



**Partners in Aid**

AUSTRALIA

# Annual General Meeting 2024

## Chair's report

### 1. Partners in Aid

Partners in Aid was established in 1962 to support very poor families in India and Bangladesh. In more than six decades of helping the less fortunate to live better lives – especially by supporting them to build their own capacity – we have evolved as an organisation but remain true to our roots. We have:

- A **vision** of building enduring, capable communities.
- A **mission** to support sustainable projects in developing countries by partnering with NGOs to enable communities to build their capacity in education, health, environmental sustainability and income generation.
- **Values** to be ethical, accountable, inclusive, respectful, empowering and caring.

And today, at our AGM, we propose a new object:

- a) To support sustainable projects in developing countries that enable communities to build their capacity in education, health, environmental sustainability and income generation.
- b) To form strategic partnerships with organisations in developing countries that share our values in order to advance our mission of sustainable development in education, health, environmental sustainability and income generation.

Our **short-term objective** in 2024 was unchanged from 2023: to assist community-based, socio-economic development projects in developing countries.

The projects we currently assist include watershed management, sustainable agriculture, environmental sanitation, poverty alleviation, health education and child education sponsorship.

This year, the Board adopted a new strategic plan for 2024–26. There are five strategic priorities:

- 1) Strengthen the organisation's governance to ensure industry standard and best practice in all areas of operation.

- 2) Ensure effective and efficient service delivery for current and future projects and partnerships.
- 3) Ensure personnel have an available skill set that match Partners in Aid's cultural, operational and governance requirements.
- 4) Ensure financial sustainability by developing a more diversified income base.
- 5) Maintain financial accountability with a growing supporter base.

We prioritise supporting projects which, through the provision of training, advocacy and/or financial and/or technical assistance, enable people to bring about sustainable changes in behaviour in their community. The emphasis is on helping to remove physical, economic, attitudinal or knowledge-based barriers to behavioural change in order to facilitate such change. Infrastructure is usually only funded as a means of removing barriers to particular behavioural change.

It has long been the view of the Partners in Aid Board that the most appropriate way of achieving the organisation's vision, mission and objectives is to operate at the grassroots level. For us, this means forming strong relationships with established, trusted partner organisations that operate locally. These organisations seek to help achieve sustainable improvements in the health and wellbeing of those communities.

## 2. Income and expenditure for the financial year 2023–2024 and overall financial position

In the 2023–24 fiscal year, Partners in Aid's income was \$151,831 which included \$145,256 in direct donations. Both figures are sizeable increases last year's \$127,005 and \$125,206 respectively.

As was reported in last year's Chair's report, the organisation is not in a position to consider new partnerships with overseas not-for-profit organisations or to fund new projects, with limited exceptions, until our income increases further. Preliminary discussions have begun on ways to improve our bottom line and it is hoped that a renewed focus on fundraising will eventuate in 2025.

## 3. Aid and development activities undertaken during 2023–2024

This fiscal year, we have continued supporting five projects:

- The Sinangpad Association's Sinangpad Healthy Village Project in the Philippines.
- The Social Education and Development Society's (SEDS) Sustainable Agriculture Project in India.
- Y Gro's Empowering War Widows and Women-Headed Families Economically Through Sustainable Dairy Farming Initiatives Project in Sri Lanka.
- The All Bengal Women's Union's Children's Home and After Care Home in India.
- The SEDS Child Education Sponsorship in India.

### Sinangpad Healthy Village Project

The Sinangpad Healthy Village Project was again coordinated by Dr Cecily Neil.

The overall goal of the project is to achieve sustained health improvements in remote Kalingan villages by enabling the residents themselves to identify and resolve the local environmental risks to health and wellbeing that they consider to be a priority. At the community level, training, community mobilisation, assistance with action planning and support to enable communities to remove barriers to behavioural change are all activities implemented by the Sinangpad Association with a view to bringing about sustained changes in behaviour that otherwise involves risks to health.

Cecily's annual report speaks to a reinvigorated project working hard to overcome challenges at the local level. A key objective – progress towards sustained community zero open defecation – will be a key element in the Sinangpad Association's plans for 2024–2025.

### Sustainable Agriculture Project

Michael Oates was the project coordinator in 2024.

The goals of the SEDS Sustainable Agriculture project are to:

- Facilitate a strong people's institution responsible for the development process of the rural poor with a specific focus on women leading towards the vision through promoting sustainable livelihoods, management of natural resources, community owned and managed health and education initiatives.
- Work towards a sustainable environment and to enhance and manage natural resources by preventing soil erosion and increasing soil fertility through local inputs, increasing water resources through more efficient catchment and promoting sustainable agriculture techniques.

Michael's report refers to a productive site visit in February where he reported the project is meeting its goals. He also observed the project is having a positive impact on the community, which speaks to part of our organisation's underlying ethos: to build communities' own capacity.

### Sustainable Dairy Farming Initiatives Project (Y Gro)

The project was partly coordinated this year by Teena Ingram and Dr Roger Hughes.

After we phased out involvement with Symbiosis Bangladeshi projects in March 2022, we supported a 12-month pilot project with a potential new partner organisation in Sri Lanka. This engagement was part of our desire to expand our operations and establish new partnerships with overseas not-for-profit organisations that share our values. This project was implemented in the northern city of Jaffna and was designed to help war widows and female-headed households with one or two dairy cows to achieve a sustainable income.

This was Partners in Aid's first venture into community development in Sri Lanka. Y Gro managed to achieve most of the intended activities in its initial proposal, despite the economic crisis that Sri Lanka was facing. Accordingly, we were this year able to enter a new three-year partnership with Y Gro team to continuing to support war widows with dairy farms in Jaffna.

Only a few months underway, Teena's report notes a formal update is still to be received from the project but is optimistic of continued success.

### The All Bengal Women's Union Homes

Dr Anne-Marie Maltby continued as project coordinator in 2024.

The All Bengal Women's Union provides broad ranging support for girls and women in a children's home and an after care home. These residents have been brought there by the court or other government or non-government agencies, generally from abusive or destitute backgrounds. While a project supporting these girls and women deviates somewhat from Partners in Aid's current main mission, the support has been provided for many years by a number of very committed donors. On that basis and notwithstanding the nature of the project, the Board decided to continue support.

In her report, Anne-Marie covers ABWU's long history supporting disenfranchised women and girls. She also notes that increasing support for the union from the local community can be regarded as a very positive outcome for our program.

### SEDS Child Education Sponsorship project

Lyn Pickering continued as the project coordinator for our long-running child sponsorship program in 2024.

The SEDS Child Education Sponsorship project had its genesis in the Sustainable Agriculture Project. During field visits carried out in the course of that project, it was realised that a significant number of farmers' children could not afford to attend school. Partners in Aid, through sponsors, covers the cost of two sets of school clothes each year, books, a school bag, shoes, school fees and the monthly activities at the SEDS campus where students participate in various activities. These can include cultural, sporting and health clinic days at which children are measured and weighed; occasional visits by doctors and dentists; and measuring for school uniforms. A set of new clothes is provided as part of an annual present from each child's sponsor.

## 4. Evaluation into the effectiveness of and the learning from aid and development activity

Partners in Aid aims to have our own volunteer Project Coordinators make site visits to the projects we support on a regular basis. In these visits, project monitoring and evaluation is undertaken as well as discussions on project directions. Additionally, we receive narrative and regular financial reports from all our Partner Organisations.

## 5. Personnel

### Board

Board stability remained a challenge for Partners in Aid again in 2024.

We have been fortunate to welcome three new Board members during this year: Sophia Gerakios, Philip Alesin and Silvia Hope. A third member, Penny Dally, joined for a short period before resigning for personal reasons. Our Secretary, Teena Ingram, also departed the organisation, again for personal reasons. At the end of this meeting, I will also conclude my time with Partners in Aid, having joined the organisation almost three years ago.

Recruitment for new Board members has been underway for several weeks and we are optimistic about returning to a full contingent of 11 members in the coming weeks.

### Project Co-ordinators

As an organisation staffed entirely by volunteers, we rely on the generous time of Project Coordinators who oversee individual projects. As noted earlier, Dr Anne-Marie Maltby and Michael Oates continued in their roles as coordinators in 2024. At their own expense, they also visited their

respective projects overseas, reinforcing our focus on governance and seeing firsthand how the work we do and the support our donors provide are making tangible impacts on the ground.

Dr Cecily Neil, who was also able to make a project visit at her own expense and Lyn Pickering continued in their longstanding roles as coordinators as well as Board members.

## Vale

We were saddened earlier in the year at the passing of Ian Pickering. In addition to being the husband of longstanding Board member Lyn Pickering, Ian was also a life member of Partners in Aid and a steadfast supporter for many years. While his contribution predates my time, I am aware that his work was a central part of Partners in Aid over a long period.

## 6. Compliance

As a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation, Partners in Aid is subject to rigorous compliance requirements, both in Victoria and at the national level. Compliance is an essential part of governing charitable organisations and it rightfully is the subject of much focus. It has been clear to me personally, however, that it takes a significant amount of our volunteers' time. It is a never-ending process, one that requires many hours every year.

### Financial statements prepared in accordance with the requirements of the ACFID Code

Audited financial statements in accordance with the Australian Council for International Development's (ACFID) Code of Conduct will be uploaded to the Partners in Aid website in the coming days.

### Commitment to full adherence to the ACFID Code of Conduct

Partners in Aid is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct, a voluntary self-regulatory sector code of good practice. As signatories, we are committed to fully adhering to the ACFID Code of Conduct, conducting our work with transparency, accountability and integrity.

### Commitment to full adherence to the ACFID Fundraising Charter

Partners in Aid is compliant with ACFID's Fundraising Charter.

### Identification of the ability to lodge a complaint against Partners in Aid

Complaints about the organisation or Board can be directed to the Chair. Details of how to do so are available on our website: <http://partnersinaid.org.au/contact-us/>.

### Identification of the ability to lodge a complaint for breach of the Code of Conduct

If anyone wishes to lodge a complaint for breach of the Code of Conduct, they are advised on our website that this can be done directly to ACFID.

### Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

As flagged in last year's Chair's report, we this began to again turn our attention to obtaining accreditation from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This is a long and arduous process but, if successful, would provide access to new funding opportunities, thereby increasing our reach.

## 7. Acknowledgements

I take the opportunity to extend my personal thanks to the members of the Board and to the Project Coordinators for their ongoing contributions. We are a very small organisation, but one with a multi-decade history of having meaningful impact in the lives of hundreds of poor or otherwise disenfranchised people. I am grateful to the directors and the coordinators for keeping things moving and for the generous donation of their time and expertise.

It would be remiss of me if I did not single out Cecily for her extraordinary contribution to Partners in Aid across almost every facet of the organisation which continued in 2024. The time and energy she expends and the knowledge and experience she brings to the organisation are invaluable. Cecily's outsized contribution has been integral in keeping Partners in Aid running and I sincerely thank her for everything she has done and continues to do.

The Board also extends its thanks to both Phillip McMillan and Andrea Pickering. Phillip kindly prints our half-yearly newsletter free of charge. Andrea has provided invaluable support to us this year – particularly to the Treasurer – in managing financial matters. In doing so, she saves the organisation considerable costs, allowing us to put donations to where they are needed most. Our thanks also to Bruno Lima and his team at Empire Technologies, the Sydney-based company that provides us with first-rate IT support.

Finally, the Board joins me in extending sincere thanks to donors and supporters, some of whom have been contributing to particular projects for many years. It is these donors who enable us to continue supporting such worthy projects. Partners in Aid, together with our partner organisations, could not be assisting the communities in which we are involved without your generous contributions. Thank you.

**DAN PAGODA**

**Chair**

**9 November 2024**