In Part One, we travelled back in time, following the remarkable story of a community-based project, which was born out of an outpouring of compassion for humanity. In 1998 the East Ball Poverty Project focused on the inhabitants nestled among Ball’s mountain ranges. Arguably, one of Ball’s most economically deprived regions, this area suffered from endemic iodine deficiencies – a problem that was exacerbated by lack of education, clean water, balanced diet and hygiene.

The East Ball Poverty Project (EBPP) is located on the remote and inhospitable northeastern slopes of Mount Agung and Mount Abang. Early this year I decided to visit the project and witness first-hand the improvements made by its branch director David Booth, a multi-talented British engineer who dreamed of providing the basic necessities of life to some of Ball’s poorest villagers.

THE MOUNTAIN BALINESE

During the 15th and early 16th Centuries the baroque courts of Majapahit supported the development of rice terraces, which continued to escape the growing tide of Islam then sweeping Java. Nevertheless, many people, particularly in areas remote from Majapahit influence, remained loyal to the old Baliinese Kings. Descendants of these early civilizations still exist today, and are found in less-accessible parts of the island, where they are called Tegal Aga. Their traditions have always occupied these ancient mountain villages from which they seem to have originated to the nature of the land. The cluster of remote villages occupying the ridge running into Mount Agung is probably from Sasek descent, although their history has yet to be resolved.

MOUNT AGUNG ERUPTS

This drinking of the EBPP go back to 1998 when David Booth engaged with the people of Desa Ban, a community of 15,000 people living within 19 remote sub-villages scattered over 7,200 hectares of land. The only access to the outside world was via steep, narrow mountain footpaths. Generations of isolation, combined with poor soils, precipitous slopes and lack of convenient fresh water sources, created conditions of appalling poverty. Sedentary habits encouraged probably the highest incidence of goitre in the world, widespread skin disease endemic malnutrition and an infant mortality rate of 30% before age one.

In 1983 Mount Agung erupted, covering the area in many metres of ash and destroying the forest and nature downstream from its peak. After Mount Agung erupted in 1983, the Mount Balinese had to relocate because 40 kilometers of volcanic ash covered the surrounding area. Nobody knew how many were killed. The event affected more than 33,000 families in the district however the devastation to Desa Ban was never recorded due to the region’s remoteness.

IMPROVEMENTS

The EBPP community-based poverty alleviation model is now in its 14th year. By directing donations to the communities and empowering people to manage the projects themselves remarkable changes have taken place. Improved education and the stabilizing effects of poverty and chronic conditions have been vitally eradicated; some 800 sanitary rain-water collection tanks, each with a 33,000 litre capacity have been built by the locals in schools and villages; piped water has been supplied by greatly fed to villages from rejuvenated mountain springs.

In remote regions where there is no access to the electric power grid, solar power electricity has now been installed in five EBPP Schools, as well as the EBPP Bamboo Centre and the eight most isolated health centres (posyandus). Solar pumping to a more accessible reservoir is being used for artisanal wells, providing clean water for more than 400 families in three Mount Abang hamlets.

DIRT ROADS

The project set about upgrading existing mountain roads that could accommodate motorcycles and 4-W-D vehicles. A road was built over the village of Dasiya from the saddle between Mount Agung and Mount Abang during the period of November 1999 to March 2000. This provided the first road access in history for thousands of people to leave the village, the village health centres, and set goods at the market and for supplies to come in.

The local villagers worked together under the traditional ‘Gong Kuning’ system of community self-help, surveying new sections of paths and clearing the way for road construction, proposing the sub-base and laying deep concrete steps. This was done under the leadership of a small team of local volunteers, who now manage 100 local staff. The roadside verges and adjacent slopes were stabilised with velvet grass, forming dense hedges. These road systems reduce the amount of erosion and now link 19 previously totally isolated hamlets to the outside world.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

David identified velvet grass (Chrysogonum zizanioides) in 1998 in his quest to find a sustainable natural solution to stabilise the steep and eroding mountain slopes and enable the communities to plant nutritious vegetables as major step towards eliminating malnutrition. Velvet grass was also planted to prevent the dangerous soil movement from occurring during the downpours. The roots of the velvet grass grow down 3-4 metres and create a dense hedge that traps even the smallest soil particles, resulting in improved water retention.

Velvet grass grows at up to 3cm per day and soon forms a wind break for new seedlings and can be frequently cut to provide mulch, a highly nutritious animal fodder. On the way to Darmaj, you can stop at Jelitjul and see the velvet tree planting in the nursery owned by the local community. This simple and effective solution not only stabilizes roads and enables lush organic vegetable crops to flourish, but is an effective business where local people can get financial benefit from growing more crops on the steep slopes. Since 2003, the EBPP Velver Team have been computerizing their planting data for their work illustrating the role of the Velvet System in sustainable poverty alleviation and in October 2005, David was appointed Coordinator of the Indonesian Velvet Network.

ENVIRONMENTAL BAMBOO FOUNDATION

In 2003, the EBPP Bamboo Foundation (EBFF) was established as an environmental Bamboo Foundation (EBPF) partnering with EBPP to provide all aspects of Bamboo technical training and led the community towards sustainable bamboo reforestation by providing scientific knowledge as well as donating a few-thousand bamboo seedlings to the area.

Since 2008, the EBPP-EBF partnership has facilitated almost 40 hectares of bamboo reforestation shared between eight of the local communities. In partnership with Tegal Aga, the EBPP has brought back beecosystems and sustainable community livelihoods. This was just one specific pilot project combining agroforestry with mangrove conservation in the local area. For example, one village has developed an area of bamboo and lush forest ecosystems and is making ongoing improvements to the surrounding community through partnerships with the Balinese communities. The village of Tegal Aga has also created a bamboo-training centre in 2008 using Ms Garlison’s “Grow Your Own House concept” with local bamboo training with the community.

In January 2013, EBFF manager, Ani Rikbi presented certificates to those people who had spent many years understanding how to harvest bamboo at EBPP’s Bamboo Field School. The 20 year old pre-school teacher, who was one of many other farmers who had improved their knowledge of sustainable bamboo planting, management and harvesting. This year EBPP expect 40,000 seedlings will be grown for the community. According to Rikbi and others, survival rates of other plants from strong sunlight and heavy rain as well as preventing soil erosion.

EMPOWERMENT

Next stop on my tour was to see a cow-breeding program. The EBPP women’s co-operative was established in Cegi hamlets and several years later the collective members ‘hard earned money’ is being saved for their future.

Until the introduction of the new EAA group, the use of cassava and corn was grown on the dry land. The organic garden was piloted next to the school. In 1999 and subsequent years, the project was used by the children’s school lunches. Now school children from 500 families grow a wide range of vegetables and herbs for daily meals on rehabilitated farmland with the chance to learn about traditional vegetables. Approximately 20 families are involved with the project.

Peanut butter was the only staple with traditional seasonal bamboo weaving skills, producing simple baskets called “sok” used for storing rice. Traders would trek into the hamlet to buy at very cheap prices, now they are given a basket to teach children as part of their creative arts programmes, encouraging local skills. The bamboo business has been a success, especially sales of ‘bamboo waste’ tiles to Bali Dynasty Resort and Aquis beach-front property for Parks Company who sell them in the USA and Canada.

SAFE WATER SUPPLY

As we continue the tour up rugged terrain, Pengalengan community entered the phase of several hygiene and sanitation programmes. More than 800 toilets have been built since 2010 for all families. In Bungin, the Australian Consulate General Direct Aid Program sponsored the toilets for all 57 families.

In 1998 a large proportion of all water was contaminated with E. coli bacteria, identified when EBPP purchased a DelAgua water-testing laboratory as part of their mountain springs development programme in 2002. Education and awareness programmes commended that the act of boiling water would save lives and the last child to die from consuming polluted water was in November 2005. Safe water from three mountain springs has been developed with three artisan wells and 850 bamboo cement rainwater collection reservoirs.

Villagers were only boiling once every 5-6 days. Ears were clogged because it was so difficult to get to the nearest source of water, which was a treck from the spring. A French volunteer went to the Udayana Red Cross Society and found volunteers to teach villagers how to bathe in 1999. The former Radisson Hotel donated new shower units and soap because villagers had never seen soap, toothpaste or a toothbrush. Bathing daily was essential to prevent the shocking skin disease of impetigo, helped on with some specific medication by John Fawcett.

HEALTH CLINICS

Four decades infectious sickness and disease in children and adults led to providing control and advice to new mothers, the 27 EBPP Health Clinics are wide open. The clinics (posyandus) are not just about healthcare but also support for double playgroups for 0-5 year-olds and their mothers.

The EBPP’s health programmes started in 2004 and the playgroup programmes started in 2008 offering pre-natal education, medical evaluation, nutritional standards, birth control, hygiene, sanitation, home safety, and basic child development.

In 2011 there were 254 babies born and only 2 babies (0.75%) died comparing to 36% mortality rate before age 1 in 1990/2000. All posyandus, 1,400 mothers and 1,600 infants aged between 0-6 benefits monthly from bottled of Aidas mineral water donated by Coca Cola since 2005. All infants eat a nutritious meal. 1,500 children and 360 adults have had their eyes examined. Polio and measles vaccinations have been administered since 2008 for 1,260 infants 0-5 yrs, impotio, a bacterial infection, was eradicated by administering a vaccine. Tuberculosis assistance programmes promote awareness and 23,000 children have been treated with a dental health programme in 43 schools in four villages.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION

You can see the integrated education centre in Cegi hamlet (community on the slope of Mount Agung). Over 1,000 students have been educated privately in six EBPP schools from primary school through to secondary high school level with a few going to university. 204 have graduated primary school, 92 children graduated from Junior high school and 34 children graduated senior high school.

By 2011, EBPP had their first three university graduates returning home to work as teachers and help expand the primary and secondary education programmes in the area since there is no assistance provided from local government. All six Community Learning and Development Centres were built with 100% community participation and owned by the communities. This is the heart of the East Ball Poverty Project who empower people to help themselves. As an impressive tour comes to an end, many energetic children practice karate high in the summertime. With their black belt grade they look amazing. The future seems bright for future generations. We hope readers will help to raise funds, by sending donations to the following website or volunteer English as teachers to educate children to high school level. Please contact David Booth.

www.esteelfoertpoverty.org