

*MEDIA RELEASE*

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*Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), Cairns*

*For immediate release*



## Treaty Village aid program improving lives on Australian-PNG border

As the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Australian and PNG Torres Strait Treaty is celebrated, an Australian-funded development aid program in Papua New Guinea's south is producing real results, with compelling human stories emerging from the program.

The Treaty Village Resilience Program (Resilience Program) operates on the border between Australia and PNG, where there are strong cultural ties between Torres Strait Islanders and the PNG Treaty Villages.

While only four kilometres from Saibai Island in Australia, the Treaty Villages face major barriers to development including a lack of roads, prevalence of diseases and poor water and sanitation infrastructure.

The Resilience Program aims to help the population of the Treaty Villages overcome these barriers by training Community Rangers - locals selected by village elders to learn a wide variety of skills including first aid, sanitation, construction, midwifery and leadership.

The program is managed by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), a small not-for-profit non-government organisation based in Cairns.

Australian Aid has provided \$1.85 million over two years for the 'pilot' program with the RRRC contributing another \$400,000.

The recent graduation of the first 52 Community Rangers trained under the pilot program was attended by more than 1500 Treaty Village residents, in addition to PNG Member for South Fly Aide Ganassi, the Australian Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion and the Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch.

Celebrations at the graduation ceremony, held at Mabuadan Village in August, went late into the night after attendees travelled great distances in harsh conditions to reach the ceremony.

The Resilience Program is now entering its 'implementation phase' with tangible results of the Resilience Program becoming apparent as the four villages included in the pilot program are experiencing the benefits of their Community Rangers' training.

For example, Mabuadan Island's school has been allowed to stay open as they have sufficient fresh water supplies thanks to a new water tank built and installed by Community Rangers while other nearby villages have had to temporarily close their schools due to low water supplies.

The handwritten reports of Community Rangers responding to emergencies have demonstrated both the effectiveness of their training and the touching, human nature of their work in their communities.

Once report, written by ranger Dobrag Done, details the Rangers' response to an incident in which a 16-month-old girl suffered severe burns from hot water.

"The poor little girl was in severe pain, screaming and crying non-stop... when rangers arrived. The casualty already had blisters developed on her skin," Ranger Dobrag writes.

"The trainee ranger did their primary surveys then applied a pad soaked in cold water for several times which helped the casualty from screaming and crying and went off to sleep.

"As soon as possible the casualty was taken to Saibai Primary Health Care Centre and was treated. When treatment was over the casualty was returned home and was on treatment for four days which the rangers did every morning, changing the dressings.

"Finally the rangers checked on the little girl and she was good again after two weeks' time."

RRRC managing director Sheriden Morris said it was both encouraging and heartwarming to see the real life impacts of the Resilience Program.

"What I think is really special is that these are members of a community helping each other," Sheriden said.

"The training and the expertise that we are helping provide here will stay in these communities and will continue to provide that benefit for many years.

“It is very easy to see how they are helping their communities and without a doubt, they are saving lives and building a better future for their communities.”



*Community Rangers trained under the Treaty Village Resilience Program demonstrating their first-aid skills at their graduation ceremony on Mabuadan in August 2015. (picture: Office of Warren Entsch)*