

CaritasNews

CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU

#169 | SPRING 2022



WOMEN'S RESILIENCE AND LEADERSHIP IN CHALLENGING TIMES

EAST AFRICA:

Caritas Australia visits communities affected by the Africa Food Crisis.

SOLOMON ISLANDS:

Recovering from the resurgence of COVID-19.

WOMEN FOR THE WORLD:

How your support is helping women like Aloma, Tarsini and Pronali.

COX'S BAZAR REFUGEE CAMP:

Rebuilding after fires, floods and COVID-19 lockdowns.



Caritas
AUSTRALIA

End poverty
Promote justice
Uphold dignity

THANK YOU

After 10 years since my last visit, I had the opportunity to travel to Ethiopia and witness firsthand the effects of the food crisis. During our time in Ethiopia my colleague Richard Landels, Advancement Director and I met with His Eminence Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel to discuss the work of Caritas Ethiopia's protection programs and the importance of vocational programs. We visited an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in the north, where we had the chance to talk to its residents about the circumstances that brought them to the camp, the challenges they face and their hopes for the future.

We also had the chance to visit more remote communities down south, where the need for help is more than evident. Globally, 49 million people are facing famine – a number so big and overwhelming.

This spring edition of Caritas News is dedicated to women living in vulnerable communities across the world, who despite facing inequality and numerous challenges, they show utmost determination to forging a path out of poverty, and creating a tomorrow for themselves, their families and everyone around them. With your generous support, and the help of our partners, Caritas Australia is helping combat these issues by supporting women and girls around the world with education, training and employment opportunities.

Over the years, we have been able to support women like Aloma in the Philippines learn about Disaster Risk Reduction, so that they can lead their communities during emergencies. Your generosity is also helping women start their own small businesses and become financially independent, like Tarsini in Indonesia.

Caritas Australia is currently holding its annual Women for the World campaign to raise awareness about the disproportionate impact of poverty on women and girls globally. I hope that you will join us in being a champion for a world where all women and girls are able to reach their full potential, and that you enjoy this edition of Caritas News.



With gratitude,

Kirsty Robertson

Kirsty Robertson
Chief Executive Officer
Caritas Australia

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and of the land on which we live and work. We acknowledge the Elders, past and present, and younger generations as the emerging leaders of the future. This land is and will always belong to our First Australians people.

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Cover: Pronali is happy working as a midwife.

Photo: Simon Argho Sku/Caritas Bangladesh.

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EAST AFRICA

FOOD CRISIS ESCALATES

Millions of people across the Horn of Africa are currently facing extreme levels of hunger and malnutrition, as the global food crisis continues to escalate. This comes at a time when the region continues to fight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, years of drought and the worst locust plague in decades.



Between February and April this year, the number of children facing acute hunger, malnutrition and thirst increased to at least **10 million**



The number of households without reliable access to clean and safe water is now at **10.5 million**



Food prices were already on the rise and are now skyrocketing as the region relies heavily on imported grains and fertilisers from Ukraine and Russia - putting basics like bread out of reach for many families.

At the time of publication, Caritas Australia Chief Executive Officer Kirsty Robertson and Advancement Director Richard Landels were in Ethiopia, meeting with communities affected by the food crisis and displaced people who have fled their homes due to the impacts of conflict and drought.

"It's been over a decade since I have been here and while change is apparent in the growing number of cars and tall buildings in the capital in many ways things remain the same – the hospitality of the people, the gorgeous Meskel square, the vibrancy of a country that was never colonised," said Kirsty.

During their trip, they had the opportunity to meet with His Eminence Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel to discuss the work of Caritas Ethiopia's protection programs and the importance and value of vocational programs. They also visited camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the north of the country.



Kirsty and Richard with community members and partner staff in Ethiopia. Photo: Jessica Stone/Caritas Australia.

"The camp leaders explained the difficulties the population are experiencing. They are only receiving half the food required to live; they have no money and no ability to earn or produce even though many come from being successful farmers; they cannot leave the camp to trade and there is little prospect of returning to their homes anytime soon," said Richard.

"The sheer scale of the African Food Crisis came into clear view for me," added Kirsty.

"Community after community are in desperate need of food and water. Some of these communities have experienced, a flood, a locust outbreak and another drought all in the same year. Their resilience is worn down. A tired resignation is etched in these people's faces. I once again feel my heart breaking for these communities and especially for these children – this is a humanitarian crisis and we must do more. We need to do more for our African sisters and brothers now," she said.

Caritas Australia is assisting our partners in Africa to respond quickly to support vulnerable communities during this humanitarian crisis. Your generosity during this humanitarian crisis can help provide emergency food rations, clean water and hygiene supplies to communities in need. Please donate now by visiting

www.caritas.org.au/food-crisis.

BE INSPIRED BY

LOEMA'S STORY

Gender inequality, traditional social hierarchies and cultural norms are strong barriers that deter women in vulnerable communities to complete their education.

Your compassion has supported women like Loema to gain an education – at any stage in life.

Loema, a 69-year-old woman from Tanzania, joined adult education classes in 2020 through the A+ Program. She had a dream of receiving education since when she was a young girl, but the school was very far from her parents' home, so she was unable to realise her dreams.

Her determination remained strong throughout her life, and she turned her dream into a goal, and from a goal into her reality.

Loema found out about adult classes in her village and joined as soon as she saw the opportunity. Despite being one of the oldest people in the class, and against the odds, she completed her studies in reading and counting.

"Now I can read the holy books in church and even read with my grandchildren," said Loema.

The A+ Program, which is supported by Caritas Australia's local partners, Diocese of Mbulu Development Department (DMDD) and Karonga Diocese' Caritas Commission through your generosity, helps marginalised communities in Malawi and Tanzania to improve access to water, hygiene, sanitation and resources to boost food security.



Loema (green t-shirt) attending a class. Photo: Karonga Diocese' Caritas Commission.



CASI distributed COVID-19 School Care Kits to help schools prepare for re-opening safely. Photo: Rose Clough/CASI.

The program's strengths-based approach encourages communities to envision their goals, and identify the skills and other resources they can use to reach their objectives. The program also focuses on providing adult literacy classes and gender awareness training, encouraging women to stand in local government elections and participate in leadership training and decision-making.

Along with your generous support, this program is supported by the Australian government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

SCHOOLS REOPENING AFTER COVID-19 OUTBREAK

In May, schools in the Solomon Islands reopened for the first time this year after a major COVID-19 outbreak delayed the start of the school year by more than five months.

With your support, Caritas Australia Solomon Islands (CASI) has been working together with Church-managed and community schools to provide a COVID-safe environment for students to return to.

CASI has been assisting schools in complying with the minimum health requirement for re-opening through the provision of School Care Kits. Each kit contains thermometers, sanitation and disinfection items, disposable face masks, first aid and education materials. Schools were also provided with Face Mask Production Kits, including sewing machines and cloth materials, so that they can produce their own face masks.

Throughout June, the CASI team continued the implementation of the Pandemic Response,

providing assistance to an additional 11 schools in Honiara and Guadalcanal Province. By the end of the month, a total of 23 schools and church groups received the School Care Kits and Face Mask Production Kits.

Replace with 'Schools were also provided with information from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHSMS) and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) regarding the use of the kits.

Your support is also helping supply materials to install and improve handwashing facilities in schools and repair and construct quarantine facilities.

Over the next few months, CASI is aiming to reach 7,500 people and 38 schools through this project.

More than 27,000 people across Tanzania and Malawi have participated in the program so far:



10,536 women have improved access to sufficient food.



5,200 women have increased their income.



10,651 women participated in gender awareness and women's rights training.



20,274 women have a greater understanding of hygiene and sanitation practices.



8,275 women are now able to access clean water through approximately 30 new or rehabilitated waterpoints.

WOMEN FOR THE WORLD

WOMEN AS LEADERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES



Tarsini leads a meeting with her Saving and Loans Group at her home. Photo: Laz Harfa.

When women are provided with opportunities to become leaders, they can bring about lasting change in their communities. However, research shows that women are disproportionately affected by poverty, food insecurity, climate change, gender-based violence and abuse, as well as a lack of access to education, health care and employment. This deprives them of the opportunity to become leaders and advocates for change.

According to the United Nations, women aged between 25 to 34 are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in poverty.

Additionally, traditional social structures, stereotypes and attitudes about women and their roles in society can further contribute to the restriction of women's rights and freedoms.

Even though there has been significant improvement in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women over the last few years, the progress for women and girls living in vulnerable communities around the world continues to be uneven.

Your generosity helps facilitate the development, growth and education of women, especially those living in communities that are prone to poverty, natural disasters and inequality. Women and girls should have the same rights as men to access adequate food, water, shelter, sanitation, clothing,

health care, education, property and participation in decision-making processes.

Thanks to your ongoing support, we are continuing our mission of eliminating discrimination, working towards gender equality and advancing women's rights, along with promoting respect for all people – irrespective of their age, culture and position in life.

Tarsini's story

Tarsini is a rice farmer who was struggling to make a living in a rural village in Indonesia. With her husband in irregular work and a weak local economy, the couple's financial future was uncertain, and they were forced to take out loans to cover their daily living expenses. This made them vulnerable to high interest and debt and they experienced periods of extreme poverty.

Tarsini was forced to leave her village to find employment as a migrant worker overseas to help to pay off the family's debts. On her return, her future remained uncertain but she was determined to forge a path out of poverty. She heard about a savings and loans group in her village, supported by Caritas Australia and its local partner, Laz Harfa. Tarsini joined and participated in training in financial management, accounting and small business skills. After several months, she decided that she wanted to help others in her community to learn about managing their finances.

With your generous support, Tarsini was able to set up a microfinance kiosk to help to facilitate savings and

loans in her neighbourhood. Her business is designed to encourage members of the community to adopt a culture of saving and entrepreneurship, while providing them with affordable loans and educating them in financial literacy. Your support has also helped Tarsini to diversify her crops and she now grows cucumber, tomatoes, eggplant, celery, chillies and rice.

Over 6,000 people have benefitted directly from this program so far.

So far, the Economic and Community-based Health Development Program has:



Trained **50 people** in business skills, including entrepreneurship and marketing courses



Strengthened the capacity of nearly **20** savings and loans groups to drive economic and social development



Established **five** new women's savings and loans groups with 50 members



Assisted **five people with disabilities** to start small businesses, through training and microfinance



Supported **150 people** to attend household economic training



Established **four** new kitchen garden groups, involving 40 farmers.



Pronali giving post-natal care to a woman in her community. Photo: Simon Argho Sku/Caritas Bangladesh.

Pronali's story

Pronali is an indigenous woman living in rural Bangladesh. She was married at a young age and worked only at home to raise her children, with no income of her own or financial independence. Through the Caritas Bangladesh Safe Motherhood program, Pronali received the training necessary to become a midwife in her local community. Thanks to your support and generosity, she is now conducting safe deliveries of pregnant women who live in remote areas where there are limited clinics or hospitals.

With further training and continuous practice, Pronali hopes to build a primary health check-up and first aid centre so that she and her team can provide safe motherhood services and safe delivery.

Pronali is now recognised as an integral member of her community and as a family health service provider, bringing her closer to achieving her dreams.

"I will try my best to admit my son and daughter in the medical education," says Pronali.

Along with your generous support, this program is supported by the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Aloma's story

You may remember Aloma from last year's spring edition of Caritas News. In 2013, Aloma's village was heavily impacted by Typhoon Santi. As a result, she faced financial difficulties with her house and the local banana and coconut plantations severely damaged.

Since then, she has become the treasurer of her local area and is part of the Disaster Risk Reduction Council, helping manage evacuations during emergencies. Additionally, Aloma was also recognised for her leadership at an exhibition held by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the Philippines earlier this year.

Thanks to your generosity and support, Aloma gained a range of skills through the program, including bookkeeping, managing logistics, and understanding ecology and environmental conservation.



Aloma standing next to mangroves grown in the Community Mangrove Nursery. Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia.

REBUILDING COX'S BAZAR



Caritas Bangladesh staff responding to a massive fire in Cox's Bazar refugee camp. Photo: Caritas Bangladesh.

Cox's Bazar is home to the world's largest refugee camp, where nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees who fled from ethnic and religious persecution in neighbouring Myanmar currently live.

Over the last year, the Cox's Bazar refugee camp has been severely affected by extreme weather, fires and harsh lockdowns brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has forced its population to rebuild their homes and lives from the ground up once again. It has also put many already vulnerable people at risk of illness, further displacement and water, food and shelter scarcity.

On 22 March 2021, a massive fire swept through the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The fire killed over a dozen residents, and left thousands of people injured and/or homeless.

It took hours to put the fires out, as aid workers and emergency services worked together to fight the flames and get the refugees to safety.

Fires are unfortunately common in the overcrowded camp, where Rohingya refugees live in cramped conditions after fleeing the 2017 conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine state. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 150 fires were reported throughout 2021 alone.

However, the scale and intensity of the fires of 22 March were unprecedented, and at least 60 per cent of the affected areas in the camps were destroyed or seriously damaged.

The residents of the Cox's Bazar refugee camp then faced the effects of harsh lockdowns within their community later in the year. The low supply of COVID-19 vaccinations and the surge of the deadly Delta strain limited access to humanitarian resources, as well as basic goods and services.

COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns meant that people living in the camp struggled to access clean water, sanitation and education. This made it harder for our partners to continue their programs, because lockdowns meant that they had to work remotely, limiting access to the camps.

To make matters worse, the camp was also impacted by heavy rains and severe flooding during monsoon season. This caused landslides and displaced over 13,000 refugees in the camp, with thousands of shelters destroyed or damaged.

As the floods were occurring, our partner Caritas Bangladesh was on the ground with the CAN DO network, ensuring that immediate shelter was being provided to the families who lost their shelters due to heavy rain and landslides. Psychosocial protection, and water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) support, as well as Disaster Risk Reduction training were also provided to those affected by the floods.

Our partner Caritas Bangladesh has helped:



Form Community Based Protection Committees



Repair and maintain latrines



Install handwashing stations



Supporting community WASH committees



Train local volunteers about COVID-19 and hygiene practices.

Despite all these challenges, Rohingya refugees continue to work alongside Caritas Bangladesh to help keep their families and community safe.

This program is supported by the Australian Government, through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP).

A STORY FROM COX'S BAZAR REFUGEE CAMP



Forok, 38, lives in Cox's Bazar refugee camp. Photo: Caritas Bangladesh.

Residents of the Cox's Bazar refugee camp participate in activities to build a sense of community and to support their mental health. However, many of these activities were on standby due to the COVID-19 lockdowns.

This was the case for Forok and his children.

Forok lives in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp. He is a father of three children - two boys and one girl. All three of his children attend the Caritas Child Friendly Space (CFS), which is a place where children can learn and play, and where parents can attend regular

meetings and awareness sessions to receive advice on how to care for their children's mental and physical wellbeing.

Prior to the lockdowns, Forok saw positive changes in his children after they started participating in the different activities run by the CFS. His children were eager to take part in the program, as it gave them a chance to interact with other children and to spend time playing and having fun. The program also gave his children the opportunity to learn about hygiene practices, which they could follow at home.

OUR COMMUNITY



Coins for Caritas

During Project Compassion 2022, schools were encouraged to host their own fundraisers to help vulnerable communities around the world to break the cycle of poverty.

St Augustine's Primary School in Wodonga ran a Coins for Caritas Day to promote awareness of the work of Caritas Australia and to raise money for communities in need.

The day began with an online liturgy, where students had the opportunity to get to know the stories of Anatercia, Biru and Janice from Project Compassion 2022. They also conducted activities, inspired by the educational resources shared on the Caritas Australia website.

The highlight of the day was the challenge to outweigh the school principal, Mr Joseph Quinn, with the amount of money that would be donated.

Despite not quite reaching Mr Quinn's weight, the school managed to collect more than 60kg worth of coins, which meant that the school helped raise \$2100 for Project Compassion to support vulnerable communities and girls like Anatercia.



St Augustine's school principal counting coins with student. Photo: St Augustine's Primary School

A Project Compassion star

Malia, a Prep student from St John Vianney's Catholic Primary School in Mulgrave, Victoria, raised \$500 for Project Compassion 2022 all by herself.

She created her own video showcasing the work of Caritas Australia from her perspective.

Malia's biggest motivation to fundraise for Project Compassion 2022 was to help people living in vulnerable communities across the world have access to food and water.

"I would like to see people looking after each other. I would also like to see that all the hunger go away and that all children get to go to school," said Malia.

Her favourite story was Anatercia from Mozambique.

"Anatercia is a strong and brave girl. I really look up to her, she is very clever and smart. I wanted to help Anatercia and other people in the world," she added.



Malia with her Project Compassion box. Photo: St John Vianney's Catholic Primary School.

Stolen Generation survivors recognised in plaque unveiling

On 10 June, survivors from the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC) took part in a ceremony hosted by Transport NSW to formally recognise the role that the Bourke Railway station played during the Stolen Generation.

The plaque recognises the many children who were removed from their families and traveled by train to KBHAC.

The ceremony focused on unveiling a plaque to recognise the history of the railway station, and included speeches and presentations from Transport NSW, local community members, school students and survivors from Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation.

KBHAC was formed by the survivors of Kinchela Boys Home in Kempsey, New South Wales, who were forcibly removed from their families during the Stolen Generations.

"Public acknowledgement and apology on behalf of Transport NSW is an important act of respect in the reconciliation journey, because it recognises the trauma that was experienced from past government policies, and how these continue to impact survivors and their families decades later," says Christine Rhazi, Caritas Australia's First Australians Associate Director, and a proud Yamatji Widi woman from Geraldton, Western Australia.



Uncle Lester, a survivor of Stolen Generation from Kinchela Boys Home, with Transport NSW staff at Bourke plaque unveiling. Photo: Caritas Australia.



Caritas Australia acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians, past, present and emerging, of the land on which all our offices are located. This edition may include images or words of indigenous people who may be deceased.



Caritas Australia is fully accredited by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Please note: some of the programs featured in this issue of Caritas News are funded by Caritas Australia and the Australian Government.



Caritas Australia is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).



The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) is the national regulator of charities.



Caritas Australia is a proud member of CAN, a group of eleven Church-based overseas aid and development agencies committed to empowering people and providing avenues for them to overcome injustice and poverty.

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