



QSA Notes

people, places & projects

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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Cambodian farmers diversify

BY ALETIA DUNDAS | QSA

With the Australian Government declaring September to be Biodiversity Month, QSA is delighted that new farming techniques adopted by QSA's partners in the Kampong Thom Province of Cambodia put the aims of this initiative into practice. Having established food gardens for fifty farmers and their families, which in turn have increased food security in the district, they are now diversifying their work by introducing new techniques such as the raising of animals and water saving training that will help them adapt to the harsh climate.

Below: Cambodian farmers undertake refresher training to respond to new challenges
Photo QSA



Above: Cambodian family with garden created after permaculture training
Photo QSA

This family [above] lives in the Kampong Thom district. They are just one of the fifty farming families who have been trained in

permaculture over the past few years. They proudly show us the garden that they have grown using the techniques in the training. For many people in these rural villages, growing sufficient vegetables to eat most of the year was not a common practice until recently. Now that they have seen the health and economic benefits of growing a diverse range of edible plants, everybody wants to be involved.

However, this project has not been without its difficulties. Cambodian farmers face a harsher climate than we do in Australia. The monsoon season sees temperatures in August hit heights well above 30 degrees and rainfall above 150mm. Many farmers whose plots of land are quite small choose to abandon their farms and take on paid employment just to earn enough income to

survive in the short term. Lack of water in the dry season and too much in the wet is another reason that some gardens do not produce enough.

It has been necessary to deal with these challenges with foresight and resolve. This year, in addition to developing permaculture skills, our partners now provide training in fruit tree growing, composting techniques and natural pesticides, vegetable production, mulching, seed saving and water saving, and have also provided training in raising animals and growing mushrooms. These mushroom farms are a very useful way for

those with limited land area to grow enough to sell at market.

It's not just the harsh physical climate that is making farming difficult at the moment. The political climate is heating up too. While elections were held on 27 July 2008, project activities ceased, as there was a concern that the provision of lunch on training days could be seen as a bribe for voting for a particular party. These difficulties were exacerbated by a standoff between Thai and Cambodian troops at a Hindu temple located at the border of the two countries.

As our partners put into practice all the necessary factors to protect, conserve and improve the biodiversity within their homes, villages and districts, it is our responsibility to support them as best we can, and also to do what we can in our cities and towns to contribute to Biodiversity Month. Just as our wellbeing and sustainability as a species is dependant on the relationship with our fellow human beings in Cambodia and elsewhere, so too is our relationship with the ecosystem around us. What will you do this September to contribute to biodiversity?

Tourism that heals

In late July, QSA signed a project agreement with a new partner in the Northern Territory, just in time for the United Nations' Day for the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August. This international day, which encourages work in areas such as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment, and social and economic development, aims to further strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by Indigenous people.

The Yothu Yindi Foundation is an organisation that we feel meets these ideals with creativity and initiative. They are in the process of creating a 'Healing Place' which will not only provide employment for and service the health needs of Indigenous people in Arnhem Land, but also offers a three-day 'Healing Tourism' program for visitors, with a focus on traditional healers, bush medicines and foods, and wellbeing through connections to land and Yolngu culture. This is a very

positive step in healing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians too.

The Healing Place is a long-term project, and will not be possible without suitable facilities. Therefore, QSA has been asked to fund the building of a toilet block for the Healing Place – another toilet to add to our collection! We hope to hear from the Yothu Yindi Foundation as this project progresses. In the meantime, feel free to visit their website to find out more about this exciting initiative: <http://www.healingplace.com.au>

New and improved!

QSA has experienced quite a few changes recently. The most important one is that our email address has changed. Please now contact us at administration@qsa.org.au as the previous email addresses do not work at all. Aletia Dundas, who has been working at QSA in a casual capacity for the past six months, was appointed the full-time Project Officer in July, following a formal

selection and interview process. She will be responsible for Indigenous projects, the website, educational materials and promotion of the 50th anniversary book. She brings with her experience in international development, peacebuilding and Indigenous concerns and is looking forward to the challenges ahead.

Friends in deed

We all know that a friend in need is a Friend indeed, and that is what QSA has tried to be for our friends overseas. Heather Saville, author of the book to commemorate QSA's 50th anniversary, has documented the history of Australian Friends' development work over the past fifty years. The book, entitled *Friends in Deed*, attempts to honestly address the question 'have we made a difference?' I believe the answer is 'yes, indeed we have', but readers will need to buy the book to find out for themselves. The book will be launched in Melbourne in March 2009. Watch this space for further details.



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Living gifts

QSA will launch its yearly catalogue of Living Gifts in September. Through the Living Gifts catalogue you can buy a gift for a friend or family member that is so much more meaningful than yet another pair of socks, and more importantly will truly make a difference to those who need it most. You can purchase almost anything from mosquito

netting in Uganda, to gardening tools in Cambodia. Please contact us as soon as possible to place your orders as we get very busy in the weeks leading up to Christmas. If you have not received a written brochure when this article goes to print, please visit our website www.qsa.org.au for details of the Living Gifts Catalogue.

a Living Gift



Toilet and bathroom

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