are also checking wells to determine whether the groundwater that feeds them is contaminated in any way, such as by ruptured sewer lines. Exposed water is also a breeding ground for dengue-carrying mosquitoes.'

In the earthquake many people lost everything. AusAID is funding a voucher system so those in greatest need will be able to get food and other essential items. Instead of paying with money they will present shopkeepers with a funded voucher. Shopkeepers will later exchange the vouchers for cash.

'The earthquake didn't affect crops so there is no shortage of

food in the area,' says Lockton Morrissey. 'And bringing in free food would just stop people buying from local traders. Using vouchers means shopkeepers can continue doing business, daily routines resume and money circulates through the community. It's also better for aid agencies because they can pay local prices rather than world prices for essential commodities, such as rice. They also don't have to pay distribution costs.'

Source: Elizabeth James, AusAID Canberra

ABOVE FAR LEFT: In the aftermath of the earthquake environmental health officer Paul Byleveld is aware dengue fever can break out. 'If we act quickly to find the mosquitoes, spray and discourage them from coming into dwellings, we reduce the likelihood of the spread of disease.'

ABOVE LEFT: Everything is lost. Photos: Elizabeth James/AusAID



## SECOND TSUNAMI

**INDONESIA:** For the second time in two years Indonesia has been struck by a tsunami – this time southern Java took the brunt.

A major earthquake triggered the tsunami which hit southern Java, Indonesia, on 17 July 2006.

Occurring 360 kilometres south of Jakarta at a depth of 10 kilometres, the earthquake created a tsunami estimated about six metres high. Cilacap, Kebumen and Pangandaran in southern Java are worst affected.

Over 650 people are dead, approximately 20,000 remain displaced and 200 kilometres of coastline has been damaged.

Communities along the coast will have to start the daunting task of rebuilding – small businesses,

shops and cafes have been swept away and fishermen have lost their boats.

Australia is closely monitoring the situation. Two AusAID personnel have undertaken on-the-ground assessments in the two most badly affected areas. They are also part of donor coordination meetings.

**LEFT:** Indonesian villagers pray for victims of the tsunami. Photo: Trisnadi/AP



## CONFLICT

**MIDDLE EAST:** The Australian Government is helping to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of thousands of civilians who have fled their homes due to conflict.

Australia's humanitarian response to the crisis in the Middle East has to date reached \$7.5 million.

Through AusAID, the Australian Government is providing additional funds to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to assist the distribution of food and water among displaced Lebanese civilians. The WFP reports that tens of thousands of people remain trapped in the region.

AusAID is also providing \$3 million through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which has assumed a leading role in coordinating the evacuation of the wounded, supplying hospitals with fuel, medicines and consumables, and restoring water supplies. Hospitals are seriously overburdened with the sudden influx of sick and injured people.

**LEFT:** Unloading food and medical supplies at the Lebanese southern port city of Sidon. Photo: Anwar Amro/AFP

## TESTING TIMES

**EAST TIMOR:** There's no natural disaster but the East Timorese are, nevertheless, caught in a complex emergency. In the past few months violent civil unrest has erupted in Asia Pacific's youngest nation. AusAID's Bronwyn Coles reports.

There's a stretch of coloured tarpaulin tents, lines of washing on wire fences, people gather around fires cooking, chatting. Some women go to collect water. Children play.

I'm at the airport camp for IDPs (internally displaced persons) – temporary home to thousands who've fled their neighbourhoods over the past weeks.

Over 70,000 East Timorese, frightened from their homes by sporadic and repeated acts of violence and vandalism, now live in camps in the capital Dili. Around 80,000 are similarly displaced in the outlying districts. Groups of fellow citizens are responsible.

The Australian Government is helping to quell the tensions. Australian Defence Force helicopters buzz overhead, armoured personnel carriers and foot patrols cover the ground. More Australian Federal Police are coming to restore law and order.

International aid workers have arrived, bringing with them millions of dollars in international humanitarian funding. The Australian Government, through AusAID, is contributing \$8 million.

Emergency supplies comprising water containers, water purification tablets, blankets and tents have already been airlifted and distributed through IOM (International Organization for Migration), Oxfam Australia and CARITAS.

Three million dollars has been provided to the World Food

Programme to cover the cost of mung beans, vitamin A-fortified vegetable oil, sugar, beans and high-nutrition biscuits – welcome menu variations to the Government of East Timor's emergency rice rations.

Don Bosco is the biggest displaced persons camp in Dili with an estimated 13,000 inhabitants. The authorities have decided it's one of the obvious locations to start a mass measles vaccination campaign, funded by AusAID and other agencies.

East Timor's Ministry of Health and UNICEF are managing the exercise which is targeting 31,000 children aged between six months and 14 years. Most live in the temporary camps around Dili. 'Children who are weak, malnourished and living in crowded and unsanitary conditions are especially vulnerable to infection. Measles can spread rapidly,' says Arnold Calo-oy, a UNICEF project officer.

In a country that is 95 per cent Catholic, seminaries and churches are not only places of prayer and worship but also refuge and shelter. In these walled and gated sanctuaries, the resident madres, padres, brothers and sisters provide comfort, food, medicine and a sense of hope that the situation will settle down.

Sister Simoa of the Salesian Sisters at Balide in Dili tells me how she and others are on four-hour watches throughout the night. 'People are worried about security, especially when they hear shooting nearby.'



Across town, at Seminario Maior, Brother Hanibal says the people in his care have formed their own security guard. And in Baucau, 122 kilometres east of Dili, where some estimate more than 10,000 displaced persons are in camps around the city, Padre Martihno Gusmao, Director of the Justice and Peace Commission, tells me his neighbour, a policeman, was held captive for two days without food or water. His comment once freed, 'I still remember their faces.' Padre Martihno believes reconciliation will be a long process.

But in the time I am here there are positive developments too. Conditions in the camps are improving with regular water deliveries, better sanitation and medical support. Small well-stocked markets have sprung up and, on the streets, hawkers have returned to ply their trade. Supermarkets are open. Newspaper sellers are back outside the Hotel Timor and there's increasing traffic.

And the previously gated and guarded driveway of the petrol station near the Australian Embassy is open. It's a telling sign.

**Bronwyn Coles was in East Timor as part of Australia's immediate humanitarian response from 31 May to 17 June 2006.**

**ABOVE LEFT: AusAID's early assessment team – Titon Mitra (second from left) and Bronwyn Coles speak with some of the displaced people.**

**LEFT: Organising food aid.**

**Photos: Bronwyn Coles/AusAID**

## COCOA BEANS, COPRA AND COOKIES

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA: One of the ways AusAID is helping to rehabilitate the economic fortunes and wellbeing of Bougainville is through reviving the cocoa and copra industries – and also making other ventures possible.**



**T**here are changes for the better going on in Bougainville. For the past six years a versatile agricultural project is helping individuals to start – or in some cases restart – the region's cocoa and copra businesses.

The AusAID-funded Bougainville Cocoa and Copra Dryer Rehabilitation Project has been running for the past five years. In that time it has concentrated on restoring cocoa and copra dryers, developing new cocoa fermentation units and introducing a finance facility – or grant system – to fund small-scale enterprises.

Raymond Gimots received a mini cocoa dryer through the project in 2001 after providing 25 per cent equity and attending the project's cocoa fermentation and processing training program. He dried his first beans a month later and has been improving his farming operation ever since.

These days he confidently harvests, ferments and dries his own beans and, as a result, he's

doubled his income. In the last couple of years he's been able to invest in a vanilla production enterprise, a commercial cocoa tree nursery and upgrade his farm equipment. 'My next goal is a larger dryer which I'm saving for now,' he says.

Pauline Togein lives in Buka, one of Bougainville's most disadvantaged areas due to the fact the land is unsuitable for cocoa and copra. But attending one of the project's business awareness sessions for women in mid 2004 Pauline heard about its grant system. Her ears pricked up. Pauline, who has four children, was worried about school fees.

Two things came together – a good idea and the means to implement it. Pauline knew she had an excellent recipe for cookies given to her by her aunt in Rabaul and thought if she had a drum oven she could earn a reasonable income from baking.

Within two months, the project approved Pauline's application for the partial funding of a drum oven and had it delivered.



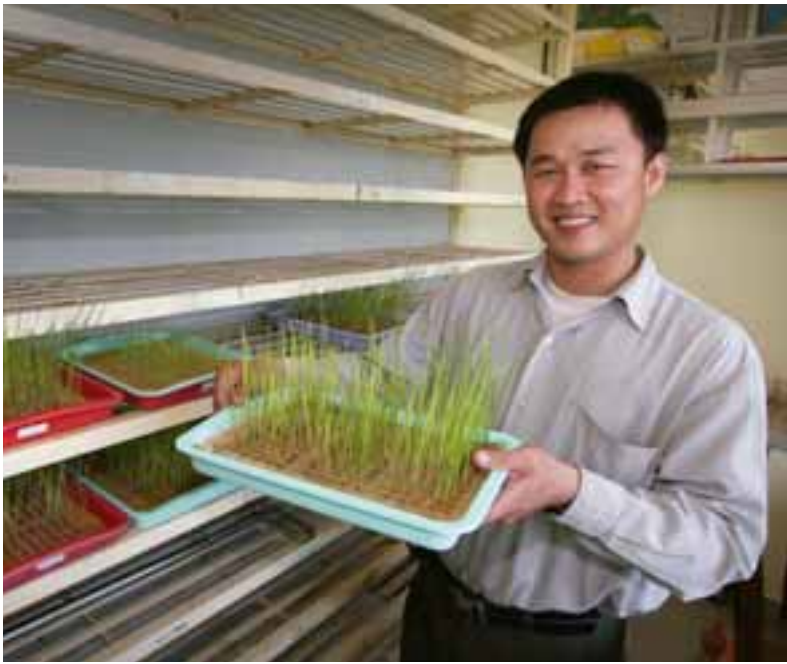
Pauline now bakes cookies every evening with the help of her husband and sells them in the village the next day. Three times a week she also bakes extra batches to sell at the Buka market. She uses some of her extra income to buy food for her family but most of it goes in the bank for school fees – although recently there was an exception.

'I decided to buy a sewing machine,' she says. 'I'm doing well with the cookies but making clothes is yet another way I can increase my income.'

What's more, Pauline, who lives in a small bush house, has almost saved enough money to start building a permanent house for her growing family.

**ABOVE LEFT: A truckload of cocoa beans. Trevor Clarke, Australian team leader of a cocoa and copra dryer rehabilitation operation with co-workers, Telatu in 2002.**

**ABOVE RIGHT: Selling at Buka market. Photos: Mathias Heng**



# THE GREAT GRAIN GAIN

**CAMBODIA:** Australia's aid to Cambodia is chiefly in rural development. Current activities include assessing land for a second rice crop, introducing new rice varieties for increasing yields, and developing options for producing and marketing alternative crops. One AusAID project is achieving particular success.

**A**lthough Cambodia has a large labour force and land area, agricultural productivity has remained relatively low for the past 30 years. One reason is the over reliance of rice farming on infertile soils. Other reasons include the widespread use of poor quality seed which in turn produces poor yields, and the large loss of grain in post harvest.

AusAID's Agriculture Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) is working to boost Cambodia's rice crop in two ways. Firstly, it's developing a commercially viable

business for the production and distribution of high quality seed. Secondly, it's improving practices post harvest.

Progress to date is impressive.

Around 80,000 poor farmers are reaping increased yields as a direct result of using high quality seed. By 2010 more than 200,000 farmers will benefit. Post-harvest grain losses will also be down because of the use of better drying, storing, handling and milling processes, both on the farm and in the mills.

How has AQIP achieved these

advances? What are the steps involved?

First of all, the project developed seed production centres in four provinces in the country's south-east. Next it established a network of growers to supply raw seed to each centre. When the seed arrives it's taken for drying, cleaning and packaging. Each centre also carefully tests the seed to ensure it meets international standards. At the end of the process the seed is sold either directly to farmers through a network of dealers located in towns and villages, or to



**FAR LEFT:** Sok Ny, sales and marketing officer at the Super Seed Company, shows off some test batches of rice seedlings. Working for AQIP has helped him develop his skills as an agronomist. **CENTRE:** Planting rice in Bakou Village, Kandal Stoeung District. **LEFT:** Rice is spread out to dry in the sun in front of AQIP's Super Seed Company's factory in Kandal Province. Kim Savoeun, manager of the company, says he enjoys sharing his knowledge of agricultural techniques with local farmers so they may improve their rice production. **Photos:** Kevin Evans



government and non-government agencies. These bodies distribute to farmers as part of broader poverty reduction and rural development projects.

The seed represents about 12 different varieties from a possible selection of 35 that have been developed through the plant improvement activities of an earlier AusAID-funded project – the Cambodia, IRRI, Agriculture Project (CIAP). The work of this project formed the foundation of what has since become Cambodia's main agriculture research institute, CARDI (Cambodian Agricultural Research Development Institute).

While CARDI developed most of the varieties in the 1990s, AQIP is now multiplying the seed and making it available to farmers through a commercially-viable seed production business. AQIP has deliberately chosen a commercial venture to help ensure sustainability.

Encouraging resource poor farmers to buy the high quality seed, however, has been challenging. Farmers naturally need to be convinced of the benefits. The seed is three times

the cost of buying 'grain' quality seed, which is the normal practice. Some farmers simply want to use the grain from the previous crop, which costs nothing.

But quietly and steadily the project is winning over farmers and persuading them the upfront investment is more than recouped in higher yields.

AusAID's overriding concern is always to help lift people out of poverty so it is gratifying that increased numbers of poor farmers are benefiting from access to the high quality seed.

Non-government agencies have simply given AQIP seed to very poor farmers not in a position to buy. But many of these same farmers have returned the next year to pay like any other customers, so impressed have they been with the benefits. The project has documented case studies in Prey Veng Province where only two families in a sizable village could be persuaded to plant AQIP seed – and then only on a small piece of land. Yet the success of this trial was so outstanding, it led to 20 households in the same village purchasing seed for the early wet

season crop, and 35 for the later one. It takes time for farmers to see and believe.

Germination rate of the AQIP seed is at least 85 per cent compared to 40 per cent to 60 per cent of 'grain' seed. Higher germination rates mean farmers need use only half as much good seed, which is another bonus. The better results are also motivating farmers to attend to other aspects of crop management, such as using the correct planting density and appropriate use of fertiliser. Yield increases of 30 per cent are not uncommon in some areas.

At the other end of the process, AQIP is introducing simple but effective methods to reduce grain losses, which can be as much as 30 per cent. Grain impairment or wastage occurs from the time rice is harvested until it is sold or consumed. Better on-farm storage and drying techniques, mill operating efficiencies and business practices are addressing the problem.

It's all part of Cambodia's 'great grain gain' – but there's more. AQIP has also helped develop a small 'fruit and veg' supply chain

for local markets and even the capital city, Phnom Penh.

Cambodia imports about 50 per cent of its fruit and vegetables yet opportunities exist for the country to grow its own where it has a competitive advantage. Following a trial in which 25 groups participated, each comprising about 25 farmers, a modest fruit and vegetable operation has emerged. Farmers have learnt about current market prices, crop diversification and the need to satisfy consumer demands.

Since completing its successful pilot, AQIP's 'fruit and veg' operation has been picked up by non-government agencies – and continues to flourish.

**AusAID's Agriculture Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) has been operating in Cambodia since 2000. AQIP's Super Seed Company is now a registered commercial entity. With some further funding from the Australian Government, the company is expected to become self-sustaining and able to supply Cambodian farmers with high quality rice seed long after Australian support has finished.**

# ZERO TOLERANCE FOR CORRUPTION

**INDONESIA:** The challenges of the tsunami response.



**R**ebuilding is gaining momentum following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that devastated North Sumatra. Over 41,000 houses have been rebuilt in just 18 months into a five-year reconstruction program.

‘Progress is very encouraging,’ says Dr Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, Director of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency for Aceh and Nias. ‘And it’s not just housing – over 80 per cent of shrimp ponds and paddy fields have been rehabilitated, giving back many people their livelihoods.’

Although there’s a long way to go with rebuilding, Dr Kuntoro is adamant on one point. His agency will not tolerate corruption.

‘Corruption is our number one enemy and there can be no compromise on it.’

Several safeguards are in place. ‘We have many corruption defences in Aceh – an internal auditor, using audit controls set up by Ernst and Young. We also have an anti-corruption unit, and we are using world best practice in monitoring, governance and auditing.’

And the procedures are working. ‘To put things into perspective,’ Dr Kuntoro says, ‘there are over 1,700 restoration projects in Aceh and Nias, many of them very large yet

there have been very few instances of corruption – and not a single one in the Australian program.’

Following the release of Australia’s White Paper on aid, AusAID is placing greater emphasis on addressing corruption which undermines the effectiveness of aid and slows development.

In defining the challenges for the reconstruction program over the next 18 months, Dr Kuntoro says the supply of building materials was high on the list.

‘We’re working in the habitat of the elephant, tiger, orang-utan and rhinoceros in North Sumatra so we cannot just source timber and other materials from our own backyard. This affects costs.’

And there’s another challenge. ‘Inflation is a big problem – caused by trying to build back a better Aceh as quickly as possible. Twelve months ago it cost about \$4,000 to build a house, now it’s almost double.’

But despite the difficulties, Dr Kuntoro remains up-beat about the future. ‘You can see in the eyes of the people that hope is back. Without hope, nothing can be achieved.’

**ABOVE:** Building houses in Banda Aceh.  
**Photo:** Rob MacColl/The Courier Mail

# VOLUNTEERING

## THE PROGRAM

One of AusAID’s most successful aid initiatives is the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) program. Since it was launched in 1998 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, it has placed around 1,700 young Australians in 20 different nations.

The purpose of the program is to build mutual understanding between Australia and developing countries of the Asia Pacific. It’s also to make a tangible contribution to development through skill sharing and cooperation between people.

Skilled young Australians, aged 18-30, are allocated short-term assignments of between three and 12 months. They work with Australian organisations and their overseas counterparts in a number of different areas including health, the environment, rural development, education, justice, governance and infrastructure development.

Accountants may find themselves setting up microcredit systems in the slums of Bangladesh, nurses may have the chance to pass on their midwifery skills in rural Vietnam, or aquaculturalists may share conservation techniques with Pacific Islanders.

For Rowena McNaughton, with a background in marketing, it was to assist with the management of various agricultural research projects in the rice fields of Cambodia (see her story below).

For more information about the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) program see <[www.aid.gov.au/youtham](http://www.aid.gov.au/youtham)>

## REFLECTIONS OF AN AYAD

**CAMBODIA:** When Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development – or AYADs – sign up for volunteer work in another country they are prepared for hard work, cultural differences and some discomfort. Rowena McNaughton from the sleepy beach town of Seaspray in eastern Victoria was prepared more than most. She had a positive attitude and reasonable expectations. But coming to terms with stark comparisons with her former ‘easy’ life was at times lonely, confusing and humbling. Here Rowena shares her feelings.

**I** watch 13-year-old Ly Sotheary measure white rice in her small hand. She carefully places the grain into a battered charred pot, empties a bucket of water over the top and methodically stirs.

As the rice begins to simmer, she chops a cabbage and adds this

to a broth her aunt, toothless and leathery before her time, has made out of water and garlic.

When the smoke from the clay bucket stove fills the wooden hut, shirtless tired men from the fields appear. A small group of stooped and shaven-head elders cease



LEFT: Hot hard work.  
Photo: Kevin Evans

their murmuring and a barefoot flock of ragged children slip down from nearby palm trees. Sotheary piles each person's plate with rice. Cooking for the community is her job.

As the foreigner, I'm given the only fork.

I'm in the countryside, in Orang Village in Kompong Cham Province, about four hours on a bumpy road from the capital, Phnom Penh. I'm accompanying my boss, Hun Yadana. As representatives of CARDI (Cambodian Agricultural Research Development Institute) we're here to talk about a rodent management trial.

During a rural workshop held earlier, we hear about financial woes and farmers' desperation to be rid of rats destroying

their crops and reducing yields. Trapping devices are widely and successfully used throughout South-East Asia but these Cambodian farmers are unable to afford the plastic to make them.

In a country where over 80 per cent of the population relies on agriculture to survive, finding ways to improve farming methods and crop yields is vital. Consequently, the Government of Cambodia is placing enormous importance on rural research and development. A once strong and productive nation – in fact, a main exporter of rice – Cambodia is working hard to make up for time lost during years of conflict and reclaim its proud agricultural heritage.

As we sit eating our lunch in amiable contentment in Orang

Village I realise I'm at ease – even happy. The heat is relentless but I'm coping and while the language barrier is still a hurdle it's no longer impossible. Each day I learn a few more words and recognise a few more phrases. I'm getting by and I can't help feeling a measure of satisfaction.

I reflect I've come a long way in a short time. I know I'm no longer the naïve person who arrived at CARDI 10 months ago with a big smile and too much enthusiasm. Nor am I the sad person who, four weeks later, sat at a metal desk uselessly flicking through paperwork. How I longed for my Cambodian colleagues to give me something to do before the last bit of my confidence ebbed away.

Something had to happen. The polite and constant smiles,

meant kindly, made me wince. I wasn't helping, I wasn't making a contribution, I wasn't doing anything – and I felt guilty.

Then I took stock and did something that changed everything.

I came to work armed with a tray of mangos. I suddenly understood a culture of sharing. Offering mangos led to talking about mangos, making comparisons between mangos, and so on. Conversations began.

Those awkward early days where lunchtimes for me were a thoughtless salad sandwich and an apple eaten alone suddenly became productive social times sharing dehydrated fish and rice.

I love it that the novelty of the foreigner eating Cambodian food never ceases to amuse.

Mangos have led to weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations and countless hours in rice fields listening to personal stories about atrocities during the Khmer Rouge. And I find – in between admitting to incredulous Cambodians that there were in fact some days in Australia where I didn't eat rice! – I am inexplicably drawn to a country whose history is hard to fathom.

Constant war and unrest have severely hampered Cambodia's progress. It's one of the poorest nations in the world. Over a third of the population survives on less than \$1 a day, sanitation is basic and access to clean drinking water isn't assured. In the villages I

# EDUCATION

visit, to have electricity is to have great wealth.

The process of improving agricultural production will be slow – databases and better farming techniques that have been lost have to be rebuilt, rediscovered or invented. Once quality crop seeds are developed – through CARDI – research will turn to crop diversification, land reclamation and social economics.

But all research must be funded. My part in CARDI coordinates project proposals which need financial backing. Under Yadana, who's head of planning, collaboration and business, I'm learning just how far \$1 can stretch, and just how fierce the competition is for donor funding.

It's hard to describe a job where most of your time is spent either out in little far-flung villages talking with farmers or sitting behind a little metal desk trying to source crucial monies.

But it's real. And it's important work.

I shudder when I recall the suffocation and 'hum-drumness' of my previous life. The 'get up, commute to work, go home, pay the bills...' routine which many people think is fine. Finding out it's not fine for me, and that I'd rather be in stifling heat, driving on bumpy difficult roads and eating rice three times a day, is just the start of an incredibly rewarding journey.



## RAISING GIRLS

**Dr Cliff Meyers is a development expert in education and a vocal champion for more and better learning opportunities for females. Here he shares some of his views on the importance of educating mothers and the factors that affect success.**

### **1. Do you think educating mothers is – or should be – a top development priority?**

I guess it depends on what we mean by 'educating'. Certainly, parenting education is a priority. It's important those who care for children know about immunisation, nutrition, hygiene, stimulation and so on. But this applies to mothers and fathers, as well as parents-to-be, not just women.

I'm not convinced that every illiterate mother needs to be taught how to read and write as a priority, especially if she lives in a remote community that hasn't a strong print culture. There are other ways to help women through non-formal education programs. I'm thinking about,

for example, practical livelihood and functional life skills courses that can also increase the status of women and help them gain confidence, independence and a greater sense of self-worth.

In general, short-term literacy classes of between three and six months have not proved very effective. In contrast, longer term literacy programs that include basic literacy and numeracy – plus longer term post-literacy and practical education courses that last up to four years – have proved effective. Longer term adult education programs also encourage women to form groups – which is a good thing.

A wide range of development benefits, such as credit activities, is achieved through women's



groups. Links to the content of courses are clear but once the women get to know each other and start to work together, they go well beyond their initial courses. For example, post-literacy classes in Nepal have resulted in women forming their own credit groups and kitchen garden clubs. The only trouble is these types of courses require heavy investment in both time and money, and the potential for drop out is high.

If resources are scarce, I would rather focus energy on educating adolescent girls. Many girls either drop out of school or never enrol in the first place. It's a far better investment to turn attention to this group before some start having their own children.

Directing formal education programs mainly at mothers who are already quite burdened with family care and who just can't dedicate much time to academic studies doesn't make much sense. Non-formal education approaches

work much better here. Practical courses, which need not be print-based or teach literacy skills, are very useful in passing on key information and teaching life skills.

## **2. What are some of the advantages noticed in the community if mothers are educated?**

There is ample research on the benefits of education for mothers. We can see striking impacts in a number of areas. For example, children born to educated mothers are less likely to die before they reach their fifth birthday. Educated mothers are less likely to have big families or malnourished children. They're also less likely to contract HIV/AIDS and are more likely to send their own daughters to school. We see these impacts as a result of girls attending school for between three and five years. We do not see such clear impacts on mothers who have attended short-term literacy classes.

## **3. What do we risk if we ignore female education?**

By ignoring female education we run the risk of increasing existing gender disparities. Women who are ignorant of the issues that affect their lives are powerless and can often become victims of abuse. In marriages they can be quite voiceless. Their right to a say in family decisions, controlling the family resources or whatever it may be, is taken from them. Just as gender equity in society is an underlying pillar so it is in education. It is extremely difficult to address the latter without first achieving the former.

Uneducated women do not do well negotiating in the

marketplace, discussing issues with, say, public health workers or doctors, or in supporting their children to go to school. They find it difficult to attend, let alone speak at, community meetings. In rural societies this is a particular loss as research shows women – even those with basic education – who organise into women's groups are able to achieve great improvements in their local communities. In Cambodia, for example, through community education programs, women have become much more active on village committees and in planning processes. Their efforts in negotiating better services for their villages are recognised and supported by the Cambodian Government.

## **4. How can development assistance encourage mothers and would-be mothers to be part of educational opportunities?**

Incentives – such as providing food or funds – targeted at impoverished girls and their families is one way development assistance can encourage girls to attend school or take up life skills courses. But once girls make a commitment to learn it's very important to make sure the education is relevant and suits their circumstances. For example, courses must be accessible with schedules fitting in with daily routines and family needs.

Critical mass is also a potent agent. And development assistance can help achieve this. If a significant number of girls or young women manage to gain access to basic education they tend to spearhead the trend for all girls to gain access. Conversely, girls from ethnic groups or remote

communities where few, if any, ever attend school are really difficult to persuade. But once the first wave of girls has successfully entered the education system – usually brought there through advocacy or incentives or through culturally appropriate approaches – it becomes far easier to involve the community from there on. Education becomes part of life for future generations.

## **5. What's the minimal level of education we should be helping females to attain so they have choice and capacity to make 'good' decisions in their lives?**

Research has pointed out that three to five years of 'schooling' is a minimum for seeing the ripple effect in women's lives, in the lives of their families, and in their communities.

Dr Cliff Meyers is UNICEF's regional adviser on education in East Asia and the Pacific. He has extensive experience in education development and is a specialist in non-formal learning approaches. Before taking up his present position, Dr Meyers worked with UNICEF Laos in Vientiane and UNICEF Nepal in Kathmandu.

**FAR LEFT: Cambodia. Community education programs are very useful for women and help them to play a more confident role in village activities. Photo: Kevin Evans**

**LEFT: Dr Cliff Meyers. Photo: Angus Braithwaite/AusAID**

## LESS WEALTH BETTER HEALTH



**NAURU is one of the smallest nations in the world – only 21 square kilometres. Between 1970 and the mid 1990s, it was also, relative to its size, one of the richest. Nauru accumulated great wealth by exporting phosphate.**

**W**ith the decline in phosphate mining over the past 10 years Nauru has suffered a drastic downturn in living standards. Yet the country continues to pay a hefty price for the years of plenty. The nation's population is seriously overweight, unfit and underemployed.

Looking back, the people realise they made a terrible mistake. As the island became richer, they replaced their traditional Pacific island diet with imported foods, high in fat and sugar. A generation's dependency on an unbalanced Western diet has led to an alarming rate of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and obesity.

A recent World Health Organization survey on lifestyle risk factors exposes Nauru as one of the world's least healthy nations. More than 60 per cent of

the population is obese, which is in large part due to very low levels of physical activity. Less than 5 per cent of Nauruans consume fruit and vegetables daily. Most people smoke (57 per cent of women and 49 per cent of men), and the use of alcohol (83 per cent) is comparably higher than many other Pacific nations.

There's now a realisation – even urgency – something must be done to restore the nation's health. Firm steps are underway. As His Excellency, President Ludwig Scotty, points out, 'What is money without your health.'

The president was speaking at the opening of a four-day workshop during which plans for a national non-communicable disease strategy were developed. He went on to say, 'We want to give public notice to the world that

we will fight non-communicable diseases and we will succeed.'

The workshop – the first of its kind in Nauru – was attended by health workers, other government workers and members from non-government organisations. Its purpose and achievement is the formulation of strategies to increase physical activity, reduce smoking, lower alcohol consumption and generally improve nutrition.

A key goal is making it possible for people to return to some of their traditional ways, such as cultivating home gardens and fishing. Nauru is essentially a rural community. There are no towns sprawling over scarce and therefore valuable agricultural land. The population of around 10,000 lives mainly on the coastal fringe.

AusAID is working with the island's ministries of health and agriculture to help Nauruans rediscover their traditional healthy diet of fruit, fish and vegetables. No one expects an immediate result but with some communities already growing – and eating – their own home-grown vegetables and fruit, and taking more exercise, the change to a healthier lifestyle is definitely underway.

THE COMBINATION OF A POOR DIET AND SCARCE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES HAS CAUSED A BURGEONING OF LIFESTYLE DISEASES MORE COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE WESTERN WORLD.

### NAURU AID

The Australian Government, through AusAID, provides \$2.1 million towards health care in Nauru including \$800,000 for pharmaceuticals and other medical consumables.

It also provides funding for the power and water sector, for education, and supports a police development program.

A financial team sent by the Australian Government is working in the Ministry of Finance to help strengthen the country's budget process.

**ABOVE:** Many participants of the health strategy workshop took the 18-kilometre walk around the island, including the Minister for Health, Dr Kieren Keke (*left*) who admitted it was his first time (but not his last!) With him are Dr Viliami Puloka and another workshop participant.

Photo: Doug Melvin/AusAID

# GENDER



## STEPPING FORWARD

**SOLOMON ISLANDS: Rebuilding a nation is a long slow process. For countries that have experienced violence, instability and conflict, there can be no quick fix. But amid the difficulties, it's easy sometimes to overlook the good things. On Guadalcanal's Weathercoast, for example, a wind of change is gently blowing through.**

There are no women in the present national parliament but it is surely just a matter of time. During the recent national elections participation by women was significant. Moreover, women are forming groups and making an important contribution to community life. They're reaching far beyond their traditional roles of domestic chores, child rearing and gardening.

Following years of unpredictable violence and economic struggle women want a better more peaceful future and they're stepping forward to achieve it. Increasingly, women are playing a more assertive role in their communities.

This is borne out in Peochakuri, on Guadalcanal's Weathercoast,

WOMEN OF SOLOMON ISLANDS WANT PEACE AND SECURITY. THEY ALSO WANT TO EARN A DECENT INCOME FOR THEIR FAMILIES. AND THEY WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO, AND LIVE IN, STRONG VIABLE COMMUNITIES.

where a group of women has successfully rehabilitated a piggery – an action that has benefited the whole village.

The women decided repairing the rundown piggery was an absolute priority. Untethered pigs wandering around the village were causing a serious disturbance, destroying possessions and trampling gardens – and also causing arguments between neighbours.

Before the recent civil unrest the piggery was well run and the pigs carefully looked after. But when conflict broke out eight years ago, it spelled the end of orderly village life. Many villagers were forced to flee to the forests, leaving their pigs to fend for themselves.

Only since the re-establishment of law and order, with the arrival and deployment of troops and police from RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands), have the villagers felt confident to return.

The sight of the piggery – rebuilt and, once again, fully functional – is one of the clearest signs that village life is returning to normal. The ability of the women's group to involve the whole village has really paid off. Men and boys cut timber,

marked footings and carved the posts for the piggery fence.

A grant of about \$3,600 from AusAID's community sector program helped pay for the wire fencing and other building materials and tools.

'Traditionally the women of this village have been good at rearing pigs and other livestock,' says Salome Timmy, one of the group's members, 'so this is why we felt comfortable about applying for the AusAID grant and managing this type of project. We were confident that we could do it successfully as it wasn't so different from work we used to do.'

Money raised through the sale of pigs and garden crops will be used, say the women, to help improve the village, pay school fees and support the work of the church.

'We have decided to work together, to stay strong and make the community better,' says Salome.

ABOVE: Pigs roaming freely.

'We need a piggery,' said the women.

Photo: Michael Cavanagh



VOLUME 21 NUMBER 3 » SEPT-DEC 2006

## FOCUS IS THE MAGAZINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S OVERSEAS AID PROGRAM

*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.

Articles and photographs may be reproduced with permission from the Editor.

Enquiries and feedback relating to *Focus* should be sent to:

Patricia Gibson  
The Editor, *Focus*  
Public Affairs Group  
AusAID  
GPO Box 887  
Canberra ACT 2601

Tel (02) 6206 4967  
Fax (02) 6206 4695  
Email [patricia.gibson@ausaid.gov.au](mailto:patricia.gibson@ausaid.gov.au)

Other contributors: Michael Cavanagh, Stephanie Doust, Elizabeth James, Laura Kemp, Doug Melvin, Michael Wightman

Proposals for articles should be sent to the Editor. AusAID does not accept responsibility for damage to, or loss of, material submitted for publication.

Design by GRI.D, Canberra  
Printed by Pirion Pty Limited, Canberra

ISSN 0819-9973  
Volume 21 Number 3 Sept-Dec 2006  
© Commonwealth of Australia 2006

For more copies of *Focus*, or other AusAID publications contact:  
National Mailing and Marketing  
PO Box 7077  
Canberra BC ACT 2610

Tel (02) 6269 1050  
Fax (02) 6260 2770  
Email [books@ausaid.gov.au](mailto:books@ausaid.gov.au)

Most of AusAID's corporate publications from November 1997 onwards are available in full on the Internet [www.ausaid.gov.au/publications](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications)



**Australian Government**  
**AusAID**