

JUNE 2020 NEWSLETTER



Partners in Aid

Enduring, Capable Communities

Your support is more important than ever

To our Partners in Aid supporters,

A lot has changed since our last March newsletter. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us just how connected we are globally, and it is more important than ever that we help our partners overseas through these difficult times.

The pandemic has pushed the globe into a recession as countries force lock-downs to try and stop the spread of the virus. Stress and uncertainty is being felt by all as we physically isolate ourselves from each other. Despite all this, thousands of people are recovering from the virus each day and we are connecting more than ever before. We've seen incredible creative responses from governments, business and individuals and family and friends have come together in new virtual ways.

We know the COVID-19 pandemic will have the greatest effect on the poor and vulnerable. Each year Partners in Aid assists disadvantaged people in Bangladesh, Philippines and India. As the pandemic gradually comes under control, we will have an even more important role to play to ensure that the people we support have access to health services, education and food.

We ask our donors and members, if they are able, to continue their support of Partners in Aid, so we can continue to help those most in need. Any contribution no matter how small, will allow us to continue supporting our communities overseas now and through the future. All projects will require urgent and significant resources outside the scope of our usual work.

We hope that all our supporters stay safe and healthy at home, and please learn a bit more about our projects below.

Call us on 03 9704 6315 or e-mail: admin@partnersinaid.org.au

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HOW TO GIVE

HOW TO GIVE:

Our June appeal is our biggest fundraising opportunity of the year. Because Partners in Aid has no paid staff, our overheads are very low. This means nearly all the money donated goes directly to our partner organisations. All donations are tax deductible. There are a number of ways you can support Partners in Aid's projects, including making a general donation, making a donation directly to one of our projects, buying items from one of our partners or leaving a gift in your will. Please send money via:

- Direct Bank Transfer
- Cheque
- Online at My Cause or GiveNow
- Leave a bequest
- Purchase from one of our partners

BANK TRANSFER OR CHEQUE

Details to donate through bank transfer or cheque can be found on the next page. Please ensure that bank transfers have the details of your name and the direction of your donation. If forwarding a cheque, fill in newsletter page or write a note with name and direction of your donation.

ONLINE AT MY CAUSE / GIVENOW

- You can make a one off or regular tax-deductible donation through platform My Cause. <https://www.mycase.com.au/charity/25612/PartnersinAidLtd>. Making a general donation gives the Board of Partners in Aid the greatest flexibility in using your contribution, otherwise for ideas on how to support our projects specifically see the donation page overleaf.
- Partners in Aid is also registered with GiveNow which means you can make a tax-deductible donation using their secure, online portal at this link: <https://www.givenow.com.au/partnersinaid>.

BEQUESTS

A gift in your will, no matter what size will make a significant difference to the work of Partners in Aid. You can bequest cash, a percentage of your estate or a residuary gift. All bequests are welcome and there are no fees. We use bequests to assist with the continual development and improvements of all our programs. We recommend that you seek professional advice from your solicitor or financial advisor in planning a bequest. For more information or a confidential conversation please contact Cecily or Lyn on 03 9704 6315 or e-mail admin@partnersinaid.org.au.

GOODWILL WINE PARTNERSHIP

You can also enjoy quality wine and support Partners in Aid projects at the same time. For every case of wine sold, a proportion goes directly to Partners in Aid, with no overhead costs. Thinking about giving yourself a treat during lockdown? Goodwill are popping in a roll of Who Gives A Crap toilet paper and a 50ml bottle of hand sanitiser in every order of their Lockdown Mix. You can order wines or buy gift vouchers. Place order here and support Partners in Aid: <http://goodwillwine.com.au/charities/partners-in-aid>



HOW TO GIVE

DIRECT BANK TRANSFER

I would like to make a general donation to Partners in Aid

I would like to make a specific donation to one of the below projects (please indicate which project)

India: SEDS (Sustainable Agriculture Project e.g. Tank De-silting)

• Donation ideas: 1000 Fish fingerlings to stock tanks (\$10), Employ SEDS Staff 1 month (\$50), Hire Tractor for 1 week (\$200).

• I wish to pledge \$200 /\$500 /\$1000 per year for 1/2/3/4/5 years

Bangladesh: Symbiosis Bangladesh (E.g. Stationery, garden tools, sewing machines, women's group support)

• Donation ideas: School stationary 1 week (\$10), Tailoring supplies (\$30), Employ a teacher 1 month (\$150), Sewing machine (\$200), Sponsor women's group (\$500), teacher salary for 1 year (\$1,800).

Philippines: Sinangpad Healthy Village Project (e.g. community health training and ongoing community engagement in each participating community, funding for community action involving construction of toilets, pig pens, drainage, etc.)

• Donation ideas: Household sanitary toilets (\$35).
• Contribution to involving new communities with health training, participative planning and funding of simple health-related infrastructure (\$50)

CHILD SPONSORSHIP

I would like to begin/continue to sponsor a child at SEDS / All Bengal Women's Union
Cost is \$260 per child per year, + optional annual gift \$20

MEMBERSHIP

I would like to begin/continue (please circle) to be a member of Partners in Aid.

BANK TRANSFER

Total amount enclosed (donations and child sponsorship)

EFT details: Partners in Aid, BSB/Acct: 033686/162354, with your surname as reference. Please email admin@partnersinaid.org.au to arrange a receipt and confirm where you would like the donation directed. If paying by cheque, please make it out to Partners in Aid, and post to PO Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, VIC 3805

TOTAL

Name for receipt: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ Phone Number: _____

Email (for internal use and occasional updates): _____

Gifts of \$2.00 or more are tax deductible (a receipt will be issued).



INDIA: SEDS TANK DESTILTING PROJECT

PROJECT DIRECTOR: AMANDA STONE

Partners in Aid works with the Social Education and Development Society (SEDS) in Andhra Pradesh, India to educate communities and help protect natural resources with water management and reforestation programs. Partners in Aid has funded the de-silting of 3-4 tanks each year since the 1990's.

Despite unpredictable rains interrupting attempts to complete tank desilting in the past 3 years, SEDS managed to complete this year's allocated tank desilting in February this year – just before all work stopped and residents were ordered into a state-wide shutdown which is still continuing.

Two tanks in the mandal of Roddam were desilted in fine weather in late February and early March. 57 farmers from the village of Naranagepalli participated in removing 6050 cubic metres of silt in 1434 truckloads to be redistributed over farmland increasing its fertility. As always, farmers matched donated funds from Partners in Aid, for the machinery required to dig out the silt and transport it to local farms.

Not long after the completion of this valuable work, India entered a period of lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and that continues as this report is written (21/4/20). Thankfully COVID-19 had not reached the villages where SEDS works in late April. However, the state of Andhra Pradesh had recorded 603 cases, with 16 deceased and 42 recovered. Due to the lockdown SEDS is also closed. Police have set up check posts on roads in the district to stop all unnecessary traffic. People from the villages can still go to their local city like Penukonda for provisions and medicines but movement is otherwise limited.

The concentration of COVID-19 cases is in the main cities in India, with Mumbai and Delhi especially hard hit. And of course, it's the poor in the cities who are hit the hardest. Daily laborers have lost their income and hunger is real for them. Millions of laborers have migrated out of the cities to their villages, often walking for days without a meal or a place to sleep. There is some aid available but the need is huge. Early support from people and industries is starting to wane and social unrest is emerging.

"SEDS managed to complete this year's allocated tank desilting in February this year."

COVID STATS

INDIA

- 85, 940 CONFIRMED CASES
- 30,152 RECOVERED CASES
- 2,752 DEATHS

As at 17 May 2020, Wiki, WHO





Mumbai recently announced that all migrant workers are now free to leave the city because their desperation was resulting in riots.

Despite the low incidence of disease in rural areas, SEDS has another concern. The lockdown is preventing essential agricultural work being done. Nurseries have to be prepared, fruit needs to be picked, seeds have to get distributed.

The whole production chain has to start up in order to be ready for the rainy season, if not the consequences could be dire.

SEDS staff, unable to work and in home isolation, are taking each day at a time. Restrictions are being lifted in some areas only to be re-imposed the next day. Fortunately, this year's tank desilting has been completed and the tanks ready for the rains – if they come.

Donations from Partners in Aid supporters continue to make this invaluable and highly popular project possible in one of the poorest parts of India.

Footnote: The DFAT Friendship Grants, which PIA and SEDS applied for last year, were due to be announced in November, then February, then delayed once more until March. The announcement of recipients has now been deferred indefinitely due to the global pandemic. We will keep supporters informed when we know more.





INDIA: SEDS CHILD EDUCATION SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

PROJECT DIRECTOR: LYN PICKERING

In addition to the tank de-silting project, a child sponsorship program was set up with SEDS in late 1994, when visiting board members recognised that the majority of the children in the area did not attend School. Sponsorship of a child covers expenses including books, uniforms, shoes, school fees, monthly visits to SEDS for cultural and sporting activities, and health checks.



Where to begin? This past year has been one of significant change for us in Australia, and around our world. Drought has impacted so much of our country and the many families who live on farms over several years. This was followed by bushfires and flooding rains, and now a pandemic which is affecting everyone in the world, and killing hundreds of thousands of people.

A big thank you to all those who have been involved in recovery efforts for the bushfire and the flooding victims, and to our many Health Services personnel who have been looking after the sick recovering from COVID-19. We do not have to agree with everything our Governments around Australia say, but it is refreshing to see some bi-partisan discussion for the betterment of all.

"All the
students from
class 6 to 9
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promoted."





And now to life in India. We have all been watching the impact of COVID-19 in the northern hemisphere. India has implemented one of the biggest lock-downs globally. Schools and colleges, hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, cinema halls and places of worship are all closed. I have been receiving updates on how SEDS are coping with the pandemic, and what is occurring with our 180 sponsored students. Our students, as our readers will know, live in small rural communities. A number of families have migrated to be closer to family, or to find work and this may have a small impact on our program.

From SEDS - "Since 19th March all educational facilities closed in Andhra Pradesh. Most other states had already closed earlier. [The lockdown] caught many people by surprise especially migrant labourers who now are suffering heavily. The Andhra Pradesh Government's Education Department have said that all the students from class 6 to 9 will be promoted. The Board has also postponed the 10th class exams of the students in AP. This could still change as mass promotion also on the table."

Students from LKG (Lower Kindergarten) to Year 5 will automatically move to the next level at school when school resumes, unknown at this stage.

One thing to clarify is that the school year in India was coming to an end and students at various levels were due to do their final exams or tests. The months of March, April and May are the hottest time of the year in central southern India, and this is their long summer holiday period. It was fortunate perhaps that when COVID-19 hit, it was towards the end of the school year, but there is never a good time for students to not be attending school. Home schooling as we know it was not really an option for the majority of our sponsored students which is why the Government made the statements above.

"Due to the lockdown SEDS is also closed. Police have set up check posts on the road to stop all unnecessary traffic. People can still go into the large town for provisions and medicines, but that's about it."

SEDS' students attend the campus once a month for cultural, sport and health activities. They also are measured for new school clothes and distribution of uniforms, school books and shoes. This March very few students participated as many parents had made the decision to keep their children at home.

Update from 29th April "Tuesday India had a record high casualties of 69 people. 22,629 are now infected, 7,659 recovered, and 1007 have died. Andhra Pradesh is still seeing an increase in numbers <https://www.covid19india.org/state/AP>. Although it is not official as yet the idea of extending the lockdown till mid-May is definitely there. Schools, colleges, shopping malls, religious places and public transport are likely to remain shut while a ban on public and social gatherings is also expected to continue beyond May 3. But this is still speculation. After the 3rd, we hope there will be more clarity."

It has never been more important to continue our support of the SEDS child education sponsorship program. Children will continue to need school supplies to study in their homes if possible, and will need to be ready for school when it starts again after summer break.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEDS CHILD SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME:

The child education program was commenced after my first visit to SEDS in late 1994. We currently have 180 students from many levels attending school in this rural area of India. The age group – range from kindergarten through to Year 10. UKG or Lower Kindergarten to Year 5 is classified Primary School, and Year 6 – 10 is the middle school. The majority of students sponsored are girls, but there are boys on the program as well. They come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Many of the Year 10 students are now going on to Year 11 and 12 (College) and sometimes University. They do this with Government and sometimes family support.

Students are selected in various ways – SEDS workers may be aware of a student who needs support, a Principal or teacher may ask for a child to be sponsored, and on occasion a family member may take a child to SEDS and ask if the child could be sponsored. Details of students are taken, an interview is held, and details are checked.

Students on our program receive their school uniforms, books, bags, shoes and school fees. They attend the SEDS campus/farm once a month for activities which include, cultural, sporting, health camps, art days and measuring for uniforms they receive along with an annual present. The present is a new set of clothes, which is acceptable by the families and the community. A medical fund is an extra which any donor can contribute to. This fund supports the checkups of students who may require glasses or other medications. It is not set up for any major medical requirements. It costs \$260 per annum to support a child, plus \$20 for a present once a year.

PHILIPPINES: SINANGPAD HEALTHY VILLAGE PROJECT

PROJECT DIRECTOR: CECILY NEIL

The Sinangpad Healthy Village Project has been ongoing now for nearly twelve years. Located in the Kalinga Province, a mountainous province in the north of the Philippine's main island, Luzon. The project helps enable poor, remote communities to make the most of their human potential, capabilities and resources by promoting behavioural changes intended to reduce the incidence of environment-related food, water-borne and vector-borne diseases, especially those affecting infants.

The good news is that, as of last week, the COVID-19 had not reached Kalinga, although it has reached some of the surrounding provinces. Everyone is praying that if it does reach Tabuk, the provincial capital, it can be controlled – a couple of weeks ago the provincial hospital had only one ventilator and less than 20 oxygen tanks. We are not sure whether the staff have been able to access more emergency care equipment in the meantime.

Many of our project villages are remote tribal villages in mountainous regions. These communities are currently restricting access to any outsider entering the village in the hope of preventing any spread of infection. With any luck, this will be effective. However, it does mean that all the work of the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project has come to a halt until such time as the threat of the pandemic is over.



In the meantime, our thoughts are with the members of Sinangpad Association, many of whom are health workers and will be in the frontline if the virus does reach Kalinga. As soon as travel restrictions are lifted, Sinangpad Association members will be restarting, with renewed energy, their efforts to improve the health status of Kalingan communities. Once again, they will help residents to improve local environmental sanitation in their communities, and, in particular, to achieve zero open defecation in the village. Our ongoing support of the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project in these difficult times is essential so they can continue to build on the incredible work to date.



BANGLADESH: SYMBIOSIS PROJECT

PROJECT DIRECTOR: ROGER HUGHES

Partners in Aid works with Symbiosis in Bangladesh on two projects which aim to build the capacity, resilience and socio-economic status of impoverished communities. The Bangladesh Technical Training and Information Support (TTIS) Program provides vocational training in sewing, with the majority of participants being women. The Jamuna River Development Project (JRDP) aims to help communities living on islands in the Jamuna River through education, improved literacy, micro-finance and health projects.

COVID STATS

PHILLIPINES

- 12,305 CONFIRMED CASES
- 2,561 RECOVERED CASES
- 817 DEATHS

BANGLADESH

- 20,995 CONFIRMED CASES
- 4,117 RECOVERED
- 314 DEATHS

As at 17 May 2020, Wiki, WHO



It is hard to imagine Bangladesh during the present COVID-19 crisis. One might expect that with much poverty it would have a very immobile population. However, this is not the case with much movement between neighboring villages and, in times of crisis from the countryside into the cities, especially Dhaka. As for the fatality rate of those who have been diagnosed, World Health Organisation (WHO) figures for Bangladesh, for the period 8 March to 12 April, show that the achieved recovery rate at the time was 6.3% and the death rate was 5.5%. As such figures almost certainly reflect the situation in the big cities where medical care is better, than rural areas, a lock down is critical.

Symbiosis Bangladesh, our implementing organisation in Bangladesh is understandably in total lock down. Abu Baker Siddique, the director of our projects, reported today (17th April) "Greetings from Symbiosis Bangladesh family. Hope you are well this time. This mail is for your kind information that all project offices are closed as per government declaration till 25 April due to COVID-19 pandemic situation. All staff have been advised to stay at home in their working locations of the projects and government promotional materials were sent to the all project offices as well. Staff physical movement to the field is closed this time. Groups' & CBOs' schedule activities are closed until the situation is improved.

Staff are maintaining communication through mobile phone/internet for organizational essential needs. In this crisis situation poor day laborers are facing very difficulties to bear the family needs (mainly food items). They are seeking support from Symbiosis if any scope remain for them, said project staff. In this circumstance Symbiosis team is thinking how we can do at least something for the group members. The matter is being discussed also with Symbiosis International...We are praying to God for all to overcome this crisis situation. So keep our matters in your regular pray."

We can only hope that government and NGO advice is able to reduce the mobility of the population during this crisis. Hopefully, but possibly a forlorn hope, all transport to the mainland from the JRDP project island on the Jamuna river has ceased, isolating the island before the virus arrived and protecting its inhabitants. Our projects, TTIS and part of JRDP, on the mainland is more problematic. Participants in these projects have in the past had training on primary hygiene and (should) know the need for reduced mobility and protect themselves, but the requirements of daily life in such communities with poverty do not allow the personal isolation that we have seen in Australia. We must wait for further news.

Our ongoing support of these projects is essential to continuing the improvement of people's lives on the Jamnua river and to continue to build people's skills as part of the TTIS project.





A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR CURRENT PROJECTS IN BANGLADESH:

When Partners in Aid was founded in 1963 it was founded as a Christian organisation. As the years passed it adopted a non-religious posture, a posture which facilitated its work in the countries in which it operated. In 1991 it was approached by a branch of the Baptist Church in Australia and it was agreed that in exchange for administrative support, thereby slashing our overheads, that we would adopt their desired development project as one of our own provided that no religious posturing be attempted in Bangladesh. This arrangement has worked very well, and although we no longer receive administrative support from the Baptist Church, we have kept supporting their projects in Bangladesh, under the trade name 'Symbiosis'. Furthermore, we now channel all our Bangladeshi bound support through this organisation.

The first series of projects, which we adopted at the beginning of our association with Symbiosis, was a technical training programme (TTIS). It started as covering training ranging from hairdressing to motor mechanics, but these days it is directed at providing training in textiles, particularly in sewing, mostly to women but some men. As with all Symbiosis programmes it also provides training in life skills including hygiene, legal rights, managing money, life planning, guidance in setting up and running savings groups, etc. I estimate that of the order of ten thousand people have benefitted directly and maybe tenfold this number have benefitted indirectly.

The second series of projects has centred on an island (varying in size with time but of the order of 300sq kilometres) in the Jamuna River. This island floods in the monsoon season and is gradually swept downstream. Only extremely poor persons live on this island. Our project started as providing and staffing a school made of corrugated steel sheets, which is marched down the island as the island collapses behind it. At present we have one such primary school and a kindergarten on the island and several schools in low land off the island on the adjacent low river banks. Each of our primary schools take in about 120-150 students. Since this project started there have been several organisations that have started to run schools on the island, including one very solid government owned secondary school. Our school on the island is moved to those locations not serviced by the other newer schools. You can probably tell it is my favourite project!

When the present pandemic has subsided, I expect that these projects will resume much as they have been running. However, it is clear that within the educational framework there need to be new areas addressed such as the learning about the transmission of infectious diseases, and possibly, resources permitting, there needs to be some buffer installed to enable resources to be called upon in times of emergency.





INDIA: ALL BENGAL WOMEN'S UNION

PROJECT DIRECTOR: ANNE-MARIE MALTBY

The All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU) of Kolkata has been operating for over 70 years. Partners in Aid has been supporting the ABWU for more than 40 years. The ABWU is an NGO run entirely by volunteer women to rescue abused, at risk, destitute, abandoned and orphaned girls.

I spent two days at ABWU in early March and at that stage COVID 19 was still largely confined to China. How things have changed since then! It's lucky that our holiday finished around that time as we returned comfortably before return travel to Australia became difficult.

ABWU have been fortunate in having no cases of the virus. They are a relatively closed population, are experienced in managing infectious disease within their area and also took early measures to reduce the risk of transmission. Most of the volunteer staff have not been able to attend but there are quite a few live-in staff who have been able to manage the basics. Hopefully they will ride out the pandemic without too much impact.

During the visit the ladies were keen for me to speak with each sponsored girl individually which was an interesting exercise given their different levels of English. I was surprised to find that all but the very youngest girls had enough English to be able to communicate even if it was only to tell me their favourite colour or foods (chow mein and paratha kebabs were high on the list). There was a bit of excitement about the upcoming Holi Festival where there are lots of coloured dyes and water thrown around and it's a lot of fun.

I was also pleased to see how comfortable the girls were with the volunteer ladies. There is clearly a lot of affection on both sides and many girls wanted to stay and chat. Many of the girls also spend time at the ABWU aged care home, particularly the girls from the most disturbed backgrounds. The aged care home is in the same compound and the majority of its residents are previous ABWU so in a sense they have come home. They certainly understand the young girls and empathize with their problems. This mixing of young and old is something that the western world is starting see the benefit of.

Few girls knew what they wanted to do when they left school but some had definite ideas. They are encouraged to think seriously about this and not accept marriage as the default option. At the same time, they are made aware that they can't be supported through further education (after 18 yo) unless they demonstrate that they are prepared to apply themselves. The girls doing nursing or other tertiary courses weren't able to visit and we get little information about them as most of their courses are residential. My visit finished with a late lunch at their Suruchi Restaurant which has delicious and absolutely authentic Bengali food. As always I left ABWU with great confidence that they are doing a great job in caring for their girls. Our ongoing support is important.





BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

NEW APPOINTMENTS:

Partners in Aid has recently appointed four new board members. We welcome:

- Jessica Gill
- Jackson Wood
- Caryl Hertz
- Nicholas Foster

DEPARTURES:

The Board was very sorry to accept Kristin's resignation as a Director at the March meeting. Kristin has been on the Board for the last twelve years. During this time, she has made many contributions to the workings of Partners in Aid, in particular, producing our Newsletter each quarter. Happily, Kristin has offered to stay on as an Advisor to the Board. We wish Kristin and her family all the best for the future.

Board members have been particularly grateful for the help that both Kristin and Graham Moore have provided in facilitating a smooth transfer of the many Partners in Aid responsibilities that they have assumed over the past years.

ACFID



Complaints Policy

All complaints should be addressed to the Board Chair and will be treated seriously, acknowledged promptly and resolved within two months.

ACFID CODE OF CONDUCT

The ACFID Code of Conduct is a voluntary, self-regulatory sector code of good practice that aims to improve international development outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing transparency and accountability of signatory organisations. Partners in Aid is committed to the Code, of which we are a signatory and have been for many years.

If you feel Partners in Aid has breached the ACFID Code of conduct you can visit

<http://www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/complaints> to make a complaint directly to ACFID.

WHO IS ACFID?

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) unites Australia's non-government aid and international development organisations to strengthen their collective impact against poverty. Their vision is of a world where gross inequality within societies and between nations is reversed and extreme poverty is eradicated. Partners in Aid is proud to be associated with such an organization, the peak body for the not-for-profit aid and development sector in Australia.