

Abundance

Magazine



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Inspired to live
simply

Thank You

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,
for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.
Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

Psalm 112 provides guidance and assurance to those who believe in God. Despite the darkness that can feel all-encompassing at times, with a life steeped in grace, compassion, righteousness, and generosity, we can bring God's kingdom to earth.

The verses above speak to the qualities we find in supporters of Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA). While we have people of all ages, many are from the Builders and Baby Boomers generations. These are loyal supporters who, through prayer and giving, are dedicated to seeing justice for some of the most marginalised people in God's world.

Likewise, younger generations are acknowledging the wisdom of such dedicated service and are also pursuing justice for those in need. Rachael Lopez, a Gen Y (also known as Millennials), explores the importance of simple living in her article on Page 12. Drawing on her experience as an AOA staff member, she is seeing the impact that long-term giving can have on creating a more just world.

On page 2, you will find Jo Knight's reflection on her time spent in northern Mozambique, visiting our partner, the Anglican Diocese of Nampula. Here she found immense poverty but, despite this, she also found communities committed to

supporting their brothers and sisters. Those who themselves had struggled to make a living and who had often seen tragedy unfold within their own homes, had overcome significant obstacles due to the work done by the Diocese. These communities are determined to advocate as volunteers for the health and well-being of their neighbours.

In Gaza, where our partner, the al-Ahli Arab Hospital is surrounded by darkness, the staff remain dedicated to caring for the sick and wounded despite the perilous risks they face. For an update on the hospital please turn to page 6.

In order to reflect God's character in the world, we must spend time with him and be restored through his love. We are delighted to have Rev. Dr Rachel Mash share about the importance of dwelling with God in nature in our Bible study on page 10.

It is true that obstacles abound on the journey to a restored world, but God is near, and we, as his witnesses, can continue to testify to his love and peace by committing to live gracious, compassionate, righteous and just lives. We trust you will be inspired by the stories of our partners who are doing all they can to seek justice and hope for their communities.



Program Leader Muassite, with Jo, Antonio who was a program participant and is now a volunteer, and Mario who also works for Abundant Life.

Thank You for supporting our EOFY Appeal and ensuring the Anglican Church of Nampula Mozambique can reach more communities with lifesaving medical information.





Jo sits with Laura

Reflections from Northern Mozambique

Jo Knight reports on her recent visit to the Towards Abundant Life for All program and the work of the Anglican Diocese of Nampula in Mozambique.

As I reflect on my time in Northern Mozambique, the pain of incredible poverty and need sits alongside the Christlike love in action demonstrated by our partner, the Anglican Diocese of Nampula. Facts and images occupy my mind, such as almost one in two children in Northern Mozambique being chronically malnourished, alongside faces of people striving in situations of heartbreaking poverty

and the haunting eyes of hungry children. Our world is indeed hurting, and poverty and injustice abound.

The work of the Anglican Diocese of Nampula, under Bishop Manuel Ernesto's leadership, is beautiful, holistic, and volunteer-led. It is a loving expression of the Kingdom of God, where people share knowledge, and that knowledge is powerfully changing lives.

Muassite Miguel leads the Abundant Life for All program, with support from Mario Muromua and local teams. The program, which recently underwent an end-of-cycle evaluation, provides training that covers vital topics such as preventable diseases, improving health and livelihoods, the effectiveness of sleeping under a malaria net, and recognising when to seek help through the health system. With the average amount of schooling just a few short years, training and knowledge are gratefully received, implemented, and shared.

Through teams of volunteers, local community members band together with great concern and care for each other, passing on life-saving learnings. What stood out to me in the program was how people loved and cared for the well-being of each other and their communities. The independent local evaluator noted this as we spoke on long bus journeys between villages and remote community meetings. Representatives of the Australian Government visited as our program reached the end of its four-year cycle, and they provided encouraging insights ahead of the next phase of program design.

I was privileged to be invited into people's homes and hear personal stories. I heard how their lives had improved and how they applied new skills and understanding. Through the program, I saw communities draw on their strengths and resources and the local church working holistically for abundant life in local areas.

In one such community I recognised Laura, a dedicated volunteer and leader of the Murrupula Health Committee. Through the interpreter, we shared a laugh as I mentioned seeing her smiling face in photos back in Australia and reading about her involvement in the program. We felt an instant connection!

Laura proudly shared her experiences of volunteering, going door to door with health information, and assisting people accessing health clinics or hospitals when needed. She recounted how pregnant women in the village previously faced barriers when seeking help from hospital staff. However, the Health Committee successfully advocated to senior health officials and established a community feedback system. This ensured that women received treatment without needing to make additional payments to hospital staff, such as chickens. The Committee also monitors the hospital's medicine stocks to ensure fair distribution.

I cannot forget the extreme poverty I witnessed in Mozambique. But the people I met are resilient, energetic, and joyful. I cherish memories of visiting communities who sang and danced, thanking the local church and their friendship with Australians far away. Alongside great joy and pain, we are invited to journey with our global neighbours and respond in partnership as people of faith. Together, we are working towards God's renewed world, free of poverty.



*Towards Abundant Life for All' receives funding from the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



Exemplifying the CAN DO Spirit in Solomon Islands



Katherine Davies, Communications Lead at AOA, joined Lionel Dau as he introduced her to the work he is doing to ensure communities in the Solomon Islands are ready during disasters.

In 2007, Lionel Dau witnessed the devastating impact of a tsunami on his country, Solomon Islands, with 52 lives lost and many villages destroyed. This experience, coupled with professional roles in climate change projects and studies in Melbourne, solidified his passion for working with communities to mitigate the effects of climate change and improve disaster preparedness.

Lionel (pictured below right) is the Church Agencies Network–Disaster Operations (CAN DO) Program Coordinator in Solomon Islands and works closely with AOA’s Tim Hartley on the Disaster READY program supported by the Australian Humanitarian Partnership. It’s a role that demands adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and an unwavering commitment to the communities served. ‘To keep people safe, it’s important to work with the governance structure of the community,’ Lionel explains.



I joined Lionel in Kolina One, a village about an hour out of Honiara and just beginning its journey with the Disaster READY program. Each Solomon Islands community has a unique origin. Kolina One was only established in 2006; the Chairman, Anthony (pictured left), who oversees all programs in the community, says that ‘at first there were only two families... now it’s 27.’ As they’ve grown they have gradually developed their infrastructure. ‘We are good leaders,’ Anthony says as he reflects on all they have achieved. His job is to ensure the community programs run effectively, especially during disasters the community regularly faces, such as flash flooding, earthquakes, and fires.

It’s a lot to manage and, with limited resources, it’s vital that NGOs such as AOA can support their efforts to keep their community safe.

In the centre of Kolina One stands a hill, the site of a large church; it is a place of worship, a place for celebrating—and a place of refuge. ‘When flooding strikes, we all run up to the church,’ Anthony reports.

With a large river nearby, people are used to fleeing to safety. However, wherever they go, a key problem remains: there is no sanitation in the village. Lionel discovered this when he first met with Anthony and other village members, saying, ‘they identified sanitation as one of the most urgent needs, not just during emergencies, but for normal church activities.’

Toilets being provided through the project and have been designed to be disability inclusive, so all members of the community can access and use them safely. Around 25 community members are being trained in Disaster Preparedness and Theology of Disaster in a Changing Climate. From a biblical point of view, this course explores the meaning of resilience, preparedness, and suffering during disasters. From here, the community will develop a Disaster Preparedness Plan with a focus on disability inclusion to ensure everyone knows what to do when an emergency strikes and all members of the community are assisted up the hill to the church and looked after when they get there.

‘I am looking forward to every community CAN DO is working with having a disaster preparedness plan,’ adds Lionel. These will be linked with the National Disaster Management Office, with annual training using simulation exercises. When I ask Lionel what he hopes these plans will do, his answer is simple: ‘I’m hoping these plans will save lives.’

Disaster READY is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP).



The Church Agencies Network–Disaster Operations (CAN DO) is a group of nine church-based overseas aid and development agencies (including AOA) seeking to support and collaborate with churches in disaster management to enhance community resilience to disasters and conflict.



A Steady Light in Turbulent Times

Al-Ahli Arab Hospital still stands as a beacon of hope despite the obstacles that continue to thwart its ability to care for people in the north of Gaza.

In its latest battle to stay open, the hospital was ordered to close on 7th July when the Israel Defence Force ordered Palestinians to evacuate several areas—forcing all patients, staff and vulnerable people to leave.

With much relief, four days later the Diocese of Jerusalem reported that despite an increase in military activity in the area, the hospital was able to reopen. Although most patients have not yet made the hazardous journey back to the hospital, ‘our remarkable staff were able to perform eight surgeries in the day.’

The courage and dedication of the staff are profound, and their ability to adjust to tenuous and changing circumstances is evident in all they have achieved.

Remarkably, since the conflict began in October 2023, staff have taken care of more than 30,000 people. For a hospital with just 50 beds, this is a considerable number. They have now increased to 80 beds, opening the hospital chapel and library to accommodate the extra patients. They have gone from three operating theatres to five, and the small emergency department has expanded, with the physical therapy department and hospital yards turned into triage and

emergency units. Medical supplies are limited; sometimes medical staff need to use vinegar instead of sterilisation solutions. When there is no anaesthesia, doctors must still perform surgeries.

In cooperation with the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre, the hospital has opened a small unit to support people living with disabilities, providing physical therapy treatment and care for cerebral palsy patients and their families. Staff have also commenced providing psychosocial support for children living in southern Gaza and have opened a clinic in the city of Khan Yunis where they care for approximately 200 patients.

Food in Gaza is incredibly scarce, and famine is imminent. People are unable to work, and prices are highly inflated. While the situation is dire, Al-Ahli Arab Hospital and its staff are providing hope and healing in the chaos. We ask that you continue to pray for the strength and safety of all staff, for the safety and healing of all patients and those who shelter within the hospital walls, and for access to food and medical equipment. Most importantly, we ask that you pray for peace.

Gracious God,



Hear our cry for those who live in fear, who have nowhere to go, who have no answers for their children. Grant them safety, provide them nourishment and heal the scars of war.

Mighty King,

May your loving hands protect all who serve at al-Ahli Arab Hospital. Provide them with the medicine and equipment they need to heal those in their care. Bring food and water to them and all those sheltering inside the hospital walls. May a shield of safety surround them and may they find their strength and comfort in you.

Prince of Peace,

We ask for a ceasefire now and the release of all held captive. We will not back down until there is peace.

In your loving name we pray,

Amen

Our Partners in Action

A glimpse into the activities of The Safe, Resilient Communities Program, where The Anglican Church of Melanesia in Vanuatu is striving to create a safer world.

Earlier this year 80 church leaders from Vanuatu participated in transformative Faith and Gender training sessions. Critical topics included attitudes toward gender, various forms of violence and their root causes, the power dynamics that lead to violence, and fostering healthy relationships.

'This workshop has broken down all the hard parts in me, my wrong beliefs and masculine status which was derived from my patriarchal society,' shared one leader after the training. 'I am so happy that I attended with my wife, and I assure you we will endeavour to practice this learning within our home and reach out to other families in our community.'



While program staff were implementing activities in the southern part of Pentecost Island, Tropical Cyclone Lola struck. They witnessed volunteers from the community, who had participated in Psychological First Aid and Psychosocial Support in Complex Emergencies training, putting their learning into practice. Immediately after the cyclone, the volunteers had consulted with the chief and a plan was put in place to ensure those most vulnerable were protected and supported.

'We were delighted to witness and hear how the words they had learned were echoed to their people,' reported program coordinator Ethel George.



In another area of work, when preparing to implement mental health training in schools, the program team consulted with a principal, who identified that a major stress for students was their unsuccessful attempts at growing vegetables in their home gardens due to wild animals eating the produce. ACOM Vanuatu staff were able to facilitate links with government services, who then provided training on backyard gardening.



Afar Pastoralist Development Society (APDA) in Ethiopia

Mighty God, we lift up the Afar community to you. They endure many challenges. We give thanks that, through APDA's work, the Afar people are learning to be resilient despite the impacts of climate change on their daily lives. Thank you that they are learning to grow vegetables. We pray that you will continue to support them as they learn new ways to combat malnutrition. Protect their crops and kitchen gardens; may they be great sources of nutrition for all. We ask that cholera ceases to spread. We pray that the soap-making project APDA is developing will ensure that health workers, birth attendants, and the Afar community as a whole can access soap to prevent diseases.



Praying for our Partners Impacted by Climate

Anglican Church of Melanesia in Vanuatu

Compassionate Lord, we give thanks for the dedicated work of the team in Vanuatu. Natural disasters weave through the everyday lives of those who reside on these islands. We ask that you strengthen the minds of the people through mental health first aid training so they can face the obstacles that continue to confront them.



PNKS in Cambodia

Merciful God, we pray for your people in northern Cambodia. They rely heavily on the natural environment for their livelihoods, which are now under threat due to logging and environmental damage. We give thanks that PNKS is working with people to forge new paths by developing community groups that promote diversified livelihoods and climate-smart agriculture. Equip them in their mission and provide them with strength, wisdom, and insight.

The Place Where You are Standing is Holy Ground

This Bible Reflection is brought to you by Rev Dr Rachel Mash, Environmental Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (Green Anglicans). She is the chair of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network and co-chair of the Ecumenical Season of Creation movement.



Exodus 3:1-12

Climate change, plastic pollution, biodiversity loss, inequality and wars. How to face up to so many challenges?

In this passage, Moses is being faced with an overwhelming challenge – to rescue his people from Egypt. He feels totally underskilled for the task ahead. And yet, by meeting with God on the mountain, his fears are put to rest and he is empowered to go back down and take up the challenge. During his time on the holy ground of the mountain, he encounters God, and is strengthened spiritually and mentally to take the lead in bringing God's people to freedom.

Jesus also went up a mountain to pray after times of stress. He did spend a lot of time in synagogues, teaching, healing and debating the interpretation of the Torah. However, we see

that for Jesus, spending time with God in nature was also very important – he started his ministry with a 40-day retreat in the wilderness and he often chose to go and pray in nature at particularly stressful times. Having just received news of the brutal murder of his close friend John the Baptist, followed by a marathon ministry day of preaching and feeding an enormous crowd of people, he sends the disciples ahead and goes up a mountain to pray alone (Matthew 14:23). After having a fight with the pharisees and teachers of the law, we read that 'he went out onto the mountainside to pray alone all night long' (Luke 6:12).

Like Moses and Jesus, may we experience the peaceful presence of God in nature, so we can 'come down the mountain' and take up the challenges that lie ahead of us.

QUESTIONS

Where in nature have you felt closest to God?
Why is that place important to you?

What changes can you make in your life balance so that you can experience more of the presence of God through Creation?



PRAYER

Creator God:

When we are overwhelmed – may we feel your presence, for we are standing on holy ground.

When we are afraid – may we hear your voice in the sound of the roaring breakers.

When our hearts are broken – may we feel your touch in the sun on our face and the wind on our skin.

When we are weary – let us lie down by the living waters and be refreshed.

Amen

This reflection is adapted from a reflection in the Creation Care Bible Challenge 2021.

To Hope and Act

From September 1 to October 4, Christians around the world unite for the Season of Creation.

This special season celebrates God as the Creator and acknowledges Creation as an ongoing divine act that calls us to collaborate in love and care for all that has been made.

As followers of Christ, we share a global call to care for Creation, recognising that our well-being is deeply connected to the well-being of the Earth. We rejoice in this opportunity to safeguard our common home and all who share it. This year, the theme is 'To hope and act with Creation'.

Our faith teaches us to hope. This hope does not need to be passive but embodied in actions such as prayer, preaching, service, and solidarity. We invite you to join us in praying for action to protect our world and unity as we care for our common home.

For more information on Season of Creation, you can visit our website:
<https://anglicanoverseasaid.org.au/>



**SEASON OF
CREATION**

Inspired to Live Simply

Rachael Lopez, participated in Archbishop Justin Welby's *Community of St Anselm* and currently serves as Operations Officer at AOA, she shares her insights about embracing a simpler life.

When I began working at Anglican Overseas Aid, my desire for simplicity was reawakened as I saw the incredible need of our partners worldwide and the faithfulness and generosity of our supporters.

Strangely, the last time I embraced a simple lifestyle, I lived in a palace. Nine years ago, my husband Jonathan and I moved from Melbourne's western suburbs to Lambeth Palace in London, UK, the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury. We were in the first cohort of Archbishop Justin Welby's *Community of St Anselm*, a new monastic, international and ecumenical community of young adults. We lived in the old cottages where staff used to reside, and my husband and I had one room and an ensuite for a year. We lived by a rhythm of morning prayer, eucharist, and evening prayer. We cooked in pairs on a rota, served with charities two days a week, and had £50 spending money each month (spent mostly on the coffee van metres from the Palace, opposite Big Ben).

Since returning from London, life has been anything but simple. With job changes, house moves and a child, the steady accumulation of things, time commitments and media consumption has meant my initial vision of simplicity has faded into the background of daily life.

I was first introduced to the idea of simplicity as a Christian imperative by reading *Living More Simply*, edited by Ronald J. Sider, who noted one of the most discussed elements of the 1974 Lausanne Statement:

'All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle in order to contribute generously to both relief and evangelism.'

To mark the 50-year milestone of this statement, I decided to read a different book on simplicity each month to ensure I live a generous life. Here are some things I am learning:

[A simple lifestyle connects us more with our global neighbours.](#)

During this year in London, we visited a range of religious communities, including Franciscan, Benedictine, Ignatian, and Celtic. There are two descriptions of religious life to which I am drawn. One is the idea of monasticism being like a feature cartoon, exaggerating different aspects of following Jesus in order to draw attention to it. The other idea is that some people are called to leave everything for Christ as a prophetic sign that all should make him the

centre and priority of their lives. Among these experiences, the Franciscan commitment to voluntary poverty stood out. This choice to live in solidarity with the poor resonates deeply, prompting me to consider my own lifestyle. Living comfortably in the suburbs, I feel a strong urge to reassess how my excess might be affecting my connection with those for whom living simply isn't a choice. Inspired by the Franciscans' example, I am motivated to reflect on how I can live more intentionally and in closer solidarity with my global neighbours.

A simple lifestyle means a smaller environmental footprint.

It would be normal for a minister to encourage their congregation to be less materialistic. However, there is an interesting paradox. In *Living More Simply*, a couple who had chosen a simple lifestyle found that, in one sense, they had become more 'materialistic'. They wrote, 'In a sense, we have become more "materialistic." That is, we care more about how we use the "materials" of our lives. We want to "have dominion over created things" rather than abusing them or letting them control us.' To have a smaller footprint on the environment, we need to consume less and be more discerning about what we consume. Connected to this is treasuring God's creation and enjoying the simple things in life that cost very little.



Rachael with
Archbishop
Justin Welby

A simple lifestyle is a daily challenge to live counterculturally.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 encourages us to strive earnestly to lead a quiet life, to mind our own business, and to work with our hands. You may wonder why you would have to 'strive earnestly' to live quietly. I believe that's because it's countercultural. The default is to live busily in consumerism and distraction. Living differently requires daily action, not just a mindset shift. One book I read quoted Franciscan priest Richard Rohr who said: 'We don't think ourselves into a new way of living; we live ourselves into a new way of thinking.' The path of simplicity means a thousand small 'Nos' in order to say 'Yes' to what is truly important.

A simple lifestyle gives us a greater capacity to be more generous.

Mahatma Gandhi famously said, 'Live simply so that others may simply live'. Part of my role at Anglican Overseas Aid is processing donations. I see the sacrificial giving akin to the 'widow's mite' despite Australia's rising cost of living. People steadfastly contribute \$50 a month over 30 years, totalling \$30,000, and families faithfully support our appeals yearly. I also witness the cumulative effects of lives of stewardship and generosity, culminating in significant bequests. This has been a profound witness to me, as I desire to live a simple lifestyle so I can be more generous. This has inspired me more than any book I have read.

We would love to hear from you, our supporters. Please email aoa@anglicanoverseasaid.org.au or write to our postal address and share your thoughts on the values of simplicity and generosity.

Leading with Love and Growing in Confidence

PNKS is fostering leadership and resilience in Cambodia's indigenous villages.

AOA's partner, PNKS, is faithfully working to ensure that communities have the tools to build a more hopeful future in two provinces of northeast Cambodia. These rural communities are impacted by illegal logging and are already feeling the brunt of a changing climate, which is impacting access to water and livelihood options.

At the heart of PNKS' work is the creation of Community Initiative Development Groups in each area. Provided with organisational and leadership training, these groups begin working together with their community to identify, prioritise, and over time, collectively address their shared challenges. Partnerships are developed between the groups and local government departments and service providers, jointly working together for a more hopeful future.

'We are the leaders in our community,' Ou (pictured right) states. 'The project team is always behind us to help if we need their advice... We have a strong relationship, and no one is left behind.'

Ou and Khea, both members of Community Initiative Development Groups, are women who know the effort the PNKS team puts into developing local leadership and building courage and confidence in people passionate about seeing change.





Khea tending to her pigs. She uses the income from her pig venture to pay for her children's schooling.

‘We are the leaders in our community....no one is left behind.’

For Ou, taking on a leadership role has been transformative, ‘being involved with the project, I have seen the change in myself,’ she reflects. ‘I never thought I could do so many good things for my community.’ With the support of PNKS, Ou has transformed into a passionate and effective advocate, encouraging widespread participation in village clean-up days and tree planting events. In her leadership role, she has also mobilised 14 families to install latrines, contributing their own

resources alongside external support. She has also facilitated linkages that ensured the local health post was equipped with local solutions to manage medical waste.

Similarly, Khea’s love for her community also shines through her leadership. She has seen encouraging changes in her village: ‘It is cleaner, people are growing vegetables, and more people have joined the savings groups. They are participating in the community, like road repairing, and have good relationships with one another.’

However, it’s not just the wider community that has seen growth; through the training delivered by the program, Khea has been inspired to develop her own livelihood.

‘It allowed me to think about pig raising, earning a living, and sending my children to school,’ she says. Managing her income wasn’t something Khea had thought possible before; however, she is now thinking about how she can effectively expand her pig-raising business.

Ou and Khea’s journey of becoming effective advocates for their communities exemplifies the work of PNKS, which builds upon the skills and confidence of those who know their community best to ensure a more resilient, hopeful future for everyone.



The Somleng Prey Lang program run by PNKS receives funding from the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Valerie's Resolve Echoes AFAR Resilience

Every Tuesday, the team at Anglican Overseas Aid gathers for a devotional session. Recently, we were honoured to host Valerie Browning, who was visiting from Ethiopia's remote regions.



Our staff were captivated as she shared insights from her 30-year tenure with our partner, the AFAR Pastoralist Development Association (APDA).

'Where I live, there are no roads. We walk to vaccinate; we walk to help with maternal health. We are treating people house to house. We have a mobile education system. If the community moves, the blackboard is on the camel and off it goes.'


Known as Maalika by the AFAR people, Valerie has become an integral part of this nomadic tribe over the past three decades. Her journey began at the age of 22 when the harsh reality of Ethiopia's famine contrasted starkly with the abundance of her native Sydney.

'I couldn't believe that people were going to die for lack of food – having come from Sydney, where there was chocolate, ice cream, whatever you wanted, on every corner.'

In 1989 Valerie, a trained nurse and midwife, married Ismael Ali Gardo, an AFAR community member. Together they founded APDA in 1994, an organisation committed to securing basic human rights for the AFAR people – health, education, clean water, and market income.

The AFAR are no strangers to adversity. They inhabit one of Earth's hottest regions, a land marred by conflict, including the recent two-year civil war in Tigray that encroached upon their territory, resulting in countless deaths and displacements. Beyond war, they face constant health threats, such as the resurgence of cholera and the devastating impacts of climate change on their livestock and livelihoods.

Yet Valerie speaks of resilience and solutions. Addressing food scarcity exacerbated by drought, she reports, 'We recently taught AFAR women to cook spinach and feed it to their children. They said, "No, no, no, that's a leaf, we don't eat that." But when they ate it, they



understood this would be very good for children. We're working on that because we now have a very serious malnutrition situation.'

Drought is not the only reason food is so scarce. During the two-year conflict, the market and the merchants the AFAR relied so heavily upon for fruit, vegetables and dry commodities disappeared; in an instant they had to completely change their way of living. 'To do this, we started a base of co-operatives,' Valerie explains. 'We now have 32 co-operatives linked to us who are working on food security in their own communities. Where there's enough water, we've started growing things like onions, tomatoes, bananas, paw paw, mango, and other vegetables like spinach... they've never grown (this food) in history... (they) have never seen onions growing.'

Not only is this assisting with food security, but it is contributing to their local economy; with no local economy, Valerie believes the AFAR will disappear. She shares an inspiring tale of a woman who emerged as a vital contributor to the AFAR economy despite losing her husband to the ravages of war.

After her husband left for the war, she picked up the children and ran for safety. Valerie found her in a camp, 'she came almost dead... two of her children went into malnutrition.' She realised the woman had no cooking equipment, so Valerie sourced food like dates that she didn't have to cook. Valerie explains that not long after, the woman said, 'I have to do something', so she set up a tea shop.

'She is one of the remarkable women changing the market from being dominated by people coming from other regions to being controlled by AFAR women... I've been to her tea shop, she's very funny. It's wonderful to see her as she is now, compared to the misery and huge problems she's been through.'

With six children, she is both mother and father, and Valerie is relieved to say that it looks like she'll manage.

Such stories exemplify the essence of the AFAR people and APDA. In the face of despair, they discover paths to hope. It's our privilege to support Valerie and APDA, standing with a community that battles daily for its future.



Anglican Overseas Aid,
PO Box 389, Abbotsford,
VIC 3067, Australia

www.anglicanoverseasaid.com
aoa@anglicanoverseasaid.org.au
(03) 9495 6100



Anglican
Overseas
Aid