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Action plan to improve Western Highlands Province, PNG

For the first time in the history of the Western Highlands Province, PNG, an action plan to improve the quality of life has been developed through the Sister City relationship between Mount Hagen Urban Local Level Government and Orange Council, NSW, Australia.

Mt Hagen Urban Local Level Government and Orange Council, NSW Australia, have been extending the hand of friendship through the Capacity Building Program for over 17 years with the relationship founded on the acceptance that to build better communities more than just physical infrastructure is needed. The Australian Government AusAID organisation funded the program and is supported by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum.

To further strengthen the relationship between Mount Hagen and Orange, Mr Wak Kewa, Project Manager for the Mount Hagen Urban Level Local Government, recently had the opportunity to visit the town of Orange to work with Orange Council members. Mr Kewa, has been a leading force in capacity building with Orange Council members to help improve resources in Mount Hagen. Orange Council and **RENEW NSW** (the voluntary waste management group working in rural and regional NSW) sponsored this great opportunity and provided funding for Mr Kewa's journey allowing further discussions and development of plans that would benefit Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands Province.

This capacity building experience resulted in the development of an action plan for Government in the Western Highlands Province. The action plan is based around the New Mount Hagen City Plan developed by the partners with Mr Kewa, and supports the input from the Mount Hagen Community over the last seven years. The City Plan was used as the basis for the support the Australian Government provided to help establish the Mount Hagen markets which is now a focal point of local life and brings together traders from all over the province. It has also seen the completion of the garden's project in the centre of Mt Hagen.

Mr Kewa indicated that with the capacity level developed through the Mount Hagen and Orange Council sister city program, there is no reason the Mount Hagen Urban Level Local Government could not work with all other authorities to make some further real changes in the Highlands City.

The action plan provides initiatives that can improve the quality of Mount Hagen residents' lives and supports working together with the new Governor Olga and the Council to improve the range of services. Key areas being focused on include city presentation, recreation, housing, utility services, roads and transport, city expansion, waste management, cultural heritage, business, industry, the informal sector, and governance and administration.

As waste management is a significant issue in Mount Hagen, this was the main topic of discussion during his recent visit as Mr Kewa, **RENEW NSW** and Orange Council members reviewed strategies that will assist in stage one of the action plan to develop a waste management strategy in Mount Hagen. The first step in stage one was a waste audit determining the waste streams followed by the development of strategies to process waste in a way that minimises environmental impact. "The audit of waste has shown that green waste and plastic bags are the biggest items and now we can work together to find ways to divert this waste from landfill, and to improve the landfill at Mount Hagen." Said Stephen Sykes a Director at Orange City Council and Chair of RENEW NSW.

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Through the Sister City program, Mount Hagen and Orange Council have been able to exchange skills, knowledge and experiences to benefit not only the Mount Hagen region but also the town of Orange. Such skills and knowledge range from building inclusive planning processes to problem solving that are self sustaining and lead to empowerment.

“Working with Mr Wak Kewa in the Sister City Partnership has been an enriching experience, as I’ve been given the opportunity to see a different culture and way of life through his openness and enthusiasm to share his stories. Mr Kewa’s commitment and passion for his city and country has been inspiring and his determination has taught me the importance of being patient and thankful for every aspect of our lives,” said Dara Clayton, Project Coordinator for the NetWaste region of NSW a member of RENEW NSW.

In addition to working with Orange Council, Mr Kewa was sponsored to attend the Waste 2007, Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Conference in Coffs Harbour, NSW Australia. The Waste conference aimed to educate and inspire delegates and to offer an environment where delegates can build on their skills, knowledge and networks.

Through capacity building at the Waste 2007 conference, Mr Kewa was able to network and learn from waste management leaders from Australia as well as from international speakers from Canada and Norway.

The development of the first Western Highland Province action plan is a step in the right direction to improve not only waste management solutions but the over all quality of life for all residents.

Further information on **RENEW NSW** can be found on their website: www.renewnsw.com.au.



Left to Right – Stephen Sykes, RENEW NSW Chairperson; Mr Kinga Wangdi, delegate from Bhutan; Mr Wak Kewa, delegate from PNG and Dr David Blackmore, Department of Environment Climate Change at Waste 2007 Conference.

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