

# Pushing back the darkness

**There is one thing that we cannot deny here in Papua: things are changing very fast, in some things anyway. People and culture change much more slowly than buildings and infrastructure. To assist development in the backward island of Papua, the Indonesian Government has granted special autonomy status. This means large sums of money are being allocated in all sectors.**

I had a visitor this past week, a son of missionaries who had left to return to Australia with his parents just 5 years ago. He was amazed at the number of people who were using cell phones and the busyness of the traffic in Wamena. Many expensive new 4-wheel drive cars joining the many pedestrians, becaks (rickshaw) and pigs! He was also amazed to see over 400 young people at Agape Church on Sunday with comparatively few adults. In a recent survey done by YASUMAT, in the YAHUKIMO regency it was estimated that over 50% of men do not live in the villages permanently anymore. Many, looking for work, registering for education, shopping or waiting for promised money from the government, come to the towns (Dekai and Wamena). This has its own knock-on effect in the villages where women

are doing much of the heavy work looking after gardens and pigs. Many school teachers and medical workers for a variety of reasons over these past 3-4 years have not been on the job regularly. Many primary schools have not had a regular teacher for 4 years and the medical work in the villages of YAHUKIMO has been very sketchy with only the faithful Church health workers present to help the people. While many Government medical facilities have been built in the area of 60,000 people, few are as yet staffed and the grass is growing up through the floors. We can continue to hope and work that this situation turns around. Much of the difficulty is due to the logistics of development in an area where there are still no roads. Plane, helicopter and by foot is not taken into consideration by

the people in high places dropping down the special autonomy programmes.

There are many opportunities and challenges for the Church and YASUMAT at this time. The Church is a very important component and a high value for the people. Many continue serving faithfully in the villages (over 550 congregations), regular Sunday and weekday services, Bible Schools, translation into Hupla, Momuna, Kimyal and Yali of the NT, Full Bible and revisions (Yali) continue. There are also many efforts in evangelism and outreach. But with all this there is a noticeable lack of younger church leaders coming forward for training and service. Often, too, we see Christian people and congregations with their leadership depending highly on Government monies to hold their activities. This makes sense to many in the context as many of 'their people' have access to these monies and they have sacrificed much to get 'their' person in a place of influence.

Amongst all this, in the medical sector, we are seeing a huge increase of cases of TB and HIV/AIDS as well as Malaria (mountain people travelling to the lowlands). The situation is made even more unstable as food shortages are frequently reported from the mountain areas. This often seems to be due to late planting and harvesting



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as there are many building programmes which bring quick cash and so garden-making gets forgotten or is later than usual. This, combined with the usual and constant hard work that it takes to eke out a living on the sides of steep mountains, causes poor harvests affecting the general health of the people.

It seems to be difficult for the Medical Department of the Government to get its head around the creeping medical disaster that we are convinced we are seeing in the YAHUKIMO area. In YASUMAT we work together with the Government, reporting our activities and concerns. It is all a bit uphill right now as programmes for TB, AIDS and malaria are patchy at best. Many sick people are still flown out to Wamena even though there are 12 or so Doctors in Dekai (Capital of YAHUKIMO). Medicine supplies to villages are still centred out of Wamena as flight connections are better. Yasumat medical staff, Denny, Yepina, Nesi and myself (advisory and education) assist where we can arranging medical supplies, arranging emergencies with MAF and Helimission, visiting villages, surveying health, befriending the increasing number of HIV/AIDS and TB patients here in Wamena. It is an evolving programme of support, education and constant evaluation.

At this time moment, we have 4 young men who we visit and support in the 4th stage (stadium) of HIV infection; several also have TB. We have several obstetric cases also. We hope to open a small facility this year where TB patients can reside so that they can get good protein food etc. to help them get stabilized quicker. When they stay in poor accommodation and have to share food around to many, progress is slow. We anticipate this would be a temporary measure till the Government get their promised systems running. So often we feel we are standing in the gap but there are many opportunities for service and witness in this time of change.

There are 18 young people in YASUMAT receiving training, learning to work in teams and to put into practice their

Christian values in often difficult and challenging situations. The training and presence of Javier and Naomi Sosa in YASUMAT is very timely and needed at this critical time in the history and development of the YAHUKIMO area, especially in mobilizing the Church to rise up and be enabled to be the hands of Jesus in these difficult and challenging days.

### Sue Trenier

Notes: Naomi and Javier Sosa serve with Papua Partners, UK

YAHUKIMO (Yali, Hupla, Kimyal, Momuna, Mek and Obukain area) Now a government term but previously name given to GIDI Church district.

YASUMAT A private foundation for the development of isolated peoples. Commenced 15 years ago by Church leaders who had a concern for social, health and educational issues in their isolated area.



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