

MID-YEAR NEWSLETTER 2023





1974

Sister Stella, a nun from India, first visits Australia to learn dairy farming techniques. Upon her return home she establishes the Assisi Farm and Training Centre to share the skills she learnt with women in her community in Tamil Nadu.

1985

Assisi Aid Projects is formed to support the Assisi Farm and Training Centre. This was a partnership that empowered thousands of women and their families across Tamil Nadu through income-generation and skills training.



2004

Following major destruction in Tamil Nadu after the **Indian Ocean Tsunami**, Assisi directly supports affected communities.

2013

Assisi gains Accreditation from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), allowing projects to receive funding under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



2015

Assisi transitions to a partnership with the Integrated Development Trust (IDT) to continue to deliver projects in Tamil Nadu, creating local enterprise opportunities for women and empowering them to be agents of social and economic change. A number of the sisters sit as board members at IDT.

2020

During the **COVID-19 pandemic**, Assisi pivoted our projects to provide additional support to the communities we serve. In Tamil Nadu, emergency relief packs were provided and health education was delivered.



2023

Today, Assisi continues to partner with IDT to empower thousands of women across Tamil Nadu, and in March our CEO, Jacqueline, and Program Manager, Cate, visited the single women's project and the children's project. Over the years, **we have further extended our impact** by seeking out new partnerships in Nepal and Indonesia, partnering with the Federation of Business and Professional Women Nepal (BPW Nepal) and Dreamdelion Indonesia.



An update from the Chief Executive Officer

Dear Friends,

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank our long-standing supporters, and to reflect on some of our past key milestones.

Reflecting on the Past

It was an incredible 49 years ago, when Sister Stella first came to Australia! We look forward to celebrating the 50th anniversary of this event in March 2024! Sister Stella came to our lands as a young sister, and entrepreneur, to learn of dairy farming techniques. She returned home to Tamil Nadu and established the 'Assisi Farm and Training Centre', to share the skills she learnt with women in her community. This event triggered the beginnings of Assisi Aid Projects (Assisi), in Australia – originally established to support the Assisi Farm and Training Centre.

The first page of our newsletter depicts Assisi's milestones and timeline. These include:

- In 2004 supporting communities tragically impacted by the Indian Ocean tsunami
- In 2013 transformation into a professional international development agency and becoming Australian government (DFAT) accredited
- The sisters in India handing the work of the projects to the project teams of 'Integrated Development Trust' (IDT).

IDT remains our implementing partner in India today, while the sisters remain involved through their participation on the board of IDT. What an amazing transformative evolution from a welfare project to a professional international development organisation.

Another milestone depicted, still a very fresh memory, is COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic your support enabled us to support the communities in India. Very recently (in March 2023) I was able to travel, with Cate our Program Manager, to visit the projects. It was wonderful to meet the sisters (who send

their very best to all), meet the IDT team in India, and see first-hand the work being achieved. The participants of the projects (our beneficiaries) work so hard to learn and apply new skills. Their effort was inspirational, and their appreciation, humbling. Your support is truly making a difference and impact to the lives of the widowed women, and the children of Tamil Nadu! They all extend a huge 'thank-you' to you.

Looking Ahead

Our five-year strategy (2022 – 2027) sees us focusing further on economic and social impact for women and their communities. We are creating local enterprise opportunities for women and supporting them to be agents of their own economic and social change. We are off to a great start with the expansion of our work into Nepal, through our new partner 'Business and Professional Women in Nepal' (BPW Nepal), and into Indonesia, through another new partner, 'Dreamdelion'. We warmly welcome our new partners! The following pages bring news, and highlight some of the wonderful work, from each of our partners... in India, and now also in Nepal, and Indonesia.

Thank you again for your tremendous support to the Assisi of the past, present, and future. Without your support we could not achieve the impact and transformative changes in the lives of the women and communities in India, Nepal, and Indonesia.

With very best wishes and thanks,



Dr Jacqueline Parisi
and the Assisi Aid
Projects team



India Field Visit March 2023

In March 2023, CEO, Jacqueline, and Program Manager, Cate, travelled to India and visited the Children's Project and Single Women's Project, delivered in partnership with Integrated Development Trust. The visit itinerary included the Children's Parliament, study centre and computer centre, to see first-hand how your donations are helping support over 850 children to access a quality education, develop leadership skills and learn how to advocate for their rights.

While visiting the Single Women's Project, Jacqueline and Cate heard from widowed women participants. Losing their husbands had led to the loss of their social status, and exclusion from community life. With the support of the project, these women have been able to receive support in accessing government welfare schemes and interest-free project loans. Many have now started their own businesses and generate an income. This has subsequently enabled their reintegration into society; they have the



recognition and confidence to participate in activities traditionally forbidden for single women.

Learning about numbers using an abacus as part of the Children's Project. Image credit: IDT 2022/23

Ms Prema is a 44-year-old woman from Allambakkam village, where she runs her own small village grocery shop. She has two daughters, now attending higher education. She supports them with the income she receives from the shop. Ms Prema ran her business jointly alongside her husband until three years ago, when he sadly passed away. This left her in a challenging position, unable to manage both the business and her family. With our interest-free loan program, Ms Prema



Visiting a Rural Study Centre in the Children's Project. Image credit: IDT 2022/23



Ms Mohana, a participant of the Single Women's Project, practising the skills learnt in her beautician training course. Image credit: IDT 2022/23

was able to receive assistance, allowing her to invest in and expand the business. As a result, Ms Prema has increased her family's income and is now able to sufficiently support her daughters as they complete their higher education.

While visiting the projects in India, Jacqueline and Cate were also able to celebrate the 49th anniversary of Sister Stella's first visit to Australia, an event that was foundational to Assisi's formation. The sisters are deeply appreciative of the ongoing support from those in Australia, whose support to the projects has enabled assistance to thousands of women over the years.

Supporting Single Women to Continue Working After Loss

Ms Padmavathy, a widow from Ongur Village, has been a member of the Single Women's Group for 7 years. When Ms Padmavathy's husband died, she struggled to support her two children alongside running her late husband's business selling bangles. Staff at IDT, our implementing partner, provided counselling to Ms Padmavathy. She gained confidence and was encouraged to use a project business loan to continue selling bangles to surrounding villages, with the use of a vehicle. Ms Padmavathy's standard of living has gradually improved, and she now

takes pride in continuing her husband's business. Ms Padmavathy recently had the opportunity to display her bangles, during the visit of the Chennai High Commission, and more recently during the Assisi field visit.

Ms Padmavathy says that she is grateful for IDT and the project for the timely support, and that she is now satisfied with her earnings.



Jacqueline and Cate visiting a bangle business in Tamil Nadu. Image credit: IDT 2022/23

Program Expansion in Nepal

Our short-term project in Nepal, implemented through our partner, Federation of Business and Professional Women Nepal (BPW Nepal), achieved great success this year. The project supported 109 women in rebuilding their agroforestry enterprises and enhancing their ability to become economically self-reliant in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ms. Santaki is chairperson of the Dhupidhora Herbal Production Women's Group. The project has enabled the women of the group to develop their herbal business plan and learn technical skills in entrepreneurship development, digital financing and digital literacy. Sanataki says that, with the help of the project, women have been motivated to turn their unpaid farming activities and skills into enterprises for profit.

In March 2023, we were delighted to receive increased ANCP funding from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Following the success of this short-term

A participant of the AWABE project attending the International Women's Day event. Image credit: BPW Nepal 2022/23



project in Nepal, we were able to use this additional funding to extend our impact in the region and expand the

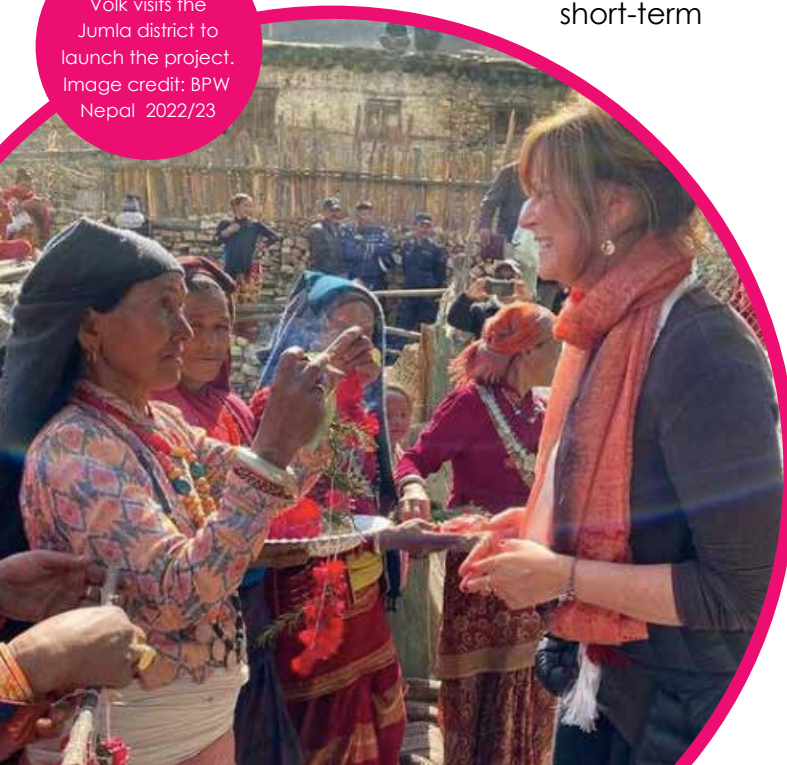
program. This comprised the design of a new long-term project, Advancing Women in Agroforestry Business Enterprise Post Covid-19 Pandemic. The project aims to directly engage over 380 women in the Jumla and Nuwakot districts, assisting them in agricultural trading co-ops and indirectly providing employment opportunities for up to 1,140 people.

"I'm able to be a lead female entrepreneur in the herbal sector and establish myself as an example in our male dominated society with the support of AWABE Project in providing me business development services"

- Ms. Santaki.

On International Women's Day, Australia's Ambassador to Nepal, Her Excellency Felicity Volk, visited the Jumla district to launch the new project. During her visit, Ambassador Volk said "Women's economic empowerment underpins the wellbeing and prosperity of local communities, nations and the globe. It is also key to the realisation of the human rights of women and girls themselves".

Ambassador Volk visits the Jumla district to launch the project. Image credit: BPW Nepal 2022/23



Agroforestry enterprises are strengthened through equipping participants with business skills. Image credit: BPW Nepal 2022/23



New Partnership and Project Launch

Dreamdelion Indonesia: Jajal Wae Sustainable Agro-Tourism Project

It is with much excitement that Assisi Projects is announcing a new partnership with Dreamdelion Indonesia, to deliver a project focusing on sustainable agro-tourism in the Ngawi region of East Java.

Cultural norms in Indonesia can limit women's opportunity to earn a living wage, develop skills and access business networks. Women in the Ngawi region often face further challenges due to poverty levels, low access to education and lack of livelihood opportunities.

Women's empowerment remains at the heart of our partnership with Dreamdelion, and this new short-term project aims to create social change for women who are vulnerable from physical, psychological and economic violence. Through the establishment of an eco-tourism management group, women will receive training in activities including sustainable tourism, management, tour guiding and marketing.

Dreamdelion has already trialled several eco-tourism trips, allowing customers to become immersed in local culture and explore Ngawi's beauty, guided by the women participants. Activities include cooking traditional dishes, making jamu herbal drinks, and embarking on a breathtaking cycling trip. In these trial trips, customers expressed satisfaction with their experience, and the women participants were very happy to receive additional income and were eager to further explore this opportunity.

Skills development and access to the expanding tourist industry in Ngawi will strengthen the economic resilience of women, boost the local economy and elevate the status of women, allowing for more equitable communities. Alongside providing sustainable sources of income for the women of Ngawi, the project also aims to increase the confidence of the women participants, as well as improve their leadership skills and business acumen. The project will initially engage approximately 70 women participants, and indirectly benefit more than 500 members of the wider community.

Permaculture activities are incorporated into the project, with the women participants learning better gardening practices to promote food security. Image credit: Dreamdelion 2023



Exploring Ngawi on a trial Jajal Wae trip. Image credit: Dreamdelion 2023

End of Financial Year (EOFY) Donations

30 June 2023 is just around the corner! It's not too late to make a difference with a donation as we approach the end of the financial year. Many of our supporters often dedicate an EOFY donation to a loved one, in honour of their memory, while others find it helpful to leave a Bequest to Assisi Aid Projects, ensuring their legacy leaves a lasting impact. Assisi Aid Projects is a registered ACNC Deductible Gift Recipient.



All donations over \$2 are tax deductible and supporters will receive a receipt for their tax return.



www.assisi.org.au

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Have you had a chance to look at our website?

We post photos, videos, and stories from the project locations on www.assisi.org.au

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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 Aid Projects has DFAT accreditation and complies with DFAT policies. REG: A0006479K ABN: 56511265170