



Strategic Plan

2017-20



Cow girl nun



Our Story

The Assisi story began in 1974 when Sister Stella, an Indian Catholic nun, arrived in Victoria, Australia to learn dairy farming. Concerned about food security and nutrition in her home community in India, Sister Stella was committed to returning to India and applying her new dairy farming skills to improve the lives of women and children in her community.

She returned to India on a cargo ship with 30 Friesian cows and three bulls and, retaining five cows and one bull, she established Assisi Farm & Training Centre in the State of Tamil Nadu. At the Centre, Sister Stella provided agricultural training to selected community members, who were encouraged to on-train others in their communities.

The idea of a community-based model for development started to take shape. Assisi Aid Projects was formed in 1985 in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia to provide funding and strategic planning to help support the project.

From humble beginnings and one person's vision, Assisi has now grown into an expanding development and humanitarian aid organisation, focusing on the empowerment of women to bring about positive changes to their own lives, and the lives of their children and the communities in which they live.







A new approach for collective action

In 2017, the Assisi 'reflection and learning' workshop provided a collaborative space for Assisi with our partners to create a shared vision for Assisi's future. The process facilitated the opportunity for reflection on Assisi's successes and lessons learnt from the past, and identified the benefits of a more consolidated approach.

In response, Assisi has refined our sectorial focus and geographic reach, based on evidence of greatest impact and our most significant stories of change.

In India, Assisi has historically supported thousands of rural women to not only access income and the skills to improve family life, but also built their confidence and sense of entitlement.

In Cambodia, Assisi has successfully transferred the self-help group model from our work in India, through the establishment of women-led savings clubs in 2010, many of which continue today.

While development initiatives in Cambodia and India are complex and present multiple challenges and opportunities, the prevailing issue of gender inequality and hierarchies of power, underscores human relations and poverty. This defines our new approach and our 2017-2020 Strategy.

Our Vision

A world in which all people have equal opportunity to determine and achieve their economic and social potential.

Our Mission

Assisi supports women as agents for economic and social resilience in their communities through strengthening women's skills, knowledge and confidence; supporting women's collectives; and addressing systemic barriers to gender equality.



Our Values

Assisi is a signatory to the Australia Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct. Our values are aligned and we are committed to:

- Sustainable, fair and equitable solutions that address the root causes and symptoms of gender inequality, poverty and disadvantage;
- Accountability and transparency to all our stakeholders for our performance and integrity;
- Building strong collaborative relationships, based on understanding and mutual trust, with the communities we work with;
- Striving to continuously learn, innovate and improve our work;
- Honesty and integrity in everything we do;
- Respecting, protecting and promoting all internationally recognised human rights;
- Environmental sustainability in all our programs; and
- Strengthening civil society both in Australia and in the countries we work.





Our Strategic Plan

The Assisi Strategy 2017 – 2020 aims to strengthen the capacity of women to establish, operate and manage their own development initiatives. The Strategy targets the root causes of gender inequality – embedded in the systems and structures of power and politics – through a focus on fostering equal gender relations and by working with women and men, girls and boys.

Assisi recognises the interrelated dimensions of gender inequity and seeks to challenge these through four spheres of influence:

1. **Tradition, culture and gender norms** shape the social rules and expectations of both women and men and have a profound impact on progress towards equality. Discriminatory gender norms act as barriers to women and girls securing their fundamental rights, including their right to education, protection, health, expression and participation.
2. **Policy and governance** can result in widespread gender inequality when laws fail to equally protect and promote the rights of women and girls, fail to encourage women and girls to participate in public life, do not allocate a fair share of resources, and fail to equitably include their perspectives in policy decision-making processes.
3. Access to **markets and income** significantly impacts women's ability to access, and control, the resources they need for themselves and their families. Barriers to women's labour force participation and access to income are numerous, ranging from the time burden associated with child-rearing and other domestic tasks, low education levels and existing wage gaps between males and females.
4. **Personal voice and agency** are critical to achieving gender equality. Supporting the active, free and meaningful participation of women and girls in all spheres of life (social, political and economic) ensures their ability to define their own life-choices and pursue their own goals.





Geographic Scope

Assisi currently works through local partners in both India and Cambodia. During this strategic period, Assisi aims to strengthen and expand our programs in India and Cambodia.

Our Goals

By June 2020, Assisi aims to achieve the following goals:

1. Increase women's social, economic and political empowerment
2. Advance transformational change in institutional and social norms impacting gender equality
3. Ensure organisational effectiveness, sustainability and accountability
4. Enhance organisational and sector learning





Our Strategies

Assisi will implement the following strategies to achieve our goals:

1. Ensure our work is informed by context specific gender analysis

In all countries where Assisi works, we will engage and consult with local partners and communities to develop a deep understanding of gender dynamics and the barriers to women's economic, social and political participation. We recognise the diversity of women within each community and our gender analysis will specifically seek to identify the most disadvantaged women, such as indigenous and ethnic minority women, widows, women from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and the specific barriers to equality they face. To ensure a strategic and comprehensive

approach to gender equity, we will integrate a gender strategy within each Country Strategy and will regularly review and revise our gender analysis.

2. Prioritise projects that target women's social, economic and political empowerment

Assisi will maintain and expand our support for programs targeting gender equality and women's economic, social and political empowerment. Assisi will work with, and support, existing local women's organisations and networks, recognising the leading role of these organisations in driving change. We will provide organisational development and technical support to our



local partner organisations to improve their capacity to utilise a self-help group (SHG) approach for empowerment. The SHG approach maximises women's economic empowerment by improving savings and asset accumulation, financial literacy and improving women's economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the SHG approach has the added advantage of contributing to women's social capital through building solidarity and peer support networks among women, creating safe (women only) spaces in which women take leadership roles and building women's confidence to act collectively to achieve real social change.

3. Challenge discriminatory gender norms, particularly by working with children

In recognition that cultural change can take generations to achieve, working with children (boys and girls) to breakdown gender bias and discrimination represents a key strategy for achieving sustainable change. Assisi will capitalise on our long history of working with children to implement interventions that challenge negative gender norms and stereotypes and promote children's rights and equality. Assisi will continue to support children's clubs as a forum for bringing girls and boys together to receive additional tuition and build mutual understanding and respect.

Where appropriate, Assisi will also work with men as advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment, including to challenge gender norms that act as barriers to equality and institutional structures that restrict women's participation and

perpetuate inequity in power relations.

4. Work with, and enable, value-aligned local organisations

Assisi works with local partners in India and Cambodia who share our objectives and have demonstrated knowledge and expertise in working effectively within their local communities.

Assisi will continue to identify in-country partners and collaborators who share Assisi's vision, and have an interest in, and the capacity, to implement projects aligned with Assisi's strategy. Assisi will work collaboratively with existing and new local partners to undertake a participatory approach to identifying, designing, reviewing and evaluating projects.

Assisi is committed to supporting the capacity development of our partners. We will work with our partners to identify capacity gaps and provide needs-based capacity development support accordingly. We will draw on our previous experience in partner capacity development to create a suite of trainings that can be drawn upon and tailored to meet future partner capacity development needs.

Assisi will strengthen partnership selection by reviewing and updating our Partnership Assessment Criteria, which will include assessing adherence to donor policies and procedures. This will guide our review of existing partners and the selection of new partners as we expand our programs.

5. Strengthen organisational effectiveness to maximise development impact

Assisi will strengthen our project management policies and procedures to support our efforts to maximise development impact. We will ensure that our policies and processes align with best practice and remain fit-for-purpose for a small NGO and for working in partnership with local organisations. This will include reviewing, updating and streamlining our existing Good Practice Manual and our Approach to Quality guidelines, which define our approach to quality at both the organisational and project levels.

6. Align monitoring and evaluation of our projects to our strategy and embed a learning agenda to support continuous improvement

Assisi will engage in robust ongoing monitoring and evaluation and report on the impact, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of all our projects. This will include capturing valuable lessons learnt, which will inform improvements to our strategic approach, realign our current project implementation plans to maximise impact and inform future project design. Our approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) will involve:

- Developing a MEL framework that captures and measures project impact on gender equality, including establishing baseline data and setting key qualitative and quantitative performance indicators and targets.

- Using the reporting process to identify and analyse emerging risks, trends and opportunities and developing strategies to mitigate risks, respond to new trends and take advantage of opportunities as they arise.
- Ensuring project monitoring and evaluation is used for continuous learning to strengthen our strategic approach and impact.

Assisi will undertake research across our country programs to assess the impact of the SHG model on women's empowerment (economic, social and political). Findings will be shared with key stakeholders / networks and will contribute to national and regional learning on best practice in the SHG approach.

7. Develop a fundraising strategy

To maximise our impact and reach, Assisi will seek to grow and diversify our income base. This will include developing a fundraising strategy that strengthens our ongoing engagement with existing Australian community supporters and donors and proactively seeks to engage new community supporters and secure new corporate and institutional funding. Securing continued long-term funding through the DFAT Australian NGO Cooperation Program is a key priority for Assisi in this strategic period.



Our Results

Assisi will track progress on the goals of our 2017-2020 Strategic Plan through a set of key performance indicators (KPIs), as set out in the Goals and Results Framework below. The Assisi Committee of Management will undertake an annual assessment against the KPIs and progress will be reported in the Annual Report.

An Operational Plan has been developed to outline the implementation of the Strategic Plan across the three year period.



ASSISI AID PROJECTS

Empowering change

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Assisi Aid Projects is a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development Code of Conduct, which defines minimum standards of governance, management and accountability for non-government development organisations. Our voluntary adherence to the Code of Conduct demonstrates our commitment to ethical practice and public accountability. Assisi is an Australian AID accredited Non Government Organisation. REG: A0006479K ABN: 56511265170