

*MEDIA RELEASE*

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

*For immediate release*



## Tropical expertise developing communities on Australia's borderlands

Severe drought is pushing communities to breaking point on Australia's borderlands - however the tropical expertise of organisations based in Cairns are helping communities in this region develop.

The Treaty Villages are a group of 13 communities along the southern coast of Papua New Guinea's Western Province separated from Australia by only four kilometres of water.

Under the 1978 Torres Strait Treaty between Australia and Papua New Guinea free travel for traditional purposes can between the PNG Treaty Villages and several communities of the Torres Strait is allowed.

The Treaty Villages and the Torres Strait are currently suffering from an extreme drought brought on by the strong El Nino weather pattern gripping the region.

Disaster relief funds from the Papua New Guinean government are yet to reach the Treaty Villages, despite being promised several months ago.

The Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), an non-government organisation based in Cairns, is delivering an innovative community development program in the Treaty Villages in funded through Australian Aid.

Called the Treaty Village Resilience Program, the project focuses on the training of Community Rangers from within the Treaty Village populations.

The 52 men and women selected for the pilot phase of the program have been trained in a wide variety of skills including construction, sanitation, first aid, leadership, agriculture and much more. These rangers will be the future leaders of their communities, and have put these skills to work in the five villages included in the pilot program, completing projects such as digging and reinforcing new water wells, repairing old water tanks and installing thousands of litres worth of new storage.

The focus of the community ranger program is now expanding to include the economic potential of the villages.

Experts recently travelled to the Treaty Villages to help the rangers and their villages develop their understanding of leadership and governance.

By setting these governance principles and understanding the obligations of leadership, the rangers and the villages have a greater chance of developing business that delivers benefits to their communities.

RRRC managing director Sheriden Morris said there would several ways the rangers' skills could be put to work helping the communities.

"The rangers are now equipped with a wide variety of skills like construction and plumbing that can be used throughout their communities," Sheriden said.

"Their leadership training means they are also equipped to quote and bid for tenders for these projects throughout the area - for example if one of the villages needs a new well dug or a schoolhouse built, the rangers can put together a tender and bid for that project..

"This means that the program will have long-term sustainability independent of Australian aid funding."



*RRRC staff and Community Rangers inspect a well in Mabuadan Village, PNG. Pic credit: Boyd Robertson*



*Community rangers plan their next move during a training exercise. Credit: Boyd Robertson*

**ENDS**

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