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ACR Staff Making A Difference:
On Poo and Loo in Remote Rambutso

Last year, as many of us spent the summer (or winter, for the southern hemisphere) break on a lovely, perhaps even exotic, vacation, Rudd Dautzenberg from IT was in Rambutso, Papua New Guinea.

He was granted two weeks of ACR’s Volunteer Leave*, which he utilised to visit the small town from 16-23 August, in his capacity as co-founder of Friends of Rambutso (“FOR”), an Australian not-for-profit organisation that operates at a grassroots level to help the people of Rambutso achieve self-sufficiency and a sustainable future. And help was something the locals in the town, mostly subsistence fishermen, needed badly. By virtue of its location, Rambutso is remote and cut-off from most parts of the world, and there is no electricity grid, running water, shops, aircon, roads, TV, Wi-Fi. Access to mobile reception is also highly limited.

In terms of toilet practices, the villages in town have a few shared toilets (ones that are either on land (pit toilets or among the bushes)) or simply over the sea. Without proper toilets designed to adequately contain or treat the waste, the people of Rambutso are at risk of a host of health issues due to contamination of water, soil and food.

“The flies frequenting the bush can easily end up on the villagers’ dinner plates,” Rudd explained, highlighting the adverse conditions and risk of diseases that the people of Rambutso face.

FOR was founded after Rudd’s first trip to Rambutso in 2006, through which he hopes to help the people of Rambutso. On what keeps him involved in his work and cause at FOR, he mused, “One aspect of the local culture I always admire when I visit Rambutso is the positive outlook on life. Compared with those who are not happy with what they do not have, the locals are happy with what they have and are keen to learn about new things.”

As part of FOR’s Sanitation Programme, Rudd’s focus on this trip was to conduct a number of awareness sessions with the local communities to highlight the importance of enhancing sanitation practices and raise public health levels in Rambutso. He shared details of his trip:

“During the awareness sessions in August, my partner and I discussed the topic of sanitation in general as well as the importance of toilets and basic hygiene practices to health. We also conducted a survey on current sanitation habits of the people in town and showed them a video of a community in a similar situation who have taken actions.

The workshops were well attended and the local people had lots of ideas and suggestions, such as protecting existing water sources, moving pig cages out of the villages, disposing of rubbish properly and keeping the villages clean. Some of these ideas and suggestions are actually already implemented by the locals.

The output of the sessions is currently being used to prepare for the next phase of the project, i.e. installation of compost toilets, which will take place in January 2017.”

*To find out your eligibility for the ACR Volunteer Leave, refer to the Employee Handbook, approach Human Resources or contact CSR Committee Chair Melanie Ryaar.

For more information on FOR or to find out how you can help support the people of Rambutso, visit http://www.friendsoframbutso.org, follow the updates on https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfRambutso, or look out for a cup of coffee – it’s promised tocoloud.