



Rebuilding women's lives in Sri Lanka... See page 5 for details

Women Rise to their Feet in the Solomon Islands!

Trudy Hairs, Overseas Program Manager – Solomon Islands

Nukufero is a remote Russell Island village in the Solomon Islands. A particularly isolated region, the Russells have no roads, few phones or radios, and transport only by outboard motorboats – a mode which is both costly and frequently hampered by high seas. The local Tikopian people of the Russells are characterised by strong “kastom” that very explicitly considers women inferior to men - so much so that **women are forced to walk on their knees when in the presence of men in and around the home.**

When IWDA's local project team visited Nukufero in mid-2005 to measure interest in a project within the community, they held a public meeting for men and women at which this “kastom” was observed by all women who spoke. Towards the end of the meeting however, one woman rose to her feet to share her views. She said that this was the first time she had ever stood in the company of men at a meeting. Unexpectedly, her courageous decision to stand was accepted by those present.

According to the Nukufero people, IWDA is the first NGO to work in their village. While previous NGOs have visited and held one-off workshops, none have established a local program. **IWDA is the first NGO to work with Nukufero women.**

Naelyn Arofo is one of 25 women in her village currently participating in IWDA's “Community Capacity and Sustainability Development Project”, funded by AusAID. Women's groups are the cornerstone of IWDA's work in the project, based on the potential for greater impact that a united voice offers in commanding the respect and recognition of community leaders: it is easier to be

heard and included in decision-making as a group than as an individual.

In late 2005, IWDA's project partner Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA conducted a literacy ‘training of trainers’ course in the capital, Honiara. Naelyn, a kindergarten teacher was one of 7 women nominated by IWDA's project team to participate in the course.

On returning home, she immediately set about establishing literacy classes at the local school and now runs 3 classes per week for around 50 adult women and men living in and around her village.

In a truly isolated village like Nukufero, **it is remarkable to see a woman seize an opportunity and, in so doing, secure such warm support from her community.**



IWDA Solomon Island Project Coordinator Anne Saenemua travels to Nukufero

PHOTO: TRUDY HAIRS

Letter from the Executive Director

I want to personally thank all our supporters who gave so generously to the tax appeal—we can now fund an innovative project to assist women in Fiji to stimulate a dialogue about the gender violence that is so prevalent in their communities!

This is a critical advance in a country where **66% of women report that they have been abused by their partner.**

Since the last newsletter, the Australian Government's White Paper "Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability" has been released. IWDA congratulates AusAID on positioning gender equality as one of three over-arching principles of the strategic framework. I have also been invited by AusAID to sit on the Expert Advisory Group that will provide advice and suggestions for the updated gender policy, which I'm looking forward to.

It has been a really busy few months, with IWDA hosting the exciting "Symposium on the Harmonisation of Gender Indicators" in Canberra in June. The idea for this symposium came from an IWDA forum on gender and development in 2004. It continues a sector-wide discussion on processes to measure the impact of development work on women's equality and empowerment. The symposium was highly successful, resulting in a number of practical recommendations and further progress on unifying this work across

the various players in the development sector (see page 3 for more info). This will include working with the Australian Council for International Development gender equity group to develop gender training in November this year.

I am also very excited to tell you that we have received funding to respond to the needs of vulnerable women in East Timor, who are suffering as a result of the recent violence and unrest. IWDA will support a local organisation, Bibi Bulak, in a project that uses theatre to address issues of trauma, healing and peace-building (see the article below for more details).

With continuing war and unrest throughout the world, our thoughts are with women who shoulder additional burdens in times of conflict.



Suzette Mitchell

3 ways to help IWDA fundraise

1. **Form** a local supporter group
2. **Sell** Karen Women's Organisation bags (\$15 each)
3. **Join** the External Relations Committee, which meets monthly (teleconference participation is welcome)

IWDA Responds to Conflict in East Timor

Kate Speechley,
Communications Volunteer



Women hold the promise of new growth in East Timor

"Each morning, large groups of women and children walk past my house carrying bed mats or small plastic bags of clothes, either heading home from a safer bed or towards a church compound for food after another night of fear."

— UN advisor and Dili resident Robert Johnson

For the 150,000 Timorese citizens uprooted by the recent unrest and violence in camps across Dili, the future seems uncertain. The widespread destruction, violence and looting of 1999 are once again a reality. With the highest fertility rate in the world many of the victims of this political stalemate are women and children.

IWDA is working in collaboration with renowned Timorese theatre troupe Bibi Bulak to address issues of trauma experienced by the Timorese citizens, and identify community empowerment strategies. Using theatre as a communication tool, Bibi Bulak will produce a theatrical piece for Timorese audiences which highlights the challenges faced by the country's women, and their vital contributions to community life.

In their role as primary carers of children, the elderly and the general community, women have a critical part to play in social healing. The Bibi Bulak theatre piece will showcase the ways in which women are marginalised, explore peaceful solutions to the current conflict, and encourage women to have a voice in the peace-making process.

IWDA thanks ANZ for funding this important initiative.

About International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)

IWDA is an Australian non-profit organisation that supports positive change for women. Our practical and rights-based projects directly address poverty and inequality in developing countries.

Our projects focus on five key areas of well being: economic empowerment, freedom from violence, participation in

decision-making, reproductive health, and environmental management.

We work in the Asia-Pacific region, in direct partnership with women who work and live in the communities themselves.

When women benefit, the entire community benefits

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The Harmonisation Of Gender Indicators

An IWDA Symposium held in Canberra, 15th –16th June

Jenny Davidson, External Relations Manager

*It's girls in schools,
It's labour too,
It's being able to plan the kids
And owning all our land,
Aspiring to be PM
And having roads and water,
So that life in the future will be
Better for our daughters.*

– Excerpt from song written by participants at the symposium

On June 15th and 16th, IWDA hosted a symposium to discuss **methods of measuring achievement of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 – To promote gender equality and empower women**; and ways of standardising 'gender indicators' across sectors and nations. The symposium brought together representatives from the Australian government, non-profit development organisations, private consulting firms, academics and gender specialists, both Australian and international.

The symposium was skillfully facilitated by **Dr Geeta Rao Gupta**, Coordinator of the Taskforce Report on Gender Indicators for the United Nations Millennium Report, and President of the International Center for Research on Women in Washington. Her work provided a basis for the discussion, defining strategic priorities in measuring

the impacts of development work by gender. The dialogue was dynamic, diverse and productive. Preliminary outcomes, available on IWDA's website, identify the **need for gender indicators that are practical, non-harmful and ideally, mandatory.**

Many thanks to the sponsors of this event: Asian Development Bank, AusAID, Australian National University, Caritas Australia, Hassall & Associates International, Oxfam Australia, WomenSpeak and World Vision, and to all the event supporters.

Look out for follow-up articles in a special edition of the *Development Studies Bulletin*, available from October.

PHOTO: JENNY DAVIDSON



Left to right: Salil Sheety, Campaign Director for the Millennium Development Goals, UN; Annmaree O'Keefe, Deputy Director General AusAID; Tricia Peters, IWDA; Suzette Mitchell, IWDA; Geeta Rao Gupta, Coordinator United Nations Millennium Project Taskforce Report on Gender Equality; and Coleen Clare, IWDA, at the symposium.

Indicators for tracking progress on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment:

Education

- * Ratio of female to male enrolment and completion rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- * Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- * Proportion of contraceptive demand satisfied.
- * Adolescent fertility rate.

Infrastructure

- * Hours per day women and men spend fetching water and collecting fuel.

Property Rights

- * Land ownership by male, female, or jointly held.
- * Housing title by male, female, or jointly held.

Employment

- * Share of women in employment, and gender gaps in earnings in both waged and self-employed.

Participation in National Parliaments and Local Government Bodies

- * Percentage of seats held by women in national parliament.

Violence against women

- * Prevalence of domestic violence.

Sub-populations of women to focus on:

- * Poor women in the poorest countries
- * Adolescents
- * Women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings

SOURCE: UN MILLENNIUM PROJECT TASKFORCE ON GENDER EQUALITY

At Ferny Grove, Silence is Golden!

Cath Rutten, Communications Coordinator

Students from Ferny Grove High School, in Brisbane, recently held an enormously successful "Silent-A-Thon" to raise funds for the Karen Young Women's Leadership School.



As part of their International Women's Day celebrations, the Culture Club of the LOTE (Languages Other than English) Department raised over \$1,200 for young Karen women on the Thai/Burma border. The response from students was huge, and the Department now plans to hold a "Silent-A-Thon" each year. More than sixty students were sponsored to stay silent for up to eight hours. They wore stickers to show their participation, which inspired more students to express their interest for next year!

Says student Bethany Martin: "Considering I never stop talking, this was a huge challenge for me... This was a fantastic cause and I'm glad that not only did we raise money to help, we also raised awareness. Thank you for letting me take part in such an amazing project."

Thank you, too, to all of the students who participated and to the Head of the LOTE Department, Fiona Hudghton who organised the event. The money raised will help to fund a **Leadership Training Program** for young Karen women.

For information on holding a "Silent-A-Thon", please contact IWDA. Your silence for a day can help women have a voice in their community.

herstory

Dr Shireen Lateef

Asian Development Bank

Interviewed by Coleen Clare, IWDA Vice President



PHOTO: SUZETTE MITCHELL

Dr Shireen Lateef and IWDA Vice President Coleen Clare

“Action is required to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment,” says Dr Shireen Lateef of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). “I compare gender and development to environment. Everybody is engaged in the environment and they lobby vigorously on environmental issues. This is what we need, to become more engaged and actively lobby to improve women’s health, provide education, create jobs, provide livelihood opportunities and protect them from violence. We need to make gender and development publicly visible as an issue.”

Primarily responsible for preparing the ADB’s Policy on Gender and Development adopted in 1998, Shireen considers her work at the bank as important to promote improvements in women’s lives across the Asia and Pacific regions. “My achievement has been to facilitate placing gender and development on ADBs agenda”, she explains.

Born in Fiji, Shireen left Suva at 17 to attend university in Australia, which culminated in a PhD. in Anthropology from Monash University. Her research focused on gender issues, particularly those affecting Indo-Fijian women in Suva, and provided her with opportunities to influence local women and their views on gender issues and feminism. “Some of the young women who were subjects of my research are today leaders on gender issues in the Pacific.”

Before joining ADB in 1992, Shireen worked as a lecturer at both Victoria College and The University of Melbourne. She was actively involved with the Women and Development Network of Australia (WADNA) and was the Treasurer of IWDA in its early years.

Shireen’s message for Australian women? **“Talk to government representatives and make them accountable. Lobby for the inclusion of gender equality issues in Australia’s development agenda.”**

Gender, Conflict, Peace and Security

Anna Stone – Overseas Program Manager, Fiji

From 15-17 June 2006, Nadi, Fiji was the backdrop for the **Regional Workshop on Gender, Conflict, Peace and Security**. The workshop, convened by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, was designed to provide participants with a greater understanding of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the role of women in conflict, peace building and security in the Pacific region.

The workshop brought together 71 delegates from women’s NGOs, military and law enforcement bodies, and Departments of Foreign Affairs in all 16 member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, including Australia and New Zealand.

In addition to increasing understanding of Resolution 1325, the workshop explored ways of putting the resolution into action. Participants shared gender issues related to conflict and peace and the challenges they face, both regional and national.

Importantly, the workshop also strengthened partnerships between national NGOs and security personnel.

A major achievement of the workshop was developing 25 recommendations that have since been agreed to by member countries (see www.iwda.org.au). The recommendations present an opportunity for organisations such as IWDA to support both Pacific women in civil society organisations and key policy makers in Pacific island countries as they work towards the full implementation of Resolution 1325.

The workshop was held with the support of AusAID, UNDP, UNIFEM, Fem’LINK Pacific and IWDA. **Funds for IWDA’s contribution were made possible by our recent “Water” film night fundraiser.**



Peacekeepers

PHOTO: MELISSA BRUCE

Resolution 1325

In October 2000, the first **United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security** was passed unanimously. The resolution set a new threshold of action for the Security Council, the UN system and all governments.

Resolution 1325 is a political framework that positions women – and a gender perspective – as fundamental to negotiating peace agreements, planning refugee camps and peace keeping operations, and reconstructing war-torn societies.

It places the pursuit of gender equality within every single council action, including mine clearance, elections and security sector reform.

For the full text of 1325, visit www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html

Sepalika and her work

PHOTO: JOSE MOTT

Creating Opportunities, Improving Lives

Jose Mott, Overseas Program Manager – Sri Lanka

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Walking through the green undulating hills to a village called Weligepola, two of Kantha Shakthi's community mobilisers, Sirima and Malini, pointed out different activities being carried out by women as a result of their membership in Kantha Shakthi savings groups. Rooves were being built and small vegetable gardens being cultivated, thanks to loans the women had received.

As IWDA's Overseas Program Manager for Sri Lanka, I was able to experience first-hand the energy and commitment of the twelve community mobilisers employed by IWDA's partner organisation, Kantha Shakthi, during my monitoring trip to Sri Lanka in May. These mobilisers work to reduce hardship for poor, rural women, and bring about positive change in their lives.

IWDA has supported Kantha Shakthi to **empower women in the South Central Highlands of Sri Lanka since 2004. As of May 2006, 558 women have been mobilised** into 109 small groups, which provide opportunities for the economic, social and political empowerment of women who have long been relegated to traditional roles in society.

Membership of these groups provides women with **easier access to credit, skills development, education, capacity-building and labour-sharing.**

Furthermore, it makes them aware of opportunities to participate in women's rights activities – such as peace-building and women's leadership – at community

and national levels. Kantha Shakthi groups also explored strategies for dealing with domestic violence, a widespread problem which has been identified by the women as a critical issue.

We arrive at our destination, a humble house in the village, where this week's meeting of Sirima and Malini's savings group "Nagenatharu" ('Shining Star') is taking place. There are six women members present. Sepalika, aged 27, is sitting in the centre of the room. She and her mother are members of the group and this is their house. Sepalika has a chronic disability and is unable to walk. She has never been able to attend school because it is too far away, the road is poor, and her parents cannot carry her.

Rather than despair at her situation, Sepalika decided to learn carpentry from her father. The results are beautiful handicrafts and intricate engravings.

Support and solidarity are strong among these women. **Every Wednesday, Sepalika's colleagues take her handicrafts into town to sell at the women's market,** which was

initiated by Kantha Shakthi to provide women with market access for their products.

When asked about the benefits of participating in this group, the responses from the women were immediate. They cited access to loans to cover shortfalls in times of scarcity, loans to start passionfruit cultivation, and loans to cover the cost of medicine and education for their children. They also spoke of the benefits of educating themselves, and of their increasing self-reliance. 'Younger women in the group learn things from the older women,' explained one member, 'and no one has to ask for money from the outside any more.'

Women in the Kantha Shakthi groups also talk about **the increased respect shown to them by their husbands and other male relatives once they become economically active.** Many women note that this has resulted in some men taking on greater responsibility for household and childcare duties.

Life is hard for the women of the South Central Highlands. They bear the brunt of rural poverty, gruelling workloads and discrimination. But with the support of Kantha Shakthi and its 109 groups, women throughout the region are dramatically improving their situations and creating better, brighter futures.

Could we be looking at a "future without poverty"?

Trudy Hairs,
Overseas Program Manager – Viet Nam

45-year-old Dang Thi Thu lives in the Tho Binh commune in the mountainous Chiem Hoa District of Northern Viet Nam. Sowing rice and raising animals are commonplace activities; the opportunity to become involved in the Viet Nam Women's Union project is not. Introduced to the newly established Women Business Group in 2002, Mrs Thu could quickly see the benefits of joining.

Previously, banks in the district had been hesitant to loan credit to individuals, preferring applications via the Farmers Union with a credit limit of 10 million dong (AUD\$850 equivalent). Through her involvement in the Women's Business Group, Mrs Thu learned the skills required to develop a business plan and budget. Her plan was deemed profitable and sufficiently innovative to warrant a 20 million dong loan (\$1,700 equivalent) and,



Mrs Thu and her "future without poverty"!

with support from her husband, Mrs Thu set about establishing her new business, a shop selling construction material.

Her husband, Mr Le Thy Canh, admits that he knows little about financial features of the business, noting "my wife knows how to record our finances better than me, so she manages that side".

The shop is keeping Mrs Thu constantly busy and provides an extra \$85 a month, offering secure cashflow to offset the uncertainties of farm-based business.

The couple's daughter arrives and Mr Canh proudly announces that she is on her way to Hanoi the next day to sit the difficult university entrance exams. If she

passes, the couple will do all they can to cover her university fees – something unimaginable just three years ago.

Clearly, this is more than just an entrance exam. The 5-hour drive on winding roads to reach the hustle and bustle of Hanoi leads to a world of opportunity that is as daunting as it is exciting. However, whatever the outcome of the university exams, a bright future awaits this family. In this beautiful village, surrounded by dramatic mountains and piercingly bright rice fields, Mrs Thu and Mr Canh employ a powerful combination of determination and experimentation with a non-farm based business, built upon a cooperative partnership.

PHOTO: TRUDY HAIRS

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Yes! I want to support women in their work to create a positive future...

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I would like to support Empower – the monthly pledge – and give ongoing support

I will give:
 \$25 \$35 \$50 \$ per month

I would like my monthly donations to be via **Direct Debit** (an authorisation form will be sent to you)

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