

MSPs follow history's tartan trail into Africa

A CROSS-PARTY group of MSPs will leave on Thursday for a ten-day trip to Africa.

The six-strong delegation will visit South Africa and Malawi to see projects aimed at reducing poverty, tackling AIDS and promoting education. They will also meet African politicians and look for opportunities to build links with Scotland.

The trip has been organised by the Scotland branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which will also meet the cost, estimated at around £20,000.

The delegation will be led by Nationalist Margaret Ewing.

Missionary

Also on the trip will be Edinburgh South Liberal Democrat MSP Mike Pringle, Tory Ted Brocklebank, independent Denis Canavan, Labour's Karen Gillon and Nationalist Michael Matheson.

Ms Ewing said: "From the 18th century onwards, Scots have helped to shape not only the African political landscape but also how Africa is viewed by the Western world.

"From David Livingstone to the Glasgow Missionary Society, Scots have immersed themselves in helping to build a better society in Africa. What is not so well known is the current work being done by Scots charities.

"Our visit will help to explore how we can further develop existing links and establish new ones."

The first building blocks of recovery

The huge job of recreating the infrastructure destroyed in the tsunami has begun in Aceh, the Indonesian province 'adopted' by Edinburgh. **Julia Horton** finds out how businesses in the region are helping people rebuild



RUBBLE: Yusri surveys the damage at the brick factory he managed in Miruk Lam Reudeup. **Picture:** CATE GILLON

IN LINE: Brick factories stand to benefit when rebuilding gets under way

Doctors are a £9000 ray of Sunshine

A CHARITY event sponsored by the Evening News has raised more than £9000 to help Lothians children.

The Instant Sunshine charity night raised cash for Edinburgh's Daisy Chain Trust.

Hosted by a team of local doctors, a musical comedy show took place at the Royal College of Physicians on January 14 in front of more than 220 people.

Lady Kirkwood, of the Daisy Chain Trust, said it was an unforgettable evening: "Instant Sunshine said we were one of the best audiences they've ever had. It was a very, very funny evening and everyone thoroughly enjoyed it."

Cash raised from the event will go towards funding children's charities throughout Edinburgh, Lothian and the Borders.

Organisations which have already benefited from the evening include Harmony school in Balerno, a residential facility for children with severe behavioural problems, which received £2750 from the trust; Cruise Bereavement in East Lothian, a team of children's counsellors, which received £1200 for staff training; and Broomhall playgroup, which received £720 for equipment.

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LIKE thousands of businesses in Aceh, the brick factories in Miruk Lam Reudeup have stood silent since the tsunami.

But in a few months' time, they are expected to be churning out hundreds of thousands of bricks to meet the spiralling demand to rebuild homes and businesses in the region.

The centuries-old industry is expected a major boom in trade, which is welcome news to village brick factory manager Yusri.

"Today his factory still looks like a bomb site, with tree trunks, a mattress and a mangled bicycle strewn across it.

The building housing the kilns for firing the bricks is cracked after the earthquake shook its foundations and reduced the walls to rubble.

The two holes in the ground where his workers dump earth and stamp on it to compact it ready to be moulded into shape are still filled with murky water left behind from the massive wave which swamped the factory.

Thousands of bricks stacked neat-



ly in rows under the low thatched roofs of the two simple buildings were ruined.

But Yusri, 30, has met staff from Edinburgh-based aid agency Mercy Corps to discuss how the charity could help him get his factory ready in time to take advantage of a boom which could keep him in business for years to come.

He says: "All my 30 workers survived the tsunami. We normally make 4000 bricks per day. I met with Mercy Corps yesterday to talk about starting work again.

"I hope they can help me. I would like to start making bricks again in a week if I can clean up the factory.

"The buildings are not too badly damaged but the equipment is ruined. The ovens are damaged too."

Mercy Corps has already helped people in Yusri's village near the provincial capital of Banda Aceh with cash-for-work schemes where locals have been paid to clean up places including some of the other brick factories in the area.

Daniel Curran, the charity's chief of staff in Aceh, says: "The area of Miruk Lam Reudeup is known for brick-making. There are about 100 brick-making enterprises each employing about 30 people.

"The aim is to get these brick enterprises up and running.

"Almost everyone says that in a few months' time demand will increase greatly. Traditionally these enterprises would not be making bricks until April in the dry season, which would coincide with the expected boom."

Sasha Muench, senior economic development specialist at Mercy Corps, adds: "Around 70 per cent of people in these villages worked in the brick factories. If they are up and running again in time to take advantage of the rebuilding, their trade will boom.

"They will probably have work from the reconstruction across Aceh for a couple of years."

In the meantime, Yusri, whose own house was half-destroyed in the disaster, is working as group leader for a pallet-making business

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This type of support is increasingly popular and helps Mercy Corps to plan ahead more effectively.



SALVAGE: A villager in Miruk Lam Reudeup collects scrap wood for making pallets

VILLAGERS, who are free to find their own buyers too, are not paid to build the pallets. Instead, they share the profits from the sale of any pallets, which are bought for about 55000 rupiah (£2.50) each.

Chicken farmer Baihaq, 34, and his two younger brothers, are among the men building pallets.

Baihaq lost his farm in the tsunami, which killed his 2000 chickens and ruined his corn crop.

He estimates it will cost around £2000 just to replace the birds.

He says: "Mercy Corps told me about the pallets and I joined the group because I thought it was a good idea.

"I lost everything in the tsunami, all my chickens, the corn, all of it has gone.

"If I have money I can have my farm again."

Baihaq counts himself lucky because his two brothers, his wife and their two young sons all survived.

But his 15-year-old cousin lost his parents and his brothers and sisters. Baihaq has taken the boy in and he too is working on the pallets.

The pallet-making business is an idea Mercy Corps has encouraged throughout the area, although not everyone has been as enthusiastic as the men in Miruk Lam Reudeup.

In the village of Lamloh, refugees living in tents because their homes in another village were destroyed complain they won't get enough money from the venture.

Hamdan, 45, a civil servant whose wife and children all died in the disaster, joined the Lamloh pallet-making group because his office was wrecked in the disaster.

He says: "I think the price [of each pallet for sale] is very cheap. It doesn't want to make any more."

Mercy Corps is clear that the business initiative has a very limited lifespan.

Daniel says: "It is another opportunity for people in this situation to make some money. It is not a sustainable business, it will provide work for around six weeks to two months."

Meanwhile, the people of Aceh are already finding their own business opportunities in the aftermath of a house in central Banda Aceh offers house cleaning for people who are unable or unwilling to clean up their own homes. And in

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