



QSA Notes

The journey of an idea!

JACKIE PERKINS | QSA ADMINISTRATOR



Learning how to grow azolla and its uses. Photo credit Vasandham Society

Many people, aware of QSA and its development work, would think that ideas travel to new community groups via the training classes given to groups of people. Yes that is true, whether it is about new ways to grow food or how to weave cloth. Small groups receive an explanation about the new skills, then a chance to practice them for themselves, and it's the application of the new ideas which reinforces the skills. But that is not all.

Visits are often arranged for the group to meet people who are already proficient in these new skills, so that they can see for themselves what is possible. These visits can be so very helpful to demonstrate how things can be done in the home setting, giving them ideas of different techniques, and the confidence to give it a try themselves. Seeing is often believing.

But not all new ideas are enhancing their practical skills. It might be a different way of thinking, such as when groups are given new information about ways of reducing domestic violence, or what it means to have human rights, especially for women attempting to

set up a business in the local market, or how to protect children from harm. Each of these ideas requires a change of ideas and thought processes, and they are not so easy to see. This is how the trainers themselves can be so helpful, as role models. It is one thing to talk about equality within a committee, and it is another to hold a discussion in which everyone is given the opportunity to express their ideas – the idea of equality is learnt from the experience of being treated in an equal way.

Sometimes ideas come from a different community that has had different experiences and ideas, and think they might be helpful to share. Sometime this works, sometimes it does not. One example of where it has worked is in Tamil Nadu, South India where Vasandham Society has been successful in growing an aquatic plant called azolla which is used for cattle fodder. When I visited them on a monitoring visit, I was very impressed with the results, and having been told by Guna and the farmers using it that it improves the overall health of cattle and increases the milk yield from cows, I took some

azolla plants with me when I visited Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre. Guna was able to supply some technical information sheets in Tamil which helped the new farmers understand, and now azolla is flourishing in ponds in another part of Tamil Nadu and more cattle are benefitting from it.

An example of an idea which did not work so well happened in Cambodia in Kandal Province where they wanted some sort of water filtration device to remove the naturally occurring arsenic from the water supply. An idea had been shared with them by a visitor from Europe who suggested clay filtration pots which had been seen to be used successfully in other countries. A test was set up to confirm the results but the opposite happened – when following the instructions, the arsenic levels increased the more it was used, so the filter was not able to remove the arsenic levels from the water before it was stored.

There is an old saying, attributed to a number of diverse people over the years, which is still appropriate to this idea of shared ideas :-

'Give a person a fish, and you feed the family for a day. Teach a person to fish, and you feed the family for a lifetime.'

Sometimes ideas are shared by simply giving them space for this to happen. Quakers have a long history of doing just that, whether it is a shared meal after meeting, discussions over the washing up, or the more structured meetings of politicians and advisers at the Quaker United Nations Offices in Geneva and New York meeting together away from the spotlight and press, for a free and open discussion of an issue.

The time of year

Friends, the end of the financial year is fast approaching, and so now is the time of year to consider making a tax deductible donation to QSA. This can be done by sending a cheque made out to Quaker Service Australia to our office at 119 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010 or by direct credit to our CUA account in the name of Quaker Service Australia, BSB 814 282, account number 50585902. Please include your name in the reference section of the direct credit and send an email to donations@qsa.org.au to advise us that the donation has been sent and whether you would like your donation to go to our General Fund (not tax deductible) or to one or both of our tax deductible funds, Overseas Aid Fund or Aboriginal Concerns Fund. Thank you Friends, you will be contributing to the sharing of ideas among communities in Australia, Cambodia, India and Uganda.

AF



Watching, looking and listening how to make compost.
Photo credit – Department of Women's Affairs,
Kampong Thom, Cambodia



Sharing ideas in Cambodia. Photo credit:
Department of Women's Affairs, Kampong
Thom, Cambodia

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development, 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 culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

119 Devonshire St Surry Hills, NSW 2010 Australia • administration@qsa.org.au
PHONE +61 2 9698 9103 • FAX: +61 2 9225 9241 • ABN 35 989 797 918



ACFID
MEMBER