



**Mid-Term Review
PNG Community Development Scheme Phase II**

**Pre-departure Briefing
19 February 2004**

**Input by
Pacific Working Group members of
Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA)**

Introduction

ACFOA's PNG-Pacific Working Group welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the AusAID Mid-Term Review of the PNG Community Development Scheme Phase II.

ACFOA member agencies, made up of a range of Australian NGOs including church-based organisations and volunteer-sending agencies, have significant experience working with local partners in PNG. This experience includes on-going multi-level interventions across all sectors by 40 Australian NGOs working with over 200 PNG partner organisations on more than 150 programs/projects. Long-term relationships have been forged with PNG partners. For instance, some church-based organisations have been active in PNG for over 100 years and some volunteer-sending agencies for nearly forty years. The scope, volume and diversity of this experience demonstrates the capacity for, and commitment to, facilitating sustainable development outcomes in PNG. The attached matrix provides more detail of this engagement by ACFOA members with local partner organisations as at May 2003.

ACFOA members are therefore well placed to provide information about lessons from their own and their partners' experience with community development in PNG and specifically with CDS. Some members have direct involvement with CDS through assistance to the staff of their partners in the provinces and through the training provided to the smaller community based organisations in project planning and management.

Assessment of progress and performance of CDS - General comments

ACFOA members regard CDS as a valuable vehicle for advancing community development in PNG. Those PNG partner organisations that provided feedback for this review commented that positive outcomes have been achieved in the first half of Phase II. They made additional comments to further enhance its effectiveness (see attached documentation). The proposed new operating environment for Australian development assistance to PNG under the Enhanced Cooperation Package, highlights the importance of strategically focused engagement with PNG civil society. Australian NGOs working with their PNG partners see a “value-adding” situation if they can more effectively complement their work with that of CDS. A strengthened relationship should contribute to enhanced PNG civil society capacity which will equip them to have their voice more effectively heard within the new operating environment created under the Enhanced Cooperation Package.

ACFOA members appreciate the difficult working environment that CDS and others undertaking work in PNG are faced with. The following comments to the Review Team are constructive and are submitted in the interests of further enhancing CDS as an important PNG civil society capacity building mechanism.

- CDS Projects are about capacity strengthening but it is felt that much of this enhanced capacity relates to ‘compliance’ activities associated with the project. Whilst recognising the importance of building compliance skills and acknowledging the interrelated nature of project compliance activities and overall capacity strengthening, value could be added by greater concentration on strengthening skills specifically for community planning and needs assessment, monitoring community development outcomes and evaluating impact.
- It has been observed that many field workers require further assistance to strengthen core skills. Also, it has been observed that in some cases field workers allowances are not being paid and as a result their vital role in the CDS project cycle is not fulfilled.
- Further monitoring and evaluation of projects in the field would assist in ensuring effective development outcomes. Having said this, it is nevertheless acknowledged that on-going monitoring and evaluation of such a large number of projects is extremely difficult in the PNG environment. The organisational structure of CDS assists significantly in the monitoring and evaluation process but investigation of additional M&E processes could be useful.
- The importance of strengthening an overall strategic/geographical approach is noted. Whilst recognising that the nature of working in this particular environment gives rise to an *ad hoc* approach and to rewarding those who are good at “undertaking a project”, a more strategic approach would add value. For instance, each CDS project has a well-developed

plan. These could form part of an overall community development strategy. This could help overcome some of the problems highlighted by local partners about “sustainability”.

Ways by which Australian NGOs can add value to work of CDS

- Capacity building through international volunteers, either long- or short-term to help especially with building skills of CDS community ‘core groups’.
- Capacity building through local PNG volunteers.
- Monitoring. Whilst in the field on other projects, ANGOs can feed back information (eg as has been the case with reporting back by an Australian NGO project with a presence involving 60 field workers in remote parts of the Sepik and monitored a CDS project associated with water tank placement).
- Information exchange. For example, many community-based organisations/ PNG NGOs approach Australian NGOs and their local partners to find out how to access CDS.
- Policy experience could be shared through the existing network. There is strength in aligning together, complementing each others work as a means of giving teeth to all community development work in PNG. Australian NGOs have much experience in governance and leadership, especially as it applies to autonomous and small groups in the non-government sector. They can provide valuable advice and assistance in ensuring that these needs are met in CDS.

Some comments from the field on STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN PNG

ACCOUNTABILITY, GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY

There is a need in PNG for Australians to stop leading. The exercise of continuous leadership is inhibiting the build up of local leadership and the experience of success and failure that is necessary in order to build up leadership skills.

If the engagement of outside NGOs serves to add another level of outside leadership, then nothing fruitful will be gained. There is already resentment within PNG directed against interfering BINGOES (Big International NGOs). Though the welfare NGOs are not included in this criticism, great care should be taken to include their role only as facilitators.

Just as in the wider national context, PNG needs less outside leadership but greater skilled facilitation. The overlap of rapid social and technological change and western organisational structures within the context of Melanesian culture has led to a situation where governance, accountability and transparency are widely cited problems. This is as true for small NGOs as it is for provincial and national bureaucracies and the national government itself. Failure of governance at all levels is the major cause of structural breakdown in this nation.

What does this mean we should do? Firstly recognise the need across the spectrum of Australian involvement in PNG. Make sure that our capacity building efforts focus on these needs. Make sure that all personnel have training in these issues. Make sure that all programs include this aspect in their design.

To that end, Australian NGOs have much experience in governance and leadership, especially as it applies to autonomous and small groups in the non-government sector. They can provide valuable advice and assistance in ensuring that these needs are met in CDS and other programs.

*Chris Harries
International Volunteer,
Communications Officer
ENBSEK
Social Action Committee (Sosel Eksen Komiti)
East New Britain*

Role of ACFOA representative/observer on Advisory Committee

There is a need for clarity in the role and operational arrangements for the ACFOA representative/observer on the Advisory Committee.

- ACFOA members have long and deep partnerships in PNG. They believe that CDS would be strengthened by sharing experiences of the local partner/ANGO relationships and activities. CDS should tap this experience, not just as an add on but as an integral part of the scheme.
- Currently Australian NGOs are structurally excluded from the process with an unclear mandate. For instance, what does “observer status” actually mean?
- ACFOA would like to have an “alternate” to cater for those times when the nominated representative is not available to travel to PNG. As you are aware Phase I of CDS provided full airfare and accommodation costs whereas Phase II provides only half airfare and no accommodation costs. The existing AMC holds the view that sharing of costs shows commitment. We believe that the cost of the representative should be

paid in full by the project unless it is a cost-sharing arrangement on another AusAID project monitoring visit. Under the half airfare cost arrangement, the ACFOA representative can only travel to the meeting when it coincides with existing travel to PNG. This proves difficult in situations where the time and place of the meeting change. Full coverage of airfare and accommodation would ensure representation at all Advisory Committee meetings. As well, partial coverage of airfares means that only part of our membership (the larger, better-funded agencies) can be considered for nomination as either the nominee or alternate.

- The above comment is submitted in the spirit of facilitating “participation”, rather than “observation” in the process. The considerable experience and strong relationships with local partners that Australian NGOs have in PNG, place them in a good position to provide critical analysis of proposed projects. We are encouraged by comments from the AMC about their wish to engage more with Australian NGOs.

Continuation of CDS Phase II

ACFOA members believe that it is important to extend CDS into a third phase. Strengthening civil society in PNG is a slow, incremental process and can only evolve through long-term commitment to CDS on the part of AusAID. CDS is an important funding source for smaller, grassroots based projects.

The key focus of Phase II has been capacity building. Both core groups and field workers are benefiting from extensive training to achieve explicit competencies. This aspect needs to be intensified with additional emphasis and resources in the second half of Phase II. Unless there is real commitment to funding innovative and culturally appropriate strengthening of CDS Phase II, then the sustainability and the objectives of the project cannot be achieved.

ACFOA’s PNG-Pacific Working Group thanks you for the opportunity to provide input to the Mid-Term Review of the PNG Community Development Scheme Phase II.

19 February 2004