

2008

ASSISI AID PROJECTS

breaking the cycle of poverty

NEWSLETTER

March Issue 2008

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Renovations Complete at Assisi Farm

The original old Assisi farm house at Thadikarankonam was very functional and a rather lovely old building. Sadly it was beginning to fall apart - with a leaking roof and dangerous cracks throughout the brickwork. The building is so important to the projects in the Hill Country, providing shelter and meeting facilities for the almost daily gatherings of tribal people, a training venue for the animators, and a resting place for Sister Stella and her farm workers.



After much planning and consulting a new building has been reborn on the same site with additional features to make life a little safer, simpler and more comfortable for all. Final touches were hurried to completion for the special visitors from Australia and President Tom was asked to plant a special tree in memory of the occasion.

New CoM member Carolyn Harkin

New Committee member, Carolyn Harkin joined us on the 2007 Monitoring and Evaluation tour to India in September. She has now demonstrated her willingness to be more actively involved in the future by nominating for the Committee of Management. Carolyn is a Financial Consultant with the Catholic Education Office of the Sandhurst Diocese, a long term resident of Bendigo and with husband John has raised three adult children into the universe. Carolyn is an active contributor in the Bendigo community but has yet to confess what her hobbies are. Her 'easy listening' communication skills, long term business experience in finance and administration and her qualification as a CPA ensured she was a very positive contributor to the touring party. In the photo, Carolyn and Sister Piusha can be seen discussing recipes with a local villager bringing the cooking fuel home to the kitchen.



STEP into Rubber

The Sustainable Tribal Empowerment Project (STEP) targets the Kaani tribal people in the remote forested hills of Tamil Nadu. Rubber latex is the 'new' cash crop for the villagers. Prices for raw latex are closely linked to world oil prices and the local product has been increasing in value in recent years. So rubber tree growing is now providing a welcome income for the villagers. A further benefit is that the rubber trees are much hardier in the hill country and less susceptible to attacks from marauding herds of feral monkeys than the villagers' other cash crops such as banana and tapioca.

The STEP project has simple objectives -

- **Build capacity of the villagers to engage with Government and industry**
- **Support sustainable income generating initiatives**
- **Assist in the provision of basic infrastructure – education and health services, latrines, and community meeting facilities**
- **Support the maintenance of cultural identity**

Assisi's STEP project is helping villagers convert their banana and tapioca plantings into rubber and understand how to better look after the rubber trees. Assisi has also funded groups of villagers to purchase and maintain rubber rolling machines, and funds the field coordinators to help to sell the product to the best value markets.

This year Assisi allocated \$48,618 towards this project that included \$18,938 from the Australian Government.



Are our Projects Effective?

Are we making a difference? - Assisi projects in India have now been subject to two separate assessments of their local impact. The Australian Government's AusAID staff arranged for a formal evaluation of our Chennai projects late in 2006. This was a very rewarding exercise and the Sisters made the decision to expand this critical thinking to all their projects to coincide with the inspection visit by President Tom and the Assisi group during September 2007.



We couldn't do it without you

Assisi extends heartfelt thanks to all of our supporters. We acknowledge the following organisations that provided vital financial, pro-bono and in-kind contributions this year.

- Freehills Solicitors
- WHK Smith Read Auditors
- Bendigo Bank Limited
- Community Enterprise Foundation
- Bendigo Community Telco
- Mulqueens Printers
- AusAID

Celebrating Success

Self help groups are supported by village 'animators' to record the results of individual and group savings programs. Effectively these record books become the evidence required for groups to gain entitlement to the Indian banking system and escape the clutches of the unscrupulous money lenders. Animators are selected from the local villages and provided with basic education and training to support them in this role. These animators are celebrating ten years of success of the program at Stella Maris and both Tom and Chris were presented with ceremonial shawls to mark the respect these ladies have for the Australian support to their work.



Improving Management of Self Help

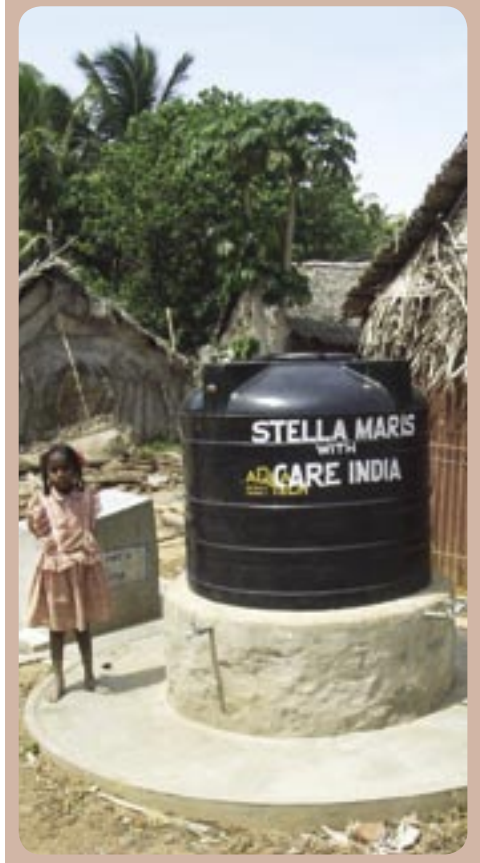
Assisi's self help focus places a high priority on education, training and encouraging group members and staff to develop new work place skills. Success will improve general living standards, the management of the Sisters projects and very importantly the skills and employability of the program staff. In this photo Tom, Sister Piusha and Chris can be seen being briefed by Mr C Suresh, Program Coordinator with the Stella Maris Trust, on the computer software the Sisters use to track the achievements of the 1350 self help groups assisted from this campus.



Tsunami Response Award

Stella Maris Social Centre and the Daughters of Mary nuns were among a select group of local and international NGOs awarded Certificates of appreciation by the Government of Tamil Nadu for efforts to support the Tsunami Response Emergency, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program. Other NGOs to be nominated included Care India, Catholic Relief Services, Canadian International Development Agency, USAID and World Vision India. The awards were presented by 3 Ministers from the Tamil Nadu Government at a function organised by the Madras Development Society. Stella Maris was the only NGO nominated from the Kannykumari District. Sister Piusha .."got really thrilled when the Minister put a shawl on me".

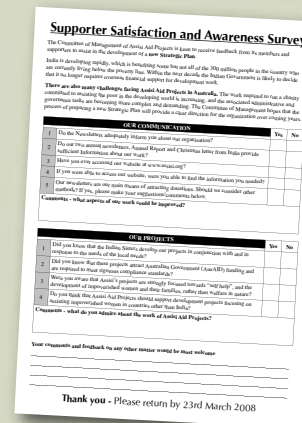
Sr Piusha has dedicated the award to ... "all team members at Assisi Aid Projects, Australia"



Tell Us What You Think

In this newsletter we have included a short survey form that we hope you will find a few minutes to complete and mail back to us before 23rd March. Your Assisi Aid Committee of Management is responsible for reviewing our 2004-2007 Strategic Plan and preparing for the next three years.

Recent evaluations indicate that together with the Sisters we have achieved much in the past 30 years and especially in the aftermath of the Tsunami. Development needs in India are changing. The Indian Government is due to reconsider if it will continue to accept foreign development aid from 2009. Compliance with Australian Government guidelines in relation to anti-terrorism, fraud, child protection and environmental impact, etc., require increasing administrative direction.



In a climate of enormous change we would appreciate your feedback on some important questions on how we have and will continue to meet your needs.

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- I would like to receive occasional updates on progress in India by mail.
- I would like to receive updates by email.

- I wish to become a member of **ASSISI AID PROJECTS** and receive an Annual Report.
- Please send me information about including Assisi in my Will.



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Assisi Aid Projects is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and is an AusAID accredited Non Government Organisation (NGO).