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## HEALING WOUNDS THROUGH AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH **'Smart Aid' helping developing countries recover faster from natural disasters and conflicts**

As important as emergency efforts are in effecting recovery in developing countries after natural disasters and social conflicts, restoring agriculture is a critical short-, medium- and long-term strategy in helping them recover faster.

*Healing Wounds: An Australian Perspective*, produced by the Crawford Fund and based on a book covering efforts in 47 countries, highlights examples of 'smart aid', where improvements to agriculture makes overall recovery efforts more efficient, effective and targeted.

The booklet will be launched tomorrow (28 July) for the Crawford Fund by Dr Meryl Williams, chair of the board of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and executive officer of the Future Harvest Alliance Office of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

"The effectiveness of 'smart aid', backed with science and experience to help rebuild agriculture and restore food production, has proved vital to recovery efforts in many countries including Cambodia, Rwanda, Solomon Islands, Iraq, Afghanistan and Timor Leste," said The Hon Neil Andrew, chairman of the Crawford Fund (and former Speaker of the House of Representatives).

"Australia's reputation in agricultural research is world-class. We have been an active but often silent partner in some of the world's major agricultural restoration initiatives, which are critical to long term effectiveness of emergency responses to disasters and conflicts," said Mr Andrew.

"Ongoing partnerships between research and emergency aid can significantly improve the ability of the international community to prepare for and respond to crises," he said.

"This has been proved recently with efforts to rebuild after the Boxing Day Tsunami."

"When conflicts and natural disasters arise, they not only take a heavy toll on human life but also cause serious damage to agriculture and the natural resources which lie at the heart of life, livelihoods and whole economies in poor countries," he explained.

"Applying lessons from agricultural research and science is truly 'smart' aid."

"In fact, there are many examples in this booklet where we have not only helped nations rebuild to the point they were at before the traumatic event, but put them well ahead of that point – as in Cambodia and East Timor."

The launch will be held before the departure of ACIAR's board of management to visit Timor Leste to see first hand the range of Australian funded agricultural projects there.

Dr Williams explained just a few of the examples highlighted in the booklet.

"In 2000, ACIAR called on the resources of five renowned centres of the CGIAR and other Australian organisations to help undertake the *Seeds of Life* project to boost the productivity of agriculture in Timor Leste, then a devastated country, where more than 90% of the people are involved in farming."

"When in Timor Leste, we will see first-hand the success of *Seeds of Life*, as farmers now produce significantly higher yields of cassava (yielding nearly twice as much), maize (outpacing local types by 50%), sweet potato (six times more), beans, peanuts, and rice."

"We will also see the success of ACIAR efforts under John Jane and others in the rehabilitation of the Agriculture Faculty of the National University of East Timor which had to be quite literally built from the ground up."

“Under the Pol Pot regime, Cambodia changed from being one of Asia’s leading rice exporters to a point where its people were starving. The Cambodia-IRRI-Australia Project, headed by Australian scientist Harry Nesbitt, helped transform that country to a point where it now exports rice but also has a more diversified agriculture to feed its people and the nation’s economy.”

“I am pleased to say that we will be meeting Harry Nesbitt in Timor Leste this coming week.”

“Australia continues to assist Cambodia and Timor Leste in efforts to boost critical agricultural production and agricultural education.”

Having lived in the Philippines and Malaysia and traveling extensively in the region, Dr Williams explained the first hand experience she has of the role Australian and international agricultural scientists are playing in the massive reconstruction program after last year’s devastating tsunami.

“Through AusAID, ACIAR and the CGIAR, Australia is making contributions to restore agriculture and promote food security embracing the entire landscape – from sea to upland forests. We are looking at the bigger picture by focussing on sustainable livelihoods for the future. Work is underway in soil rehabilitation, improved crop stocks, forestry, early-warning systems, water management and coastal fisheries.”

“And the Crawford Fund is providing strategic training programs in a range of these countries.”

The booklet’s examples highlighting the efforts supported by Australia include:

- **Afghanistan:** Through AusAID and ACIAR, Australia has been helping the *Seeds of Strength* project to deliver locally adapted wheat and maize seed from the international wheat research centre, CIMMYT. Another CGIAR centre that Australia supports, ICARDA, is coordinating the Future Harvest Consortium to Rebuild Agriculture in Afghanistan, working with a range of CGIAR centres and the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock to rebuild, diversify and expand Afghan agriculture.
- **Iraq:** AusAID is funding an ACIAR managed project with ICARDA and the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture to introduce and promote improved varieties of wheat, barley, and pulse and forage legumes in northern Iraq and provide critical training of farmers and scientists. There is a particular focus on saving crop diversity in this area that is the origin of some of humanity’s most important food crops. Efforts have restored hundreds of varieties lost to looting.
- **Timor Leste:** In the world’s newest country, more than 90% of the population is involved in farming. In 2000, Australia called upon five CGIAR Centers to help it carry out the *Seeds of Life* project. New varieties are producing much higher yields of cassava, maize, sweet potato, beans, peanuts and rice. Many experts have been trained, providing more secure food supplies for this fledgling democracy.
- **Solomon Islands:** The WorldFish Center, with support from Australia and others, stepped in after ethnic conflict erupted in 1998 to help poor people create livelihoods to reduce the poverty that was fuelling frustration and anger. Environmentally friendly ways of cultivating high-quality black pearls, giant clams, ornamental crustaceans, coral, sea cucumbers and fish are being developed.
- **Rwanda:** AusAID was a significant contributor to the CGIAR’s *Seeds of Hope* project, which began after Rwanda’s genocide and civil war (1994-96) and restored seed supplies in ways that were carefully targeted to differing needs across this small but diverse country. The project engaged neighbouring countries to play a major role in restoring seeds and expertise to Rwanda.
- **Cambodia:** From 1988-95, the International Rice Research Center, based in The Philippines, worked closely with Australia to help Cambodia rehabilitate its agriculture. Lost rice varieties were restored, irrigation systems were rehabilitated, Cambodian experts were trained, and a new national agricultural research institute was established. Benefits were estimated at US\$1.3 billion.

### People to Interview

- Dr Meryl Williams, chair of the board of ACIAR and executive officer of the Future Harvest Alliance Office of the CGIAR with extensive experience in international agricultural research
- The Hon Neil Andrew, chair of the Crawford Fund
- Dr Harry Nesbitt, the quiet Australian agricultural scientist who resurrected Cambodia’s killing fields
- Dr John Janes, who is working on efforts in East Timor to redevelop the agriculture faculty of the university

**To organize interview/s,** contact: Cathy Reade, Crawford Fund, 0413 575 934

Copies of the Booklet at <http://www.crawfordfund.org/awareness/interest.htm#publications>  
Copies of the Book at <http://www.cgiar.org/publications/index.html>