

# Oxfam Working Lives

## Improving Livelihoods in Rural Papua

Oxfam New Zealand is working with an innovative local organization to raise the standard of living of poor indigenous Papuans in remote Highland communities through the development of sustainable cash-cropping techniques.

### Background

Indonesia is spread across an archipelago of more than 17,500 islands and is home to 230 million people, making it the world's fourth largest country by population. The country is vulnerable to natural disasters, internal conflict and economic crises. The 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, the 2005 bombings in Bali, and the SARS virus have all contributed to the unprecedented turmoil of recent years.

More than half of the population lives in poverty, and these people are always the hardest hit by disaster and conflict. Because of Indonesia's significant external debt, the government has cut back on food subsidies, has privatised state enterprises, and has limited spending on education, health and social services. These policies make it even more difficult for the poor to access adequate social services and escape the cycle of poverty.

### The challenge

Papua, an Indonesian province occupying the western half of the island of New Guinea, is one of the poorest and most politically marginalized regions of Indonesia. The population of 2.6 million has high adult illiteracy and infant mortality rates. Life expectancy is 40 years and less than one third of the population has access to safe drinking water.

A large proportion of the population of Papua is dependent on subsistence agricultural practices, and farmers struggle to produce enough food to feed their



Papua is a remote, rural region in the Highlands of Indonesia. Many people rely on subsistence agricultural practices, and have poor access to basic services. **Photo credit:** Michael Riach/Oxfam

families and communities. There is a real need to develop the agricultural practices of this remote area, to improve the income, health and livelihoods of the population.

### Who we work with

Since January 2008, Oxfam has been working in partnership with Yapkema, a local, innovative non-governmental organization that specialises in managing small-scale projects. Oxfam and Yapkema work in the remote rural districts of West Paniai, East Paniai and Kebo, aiming to develop the economies and livelihoods of these communities.

### Our objectives

This is one of Oxfam New Zealand's newest programmes and, after the successful completion of a six-month pilot phase in 2008, we are expanding the programme. Oxfam and Yapkema aim to provide

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tangible improvements in the livelihoods of poor rural Papuan people by improving agricultural practices. We are particularly focusing on the development of the vegetable growing industry, with the aim to increase farmers' cash income. We place emphasis on improving Papuans' knowledge and skill in small-scale farming, which involves value-adding to the production chain, small business development and improving access to markets. Our people-centred, locally driven, and participatory bottom-up approach, contributes to sustainable development in Papua.

## What we are doing

Oxfam and Yapkema are focusing on the Lake Paniai Vegetable Cash Crop Project, which assists farmers in Paniai to diversify their cash crops and improve their farming techniques. In 2008, 16 farmers were chosen to pilot the project. They were given the resources and practical training to grow different vegetables such as cabbages, carrots and potatoes. These farmers are encouraged to work together to share skills, knowledge and tools, and to impart their success to the wider community.

We are supporting the farmers to improve their access to existing markets and to find new buyers for their diversified and larger vegetable crops. We are also training farmers to raise rabbits, to provide organic fertilizer for the crops.

## What we have achieved so far

The Lake Paniai Vegetable Cash Crop Project has achieved a number of tangible successes:



Farmers now produce greater yields of vegetables such as cabbages, which help to increase their cash income. **Photo credit:** Yapkema



Members of Yapkema - from left: Hanok Pigai (Director), a farmer, Sem Pekei (Programme Coordinator) and a volunteer.

**Photo credit:** Michael Riach/Oxfam

- Farmers have improved skills in growing new types of vegetables, composting, marketing, and using natural pest control. In particular, there has been great success in growing much bigger cabbages. This has resulted in an increased cash income of at least five per cent in 2008.
- Farmers now cooperate in a network to grow vegetables. They share tools and equipment, and work together to discuss and solve farming issues.
- The success of the 2008 pilot project is able to be replicated outside the target communities, allowing more Papuans to increase the productivity of their small-scale cash cropping. This sustainable project therefore also helps people outside the target communities to improve their livelihoods.
- The better access to markets and improved incomes provide greater livelihood security. Farmers have seen tangible and significant benefits to the community and their individual lives, which enables them to live with dignity and to build a better future.

## What we need

This year, Oxfam has committed to raise NZ\$280,000 for this ambitious and important programme.

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