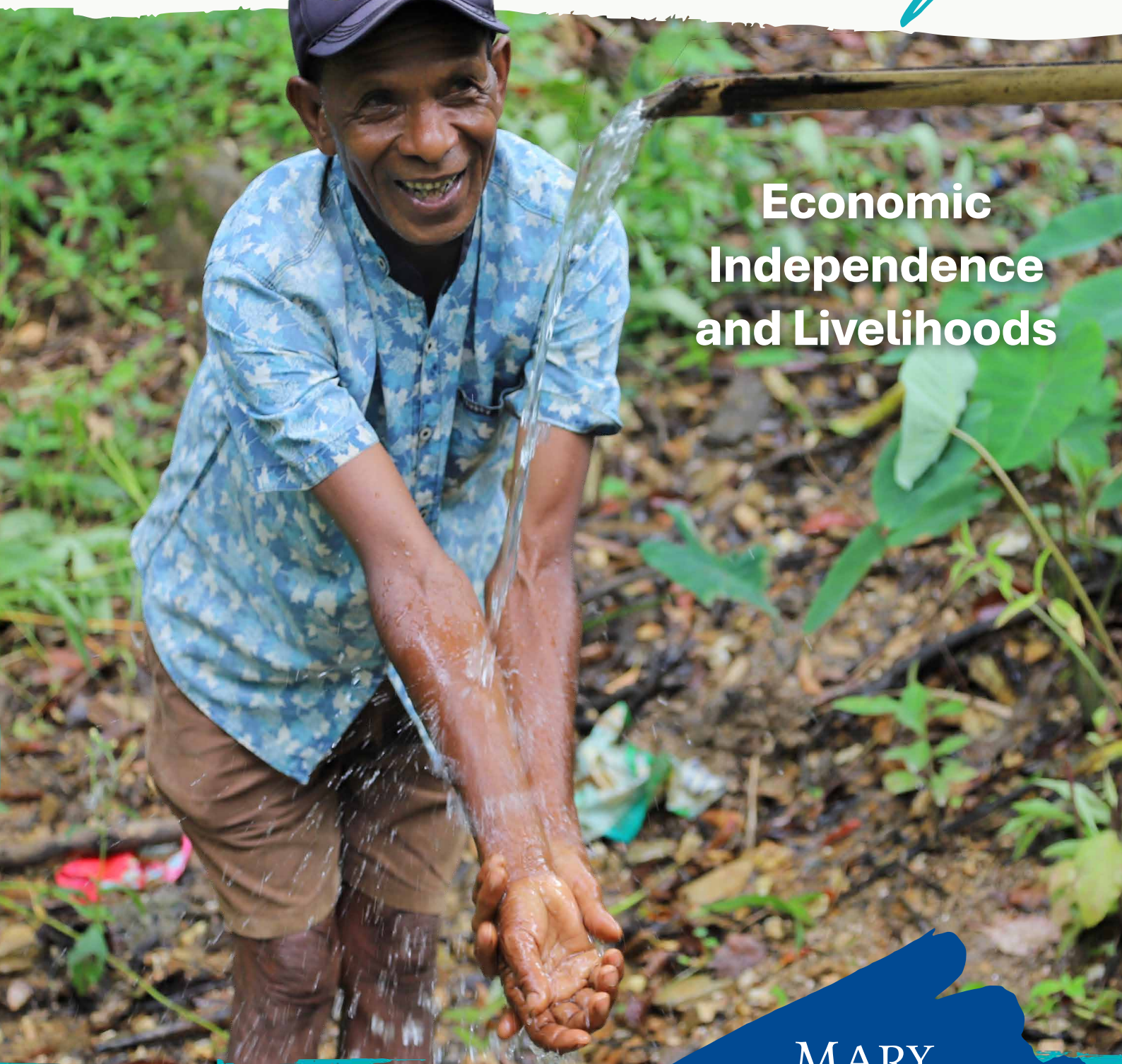


SPRING 2026

MARY'S NEWS

today



Economic
Independence
and Livelihoods

Planting water for the future in Timor-Leste
Weaving a new income in Fiji
Empowering women farmers in Timor-Leste
A soldier's story of hope and education

MARY
MACKILLOP
today



Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of Mary's News Today, reflecting on the difference your support continues to make.

This edition focuses on Economic Independence and Livelihoods, helping people facing barriers build sustainable livelihoods and provide for their families with dignity.

I am deeply grateful for the generosity of supporters like you. Together, we reached the target of our recent Tax Appeal, raising over \$200,000 to help children like Maria, a nine-year-old living with a visual impairment, access the education she deserves.

We also recognise the threats climate change poses to the most vulnerable, and the importance of building a sustainable future.

In this edition, meet Liku, whose salusalu-making skills opened the door to a new income, and Arifa, who found her voice and confidence through community workshops in Fiji. You'll also learn about our Sustainable Agriculture

and Women's Empowerment (SAWE) Project empowering women farmers in Timor-Leste, our Highways and Byways Small Grants Program, and meet Steve, one of our dedicated regular givers. You'll also meet Patricia, a proud member of our Friends of Mary bequest community.

Thank you for walking alongside us and for helping people live with independence and dignity.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Jane

Jane Woolford
Chief Executive Officer

Finding Her Voice: One Mother's Journey to Empowerment

Arifa, a determined mother from Fiji, is one of many women whose life has been transformed through community workshops run in partnership with BIRTH Fiji and supported by Mary MacKillop Today. These sessions equip women with practical skills, from managing household resources to understanding their rights, building the confidence and knowledge needed for a more secure, self-sufficient future.

Before the workshops, Arifa had never spoken openly about violence at home. Now, she knows where to turn for support, and she isn't alone.

"Before, we didn't speak up. Now we know the helpline numbers, and we use them."

Arifa has also embraced positive parenting techniques, strengthening her bond with her children. Her story shows how, with the right support, women can build safer, stronger, more independent lives, for themselves and their families.



"Women here don't stay quiet anymore; we ask for help and help each other."

– Arifa

Inspired by Australia's first saint, Mary MacKillop Today empowers communities in Australia and overseas to realise their dignity through education, health, financial inclusion and livelihoods. All photos by Mary MacKillop Today unless otherwise stated. When necessary, names have been changed for privacy. Some content in this newsletter has been translated.



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Mary MacKillop Today is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and complies with industry standards of good practice, transparency and accountability.

Mary MacKillop Today NGO is accredited by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), responsible for managing Australia's development program. To maintain accreditation, Mary MacKillop Today's systems, policies and processes are rigorously reviewed by the Australian Government. Mary MacKillop Today receives support through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Planting Water For the Future



In the mountains of Timor-Leste, water has always run away from the families who live on the ridges above. For generations, the dry months from August to November meant walking more than a kilometre to a spring, queuing before dawn, and carrying 20-litre containers back up steep slopes. The burden fell heaviest on women and girls, who rose early to fetch water before school, often carrying a baby on one hip and a container on the other.

Access to clean, reliable water is fundamental to health, dignity and opportunity, yet for many communities it remains out of reach. Human wellbeing and the natural environment are deeply connected, and investing in sustainable water management builds stronger, more resilient communities.

Through the Sustainable Agriculture and Women's Empowerment Project,

part of Mary MacKillop Today's new Livelihoods Program, farmers across these mountain communities are rewriting that story themselves. With training and hands-on support, they have built simple infiltration trenches and recharge pits that hold rainwater in the hillsides, letting it seep slowly underground to feed the springs below.

Within a year, springs that once slowed to a trickle now run steadily. In one community, people count around 15 water sources that have re-emerged. Families who once shared a single spring now draw water close to home, children bathe before school, and soil erosion and flooding have eased. For women and girls who once shaped their whole day around the walk downhill, the hours returned to farming, family and school matter most of all.

For Leonel, the value runs deep. The support, he says, is “not like

money that is spent and finished”, it is “planting water for future generations”, for the children and grandchildren still to come.

This is water security that communities lead and own, knowledge that will stay long after the project ends.

For Recardina, 22 and the eldest of seven, the difference is felt every day. “*We no longer feel the sadness,*” she says.

Your support can help more families in Timor-Leste secure reliable water for good.



Scan the QR code to see the project in action.

A Soldier's Story: Saving Books, Building Futures

In 1999, as part of the Australian-led InterFET deployment, Steve Wilson, a Warrant Officer, found himself stationed in Balibo, on Timor-Leste's western border. As the fighting eased, he traded his role as war fighter for interpreter, working alongside the Battalion's doctor and Catholic Padre, quickly picking up the basics of Tetum along the way.

Amid empty, abandoned towns, he rescued schoolbooks left to the elements, sheltering them in the only building left with a roof: the local Catholic Church. Many were in Tetum, published by the Mary MacKillop Press, and treasured by the community. When local families returned, the books were put

straight back into use, a small but powerful act of preserving culture and learning.

That experience never left him. Today, Steve is a regular giver to Mary MacKillop Today, supporting the education work he witnessed firsthand, work that gives Timorese children the foundation to build sustainable livelihoods and a self-sufficient future.

There is still much work to do, and education is one of the most important enablers.

— Steve



Weaving New Beginnings: Skills That Change Lives



— Liku

Across the Pacific, Mary MacKillop Today partners with local organisations to help people facing real barriers, single mothers, people living with disability, and unemployed youth, build the skills they need for a sustainable future.

One such program teaches participants to make salusalu, a traditional flower garland woven from scented blooms and bark fibre, worn to mark special occasions and welcome honoured guests.

For Liku, one participant, this simple craft became a turning point. After completing her training, she made and sold four salusalu, earning her own income for the first time and, with it, a new sense of confidence and independence. Her success has multiplied: fellow participant Rhonda has since taught the skill to others in her community, spreading opportunity further still.

These programs prove that when people are given the right tools, they can build lasting, dignified livelihoods, and your support makes that possible.

Restoring the Land, Strengthening Communities

Thanks to generous donor support, the Mary MacKillop Today Highways and Byways Small Grants Program helped fund a practical field day for 19 local graziers in a rural Queensland community, collectively managing over 28,000 hectares of land.

After years of flooding and extreme weather, these producers had watched their landscapes suffer from topsoil loss, erosion, and reduced groundcover, placing real pressure on their farms and livelihoods.

The event brought producers together with experienced practitioners to explore practical solutions for erosion control, water retention, and landscape restoration. Every single participant left with a better understanding of erosion management, and all rated the day highly for its content and delivery.

Beyond the practical skills gained, the day also strengthened community bonds, giving neighbours space to share knowledge, build confidence, and support one another in restoring fragile land.

Your support helps rural communities build resilient, sustainable livelihoods for the future.



“The real value of this project was bringing producers together to learn from each other, share practical experience and rebuild confidence in what can be done locally.”

– Charisse Anderson, CEO
Dawson Catchment
Coordinating Association

Growing Resilience: New Project Empowers Women Farmers

Mary MacKillop Today is launching a new livelihoods initiative in Timor-Leste, the Sustainable Agriculture and Women’s Empowerment (SAWE) Project, working across four villages in Railaco, Ermera Municipality, and building on more than a decade of learning from our earlier vanilla and women’s livelihoods work.

Baseline research revealed a clear picture: many households rely heavily on coffee for income, while women often carry the bulk of unpaid care work and earn less than men. Yet there is strong appetite for change, particularly through savings and loans groups, which offer women a practical first step toward financial independence.

SAWE aims to strengthen household financial resilience and diversify livelihoods through a multi-sectoral approach, combining savings and loans, agriculture and horticulture, value-add activities, and inclusive, community-managed cooperatives.

By diversifying income sources and strengthening local governance, the project aims to build lasting financial resilience, especially for women, in the face of poverty and climate challenges.



– Lourenca

A Legacy of Everyday Miracles

Patricia first learned about Saint Mary MacKillop as a child, attending a Josephite school. Mary's courage, compassion, and commitment to helping those most in need left a lasting impression, one that stayed with Patricia into adulthood.

Years later, Patricia heard about a young Australian man imprisoned overseas with little hope of release. Moved by his family's distress, she prayed every day for his freedom. Months passed, until she turned on the television and heard the extraordinary news: he had been released.

"I fell to my knees and cried," she recalls.

*No one expected it.
But I knew in my
heart that Saint
Mary had heard me.*

– Patricia

That moment of faith led Patricia to join Friends of Mary, our community of supporters who leave a gift in their Will to continue Saint Mary MacKillop's legacy.



Like Patricia, you too can help make everyday miracles possible for generations to come. To learn more, contact our Philanthropy Officer, Hannah Pham, on (02) 8043 8700 or at hannah.pham@marymackilloptoday.org.au.

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