Fred Hollows celebrates the Pacific Regional Blindness Prevention Programme
On 24 August Fred Hollows Foundation New Zealand hosted a function in Wellington to celebrate their Pacific Regional Blindness Prevention Programme, which is jointly supported by NZAID and AusAID.

The initiative was announced earlier this year. New Zealand will contribute $5.6 million and Australia will contribute $11.2 million over the next three years to support the training of eye nurses and doctors in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

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The event was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon Murray McCully, a representative from the Australian High Commission, board members from Fred Hollows New Zealand and Australia, and staff from Fred Hollows NZ and NZAID.

The Pacific Eye Institute (PEI), based in Fiji, is part of Hollows NZ's Pacific Regional Blindness Prevention Programme, and trains eye doctors and nurses through courses tailored to meet the needs of Pacific communities. By the end of 2009, 33 nurses and five doctors will have graduated from the PEI, and these eye health professionals will all work in the Pacific.

In addition, 21 nurses will have graduated from Hollows NZ’s training programme run in partnership with Divine Word University in Madang, Papua New Guinea. By March next year, 15 eye nurses will have graduated from a training programme in Timor-Leste. Hollows NZ has also recruited and trained Timor-Leste’s first permanent eye surgical team.

For more information about NZAID’s work with the Fred Hollows NZ Foundation contact Megan McCoy.
Programme will match selected enterprises with experienced New Zealand mentors. Mr Key also hoped to see the creation of a network of local business mentors in Pacific Island countries.

The programme will be designed to help small and medium-sized businesses in the Pacific grow by identifying training needs, creating opportunities for partnerships and joint ventures, and increasing Pacific exports to New Zealand.

**World Humanitarian Day**

The very first World Humanitarian Day was recognised on 19 August, honouring current humanitarian aid workers and remembering the aid workers who have lost their lives while bringing relief and assistance to others.

Responding to humanitarian need, whether arising from natural disasters or conflict is one of New Zealand’s obligations as a good international citizen. It is also a vital aspect of NZAID’s role and everyday work.

NZAID supports professional agencies, such as the New Zealand Red Cross, who send trained aid workers with specialist skills in health, water and sanitation, security, logistics and administration to humanitarian situations worldwide.

The role of humanitarian aid workers is becoming increasingly important as there has been a steep increase in the number of natural disasters in the past two decades. The impacts of climate change are evident, with the number of flooding events and cyclones increasing at a rate greater than the number of earthquakes and other non-climate related events.

The number of armed conflicts occurring globally has shown a marked decrease over the same period. However, the impacts of conflict on civilians are much greater than that on military forces. Civilians may be targeted in conflict, or they may be implicated later as a result of disease or malnutrition.

In these situations, humanitarian aid workers are making a difference to those who need it most. World Humanitarian Day acknowledges and honours the work of individuals and agencies who work in trying circumstances to bring relief to those affected by conflict and natural disasters.

For more information about World Humanitarian Day visit the NZAID website.

**NewZAID**

A joint report released this month, *Surviving the Global Recession: Strengthening Economic Growth and Resilience in the Pacific*, highlights some of the ways in which Pacific island countries are being affected by the global recession. The report was commissioned by New Zealand Prime Minister John Key and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd ahead of the recent Pacific Island Forum Leaders’ meeting in Cairns.

Pacific island countries are experiencing lower growth and increased poverty because of the global recession. The impact of the recession in the Pacific is being felt through lower prices and demand for exports, a reduction in tourist numbers and spending in some countries, and a fall in the amount of remittances being sent to Pacific island countries.

The report finds that the global recession has highlighted a number of fundamental policy challenges in many Pacific island countries. These have intensified the impact of the recession and are restricting several countries’ capacities to respond. A number of Pacific island countries, and vulnerable groups of people, were already under pressure as a result of the high food and fuel prices in 2008 and are now also facing potentially unsustainable government budget shortfalls.

Without significant improvements to the current situation, several Pacific island countries are likely to face increasingly difficult fiscal choices and will be hard pressed to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. By contrast, countries that had already begun to take a number of key reforms appear better placed to weather the current recession and follow a more resilient development path.

The report highlights the main challenges for Pacific island countries in responding to the global recession and suggests a four-pillared approach for an effective and co-ordinated response to lessen the impact of the global recession.

For more information and a copy of the report visit the NZAID website.

**Remittance card wins “Best New Product” award**

Westpac Bank’s remittance card has won the *Sunday Star Times* “Best New Product” award in the newspaper’s annual review of banks. Westpac were able to introduce the remittance product after a regulatory change in September 2008, which had been driven by the cross-government project to reduce the cost of remittances, partly funded through NZAID’s State Sector Development Partnerships Fund (previously the Government Agencies Fund - GAF).

In November last year Westpac launched the first low-cost remittance card scheme designed to cut the cost of sending money to the Pacific Islands, identified by the World Bank as a significant constraint on the finances of some of the poorest people in New Zealand.

The *Sunday Star Times* recognised the remittance card as the best new product because “It is designed to meet the needs of people often overlooked by the financial sector… to break the stranglehold of exorbitant money transfer schemes that clip the ticket every time people send money back to families in the Pacific Islands, which often puts food on tables or helps rebuild after tropical storms.”

While remittances from people working in wealthy countries including New Zealand and Australia are hugely economically significant for Pacific island countries, transferring money back to the Pacific Islands can be a costly business.

NZAID worked with the Reserve Bank, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and the World Bank, recognising that the high transaction costs of remittances needed to be addressed. A project coordinator was partly funded through NZAID's Development Partnerships Fund who worked across the government and private sector to identify some of the restrictions towards lowering costs and drive the change in regulation.

As a result, a regulation was approved in late September 2008 that makes it possible for the financial sector to offer more efficient and effective remittance products.

Complementing this work, NZAID has co-funded with AusAID, the launch of the Send Money Pacific website to increase awareness of the costs and services of different money transfer operators, including the new Westpac product.

For more information contact Ginny Chapman or Vicki Plater.
Funding for Taiwan following Typhoon Morakot

Foreign Minister Murray McCully has announced that New Zealand will provide up to $100,000 to support relief efforts in Taiwan following Typhoon Morakot.

"More than 1.5 million were forced to evacuate their homes, and 14,000 people have been displaced, with 5,000 living in temporary camps after their homes were destroyed. Large numbers of people are without water or electricity, and there have been significant losses of crops, livestock, fisheries, forestry, and infrastructure," Mr McCully said.

The funding will support the work of Taiwan Red Cross, which is helping people who have lost their homes as a result of the natural disaster.

For more information contact communications@nzaid.govt.nz.

Latest Currents magazine available now!

NZAID’s Currents magazine is an interesting and informative way to find out more about how New Zealand is working to support development and respond to humanitarian crises in our region, and around the world. To receive a free copy of the magazine in the post please contact Nadine Koszler with your mailing details or visit NZAID’s website to download a copy.

The latest issue includes stories on the work of the Fred Hollows Foundation New Zealand, the Prime Minister’s trip to the Pacific, the role of microfinance and microcredit in developing countries, a close look at New Zealand’s aid programme with Samoa and much more!
NZ announces funding for Fiji flood recovery efforts

New Zealand will provide FJ$330,000 in funding to Habitat for Humanity Fiji (HFHF) to repair houses damaged by flooding in January this year and to retrofit homes to make them more resistant to extreme weather.

HFHF is a non-profit organisation that assists lower income families and communities to have decent living conditions. The support from NZAID will see 105 homes properly repaired and upgraded to make them safer and more secure.

New Zealand has also provided a grant of FJ$159,167 to the Fiji Red Cross to implement a Disaster Risk Reduction Project amongst those villages and settlements in Ba and Sigatoka that were badly affected by the January floods. That funding will allow the Fiji Red Cross to train close to 800 people in disaster response and first aid. Participants will come from 20 villages in the flood devastated areas of Ba and Sigatoka.

The same villages will also be supplied with resources to help them prepare for the next extreme weather event in their region, and to ensure that communities have the localised skills and resources readily available to effectively respond when need be.

The funding is part of a NZ$3 million package of assistance managed by NZAID to support recovery work following the January floods.

The flood recovery package has two main components: social services and disaster mitigation projects, and rebuilding and rehabilitation of infrastructure for economic recovery.

For more information see NZAID's website.

UNIFEM Executive Director visits Wellington

Earlier this month the Executive Director of UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Dr Inés Alberdi, was in Wellington to meet with government officials, the Minister of Women’s Affairs Pansy Wong, and non-government organisations. As part of
her visit, Dr Alberdi met with NZAID staff to discuss the current work and direction of UNIFEM.

UNIFEM is dedicated to advancing women’s rights and achieving gender equality worldwide. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that foster women’s empowerment.

At a parliamentary function on 13 August hosted by the Jackie Blue, the chair of the New Zealand Parliamentarians for Population and Development, Dr Alberdi launched the UNIFEM flagship report *The Progress of the World’s Women*. The 2008/09 report focuses on the need to strengthen accountability to women through politics and governance, access to public services, economic opportunities, justice and the distribution of international assistance for development and security.

UNIFEM have a strong presence in the Pacific region with a sub-regional office in Suva, as well as country programmes in four priority countries: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati. UNIFEM’s programmes in the Pacific focus on sustainable economic development, working to ensure women are able to engage effectively in economic activity, particularly at local markets.

While meeting with NZAID staff, Dr Alberdi discussed a new UNIFEM initiative, the Fund for Gender Equality, a multi-donor scheme designed to advance high-impact gender equality programmes that focus on women’s economic and/or political empowerment at local and national levels.

NZAID provided funding of $2.7 million for UNIFEM in 2008/09, including $200,000 for the UNIFEM Bamyan Women’s Referral Centre in Afghanistan.

For more information about NZAID’s work with UNIFEM contact Jane Coster.