

THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER



OF THE MiVAC TRUST

www.mivactrust.org

PATRON: Sandy MacGregor MC, RFD, Colonel (rtd)

FEBRUARY 2011

The MiVAC TRUST is the initiative of Australian Vietnam Veterans who cleared landmines during the Vietnam War and witnessed the devastation caused by these indiscriminate weapons. MiVAC is primarily a fundraising body, a voluntary organization allocating much needed funds to projects identified to the MiVAC Trustees by Australian deminers, or others who are, or have been, involved with de-mining, health or education projects overseas. Membership of the Trust includes veterans from other conflicts, humanitarian aid workers, members of the peace-keeping forces and other service personnel, and of course the many civilians who have been touched by the plight of those living in war torn countries.

LAOS

THERE IS A PICTURE BELOW OF A LADY WHO IS FAMOUS – OR DESERVES TO BE!



From the Rice Field to the Minefield

In news arriving today (27 Feb 2011) Ms Bouson (35yr old mother of 5) is the first deminer in Laos to intentionally find and uncover an M14 Anti-personnel Blast mine. Ms Bouson found the mine in the Khangpunhor 2 minefield.

She is one of 11 deminers on this task all being recruited from the local community and intensively trained by PCL staff to perform the demining task. She says *“Three months ago we were working in the rice field now I am very proud to be working saving the lives of my children”*. It is to be noted that these particular mines are made of plastic and contain minimum metal, making them very difficult to find without devastating results. The deminers are using the new F3 mine detectors bought by MiVAC from Minelab with funds raised by friends of MiVAC. Evidence of the existence of these mines in the minefield has been found, however the photo above shows the first M14 mine found in a minefield laid all those years ago. More often

than not these mines are located only when they are detonated by people or animals, occasioning of course, loss of life.

There are 5 minefields around the village of Ban Xai in the Province of Xieng Kuang, all remnants of the "Secret War in Laos" which is part of what we know as the Vietnam War. These minefields have devastated the local people, their crops and their livestock. Last year Phoenix Clearance Ltd (PCL) cleared, with MiVAC funding, the first minefield in this village and once this second one (known as Khangpunghor 2) is completed the village will be two steps closer to a landmine free existence

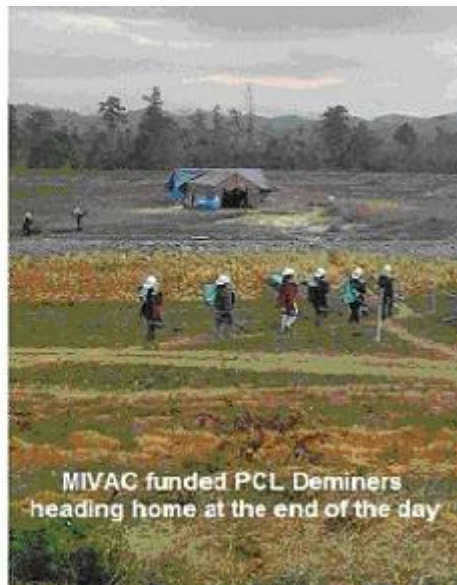
Current Situation with Khangpunghor 2

This minefield is partially cleared, after a variety of mines have been found, and at present plans exist to fence off the remaining area until MiVAC has raised further funds to complete the clearance. MiVAC needs another \$25,000 to complete the minefield clearance. MiVAC's intention in 2011 is to commence a program of sustainable humanitarian assistance for the people of Ban Xai and another nearby village of Hinmo Pueng. ***However we need the minefield cleared first.***

These people are destitute. To give an idea, the average earnings are the equivalent of US\$30 per annum, which is well below the poverty level. There is no electricity connected. There is very little fencing. Sanitation is not understood. Water is neither clean nor plentiful.



Deminers walking the safe lane into the Minefield



MiVAC funded PCL Deminers heading home at the end of the day

DONATIONS: To donate to any of our projects please make cheques payable to THE MiVAC TRUST and post to National Office, Box 967, SANDY BAY, Tas. 7006 or Via Direct Deposit BSB 037-015 A/c No 155418 Acc. Name MiVAC TRUST No.2 StatementText/Reference YOUR NAME ** Please forward details via post for receipt.

So MiVAC needs assistance please and any contribution you are able to give will all be gratefully received and put towards this project. Every little bit will help. We know that you have been called upon with helping all the disasters in Australia and now New Zealand however these people are really absolutely destitute without any world-wide attention having been drawn to their plight. They don't have anything to lose - except their life!

NATIONAL PATRON – SANDY MACGREGOR MC, RFD Colonel (rtd)
NATIONAL OFFICE – P.O. BOX 967
SANDY BAY, TASMANIA 7006

SECRETARY – GILL PAXTON secretary@mivactrust.org
PROJECT OFFICER – ROB WOOLLEY Ph. 03 62641485

LAOS

KO HAI SCHOOL

Khamkeurt District Borikhamxai Province Lao PDR.

MiVAC became associated with Ko Hai School when members of Phoenix Clearance Ltd subcontracted to clear cluster munitions from the school playground in 2009. After clearing 87 munitions from the school playground the role expanded into clearing UXOs from the communal rice paddy adjoining the school. Following completion of the clearance Sandy MacGregor and Luc Verbeeck accompanied Mick Hayes to Ko Hai to review the completion of the clearance programme. During that assessment it became apparent that UXO clearance introduced some new but positive consequences. Word passed around that the school and its playground was now safe and that led to an influx of students from farther afield.

A growing school population led to the need for new toilets, a clean water supply and permanent accommodation to replace the ramshackle “cubby houses” that students who lived far from the school constructed for their overnight stays. One area in which the students were active was in planting cornfields and fruit trees to boost their food sources.

In May 2010, Steve Carroll and his wife Dorene, travelled to Ko Hai to clarify what was needed. As a result of this visit plans were drawn up for new accommodation to house eighty students.

Steve, together with his daughter, Natalie returned to Lao PDR in November to implement the project. Accompanied by an interpreter, On Keo, Steve and Natalie journeyed to Lak Sao, the nearest accommodation to Ko Hai, on 20th November.

Initial setbacks included no site preparation or materials acquisition by the school staff. These hurdles were soon overcome when Steve’s presence reassured locals of the sincerity of MiVAC’s intentions and of Steve’s resolve for the project to be completed within three weeks.

Some building materials were procured at Lak Sao but timbers were milled as required at Ko Hai to channel as much of the building cost into the local community. Once the school staff accepted that the project was to go ahead they all joined in with local builders to turn the plans into reality.

The project was completed by 9th December with a four-metre water tower replacing the planned well. The tower gave pressure for the water to flow to two new toilets and two dormitories built to accommodate eighty students.

Following an initial survey by Steve and Dorene Carroll after clearance of UXO’s from Ko Hai school’s playground, it was decided to return to the school to construct additional facilities to cope with the increased school population that resulted when parents felt safe to send their children back to the school after it was declared clear of UXOs..

Construction planned was for:

- * Permanent 'local-style' accommodation for eighty students,
- * Kitchens for the accommodated students,
- * Two toilets to prevent students relieving themselves indiscriminately, and
- * A well to provide water for the new accommodation and for toilets

On site it was decided not to proceed with the construction of the kitchen and that the well would be replaced with a four-metre water tower.

Before the project was commenced several steps were coordinated with the school principal and staff. These included design of the accommodation buildings and the toilets.

During this phase, school staff requested the planned well be changed to a water tower to enable water to flow to the toilets with sufficient pressure to refill the water reservoirs..

Despite previous arrangements to have materials on site and foundations prepared by the time Steve arrived, none of this preparatory work had been undertaken before his arrival.

It was proposed that all materials be purchased as close to the school as possible to ensure that inflow of funds to the local economy was maximised. Moreover much of the work was to be undertaken by school staff with the aid of local villagers to ensure ownership of the improvements vested with locals.

All structural goals were achieved within budget and on schedule.

Completion of the project coincided with a nine-year festival so the hand over on completion attracted attention from villagers of many nearby villages who had journeyed to Ko Hai for the festival.

Social goals of passing responsibility for construction to local villagers were exceeded by the response from school staff, students and district / provincial officials.

The rapport established with the school through demining has deepened with the completion of this current project.

We have learned that clearing areas of mines can uncover other development needs that are emerge once mines and UXOs are cleared. UXO clearance helps villagers feel safe and secure in their local environment and acts as a catalyst for social and economic development.

The continued contact with the school through both UXO clearance from the school playground and communal rice paddies and this follow up project has resulted in an English teacher being appointed at the school so the children can learn to communicate with “their Australian friends”.

As projects progress new needs are often uncovered. In some instances such needs can be structural but in other cases they are requests for the provision of resources beyond what the locals can afford.

For example, during construction Steve was appalled by the state of some existing classrooms which have only half-walls leaving students exposed to wind and rain. The cost of completing these walls is approximately \$250.00.

In addition to this structural need, the school has also requested the provision of library resources and the donation of a keyboard. Provision of both of these resources is currently being pursued.



Accommodation Block under construction and Water Tower

This project was funded and carried out by MiVAC members Steven and Dorene Carroll and daughter Natalie. Their commitment to this project has given this small community and especially the young students attending the school a chance to gain an education and have a healthy and rewarding life. Great work

VIETNAM **MISSION ACCOMPLISHED**

The orphans at Vinh Son 1 orphanage in Kon Tum, Vietnam, sing a song called “The Climb”. Parts of the words are as follows;

*There's always gonna be another mountain
I'm always gonna wanna make it move
Always gonna be an uphill battle
Sometimes I'm gonna have to lose
Ain't about how fast I get there
Ain't about what's on the other side
It's the climb.*

This song epitomizes the journey to reach the opening of the new crossing named Kon Klor Two Crossing, Kon Tum, Central Highlands, Vietnam. The journey began in 2007 when my wife and I were shown another crossing on the Dak Bla River just beyond the village of Kon Katu. With us were Mr. Kheo, Village Chief, Mr. Hau and Mr. Ho, all of whom are now good friends.

Rob Woolley of MiVAC, had asked me to keep an eye out for possible projects in Vietnam. This looked like a good one to undertake. And so the process began with an initial plan developed by my good friend Elvin Smith. Then Walter Kopek and two civil engineers from Thailand visited the site and further developed the plan.

Back home I put out the call for an off- sider and was joined by Dave Penson CSM and retired Warrant Officer One, Royal Australian Engineers. Dave has been with me on the journey ever since.

On advice from our Consulate in Vietnam, we linked with the NGO, East Meets West Foundation, an organization founded by Ms. Le Ly Hayslip, author of the book, ‘Heaven and Earth’ which is an inspirational read. The project could not have been accomplished without this relationship. And so the plan really began to take shape.

Typhoon Ketsana struck Kon Tum in September 2009 and caused widespread destruction. Dave and I arrived in Kon Tum in November. We visited the site and it was clear that, with the damage caused by flooding, the project was well beyond our scope. We identified a new site near Vinh Son 5 orphanage and as it turned out, the President of the Province asked us if we could construct a crossing at this new site. We had the Peoples Committee on side and East Meets West was happy to proceed. Work finally commenced and the job was completed in April of this year.

On 14th October 2010 I was finally able to set the plaque for the crossing, in stone as it were. This climb was over. I was honoured and humbled to have good friends present for this milestone, but more significantly, to have children from Vinh Son 1 and Vinh Son 5 orphanages there. The crowning moment was when, after having spoken about the song, the kids from Vinh Son 1 sang it for all present.

This project would not have been possible without the generous donations and in kind support from the Australian Government, our National RSL, Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation, BBBH (Bilfinger, Berger, Baulderstone, Hornibrook), GHD (Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey), and many other generous organizations and individuals from across Australia.

The MiVAC project in Vietnam is now finished but Dave Penson and I will continue our roles in helping the six (6) Ethnic Minority orphanages (about 650 children) in Kon Tum. We need as much financial support as possible to enable us to do this work so if folks can help, every dollar is put to 100% use across the orphanages, to help the kids.



The Crossing in November 2009



The Crossing in April 2010



The Plaque at Kon Klor Crossing, Kon Tum, Vietnam 2010 Some of the folks from the orphanages at the plaque

***AIN'T ABOUT HOW FAST I GET THERE
AIN'T ABOUT WHATS WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE
IT'S THE CLIMB***

**My sincere thanks
Derek Smith
MiVAC Vietnam Project Coordinator**

**VIETNAM
STUDY AND INSPECTION TOUR**

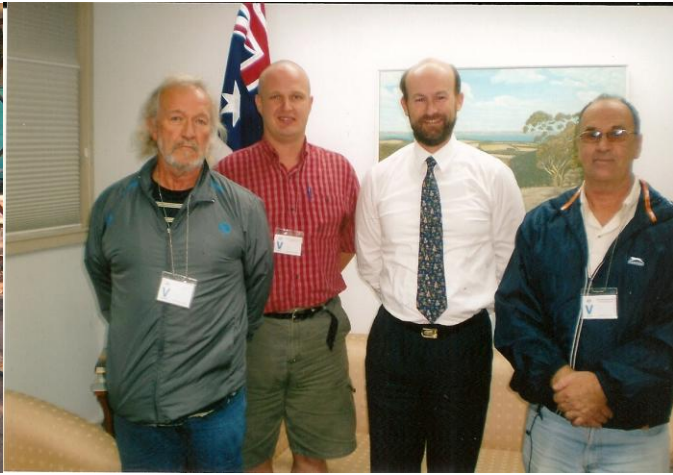
In January 2011, four MiVAC members –Alex Thomson, John Bygrave, Peter Campbell and Rob Woolley travelled to Vietnam as part of a tour to assist MiVAC in planning future projects and to visit the Kon Klor Crossing in Kon Tum (see above article by Derek Smith).

The group began their visit in Hanoi where they met with members of PROJECT RENEW. An American organisation, established in 2001 as a joint effort between the U.S. Department of Foreign Affairs and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) with the goal of *restoring the environment and neutralising the effects of war*.

Many thanks to the students of the MET School, Sydney for their generous donation to MiVAC after Dave Sturmer, a member from NSW spoke there recently. Their donation helped to establish the female mine clearing team in Ban Xai.

Chuck Searcy, the in-country representative and his staff invited our members to visit their Hanoi office for a briefing about their work and also to arrange a visit to the Quang Tri Province where they are mainly working. Quang Tri Province was one of the most heavily bombed and shelled areas in Vietnam during the war and has many thousands of UXOs, still active, from both Australian and United States forces. The MiVAC members were most impressed by the work RENEW is doing in Vietnam, especially the bomb clearance work, victims assistance programs including Mushrooms with a Mission, a project intended to help UXO affected families overcome the circumstances of their injuries and disabilities, which are usually compounded by severe poverty. Families are given a guarantee from Project RENEW and the Humpty Dumpty Institute (HDI) that all mushrooms grown by these families will be purchased at a set market price.

Before leaving Hanoi the MiVAC members also had a very productive meeting with Mr Allaster Cox, the Australian Ambassador to Vietnam. Ambassador Cox was very supportive of MiVAC and was briefed about the tour's aims, MiVAC's intentions and future funding.



John Bygrave, Mr Ho, Mr John, Peter Campbell with orphans from Vinh Son 6

John Bygrave, Alex Thomson, Ambassador Cox, Rob Woolley

After visiting Quang Tri, the group moved to Kon Tum via a flight from Da Nang to Pleiku. As well as visiting the Kon Klor Crossing site they met with Mr John and Mr Ho, representatives from Vinh Son Orphanages 1 – 6. A donation from MiVAC consisting of toothbrushes and toothpaste, towels and biros was given for each of the orphanages as well as 20 plastic chairs needed for Vinh Son 1 orphans to use as dining chairs. It was a pleasure to meet with the Nuns and teachers who provide support, care and education for the orphans. Their hospitality and friendliness was much appreciated. We are also indebted to Derek Smith who provided us with introductions and information, as well as suggestions for accomodation and eating places in Kon Tum. It made our trip to this region a lot easier. We stayed at the “Family Hotel” in Kon Tum and really enjoyed the family atmosphere.



Vinh Son 6 Orphanage

MiVAC members with Chuck Searcy from RENEW

LAOS

WOMEN'S TEAM GAIN EMPLOYMENT

Some time ago MiVAC sponsored the training by Phoenix Clearance Ltd (PCL) of a women's UXO demining team in Southern Laos. One of the reasons was so that the women, 18 to 25 years old, had little to do in their villages and when they get a job in the clearing UXO area they will be able to bring money into their family household.

I am very happy to report that these girls were employed by PCL for their SARCO job. Ord River Resources and China Nonferrous Metal Industry's Foreign Engineering and Construction (NFC) agreed to commence a Scoping Study, to be carried out by NFC, for the development of an alumina industry in southern Laos – this joint venture is called SARCO.

I visited the area and learned about the fighting in the area. Actually I saw a considerable amount of evidence of the fighting which included weapon pits, bomb craters, parts of mortar bombs, grenades and the like. [Here's a short video](#). On touring the area I observed the UXO clearing teams working and finding UXO's which were still live.

There are always watchful critics of resource recovery in developing country So congratulations to SARCO and particularly Ord River Resources for taking care of their workers by clearing the areas before they send in their Lao workers! Keep up the 0 zero UXO accident record.

Sandy MacGregor
Patron
MiVAC Trust

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MiVAC's AGM was held on the 27th November 2010 in the Function Room of the Southern Lights Hotel at Kingston. Robert Rands chaired the meeting and the Annual Report as well as Reports from Office Bearers were tabled and accepted. Office Bearers for 2011 were elected as follows:

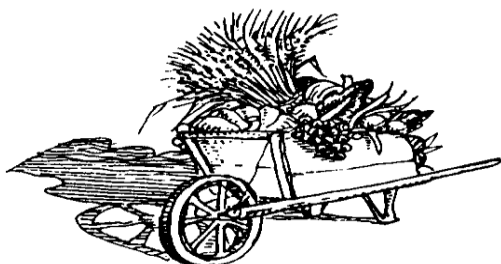
Secretary – Gill Paxton

Treasurer - Robert Kitchell

Project Officer – Rob Woolley

Don Camm has been appointed as Auditor

A vote of thanks was given to two retiring Trustees – Robert Rands and Eva Ruzicka for their invaluable contribution as Trustees over a period of several years. This was carried unanimously.



Bio-Distributors

Thanks to Bio-Distributors
**Bio-Dynamic & Organic Wholesalers of
Tasmania for their support of our
Newsletter**

www.biodistributors.com.au

LAOS BAN XAI

In November 2010, Ben Boyle, a Tasmanian ex Army Infantry Officer who served in Timor several years ago travelled to Laos to visit the area of Ban Xai to initiate the training of a locally based, mine field clearing team. Ben, who was accompanied by Paul Miles, a former soldier who served with the RAE, stayed several weeks with villagers in this area.

An excerpt from one of Ben's letters will give you an insight of how he was received at the village:



Figure 1 Ben Boyle with Mr Ming

Since Ben's visit the women and men who were trained as minefield clearers have been working with PCL in a MiVAC funded clearance project in Ban Xai. In the last few years, this minefield has taken the life of a child and other children have been killed and maimed by cluster munitions in the area. Livestock have also been killed in these minefields. We hope that involvement by MiVAC, the expertise of PCL staff and donations from you will enable villagers in this area to be safe while going about their daily tasks.

"Here is a quick update of our recent activities. We have had a successful week. I bought \$100 worth of stationery for the school in the Hmong village of Hinmu Pueng and delivered it to them during the week. They were extremely grateful and appreciative. It was very well received with the teacher wearing his best suit for the presentation and he gave a written speech he had prepared. I also handed out mandarins and bananas for the kids at the school - a healthier option than lollies I thought. Some photos attached. We also shared a lunch with them in their home. Again on leaving their home we were humbled as they gave us a gift of sugar cane sticks and yams...they have little themselves to give but are more than happy to do so...our western society can learn a lot from this act...I did accept the gift and thanked them for their kindness, however outlined that next time I will not accept any more of their gifts. The preparation for the minefield clearance project has gone well. The training for the minefield project commences tomorrow...11 out of the 12 are women. The lecture room is the town hall and is very well appointed...the village is very excited. The training of 2 designated medics will also take place this week as well

TASMANIA

A Fundraising Dinner was held at Parliament House in Hobart on the 13th October 2010, in support of the Women's Demining Team in Laos. The Hon. Lara Giddings, a long time member and supporter of MiVAC hosted the dinner, which was attended by over 60 guests. During the evening Guest Speakers, Sister Patricia Pak Poy and Alex Thomson gave presentations of their experiences with land mine affected countries.

Sister Pak Poy, Hon. President of the Australian Network to Ban Landmine and Cluster Munitions (ANBLC) spoke of her involvement with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Ottawa Treaty and her early contacts with landmine survivors.

Alex Thompson, a war veteran who had served in Afghanistan and Iraq, told of his experience with landmines during the time he was in charge of over 1,000 deminers in Afghanistan. A very sobering part of the evening

for guests was when Alex read from his personal diaries that he had kept while deployed overseas. It gave us all a different perspective of those involved with landmines, IEDs, booby traps and bombs, as professional soldiers.

Our M.C. for the evening, Chris Neilson, also introduced the MiVAC documentary recently filmed in Laos by Luc Verbeek and Sandy MacGregor.

As a result of the evening almost \$9,000 was raised, directly and indirectly, for MiVAC. We are grateful to The Hon. Lara Giddings, Senator Christine Milne and all who attended and participated in the evening. Thanks also to The Hon. Kerry Finch, who unable to attend on the night, had a “quick whip round” (that great Australian tradition!) of several Upper House Members and presented us with a further \$250 for MiVAC.

Margaret Bester, a teacher at Calvin Christian School at Kingston, sent a copy of the school’s Newsletter to us giving details of fundraising carried out by students at the school. A Cheque for \$1,000 was presented to Alex Thompson and since then we have received a further donation from the school of \$1,337.75.

From Calvin Christian School Newsletter

“A mission donation of \$1000 to MiVAC (Mines Victims and Clearance Trust) was made by M1 and M10 Home Rooms to aid the campaign to de-landmine parts of Laos. The cheque was presented to Mr Alex Thomson, a MiVAC representative, who spoke at a recent Calvin full school assembly about landmines and their impact on civilian populations. He noted that MiVAC, a Tasmanian based charitable organisation, supports the training of local people in the skills needed to clear farms and village areas from these remnants of war to enable families to live in safety and prosperity. MiVAC recently provided training for a group of Hmong women in these skills and will visit orphanages and other sustainability projects in January 2011. MI Home Room conducted a picnic hamper fundraiser to raise some of the funds for this donation in the recognition that we are free to move anywhere in our local area without the fear of landmines or other remnants of wars that could harm or kill.”

Our thanks go to the students of M1 and M10 Home Rooms at the school – what a fantastic effort!! You really have helped to make a difference to many lives.

Rob and Merle Woolley have also visited Immaculate Heart School at Lenah Valley and U3A participants at Geeveston resulting in several new members and donations.

Tas State Meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of every month – 7pm at the Adult Ed Centre, Kingston

NSW

Sandy MacGregor, Steve Carroll and Paul Jeffress are continuing their awareness programme with service clubs in both Sydney and Newcastle. With the recent completion of the MiVAC documentary filmed by Luc Verbeek we are have a resource that will extend our ability to reach service clubs all over NSW.

After one recent presentation, Paul held up his hand to say ‘Goodnight’ and all members of the club began clapping and some even stood as they clapped. He was humbled by such regard but he was very much aware that the club was acknowledging what MiVAC was achieving and that applause was a tribute to each member of MiVAC.

Steve has travelled to Ko Hai village and finished some work at the school there including restoring wells, installing new toilets and constructing dormitory accommodation for up to 140 children.

Meanwhile, we are looking forward to John Pritchard being free again to lend a hand in the NSW branch. For information about venue and time for NSW meetings – contact Paul Jeffress 47352968

QUEENSLAND

Bob Musgrove has been speaking at several engagements in Queensland and his efforts have enabled the purchase of Mine Detectors that were issued to our Women's Demining Team in Laos.

He can feel proud of the knowledge that it was one of these detectors, which was used by Ms Bouson recently to uncover the M14 Anti-personnel Blast mine in the Khangpunghor 2 minefield.

FUNDRAISING

Below are listed the projects scheduled for 2010/11. The total cost of each project is shown by the green line and the donations so far collected for each project is shown in red. The Ko Hai village project has been funded and undertaken by Steve Carroll.

You will note though most projects are still underfunded. Only with the combined fundraising efforts of all members will these projects be completed. Details of each project are outlined elsewhere in this and other newsletters. So please put the hard word on everyone you know because with your input we can accomplish these projects. Remember MiVAC gets more of its donor dollar to projects and then gets more bang for the buck by working efficiently and productively. Additionally donors can specify which project their donation goes to. If you want to know more or to offer your help, please email the Secretary.

