INTERVIEW

The lack of tourism-based revenue, its remote nature and the generally harsh environment for farming have made East Bali one of the poorer areas on the island. The East Bali Poverty Project (EBPP), a non-profit organization established in 1998 by a British resident of Bali, drew attention to the plight of the local villagers in this area and that, together with recent tourist development, has gone a long way to improving general standards of living, health and education.

NOW! Bali caught up with David Booth, the great man behind this project.

How was the organization started?
After choosing Indonesia as my permanent home in 1989, I travelled extensively before settling in Bali in late 1993. Poverty was almost everywhere, especially in the east and north of Bali. I then decided to put my civil engineering and marketing background to good use to give back to my adopted country and dedicate myself to alleviating poverty in the poorest Indonesian villages by prioritising the health, nutrition and education of children and establish models of sustainable social and economic development. My four year search led me to an isolated 7,200Ha mountain village, forgotten by time and progress high up Mounts Agung and Abang in East Bali who appealed for help. They soon agreed to my principles of no hand-outs; mutual trust was established and I sought government permission to establish our Yayasan.

Participatory community surveys in 1998 with 1,056 of the 3,000 families in the 19 sub-villages revealed thousands of people living in abject poverty without water, sanitation, roads, schools, health facilities and electricity. Illiteracy was up to 100%. Malnutrition and iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) were endemic. Iodine being the essential nutrient for healthy child births, brain and body development.

What are the principal purposes behind the organization and what does it do?
In 1998, most of the 19 communities were isolated from the outside world and with our mission to help impoverished communities to help themselves, prioritising the health, nutrition and education of children, in November 1998, over 1,000 families requested children’s education as a foundation for a better future. An inspiring and productive collaboration then began with the most disadvantaged communities. We designed curriculums to address all key problems, trained local people how to teach and initiated partnerships with the respective hamlets with three promises from EBPP and three from the community forming the basis for total trust. These principles have applied for all of the programmes that followed in organic farming, community health, safe water resources, infrastructure, toilets for seven communities so far, etc. This was the start of 100% community empowerment and ownership and the principles of “for the people and by the people”. All programmes are designed as models that can be replicated, and executed by local people who directly transfer knowledge and appropriate technology within their communities.
What is the biggest obstacle to doing so?

Our biggest obstacles are twofold: donor funding and sourcing suitably experienced Indonesian staff and/or volunteers who are prepared to work in remote areas without access to entertainment and other amenities. We have our core donor base funding the basic programmes of children’s education and comprehensive community outreach health programmes but essentials such as safe water resources, toilets, road infrastructure, environmental rehabilitation, etc. are the biggest challenges for funding due to their high costs, as each project must include all families in a particular hamlet. Fortunately, most of our 100+ staff are local but most expert volunteers who can transfer knowledge and technology are reluctant to be posted in remote villages for more than a few weeks - if at all.

Do you have any strategy to overcome it?

To reach more donors, we registered our charity in UK where UK taxpayers can get tax relief, and are in the process of establishing similar facilities in USA and Australia. Social media is an important tool for reaching wider audiences and we have new volunteers overseas who will be assisting/advising on improved PR and marketing strategies as well as revamping our website, which we hope to have on line in early 2014. For volunteers, we now have a furnished house, near the ocean and more access to other amenities. We recently registered with a major Australian volunteer recruitment agency that is seeking experienced candidates to fill posts for one year periods with key roles of assisting fundraising, image building and others such as English teaching and technical assistance in environmental rehabilitation with key focus on sustainable bamboo development for community economic development.

If you would like to make a donation or help in any way, you can contact EBPP at:
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