

Project to redevelop the school building in Lese Oalai village in the Gulf province of PNG

In the swampy lands of the Gulf Province of PNG, education is a major problem, with only 4.4% of the population (160,000) being literate. The school at Lese Oalai, (200km from Port Moresby), which currently houses 560 students, and was built in the middle of the last century is not only inadequate, but also unsafe as well.

Preps to Grade 3 are in classes of 70, teachers are poorly paid and the hope of providing each child with a proper education is poor.

There is no electricity, no reticulated water, and the only toilet is an open pit. The slab floor has been ravaged by floods and is broken and unsafe. Supports for the rooves are deteriorating, so classes are mostly held outside under a tree.

The school numbers are growing larger because the peripheral schools have even less support, are closing, and students are travelling large distances to get to Lese Oalai.

The school community has tried to get government assistance, but after many years of trying, this has not come. They are prepared to provide the labour (and are prepared to do the maintenance), but don't have the capital to purchase the building materials. The current aim is to rebuild four classrooms to house the Preps to grade 3.

Our aim would be to provide the funding and some support, although in current Pandemic conditions, this will be hands-off. The Governor of the Gulf Province is very enthusiastic to help, but does not have the funds, though he will use his office to attract other support. The Rotary Club of Boroko is enthusiastic to help, and will provide building supervision etc. Global Grants won't support the building of a new school, only the renovation. The current building is unsalvageable - from the foundations up. So, this will be a problem for providing support.

We have established a crowd funding facility with RAWCS (project 41-2021-22) and will soon have completed a formal business case to present to other governments, to Rotary and to Private Donors. But somehow, we would like to help to make this a model school, with a ripple down effect providing direction to other impoverished, unsupported parts of Papua New Guinea. It is imperative that Papua New Guinea is able to educate its people, as they are our closest neighbours. Without education, and only 5km from Australia, their problems will become our problems.

