

Solidarity

Workers in New Zealand helping workers overseas

The Newsletter of the Unions Aotearoa International Development Trust

Issue Five, Winter 2011

Contents

Page 1

Exciting new South India project
Join us on Facebook

Page 2

South India: building economic independence
Study tour to Mae Sot
2011 Fund-raisers

Page 3

Mae Sot Project success
Regular donations hit \$3000 per month

Page 4

Comment
Social networking help wanted

Cooperative economic development

An exciting new UnionAID project in South India will develop 5 cooperative based businesses and more than 120 micro-enterprises over the next 3 years. This new project will build on the UnionAID project work of the past 3 years which has organised more than 30,000 people in Dalit and Tribal communities and will help them to achieve their goal of economic independence. India may be prospering economically but this prosperity has failed to impact on two of India's poorest and most disadvantaged groups: Dalit (untouchable) and Tribal (indigenous) people. The goal of this project is to take up this challenge at a grass roots level and, by breaking the cycle of poverty and discrimination, improve the livelihood choices and economic security of Dalit and Tribal (including previously nomadic)

communities in Tamil Nadu, South India over the three year term of the project.

The project will assist these communities to:

- establish five co-operative-based businesses: a Goat and Sheep Rearing Co-operative, an Agricultural Farming Co-operative, a Sandal makers' Co-operative, a Bamboo Basket Weavers' Co-operative, and a Gypsy Craft Co-operative.
- form 120 micro-enterprises which will include floristry, jewellery crafts, and organic manure products.
- train 155 key Dalit and Tribal representatives to deliver basic vocational skill training to 1045 participants from local communities to develop business skills, and increase earning capacity and employability.



Angali is the president of the Bamboo Basketweavers' Union

Join us on UnionAID Facebook



www.facebook.com/unionaid

Become a UnionAID Facebook friend and meet the workers that your donations are helping. "Share" our news to spread the word about courageous people like Meenakshi, the first female cremation worker in Tamil Nadu who had no sons so took over the job when her husband died. Or meet Mr. Robin, the president of the Sandalmakers' Union in Tamil Nadu, who organises the workers from 189 small sandal-making enterprises.

Become a Kiwi Solidarity member - Support real change

You can help vulnerable workers in developing countries in our region get a fairer deal by making a small monthly donation by direct debit by emailing unionaid@nzctu.org.nz with your contact details. We will then contact you and make the arrangements. Unions Aotearoa International Development Trust is a registered charity - Reg. No. CC42051

unionaid.org.nz



South India: building economic independence, cooperatively

The new UnionAID project will enable Dalit and Tribal communities to build their economic independence (from landlords, middle men and moneylenders) through cooperative based businesses and micro-enterprises.

On a recent visit to South India UnionAID Executive Chair Ross Wilson was able to talk to many of these groups about their aspirations.

Gypsy communities

Rajalakshmi and Rana are the leaders of a Tribal nomadic (Narikuravar) community who, as part of the UnionAID project, have settled on government land near Madurai. Organised as a union they are proud of their achievements in obtaining the land and a water supply. They now want to work with two other Narikuravar communities to extend their jewellery making business as a cooperative venture providing an important source of income for the community.



Rajalakshmi and Rana are the leaders of a Narikuravar community

Sandal makers

There are 189 units of Dalit sandalmakers in and around Madurai City working in poor conditions on piece rate work. The UnionAID project will enable them to develop these businesses together as a cooperative venture, and link them directly with the market.

Bamboo weavers

Angali is the president of the Bamboo Basketweavers' Union. Dalit women in several villages aim to develop their existing bamboo weaving skills and micro-enterprise activity into a cooperative based business. These women are working in the forecourt of the Dalit temple in Ambedkar Nagar which is the Dalit area of Perunkueli village.



Erammal is the leader of the Women Agricultural Workers' Union

Agricultural workers

Erammal is the leader of the Women Agricultural Workers' Union which has built the collective bargaining power and confidence of these workers over the past few years. Erammal says that the women want to build their economic independence by developing their agricultural activities as a collective based business.

Study tour to Mae Sot and Bangkok January 2012.

The programme has yet to be finalised and will depend on numbers. We will contact those who have expressed interest within the next month or two.



Mr Robin – Sandalmakers' Union leader in Maduari

Don't miss out on our 2011 fundraisers!

Tickets to our April fundraising dinner at Maranui sold out within five days. Due to the success of this dinner at which we raised over \$3000, UnionAID plans to hold a spring dinner in September. We will notify local members of the date closer to the time.

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Regular donations hit **\$3000** a month!

Your Kiwi Solidarity contributions recently reached a high of \$3000 a month. Thanks to the efforts and encouragement of our volunteers, unionists and others, people are signing up to UnionAID in growing numbers. This regular monthly income provides UnionAID with a sound financial base from which to plan future projects and consider expanding into other regions. The UnionAid philosophy is to build on existing international union relationships to ensure that money is well spent. Projects are driven on the ground by trusted project partners, with identified local grass root needs, and ideally take a community development approach. There is an increasing expectation that projects are sustainable and the aim is that they are self-supporting within the medium term. The focus is holistic, on the assumption that if lives and livelihoods are better and more dignified for adults, the lot of the whole family, including children, will be improved.



Bracelet makers' micro-enterprise leader Karuppayee

Mae Sot project **success**

The new UnionAID skills training centre in Mae Sot is already a great success with all of the trainees obtaining work in local factories on completion of their training. In addition to the first classroom (see "Solidarity Summer 2011") a second classroom, an office, and accommodation for both staff and trainees are being built. The project has already made a difference to the lives of the young women trainees and their families. Employment gives them income and security and also enables them to remit money back to their families in Burma. It also reduces their vulnerability to human trafficking.

In reviewing the selection rules (for training) a decision has also been made to prioritize applicants with disabilities, are without family support in Mae Sot, or who have limited other opportunities because of low education levels. There has been a lot of interest from local employers and it is likely that this interest and support will grow. With our total funding of \$NZ56,000, our project partner, the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB) will build the complex of buildings, pay three staff, and provide food and accommodation for the staff and 350 trainees for a full year.



A classroom in Mae Sot

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Comment



30,000 people), now have the organisational capacity through their union, to develop their earning potential through cooperative based businesses, micro-enterprises, and vocational skills training.

In Mae Sot the union women identified skills training for young migrant women as being their most urgent need.

We have been fortunate to get financial support from the New Zealand Government Sustainable Development Fund for the Mae Sot project, and from the Morgan Foundation for the Tamil Nadu Project.

Gareth Morgan has agreed to match every dollar that we raise up to \$30,000 a year. This provides a new urgency to our UnionAID campaign to recruit Kiwi Solidarity Members committed to monthly donations. So please help us fund the Tamil Nadu project by recruiting your friends and family. \$10, or even \$5, per month will make a real difference to our project communities in South India.

Ross Wilson
Executive Chair
UnionAID

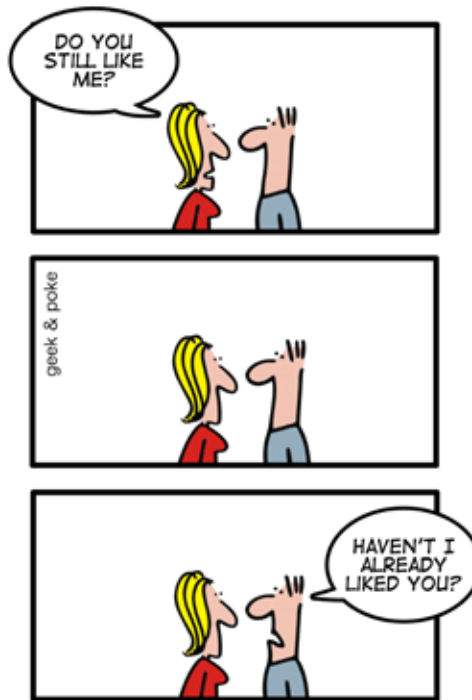
The past six months have seen a major shift in focus for both of our major projects in Mae Sot and Tamil Nadu.

We have been working with the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB) in Mae Sot, and the Tamil Nadu Labour Union (TNLU) for several years. In both cases the projects have been training and organizing projects, and both have now evolved into economic development projects. Reports on those projects are included in this issue of *Solidarity*.

In the case of Tamil Nadu this is because the 11,000 union members and their families (totaling about

Social networking help wanted

Help needed to uplift the UnionAID profile through online social media. Do you have the skills and interest to help with this. Please contact us if you can give some time: wilsonross@xtra.co.nz



Thanks to Oliver Widder at geekandpoke.typepad.com for the cartoon

Yes

I want to become a Kiwi Solidarity Member

Name

Address

Phone

Email

Please contact me and sign me up as a Kiwi Solidarity Member to make a monthly donation.

Signature

Your regular donations mean that UnionAID can guarantee funding to our projects. It only takes a small amount each month to make a real difference to people's lives. Sign up for monthly donations now. Return the coupon to

UnionAID
P O Box 6689,
Wellington

or email the details above to:
unionaid@nzctu.org.nz



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