

Oxfam Peace and Refuge

Bringing peace to the Highlands of Papua New Guinea



In the Kup region of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea Oxfam is helping reduce armed conflict and establishing a gun control coalition to curb the use of firearms.

Background

Papua New Guinea achieved independence in 1975, following 55 years of administration by Australia. Before that, the area had been divided into British and German colonial interests.

It is the largest island in the Pacific and one of the most varied areas of geographic, biological, and cultural wealth on Earth. Although the population is only six million, linguistically it is the world's most diverse country, with more than 700 indigenous languages.

Papua New Guinea is abundant with natural and mineral resources including forestry, fish, nickel, cobalt, oil, copper, and gold. However, it suffers from the "resource curse". Exploitation of its natural resources has fuelled corruption and poor governance, alienated communities and exposed divisions between haves and have-nots.



Mary Kini, a leading women's activist (centre, wearing white T-shirt), leads peace negotiations between warring factions.
Photo credit: Kup Women for Peace



Mary Kini of Kup Women for Peace holds the organisation's loudhailer which they use to mediate conflict in the Kup region.
Photo credit: Jerry Galea/Oxfam

The challenge

More than 40 per cent of the population are living on less than NZ\$3 a day. Papua New Guineans also have very low average life expectancy and very high maternal and infant mortality rates.

Rural communities have farmed sustainably for thousands of years, but the introduction of a cash economy, particularly mining, has triggered social disruption and tribal fighting. When the conflicts escalated in the 1990s, government services were abandoned and many of the remote areas suffered a breakdown of law and order and increased marginalisation and poverty. Many people were killed, entire villages burnt down, women raped and children and the elderly attacked.

To support Oxfam Peace and Refuge:
contact oxfam@oxfam.org.nz or call 0800 400 666.

Who we work with

Oxfam has supported Kup Women for Peace in their peace building and community development work over the past five years. Kup Women for Peace is made up of women from six tribal clan groups in the Kup district of Chimbu province. They took a courageous stand to shame the men to stop fighting and at times placed themselves on the battlefield between groups to prevent bloodshed. They then built a powerful network of people across the Kup area of around 60,000 people. They have organised to bring peace, stability and development to Kup, including village courts, a health clinic, water supply, community policing, schooling and conflict resolution.

Our objectives

- Reduce the number of small arms and ammunition present in Highland communities and promote successful community-based approaches to dealing with small arms and local security.
- To help local volunteer organisations organise their efforts to reduce conflict and build peace.
- Increase participation in decision-making, especially among women and young people, through education and the promotion of self esteem.

What we are doing

- Undertaking groundbreaking research in the remote Tari basin of the Highlands on the incidence and causes of violence.
- Building coalitions and working with district, provincial and national authorities to improve security and tighten gun controls.
- Improving the ability of local NGO leaders to manage and lead their voluntary groups by training in participatory community development, governance and organisational effectiveness.
- Informing communities about human rights, and helping them understand how they can hold local government and MP's to account to restore services to the area.



The work of Kup Women for Peace is ensuring that peace will be maintained for the next generation.
Photo credit: Daniell Cowley/Oxfam

What we have achieved so far

People can now move freely between tribes and the town and tribal fighting is much reduced. The initial worth of these courageous women leaders has now grown into a community initiative, involving hundreds of volunteers, creating a sense of self-help and civic pride among the community.

Kup Women for Peace won the 7th Pacific Human Rights Award in 2007 for its outstanding work in situations of conflict, for its intrepid dedication to the cause of peace in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea and for its bravery in challenging discriminatory customs and norms, including violence against women.

This is a vitally important initiative, not only in terms of the Kup area, but as a successful model that is starting to be replicated in other areas of the Highlands. The Kup experience is also influencing provincial and national policies.

What we need

This year, the organisation has committed to raise NZ\$90,000 for this ambitious and important programme.

For further information please contact oxfam@oxfam.org.nz or call 0800 400 666.

To support Oxfam Peace and Refuge:
contact oxfam@oxfam.org.nz or call 0800 400 666.