



indigo foundation

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Project updates, Aid discussions, Pakistan Earthquake relief and more

IF project update

Sarah Kelly - IF Co-ordinator

Rote, Indonesia

The community organisation, Lua Lemba, which Indigo supports on the island of Rote in Indonesia, is currently preparing the budget for the next tranche of IF funding. The money will be used to buy computers, furniture and stationery for computer and language classes, to support health awareness projects in local schools at all levels and to build on the M'bore irrigation project by providing 100 young citrus trees for planting. Money for an additional water pump will be provided by IF to M'bore after IF representative, Alberto Vela, gave a positive report on local irrigation activities.



community pump being used at Mbore lake. photo: Alberto Vela

Lua Lemba is also considering what "in kind" support can be provided by the local community to help support a native speaking English teacher to teach in Delha. The related Besialu Co-operative continues to run a profitable bakery and handicraft stall at the weekly market, catering largely to the small tourist and yachting population.

Project Manager Libby House will be visiting the organisation in June both in order to evaluate these recent activities, and to assist in community consultations and priority setting exercises to determine the direction of future Indigo support. A field trip and learning exchange to a perma-culture project in central Rote with members of M'bore community is planned, as are training exercises in monitoring and evaluation techniques with a view to ongoing community evaluation of Lua Lemba projects.

AvuAvu, Solomon Islands

A new semester is well underway at the Turusuala Community Based Training Centre in AvuAvu, Solomon Islands and it would appear that both students and staff remain enthusiastic and highly motivated. The focus of the courses is on developing practical skills which young people will use back in their villages after graduation. The Centre is in the regional area of Guadalcanal which is very difficult to get to (a day's walk over the mountains, or 3 hours in a little boat with an outboard motor). It is an area in desperate need of vocational support for youth. IF's support of \$3000 this year is being used to pay staff salaries and buy equipment, materials and tools for the vocational classes.

To improve communication flow between IF and Turusuala we have recently negotiated an agreement with a Honiara based liaison officer, Doni Keli, who will support the Project Manager by following up on negotiations on agreements and assisting with logistical arrangements for IF visitors.



piggery at training centre & potato patch. photo: Sue Cunningham

Borjegai, Afghanistan

The remote village of Borjegai in central Afghanistan has weathered the bitter snow and winds of Winter and celebrated Afghan New Year on 21 March. The school year is about to start again now that roads and mountain passes are accessible, and qualified teachers from the regional cities can come and stay. The first girls high school in the village (built partly with IF funds) will open its doors. We look forward to telling our members more once further reports from the school, required under our commitment agreements, arrive (via Pakistan) and are translated for us into English.

Lots of talk about Aid

Zoe Mander-Jones, IF management committee

In some corners and corridors of government, there is currently a lot of talk about aid. This is mainly due to the fact that the Government will release a new White Paper on Australia's Overseas Aid Program in April. *The Core Group Recommendations Report for a White Paper on Australia's aid program*, released in December 2005, makes a series of recommendations on where the aid program should be heading (and gives a bit of a preview of what may be in the final White Paper). The Opposition has also been thinking about the aid program and in February 2006 it released *Our Generation's Challenge: ending extreme poverty in our region and world*; Labor's policy discussion paper on Australia's development assistance.

The talk is quieter in the minor parties, but the Greens and Democrats also have policies on Australia's overseas aid. Perhaps more interestingly, the talk is growing louder outside of government, at the community level and on an international scale, as a grassroots campaign calls on governments around the world to eradicate poverty: that is to *Make Poverty History* in our generation.

Given that part of Indigo Foundation's core mission is to quietly advocate for a more realistic and responsible approach to development, we thought it is timely to draw our members' attention to these developments and highlight some of the key areas for debate.

Firstly, let's have a brief look at the key elements of the various discussions on aid.

Where might Australia's aid program be heading?

The Core Group's Recommendations Report starts with and supports the current objective of the aid program that is: *'to advance Australia's national interest by assisting developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development.'* The report suggests that the aid program should give greater emphasis to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs: a set of 8 goals that aim to halve global poverty by 2015). However, rather than using the MDGs as an operational framework, the Report recommends organising the aid program around four major themes: economic growth, functioning and effective states, investing in people and promoting regional stability.

The report is set in the context of a proposed increase in the aid budget (an average of an extra \$300 million a year for the next five years) in line with the Prime Minister's goal to double Australia's aid to \$4 billion a year by 2010. The focus of the report is on how to effectively scale up the aid program and increase the impact of Australia's aid.

The report supports the aid program's continued focus on the Asia-Pacific region. Some new directions in the report relate to strategies to enhance the effectiveness of aid including strengthening the evaluation functions within AusAID. It recommends the immediate and complete

untying of Australia's aid program to ensure value for money ('tied aid' refers to when only organisations from Australia and New Zealand can tender for aid projects and procurement). It recommends that greater resources should be allocated to what it calls 'investing in people' that is health, education and gender equality. Interestingly, it recommends expansion of migration from the Pacific, particularly to allow both skilled and unskilled migration from the Melanesian countries, citing how significant migration and remittances to countries like Tonga have been in that country's development.

What is the Opposition saying?

The Labor policy discussion paper recommends that the aid program be organised around the achievement of the MDGs — eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, empowering women and improving health. It wants the objective of the aid program to be *"helping developing countries to reduce poverty"*. It also recommends an immediate end to the practice of tied aid and calls on the government to increase the aid budget to 0.5% of GNP.

The Paper calls on more support to be directed through non-government organizations and calls on greater resources going to Africa. Like the Government report it recommends an increase in funding for development research and an increased focus on evaluation.

What are the minor parties saying?

The Greens and the Democrats both advocate for an increase in the aid budget to the United Nations targeted level of 0.7% of GNP. The Greens call for aid to be redirected to the poorest countries; a focus on meeting basic needs and programs that are environmentally sustainable and culturally sensitive. They also advocate for smaller-scale, grassroots programs. The Democrats advocate for the adoption of the MDGs.

What is it with all those white armbands?

"Make Poverty History" is a grass roots campaign that calls on governments to increase aid budgets and implement the MDGs in efforts to eradicate 30,000 child deaths a day due to extreme poverty. The symbol of this international campaign is a White Band worn around the wrist, which has on it the words MAKE POVERTY HISTORY. The central message is that extreme poverty can be eradicated in this generation — that it is possible. The movement calls for debt cancellation and trade justice; and wants aid budgets to increase to 0.5% by 2010 and to keep rising to reach the UN target of 0.7%. The Labor party's paper cited the campaign. In Australia, over 50 organisations (including a number of NGOs) are involved in the campaign.

What do we make of all this?

A clear area of contention surrounds what **the objective** of Australia's aid program should be. The current objective, cited above, often draws criticism from the aid community and also from some developing countries for including the aim of advancing Australia's 'national interest'; it seems to suggest that the aid program is driven by a national self-interest agenda as opposed to a purely poverty reduction one. Others argue that national interest and poverty reduction are not at odds, as reducing poverty advances security and hence our national interest. Still others view the 'national interest' bit as pragmatically aimed at a political and domestic audience that may question why 'so much' taxpayers' money is going overseas.

How Australia's aid program should be organised is also being questioned. Many NGOs would like to see the **Millennium Development Goals** as the central framework for the aid program. 191 countries, including Australia, have committed themselves to achieving the MDGs. There can also be differences of opinion in regards to where Australia's aid program should be directed – its **geographic focus**. Currently, the aid program is strongly focussed on our area i.e. the Asia-Pacific region. This is widely accepted in the donor community as it recognises a division of labour amongst donors – that is we should be assisting countries close to us while others focus on other regions. While there *is* mass poverty within our region (think Indonesia, Philippines) there is also the Pacific, which suffers more from poverty of opportunity than extreme deprivation of basic needs. If you support the argument of focussing Australia's aid program on the poorest countries in the world, that probably means a much greater proportion of aid going to countries in Africa and South Asia than to our Pacific neighbours.

The centrality (or not) of **economic growth** to development is an area of much debate. While economic growth is widely acknowledged as an important part of development it often fails dismally to deliver benefits to the poorest and most vulnerable. The belief in the 'trickle-down' effect of economic growth (whereby poverty reduction is an outcome of economic growth via increased average incomes) is not sustained by the weight of current research. Experience shows that economic growth will only benefit the poorest and most disadvantaged in a community when there is a relatively equal distribution of income and assets. This is not the case in most developing countries. Arguably then, economic growth needs to be supplemented by pro-poor expenditure on health, education and social safety nets.

Resources are a critical issue. Worldwide there is growing pressure for donor countries like Australia to increase their aid budgets in a global effort to achieve the MDGs. It has been strongly argued that poverty will not be eradicated without an immediate and major increase in international

aid. The average country effort of OECD nations is 0.41% of GNP. Australia is currently providing 0.26% of GNP (although taking into account the Australian Government's \$1 billion in aid and soft loans to Indonesia, this is estimated to rise to about 0.28% of this year's GNP). This is still a long way off the target of 0.7%, and tiny compared to the amount spent on defence.

At the same time there are yet others who would question the importance (or not) of aid to a country's development anyway. They argue that **other policies** such as trade policies (both of developed and developing countries) are far more significant to a country's progress than aid. Aid should be seen as only part of the development equation (i.e. aid can never be solely responsible for progress towards poverty reduction and/or the achievement of the MDGs). **Trade, immigration and developing countries' own policies** and institutions also have a strong role to play.

Who delivers the aid is also an interesting area of debate (especially for organisations like IF). There are a number of possible delivery mechanisms: Australian NGOs; private (Australian) consulting companies (which have tended to dominate bilateral aid delivery); developing countries' own NGOs; UN agencies; regional organisations. In recent years, we are seeing a number of 'new players' in the form of Commonwealth Departments (like Treasury and Finance) being directly involved in aid programs in developing countries by using current public servants as technical advisers.

Want to know more?

If you'd like to read more about the reports and policies above, you can find them at:

Core Group Report: <http://www.ausaid.gov.au>

Policy Discussion Paper: <http://www.bobsercombe.com>

Greens: <http://greens.org.au/policies/>

Democrats: <http://www.democrats.org.au/policies/>

Make Poverty History: <http://www.makepovertyhistory.com.au/home.html>

We'd be interested to know what you think. **Any letters on this subject would be welcomed and can be sent to indigofoundation@bigpond.com.**

2006 Development Praxis Award

IF is pleased to announce that the 2006 Development Praxis Award has gone to Beth Rushton. Beth is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. She is researching the enabling conditions for strong public participation in the management of the health sector in Cambodia. Genuine public participation is obviously a topic of central importance to IF work. Here is Beth's first contribution on the topic, sent from Cambodia where she is undertaking field work.

Designing & Evaluating Participation

Policies & Programs

Beth Rushton, University of Sydney.

Participation policies and programs are becoming ever more popular, introduced by both governments and development agencies around the world. Although there is a fairly widespread belief in the development world that participation is a "good thing", it is important that these programs aren't applauded without examining what's really going on within them. Participation processes can be easily corrupted by traditional power-holders within communities and by both the development agencies and governments who introduce them. A less sinister reason for low levels of participation is that some structures introduced to increase community involvement in decision-making are poorly designed. Whether you want to establish a new participatory policy/program or evaluate an existing one, it is important to think carefully and critically about participation.

Participation is about shifting power from those in traditional decision-making roles to the community (or parts of it). The extent to which power shifts from the development organisation or government to the community is the most important measure of the level of participation. There are a range of different criteria and questions that can be asked to determine the extent that power shifts, in order to help design or evaluate participatory processes. The ones that I find most useful are:

- is the participatory process actually *operating* at all (compare what's happening on paper with what occurs in real life),
- how *representative* are the participants of the group that is to be included in the decision-making process (have traditionally excluded groups been included as well: elderly/young people, women, the very poor),
- how *influential* are the members of the community within the decision-making process (e.g. who sets the agenda for what's to be discussed, who holds sway over the decisions that the group makes, are the decisions that the group makes implemented by the authorities), and
- how much *debate* and discussion is there of key issues by the participants (i.e. is it active or passive participation?)

Participation is an important principle and should be included in all development programs and in all stages of project management, from design right through to implementation and evaluation. Participation improves programs, making them more responsive to the needs of the broader community, not just local elites. Unfortunately it's not enough to say "the public was/will be included in the decision-making". We must think critically about power and participation in order to effectively design and evaluate participatory policies and programs.

Ask Before You Give

Susan Engel, IF management committee

In October 2005, the *New Internationalist* magazine published a special issue on big international non-governmental organisations. It was a critical examination of what NGOs do with their donor's money. As part of the issue they produce a checklist designed to help readers decide which NGOs they may wish to support. Indigo Foundation met virtually all of the criteria or issues they covered. So if you're asked by others 'why support IF?', here is an excerpt from their checklist that indicates precisely why IF is worth supporting:

Principles — consider:

- Searching out small rather than big organisations
- Making modest contributions regularly
- Donating not just hard cash but time, energy, skills.

Fundraising

- Does the NGO use exploitative or degrading images, especially of children?
- Is child sponsorship — which benefits only some individuals within a community — a key source of income?
- Do fundraising techniques add to knowledge and understanding?

Partnership

- Does the organisation have local partners in the places where it works?
- Is there a policy of local management, staffing and sourcing?
- What influence do partners have in the NGO?

Recipients

- How much information about the organisation, its finances, etc do beneficiaries receive?
- How are recipients able to make their views known?
- Are such views acted upon by the organisation?

Other Issues

- Does the organisation broadly support the movement for global justice?
- Where does real power within the organisation lie — with major donors or with a democratically elected board or committee?

The Pakistan Earthquake response: notes from the rubble

Pat Duggan, IF management committee

Last year, I spent two months working in the rubble of Muzaffarabad, the capital of Kashmir province in northern Pakistan, following the 8 October earthquake. I was in charge of the local Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations (UN) agency charged with building coherence in humanitarian response¹.

The scale of the devastation caused by the earthquake is difficult to get your head around: 73,000 people killed, 70,000 injured and an estimated 2.8 million made homeless. The degree of difficulty presented to responders by the sheer scale of the disaster, the climate and the topography cannot be understated. Affected communities were scattered across 30,000 square miles of the Himalayan foothills. A significant number of those in need were living in villages above 5,000 ft, and often as high as 14,000ft, with no road access. A large number of those with road access were initially cut off by landslides, eventually repaired by the Pakistan military's engineers. As well, the earthquake struck just weeks before the onset of the winter, leaving millions facing its accompanying sub-zero temperatures with no shelter or food.

Muzaffarabad, a city of 90,000, lies at the confluence of the Neelum and Jhelum rivers straddling a dramatically beautiful valley. Its proximity to the earthquake's epicentre showed: one BBC journalist described post-earthquake Muzaffarabad as looking like it had been "smashed by a cosmic fist". Street after street of collapsed houses and public buildings, piles and piles of rubble.... and growing numbers of tents dotting the landscape, pitched in household compounds, on roadside verges, or squeezed together in clusters on sports grounds, government office compounds, schools, mosque compounds and sandy river banks.

What to do with all that rubble? Where do you start reconstructing a city, or rural communities that have lost so much? Is it possible for a community to recover from such sudden and widespread human and physical loss? Big questions, but we had much more immediate preoccupations. We had to ensure those most affected by the earthquake survived the approaching winter.

When I arrived in Muzaffarabad in late October, three weeks into the relief operation, three main priorities for the response had just been agreed by the Government and the international community:

- Getting emergency shelter, food supplies, clothing/blankets to affected communities in altitudes over 5,000 ft - in sufficient quantities for them to survive the winter.
- Stabilizing the health situation of tens of thousands of people in urban spontaneous camps which had sprung up in the wake of the disaster. The sanitation situation in the camps was extremely dangerous and the risk of serious epidemics high.
- Reaching those in the valleys who had remained in their homes, who had taken in relatives and others from higher villages.

Analysing the response:

Achievements and constraints

When I left Muzaffarabad, in late December, I was amazed and gratified by how much had been achieved in such a short period of time, thanks to the professionalism and commitment of agency personnel on the ground. After several weeks delay, sanitation services and hygiene education geared up, stabilising the health situation in the displaced peoples' camps. Assistance to households in need in the valleys gained momentum. These achievements were all the more impressive given key constraints facing the operation:

* ***Delays in deployments of international aid.*** The delay in gearing up was directly related to preparedness. The international community was seriously "caught out" by such a large scale crisis, following so closely on the heels of the last unprecedented disaster, the Asian tsunami. Agencies were still replenishing their emergency preparedness arrangements – staff rosters, supplies, planning tools - when the earthquake occurred; agency staffing in the field took time to stabilize.

* ***Significant under funding of the relief operation by donor agencies.*** This put UN teams on the ground under enormous pressure. Hopefully the recent significant boosting to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund – a revolving fund for up front disbursements to UN agencies in need - will overcome this recurrent and longstanding problem most agencies face when an emergency hits and a response must gear up quickly.

* ***Reduced presence of implementing partners.*** The funding shortfalls and the limits of NGO capacity after the tsunami meant that a number of the UN's traditional NGO partners who deliver relief goods and services were under represented or not present at all in Muzaffarabad. The burden of implementation - distribution of supplies in particular - fell much more than anticipated on the already over stretched local authorities.

In Muzaffarabad, we sensed that we might just be winning the race to provide relief to all those at risk before the winter cut off survivors. But this wasn't a signal to relax. There was still an immense job ahead which included:

- The most pressing priority was the need to "winterize" shelter. The many summer tents distributed in the absence of winter tents needed reinforcement if they were to be any use to communities over winter. Guidelines for winterizing tents were agreed, supplies were mobilized and a distribution was mounted. The military and international community together covered the ground with their resources, and this exercise continued well into January.
- Distributions of food and non-food items – blankets, clothing - would need to continue into January.
- Verification exercises were needed. This meant NGOs and others would revisit areas of concern to identify any gaps in distributions, and ensure the most vulnerable – who were not necessarily given priority by community leaders during distributions - were taken care of.
- Discussion began on how agencies would monitor vulnerability over winter in the most at risk areas. Plans for managing any displacement from the mountains to valleys - a contingency which could not be entirely ruled out - were being drawn up.

Opportunities missed

Against the achievements, some opportunities were missed. Briefly, I'll mention two that were critical. Shortfalls in staffing and funding were a significant contributing factor in each case.² Firstly, there was ***insufficient attention to 'needs assessment'***. A systematic picture of needs and vulnerability should emerge in those first 2-3 weeks of a response. OCHA would usually coordinate an overall assessment of needs and continue with follow on exercises as the situation evolved. This would be a key step to informing the overall response strategy which follows. This did not happen. Much assessment work was done by sector groups, and by NGOs in particular, but a baseline "map" of vulnerability, against which coverage could be plotted, was not completed. Some NGOs developed their own monitoring tools from the results of their assessments in their area/s of operations. The lack of baseline data was a constant challenge to planning, addressed to some extent by information about population and needs provided by local authorities and the Pakistan military. An earlier coordinated assessment exercise around which consensus on priorities is built was missing, and that added to the degree of difficulty once implementation started in earnest.

A second key area for which earlier and greater attention was needed was ***restoring livelihoods***. Peoples' sources of income, and assets, were decimated by the earthquake. Crops were lost; businesses in the earthquake zone were destroyed; those with employment before, were unemployed afterwards; shops were made marginal even if their business did not suffer physical damage, because their customers lost their purchasing capacity. In some disasters, employment generating projects have been established very early in the response – rubbish clearance, building workers for schools, etc. These were not initiated on a large scale in Pakistan's earthquake affected areas. Some NGOs were commencing pilot programs for cash payments to vulnerable people – mainly women – when I was leaving. Hopefully cash options can become a more standard option on the disaster response menu for communities who need quick, flexible options for recovery, from the day after the event³.

Capacity building

A point on ***national capacity building***, in the down time between responses. The level of cooperation and commitment received by the international agencies from the Pakistan military in Kashmir, particularly in shelter, was excellent. The Pakistan military will no doubt continue to play a major role in national emergency response. The international community might explore capacity building opportunities for personnel, in areas of humanitarian response. For example, military officers running distributions might benefit from training in community-focused assessment and distribution methodologies, including gender awareness. (This orientation for the international community in Pakistan new to humanitarian response should also have occurred early in the response). Equally, the professionalism and effectiveness of the PakMil's operation suggests they have much to teach others: this should be considered in the context of mobilizing national forces for UN peacekeeping missions, for instance.

² What follows are personal comments based on the Muzaffarabad experience, not any real assessment: the result of OCHA's "real time" evaluation, being discussed in Islamabad will provide a more conclusive assessment.

³ An informative assessment of the damage to livelihoods in Pakistan, and recommendations for rebuilding, was completed by Save The Children UK in November. You can view at www.savethechildren.org.uk – click on emergencies.

Beyond humanitarian response: Transition to Recovery

In mid March, the UN in Islamabad signaled a phasing out of relief deliveries from the end of March, and the beginning of the “recovery” phase, with the end of winter. A strategy for the return of people who left their homes for low altitudes was nearing completion in mid March, as is an action plan for recovery of communities. The UN pointed out that our worst fears of a “second wave” of morbidity, mortality and displacement from the mountains over winter were not realised. The humanitarian response was certainly important in this result, helped by a mild winter. We cannot forget, of course, that communities themselves have enormous resilience. Like their counterparts in other countries, their remoteness and their experience of government services tells them they cannot rely on relief assistance arriving. They have a history of survival in extreme conditions. Although a great deal of progress has been made in the past 15-20 years, we external actors still need to be more attentive to developing assistance which is appropriate to the needs and capacities of communities. Hopefully some reflective work will be carried out in Pakistan to better understand how people survived, to better inform future responses.⁴

Communities will face different, perhaps harder, challenges in the months – nay years - ahead: economic, physical, social and psychological. This is a subject needing its own article. Briefly, let me flag some key challenges I see:

- ***Continued geographic instability for farmers:*** with the winter thaw, the prospect of more serious landslides is very real at least into the monsoon. Those in at risk areas will face the threat of further land instability
- ***Restoring normalcy by restoring assets:*** With the beginning of spring, people will need to return to agricultural activities, to rebuild houses, to restore assets. This will require more community-focused programs for kick-starting agriculture, rebuilding housing and restoring community assets – schools, health clinics, water systems, sanitation. This needs to accelerate quickly, so that people can gain a renewed sense of hope, but underneath this, the psychological trauma of loss will have changed people’s priorities. It is a lot to ask: how can hope be renewed?
- ***Accelerating employment.*** Those without sufficient land will need work. Employment generation will need escalation. Compensation packages are being provided by the Government, but not at a level sufficient to house those made homeless.
- ***A substantial effort to improve women’s situation:*** women whose vulnerability has been exacerbated since the earthquake need particular attention. Their story of survival needs to be told: they need much more visibility than they received in the early weeks of response. A sustained effort will be required to ensure their economic status is better, not worse, than it was before October 2005.

In November last year, a reconstruction conference in Islamabad pledged around \$6b in funding for recovery and reconstruction of earthquake affected areas – no small sum indeed. Those who pledged need to make good, and quickly. The worst thing that could now happen would be that there is a delay between the end of relief programs and the disbursement of recovery resources to communities. Survivors have shown enormous resilience over the winter, but a marginal existence made more marginal cannot go on forever.