“Ecological resilience, not economic growth, will be the real measure of human survival in these uncertain times.”

— Vandana Shiva
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Australian Volunteers International connects skilled Australians with organisations that request their services around the world.

Our volunteers work in partnership with local people to reduce poverty, provide better health and education, support sustainable livelihoods and environmental management, and promote human rights and gender equality.

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Recently I was privileged to participate in the Australia 2020 Summit, which brought together leaders from all walks of life to offer ideas to shape our country’s future. In preparation, I invited our returned volunteers to send me their ideas on how we can sustain and improve Australia’s future in the world. The response was overwhelming.

A great many volunteers put climate change at the top of their concerns, having witnessed its effects first-hand during their assignments. They insisted that it was not only an ‘environmental issue’, but also a development and human rights issue, and that Australia had an important role to play in reducing its own energy consumption and leading by example.

Others spoke about the importance of migration, especially from our neighbours in the Pacific, or stressed the value of cultural exchange at all levels of society. They demanded a firm and sustainable approach to recycling, especially from our neighbours in the Pacific, or stressed the value of dialogue with our neighbours. There are not only an increase in the Australian overseas aid budget but also more effective ways of supporting development.

Almost all responses suggested that Australia could be a world leader in changing the ways in which peoples and nations interact with one another. As one returned volunteer from Indonesia put it: “This country is very unique. On one hand, Australia is located in the east part of the world and on the other hand, the majority of its population is European with western culture. Therefore, Australia has the capacity to be an equilibrium power and a bridge to link eastern countries and western countries.”

The need to radically change the ways in which countries relate to each other was also raised at a course I recently attended at Schumacher College called ‘Development: What Next?’. Facilitated by environmental and social activists Gustavo Esteva and Vandana Shiva, the course challenged everyone involved in the work of ‘development’ to change their attitudes and practices to reflect the true needs of our partners, and let them define and control what is meant by ‘development’.

At AVI, we are working hard to ensure that this principle guides every volunteer placement. In the following pages, you will read about how a locally-identified approach to recycling has become a way of life for a whole village; how mine-affected communities in Cambodia are setting priorities for mine clearance and land usage; and how the island communities of Tuvalu are using traditional methods of mediation and conciliation to resolve disputes.

In each example you will find AVI volunteers: not driving these changes, but often working quietly in the background to make them happen – delivering training, creating databases, building networks or simply encouraging various stakeholders to talk to one another.

I was proud to represent the views of our volunteers and partners at the 2020 Summit, where we called for Australia to take a new approach in listening and engaging in dialogue with our neighbours. There are not global and regional problems for Australia to solve, but rather common issues to work through and options to explore together.

In peace and hope,

Dimity Fifer
Chief Executive Officer
AVI CEO participates in 2020 Summit

AVI’s Chief Executive Officer Dimitry Fifer was among a select group of business, community and government leaders who participated in the Australia 2020 Summit. Held by the Federal Government in Canberra on 19-20 April, the summit called for ideas to shape Australia’s future. Dimitry participated in a discussion on Australia’s future in the region and the world, sharing ideas contributed by AVI returned volunteers and staff on how our country could address issues of international poverty and engage with our neighbours in the region.

Volunteering on the agenda for National Youth Week

AVI kicked off National Youth Week (5-13 April) with the launch of an interactive learning kit for secondary schools (see p.9). The kit includes learning activities on international development that draw on the experiences of AVI youth volunteers. More than 60 returned volunteers, AVI supporters and education professionals gathered at the Fitzroy Town Hall to launch the kit, celebrate Youth Week and hear from AVI’s partner organisations and volunteers in the field, and hear local band Ryan Meeking and the Better Health.

Returned volunteers, come on down!

Whether just off the plane or alumni from the 1950s, returned volunteers have been catching up at a range of AVI-supported events across the country. From dinners to book launches and cocktail evenings, these events have brought a wide range of returned volunteers together to network, swap stories and find out what’s been happening with AVI.

Re-entry workshops have also been held in all state capitals to assist recently-returned volunteers to debrief and transition back to life and work in Australia. To make sure you receive an invite to upcoming events, visit www.australianvolunteers.com and log on to access event details, or contact Renee Archer on (03) 9279 1757.

Out and about at WOMADelaide

International volunteering captured the attention of the crowd at WOMADelaide, Adelaide’s famous world music festival. A small team of AusAID staff and returned volunteers manned a stand aimed at raising awareness about Australian aid and promoting overseas volunteer programs. The event attracted around 80,000 visitors over three days, many of whom stopped in to chat about how they could get involved as a volunteer. AusAID would like to thank all the volunteers who helped out on the day.

In Memoriam – Vonnie Brown

Returned volunteer Vonnie Brown passed away in January 2008. Vonnie was placed in Timor-Leste as a teacher trainer and English Language Teacher for the Claretian Missionaries at Lolotoe, on three ongoing assignments from 2001 to 2007. She returned to Australia each year to speak at schools, churches and Rotary clubs, to raise funds for a range of projects. Before her AVI assignments, Vonnie spent several years in the Kimberly and the Pilbara regions with the order of the Sisters of St John of God. Those who knew Vonnie remember her as an inspirational, hardworking colleague and friend who, despite working in tough and challenging conditions, always remained optimistic, deeply committed to Timor-Leste and dedicated to improving the lives of others. AVI was greatly saddened to hear of her death.

Australian Volunteer magazine survey

Thank you to everyone who completed our Reader Survey in the last issue. We received over 130 responses, with many kind words about the magazine and useful advice on what content you would like to see next. We will continue to bring you a free magazine chock-full of stories on development issues, tips and advice on capacity building and, of course, plenty of volunteer stories from the field. With your advice, we have also identified a better quality of paper stock – still recycled, naturally! Doanvy Roberts won the survey prize draw, receiving a copy of AVI’s coffee-table book A Place in the World plus two gold-class cinema tickets. Please continue to send your feedback on the magazine to mystery@australianvolunteers.com.

AVI in your inbox

Want up-to-the minute alerts of new AVI assignments and project positions? Then log into the AVI website using your member id and password and update your preferences to subscribe to email updates of new AVI assignments. If you haven’t registered on the website, do it now and make sure you tick the box to receive our emails. Our quarterly job updates are targeted to your sector of experience. We also make sure to give you a gentle reminder of application closing dates.

Email subscribers can also receive our monthly AVI+ eNewsletter, which lets you know about current PACTAM, Remote Recruiting and other project positions available. Subscribe online today or email webmaster@australianvolunteers.com.
Many people think the role of an international development volunteer finishes once they return to Australia. In my opinion, returning to Australia opens a new range of opportunities to returned volunteers.

Australian volunteers work to share their knowledge and skills with people and organisations overseas, but they can also engage with the Australian community on their return, sharing valuable experiences and insights.

Some volunteers go on to work with AusAID or other development agencies, using their field experience to deliver more effective programs. Others pursue further studies, or change careers and lifestyles. Many go on to become leaders in business, government and society, using the self-reliance, adaptability, management and relationship-building skills they developed overseas to enrich the Australian workforce.

No matter what they do upon their return, all volunteers can play a vital role in expanding community support for Australian aid.

Volunteers experience the reality of aid and development on the ground. They witness the impact of poverty, preventable disease and conflict upon the world’s most vulnerable people. They can also see the impact of various international development programs, how humanitarian assistance can save lives, and how long-term activities to boost resources, education and training can assist in breaking the poverty cycle. They can tell some of the success stories that Australians are keen to hear.

Last year saw unprecedented community support for aid through campaigns such as Make Poverty History. This made it easier for the Rudd Government to commit to increasing Australia’s aid level to 0.5 per cent of gross national income by 2015 and to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

But any government can only continue to support international development and aid in the long term if the public encourages it to do so.

The increased engagement of our returned volunteers in the wider Australian community is a critical part of maintaining and building community support. For example, some returned volunteers organise community events – talks, photo exhibitions, displays, theme days and fund-raisers to raise awareness of the issues faced by Australia’s neighbours. Some are highly successful and innovative in raising funds to support the work of their host organisations overseas. Some speak to community groups, businesses and schools. Some work through the media; newspapers, radio stations, magazines and journals, sharing their stories with a wide audience. Others write books or produce films on humanitarian issues.

The experience, insights and above all the stories of returned volunteers help to raise community awareness of Australia’s role in supporting our neighbours in the region and the world.

I applaud the tireless work of Australian volunteers. I encourage you to consider the role you can play as a volunteer overseas, and as an advocate for Australian aid upon your return.
An Indonesian village of landless labourers, farmers and just four university graduates is an unlikely champion of the cause célèbre that is environmental sustainability. Eleanor Thomas reports.

In the last five years, more than 7000 people have visited a small Indonesian village to see how it has turned waste management into a way of life, creating pride, income and future prospects along the way.

Sukunan was a typical Indonesian village in 2003; its air, soil and water polluted by the burning and dumping of waste along roadsides, in rice fields and rivers.

A returned AVI volunteer with an abiding passion for Indonesia and an inspirational Sukunan villager who started to ‘act locally to think globally’ were instrumental in changing its future.

Thirty years after her stint as an AVI lecturer in Jakarta, anthropologist Lea Jellinek and her partner Ed Kiefer were managing an Australian student program at Gadjah Mada University in Java. They soon became frustrated with the air pollution from burning rubbish and vehicle fumes.

Meanwhile in Sukunan, health research scientist Iswanto discovered that discarded plastic bottles were a prime breeding ground for the mosquitoes that carried dengue fever.

Iswanto met Lea and Ed at a party in Yogyakarta, and the trio began a lengthy discussion on waste management and ways to solve the problem. Over several months, the Sukunan recycling program took shape.

“Iswanto started to implement the program in Sukunan by separating waste in his own home,” explains Lea.

Two factors helped Iswanto to enlist the support of his fellow villagers in recycling: he discussed his plans at the meetings of his neighbourhood night watch group; and two of his supporters, Bapak Harto and Bapak Jariadi, were former village headmen with great influence over the community.

“We started working with village leaders to get the community active,” recalls Bapak Harto. “Headmen and women’s groups in each of the five neighbourhoods of Sukunan were encouraged to spread the message.

“By the first year, 40 to 50 per cent of village households had started recycling and separating their rubbish. People used to throw their rubbish in the river, on the land or burn it. Now people don’t litter in the river and more than 70 per cent separate their rubbish.”

From the start, Iswanto and Lea have sought unusual ways to engage people with the concept of waste management.

“We held an art competition with village youth to paint 66 rubbish bins,” explains Lea. “Young men who hadn’t been interested in the program then began to paint murals around the village showing how to manage waste.”
The village women proved more difficult to engage. When one woman was asked what she wanted for the village, she answered, “I just plant the fields; I don’t think beyond that.”

Eventually, Iswanto’s wife Endah encouraged the women to set up a cottage industry making handbags and purses from discarded aluminium-backed plastic sachets, which are not degradable and used throughout Asia for packaging coffee, snacks and drinks. This initiative became a successful income-earner for some women and helped remove more non-degradable litter from the environment.

Word got out about a village with colourful ways to manage waste, and visitors began to flock to Sukunan. Iswanto was invited to Java and Kalimantan to speak, and visited Australia to learn more about sustainability and permaculture.

“We have had wonderful donors from Melbourne who have allowed us to channel funds carefully and slowly into Sukunan when they have been needed,” says Lea.

“The Monash Asia Institute at Monash University has been helpful in providing a conduit for these funds into the village.”

With waste management entrenched in Sukunan village life, new projects for a greener community have been initiated by two young village leaders, Hari and Muji.

A leaf bank has been created to stop the burning of leaves around Sukunan houses. Hari and Muji went house to house to encourage women to put their swept leaves into bamboo baskets and deliver them to a depot. The leaves are turned into compost and sold, with the women receiving a percentage of the profits.

To support the re-greening effort, AVI permaculturalist Sophy Millard arrived in Sukunan in November 2007.

“Permaculture in itself is not a practice; it’s a tool for sustainable design,” says Sophy. “My day-to-day work is about hearing problems and working with people in the village to offer solutions.”

The village is now trialing a semi-organic rice system called SRI (System of Rice Intensification). After seeing SRI in practice in Bali, a group of farmers are rolling it out in Sukunan.

“The sawah (rice paddy) is being replaced by the city,” Sophy observes. “Only 20 per cent of the land is now sawah, as opposed to 50 per cent a few years ago. It’s hard to be a farmer and it’s not hard to see why farmers turn to chemicals. However, it’s encouraging to see people trialing organic rice in Yogyakarta, Bali and other parts of Indonesia.”

In addition to setting up a vegetable garden program and nursery, Sophy is actively involved in a children’s education program run by her housemate Wati, a young woman from Jakarta.

“Up to 40 children visit our house for lessons every Sunday,” Sophy explains. “They plant gardens, undertake ‘water watch’, identify insects or learn about the damage effluent can cause in the rivers... The kids start out quite shy, but these classes give them the opportunity to think outside the square and to think about the environment.”

An initiative to encourage villagers to think about the effects of rubbish dumping and burning has quickly become a way of life in Sukunan.

“I would like this program to spread to the rest of Indonesia,” says Bapak Harto. “If this village can be seen to have organised itself, it encourages other villages.

“I hope to keep this program running forever and to make Sukunan completely green.”

Eleanor Thomas delivers AVI’s online marketing services.

Contribute to the Sukunan program!

Do you have experience with composting? The Sukunan leaf bank is seeking rapid but natural ways to break down leaf matter without the use of diesel-powered machinery or cow dung. Send your tips to us at mystery@australianvolunteers.com.

Opposite top > The women of Sukunan now sell handbags and purses made from discarded aluminium-backed plastic sachets.

Opposite left > A competition to paint rubbish bins helped increase their use around the village.

Top > Returned volunteer Lea Jellinek (far right) played a large role in setting up the recycling initiative.

Photos > Courtesy Lea Jellinek
**Australian PM meets AVI volunteers in PNG**

**S**taff at the Goroka General Hospital welcomed Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd during his two-day visit to Papua New Guinea in March 2008.

AVI information technology manager Rob Schilt was working at the hospital during the visit. “The hospital was fortunate to receive a visit by the PM during his six-hour stopover in the Goroka Township,” he says. “Mr Rudd went to Goroka to see a range of AusAID-funded aid and development projects.”

Rob was one of four AVI volunteers invited to attend the Prime Minister’s lunch, where Mr Rudd spoke on a range of key issues surrounding PNG and Australia’s relationship with the Pacific nation.

While at the hospital, Mr Rudd made an important stopover at the Michael Alpers (HIV/AIDS) Clinic. “Mr Rudd held a conference and spoke about HIV/AIDS being a major concern for PNG communities and globally,” says Rob. “Staff also took the time to present him with some gifts including a bilum and local coffee.

“Mr Rudd’s friendliness is something that I, and many of my colleagues at the hospital, will remember. The hospital staff worked so hard to prepare for Mr Rudd’s visit, and the excitement at the hospital was overwhelming. It was really rewarding that he took the time to meet us.”

The PM has announced $13 million in funding to non-government organisations working across PNG with people affected by HIV/AIDS, and an increase of up to $25 million in funding in 2008-2009 to assist PNG with meeting its Millennium Development Goals.

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**Team effort delivers Balmain Tigers shirts to junior rugby players**

**H**undreds of junior rugby players in the Pacific are wearing Balmain Tigers rugby t-shirts, due to the generosity of the Australian rugby club and the Toll Group.

A phone call from returned AVI volunteer and Balmain Tigers employee Michael Keech led to the donation of over 300 Tigers junior rugby t-shirts.

Logistics service provider Toll delivered the t-shirts free of charge to AVI’s overseas offices in Solomon Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

On arrival, AVI country managers distributed t-shirts to the Solomon Islands Rugby Union Federation (SIRUF), the Draiba Fijian School and the Port Moresby Rugby League.

SIRUF junior development officer David Fenbury said the t-shirts were presented to junior rugby players before the launch of the country’s 2008 junior rugby program, Pikinini Rugby.

“The SIRUF Development Department is very grateful for the generosity and collective effort of the Balmain Tigers Rugby Club, Australian Volunteers International and Toll Group for organising the donation of the shirts,” he said.

According to Balmain Junior District Rugby League’s Jennie Webster, the Balmain Tigers is a club committed to promoting the game to young Australians and young people in the Pacific.

“To play a small part in events such as the launch of the Solomon Islands 2008 junior rugby program is a very proud moment for the Balmain Tigers and Balmain Junior District Rugby League,” she said.
Australian Volunteers International is committed to working with teachers and students to raise awareness of Australia’s role in international development.

The AVI Schools Program has been developed to provide secondary schools with creative activities and educational resources. It includes a free, nationally-targeted resource kit designed for teachers delivering curriculum in the areas of community involvement, social justice, human rights and global citizenship. It includes:

- An interactive presentation, including footage of AVI youth volunteers at work
- Teachers’ notes for classroom learning activities
- Details on how international volunteering contributes to the Millennium Development Goals
- Creative ideas for fundraising events

Activities draw on the experiences of AVI youth volunteers to demonstrate how young Australians can play an important role by volunteering in developing communities (see story p.20).

The kit was launched at Fitzroy Town Hall during National Youth Week in April 2008. AVI would like to thank volunteers Carmen Beaton and Ben Parangi, MinuteMan Press Collingwood, DataSend and musicians Ryan Meeking and the Better Health and the John Butler Trio for their assistance in creating the kit and supporting the launch.

Order the free Schools Resource Kit from www.australianvolunteers.com/youth or contact the Schools Program team on (03) 9279 1763.
Removing The Red Tape

Ending the threat of landmines means more than just removing the mines themselves – it means ensuring that vulnerable people have secure and productive access to the cleared land.

Scott Rankin explains why.

I saw it on my first visit to Cambodia in 1993, and lost count of how many times I’ve seen it since. A red and white ribbon demarcates a field. Hanging from the ribbon are intermittently-spaced red signs bearing an image of a red skull and the words ‘Danger Mines!!’ – written in both Khmer and English. The scene leaves you in no doubt that this is a place to avoid. Yet on the wrong side of that red ribbon – the UNIMAGINABLY wrong side – a child, a woman, a man wanders. Chasing a cow, collecting firewood, cutting rattan, clearing a field.

There are few more emotive and disturbing issues in the world than the spectre of landmines. Their capacity to indiscriminately injure, and their propensity to linger for decades after battlefields have fallen silent leaves people unequivocal in their response – “Remove the threat. Immediately.” Whatever it takes.”

Yet in Cambodia, a country synonymous with the impact of landmines, an important lesson has been learnt. The people wandering behind that red ribbon are generally aware that they are taking a risk, yet they do so because they regard themselves as having no alternative. Anyone with even barely sufficient resources will stay behind that red line, and find an alternative means to secure a livelihood. Yet people living in the most severe poverty regard the line to be an acceptable risk.

A common misunderstanding of landmines in Cambodia is that they are an invisible threat, innocently stumbled upon by unsuspecting people. While this situation can still occur, it is far more common that those injured are well aware they are in what is euphemistically known as a ‘suspect area’. Their poverty leaves them no other choice. And if their economic insecurity has not been resolved when the actual mine threat is removed, they might even venture on to another mine-affected area to pursue a new livelihood opportunity.

In 2004, AusAID funding enabled AVI to develop the ‘Capacity Building for Mine Action Planning’ project, allowing AVI the opportunity to work closely with Cambodian provincial mine action planning units (MAPUs). MAPUs are a provincially-based secretariat responsible for coordinating a transparent and holistic mine action planning process that has at its centre the needs of the most vulnerable people.

Over the past four years, a team of AVI community planning advisers have worked with MAPU staff to develop methods for prioritising clearance activities, organise meetings and workshops to ensure that all stakeholders are involved, create data management systems, ensure sound budgeting and accounting practices, and continually review and improve all aspects of the mine action planning process.

The result is a stronger process that better accesses local priorities, better documents the knowledge that exists within affected communities, and ensures the transparency and accountability of government in addressing the ongoing needs of these communities.
Cambodia’s annual landmine casualty rate averaged 800-900 victims until 2005. In 2006, the figure dropped to 450 casualties, and dropped further in 2007 to 351 casualties. While many factors have contributed to these encouraging and quite startling statistics, they offer hope that the better-coordinated efforts of the mine action sector in recent years are producing results.

Central to the success of the mine action planning process is that the needs of ‘beneficiaries’ are considered at the front end. Landless and poor people are identified prior to clearance for resettlement on cleared land, and an administrative process commenced to assure that they have tenure of that land in the longer term. MAPUs help ensure that the intended use of land is agreed upon before it is cleared, thus avoiding it being grabbed by powerful people post-clearance – a situation that was all too common prior to the planning process being commenced.

Solutions are also sought to ensure that newly-cleared areas are viable. It is common for areas affected by landmines to become ghost towns of sorts. Unused roads deteriorate, schools and health centres might close. The planning process helps identify the holistic needs of the community that will emerge from clearance and, since new residents are selected based upon their ‘vulnerability’, their needs are complex and often long term.

This process addresses the fact that poverty puts one most at risk of becoming a landmine casualty. By working to build livelihoods for poor people living in mine-affected areas, it is hoped that people will have less need to take the extreme risk of entering these areas in search of income.

MAPUs have been energetic in ensuring that those living in affected areas actively participate in the planning process. Being a bottom-up planning process, villagers are able to contribute to identification and prioritisation of clearance tasks. These include ever-improving efforts to acknowledge the different priorities, as seen through the eyes of women.

The red ribbons are disappearing with time and more importantly, the broad-ranging needs of some of Cambodia’s most vulnerable communities are now better understood. As landmines are cleared, communities now not only see a threat removed, but are hopeful that the piece of land they receive will be the stepping stone to a secure future.

Scott Rankin is the AVI project manager for Capacity Building for Mine Action Planning.

The people wandering behind the red ribbon are aware that they are taking a risk, yet such is their poverty that they have no alternative.
One is a Pacific slice of paradise, the other a tiny, landlocked nation completely surrounded by South Africa. Our in-country staff give you the lowdown on volunteering in Kiribati and Lesotho.

**Kiribati**
After 12 years living in Viet Nam, Claude Potvin has settled into a Pacific lifestyle as AVI’s country manager for Kiribati and Fiji. Claude has previously worked with World University Service Canada and the Canadian International Development Agency.

**Lesotho**
Dennis Lane has worked in development for 21 years in the Caribbean, East and West Africa, the Pacific and Southern Africa. He now works with AVI’s partner organisation Skillshare International to deliver the volunteer program in Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa and Swaziland.

**What are the focus areas for the program?**

**Claude:** In Kiribati it’s mostly education at the secondary and college level. We’re also strengthening the service delivery of government departments like the Judiciary and the Ministry of Public Works. We have a new focus on supporting local enterprises and cooperatives.

**Dennis:** Our first Lesotho volunteer arrived in March 2007, so the program is still growing. We’re aiming to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS and chronic illnesses through better diagnosis, treatment and care. We’ll also support access to quality education, including literacy programs and vocational training, and promote sound environmental management and agricultural productivity to sustain household food security. Lastly, we’ll offer management and marketing training for small enterprises to help increase employment and household incomes. All of this takes into account issues of gender and human rights.

**How many volunteers are in the country?**

**Claude:** We now have 12 volunteers, 10 on the main island of Tarawa and two on Abaiang.

**Dennis:** We currently have two volunteers, both in the capital Maseru. More are on their way soon!

**What is the best thing about volunteering in this country?**

**Claude:** As one volunteer recently said: “You can’t get more Pacific than Kiribati!” You’re on a small atoll in the middle of the ocean, with a few coconut and pandanus trees and a sandbank. The fishing is really good – volunteers actually look out their windows and see giant tuna and marlin jump out of the water! Plus the people are very friendly. Most volunteers are very sad to leave Kiribati, because they’ve had a real good time there.

**Dennis:** It may sound like a cliché, but people always comment on the friendliness of the Basuto people. There’s also the variety; you never know from one day to the next what new challenge will make your life interesting. Outside of work, one could hardly find a more beautiful country. The sight of pink-blossom-laden peach trees against a backdrop of snow-covered mountains will always stay with you.

**What will volunteers find challenging about working in this country?**

**Claude:** Ironically, the fact that you’re on an island in the middle of the Pacific is what makes Kiribati challenging! Most volunteers face geographic isolation because getting off the island is not easy or cheap. The other thing people find difficult is the food; imported food is expensive and you have to depend on a supply ship that comes every six to nine weeks.

**Dennis:** Things often take a lot longer to happen than volunteers are used to. However, if you spend time observing things at the start and reshaping your expectations of what can be achieved, a lot more happens in the long run. Also, things like internet access do not always work as expected.

**What is the standard living allowance and how far does it go?**

**Claude:** Right now we’re paying A$860 per month. If you live as the locals do, it goes very far. If you want the lifestyle of an ambassador, you might find it not enough!

**Dennis:** A$1100 a month, paid quarterly. On that amount, volunteers can eat out now and then and buy a few little luxuries, but it does require them to look at their lifestyle and decide on priorities.
What kind of accommodation is available for volunteers?

Claude: Housing can be a problem as there's not many houses available. Most volunteers get an extra allowance of A$700 per month for accommodation, but they have to share because renting a nice house costs more than that. On the flip side, a volunteer might not end up with a beautiful house but they will have a beautiful view of the ocean!

Dennis: Currently we’re looking for volunteers to work just outside of Maseru; their accommodation will be traditional rondavel dwellings, but with electricity and water.

What kind of a social life is available to volunteers?

Claude: Kiribati volunteers have an extremely active social life. There are all sorts of expatriate events – the Hash House Harriers, the Australian High Commission ‘happy hour’, fishing contests ... Some volunteers prefer to mingle more with the local community and for them it’s fishing and picnics with local families, and basket weaving and other handicrafts for the women.

Dennis: To quote one of the first AVI volunteers: “I've been invited to barbeques, day trips and social gatherings already, and it's allowed me to create useful professional and personal networks”. Apart from that, a volunteer's social life revolves around eating and drinking with local colleagues and neighbours.

What personal qualities will volunteers need?

Claude: It’s my turn to quote a recent volunteer: “Bring a strong constitution, a sense of humour and loads of tolerance”. You need to understand that the culture is quite different. People who have been living off their sandbars for a long time don’t have the same attitudes to work that we do.

Dennis: Paraphrasing an ex-UK Prime Minister: “Patience, patience, patience”! Apart from that, we hope that volunteers will be resourceful and open to different ways of working. Being interested in learning about Basuto culture is key. Oh, and did I say patience?

What clothes should volunteers pack?

Claude: My advice is to travel lightly as you won’t need any formal clothes or warm clothes. What you should pack are medicines and toiletries because there are no pharmacies on the island. Bring your favourite shampoo, contact lens solution, antibiotic cream, eye and ear drops.

Dennis: Some workplaces are very traditional and volunteers need to look smart, but others are casual and jeans are fine. Cheap (and therefore not great quality) clothing is readily available. It can be very cold in winter so bring thermals if you have them! Good boots are useful for hiking or pony trekking in the mountains.

What's the best local beer?

Claude: There are no local beers! The local grog is a syrupy thing made from palm sap. But the imported beer is always cold at Captain’s Bar by the ocean!

Dennis: A nice cold Maluti goes down very well all year round. Hot toddies are great in the winter!

What assignments are coming up in the next few months?

Claude: We’re looking for a boat builder and a cabinet maker, as well as science, maths and English teachers. Plus lawyers for the Judiciary.

Dennis: We’re looking for a psychosocial support officer to work with orphans and vulnerable children, a legal adviser to work on youth policy and family law cases, an eco-tourism development officer and a youth worker.

Talking the Talk on Island Justice

The island nation of Tuvalu has its own way of resolving disputes, dispensing British common law and traditional justice in equal parts. Claire Layden talks to two Australian lawyers working within this unique system.

Night holds no fear for the citizens of Funafuti atoll – not when policemen on bicycles patrol the streets, handing out fines to anyone caught without a flashlight.

Funafuti is the capital of Tuvalu, a Polynesian nation of nine islands with a total land area of 26 square kilometres. Since gaining independence from British rule in 1978, Tuvalu is developing its own system of justice by combining the common law system initiated by the British with traditional methods of dispute resolution.

The Office of the People’s Lawyer on Funafuti supports this process by providing legal and advocacy services. It was instituted by departing British administrators in recognition that the small island nation would not be able to provide either a private legal sector to which citizens could turn, or the economic growth to enable citizens to afford private legal advice.

Joelle Grover is the current People’s Lawyer, supported by AVI through the AusAID-funded Pacific Technical Assistance Mechanism (PACTAM). She has discovered that, in a nation of 11,000 people, there is a high demand for advice and representation on civil, family law and criminal cases for individuals, companies and organisations.

“Since I started in September 2007, I’ve been processing a backlog of cases that built up during the 10 months since there was last a lawyer in the Office,” says Joelle. “I’ve dealt with criminal defence for misdemeanours like assault, and civil litigation including employment issues, native title land disputes and judicial review applications.”

Aside from the Office of the People’s Lawyer, the only lawyers operating in Tuvalu are based in the Attorney-General’s Office or other government departments. This presents difficulties when cases between two parties proceed to the courts, as the People’s Lawyer is the only representative and cannot speak for both parties. On these occasions, a lawyer from the Attorney-General’s Office is sometimes called upon to represent one party.

Daniel Gorman is a legal adviser with the Attorney-General’s Office, also supported by PACTAM. His role is to draft government bills and subsidiary legislation, train colleagues in legislative drafting, advise on criminal and civil matters and represent the Government in legal proceedings.

Both Daniel and Joelle note that practising law in Tuvalu involves the interplay between common law and the traditional methods of justice that continue to play an important role in community relationships and local government, especially on the outer islands.


Dispute resolution is one area which highlights this complex relationship. Island councils (kaupule) have a pivotal
The procedure is very informal – asking parties what they think of a proposed solution, adjourning to go conduct a family meeting, and then adopting the family’s decision at the next sitting.”

A sea change and much more!
The Pacific Technical Assistance Mechanism (PACTAM) is an AusAID initiative that deploys highly-skilled personnel to assist Pacific governments and agencies to meet their human resource needs. Employees receive remuneration at Australian market standards and relocation support. For upcoming assignments visit www.australianvolunteers.com/pactam

role in governing the island community (falekaupule) and determining the obligations of community members.

“The Falekaupule Act 1997 has empowered the traditional island assembly to be the key decision-making body within the local government system,” says Daniel. “The kaupule of each island votes in accordance with the customs of the island.”

Falekaupule have a traditional way of managing disputes, in which the aggrieved parties raise their concerns with community leaders, who then make a decision on what is to be done. Joelle explains that these decisions are made in consultation with the community. “The acceptance of a consensus-based approach means that clients are more readily amenable to engage in mediation processes than a culture without that tradition – such as in Australia, where dispute resolution processes are historically more adversarial.”

The conciliatory processes used by kaupule are also used in the Lands Court in Tarawa, whose members are selected from the community and often have no legal background. “The procedure it adopts is very informal: asking parties what they think of a proposed solution, adjourning for the parties to go conduct a family meeting, and then adopting the family’s decision at the next sitting.” Joelle explains.

This approach even plays a role in criminal matters. It is quite common for a perpetrator of a crime to counteract their actions through a formal apology, and the affected person or family will let the matter go. As Joelle points out, “This can be a good thing in the case of a minor offence – such as someone who has broken the neighbour’s window while drunk”. Unfortunately, this approach can sometimes mean that perpetrators of more serious crimes such as assault are not prosecuted and victims may feel family pressure to drop the complaint.

There are other occasions where the motives of legislation do not align with Tuvaluan custom. In the case of land rights, the Lands Code allows for women and men to inherit equal proportions, but traditionally sons in Tuvalu receive the larger share. The Tuvalu Bill of Rights does not specifically protect women’s rights and cases where women have challenged unequal distribution of property have often been unsuccessful.

The offices of the People’s Lawyer and the Attorney General are therefore crucial to resolving the challenge of implementing a consistent and fair legal system while maintaining the strengths of Tuvaluan customary practice.

Joelle’s ‘outsider’ status is often an advantage. “Being a foreigner has helped to maintain the neutrality of my role as People’s Lawyer, and in gaining the trust of the community,” she explains.

Daniel believes that both offices must respect custom. “It is important that laws meet the expectations of the community and accord with traditional values and customs, especially in post-colonial societies where law and customary practice can sometimes diverge,” says Daniel.

“Steps have been taken to accord many customs with the status of customary law in relevant circumstances and to recognise the important function of traditional decision makers – even if this is at times challenging to an Australian common law lawyer.”
An Elephant Patrol Never Forgets . . .

The Leuser Ecosystem in Indonesia comprises 2.5 million hectares of natural rainforest between Aceh and Sumatra. The Leuser International Foundation protects this area, which is one of the most important conservation hotspots on earth and home to several endangered species. AV graphic designer Eva Collado works with the foundation to create promotional material that supports ecotourism and promotes conservation at a community level. She shares her photos of the foundation’s conservation activities.

All photos by Eva Collado.
For more on the Leuser Ecosystem visit www.leuserfoundation.org.
A visit from the World Bank requires a formal photography session. The foundation’s training coordinator Milla Sörgärde shares a joke with the participants.

On the field component of the training, students question a man caught logging illegally. They will write a report which will be used in court. Unfortunately, many cases will not make it to a proper hearing.

The students at the end of their training workshop.

The Unit Patroli Gajah (‘Elephant Patrol Unit’) carries out forest monitoring and protection activities on elephant back. These elephants are the smallest species in Asia and only found within the Leuser ecosystem. Deforestation is forcing the animals into villages to search for food. The patrol educates villagers on how to protect both their crops and the forest.

Here, patrol member Harris and coordinator Leila Schuh bathe the elephant in a river before the patrol starts.

The foundation organises a number of training activities with staff and students. Students participate in an eight-day workshop on navigation skills, illegal logging practices and the law in their area, and how to identify flora and fauna species.

A two-hour boat journey down the river and into the rainforest. Eva and her colleagues are trekking in search of gibbons and wild elephants, two of the many species that call the Leuser Ecosystem home.

The elephant patrol team wear bracelets made from local grass. Hand-made, they take only half an hour to weave, and change from a light tan to black with wear.

A visit from the World Bank requires a formal photography session. The foundation’s training coordinator Milla Sörgärde shares a joke with the participants.

On the field component of the training, students question a man caught logging illegally. They will write a report which will be used in court. Unfortunately, many cases will not make it to a proper hearing.

The students at the end of their training workshop.
A doctor, an architect and a business manager fly to the Pacific … and discover that working with limited resources can sometimes make you more resourceful.

Tools of the Trade

“Running a general medical ward in Australia with 50 patients as sick as mine, I’d be relying on countless resources,” says Ruth. “From rooms protected from insects and rodents (with clean sheets and purpose-built beds) to basic medical equipment such as blood pressure machines, pulse oximeters and machines to control the infusion rates of intravenous fluids or medications. I’d rely on diagnostic resources such as blood tests, microbiology, X-rays and CT scans. “I’d also have the comfort of knowing that, should my patients need it, intensive care services and surgical consultation were available.”

At St Mary’s Hospital, the rooms were open to the outside air; a practical consideration in the tropical heat but no good for keeping out malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The patients had basic beds and their family members slept on the floor beside them. Diagnostic equipment was limited to blood slides for malaria, sputum slides for tuberculosis, basic blood tests and X-rays of varying quality.

Architect Jeremy Mather left a job managing multi-million-pound retail and infrastructure projects in the United Kingdom to become the government architect for the Ministry of Public Works in Kiribati. He cites the desire to get back to grassroots as the reason for his career change.

“It went right back to the notion of providing shelter; not just providing wants, but needs. That’s what drew me to the AVI assignment.”

Jeremy and his small team in Kiribati were responsible for maintaining all existing government buildings as well as managing an outer islands development program to build council offices, guesthouses, community centres, police stations and copra sheds.

“We were working with concrete blocks and low-grade timber,” he recalls. “We had limited surveying equipment and no civil engineering advice to rely on, so we had to make a lot of assumptions.”

Ruth and Jeremy soon learnt to improvise. “Instead of diagnostic tests, I came to rely on my clinical skills,” says Ruth. “I learnt to estimate a patient’s haemoglobin by looking inside the eyelids. I learnt how to drain fluid from a patient’s belly with a home-made kit consisting of a fluid-giving set, an IV needle and a urine collecting bag.

“I used recycled gloves, washed again and again until they broke. I treated for malaria every time someone presented with a fever, whether or not it appeared on the blood film. In short, I learnt to practice bush medicine!”

Jeremy changed his design style to cope with a lack of materials. “We had to use structural members as architectural features, using the structure to highlight the building rather than hide it.

“It was a challenge to be creative using limited tools and materials; to create architecture in keeping with the local vernacular while providing modern, contemporary facilities for the client.”
Business manager Robyn Aburn had a somewhat different experience in Vanuatu. Her AVI assignment involved developing a small business training program for VANWODS Microfinance, an organisation that assists more than 850 disadvantaged women to run micro-businesses such as cooking and handicrafts.

Robyn discovered that many aspects of her new role were similar to work she had done in Australia: networking, delivering workshops, project management and office administration. Her office in Vila was well equipped with working computers, an internet connection and a photocopier. The challenges began when she took her training to the villages.

Number one was finding a rain-proof location where training resources could be displayed. “One of the sessions was held at a youth centre,” Robyn recalls. “When the manager of the centre didn’t arrive – with the keys to the room – we held the training outside on the grass and found an old table to blu-tack the flipcharts to. In other villages I’ve had to peg the flip-charts to a washing line.”

A more significant challenge was the participants’ level of education. “I found out during the first workshop that some members hadn’t had any formal education; so teaching them to run a small business when they couldn’t read or write was never going to work!”

To overcome the problem, Robyn contacted other organisations to provide basic numeracy and literacy training for the members. For participants who could read, she prepared detailed handouts, translated into Bislama to help with comprehension.

All three volunteers discovered that there were some things they couldn’t live without. For Ruth, it was pocket medical textbooks, plus the respect she received from her patients and their families. Jeremy’s scale rule and butter paper became indispensable when no other equipment was handy. Blu-tack became Robyn’s saviour; with it, she could display her flip charts on tree trunks.

They also insist that the right attitude is vital; leaving behind western expectations, learning to be flexible, leaving plenty of time to do things, and accepting that some things could not be done.

One of the hardest things Ruth had to learn was the reality of life and death. “Sometimes we would attempt to treat patients who were sick beyond our resources. Without a clear diagnosis, we often had to treat for more than one thing at a time. Occasionally there was a miracle story, such as a little boy who recovered from cerebral malaria and walked home after treatment.

“But there were many cases where the diagnosis wasn’t clear and the treatment didn’t work. One of my most-used phrases was, “Em bikelia sik nau, em sick tumas. Bai yume pray, tasol” (He’s very sick, he’s too sick. Now all we can do is pray).

“My main advice from what I’ve experienced is to work to the best of your abilities, recognise your limitations and, above all, show that you care.”

Jeremy agrees that a lack of resources is part of the challenge that development workers accept. “You do an assignment like this because you want to and you tackle the challenges as they present themselves; you don’t turn away.”

Eleanor Thomas delivers AVI’s online marketing services and Zayne D’Crus manages brand strategy, advertising and publications.
The Amazing Race: India

The challenge: You're headed for a tiny tribal village in the forested hills of Tamil Nadu to plan and deliver a series of community development projects. Your goals are to increase attendance at the village school, train children in basic hygiene, organise a women's self-help group, establish a village resource centre, teach people to recycle their garbage and raise awareness of HIV/AIDS. Oh, and you don't speak a word of Tamil. You have 10 weeks. Go.

Seven young Australians took up this challenge in December 2007, heading to India to launch a brand new youth program. Developed as a partnership between Australian Volunteers International (AVI) and Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW), the program brought together volunteers from Australia and India to work in remote tribal villages in Tamil Nadu. All volunteers were in their twenties; most were university students.

SPW had been based in the region for more than 10 years, working on the gargantuan task of reducing poverty, illiteracy and chronic health issues by empowering young people to make decisions about the future of their communities. For the first time, AVI volunteers would work alongside SPW’s Indian volunteers in two villages, Thandayan Kottai and Pinjamandhai.

SPW’s field coordinator Sri Ram was instrumental in setting up the partnership. “Our model of working is to bring young volunteers from different places into the villages,” he explains. “We’ve found Australian volunteers to be a little more mature and understanding of the problems these communities face.”

For the AVI volunteers, the 10-week program was a steep learning curve in the realities of community development: they encountered limited resources, language barriers, a lack of education and lengthy delays caused by inclement weather, compounded by the short time they had to spend in the villages.

Challenge number one in Thandayan Kottai was to teach hygiene practices at the village school to prevent diarrhoea. The team discovered on arrival that the school consisted of one classroom housing 40 students aged three to 15 and just one teacher.

“That was definitely an eye-opener for us,” says Amanda Hutchings, an environmental health officer who joined the program to put her professional knowledge into practice. “We ended up taking classes when the teacher didn’t turn up.”

As none of the children spoke English, the classes were delivered by the Indian volunteers, which meant that the group had to produce detailed lesson plans before each class. They also wanted to break away from the traditional rote-learning system, which meant identifying innovative ways to raise awareness of hygiene.

“We organised a hand-washing relay,” says Amanda. “We lined up cakes of soap at the water tank and the kids had to run to the tank, wash their hands, run back and tag the next person. It was fun and it encouraged them to keep washing their hands.”

Flash cards provided by SPW were another way of demonstrating good hygiene, using examples relevant to the children’s lives. “We had a series of cards showing two girls buying food with flies all over it, and then getting diarrhoea. So that let us talk about how you should only buy food in sealed packages.”

The next challenge was to increase attendance at the school, which the group attempted to solve by instituting an attendance register and giving prizes to children who came to school for five straight days. “We stopped that after a few weeks, because a number of children simply couldn’t come to school because they had to walk a long way, or because they were sick, or their parents made them work in the fields instead,” explains Amanda.

Waste management classes produced mixed results, due to the community’s lack of awareness on the issue. The team placed bins in the classrooms, dug composting pits and planted a kitchen garden. “One day we found the children all standing around our composting pit and throwing their eggshells into it,” Amanda recalls. “It was a proud moment because we hadn’t told them to do it, they just remembered the training.”

Engaging the adults in the village proved much more challenging. One of SPW’s priorities was to start a women’s self-help group in the village to discuss gender issues, yet the volunteers struggled to raise interest among the women. “For each meeting we’d have to door-knock the night before, then have another door-knock when the meeting was meant to start, then a third reminder an hour later,” says Amanda.

Eventually, the women identified their top ‘wants’: road access, a ration shop, skills training, access to medical services and a hostel for students. “It wasn’t realistic for us to address all those issues in 10 weeks,” admits volunteer Nick Bachmann, a commerce graduate from Sydney. “We decided on skills training because that was something we could do.”
Above > AVI youth volunteers Sally Brooks and Gabby Lam dig an irrigation ditch with SPW volunteers Bose and Nagesh and boys from Thandayan Kottai.

Left > The youth volunteers and village women participate in an incense-making workshop.

Photos > Nick Bachmann

One woman mentioned incense making as an income generation activity, so the team set about finding an incense company to supply raw materials and a trainer from a nearby village to teach the women to make the finished product. “We held five workshops and, by the end of our stay, 12 women were quite capable in making the incense sticks,” Nick reports. “SPW is now looking into a manufacturing contract with an incense company.”

More projects followed, each with their own successes and failures. The school’s second classroom was converted to a village resource centre with colourful murals, books and craft kits. Computer classes were delayed several times because there was no computer cable in the village. An attempt to create an eco-trail to encourage tourism fell apart because the trail cut across a road commonly used to transport illegal alcohol. A basic health training program, organised at short notice, raised a great deal of interest in the village. Out-of-school youth refused to attend a sports day designed to attract them back to school, but turned up en masse for a Tamil movie night.

Reflecting on the program, SPW’s Sri Ram believes two important outcomes were achieved. “First of all, having volunteers come and work with the villagers generates interest in education. We’ve been asking parents to send their kids to school for months but when the volunteers started playing games and developing learning systems, the kids started going on their own. “Secondly, the volunteers learnt that any kind of development work takes a lot of time and needs a lot of patience.”

Amanda concurs. “Sometimes we thought we weren’t achieving anything, and we were just waiting for things to happen. But we learnt that if it didn’t work the first time, it doesn’t mean we’d failed; we just had to try a different angle to get things done.

“When we did our final report and looked back on our time in Thandayan Kottai, we realised we’d achieved a lot more than we first thought.”

Find your place in the world...

We’re looking for young Australians with an interest in community development for projects in Papua New Guinea, India and the Philippines, departing in June and December 2008. For more, visit www.australianvolunteers.com/youth
More than 80 per cent of people with a disability live in the developing world, and the literacy and employment rates of people living with disabilities are staggeringly low. Australian Volunteers International is delivering two new initiatives to ensure that volunteering can effectively support the disability sector in the Pacific.

With the support of AusAID, AVI will review the efforts of all Australian volunteer-sending agencies in relation to disability in Pacific Island nations. By analysing case studies and lessons learnt, AVI will document the processes, structures and techniques that promote effective capacity building and advocacy within the disability sector.

In addition, Planet Wheeler Foundation has enabled AVI to offer small grants to its partners in the Pacific for training activities, equipment and small projects.

The Planet Wheeler Foundation, an initiative of Lonely Planet founders Tony and Maureen Wheeler, is supporting a special fund to extend AVI’s capacity building work in the region.

“There is a growing need to complement the AVI volunteer program with additional resources to maximise its impact,” explains Vicki Mau, AVI’s regional manager for the Middle East. “We’re taking a more innovative approach by sharing volunteer expertise across the region, enabling organisations to co-host volunteers and providing small grants.”

Through the newly-established fund, partner organisations can apply to AVI for small grants to initiate pilot projects, access transport to reach isolated communities, organise training or purchase equipment which can be shared with other agencies.

Anna Demant from Planet Wheeler says: “The Middle East has always been an area of interest for our trustees so we were delighted to hear that AVI has planned a small grants program in the region. AVI volunteers and the people they work with are very resourceful, but often they can achieve so much more with a small injection of cash.

“There is so much potential in the region, and we look forward to hearing how the people living there choose to use these grants.”

For information on AVI’s disability research, contact Russell Hocking on (03) 9279 1849 or email rhocking@australianvolunteers.com.

For information on the small grants program contact Eleanor Loudon on (03) 9279 1805 or email elouden@australianvolunteers.com.

Volunteering and disability in the Pacific

AVI’s partner organisations in the Middle East will now be able to access grants for training activities, equipment and small projects.

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“There is so much potential in the region, and we look forward to hearing how the people living there choose to use these grants.”
Those travellers who turn their noses up at Bali usually envisage nightclubs, boozy end-of-season football trips and gaudy souvenirs. They forget, however, that beyond the small bubble of tourism madness in the south lies the rest of Bali; a green place of mountains and rice terraces, gods worshipped with incense and flowers, and villages unique for their traditional Hindu lifestyle.

In 2002, four such villages teamed up with a local environmental agency to set up Bali's first village ecotourism network, Jaringan Ekowisa Desa (JED).

The JED villages wanted to prove that a different kind of tourism was possible in Bali; tourism based on local control, sustainable community livelihoods, respect for the environment and the sharing of culture. They were passionate about setting the record straight on Bali, and sharing with visitors the Bali that they knew and loved.

Three years into the project, the enthusiasm and commitment of the villages was still running high but was unfortunately not reflected in their tourist numbers. Thus I joined the JED team as an AVI ecotourism officer in 2005, to help get their vision off the ground and offer business and marketing know-how.

We worked together for two years, securing financial grants, training village guides, learning first aid, recruiting a local manager and learning about marketing, pricing and business administration. By the time I left the project seemed ready to stand alone, but I still harboured my secret trepidation as I said my goodbyes.

So when I visited my Bali friends in January 2007, 12 months after my departure, I was elated to see the progress that JED has made. Gede, the Balinese manager I left in place, has maintained the ethos of partnership with and between the villages. Together they had fully implemented the work plan we had set out for the year. JED has become so successful that, although its international funding has come to an end, the project is now financially independent.

Travellers are now spreading the word about the JED village daytrips and family homestays, new brochures are being printed, a new website is under development and our network of friends and supporters is growing steadily.

I no longer feel any concern for the future of JED. The expressions of wonderment on the faces of returned tourists, the tireless energy of the villagers, the competence of Gede and the other staff and the timeless charm of the island will ensure the project's ongoing success ... and, with luck, a fresh start for tourism in Bali.

To experience Bali as the Balinese know it, visit JED at www.jed.or.id

Forget the tacky bars and crowded beaches – there's another kind of tourism in Bali, and it's thriving. Returned volunteer Virginia Simpson reports.
Creating a protected area network to conserve one of Timor-Leste’s most spectacular coastal and marine regions has taken a great deal of persistence and collaboration.  
Bianca Thair talks to the people involved.

Stretching over 68,000 hectares of land and 55,600 hectares of sea lies one of the most unique and picturesque terrestrial and marine habitats in Asia. Dense tropical forests are inhabited by rare, endemic and critically-endangered birds such as the Yellow-Crested Cockatoo and Timor Green Pigeon. A lake perched 350 metres above sea level flows slowly into a rugged limestone mountain range, to disappear into a labyrinth of caves and underground streams. Along the coast, divers can witness the incredible biodiversity of coral and reef fish that inhabit the Coral Triangle.

Located at the far eastern tip of Timor-Leste, this tropical paradise holds a profound mythological and historical significance for the Timorese people. Known as the Nino Konis Santana National Park, it is the first park of its kind in the country and internationally commended for the conservation of its terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

Senor Manuel Mendes is Director of the Department of Protected Areas and National Parks, located within the Timorese Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. In his view, the National Park plays a critical role in preserving not only biodiversity but also Timorese livelihoods and culture. “These areas have many natural, cultural and historical values that have been lost in other places in Timor-Leste,” he explains.

“Protection is also about land management for nature and rural livelihoods to protect air, soil and water. Conservation is not only to rehabilitate the land but to protect what is still remaining.”

Calls had been made for more than 20 years to protect the natural and cultural resources in the park. Under United Nations administration in 2000, a regulation was passed to establish 15 protected areas but little happened on the ground until after the country gained formal independence.

In 2001, Timor-Leste’s then Foreign Affairs Minister Jose Ramos-Horta approached Australian Greens Senator Bob Brown for advice on how to formally establish a protected area network (PAN).

After some discussion, the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change became involved and worked consultatively with the Timorese Government and local communities to develop a plan to move forward. Conservation agency BirdLife International assisted with a nation-wide survey of bird populations to identify national priorities for biodiversity conservation.

It has taken seven years of consultation, collaboration and surveys to establish the PAN and the park. AVI volunteer Cathy Molnar has played a significant role in the process.

Cathy, who had already spent several years doing environmental work in Timor-Leste with the UN administration, received a surprise invitation to join the project. “I received an email from BirdLife’s Asia Division, asking me whether I would be interested in a short contract looking at the assigned protected areas and seeing whether much had progressed since the project commenced,” she says.

Cathy soon discovered that the project was lagging considerably and chose to remain in Timor-Leste for an extended period, jointly supported by Australian Volunteers International, BirdLife and the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change.

The first step in moving the project forward was getting local ownership, especially from the communities residing within the park. As Senor Mendes explains, “We cannot simply ban or change human activities; we must harmonise between conservation, sustainable livelihood practices and the rights of local communities.”

For Cathy, this meant taking a gradual approach and ensuring that all interest groups were represented in consultations and planning.

“Consultation, collaboration and inclusion must happen from the outset and throughout all steps, and at all levels,” she says. “A program that is overly conservation-oriented
without considering and involving local communities is inappropriate and likely to fail for lack of ownership.

“Local stakeholders must be part of the development process, actually defining what they desire. Developing something separately and then presenting it for approval is not consultation or collaboration.”

Another important step was the collection and analysis of data, to which BirdLife has contributed greatly. Richard Grimmett, head of BirdLife’s Global Conservation Division, became involved with the park while he was based in Indonesia. "We had been supporting some work in Timor-Leste prior to independence and realised that the country had some very important areas of forest and populations of wildlife – particularly birds threatened with extinction," Richard explains.

Richard and Cathy have developed a solid working relationship and BirdLife hopes to continue its involvement long into the future. "The partnership is about conserving biodiversity and protecting important areas of natural habitat, because rural communities need resources like water and timber to survive. It’s about creating a balance, which isn’t something that will happen overnight."

The Nino Konis Santana National Park was formally declared in 2007 and named after a hero of the Timorese independence movement. The park is now being managed by the Timorese Department of Protected Areas and National Parks in collaboration with other government and civil society groups and local communities.

“Local stakeholders must be part of the development process, actually defining what they desire. Developing something separately and then presenting it for approval is not consultation or collaboration.”

As Senor Mendes believes, these communities stand to benefit from conservation of the area. "As well as cultural rights, there must be benefits from things like ethical tourism, more sustainable livelihood activities and, improved infrastructure like roads to ease access, and water and land management to protect soil and water."

Several small-scale tourism developments are also under way; although, as Cathy explains, this can be a tricky proposition. "Tourism by its very nature is a business, the imperatives of which often move at a different pace to conservation, so getting the balance is critical."

Richard agrees that tourism development should be approached with caution. "We do hope to encourage visitors and generate economic opportunities for local stakeholders in the near future. The coral and marine wildlife are in very good condition, so you always have to be careful to avoid any negative impacts on the park."

Senor Mendes believes that the park can be an international example of Timor-Leste’s progress. "I think most people in the world don’t really know much about Timor-Leste. The National Park and Protected Area Network is our opportunity to show other countries what we have and who we are – and for them to understand about Timor-Leste and what we have to give to the world."

Bianca Thair works as a journalist for a number of publications around Australia.

Opposite > The forests at Mount Curi, part of the National Park.
Top Left > Bird survey training at Lake Tasitolu.
Top Right > The Vero River estuary.
Photos > Colin Trainor
She had no experience in formal education and couldn’t find her host country on a map. So how come her students now fill management positions in the hospitality industry? Bronwyn Driscoll tells her story.

Not just your everyday forest green, but luminous, glow-in-the-dark, radioactive green.

That’s how I would describe myself as I embarked on a two-year assignment with AVI. The year was 2003 and I was off to Malawi. Where? I said ‘yes’ before I even knew where the country was. In fact, I was so desperate to be a volunteer that I told my AVI interviewer I was perfectly competent to perform almost any task, aside from more difficult surgical procedures. Fortunately, the recruitment team at AVI decided to offer me a position better suited to my actual work history as a business and hospitality manager.

So that’s how I took my bat and ball and headed off to begin work at the Malawi Institute of Tourism (MIT) in Blantyre. My role was to develop, implement and manage a three-year diploma course in hospitality and tourism management, the first of its kind in Malawi.

Rated one of the poorest countries in the world, Malawi has little to rely on to generate foreign exchange or employment opportunities: no export commodities, few natural resources and almost no industry. Tourism, however, offers a ray of hope. MIT had been running certificate courses for line-level staff in food and beverage operations, housekeeping, front office and cooking. By 2003 though, the industry was demanding highly-qualified staff to meet specific needs, particularly in supervisory or management positions. Prior to my arrival, a survey showed that 98 per cent of management positions in Malawi were filled by men and women with the equivalent of a Year Nine education.

It was daunting to pass into the world of being an official ‘educator’. I sometimes felt like a fraud to be in the privileged position of giving young Malawian men and women ‘An Education’ – such a highly sought-after commodity. I was continually waiting to be caught out, and I often was (“No Madam, that’s not a pronoun, that’s a past participle!”).

My students were accepting of my flaws and forgiving of my failures, and their needs were a tremendous motivator. With almost no resources available at MIT, the challenge of putting together a syllabus was significant. As is so often the case, family, friends and allies from unlikely places rallied together to help from afar. The course we developed covered topics such as Management Principles, Financial Management, English and Business Communication, Sales and Marketing, Human Resource Management, Banquet Operations, Safety and Hygiene and Tourism Operations.

Three and a half years of work eventually culminated in the sight of 38 students, resplendent in their gowns, receiving their diplomas in front of over 300 family members and friends. Their faces were not large enough to fit their smiles. My smile was equally wide, but mixed with tears. The pride I felt could not be measured. Opened by the Right Honourable Minister of Tourism, the graduation was held at Blantyre’s finest hotel – only fitting for the future captains of Malawi’s tourism industry!

My students, whose every name I remember, whose every face I can see clearly, came
from every corner of the country. They came from different tribes and religions and economic circumstances. Some were orphans; some came from families of 10 and more. They called me their mother and asked me to mould them into men and women who would play an integral role in the future success of the hospitality industry. They still make contact regularly, filling me in on their latest news, asking for advice, wanting to hold onto the bond that we all shared.

Was I successful? If I was, it was less on my part and more on the part of the 38 students with whom I spent six hours a day, five days a week, for three years. If I was successful, it was because these students – whose parents sacrificed greatly to send them to school – studied for hours by candlelight in the small quarters they rented for MK1500 (A$12) a month. It was because these students injected humour, honesty and tenacity into our cramped little classroom.

My success lies not in the fact that 98 per cent of these students are now gainfully employed in supervisory or management positions in hospitality – the credit for that is entirely theirs. It is far more personal than I can write about, but is shared by thousands of AVI volunteers who understand that success cannot be measured by what was achieved, but by what they have become because of the experience.

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**Dates to Remember > 2008/2009**

10 May – 1 June
- **AVI Volunteer Recruitment Drive**
  Check out the paid, professional volunteer assignments on our website

12 – 18 May
- **National Volunteer Week**
  Celebrate how ‘Volunteers change our World’ at www.volunteeringaustralia.org

May
- **Information Sessions in all capital cities**
  Check the AVI website for details
- **Returned Volunteer social events in capital cities, Ballarat, Bendigo and Coffs Harbor**

8 June – 13 August
- **AVI Youth Program**: Papua New Guinea project

13 June – 15 August
- **AVI Youth Program**: India project (Ooty)

26 June – 27 August
- **AVI Youth Program**: Philippines project

6 – 13 July
- **NAIDOC Week** www.naidoc.org.au

July – August
- **Returned Volunteer debrief workshops in selected cities**

9 August – 1 September
- **AVI Volunteer Recruitment Drive**
  Check out the paid, professional volunteer assignments on our website

August
- **Information Sessions in all capital cities**
  Talk to AVI staff and returned volunteers. Check the AVI website for details

12 – 18 October
- **Anti-Poverty Week**
  www.antipovertyweek.org.au

17 October
- **Stand Up for the Millennium Development Goals**

1 November – 24 November
- **AVI Volunteer Recruitment Drive**
  Check out the paid, professional volunteer assignments on our website

November
- **Information Sessions in all capital cities**
  Check AVI website for details

1 December 2008
- **World AIDS Day**

2 December 08 – 06 February 09
- **AVI Youth Program**: India project (Vellore)

5 December
- **International Volunteer Day**

December
- **Returned Volunteer social events in all capital cities**

4 December 08 – 2 February 09
- **AVI Youth Program**: Philippines project

6 December 08 – 6 February 09
- **AVI Youth Program**: India project (Ooty)

7 February 09 – 2 March 09
- **AVI Volunteer Recruitment Drive**
  Check out the paid, professional volunteer assignments on our website

Please note: These dates are correct at the time of printing and may be subject to change.
AVI’s pre-departure briefings for new volunteers draw on a range of participatory and reflective activities to prepare volunteers for the challenges of a cross-cultural assignment. Where do you stand? is an interactive way to promote group discussion and highlight the range of views that can exist on a topic.

Where Do You Stand? can be adapted to almost any topic that attracts a range of viewpoints – such as women’s rights, education, HIV/AIDS, group dynamics or even corruption.

AVI’s trainers use it in a discussion on the nature of ‘Australian culture’, which is a starting point for examining the issues involved in living and working cross-culturally. What emerges from this discussion is an appreciation of the stereotypes that may be attached to Australians living overseas; as well as an understanding that while there is great diversity within Australian society, there are many commonly-held Australian workplace and social expectations that we may mistakenly view as universal.

How to use the activity

The object of Where Do You Stand? is to have the group create a visual representation of their views.

> A poster placed on one end of the room is labelled ‘Strongly Agree’, while the other end is labelled ‘Strongly Disagree’. The mid-point of the room is ‘On the fence’ or ‘Not sure’.

> The trainer then reads out a series of statements relevant to the topic. These may be deliberately controversial, such as:

  — ‘Working individually is much more effective than working in a team.’

  — ‘It is unrealistic in this country to assume that women should have the same rights as men.’

  — ‘A person who contracts HIV has no one but themselves to blame.’

> When each statement is read out, participants are asked to walk to the point that they believe represents their opinion on that issue.

> Participants are then offered the opportunity to explain their stance to the group, and others may move from their position if convinced by the arguments.

This activity offers a great opportunity for further discussion. In a context where it may not be practical to have the group standing, participants can be asked to write their name on a continuum drawn on a whiteboard. This can also help facilitate discussion when there are language barriers within the group.

AVI’s cultural effectiveness trainer Cecilia Fairlie presents a way to stimulate group discussion and encourage people to reflect on their own opinions.

AVI’s training team offers tailored cultural effectiveness training to people and groups preparing for overseas assignments. For more information visit www.australianvolunteers.com/partners.
Climate change – are we part of the solution or the problem?

Any organisation that addresses poverty must also engage with climate change, since climate change exacerbates drought, flooding, disease and other factors that compound poverty. A recent study commissioned by AVI explored the ways in which international volunteer cooperation organisations (IVCOs) are responding to the issue.

Air travel is a significant factor in climate change, due to emissions from aeroplanes. Most IVCOs rely significantly on air travel to transport volunteers to their destinations, yet very few contribute to carbon offsetting schemes. Climate change, however, was a significant concern for the management of all IVCOs. Most had set up a staff ‘Green Team’ with the dual mandate of reducing the organisation’s environmental footprint, and developing programs with a focus on climate change and sustainability.

IVCOs also reported an increasing number of volunteer assignments dedicated to either climate change mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) or adaptation (assisting communities to manage the effects of climate change). This was especially true in the Pacific.

The study concluded that there was potential for IVCOs to run a combined carbon offsetting fund, which contribute directly to mitigation and adaptation projects, perhaps delivered through their overseas partner organisations.

This idea is currently under discussion through the International FORUM on Development Service, a group of IVCOs from around the world. The study is available from www.forum-ids.org.

Pictured > Rising sea levels caused by climate change pose a significant threat to Tuvalu.
Photo > Heidi Arnaudon

Green is Good: Smart Ways to Live Well and Help the Planet

By: Rebecca Blackburn
Reviewed by: Christine Crosby

Soon after Rebecca Blackburn moved into her new lodgings in the Cook Islands to start work as an AVI conservationist, her four-year-old neighbour remarked, “Youse guys have lotsastuff!” It was this comment that compelled her to write Green is Good.

Aware that there may come a time that the environment falls off the general public’s radar, Rebecca has compiled a book that moves mindsets from vague efforts such as turning off lights, shorter showers or not using plastic bags. Instead, her book inspires individuals, families and communities to focus on one-off actions that deliver major environmental benefits.

We may have heard many of the suggestions before; however, Rebecca goes one step further by giving information to that can make the changes a lot easier. She presents statistics that not only show why we need to change, but how our changes will have a positive impact. For instance, the average amount of water used to produce a meal of steak and salad is 3168 litres.

Talking about food, the ‘Eat Green’ chapter is a stand out. As well as explaining the benefits of eating organic and seasonally, Rebecca discusses the positives in creating a greener protein menu.

This is a book that inspires both gradual and major lifestyle changes. While Rebecca suggests changes that are achievable, it is her infectious enthusiasm that will have every reader becoming a locavore (someone who only eats food grown locally) or adopting her Meatless Monday or Transport Tuesday initiatives.

Published by Harper Collins
RRP $14.99
www.harpercollins.com.au
Development that lasts for life: 
You can keep it going

In the Philippines, 350 children each week receive life-saving health services, regular nutritional supplements, education and counselling. Their plight has received the attention of the wider community of Manila, and policies are now being effected to improve their wellbeing.

This happened because of the work of Bahay Tuluyan, a shelter for street children. Bahay Tuluyan’s work is supported by AVI volunteer Catherine Scerri. Catherine has worked across all levels of society to not only ensure that children’s immediate needs are met, but steps are in place to ensure that they have a sustainable future.

Sharing skills with individuals

Catherine trains her colleagues in how to advocate for the rights of children with government departments, parents, children and youth workers. She also coordinates groups of AVI youth volunteers, who train children in computer skills, creating resumes and using the internet for job preparation.

Building the capacity of organisations

Catherine goes beyond individual training to ensure that Bahay Tuluyan as an organisation is sustainable. The procedures she has put in place with local staff ensure that education, health and counselling services effectively reach children in need.

Engaging the sector and forming networks

Catherine engaged with five local organisations this year to coordinate Manila’s first ever Street Children’s Festival. Over 1600 street children attended and gained access to basic health services and information on their rights. The Mayor of Manila was presented with a research report compiled by AVI youth volunteers. This report is now affecting public policy in favour of the rights of street children.

Catherine’s AVI assignment is entirely funded by the donations of the Australian community.

When you support volunteers like Catherine with a donation, you are helping to bring about positive change that lasts for life.

We need your help for this work to continue. Please consider a tax-deductible donation by filling out the form on the opposite page, or make a safe online donation at

www.australianvolunteers.com/support
Photo Gallery >

Photographer Debra Plueckhahn travelled to the Pacific with AVI in March 2007. Here are some of her photos of the Central Memorial Teaching Hospital in Fiji. For more of Debra’s work visit www.inviewmedia.com.au.

Want to share your photos? Send six high-resolution images and short captions to mystery@australianvolunteers.com

Yes, I’d like to support development that lasts for life.

All donations over $2 are tax deductible

☐ I would like to make a single gift of $________

OR

☐ I would like to make a regular gift to AVI by pledging a monthly gift of $________

(pledge program donors give a monthly donation of $25 or more that is debited from a credit card or bank account on the 20th of each month until notification is received to change or terminate their pledge. Please complete your credit card details below or contact us to arrange a direct debit from your bank account. Alternatively you may set your own pledge up online.)

☐ Please find my cheque / money order made out to Australian Volunteers International

☐ Please debit my credit card:

-card no. ______ / ______ / ______ / ______ Expiry ___ / ___

☐ Signature ____________________ Date ___ / ___ / ___

Donate online at www.australianvolunteers.com/support or over the phone 1800 331 292

Please send me more information on:

☐ Holding a fundraising event for AVI

☐ Leaving a bequest in my will to AVI

Australian Volunteers International 71 Argyle Street (PO Box 350) Fitzroy Victoria 3065 Australia
Tel +61 3 9279 1788  Fax +613 9419 4280  Email donor@australianvolunteers.com
AusAID, the Australian Government’s overseas aid program, is proud to provide significant support for Australian volunteers who work in a development capacity overseas.

During May and June 2008, AVI’s new coffee-table book *A Place in the World: Stories from Australian Volunteers International* is available for only $38.95*.

This special discount marks National Volunteer Week (12-18 May) and inspires one and all to see life through the eyes of a volunteer.

A colourful tribute to Australian volunteers and their involvement in the events that have shaped our world over the past five decades, *A Place in the World* features forewords by The Hon Justice Michael Kirby and President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and Nobel Laureate, Jose Ramos-Horta.

Available from the AVI website during May and June 2008 for $38.95 (normal price $43.95).

*price does not include postage and handling.

**AVI’S mid-year madness!**

**SALE** $38.95*