

Successful Community Support Activities — Lessons from Post-Conflict Melanesia

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Abstract

Engaging communities in development and nation-building is important to the foundations of democratic governance as well as to building a healthy economy. This is more important for countries racked by conflict that has left the state weak and its populace traumatised and divided. Consistent with the conference themes of exploring 'what works' in community engagement and sharing lessons learned, this paper focuses on methods of 'engagement' in two post-conflict situations in Australia's near region — Bougainville and Solomon Islands. The lessons to date are not profound. This remains a situation in which everyone is still learning. One lesson of engagement in any such program is that communities and intermediaries must be involved in the development and design of such activities and integrally involved in their delivery. Community-based assistance that requires local involvement can encourage people to divert their attention to addressing their own social welfare, but it is very difficult to engage communities at the outset, and in the design of such activities. A key to longer-term maintenance of peace and harmonious working together is to facilitate building self-reliance in communities.

Keywords

Post-conflict, community development, self-reliance, Bougainville, Solomon Islands

Introduction

The focus by international donors on 'top-down' state-centric approaches to development generally and to assisting the recovery and rebuilding of war-torn societies in particular has tended to overshadow the importance of working to engage local communities and to strengthen and support participation in such peace-building and recovery at the community level. While in developed and industrial societies community members may respond well to government-driven processes, this is not the case in many developing countries, where subsistence economies prevail, and government support services are minimal.

Donors have recently become more aware of the potential inherent in community-level action and initiatives for social and economic transformation. AusAID, for example, supports many community development schemes, and even large-scale multilateral agencies including the World Bank are devoting considerable attention to what is termed 'community-driven development'.

Engaging communities in the development and nation-building processes is intrinsically important to the foundations of democratic governance as well as to building a healthy economy. Such a strategy is doubly important for those countries racked by turbulence and conflict which has left the state weak and its populace traumatised and divided.

Consistent with the conference themes of exploring 'what works' in community engagement and sharing lessons learned, this paper focuses on methods of 'engagement' in two post-conflict situations in Australia's near region — those of Bougainville and Solomon Islands.

These are interesting forms of engagement. In Bougainville communities were fully engaged in public works of direct benefit — more than simply providing input through the provision of local labour, but also involved in training and developing or re-establishing local capacity to deliver such infrastructure. In the Solomons, the engagement engendered by the Community Peace and Rehabilitation Fund, and now the Community Sector Program, is between donor and communities — in the absence of the state. The follow-on program is a more comprehensive strengthening program, part of which is to encourage communities' linkages or connectedness to the state, at provincial level in particular.

This raises other questions. Is this a desirable outcome if the state apparatus is corrupt and ineffective, or can community engagement and pressure influence the state and change that situation? Is it the role of donors to be engineering this engagement? Perhaps so, because it may help build demand for better governance. Research elsewhere suggests that civil society organisations and social capital more generally, when allied with local-level institutions, deliver more effective governance at those levels (Krishna 2004). The current Solomons program was designed to help provincial-level agencies to improve service delivery, build the capacity of local NGOs to act as facilitators or intermediaries in assisting community capacity, and assist communities identify and develop livelihood opportunities.

Post-conflict engagement: Lessons from Bougainville roads

Post-conflict environment

Severe civil conflict prevailed on the island of Bougainville (North Solomons Province) of Papua New Guinea between 1988 and 1997. The dispute began at the site of the Bougainville copper mine, but spread throughout the southern part of the island, and effectively isolated the province for those nine years. The conflict, which began as a secessionist movement but transformed into a civil war amongst Bougainvilleans, gained widespread media attention because of police and

military involvement and an aborted attempt to introduce mercenaries to resolve the conflict. Following a long-negotiated truce that led to an agreed peace process, a situation of calm was restored in 1997, due largely to the efforts of women in the warring communities, and with concurrent inputs from peace-keepers from Australia and New Zealand (May, 2004).

Contrast

Prior to the conflict, Bougainville and Buka islands were very different from the rest of Papua New Guinea. In the 1980s provincial income from Bougainville Copper Limited meant North Solomons Province and the central part of Bougainville in particular were 'developed' in a way that the rest of the country was not. Bougainville was the only area outside the major cities of Port Moresby and Lae to be characterised by houses of permanent materials, modern motor vehicles, well-stocked supermarkets, widespread use of English for business and commerce, and a thriving cash economy. For those who had known Bougainville then, it was a severe shock to see the area in late 1997. Vehicles were no longer visible, and there was no petroleum-based fuel. Shops, commercial buildings and a majority of town housing were in ruins, with lush vegetation having encroached on the broken framework of burned-out and collapsed infrastructure. Schools had closed during the conflict, and children spoke local *tok ples* or some *tok pisin*, but no English. People had retreated to subsistence lifestyles, in many instances without the benefit of experience, as the mine had provided their 'developed' economy for 20 years prior to the conflict. It had been necessary for older people to teach the young traditional subsistence survival skills. Nothing had been able to replace 'western' medicine adequately, and malaria and its complications, especially for pregnant women, had resulted in high death rates, quite apart from those caused directly by the conflict.

Australia back in Bougainville

An AusAID mission visited Bougainville in late 1997 to determine a design to meet the Province's immediate transport needs. While an operational base from which the Province was governed had been established on Buka island (to the north of the main island of Bougainville) there were no road links in Bougainville. Access was very limited beyond Buka. The design team travelled by helicopter, and located many bridges and major road sections that needed total repair and replacement. Purchased goods were unavailable, and in the south of the island food supplies were very limited. Most people had no access to educational or medical facilities, except where such services occurred within walking distance. Given AusAID's focus on poverty alleviation, it was acknowledged that roads and jetties were fundamental transport needs for access to basic services such as schools and health centres, and for transport of goods and local products to and from markets.

The design

Two main design options were considered for a road rehabilitation project. One was to bring in a road-building contractor possibly from Port Moresby, or from Australia or New Zealand, to have that company build the road and associated bridges, and possibly to employ local people on a day-labour basis. This would have been efficient in terms of value-for-money, and would have delivered a completed rehabilitated access road system for Bougainville within a minimal period. The second option was a less efficient design, that would involve the establishment or re-establishment of local construction companies, the hire of locally available equipment and materials, the supervision of local teams to construct sections of the road, and the complex management of disparate groups, possibly with inadequate equipment and limited access to spare parts and maintenance. The management team would include local community liaison people, local environmental coordinators, local works supervisors, and associated local labour groups.

Discussions during the design process resulted in a clear preference from the Bougainville community for this latter less efficient system, and after considerable review, that was the process selected. Although suspicion of outsiders was an issue in determining the strategy, the fundamental basis for the decision was that people wanted to participate in income-generating work

The road construction took a long time. Machinery had to be re-built and was expensive to maintain. Local government supervisors required training in project management, in road and bridge design, in supervision of works staff, and support as managers. Many people were employed, and some people acquired business skills, and were able to improve their own (commonly salvaged) equipment. Women's and youth groups gained access to associated contract work such as grass cutting, drain-clearing, gravel supply, and gabion basket-filling. Community individuals or groups were encouraged to participate and to contribute to this local rehabilitation of services.

The project delivered a trafficable road, but it did more than that. It encouraged local participation in reconstruction as part of a peace effort. It built capacity locally, it developed skills in community facilitation and liaison, and it raised awareness of the issues related to road maintenance, and social and environmental impacts.

The development lesson was recently described as being much more than the reconstruction of a road and the provision of market and service access (Regan in Hegarty and Thomas 2005). It also used donor money to assist in post-conflict peace-building through creating and spreading

economic activities, encouraging integration of former combatants, building capacity in the communities, and will in the next phase – which has strong support within the Province - build capacity in the Administration. The road project has built local confidence, and encouraged previously warring groups to work together for common good. It engendered trust between those groups, at least as far as that common purpose was concerned, and it encouraged local livelihoods by supporting the re-establishment of a service industry in Bougainville. The key lesson for donors is that full community participation that enables capacity building and skills enhancement and encourages communities to work together can contribute in several ways to restoring or maintaining peace.

Community support in post-conflict Solomon Islands — CPRF

Conflict and post-conflict

In the past decade, the Solomon Islands experienced several years of unrest due to ethnic conflict that led to the formation of armed militant groups, comprising mainly young men and adolescent males. The conflict resulted in deaths, displacement of families and destruction of personal and government property. Guadalcanal and Malaita were impacted directly but the conflict exacerbated a breakdown in government systems that were already failing to deliver basic services, especially in rural areas, so all provinces were affected. With the intervention of New Zealand and Australia and the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement, the conflict ended formally in October 2000.

An AusAID humanitarian and rehabilitation mission visited the Solomon Islands in August 2000 and recommended a number of interventions including the establishment of a community peace fund. Their report provided the original rationale and goal for what became the Community Peace and Restoration Fund (CPRF) and served as its foundation document (Sullivan and Pattison 2004). The mission observed these issues:

- While the conflict in Solomon Islands was primarily ethnic, there were other factors which had been exacerbating levels of tension for many years — inequitable access to development, perceived injustices around land compensation, intra-ethnic tensions, the clash between conservatism associated with traditional tribal governance and modern values with different structures of authority and individual power-seeking
- Acknowledged that as most needs and issues identified existed prior to the crisis as a consequence of chronic underdevelopment, there were not likely to be immediate solutions
- Some problems, especially inter-group resentment and mistrust, and issues relating to the resettlement of displaced persons, were direct consequences of the conflict

- The very small scale of most sectoral activity, the roles and in many instances virtual collapse of different levels of government and the involvement of other donors precluded any proposed Australian aid from focussing on a specific sector or area
- Traditionally where government resources are limited, non-government or civil society organisations (NGOs, CSOs) take on sectoral support roles, but the equally small scale and limited capacities of available delivery mechanisms meant no single group offered adequate scope to provide a broadly based community response. It was observed that most such organisations would benefit from capacity building support.

Objectives and methodology

The mission attempted to identify strategic opportunities that would promote peace at the same time as addressing both immediate and longer-term needs. The recommendations, which guided CPRF and acted as the implementation framework, were that:

- the local population must be empowered to maintain ownership of the peace process if a durable solution to the crisis was to be found
- Australia should take a flexible approach and establish a broad-based community peace fund that could target all sectors and delivery mechanisms
- the fund should be established for a minimum period of 12 months.

Criteria for the operation of the fund recommended by the humanitarian and rehabilitation mission were that activities should be underpinned by reconciliation and peace-building objectives rooted in community participation, i.e. they must act as vehicles to strengthen communities as well as address immediate needs. Projects to be funded should have broad-based support within the community, make maximum use of local resources and institutions — with unemployed or underemployed youth a priority — and have immediate tangible benefits. They should provide support to local capacities for peace. Guidelines for the proposed community peace fund allowed for emergency relief assistance.

An activity was established immediately following the mission, simply as a fund/facility with a goal: to provide incentives to communities to pursue peaceful resolutions to disputes and to assist them to address priority community concerns. This was made operational by a Honiara-based AusAID officer assisted by a local community development specialist.

The Community Peace and Restoration Fund (CPRF) was established in November 2000, as a formal AusAID activity, with a team leader and local administrative support, initially for a six-month period. With hindsight, the longer timeframe recommended in the report was probably warranted, but the potential risks in a constantly changing environment weighed against that.

It had a more specific purpose that evolved to be “to provide support for small-scale, community-based initiatives, which meet reintegration, resettlement and rehabilitation needs of affected populations in a manner that promotes peace and reconciliation between parties to the conflict.” This was highly ambitious and it remains difficult to see how small grants could in themselves be ‘peace promoters’, but it was clear to Australia’s representatives in Honiara that something had to be done. That was in contrast to the total inaction on the part of the state instrumentalities and elected representatives — the former paralysed, the latter intent on either positioning themselves for the spoils or too afraid to act (or both). AusAID had experience with small community grants, and knew that these mobilised a high proportion of community members and focussed attention on the benefits of meeting a locally identified need.

Community engagement

CPRF addressed immediate needs identified by communities. Key objectives were responsiveness and equitable distribution of projects in all provinces (later in all wards) and to women and youth as well as to men. The delivery mechanism for CPRF involved selecting and training provincial coordinators (PCs), who acted as community facilitators. People were chosen who had standing within, and the trust of a significant proportion of their communities. From the outset one male and one female coordinator were selected for each province, and one for Honiara, with the number of coordinators increasing as CPRF was extended and grew. The initial six-month contract was extended repeatedly, but always for time periods of six to twelve months, so there was no ability to plan for longer-term support or extended community projects.

Conflict ceased formally in October of 2000, but skirmishes and lawlessness continued and in some areas accelerated until the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) intervention in July 2003. At this time there were still no almost services, except a slight increase in transport services and ability to travel. The tension had remained even though the overt fighting had stopped.

Initially CPRF requests were ‘post-conflict’ specific. Many requests were for mediation support and training, group counselling on trauma and reconciliation, workshops to discuss the re-establishment of traditional leadership, support to Councils of Chiefs to reconvene and exert authority in villages, grants targeted to women, and demobilising youth who were interested in locally beneficial activities. There were also requests for the rebuilding of school classrooms, water supplies and health centres that had been destroyed during the conflict or allowed to deteriorate through years of government neglect and failure to provide maintenance services. For the first year CPRF was the only obvious ‘connector’ the communities had. The churches had

retreated to an evangelical role and did not have the ability or (even if they had the inclination) to deliver material benefits, which the new actor CPRF did.

By the end of its first two years CPRF had begun to change from responding to an emergency post-conflict situation to meeting requests for a wide range of community facilities and longer-term livelihood support, in an environment that gradually became more settled. As CPRF evolved, the coordinators acted as extension agents. Projects shifted towards sectoral interventions and some community development, in which the coordinators received basic trainer-training. CPRF evolved from delivering activities responding to restoration and rehabilitation needs of communities affected by ethnic tension, into what resembled a community support project. It ended in February 2005, with a total allocation of just over AUD\$21 million.

It was recognised that an activity was needed with better support to focus on community development and in late 2003 a design was undertaken within the broad framework of CPRF, for a more comprehensive follow-on Community Sector Program (CSP) — to incorporate the lessons learned and build upon CPRF's systems and networks. That program commenced in February 2005, with a smooth two-week transition/handover period.

Lessons on community engagement emerging from CPRF

There are two common models for international agencies operating in a conflict or post-conflict situation (Anderson 2003): working directly on conflict; and working within a conflict situation to “alleviate suffering and support systemic development”. CPRF fell into the second category. It was to contribute to overall peace-building, which was intended to lead directly to ongoing development.

The original analysis (AusAID 2002) that led to the establishment of CPRF was confirmed by the United Nations 2004 Solomon Islands Peace and Conflict Development Analysis (PCDA). One of the root causes of the conflict was the perceived inequity in accessing government services and resources. CPRF attempted to address that inequality by ensuring a wide distribution of projects throughout the Solomon Islands. Within two years there were coordinators within each province, with up to five in the most heavily populated provinces, and projects had been delivered in every ward in the Solomons. Addressing inequality is fundamental to maintaining peace.

Given the nature of the fund, CPRF was not equipped to undertake situation analyses, and although more projects were delivered in what were perceived to be the most needy areas (Figure 1) this was not systematic, nor was need defined. A systematic approach to supporting

peace through equitable development requires a better analysis of a wide range of community needs.

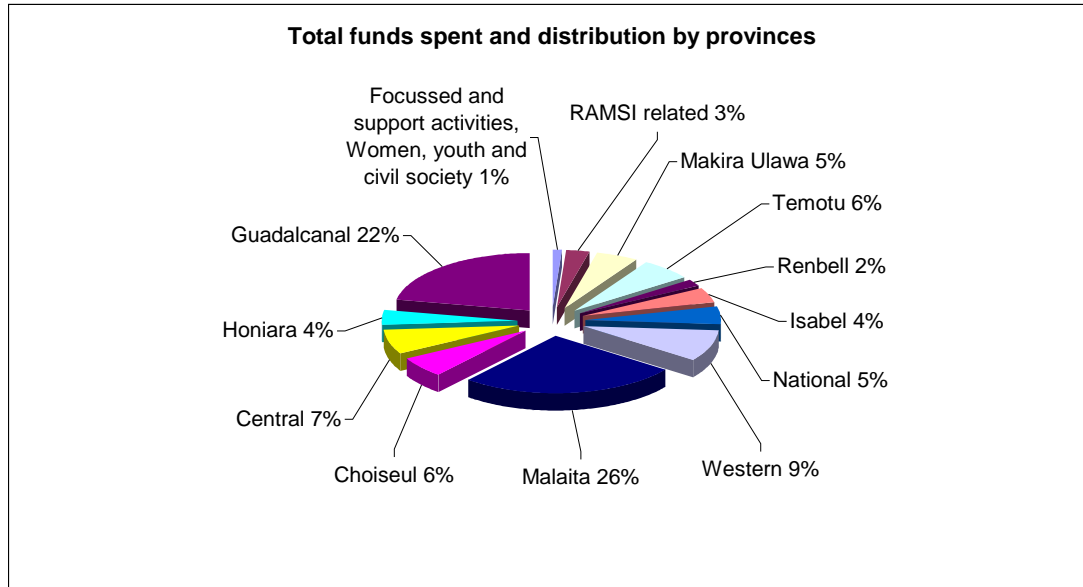


Figure 1. CPRF total expenditure, reflecting the special needs of Malaita and the weather coast of Guadalcanal

The trauma and inability of SI leadership to resume control and build confidence meant that the consequences there were similar to those observed in many other parts of the world — resources fail to be managed by government, services fail, and communities lose confidence (see Bannon and Collier 2003; Collier 2003). In fact, the outcomes of much recent conflict/post-conflict research and observations in post-conflict situations are that confidence and capacity-building are unlikely to occur in conflict and immediate post-conflict situations. It is indicated that communities (of any nature) involved in conflict are distracted, it takes up to four years after conflict ceases before capacity building and development can again be resumed (see for example Clements 2004).

Part of the answer to any questions about the successes or lessons from CPRF is the issue of how secure is the current situation of peace in the Solomon Islands. Long-term observers of the Solomon Islands governance situation (for example, Bennett 2002; Chand 2002, 2004; Hegarty et al. 2004) and the conclusions of the PCDA are that until the original causes are addressed, the potential for conflict remains. Ongoing support is needed and flexibility, responsiveness and processes for promoting peace and stability through community-based activities will need to continue for many years.

It was possible to rate CPRF against post-conflict intervention criteria (Sullivan and Pattison 2004), although it is not easy to define criteria that measure peace and restoration (except to note no lapse to conflict and disquiet). AusAID's August 2000 diagnosis of the elements of the Solomon Islands conflict was confirmed by the PCDA, and CPRF worked to address each of these within its operational parameters. Outputs in the form of improved services and infrastructure are observable. All provinces have new, upgraded or rebuilt schools or classrooms, clinics and aid posts (both sets of facilities now staffed by national government agencies), improved water supplies or sanitation facilities, rehabilitated or new copra driers, repaired or extended roads and other physical benefits. Meetings of traditional chiefs or elders, sporting facilities and many projects supporting women's groups or women's activities were spread throughout the country.

Working together and with CPRF facilitators and technical support teams, in workshops, on sporting projects, on rebuilding or improving schools and clinics, on women's or community resource centres, and on road reconstruction brought people together with a common purpose, and encouraged the restoration of peace and rehabilitation of community harmony and well-being. Many individuals involved in projects gained in self-esteem and confidence, and can take leadership roles within their communities in future. Stories from communities suggest that in areas where there was fighting (on Guadalcanal), disruption and disagreement about the fighting. The greatest benefit came from providing a focus for communities with internal conflicts to come together to achieve a project outcome.

Monitoring was on a case-by-case delivery basis, not of wider impacts or changing context, and with hindsight it is clear that the system used did not allow context and impacts to be monitored. Measuring overall impact against the goal was attempted, by consolidating summary data from project monitoring, with data from other sources using indicators of community strengthening developed by provincial coordinators. Did CPRF "build self-reliance, cohesion and positive relationships between and within communities throughout Solomon Islands by providing incentives and assistance to address priority community concerns?" CPRF was not able to demonstrate unequivocally the consolidated effect of its activities on those higher-level goals of transforming conflict and affecting development.

There was increasing cooperation and development of linkage agreements with CPRF on the part of government agencies in agriculture and works, and with non-government and community organisations as the project developed. Those partners will be service providers in the community sector in the future, so such links and networks remain vital. At its conclusion, CPRF produced

situation summaries for all the sectors within which it had operated. These are a valuable resource, and establish part of the baseline information for the subsequent community sector program

Until recently there were few internationally agreed guidelines for evaluating work in post-conflict settings, but there have been attempts by peace and development agencies (for example, the Berghof Research Center) and practitioners (for example, Anderson 1999, 2003) to address the issues. Anderson noted in particular the dynamic environment within which such activities are undertaken, and that there are inherent difficulties both in measuring impacts in complex dynamic environments, and attributing them accurately to any intervention. She also stressed that the more accurate the diagnosis of the elements of a conflict and the specification of a strategy to address precisely these elements, the more likely will an approach be linked to conflict resolution and peace promotion.

A key lesson is that all activities in post-conflict setting must be managed to allow maximum flexibility. As peace is restored and people become more confident, many move back to former locations or to centres from where people fled during conflict. The context of any development program changes but that occurs rapidly with changes in tensions, and post-conflict programs must be flexible to respond. Post-conflict literature refers to this as 'reflective management'; a common term in wider use is 'adaptive management'. Flexibility in how the program is delivered is essential.

What was especially clear from CPRF in its early phase was that to establish contact and then engagement with communities that had been involved directly in the conflict — in Guadalcanal and Malaita — there needed to be some material element provided, in order for them to be really interested. Workshops and counselling were accepted, but their 'hunger' was to see something tangible.

Another observation from that time was that the mere presence of a provincial coordinator or someone taking an interest in their situation was appreciated greatly. Undoubtedly this enabled an information flow for people isolated by conflict and demonstrated that psychological comfort that can come to people who have lost homes, possessions, jobs and perhaps even family members or friends, from a caring outside organisation. It helped the reorientation process and that may be a step towards peace and reconciliation.

While over 800 community-driven projects were delivered successfully, it is not surprising that some CPRF projects did not achieve all that had been planned. In areas of persisting tensions

people remained apprehensive. In the worst-affected areas, such as along the weather coast of Guadalcanal where village communities were within easy reach of the warring factions and in fact were raided by them, they did not know when well-organised armed gangs might turn up and take their food and money and they were not sure even whether they could trust their local members of parliament. Early projects were least successful where there was both continuing uncertainty over conflict, and there were unsettled issues from many years ago. A failure to agree on rehabilitating a water supply for instance, was because in an area of ongoing tension, resource ownership and usage rights had never previously been agreed when the supply was established. Wider-reaching conflict and ethnic tension aggravated pre-existing local disputes and conflicts, and there is a lesson that this is expectable in such situations.

The main lesson for donors however is the same as that from Bougainville. Success in re-establishing harmony and in rehabilitation of communities affected by conflict is achieved to a major extent through community participation and thorough involvement, covering as many members of community — however defined — as possible. Joint involvement that encourages personal familiarity and working together for mutually beneficial outcomes is almost certainly the greatest contributor to ongoing peace.

CSP — a follow-on community program

A different form of engagement

CPRF finished in February 2005, and there was a smooth transfer to the Community Sector Program (CSP) that had been designed from within the CPRF framework. A key objective was to build on the achievements of CPRF, but to ensure an increased analytical and strategic approach to community development (defined initially as “the process of helping a community strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential by supporting action by people locally to enhance their social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions”) and more direct stakeholder involvement in decision-making.

Approach

Any analysis or evaluation of the contribution of such a program to post-conflict governance will rely on external assessment of the ‘state’ of peace. The managing contractor of CSP has a contractual link with the Australian National University (ANU), ensuring access to a range of relevant researchers, and to the Solomon Islands Country Update series (an annual event for information and knowledge sharing on Solomon Islands).

Strengths of the process of handover from CPRF to CSP

CSP is based on an adaptive rolling program, so specific design shifts that respond to a changing environment are incorporated into annual planning, to enable the program to retain currency and flexibility, respond to changing environments, and promote accountable participatory approaches to service delivery. CSP has re-engaged all the CPRF provincial coordinators to ensure familiarity and encourage community stakeholders to be fully involved, and so take ownership of the planning and the strategic direction of the program. The program undertook early consultations to ensure its directions are in line with both the Australian Government's country program strategy for the Solomon Islands and the Solomon Islands National Economic Recovery, Reform and Development Plan (NERRDP).

To maintain continuity between the CPRF and the CSP, approximately 65 CPRF projects across all provinces were left to be completed at the handover stage. Like CPRF, CSP is continuing to have advertised funding rounds to support community-demand projects, and to encourage sustainability and a more strategic approach to community support and community development. The criteria for selection are being changed gradually, and some program funds are being used to introduce more strategic interventions that follow from the situational analyses this program is able to undertake.

New trust fund documentation enables CSP advisers and provincial coordinators to communicate fairly and consistently with all applicants, to minimise any tendency for conflict of interest, and to focus more on sustainable outcomes or impacts. The new program is establishing provincial working groups (PWGs) and as the governance setting makes it possible, will set up a National Technical Advisory Group with representation from the full range of possible stakeholders, to advise on the operation of the fund. CSP has established procedures that continue to enable a quick response to requests for small activities (fitting within the guidelines for funding but not warranting major submissions for funding rounds) and retain the demand-driven nature and flexibility of CPRF.

Focus

Peace and conflict issues remain a key concern in CSP. Although the Solomon Islands is perceived as being in a post-conflict situation, the root causes, and therefore the potential for further conflict or social unrest still exist, and CSP is cognisant of the need to include conflict-sensitive delivery of its projects, and to include conflict indicators in its monitoring system. The program has a key role in maintaining the still fragile peace, and in assisting in consolidating that peace through a change from community assistance to community development, thus fostering a return to self-sufficiency.

Local governance is also an area of focus in CSP. Some traditional cultural practices in the Solomons are exclusive and do not promote community and national unity. While not setting out to change cultural values, CSP has an objective to increase the role of women and youth in decision-making and this will involve integrating traditional practices with other types of leadership involving especially women, youth and churches. The program includes advocacy and participatory roles for women and youth in developing action plans and in engaging with government. This recognises that cultural practices are already changing, particularly in urban areas, and program support is reinforcing changes already underway.

There is a need for immediate incisive analysis to understand the current situation and capacities in terms of communities, tribal governance, the different roles and authorities of traditional chiefs and administrative leaders, the strengths of partnerships between communities and non-government or civil society organisations, and the ability of communities to engage with formal government at provincial or national level. The involvement of ANU researchers in the program will facilitate this analysis.

A rural livelihoods sectoral theme

The Solomon Islands remains a predominantly rural agriculturally-based subsistence economy, so the rural livelihoods sector offers the main avenue for high demand engagement. It includes both food security and a variety of income generating activities that began to be requested in the last years of CPRF and that continue to be areas of demand, but inadequate government support. The sector offers the only widespread opportunities for local income generation and to provide employment. There is a strong need to include disaffected youths and build-in a range of community development variables, and this forms a key part of the livelihood strategy and ongoing gender involvement and awareness.

CPRF 'delivered for' communities essential infrastructure and support during a time of great need through a strategy that focussed on the equitable distribution of benefits. This was highly successful and ensured a positive reputation for CPRF that CSP is building on to help communities identify and address their own priorities. CSP was designed to enable it to continue to respond to the wide range of concerns that communities identify. A premise underlying the design and early implementation of CSP is that CPRF was a well conceived simple funding mechanism that succeeded in its context because:

- it was timely and interacted with communities
- it focussed on peace and restoration activities, at the local level
- its guiding principles included equity and responsiveness

- it established and maintained an effective outreach network
- it delivered rapidly, responses followed immediately after requests
- it advocated a do-no-harm policy.

A key challenge for CSP is to retain the responsiveness and adaptive style of CPRF, including supporting emergency or priority AusAID or RAMSI activities, while enhancing a more strategic, integrated and informed approach. CPRF benefited many people, and communities were grateful for what it did for them. CSP is now working with communities emphasising sustainability, and encouraging them to be more self-sufficient and assertive with service providers to meet communities' needs.

CPRF, by its nature, was primarily community support with some community development. There was limited community involvement in the selection, design (and in some cases implementation) of projects. It met needs and assisted communities at a crucial time. It was appropriate as a transition to a post-conflict situation activity. There were elements of constraint within CPRF that are now being addressed in CSP, which include:

- a full range of resources to build capacity among its own staff and to work with counterparts to build their capacities
- better access to technical resources
- a mandate no longer constrained to being directly responsive to requests, so able to influence more strategic requests for funding
- adequate resources to undertake economic analyses for planning, to develop support strategies, and to undertake holistic sectoral evaluations, establish baseline information, and undertake impact analyses.

Emphasis on processes

The program includes two main operational mechanisms. There is an analysis and planning mechanism focussing on collecting and analysing information from communities, civil society groups, and government organisations to enable informed strategic planning. The mechanism of demand-driven funding ensures that existing priorities and expectations are met, whilst gradually shifting emphasis to encourage and respond to priority requests based on better needs analysis.

CSP is developing rigorous community development processes and will have to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the added benefits of community self reliance and sustainability that such an approach will produce. The majority of funding for community activities over the coming years is likely to continue to come from donors rather than from government or local income. CSP has begun to implement strategies to improve self reliance by strengthening the links

between communities and service providers, and with other donor-funded activities in the Solomon Islands (including community forestry, customary land registration and an extension of a mechanisms of government activity) that encourage participatory approaches and techniques, and include a range of cooperation agreements focusing on women, youth, peace, governance, and rural training. CSP is attempting to ensure there is no duplication, or competing techniques being taught/implemented, and is enabling participatory-based demands to be channelled into realistic applications for funding or requests for support.

Early lessons for CSP

A key ongoing objective of CSP is to support the maintenance of peace through continuing to address the causes of conflict, but this requires a fundamental understanding of the underlying causes, not just addressing superficial issues of community disquiet. CSP must remain cognisant of the need to continue to apply criteria that made CPRF successful, but must go further in its analysis of the underlying contributions to conflict, and how the program can assist communities to address them. Activities that will support the maintenance of peace, and that foster equitable access to development, and enhance communications over land issues, values and power, should be rooted in community participation, act as vehicles to strengthen communities, have broad-based community support, maximise use of local resources, provide immediate tangible benefits and be flexible to allow for unforeseen demands and emergencies.

As noted, capacity-building support is of little value to shocked communities for a period of up to four years after conflict ceases; after that period support activities can have sustainable impacts. CPRF operated during that time. It is timely for CSP to build on CPRF's successes and principles of adaptive management, but to refocus emphasis on working with communities and intermediaries to build their capacity to better meet their own needs. CSP is supporting communities to identify and address their own problems and priorities. While the program will continue to help communities and service providers address immediate needs, it is developing a strategic and realistic approach to comprehensive community development that encourages communities to help themselves whilst simultaneously engaging with and building the capacity of a range of government and non-government service providers.

What works in engaging communities in post-conflict and development situations?

The lessons to date are not profound. This remains a situation in which everyone is still learning.

There is a long history in developing countries, of community engagement in community development projects that address poverty or lack of services — this is a major area of development support from most donor agencies. Australia uses financial facilities and small

grants as a common mechanism for community support and the development of community capacity in many countries. Current projects of this nature operate, for example in Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Tonga, and small grants schemes to community or other non-government organisations that are managed by AusAID in almost all countries where Australia has a development cooperation program.

The key lesson of engagement in any such program, and especially from Melanesia is that communities and intermediaries must be involved in the development and design of such activities and integrally involved in their delivery. The Community Development Scheme (Ahai 2004) in Papua New Guinea has now operated for more than three years and has confirmed this.

Few lessons relating to engaging communities in post-conflict situations are yet known. What CPRF yielded was further confirmation that as in more 'normal' development settings, that same level of involvement is required for project benefits to be sustained.

Community-based assistance that requires local involvement can encourage people to divert their attention to addressing their own social welfare, but it is very difficult to engage communities at the outset, and in the design of such activities. Facilitators are essential, and need to be local and respected people with the personal strength to dissociate themselves from the conflict issue.

The key to longer-term maintenance of peace and harmonious working together is to facilitate building self-reliance in communities. Development interventions may help to break the conflict cycle or trauma. Until the benefits begin to be realised, however, it is difficult to engage or have the participation of communities, or to build their capacity for self-reliance.

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