

Christian World Service – Making a Difference for 70 Years

Beginnings

On December 15, 1945, an article headed “Help for Greece” appeared in “The Press”. It asked the public for financial assistance so that 4 relief teams could be sent to Greece to provide humanitarian aid and assist with reconstruction. This was the first Christmas appeal by what is now Christian World Service (CWS).

In a recent address to supporters, former Prime Minister and now Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Helen Clark, reflected on CWS’s beginnings.

“CWS was one of the many organisations formed in response to the need for reconstruction in Europe after the destruction wrought by World War 2. Its formation was a response by New Zealanders offering concrete, local and practical assistance to help reconstruct the lives of those devastated by that cataclysm.”

70 years later some things have not changed so very much. Catastrophic events in Syria remind us, as if we needed it, that many people in the world are continually beset by desperate need born of chaos. And CWS, now New Zealand’s longest serving home-grown development and aid agency, continues to respond to crises triggered by conflict, poverty and climate, forging and building on relationships with partners on the ground.

“Every day people all over the world are doing their best to build lives for themselves and their families in what are often almost impossible circumstances” says National Director Pauline McKay. “Violence, lack of resources and extremes of weather make even marginal life difficult for too many of our world’s people.

Making a difference on the ground

But there is hope”, she says. “Our task is to connect resources with the people who are making a difference on the ground.”

In Gaza, where the war has left children traumatised and without vital healthcare, CWS’s partner is helping provide these shocked and injured young people with the skilled psychological support they need.

In Vanuatu, the recent cyclone swept away the gardens that sustain rural communities. But CWS’s Nivan partner is making tools and seeds available so people can feed their families once again.

And while the conflict in Sudan has generated chaos and insecurity, the possibility of free education provided by local communities in partnership with CWS is preparing a new generation for a new life.

Partnership

CWS’s commitment to partnership as a way to support people in crisis is at the heart of its work. It’s something that struck Helen Clark powerfully when she visited a CWS programme in Uganda in 2008.

“That initiative was part of the Church of Uganda’s response to HIV and AIDS”, she says. “It was an example of CWS’ distinctive model of partnership - working at the grassroots with vulnerable and marginalised people and trusting the community to know what is needed and how best to make it happen.

“This model of partnership is now accepted as good development practice and one of the underlying values of the UNDP. CWS was a pioneer in this partner-led approach.”

Development and politics

CWS soon recognised it was impossible to separate aid from its political and social context. Education and advocacy became core values for CWS along

with a growing emphasis on action against the root causes of inequality and poverty.

As Helen Clark observes, “CWS has always spoken out against injustice, globally and locally. It has consistently highlighted why poverty exists, even when that has put it at odds with the government of the day and even when its stance has not been popular with the general public. However, over the past 70 years CWS has been proven to have been on the right side of history.”

Pauline McKay acknowledges that CWS takes some satisfaction from that. “We’re proud of all we have achieved with our partners, but there is still much more to do. Our emergency relief, campaigns and community development focus on ensuring people have the basics of life, while protecting their environment and community services for future generations.

“People are struggling to have enough food and water. Unfair trade rules and climate change worsen the problem. Natural disasters and conflicts are devastating poor communities.

“Every Christmas, for the last 70 years, Christian World Service has asked the New Zealand community to support its work with partners like these” says Pauline McKay.

“And we’re doing it once again this year, because the opportunity to resource partners in places like Gaza, Vanuatu and Sudan is one way New Zealanders can help enable people at risk to overcome the odds that are otherwise so shockingly stacked against them.”

769 words

Chris Nichol

Notes:

Or link to our [web page](#).

[Watch](#) a series of messages from partners, Helen Clark and John Nduna plus a visual history of CWS.

Make a [donation](#) to the 2015 Christmas Appeal, post a cheque to Box 22652, Christchurch, or call 0800 747372.

Your contribution will make a world of difference.