

the first thing we offer is respect



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indigo news & knowledge



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COVER IMAGE: In late February, primary and high school students from Haku Community, Bougainville participated in an essay competition designed to boost literacy levels. Students entering the competition submitted a short written essay about themselves and what they hoped for their future, along with a brief summary of a book they read from the Hako Women's Collective's community library. The award ceremony was a tremendous success with prizes, dancing, singing and a lunch for everyone

from us to you

We're undoubtedly passing through challenging times in Australia and around the world as many lives are upended by the pandemic. From all of us at indigo foundation, we hope that you and your loved ones are safe and well and are finding some peace and stability in the midst of so much change.

In this edition, we feature articles on Afghanistan, Bougainville and India, including the impact COVID-19 is having and how our partners are responding. We also have article on how indigo foundation has approached and adapted to COVID-19. In sharing this piece we want to be transparent about how we are showing solidarity with our partners and what is guiding our decisions. Finally, to help us reflect on these times, Ann Porcino has written a piece exploring the discomfort and possibilities arising from the disruptions we are dealing with and asking us 'how will we go forward' in this decade.

This month we celebrate World Refugee Day - a moment to acknowledge the difficult journeys people take to find safety and a moment to honour the contribution that asylum-seekers and refugees make in their countries of origin, in Australia and in our own organisation. Our Afghan and South Sudan partnerships are driven by former refugees and leaders in their communities. These projects continue to thrive thanks to Santino Yuot in South Sudan and Ali Reza Yunespour in the case of Afghanistan. As an organisation and as individuals, we have benefitted enormously through the connections and friendships with Santino, Ali, Salman and their communities.

Finally, we are excited to share that indigo foundation is now an interim member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). ACFID is the peak body for Australian international development NGOs. We expect to become full members at the upcoming ACFID AGM. The application process involved an extensive audit of our operations, policies and development approach against the ACFID Code of Conduct. We look forward to joining a powerful network of like-minded organisations committed to social justice and good international development practice.

Jemma and Lyla

power of women in Bougainville

HAKO Women's Collective



ELIZABETH, JUDITH, JANE AND BRIDGETTE AT A JOINT INDIGO-HAKO MEETING IN MARCH IN BOUGAINVILLE

This July will mark the end of our first year partnering with the HAKO Women's Collective, a thriving collective of women working in the Haku constituency at the northernmost point of Buka island, Bougainville. As we approach this milestone, we reflect on new friendships and learning, and resolve to continue building our partnership together. The partnership in this first year has focused on providing core support for HAKO by funding staffing and operating costs for their Resource Centre, library and Safe House.

HAKO serves a large and dispersed community which is dependent on subsistence agriculture and is still experiencing the effects of a brutal secessionist conflict during the 90s and early 2000s. In a community with high levels of family and sexual violence, the HAKO safe house, the *Meri Seif Haus*, is a sanctuary for women and children seeking refuge, counselling and justice. Through the HAKO Resource Centre and library, HAKO also provides opportunities for learning and the development of healthy and peaceful families.

Our Development Coordinator Christina visited HAKO just before the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and observed:

As I reflect on my visit, what remains with me is the responsiveness of HAKO to community needs and how it has adapted its programs over the years as the community has developed. There is a strong sense of community-ownership in HAKO's programs. Students coming home from school drop into the library to borrow books; the rice mill serves as a hub for farmers to exchange ideas for better yields while waiting for their harvested rice to be processed; and a stock of agricultural tools are rented out for a nominal fee to assist in tending house gardens. The open-air Resource Centre is a cool and shady space for meetings and community consultations (and a chance to charge phones if the generator is running), and the canteen and catering teams ensure meeting participants are well fed with local supplies of delicious fish, veggies and fruit.

In response to COVID-19, Bougainville followed a PNG-declared state of emergency, closing borders and putting in place a lockdown. During this period, HAKO instituted social distancing measures and continued to run essential

programs. The Safe House, Resource Centre and Library have remained open but with fewer staff and limited operations to comply with social distancing practices. HAKO have also undertaken outreach work in surrounding communities focused on COVID-19 awareness activities including sanitation and hand-washing.

As of June, restrictions are beginning to ease. Meetings of up to 50 people are now allowed which means HAKO can once again hire out its meeting hall – a valuable source of income. These funds are ploughed back into vital HAKO services as they strive for self-sufficiency.

The women of HAKO recently served their community as Accredited Domestic Observers during the independence referendum, in which 98% voted for Bougainville to become independent from PNG. Anna, a member of the HAKO program team, explains “On that day, I felt significant, proud to be a Bougainville woman. We feared violence but experienced only peace.” With an election planned for the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) towards the end of 2020, the women of HAKO will be advocating on behalf their community on issues such as good governance, gender equality and inclusion of people living with a disability.

As our in-country liaison, Marilyn Havini, writes, “We are in for interesting times ... critical for Bougainville, and the chance to set the future of our people.”

We look forward to deepening our engagement with the formidable collective of women that make up HAKO, particularly through supporting the resourcing of the Safe House, as well as contributing to their efforts to become self-sustaining.

increasing demand for HAKO's Safe House

Family violence is a longstanding issue in Bougainville, exacerbated by post-war trauma and social issues, and related drug and alcohol use. HAKO's Safe House and Family Referral Service provides a sanctuary for women and children escaping family violence – giving emergency shelter, counselling and referral to law and justice and health services. Over the past 12 months, we have supported core staffing and operating costs to keep the Safe House open seven days a week. With an average of 3 – 5 clients a week, the Safe House provides a vital service – the only one of its kind in the remote area.

BELOW: MARINA WITH HER DAUGHTER OUTSIDE HAKO'S RESOURCE CENTRE AND LIBRARY.



MEET MARIANA librarian at HAKO's Resource Centre

“I have worked in the library for five years. I joined HAKO because I really wanted to be a librarian, talking with the students, looking after the books, making some programs with the schools. I have always liked reading books ever since I was a small child. My daughter ... is also growing up in the library with the books and I'm happy about that. My favourite part of the work is with the students and helping them find books they will love or writing essays for their school-work. I have finished a library studies course, I really loved it and learnt so many new skills. I learnt how to be confident and manage the visitors to the library. I love welcoming everyone to the library. I am just waiting for my certificate.

HAKO have managed to keep the Safe House open during the pandemic – and it has been needed more than ever. Enforced lockdowns over the past two months to stop the spread of COVID-19 have led to increases in family violence and an increase in the number of clients seeking protection and counselling at the Safe House.

These services are currently run from one small office that transforms into a bedroom in the evening. Given the demand for services, HAKO has secured funding from other donors to begin the construction of a stand-alone dedicated safe house, one which will have a separate counselling space and two bedrooms each with a small balcony, as well as ablutions and cooking facilities.

As the construction nears completion, in the coming year we want to support HAKO's core staffing and operating costs so the expanded Safe House can open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our plan is to provide this support for up to three years, to allow time for HAKO's income-generating activities to gain momentum and eventually to be used to resource the Safe House and its vital services.



ABOVE: THE HAKO LIBRARY IS A HUB FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

club rafiki and COVID-19

IN KIGALI IN RWANDA, CLUB RAFIKI MOBILISED QUICKLY IN THE FACE OF COVID-19. THEY SHIFTED PROGRAMS, INCLUDING THEIR SEXUAL HEALTH CLINIC AND DANCE CLASSES, ONLINE, STARTED DISTRIBUTING FACE MASKS AND RAMPED UP THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHARE PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGES. THEY ALSO REACHED OUT TO THE MOST VULNERABLE WOMEN IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND EMPLOYED YOUNG PEOPLE TO DELIVER ESSENTIAL FOOD PARCELS, SOAP AND PADS. AS OF JUNE, THE CENTRE HAS REOPENED, WITH CAREFUL SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES IN PLACE.

CLUB RAFIKI
Strengthening our future

STAY HOME . SAVE LIVES
Help to stop coronavirus

- ✓ **STAY HOME** as much as you can
- ✓ **KEEP** a safe distance
- ✓ **WASH** hands often
- ✓ **COVER** cough
- ✓ **SICK?** Call ahead **114**

#StayAtHome
#GumaMuRugo

covid-19 and access to education in afghanistan

Afghanistan



GRADE 11 STUDENTS OF L [REDACTED] HIGH SCHOOL IN JIRGHAI USING THEIR NEW DESKS AND CHAIRS IN THEIR CLASSROOM. IN 2019 WE WORKED WITH OUR PARTNERS ACROSS A NETWORK OF SEVEN SCHOOLS AND 2,200 STUDENTS, INCLUDING BUILDING THREE NEW SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND ENSURING STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO DESKS AND CHAIRS, CLEAN WATER AND SEPARATE FEMALE TOILETS.

By Ali Reza Yunespour, Partnership Coordinator

spread of COVID-19

The first positive case of COVID-19 was reported in Herat Province of Afghanistan in late February 2020 due to forced and voluntary return of thousands of Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan. In the month of March alone, around 150,000 Afghan refugees returned from Iran and Pakistan to different provinces in Afghanistan. As of 10 June, the virus has taken the lives of 405 people and the total number of confirmed cases has reached over 22,000 people. Like the rest of the world, most confirmed cases and deaths have been reported in the major city centres such as Kabul, Herat, Kandahar and Balkh. Higher population mobility and density in places like Kabul City, better access to health facilities, and higher rates of COVID-19 testing are the main reasons for the disparity of confirmed cases between the urban and rural areas.

In the past three weeks, the virus has been spreading rapidly across the country. In every 24 hours, nearly half of those tested have been confirmed as confirmed cases of COVID-19 (over 500 cases out of around 1000 tests every day). From the initial doubts and spread of rumours about the origins and nature of the virus, the public perceptions in Afghanistan have changed about the virus and its deadly nature. The Ministry of Public Health has now acknowledged that testing has been limited, and the official statistics of confirmed cases and deaths do not show the true spread of the virus amongst the public.

To date, no confirmed case of the virus has been reported in our partner communities of Borjegai, Jirghai and Behsud. Sadly, however, several Borjegai, Jirghai and Behsud individuals have been amongst the confirmed cases of COVID-19 and deaths in Kabul in the past two weeks.

impacts on education

The Afghan Government introduced lockdown, banned large gatherings and encouraged social distancing in mid-March 2020. With the newly pledged foreign aid, the Ministry of Public Health set up testing centres and several new hospitals for COVID-19 patients. During the Muslim month of Fasting (late April-late May), the Afghan Government distributed free bread to families who were at risk of hunger. At the same time, community solidarity was higher and many individuals and organisations inside and outside Afghanistan provided financial and health assistance to those in need. Nevertheless, measures such as social distancing and staying at home have not been widely practiced in Afghanistan because of the initial doubts about the virus; communal lifestyles; and overcrowded families, streets and neighbourhoods.

As the COVID-19 outbreak coincided with the Afghan New Year and the start of academic year, schools and higher education institutions remained closed after the long winter holidays (December-March). The Afghan Government ordered schools and higher education institutions to offer online or distance education however this effort has faced serious challenges with enduring consequences for education access and equity:

- **Ongoing conflict:** Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan have meant nearly 5 million children have remained out of schools or dropped out of school. During the spread of COVID-19, the Taliban, Islamic States (IS) and other insurgent groups maintained their attacks on innocent civilians and the Afghan government security forces in the first half of 2020. Despite signing of a 'peace' agreement with the US in late February 2020, the Taliban has been reluctant to accept a permanent ceasefire and start direct negotiation with the Afghan government. The political uncertainty in Kabul, caused by the disputed presidential election result, also contributed to the ongoing violence and halted the Government's capacity to respond more effectively to COVID-19. In recent weeks, the election disputes have been resolved in Kabul, and the Trump

Administration has increased its diplomatic and political pressures on the Afghan Government and the Taliban to start the 'intra-Afghan' negotiations. Despite these efforts, incidents of violence have been reported on a daily basis in Afghanistan. As such, the prospects of access to education for the five million out-of-school children remain unknown for the foreseeable future.

- **Access to electricity, stable internet and learning equipment:** For the enrolled students (around 7 million) in primary and secondary schools, the majority have not had access to regular electricity, stable internet and learning equipment at home to benefit from limited distance education provided by some of the private schools and local radio and television channels. According to a 2018 study, "roughly 70% of the population has no access to electricity, and 90% of those without electricity live in rural areas. The vast majority of its power is imported from neighbouring countries and is often subject to outages". During the last month, there were at least three major attacks on electricity networks in Kabul and other provinces, which resulted in ongoing electricity blackouts across the country. Electricity outages make it effectively impossible for students to access stable internet and benefit from the limited distance education. At the same time, the widespread poverty in urban and rural areas (more than half of the population are under the poverty line) makes it difficult for families to support their children and provide learning equipment like computers or smart phones at home.
- **Low capacity:** The education system and current textbooks in Afghanistan are highly teacher-centred and encourage rote memorisation schools. Apart from students who may have attended privately provided computer and English language classes, most teachers and students do not have basic literacy to use modern technology for distance education. Despite the Ministry of Education's efforts to introduce distance education during the pandemic, low levels of tech literacy amongst teachers and students and lack of training in distance education

pedagogy have further hindered student learning. At the same time, many parents and families struggled to get their children to follow the limited education provided by the state-funded 'Education TV' and private TV channels.



Access to education has been severely impacted in Afghanistan during the pandemic and perhaps the worst is still ahead of the Afghan people and students because of the rapid spread of the virus in the past few weeks. As research has shown, most families prefer to support their boys in a male-dominated culture during challenging times such as ongoing conflicts, droughts and disease outbreaks. Due to the shocking health and economic impacts of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, I already hear reports that some families may not be able to send their children, especially their girls, to schools and support them in higher education institutions in the immediate future, even in major city centres such as Kabul City.

our work in 2020

We are working closely with our partner, the Jirghai and Behsud Shura, to monitor the health and socio-political situation in the Borjegai, Jirghai and Behsud communities. Like the rest of the country, our partner schools have been closed since March and will remain closed for another three months following the Afghan Government's extended lockdown measures. We fear that the majority of Borjegai, Jirghai and Beshud students are likely to lose a whole academic year due to halted access to the limited distance education.

Taking a flexible and responsive approach will be key for us in the coming 12 months as the pandemic unfolds. The Shura is determined to continue with plans to enhance education infrastructure across six schools – they will provide a new school building for a primary school and furniture and library for another five schools.

It is not an easy time for the people of Afghanistan and our partner schools. With the support of our community in Australia alongside the Planet Wheeler Foundation, we will trust our partners' resilience and capacity during this challenging time.

now is the time for radical change

At this critical moment, indigo foundation stands in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their long struggle for recognition, justice and an end to systemic racism.

Our hearts go out to African Americans who are mourning George Floyd's death at the hands of police and the many thousands of people protesting the racism, violence and oppression that impacts the lives of people of colour every day in the United States.

The powerful Black Lives Matter campaign has reignited cries for justice in Australia. It remains shocking that across this land we have had at least 435 confirmed deaths in custody since the Royal Commission into black deaths in custody handed down its report in 1991. No convictions have ever been made for these deaths or other assaults at the hands of authorities. And incarceration rates are increasing at shocking rates, not reducing. We need to re-register this truth and take a stand against institutional and community racism.

indigo foundation has long held a commitment to justice, reconciliation and recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. In February, our board formalised this commitment, including support for the reforms called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart (<https://ulurustatement.org/>). We are inspired by the powerful Makarrata campaign and are now in a process of looking at how we can be better allies to support First Nation peoples in their struggle for treaty, voice and truth. We know this requires us to learn the facts, be better listeners to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates and leaders and find practical ways to support Indigenous led organisations and communities in their fight for justice.

Radical change is being demanded and is urgently needed. This moment presents an opportunity for organisations like ours to think seriously on what we can contribute individually and organisationally to build hope and support the momentum for change.

standing in solidarity with local partners during COVID-19

Over recent months, we have worked closely with each of our community partners to understand how COVID-19 is impacting their operations and their communities and to consider how best to support our partners to manage the health and economic fallout.

In each of the countries where our partners operate, governments have imposed a range of restrictions on movement that have impacted work, travel, social, cultural and religious practices. Our partners and their communities are feeling the impact of the pandemic. Women with insecure incomes dependent on daily cash in unregulated industries lost livelihoods overnight. A lack of permanent housing and poor access to clean water and toilets has made social distancing and sanitation difficult. Migrant workers returning to their villages has placed greater strain on families without any means of support. In all of this, women and girls are likely to experience greater impact as they take on caring for those who are unwell and risk their own exposure. We are deeply concerned about the possibility of an increase in violence against women as a result of restriction of movement for individual households.

In the face of this, our partners are showing resilience and determination in spades – finding innovative ways to run programs online, adopting social distancing measures, educating about sanitation and hygiene and ensuring the most vulnerable women and children have access to soap, sanitary pads and food at the height of the crisis. And all the while keeping their focus on their long-term development goals.

indigo foundation stands in solidarity with all our local partners during this challenging time. We have developed the following principles to guide decision-making during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- We recognise that the pandemic is disrupting our partner's operations and

priorities and we support our partners to determine the changes that they need to make at this time on the understanding that these decisions are based on sound knowledge of local context and community needs.

- We are open to working with partners who want to implement new activities in response to livelihood and health impacts of COVID. Activities must align with our guiding principles and, where possible, build community resilience, have a longer-term development lens and facilitate a resumption of programs when the context allows.
- We know that women and girls are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and we will prioritise supporting partner initiatives that promote women's participation and leadership, improve safety and protection and ensure better health, social and economic outcomes for women and girls.
- Whilst recognising our fundraising capacity may be challenged in the next 6 – 12 months, we will continue to meet our obligations. We will be flexible in the application of partner funding, whilst maintaining good stewardship of the resources entrusted to us by our supporters.
- We will be guided by indigo foundation's principles of community ownership, sustainability, transparency and equity in decision-making throughout this period.

We have developed further guidelines to help us ensure that we are consistent and transparent as we support partners to navigate the health and livelihood impacts of COVID-19. As part of this we are committed to supporting our partners to undertake mapping of other organisations

and programs providing emergency relief. We understand that neither we nor our partners are emergency relief organisations and that where possible it is more appropriate to connect our partners with other organisations with greater skill and capacity.

Some promising signs are emerging as lockdowns are eased. In Rwanda, Club Rafiki has been able to reopen their doors and their sexual and reproductive health clinic is receiving an influx of young people seeking HIV testing and counselling. In Eastern Indonesia, women from PEKKA NTT have resumed working in the cooperative food gardens in time to plant corn, harrow, peanuts and mung beans. And in Uganda, we have just transferred funding to ensure children and young people impacted by HIV will have access to school supplies and sanitary pads when school resumes.

Trusting in and embracing flexibility by our partners has been a logical extension of our development approach – grounded on respectful relationships, community led development and being willing to ride the highs and lows of the community development process over time. And we are learning about the strong capabilities our partners have when responding to and adapting their activities during a crisis of these proportions. Together we will emerge from this pandemic stronger.



THE WOMEN-RUN FOOD GARDENS OF PEKKA NTT ON ADONARA AND LEMBATA ISLANDS IN INDONESIA HAVE BEEN INVALUABLE DURING THE LOCKDOWN, WITH LAST YEAR'S PLANTINGS CONTINUING TO PRODUCE FOOD FOR WOMEN HEADS-OF-HOUSEHOLD AT A TIME WHEN WORK IS SCARCE AND MARKETS ARE CLOSED. WITH RESTRICTIONS NOW EASING, WOMEN ARE RETURNING TO THE GARDENS IN TIME TO PLANT CORN, HARROW, PEANUTS AND MUNG BEANS BEFORE THE RAINY SEASON STARTS IN DECEMBER.

update: teacher training and women-led food gardens in South Sudan

In February, 110 teachers drawn from three provinces in South Sudan graduated from a one-month intensive teacher training course at the Aweil Teachers' Training Institute. This training course was jointly supported over the past three years by indigo foundation, our partners the Wedweil Community Development Foundation and the South Sudan Ministry of Education.

We are pleased with the training outcomes, especially in light of ongoing political instability and heightened food shortages in South Sudan. A key question we are grappling with is how to best measure impact as a small organisation working in an extremely complicated and remote environment. We also continue to focus on how to increase participation of female teachers in the course, including funding to accommodation and travel home for female teachers. In this year's cohort, 7% of the graduates were female. This is slightly down on 8% last year but significantly higher than the first year of training.

On his most recent field visit, our Partnership Coordinator Santino Yuot observed a deterioration in food security due to widespread flooding late in the 2019 growing season which pushed back planting. Two years ago, in the face of chronic food shortages, we started working with a group of women in Wedweil who were keen to establish a cooperative food garden and last year, the garden was established. Unfortunately the first year's harvest was disappointing due to the poor growing season across the region however the women did harvest enough seeds to plant in the upcoming season. This year, our partners supported training for another collective of women to establish a food garden and we hope we can find a way to continue to support this important work to improve food security.

We are coming to the end of our current three-year partnership agreement with the Wedweil Community Development Foundation. The outcomes of the past three years are a testament to the hard work of Santino and our partners and we will be working together in coming months to review the partnership and develop the shape of any future agreement. As always, we keep our eye on the political context in South Sudan. There has been little progress with implementing the national-level peace agreement. A political breakthrough came in February with PM Salva Kiir and his long-time rival, Riek Machar, agreeing to the terms of a new government. Much is yet to be resolved between the two opposing forces and we will continue to monitor the political situation.

With thanks to supporters who came along to our 2019 Canberra and Sydney dinners and pledged funding to support the teacher training program, as well as the Rotary Club of Ryde for their ongoing support.

rising to the challenge in Tamil Nadu

India

By Dr Susan Engel, Partnership Coordinator for India

In December 2019, I was fortunate to undertake my first ever monitoring and evaluation visit for indigo foundation after 18 years of volunteering on the Board and its Research Committee.

In Tamil Nadu we work with three partners: Mahalir Sakthi, the Program for Education and Awareness Building (PEAB) and Social Awareness for Society and Youth (SASY). Our partners support Dalit, Adivasi and other marginalised communities in the slums of Madurai and in a network of rural villages near Madhurantakam, 90 km south of Chennai. While each partner has a different focus, the goal is to break the cycle of poverty through education, addressing discrimination and defending human rights.

My visit started at PEAB, facilitated by our Liaison Officers, Semmalar Selvi and Jabaraj Selveraj. PEAB works in rural villages with around 5000 households. Compared with communities nearby, the Dalit villages are remote, have worse roads, poor quality of housing and very limited

services. Most women and children have some level of malnourishment and many have anaemia and skin and eye problems. Sanitation is poor and only around a quarter of the population have toilets. Alcoholism and domestic violence are commonplace. In the midst of this, our partners at PEAB have worked long-term to improve the wellbeing and chances of Dalit children and youth through a network of after-school Village Education Centres.

I visited five of the Centres and met with tutors and students. While most classes are conducted undercover, the conditions at all centres are basic with poor lighting and exposure to the elements and insects. Two groups meet on the veranda of tutor's houses and Ms Dewi's class was a highlight. Despite the limited space, the students were enthusiastic and confident, singing songs and reading poems, reflecting Ms Dewi's own enthusiasm.

During my visit, I met all of the VEC tutors to hear their views and experiences. They reported some impressive exam results from their students

VISITING MAHALIR SAKTHI'S THRIVING CENTRE IN THE SLUMS OF MADURAI



and reflected on how much they have learnt from the experience and how their confidence has grown. The tutors also discussed what is needed to better address student needs. They identified white boards, pens, rugs for the floor and a place to keep their materials between classes. They are concerned that tutoring currently stops at the 10th Standard and would like to have more specialist tutors to extend tutoring to the 12th Standard. Some tutors were interested in finding a volunteer English language tutor. We will continue to work with PEAB to explore how these gaps can be accommodated.

Next stop was Mahalir Sakthi in Madurai. I travelled by taxi and foot through a winding alleyway to their small, unassuming but bustling community centre. Inside, there is a meeting space, a small kitchen, a toilet and another small room for the tailoring classes. Upstairs, the roof has been covered to provide additional space for activities in the cooler months.

I received a wonderfully warm reception. The centre is a hub of activity – during the day it is used as an informal safe meeting space for women, as a training venue for tailoring, typing and other skills, and as a site for health clinics and other training sessions. In the evening, the children arrive for tutoring, meetings and cultural activities.

As this was my first visit as Partnership Coordinator, I was mainly listening to and learning from the stories and experiences of staff, volunteers and the women and children that are a part of Mahalir Sakthi's community. There is strong ownership by the community and the centre is a safe and encouraging space for women and children of all ages and cultures to come together. I was particularly struck by the younger women who participated in tutoring, dance, language and other programs as students, and who are now tutors and emerging leaders.

Grace, the centre manager, and Guna, the Founder and Chair, remain the heart and soul of the organisation. Guna plays a leading role in governance and management and Grace takes care of the day-to-day management of Mahalir Sakthi – she has great organising skills, is a fierce advocate and is well-regarded in the community. She intervenes in households to protect women and supports Women to advocate for themselves

to employers and the government.

I asked staff if there was one other thing Mahalir Sakthi could do what would it be. Their priority was further training in human rights and in sexual health and sexual abuse awareness. Domestic violence is a huge problem in the community and for many women who attend the centre. Mahalir Sakthi are evolving their work in response to participant and community needs and indigo foundation's will continue to support this.

I was deeply impressed by both partnerships and by the network of community activists that I was privileged to meet.

indigo foundation thanks Navitas Education Trust for their generous support for education and training activities in Tamil Nadu.

mobilising during the pandemic

The Indian government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has responded to COVID-19 with one of the harshest lockdowns in the world. The majority of the people our partners work with are 'day labourers', dependent on leaving their house for daily cash-in-hand work and do not have savings. Our partners have reported that many people are unable to work and therefore unable to buy food and essentials.

As a result of government restrictions, both Mahalir Sakthi and PEAB were forced to suspend face-to-face activities. Despite this, our partners have continued to mobilise. Mahalir Sakthi, working with a coalition of local NGOs, has set up community hand washing stations, promoted safe hygiene practices and distributed staple food and soap to the most vulnerable people in the community, in particular widows, children and migrants. Likewise, PEAB activated local networks to support vulnerable students and families attending the after-school tuition centres, bringing in bulk food supplies and hygiene essentials from Chennai. Mahalir Sakthi also took the opportunity to do some painting and repairs at the centre.

Our partners have shown incredible resilience and courage in the face of the pandemic. They are hoping to resume face to face programs this month.

a new decade – what will we make of it?

By Ann Porcino

This decade has started with a scream. So much has changed. There is no going back, but how will we go forward? What will we make of this historic moment? Will this be the great turning towards people and planet the world needs?

I am coming to see that we can't change the world and be comfortable at the same time. Can we bear to sit in discomfort?

Discomfort in not knowing what to do, of losing control and having to listen, learn and feel our way.

Discomfort for looking honestly at how we have lived and, for some of us to fully notice how we are advantaged by the oppressive world order; letting ourselves know.

Discomfort in realising that though it mightn't have been our fault, we all have work to do to change the oppressive programming we have received – programming that was planted in our heads and our hearts from the day we were born to make us feel better (or worse) than other people.

Discomfort in having to look straight into the face of what is happening in the world - the injustices, inequality and desecration of the earth. Seeing it, talking about it. Deciding you matter in making change. Not giving up.

Discomfort in knowing that something big is called for here – that small, incremental changes are not going to cut it, even though we wish they would.

Discomfort in deciding to act and keep acting, even though nothing seems to make any difference. You cannot know the impact you are having after one action or even after a dozen. Not when what you are working to change are the very systems that hold the existing world order in place.

Ironically this discomfort may produce something more joyful than we could

ever otherwise experience. Can we allow ourselves to find joy?

Joy in discovering a strength in ourselves that is bigger than despair, silence, fear and complacency; a discovery that propels us to reach out for others, take one step and then another.

Joy in being involved in a movement for change - a movement towards the best we can be, a movement that is unstoppable, that withstands the losses and celebrates the wins, that stretches over time and place, and connects a mass of people in calling for something better.

Joy in discovery and learning, unpicking how we got into this place and what we need to do to get out of it.

Joy in building new relationships and deep connections with people who have always been the 'other'; backing them to lead and being the best ally we can.

Joy in remembering again what you care most deeply about, and bringing these values, people and ways of being to the centre of your life.

Joy in learning how little we really need and what we can give up, to make room for others and space and time for ourselves.

Joy in being part of bending the arc of the moral universe towards justice.

This morning I had a conversation about the start of this new decade . . . one person spoke of looting, burning, death, despair, violence, corruption; another of rising up, solidarity, community, transforming, neighbours, love, openings. Both are right. History is wildly unpredictable. Things we never expected to happen did.

And in this first tumultuous six months of the new decade we have seen things spring up that we have long fought for – liveable benefits, housing for the homeless, people held and invited to show their love and compassion.

Will we sustain it? There is already a pull to go back to making the economy the only driver; to a way of being in which we all wittingly or unwittingly serve a society that is lining the pockets of a few in the mistaken notion, the lie, that this is good for us all.

But we know better now. We know what can be achieved when people come before profits. When governments seek the views of experts. When we work together – across political parties, unions, civil society, business and the public. When we gather to say 'no more' and hold up a vision of something better.

What this period has shown is that it is possible for us to transform and that there is an opening. Can we wedge it in so that we progress as

people, communities and a nation with global justice, equality and care for our planet at the core?

What will we make of this new decade? That depends on what each of us decides to do, individually and collectively through our communities, organisations and institutions and whether we maintain our rage and vision or give up. The choice is ours.

Ann Porcino is a change maker, skilled in strategy and organisational development. Ann helped us craft our Strategy 2017-2022 and in February, facilitated a workshop with staff, board and volunteers on 'leading with vision and courage in challenging times'.

indigo news

This year we celebrate our 20th anniversary. We want to take this opportunity to honour our community partners and to thank our volunteers and supporters in Australia who have built, supported and believed in indigo foundation. We had a number of events planned for March to mark this milestone, including a visit by the Founder and Director of Mahalir Sakthi Guna Vincent and gala dinners in Sydney and Canberra. COVID-19 restrictions forced us to cancel these events. We are now planning events in the second half of the year to mark this milestone and we are in the final stages of producing a book of stories reflecting on 20 years of community partnerships. Watch this space!

We are excited to introduce two new members of our Indonesia partnership team. **Jacqui Fidler** is our Partnership Coordinator working with PEKKA NTT and the Nefo Ko'u Farmers' Cooperative. Jacqui is currently Regional Manager Programs with CatholicCare NT and has previously worked as a trauma psychologist and in mental health, particularly with asylum-seekers. **Peggy Dano** is our Partnership Support Officer. Peggy is Indonesian and recently moved to Australia to study a Masters. Welcome Jacqui and Peggy.

Many thanks go to **Emily Jackson**, who stepped down as Indonesia Partnership Coordinator. Over almost past three years, Emily worked tirelessly, with respect and care, to build and nurture two relatively new partnerships in Indonesia. Big thanks Emily!

We also welcome **Pam Hartgerink**, who has joined the Development Committee of our Board. Pam comes with 30 years' experience in the social justice and refugee rights sector, including stints in Afghanistan and East Timor and senior roles with the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS).

Finally, I want to welcome and thank **Colleen Fernandez**, **Laura Backhouse** and **Gabrielle Quirk** who are volunteering their marketing skills and creative flair to help strengthen the way we share stories of impact.

meet Supipi Jayawardena

indigo foundation is proudly volunteer-based – from Partnership Coordinators, to Committee Members to our incredible community of supporters that drive fundraising. Over more than six years, Supipi has helped to organise our Canberra and Sydney dinners, contributed to our



SUPIPI WITH JEMMA BAILEY AT THE 2019 SYDNEY DINNER

internal planning and discussions in Australia, rallied her friends and family and prepared Sri Lankan feasts to be auctioned to raise funds. Thanks Supipi!

can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I am a mother, a scholar, an activist and a woman. I am a mother of two children, Yuhansa and Leshan. I am in a never ending journey of learning, from everyone around me, including my children hence I recognise myself as a scholar. I am active as a global citizen, placing my duties ahead of my rights. This could range from my duty to check on my parents on a daily basis to standing against injustices around the world. Most importantly I am a woman, I am a dreamer and I never give up.

why do you support indigo foundation?

indigo is one of the first contacts I made as soon as I moved to Australia. I was welcomed to this amazing organisation by the indigo team in Canberra and there were multiple reasons to continue to support indigo. I appreciate indigo's ways of working in partnership with the local communities, listening to them deeply and building their capacities towards sustainable solutions. I admire its very flexible and extremely agile ways of working. Most of

all, I love and respect the amazing people who are part of indigo who are non-judgemental, full of knowledge and challenge traditional ways of thinking about 'international development'

How have you been involved with indigo foundation?

Introduction to indigo foundation came through two very strong women I met in my life, Libby Lloyd and Moksha Watts. Since then, I have been involved with indigo foundation in the capacity of a volunteer, mainly giving my time and skills to fundraising related activities.

We are living through difficult times. What gives you hope?

As someone who has lived through a conflict most of my life, I understand 'uncertainty' is part of life. Since the end of the war in Sri Lanka, I have worked with many cultures, completely moved away from my family and home land to a world full of strangers. The lessons from every moment of this journey give me hope to go through the present moment. More importantly, I am in the lands of the oldest living culture on earth. They have given me a new meaning to 'resilience' and hope to live through continuous challenges i.e. bushfires, COVID-19, racism on a daily basis and many more.

support our work

We only exist as a result of the generosity of a huge range of supporters.

Whether it is by making a small donation every month, volunteering your time or expertise, or by helping us raise funds and awareness about our projects, it is all critical to our objective of improving the lives of those in marginalised communities and building the power of small grassroots organisations.

No matter how big or small your contribution might be, every little bit counts.

On behalf of everyone we work with, thank you for your ongoing support.



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www.indigofoundation.org



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