

UNITINGWORLD

UPDATE
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Reaching
the forgotten in

West Papua

***Good news
you need to hear***

from the frontlines of the
changing climate



UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

UnitingWorld is the international aid and partnerships agency of the Uniting Church in Australia. Together we work for a world where lives are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice.

Because every person matters.



In the face of huge challenges, our church partner in West Papua, GKI-TP, is spreading hope and courage to people, including this young church member, who is wearing a shirt with the GKI-TP logo.

Reaching the forgotten in West Papua

Along the far north coast of West Papua, Indonesia, people are facing an intensifying struggle to survive on lands and seas that have sustained them for generations.

"Life is hard here and getting harder. Governments make promises about this area but then nothing happens. It feels like we've been forgotten."

Travelling to the remote Tambrau region in the far north of West Papua, it's a sentiment you hear often. It's not just poverty or the lack of services, it's the sense of being left behind as the world changes around them.

In 2011, more than 70% of Tambrau was declared a conservation zone, the highest form of environmental protection in Indonesia. The designation was a hard-won victory for Indigenous leaders resisting corporate mining and logging interests. But while most of the forests became protected on paper, the people were not.

Development stalled. Poverty deepened. Climate impacts worsened.

"The lack of economic opportunities is the main challenge here," says Wehermos, a villager who was part of a community consultation carried out by our church partner, the Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua (GKI-TP).

"People in my village are so poor that there's no market to sell crops to one another. People must travel a long way to sell, so there's little incentive to grow any more than a family needs."



Children are the hardest hardest hit by poverty and climate change in the remote Tambrau region of West Papua.

The problem with that, he explains, is when a crisis hits a family—a sick child or a garden washed away by floods—they don't have money to pay for the long trip to a hospital, or to even cover the cost of food when their crops get wiped out.

"People get stuck like that. They get sick, malnourished and many children die." he says.

National statistics show children in the region are the hardest hit on many fronts. They currently face the highest levels of deprivation in Indonesia across key measures of well-being, including malnutrition, stunting, education, sanitation and basic living conditions.

Climate change is stacking the odds against people even further.

In the mountains and along riverbanks, illegal and unsustainable logging has triggered flash floods and landslides, destroying homes and lives. On the coast, rising seas and king tides are eating away the land, flooding crops, and leaving families struggling to feed their children. Even endangered turtles no longer recognise the beaches where generations have hatched their young.

The situation has created a paradox trapping the people: either protect the nature they depend on or exploit it to survive in the short term; clearing forests, overfishing or selling their land to foreign developers.

But GKI-TP understands that pitting people against the environment is a zero-sum game. That's why we've been supporting them to develop a new kind of response. In April, GKI-TP and UnitingWorld staff hosted an extensive community consultation and climate analysis to find out the drivers of poverty for men, women and children, and the ways human development can be done sustainably.

"We want to help people make a living and have long-term food security without destroying the forests," says GKI-TP Program Manager Donaltus Rumbesu. *"If our approach works here, we can use it as a model to adapt for communities across Papua."*



Sea-level rise is flooding neighbourhoods and transforming coastlines.

Our church partners already making change

GKI-TP is one of the largest and most trusted institutions in West Papua. It's filled with inspiring leaders who are fighting to improve the lives of people across their communities as well as protect the natural environment they depend on. But they need help, and we in Australia can play a powerful role.

In a village where sea levels are rising and fish are disappearing, Rev Oto and his congregation are learning a hard truth: when you destroy the environment, you put your future at risk.

"It used to be all mangrove forests and coral along here," he says. "But people cut down the mangrove trees and sold the coral to the tourist shops so they could build their houses."

Most homes now sit on stilts to escape the encroaching sea. And the cost is becoming clear.

"The king tides are getting higher. The mangroves used to be a fence that softened the waves, and now it floods badly. During typhoons, even when they're far offshore, no one sleeps. It feels completely exposed, like we'll be swept away."

Mangroves are also habitats and breeding grounds for many of the local fish populations. Destroying them has meant fishing families have to go much further and the daily catch is getting harder.

So Rev Oto is working to restore the mangroves, even knowing it will take years.

"I use my position in the church to encourage every person to plant at least one mangrove or tree, and care for it. If everyone does that, it will become a mindset," he says.

As well as overseeing hundreds of seedlings being planted, he's found strong support from his church, GKI-TP. Their statement of faith commits the church to caring for the environment to ensure the flourishing of future generations, giving him confidence to speak boldly.

"I tell people it took just a few years to destroy the mangroves and coral.

It will take 30 years to bring them back... but only if we start today."



In a region of West Papua battling poverty, malnutrition, gender-based violence and climate extremes, Rev Monim spreads hope wherever she can.

Rev Monim's story begins with deep loss. In 2010, she was away at a church training when torrential rain triggered a landslide. The blocked river overflowed, flooding the town where her two children were staying with friends. They tried to reach higher ground, but as they ran, the riverbank and part of the mountainside gave way. Days later, her son was found alive, buried under metres of debris, cut, broken and stripped by the force of the water. Her daughter was never found.

The disaster killed 145 people, left thousands injured and homeless, and destroyed the entire town.

Later, Java-based researchers claimed that deforestation, if not directly the cause, certainly made the landslides worse. In the eight years before the disaster, nearly 30,000 hectares of forest in the area had been logged or disturbed.

Rainfall and storm patterns are intensifying with climate change, making the risks of deforestation much greater than they were in the past.

Today, Rev Monim leads a humble but vibrant church in the remote Tambrau region. Her faith, rooted in grief and resilience, is now deeply connected to protecting life, both human and ecological.

"This region really needs help. People want to look after the forests, but life is hard and so many live in poverty. The quickest way for people to make money is to cut down the trees or sell their land."

So Rev Monim was thrilled to host the newly-formed climate team sent by the GKI-TP Synod office and UnitingWorld staff.

"We're excited to have the Synod team and Australians walking alongside us. We really need the support."



Working with nature against poverty

In the coming months, we'll share more from West Papua, where our partners are rolling out nature-based solutions to poverty and climate challenges.

Together, we're helping communities grow food, earn income and protect the environment they rely on.

Visit www.unitingworld.org.au/westpapua to discover the next part of the story and how you can help.

The *good news* you need to hear from the frontlines of the changing climate

More than two thirds of Australians in a recent survey* admitted they avoid news at least some of the time, with news about climate change ranking third highest on the topics we scroll past.

Why? Does it feel too big to fight? Too overwhelming and negative?

Probably.

But there's another narrative we need to hear more often, and it's this:

For people in the fight of their lives against drought, flood and storm, small things can make a big difference.

And we're helping make those things happen.

If you think climate change is too big to fight, ask the mums, dads and children of the world's hardest hit regions. **They'll tell you the smallest things can have a big impact. And they'll tell you your contribution matters.**

Thanks so much

for supporting these innovations in big ways and small.
Every donation makes a difference.



Just \$25 can provide seeds that stand between a family and disaster in Timor-Leste.

For families living in areas prone to landslides and soil erosion, it's hard to grow food. On top of hunger, there's constant anxiety that your house and family could be swallowed by mud during the next storm, which are coming more and more often.

UnitingWorld partners are helping people plant out these areas to stabilise the land, absorb carbon, revitalise the soil for crop growth, plant gardens and deliver protection from disaster.

Just \$25 can provide seeds for a family.



Do kitchen gardens make a difference? Yes, and just \$90 from a donor in Australia can make it happen.

Families in Maluku worry constantly about the high price of food right across their region. Food supply is difficult because of less predictable patterns of rainfall, as well as conflict over land and water. Families are forced to choose imported, low nutrition food and children suffer malnutrition and stunting.

UnitingWorld partners are helping people start their own productive kitchen gardens to grow healthy, nutritious food. They're supported with drought resistant seeds, irrigation techniques and training to improve the soil.

It costs just \$90 to help a person get access to the program.

Could a school be part of the solution?

Imagine you're a child in rural Zimbabwe, watching the anxiety grow in your parents as your family crops fail once again. The rains won't fall, or they fall too fast. Your parents give up their own meals to make sure you don't go to bed hungry.

UnitingWorld partners are using schools as a hub where children have reliable access to clean water, disaster risk reduction training and gardens to grow their own food – building the whole family's resilience to climate shocks.

\$250 can help support the program in a school, reaching hundreds of children and families.



* <https://theconversation.com/why-more-than-two-thirds-of-australians-think-no-news-is-good-news-at-least-some-of-the-time-207214>



Lent Event 2025



During Lent Event this year, we shared inspiring stories of faith, courage and resilience from Tonga in the aftermath of the 2022 volcanic eruption and tsunami. Stories of people like Mr Folau, who miraculously survived more than 27 hours at sea after being swept offshore by the tsunami.

As we took 40 days of faith-filled action for God's creation, we raised funds to help communities in the Pacific, Africa and Asia fight poverty, build food security and safeguard lives in the face of climate change and disasters. **Thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, we have raised more than \$200,000!**

If you missed it, you can still see the videos from Tonga at www.lentevent.com.au And it's not too late to donate.

Hearts aligned for change

40 for the Future was a great new initiative launched this year by UnitingWorld, enabling individuals and church groups to take on a **40-day challenge to help build a fairer future**. Participants transformed the way they ate, shopped, travelled or used energy for 40 days to reduce their carbon footprint, and set a fundraising goal so their family and friends could sponsor their efforts.

Uniting Church President Rev Charissa Suli was one of the people who took up a personal challenge to help make change. She shared,

"Lent is a season of reflection, sacrifice, and renewal and a time to draw closer to God and align our hearts with Christ's call to love and serve. Lent reminds us that transformation is not just about giving something up, but about making space for something greater—God's justice, peace, and love in our lives and in the world. Through prayer, fasting, and acts of generosity, I hope to not only deepen my own faith but also contribute to the flourishing of others, particularly those in need."

Thank you to everyone who took part!

Find out more at www.40forthefuture.com.au



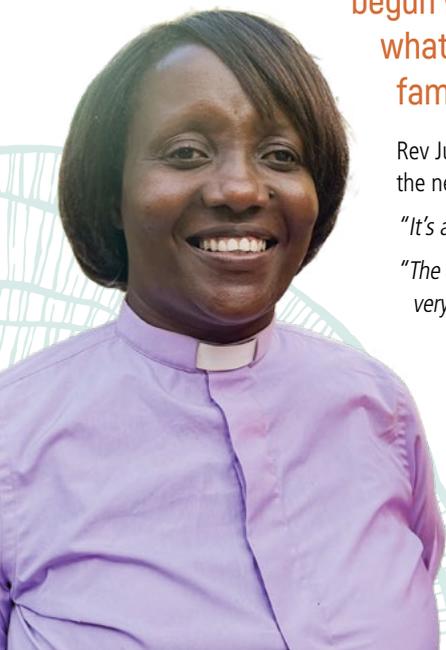
Hope grows in schools

Across rural Zimbabwe, families are facing long droughts, food insecurity and lack of clean water. Supported by UnitingWorld, the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) has begun working in schools to transform what is possible for children and families in poverty.

Rev Junior Paradza is one of the leaders championing the new project.

"It's a difficult place," Rev Junior says.

"The problems are complex and cross over from the very practical, like hunger and disaster relief, to the fact that patriarchal and cultural beliefs mean women and girls have no voice and are vulnerable to high rates of abuse. All these things influence each other, and they don't just impact the children but the adults too. People want change, but there's a knowledge gap about how to make it happen."



Through the schools, our partners found the ideal place to bring together resources, training, policy and communities in need.

Selected schools are becoming hubs not only for climate resilience, giving students access to freshly grown food and clean water, but also for sharing knowledge that changes how women and girls are treated and how people with disabilities could be included in their communities.

Designed to impact not only students but their families and surrounding communities, Rev Junior believes the project will grow to reach more than 10,000 people.

"As soon as we began providing guidance and resources, and the school staff knew this was really possible, they have become zealous in planning! They know that this will transform life not just for the families at the school now, but for generations to come."

THANK YOU FOR PLAYING A PART

Thank you for enabling our partners to lead change and transform lives. In rural Zimbabwe and beyond, your support is helping grow their impact and create lasting change. We're so grateful.

Find out more about the project at www.unitingworld.org.au/possibility



Coming soon to a church near you!

UnitingWorld's new-look Engagement Team is here to share stories about exciting change in difficult places and to help you get involved. They serve as a connection between UnitingWorld's work and Uniting Church congregations throughout Australia.

Invite them to speak at your church or group, or ask them how you can support a project – email info@unitingworld.org.au or call 1800 998 122.



Rev Cyrus Kung in South Australia is energised by spending time with people to dream together of what's possible for creating change in the world.

"I like hearing stories that are not like my own; they challenge me to open myself a little wider. There's so much we can learn from our partners when we hear of their stories, and what hopes, dreams and struggles are a reality in their part of the world."



Antony McMullen is based in Victoria and excited about seeing local congregations realise they can make a real difference in our region.

"I think people respond well to the fact that UnitingWorld isn't about fly-in-fly-out aid but collaborating with actual church communities in our region to support them in doing what they determine is needed in their local context."



Team leader **Mardi Lumsden**, with UnitingWorld since 2017, is inspired by the passion for justice of UnitingWorld supporters.

"I love to see how excited people get when they understand that what UnitingWorld does really works – the key is working with local people who understand the context and challenges their communities face. Their hope, courage and faith encourage those around them to realise that small things, done intentionally, grow to make a big impact."



Barry Higgins is based in NSW and previously worked in international development and the local community services sector.

"Community-owned decision making is a bit of a buzz word, but it's the most effective way to create change and it's what our partners are doing in our projects around the world. People's eyes light up when you talk about it because it works, and seeing that happen is what I enjoy most about sharing UnitingWorld stories."



Long-term team member **Jenny Guyatt** is a regular on the rural circuit in Queensland, speaking at churches up and down the coast.

"They really appreciate the visit, knowing they're not forgotten, and love hearing about the work of the wider Church. I love to share the stories of our partners who, like our congregations here, really understand the needs of their local communities and want to do what's best for them."



Pacific Women in Ministry

Several of our Women in Ministry scholars have graduated recently. We were thrilled to get this note from Rev Toobora from Kiribati:

"I thank God for the gift of life and for our shared calling to serve in the various ministries He has entrusted to us. It is my constant prayer that God will continue to pour out His abundant blessings upon UnitingWorld as it continues to serve His people across the globe."

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to UnitingWorld for its significant role in making my academic journey a successful one. Without the love, support and generosity extended by UnitingWorld in so many ways, I would not have reached this important milestone. Your collective efforts have made a lasting impact.

As we say in Kiribati, Kam bati n rab'a (thank you from the depths of my heart)."

Thanks to the UnitingWorld supporters who have donated and the congregations that have sponsored women like Rev Toobora to pursue their calling to serve God and change lives through their leadership. Currently we have two scholars at Davuilevu Theological College, Fiji, and we will share their progress in future Updates.

Meeting the Australian Ambassador in Zimbabwe



In Harare recently, representatives of UnitingWorld and the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) met with the Australian Ambassador, Minoli Perera.

Kudzaishe Ndawana, National Director of MCZ's Methodist Development and Relief Agency (MeDRA) and Diana Asencio Galvis, International Programs Manager, UnitingWorld, were able to give updates on the current phase of our Safety and Inclusion Project, which receives funding from the Australian

Government. This includes the work in schools, addressing food insecurity, water supply, climate change awareness and disaster risk reduction, safeguarding, and inclusion for people with disability.

The meeting provided a valuable opportunity for MeDRA and UnitingWorld to reconnect with the Australian Embassy in Harare. MeDRA has now been invited to attend regular partner meetings at the Embassy to share their perspective as a prominent civil society and faith-based organisation. We hope the close relationship continues to go from strength to strength.

Going further together!

Each year, UnitingWorld brings its international church partners together for mutual learning, support and solidarity.



The South Asia Regional Learning Forum was held in Durgapur, West Bengal, in February. This year's forum focused on critical themes including climate change impacts, disaster resilience and preparedness; gender, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) and sustainability. Partners discussed ideas and strategies to strengthen their work, then worked together on action plans to incorporate these strategies into their programs over the next year.



The Pacific Regional Learning Forum was held in Fiji in April.

"I'm with a roomful of ordinary people, who are truly extraordinary. They are staff from churches across the Pacific who work in community - running gender equality programs, planting mangroves and helping villages develop their climate disaster plans. They remind me that it is God who is the flame in our hearts, and neither the oppression of empires nor the frailty of human thought can put out that light."

~ UnitingWorld National Director Dr Sureka Goringe at the Pacific Regional Learning Forum



The South East Asia Regional Learning Forum was held in Bogor, West Java, in March.

"With climate change as the central theme, the gathering sought to reflect on how our churches can respond faithfully and collaboratively to the challenges faced by communities across the region."

~ Rev Dr Apwee Ting, UnitingWorld International Partnerships Manager, at the South East Asia Regional Learning Forum



ACFID Board members meeting with Hon Dr Anne Aly (3rd from left).

UnitingWorld commends the Australian Government for holding the line on global commitments to end poverty and fight climate change.

At a time when many governments are turning inward and slashing vital aid, we're grateful that Australia continues to act as an outward-looking, reliable partner to our region and beyond.

The 2025–26 Federal Budget includes a \$135.8 million increase to overseas development assistance. We commend this as a strong signal of the values we want to champion as a nation.

"While traditional donors are scaling back, Australia has made it clear that we will not turn our backs on our friends in the region," said UnitingWorld National Director Dr Sureka Goringe.

"This increase, while modest as a share of the Federal Budget, shows we're continuing to stand alongside partners facing escalating challenges from climate change, health crises and economic instability."

Earlier this month, Dr Goringe met with the new Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Hon Dr Anne Aly, alongside Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Board colleagues.

"Dr Aly brings deep lived experience to the role and understands the importance of partnerships built on trust and local knowledge," Dr Goringe said.

"I'm looking forward to strengthening that trust and friendship during this term of government."

Despite the increase, Australia currently spends just 0.65% of the Federal Budget on aid—the lowest in our history. New analysis from the ANU Development Policy Centre shows Australia now spends ten times more on defence than on aid, one of the widest gaps in the developed world.

"This is an alarming trend," said Dr Goringe.

"We call on all parties to recognise aid and development assistance as more than just an investment in our neighbours. It's an investment in a safer, more stable future for all of us."

"We echo the call of our sector through the Safer World for All campaign to increase aid to at least 1% of the Federal Budget, so we can meet the challenges of our time with generosity and vision."

Find out more about the Safer World for All campaign at www.unitingworld.org.au/saferworldforall

NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

There's a lot happening in the world right now. Big, overwhelming things. It can feel like all we hear is noise, conflict and fear.

But when I spend time with our partners, in person or through their stories, I see something else.

I see courage, determination and love. I see communities standing firm in the face of poverty, injustice and the growing climate crisis. They're finding ways to plant seeds for the future.

In this newsletter, you've read about people like Rev Monim, Rev Oto and Rev Junior, leaders deeply rooted in their faith and their communities, doing the hard and hopeful work of change.

They remind me that the best antidote to despair is action.

When we stand alongside our partners around the world, sharing resources, prayers and acts of solidarity with the poorest people, we bring God's love to life.

I also see other reasons for hope.

Our government has made a conscious choice

to stay committed to global partnerships and to the values of justice, generosity and cooperation, even as other world leaders turn to self-interest and cynicism.

It may not make headlines, but one of the reasons Australia has stayed this course is the faithful, persistent advocacy of Christians across the country. Through the Micah Australia network of faith-based organisations, including us and many others, thousands have raised their voices to ensure our government remembers those most vulnerable to poverty and climate change, even with hard decisions to make.

It's a welcome reminder of the collective power we have.

Our church partners are stepping up their work to address growing need with creativity and boldness.

And here at UnitingWorld, we're thinking big about the future, seeking new opportunities to scale up our impact and reach more people with practical, faith-led solutions to poverty and climate change.

We can't do any of it without you.



Your prayers, generosity and partnership are what make this all possible.

Please keep walking with us. Keep sharing the stories. Keep believing, giving and acting.

Because yes, the world is changing and breaking in many ways. But what we do together in these critical times is how we are part of God's restoration of all things.

Thanks for being with us.

Dr Sureka Goringe
National Director
UnitingWorld

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