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Port Moresby and Mainohana, Papua New Guinea (PNG)



In PNG the Brothers currently operate the Hohola Youth Development Centre in Port Moresby, and a school in the rural area of Mainohana. The Brothers are also associated with Rosary Secondary School in the remote highlands of PNG and Jubilee Catholic Secondary School located in Port Moresby which is currently ranked as one of the top schools in the country.

By almost any measure, Papua New Guinea is one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged countries in the Asia-Pacific region. PNG is currently facing its third economic crisis in 10 years, in the midst of declining living standards and a deterioration of law and order. Corruption is endemic and consumer and business confidence have collapsed. In 1999, the World Bank reported the following data in relation to key social and economic indicators in PNG:

- 37.5% of the population is living at or below the poverty line.
- 93.5% of the poor population live in rural areas.
- 30% of children under the age of 5 are classified as malnourished.

Despite some gains in recent years, the country still has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, and by regional standards high infant mortality and low life expectancy.

Illiteracy rates are high, particularly for women with 28.6% of males aged 15+ classified as illiterate, compared to 44% of females in the same age group.

87% of primary school age boys are enrolled at school, compared with 74% of girls. At least 60% of males progress to Year 5 at school, along with 58% of girls.

Earlier data from 1994 reported that enrolment rates for secondary school age girls were 17.4% and boys 21.3%. Overall only 40% of school age girls attended school.

Hohola Youth Development Centre

At just 13 years of age, half of all PNG students are forced to abandon their education as there are no vacancies in secondary schools. Of those students who gain entry into high school, many can't afford the school fees. So through the Hohola Youth Development Centre, these students are given a second chance at life by furthering their education and skills so they can gain and retain employment once they leave the Centre. What's more, the Hohola Youth Development Centre provides a safe haven for students of all ages from the surrounding threat of street violence. Here they are given protection, care and hope for the future.

The Hohola Youth Development Centre (HYDC) was established in 1972 by the Bridgidine Sisters and in 1993, management was taken over by the De La Salle Brothers, who have been active in PNG for over 60 years. HYDC now provides a 3-4 year educational program for over 300 students aged 14-20. The curriculum provides a broad based education as well as more specific vocational training.

Some students are completing their Year 8 certificate by correspondence in classes at the Centre. The rest are taught basic literacy and numeracy, and have access to studies in commerce, art, drama, music, computer and secretarial studies. Girls also study cooking and sewing, whilst boys have access to woodworking, upholstery and metalwork classes, and in the near future, motor mechanics. Work experience is a key part of later year studies, with local firms providing places for students.

Much progress has been made, with many students going on to find work in their community, using the essential skills learnt at the school.

Mainohana

Mainohana is a particularly impoverished part of the country and is located three hours northwest of Port Moresby. There, the PNG Government has provided no schooling whatsoever, and educational opportunities for young people are very limited. In 1958, the Brothers opened a secondary school in the area. The school is the only Catholic high school in the area educating 600 students (the majority which are boarders) from years 9 to 12, providing children with access to a certified high-school education.

Through the school, the Brothers offer students with better living standards than they have at home, where they're often without electricity and running water. Many students are also coping with drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, relationship issues and neglect by parents.

The Brothers role here is to provide each student with education, stability, spiritual role models and a positive vision for the future.

The switch to bio-fuel production has been a major reason for huge rises in food prices and a world-wide shortage of rice. This has particularly hit home at the school in Mainohana. School Principal Br Robert McLaughlin, reports that PNG is running short of rice and that he will have to stop rice as the staple food for his 600 boarders in about two months. They are currently looking for alternate food supply and Brother Robert plans to reinstate crops such as sweet potato and bananas on the school property. Aus-Aid is also providing assistance in the form of a three year farm manager and the purchase of necessary machinery, including a tractor.