



Partners in Aid

AUSTRALIA

Annual General Meeting 2025

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 enhance the education, health and income-generating capacity of their local communities, and
- **values** that cover being ethical, accountable, inclusive, respectful, empowering and caring.

Our objectives are:

- to support sustainable projects in developing countries that enable communities to build their capacity in education, health, environmental sustainability and income generation, and
- 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 2025 was unchanged from 2024: 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.

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 behavioural changes.

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 2024–2025 and overall financial position

In the 2024–25 fiscal year, Partners in Aid's income was \$118,0808, of which \$38,694 was from direct donations. This income was a significant drop from the \$145,779 income raised in 2023-2024 – a drop possibly explained in part by the phasing out of the Bangladesh Project the previous year, which had had a number of committed donors. Project expenses also declined in FY25, \$113,887 being transferred to projects, compared to \$127,945 in FY 24. Admin expenses in terms of total value remained stable, but due to the decline in income, the ratio increased to 11.6% in FY25, compared to 9.2% in FY24.

However, FY 26 figures to date are currently showing some increase in both income and project expenditure. A key element in the PIA 2025-2026 Strategic Plan is to try and ensure financial sustainability by developing a more diversified income base. Preliminary discussions have begun on ways to improve our bottom line, and it is planned that there will be a renewed focus on fundraising in 2025-26.

3. Development activities undertaken during 2024–2025

This fiscal year, we have supported four development projects:

- The Sinangpad Association's Sinangpad Healthy Village Project (SHVP) 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.
- Backyard Gardening and Healthy Cooking for Improved Nutrition in Bila Settlement and Koroqaqa Village in Fiji.

The first two of these projects are long-standing projects. The Y Gro project is a more recent one, and the Fiji project is one initiated in the 2024-2-25 fiscal year.

In addition, we have continued to support two welfare initiatives:

- the All Bengal Women's Union's Children's Home and After Care Home in India, and
- the SEDS Child Education Sponsorship in India.

PIA's support for the All Bengal Women's Union's (ABWU) Children's Home and After Care Home in India is currently being phased out, as the home now receives more government and community assistance. The ABWU has been informed of PIA's decision to phase out support, but as some sponsors are still contributing to the support of girls in the home, it was decided that ongoing sponsorships should continue to be supported so long as the affected girls remain at the home and the sponsorships continue.

On the other hand, the SEDS Child Education Sponsorship initiative has been extended, with a number of donors that previously sponsored girls at the ABWU homes now sponsoring the education of SEDS children. This initiative has enabled many children to ultimately have a career that they might otherwise never have been able to achieve.

Sustainable Agriculture Project (Social Education and Development Society, India)

Michael Oates, assisted by Silvia Hope, is now the project coordinator for this project.

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.

In the report that Michael will give shortly, he refers to a recent productive site visit during which he found that 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.

Sinangpad Healthy Village Project (Sinangpad Association, Philippines)

The Sinangpad Healthy Village Project was again coordinated by Dr Cecily Neil, to be joined shortly by Dr Richard Buchta.

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.

The project has been implemented over the years in several phases, each with its own MOU based on a new proposal submitted by the Sinangpad Association. In the last phase of the project, implementation was beset by a number of challenges – COVID, local elections, tribal disputes, and natural disasters. The SHVP annual report highlights how hard the Sinangpad Association members have worked during 2024-2025 to overcome these challenges at the local level and fully implement the activities outlined in 2020-2025 proposal. In particular, significant progress has been made with respect to achieving zero open defecation – the initiative that villagers invariably chose as their top priority.

Sustainable Dairy Farming Initiatives Project (Y Gro, Sri Lanka)

The project was coordinated this year by Julie Kirk Sullivan.

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, in 2024 we entered into a new two-year partnership with Y Gro team to continue to support war widows with dairy farms in Jaffna with training, provision of equipment, and additional cows. The Y Gro team has also successfully advocated in support of the women on a number of issues with the two local companies buying their milk. A recent field visit highlighted the value that this project has had in helping women escaping from a continuous cycle of debt.

Backyard Gardening and Healthy Cooking for Improved Nutrition in Bila Settlement and Koroqaqa Village (FRIEND, Fiji)

Silvia Hope initiated this project and has undertaken to be its project coordinator

In this proposal FRIEND aims to bring back backyard gardening combining integrated, sustainable and organic agriculture, to tackle malnutrition, food security and financial poverty in two communities (Bila Settlement & Koroqaqa Village) in the Western Division of Fiji.

The project aims for all the households in the two communities to have actively maintained backyard gardens or food security gardens with a diversity of crops, and at least 50 different households consuming harvested produce in healthy meals. The gardens are using organic agriculture practices. Surplus produce is to be sold in local markets. At least 50% of the project beneficiaries will establish their own seed bank from their own garden and not need to purchase seeds from the market or overseas seed suppliers.

This project seeks to overcome the current trend in Fiji for the consumption of low nutritional value consumer products.

The All Bengal Women's Union Homes

Dr Anne-Marie Maltby continued as project coordinator for this initiative in 2024-2025

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. However, as indicated above, Partners in Aid has decided to phase out support for this initiative.

In her report to this AGM, Anne-Marie covers ABWU's long history supporting disenfranchised women and girls. She also notes that increasing support for the ABWU from the local community and the government 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 2024-25.

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. Accordingly, 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. Ensuring that the upcoming generation receives a sound education not only provides career opportunities that the sponsored children might otherwise never had, but adds to the sustainability of the outcomes of the Sustainable Agriculture Project.

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.

Our Secretary, Teena Ingram, left the organisation for personal reasons at the end of 2024, and the role of Secretary has been very ably taken over by Sophia Gerakios. Two other Board members left us – Fa. Philip Alesin, for health reasons, and Penny Daly due to pressure of work. We wish them all the best. At the end of this meeting, John Gougoulis will also conclude his time with Partners in Aid, having joined the organisation almost three years ago. During his time on the Board, John has made significant contributions to governance, especially the development of our Strategic Plan. He will be missed.

I will be stepping down as Chair at this AGM. I am delighted that Silvia Hope has agreed to be nominated for election as the new Chair. Silvia has worked closely with me during her 18 months with Partners in Aid. She has experience in a project coordinator capacity as well as multiple board responsibilities and brings a strong understanding of and passion for the organisation. I believe she will make an excellent Chair.

At the end of last year, we were joined by Dr Richard Buchta as a new director. Richard has a very impressive resume which includes experience as a health volunteer in Ethiopia. James Koulouris has been nominated to be elected as a director at this AGM. He too has a most impressive resume and has had experience on non-for-profit boards. We welcome both these new members to the Board.

We are currently endeavouring to ensure that we have the right set of skills on the Board, and we are optimistic about returning to a full contingent of 11 members in the coming months.

Project Co-ordinators

As an organisation staffed entirely by volunteers, we rely on the generous time of Project Coordinators who oversee individual projects. During the 2024-25 fiscal year, self-funded field visits to projects were made by Dr Anne-Marie Maltby, Michael Oates, Silvia Hope and Dr Cecily Neil. These

visits reinforced our focus on good governance and enabled PIA to see firsthand how the work we do and the support our donors provide are making tangible impacts on the ground. We are delighted that in their most recent visit to SEDS, Anne-Marie and Michael were joined by Lyn Pickering, who has been involved in the SEDS projects since their inception, as well as coordinating the Child Education Sponsorship initiative. Lyn has made many trips to SEDS in the past, but her travel has been restricted for some years by the long-term illness of her husband .

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 of our focus.

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 to which it is committed to adhere.

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 have again turned 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. As part of complying with DFAT requirements, a significant amount of work has taken place in improving our proposal, appraisals and monitoring and evaluation templates. It is anticipated that in addition to helping PIA qualify for DFAT accreditation, this will enable us to become even more professional with respect to our assessment of project design, implementation and evaluation.

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.

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.

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.

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Chair

November 2025