



# Strategic Plan

## 2020-2022





# **Our Story**

The Assisi story began in 1974 when Sister Stella arrived in Australia from India to learn dairy farming. Concerned about food security in her home community she returned to India with 33 cattle in the hold of a cargo ship. Retaining six cattle, Sister Stella established the Assisi Farm and Training Centre to train local women in dairy farming. Assisi Aid Projects (Assisi) was formed in 1985 in Bendigo, Australia, to provide funding and strategic planning to support the Centre.

## **Assisi Aid Projects Today**

Assisi has grown into an expanding development organisation, focusing on the empowerment of women to bring about positive changes in their own lives, the lives of their children, and the communities in which they live.

Assisi Aid Projects is committed to high quality programming, and is a proud signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct, as well as an accredited DFAT Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) partner. This requires us to demonstrate high quality programming, operational and risk management practices.









## **Assisi is currently working with communities in Cambodia and India.**

In India, Assisi has historically supported thousands of rural women to not only access income and the skills required to improve family life, but also to build their confidence and sense of entitlement. Assisi Aid Projects also work with children from disadvantaged communities to improve educational opportunities, and improve gender equality. In Cambodia, Assisi Aid Projects focuses on empowering women and youth to represent their views and issues through civic engagement, and to increase livelihood resilience.

Development initiatives in Cambodia and India are complex and present both opportunities and challenges. Our approach, and our 2020 - 2022 Strategy are defined by managing this complexity, alongside the prevailing issues of gender inequality and hierarchies of power which underscore human relations and poverty.

### **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..





Handwritten text on the whiteboard, likely a schedule or agenda, with columns for dates and activities.

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# Our Strategic Plan

The Assisi Strategy 2020-22 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.

In the future, the Assisi strategic approach will be to plan five years ahead, reviewing progress on an annual basis.

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.



நீங்களில் பால் கணப் பெருக்கம்  
மகரந்த ஊரணை



மலர்

நாவரத்தின் கண்பெருக்க உறுப்பு



புல்லிகை



அல்லி கிழி



மகரந்த தளர்

அமிலம்



எலுமிச்சை (சிட்ரிக் அமிலம்)



பால் (லாக்டிக் அமிலம்)



ஆப்பிள் (மலாலிக் அமிலம்)

சோயா

அமிலத்தின் உதாரணம்





## 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 2022, 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 the 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 the importance of adopting a 'do no harm' approach to behaviour change. Our gender analysis will specifically seek to identify the most disadvantaged women, including

indigenous and ethnic minorities, widows, women from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with a disability. Our strategy will also focus upon the particular needs of girls and support their development and personal safety through our education project. From 2020 onwards Assisi will update our strategy and work with partners to ensure our programs support inclusion of diverse gender identities. 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 behaviour change. We will provide organisational development and technical support to our local partner organisations to improve their capacity to utilise a self-help group approach for empowerment. This approach maximises women's economic empowerment by improving savings and asset accumulation, financial literacy and improving women's economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the self-help group 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. Assisi will support existing self-help groups to determine their own pathways to increased advocacy and empowerment, for example supporting development of the Velichem Federation of Widow's self-help groups in India, who aim to improve conditions for all widows by advocating for their rights.

## 3. Challenge discriminatory gender norms and disability inclusion issues, particularly by working with children

In recognition that cultural change can take generations to achieve, working with children (boys and girls) to breakdown gender and disability bias and discrimination represents a key strategy for achieving sustainable change. Assisi will capitalise on our long history of working with children and parents 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.

## 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 will work with its partners to support programs that address the challenges of COVID-19 and threaten the health and livelihoods of the vulnerable communities where we operate.

Assisi is committed to supporting the capacity development of our partners, and helping them to build their institutional strength and sustainability. We will work with our partners to identify capacity gaps and provide needs-based capacity development support accordingly. We will draw on our 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. We will particularly focus on supporting partners to implement strong policies to support safeguarding and prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Assisi will strengthen partnership selection which will include assessing values alignment, adherence to donor policies and procedures to ensure people of all genders, and those with disabilities are considered. 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 the development impact of our programs. 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.

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

Assisi will undertake research across our country programs to assess the impact of the self-help 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 self-help group approach.



## Our Results

Assisi will track progress on the goals of our 2020-2022 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 two year period.







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Empowering change

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