Sally Lloyd: the essence of community development



By Cleo Fleming

When starving and malnourished people started to arrive at Mougulu health clinic in Western Province, Sally Lloyd used social media to call for help for those forgotten and unassisted during Papua New Guinea's long 2015 drought, bringing their needs to international attention. Behind the scenes, her relationship with the community has quietly spanned a lifetime.

A voice for a forgotten community

Starting in April 2015, Papua New Guinea experienced a prolonged, El Nino-induced drought and a series of devastating frosts. Across the country people suffered from malnourishment, an acute lack of clean drinking water and the threat of death from starvation. Schools and businesses were closed, hospitals and health clinics struggled to meet demand, and communities were displaced as fathers left families or parents left children in order to find food and water, or earn the money to buy them.

By December, food and water shortages due to the drought were still being felt, particularly among remote, isolated communities, and deaths were starting to be reported. Government relief, provided through the controversial District Services Improvement Program, had not reached these places. Difficult and costly to reach — and lacking the political voice of communities more closely linked to the authorities charged with distributing relief — they had essentially been forgotten.



Frost-burnt food in PNG. Photo: Jake Tame, CARE (via ABC)

Mougulu, a mission station in the Strickland Bosavi region of Western Province was one of these places. Built within the territory of the Bedamuni tribe, of which there are some 12,000 members, the settlement at Mougulu has been carved out of a harsh and rugged environment. After months without rain, the crops that the people here rely on as their only food source had failed. When rain began to return in fits and starts, insect and rat infestations ruined much of what grew. At the usually busy market, the stalls were as good as bare: a pumpkin, a bunch of greens, a handful of beans to share among a couple of thousand people.

Starving and malnourished people had begun to arrive at Mougulu's health clinic, having walked for days from other remote communities to get there. There are no roads and the terrain is mountainous and unforgiving. Among the number of drought-related deaths and illnesses reported in the area, one woman had cracked her head open when she slipped down a cliff-side while searching for food in the dense bush.

While news of this rapidly unfolding disaster had not been heard in Port Moresby, it was starting to spread elsewhere. One of the first to be alerted was Sally Lloyd, a volunteer Australian community development worker who, for much of the year, calls Mougulu home. Arriving in Mougulu on 1 January 2016, she quickly began to gather the kind of evidence that she knew would be needed to spark a response.

To meet Sally is to be given a glimpse of otherwise hard to know people and places. She not only speaks the local Bedamuni language but understands its nuances. So, when undertaking a count of the number of people reported dead due to food shortages, she knew to ask whether they were simply "dead" or "dead-finish". It turned out that some had been "dead": they had fainted from weakness or fallen unconscious after eating poisonous mushrooms. Sadly, others were "dead-finish": they had died as a direct result of a lack of food and water.

Having worked for decades to help reduce local rates of infant mortality, malnourishment and stunting, Sally was shocked by the state in which women and children were presenting at the health clinic. She told the Pacific Islands Development Program in late-January that:

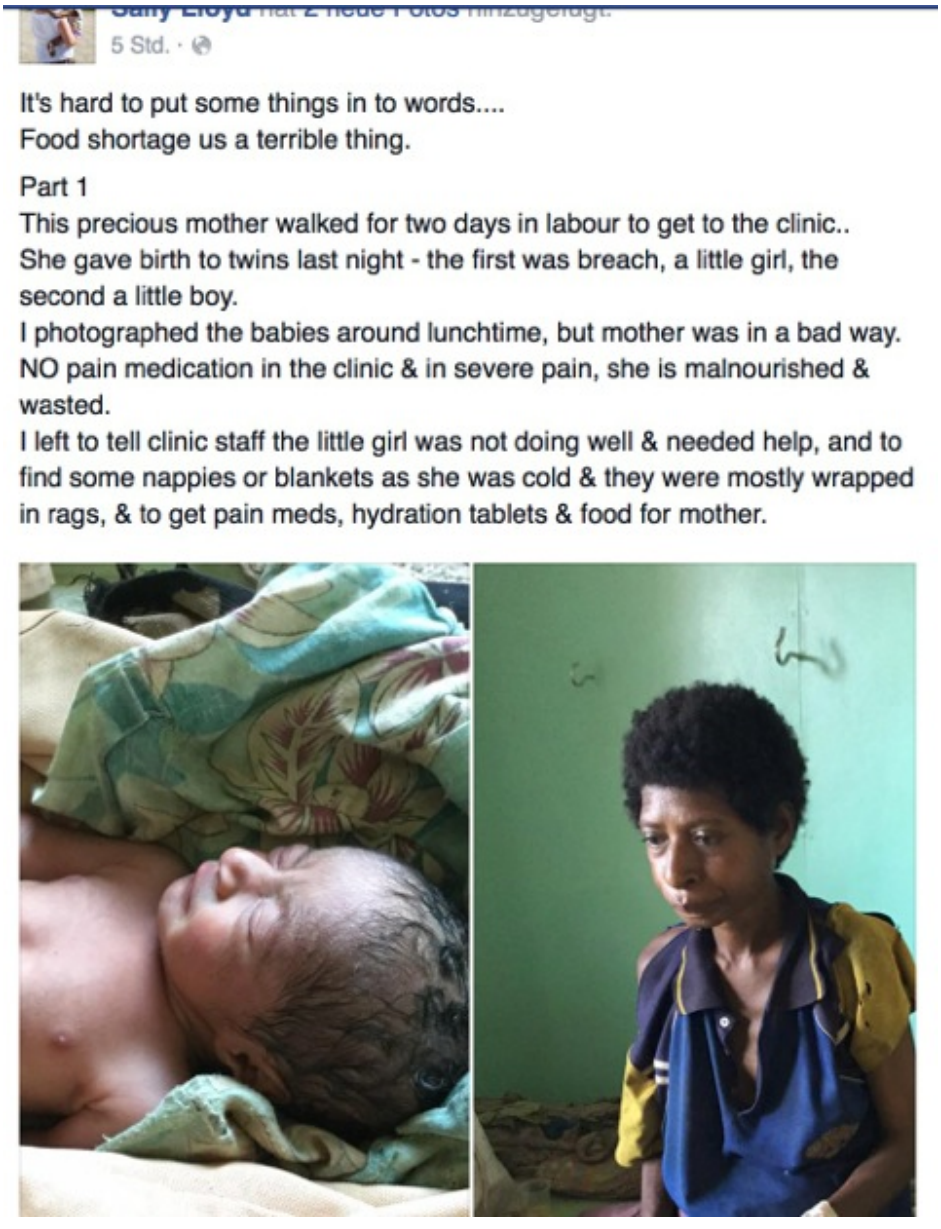
> *"A little boy came in one day, or his father carried him in … he was really dehydrated, malnourished, very, very hungry and he had fainted, and then become unconscious. They had really nothing to give him and he was too flat to even get a drip into him. We just tried to rehydrate him a little bit and things like that … to see little children in that state because they have not had adequate food is quite heart-wrenching."*



A sick child presenting for treatment in Mougulu. Photo: Sally Lloyd

She began to photograph some of the severely malnourished and dehydrated people in need of care. One of the women she photographed had arrived at the clinic ready to go into labour with twins. Margaret Hagobai had walked for two days to get to Mougulu and in Sally's words, she was "skin and bones". After a complicated and painful delivery, one of the babies died the following day.

Sally shared this and other stories along with her photos via social media and emailed them onto friends that she hoped could help, including Dr Michael (Mike) Bourke.



An agricultural scientist and geographer, Mike has extensive knowledge of Papua

New Guinea's agricultural sector and rural communities. He had spent the second half of 2015 trying to raise awareness of the severity of the drought for people across the country, and particularly those in remote, high altitude locations. A major component of this was his work with ANU colleagues to publish a map in December 2015 of the food needs of drought-impacted areas of rural PNG. On the map, Mougulu and surrounds are shown to lie in a "Category 5: Extreme Situation" area, denoting that there was no food available at all.

Mike recognised the power of the images that Sally had sent. He put her in touch with Malum Nalu, a journalist from *The National* newspaper. Malum wrote a two-page article titled 'Lloyd returns home to death, starvation'. Sally's photos and the story of the forgotten communities of Western Province became front page news. Soon Sally was being asked to brief government and aid agencies on what needed to be done.



36 COVER STORY Weekender Friday, January 22, 2016

Lloyd returns home

Right now, men, women and children are starving and dying because of the drought in the remote Nomad area of Western as they await Government assistance, says Sally Lloyd. She spent the first two weeks of 2016 there

By MALUM NALU

SALLY Lloyd (nee Hoey) first came to the remote Bedamuni tribe of Western in 1966 as a four-year-old child.

Fast forward 48 years, and Lloyd is now helping the Bedamuni in the fight of their lives against starvation and death.

Her parents, Isbister and Tom Hoey, were pioneer Australian missionaries at that time in the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

"They came in 1966," Lloyd tells me.

"They were with Asia Pacific Christian Mission, which now is the Evangelical Church of PNG.

"For all intent and purposes, all development there has been through mum and dad, through the church in that particular area.

"My dad built about eight airstrips out there.

"He's quite a clever man and has done a lot of work to assist the people.

"They came with five of us children and first lived at Ihuruginas when dad first patrolled that area because it was restricted.

"No one was allowed there.

"He went in at the same time as the government patrol officers. I think in 1967, when he first went there.

"We've been there a long time."

Her siblings were brothers Roy and Rob and sisters Betty-Anne and Heather.

Little did they know that this remote part of the world would become a place they would call home.

Roy, who was later to become a pilot with Missionary Aviation Fellowship, died in a plane crash 38 years ago and is buried at Mougulu.

"For many years, my eldest brother was flying with the MAF," Lloyd says with emotion.

"He was probably the most experienced pilot and he crashed with a Papua New Guinean co-pilot near Safiwog.

"He's buried at Mougulu so that's another connection that we have.

"That's our family place.

"They all say that dad should die there, just like my brother, and that will probably happen.

"There's a very strong con-

Villagers from around the area bring food to show the damage caused by drought, insects, pests and rats. — *Picture by SALLY LLOYD*

nection there."

My other brother was with MAF based in Telefomin and other places but he went back to Australia when his daughter was born and had some serious health issues.

"He comes back to visit his PNG family whenever he can."

Right now, men, women and children are starving and dying because of the drought in the remote Nomad area of Western with no government assistance whatsoever, says Lloyd, who spent the first two weeks of 2016 there.

She tells me shocking stories of people starving and dying and captured so poignantly in pictures.

Lloyd, who is fluent in the local Bedamuni language, was asked by the people to visit them after not receiving any Government assistance since the start of the El Nino-induced drought.

"When I went back to Mougulu, on January 1, I went to market and I would estimate a few thousand people were there milling around and there was one pumpkin, a couple of raw bundles of greens, one bundle of beans and that was it," she says.

"You can understand that people were quite upset and that's been ongoing for some time, not just at that one particular market.

"People were asking why this is happening, is the world coming to an end, as their crops are failing as well as the drought that's used up all their food.

"They're in a situation where they don't know what to do about it.

"The clinical health workers have reported an increase in the number of people fainting and dizziness.

"It was from that area that people have been eating mushrooms.

"As soon as a little bit of rain fell, mushrooms came up, and people ate mushrooms.

"They found out that these mushrooms were poisonous.

"There is at least one case of one man dying but there are quite a number of people losing consciousness, including one man who had to be sedated for a number of days because it made him a bit laughing (mad). They're really desperate that they'll eat anything."

Lloyd saw children coming into the clinic, who had actually fainted and became unconscious, simply because of lack of food and dehydration.

"These children have had no protein and very low amounts of any kind of food. If they've had any food, which is usually only sago, for some months," she says.

"It can be attributed directly to the drought.

Drought-related deaths are also prevalent.

"Apparently, just before I arrived, there was one lady working out in the garden, and because she was already weak, she fell down a cliff and split her head open," Lloyd says.

"While I was there, there was also a lady who walked for two days from a place called Habi to Mougulu, to the aid post, and she was just skin-and-bone, really skin and bones.

"She came to the health sub-centre at Mougulu when she was in labour, a complicated delivery, and she actually ended up having twins, one of which was a breached birth.

"She had no strength.

"There was no point filling medication at the clinic.

"Unfortunately, because of her weakness, one of the babies had not

Sally Lloyd with a mother and her twins. One of the babies died a day later.

Sally went on to work closely with communities to distribute the food relief that was eventually delivered. She's grateful that in this process local people were trained in the skills needed to undertake this work. Those same communities needed to draw on this training in logistics and coordination when their lives were upended once again, this time in early 2018, by the largest earthquake to occur in Papua New Guinea in over a century.

The accuracy of the data Sally collected and the impact of her photos led to donations from USAID and the Ok Tedi Foundation, and the involvement of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) in distributing food aid. UN Resident Coordinator in Papua New Guinea, Roy Trivedy, explains why Sally was

instrumental in galvanising the response to the drought, saying:

> *"We (the humanitarian partners) kept telling Government officials that in some districts people were really struggling with food and water issues. It was only when Sally got in touch and said that in parts of Western Province people were really badly malnourished and even dying that some leaders started to take notice."*

Working for the WFP, Sally coordinated the airlift of 691 metric tons of rice in Western Province, which eventually reached 77,657 people. The Emergency Coordinator for the WFP, Mats Persson, notes that this equated to 585 flights, and that most of the time Sally worked in this capacity alone.



Rice distribution. Photo: Mats Persson, WFP

Sally's tireless efforts during the drought are just an instance in a lifetime committed to the people of this isolated part of PNG. From her arrival in Papua New Guinea at the age of five, until today, Sally has listened to, learned from, advocated on behalf of and actively strengthened the community at Mougulu and those surrounding it. As you might imagine, her dedication and selflessness didn't

emerge in a vacuum: she comes from a family of people who share these qualities and they are integral to her story.

Half a century in PNG

Sally's family has lived and worked with the Bedamuni people since the late 1960s, when her parents, Tom and Salome Hoey, went to Western Province to establish a Christian mission there. Raised in farming families from Queensland, they are both immensely practical people who had a range of life skills to add to the training they received at Tahlee Bible College before leaving Australia.



Hoey family, 1968

Tom's first job was to scout a location suitable for airstrip development. Supplies delivered by plane are literally a lifeline in places like Mougulu, where there is no river or road access. A short film was made about the three week journey that

Tom and two other missionaries from the Asia Pacific Christian Mission undertook in 1967 to make contact with the Bedamuni tribe and seek their permission to build an airstrip within their territory.

Joined by a local translator and 40 men carrying supplies, we watch the intrepid party head into dense forest. The film's narrator reports that "Each man knows it may be the most dangerous journey of his life". Little was known of the Bedamuni at the time, though it had been established some years earlier that they practiced cannibalism and a previous attempt at making contact had found them to be "hostile and elusive".

Along the way we see the impressive burial platforms customary to the Bedamuni, on which corpses are laid out. The relatives of the deceased sit with the rotting corpse to mourn and handle it until it is just bones. The clean skulls of the dead are later displayed around the entrance to the communal long-houses, in which all members of the tribe lived at that time. We're also shown the long bamboo spikes that Bedamuni tribes would place on the approach paths to their long-houses so that raiding parties could not surprise them during the night.

Though these images are excitingly reminiscent of an Indiana Jones movie, what stayed with me from the film are the scenes of Tom taking notes while speaking with Bedamuni people. From the earliest days of his life there, he began the work of learning and creating the first written form of the language, also called Bedamuni (sometimes known as Biami). Until this was accomplished, translation from English to Bedamuni was a Chinese-whisper type process using up to five different languages.



Tom Hoey with Bedamuni people.

Over time, Tom and Salome would work with the local people to build five airstrips in the area using a small tractor that had to be delivered in pieces by helicopter. Each airstrip was later accompanied by an aid post, school and other services. At Mougulu, the Hoeys built a health clinic, church, school, radio station, hydro-electricity plant, homes and other buildings. The work at the church, school and health clinic was also undertaken by them, during which they mentored and trained local people to provide these services.

Now in their eighties, Tom and Salome continue to visit Mougulu to oversee this work and contribute what they can. In all of these endeavours, Sally and her four siblings were necessary and valued contributors. While Sally describes the freedom and adventure that she and her brothers and sisters enjoyed as kids, by the age of nine she had learned to assist her Mum in delivering babies and by sixteen she had established the first pre-school in the area, teaching children in both Bedamuni and English.



Sally as a teenager with twins that she delivered. These were the first twins in the village of Mougulu to survive. Prior to the arrival of Sally's family, twins were regarded with suspicion and one was killed at birth. One of the babies, Farwana, has grown up to become a Community Health Worker.

Sally's brothers, Roy and Rob, would go on to become pilots with Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), an international Christian organisation founded in 1947 by veteran air force pilots from countries including Australia and New Zealand. It opened its first operational base in PNG in 1951 and has grown to become an essential service provider there and in other remote places around the world. The fixed-wing light aircraft that MAF fly make it possible for pilots to reach the airstrips that people like Tom Hoey have built on mountainsides and in densely forested settings across PNG. The size of the planes and the conditions in which pilots fly mean that it is a thrilling but dangerous occupation.

Tragically, after flying with MAF for 19 years, Roy Hoey died in December 1994 when the plane he was flying crashed in the Star Mountains of Western Province.

He had 28 passengers on board, most of them mine workers and their families. Buried at Mougulu, Roy was survived by his wife Lynn and two young children. His son Tom is now a commercial pilot, like his uncle Rob. They both return to PNG as they can to assist local communities through family generated projects and to fly partners in development services to the region. (For an insight into the life of missionary families in Papua New Guinea in general and to learn more about Roy and Lynn Hoey's experience in particular, see Lynn's memoir: *Beyond the Boabs and Billums: Letters of My Life*; and her daughter Taffline's photo essay of a visit to Mougulu in 2012).



Sally with her parents and brother Rob in May 2019.

Sally's husband Ian, their children, Craig and Amanda, and Sally's son Mark, all have their own relationship with Papua New Guinea. Ian and Sally took Craig and Amanda to live in PNG from 1997 to 2001, where Ian worked as a teacher. In 2013, Amanda crowd-funded a visit to Mougulu to document and photograph the Bedamuni tribe for historical archiving. And in 2014, Mark travelled to Mougulu

to assist with a health project, returning again in 2016 to volunteer in disaster relief.

Just another day in Mougulu

While Tom and Salome went to Papua New Guinea to save souls, their approach to mission work was imbued with the values of community development, and they carried it out with respect for the culture, traditions and priorities of the people they worked with. This inheritance is present in Sally's work today. More at home sleeping on a dirt floor than in a hotel, and more at ease at a village meeting than behind a desk, she is a valuable entry point to understanding the needs and interests of local people.

In some ways her skill set is intangible, such as knowing not to simply take the word of the first people that approach when arriving in a remote community to assess needs: instead bringing the village together as a whole and taking time to talk with them collectively. Or recognising the problems that can follow from distributing food relief according to the Western metric of family or household unit among communities where families or households can consist of up to 30 loosely-related people. In other ways Sally's skill set is very concrete: her long-term relationship and track record with the people of the area mean she is trusted and believed. Advice that might otherwise go unheeded or received with skepticism is taken seriously when conveyed by Sally. During the 2018 earthquake, this turned out to be particularly valuable as it enabled her to correct local misconceptions about when, where and why aftershocks would occur.

Travelling regularly between the Hoey family home in Mougulu and her home with Ian in Brisbane, Sally's largely unpaid work covers the spectrum of challenges facing the people of Mougulu and in many senses fills a gap created by missionaries slowly moving out of the region. As in other parts of the country, pioneering mission workers like the Hoeys have not been replaced. Sally believes that this has led to a decline in service provision for remote communities in key areas such as health and education.

For example, she tells me that in the Strickland Bosavi region, home to approximately 35,000 people, there are 31 health clinics. According to government standards, there should be 131 workers employed across those

facilities: currently there are 27. This under-resourcing is particularly concerning given the health crisis that experts warn is developing in Papua New Guinea due to the re-emergence of polio and the high prevalence of a drug-resistant strain of tuberculosis.



Sally Lloyd at work in Mougulu.

Sally sees her role as twofold: to advocate for funding to reinvigorate services; and to empower and educate local leaders to be proactive in lobbying government and international donors to meet their needs. At present, her work is largely on an ambitious community development plan for the Strickland Bosavi region focused on education, health, access and livelihoods. At the centre of the plan is a project to build a college at Mougulu that would offer secondary education and vocational training. This would cater to people across the region, some of whom currently travel up to five days by foot in order to attain a secondary school education. The college would also incorporate an administration office where data could be recorded on population numbers, health outcomes and the management of facilities.

The plan, which has a timeline of eight years, is the antithesis of the kind of development projects that Sally sees as routinely failing local communities and wasting resources. She gives the example of a recent water, sanitation and hygiene initiative in which the community was told by visiting health workers that all children must wash their hands after using the toilet and before they eat. While acknowledging the merits of the message, she explains that if you live a kilometre from the river and have no means of collecting or storing water, it's "all just talk".

A great deal of preparatory work has already been undertaken in relation to the community development plan, particularly in relation to Strickland College. Extensive stakeholder consultation has been conducted and the plan has the support of the communities and heads of relevant government departments. However, there remain myriad risks and dependencies that need to be overcome and accounted for, not least of them funding.

Achieving even some of the key priorities of the plan will require the same sort of fortitude and commitment needed to walk out into a dense jungle to befriend an unknown tribe with a reputation for cannibalism and hostility. To this Sally would say, "It's just another day in Mougulu. There are always challenges, but if you make a difference, it can be very rewarding."