

MEDIA RELEASE

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Reef and Rainforest Research Centre - Cairns, Australia

For immediate release



PNG Treaty Villages Pilot extended

The Australian Government is strengthening its support for a group of Papua New Guinea villages located less than 5km from Australia's northernmost point.

The Building Resilience in Treaty Villages (BRTV) pilot project is an innovative community development and conservation initiative to strengthen the capacity of villages covered by the Torres Strait Treaty.

Following an initial \$1.8 million from the Australian Government in 2014, the pilot in four Treaty Villages has been extended under a \$400,000 commitment in 2016-2017. Subject to successful completion of the pilot, the Australian Government will support a phased scale up of the project over the following three years, reaching three extra Treaty Villages each year and all by 2019-2020.

The Treaty Villages, on the south coast of PNG's Western Province, face many challenges including a lack of civic and health infrastructure, severe drought and outbreaks of diseases like leprosy and multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis.

Managed by the Cairns-based Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), the project involves the recruitment and training of multi-skilled community rangers to work in construction, sanitation, first aid and leadership.

Commencing in 2014, fifty-two community rangers (including 12 women) were trained under Stage One. These rangers have now used their skills to:

- Install more than 1.5 million litres of reliable, clean fresh water storage;
- Build eight new reinforced capped-and-sealed groundwater wells;
- Provide emergency medical assistance on more than 100 occasions including lifesaving first aid, transportation and child-birth support; and
- Complete a top-down refurbishment of Mabaduan Village's hospital outpost.

A scaled up project would include an increased focus on food and water security, leadership and self-governance in the villages, while supporting long-term resilience and self-reliance in the Treaty Village area as a whole.

RRRC Managing Director Sheriden Morris welcomed the extension of the BRTV pilot project and planned scale up.

“Papua New Guinea is our nearest neighbour – closer than Brisbane – and what happens there matters here,” she said.

“The Treaty Villages are full of resourceful, hardworking people but they’ve lacked the opportunity and means to build their resilience to a changing climate and increasingly dangerous diseases.”

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Further information on the Building Resilience in Treaty Villages (BRTV) pilot project is available at <http://rrrc.org.au/programs/png/>.

Two images are available for use with this story:



*The first class of 52 Community Rangers trained under Stage One of the Building Resilience in Treaty Villages project at their graduation ceremony in Mabuadan Village in August 2015.
Image: Office of Warren Entsch*



Female Community Rangers installing new birthing beds at Mabuadan Hospital, which has now been refurbished by ranger teams. Female empowerment including the setup of safe birthing facilities is a key aspect of the Building Resilience in Treaty Villages project. Image: RRRC