

CASE STUDY

Solomon Islands PCDA

1. The Solomon Islands is a sprawling archipelago to the north-east of the Australian continent. The country has a population just over 400,000 people and more than 70 language groups signifying its cultural diversity. Solomon Islands is ranked 124 on the 2004 Human Development Index and is one of the 49 Least Developed Countries in the world.

2. Violent conflict in the Solomon Islands, locally referred to as 'the tensions', began in 1998 when a group of militant youths from the island of Guadalcanal attacked settlements of islanders predominantly from Malaita (a neighboring island) in northwest Guadalcanal, an area bordering the capital city Honiara. Their actions were prompted by the failure of successive national governments to address issues raised by the indigenous people of Guadalcanal. First tabled as 'bona fide demands' in 1988 and again in January 1999, the issues that were listed were rent from the use of Honiara as the capital city; non-payment of compensation for the indigenous people killed by settlers over the years; demands for the review of the Land and Title Act; the squatter settlements; and restrictions on citizens from other provinces from owning land on Guadalcanal.

3. The increasingly belligerent behavior of these Guadalcanal militant groups resulted in some 25 000 Malaitans fleeing Guadalcanal and an estimated 11 000 people from Guadalcanal people exited the capital city of Honiara for the safety of the interior of Guadalcanal. The violence escalated at the start of 2000 when a resistance group named the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), claiming to represent the interests of the Malaitans who had been displaced, armed themselves by raiding police armories and subsequently took control of Honiara. Small arms skirmishes took place frequently between MEF and Guadalcanal militants around the city limits and other key areas on Guadalcanal and neighboring islands.

How was the peace restored?

4. In August 2000 the Australian and New Zealand governments assisted in negotiating a ceasefire between the militant groups. This ceasefire failed and further negotiations by the assisting two governments brought a response from belligerent parties, the provincial governments of Malaita and Guadalcanal and the central government of Solomon Islands to participate in the Townsville peace conference in October 2000. This resulted in the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA).

5. The TPA established the framework to progress the peace process by establishing an indigenous Peace Monitoring Council (PMC) supported by an International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT) that comprised 50 armed police and civilians from Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island Countries. The mandate of the PMC was to oversee the peace process, pursue recommendations and enforce compliance.

6. The PMC and the IPMT made considerable progress in the difficult environment. The PMC's monitoring teams engaged affected communities building confidence through information sharing and stigmatization campaigns such as 'weapons-free villages'. Weapons were also collected and reconciliation ceremonies facilitated.

7. Apart from these efforts the implementation of the TPA was seen as limited. Militant leaders and many politicians kept their guns, especially the high powered guns that were seized from the police armories. Obtaining compensatory funds and other state resources for self interest replaced political affairs. The environment became characterised by rampant lawlessness. Extortion, theft and beatings became commonplace in and around Honiara. The state became ineffective. It was unable to meet reparation commitments outlined in the TPA and all major revenue earning industry had stopped and the security organs were largely

ineffective because of the lack of capacity and that they had been infiltrated by criminal elements and the involvement of personal in prior TPA militant action was unresolved.

8. In 2003 the Australian government led a multilateral Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The assistance mission was in response to a request from the newly elected Solomon Islands government for support in restoring the rule of law.

9. Under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum, the regional multilateral organ, more than 2000 police and soldiers from many member countries landed in Solomon Islands with the mandate to 'reinforce and uphold the legitimate institutions and authorities in Solomon Islands, and insure respect for the Constitution and the implementation of laws'. RAMSI's first goal was to reinstate law and order. As the rule of law returned and donor activity restarted UNDP commissioned a Peace and Conflict related Development Analysis of Solomon Islands within this context.

What was the rationale for undertaking a PCDA?

10. UNDP and other donors recognized early that fundamental development issues fed into the tensions and helped provoke violence. There was also a recognized need to peel away the multiple layers of violence in order to build a sense of the interconnections, dynamics, histories, contexts and trajectories in order to avoid reconstructing the same conditions again. UNDP, together with the National Peace Council (NPC) the former PMC, proposed the idea of carrying out a joint Peace and Conflict-Related Development Analysis (PCDA). The PCDA is a means of assessing the ways in which an intervention may affect, or has affected the dynamics of peace or conflict in a conflict prone region. PCDA focuses on:

- 1) Peacebuilding Impact – those factors that strengthen the chances for peace and decrease the chances that violent conflict will breakout, continue, or start again, and;
- 2) Conflict-Creating Impact – those factors that increase the chances that conflict will be dealt with through the use of violence.

11. Broadly, the objectives of the exercise in this instance were to:

- ◆ Analyse the causes of the conflict in Solomon Islands in particular reference to development dimensions;
- ◆ Formulate recommendations for donor and Government strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding;
- ◆ Conduct capacity building exercises, including a workshop on conflict assessment and planning workshop for forward strategies with the mandated government ministries.

PCDA – Process

12. In partnership with the Solomon Islands National Peace Council and the Department of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, the UNDP team led by Dr Ken Bush interviewed over 300 people representing governments, donors, private sector, non-government organizations and community representatives such as village elders, chiefs, senior women and church leaders. Initial consultations were held with eminent people in government, NGOs, the church and the donor community. After this focus groups were created and participatory peace and conflict research techniques were completed within these groups. The focus group work was supplemented by field visits to provincial areas that were directly and indirectly affected by the conflict.

13. Throughout this process regular meetings were held with a group labeled "Friends of the PCDA". This group consisted of interested people from organizations directly working in the peace and development field such as Councilors from the NPC, NGOs, donor and prominent Solomon Islands people. The group was a forum that was knowledgeable and able to provide input on the next steps as well as clarification on the complex interrelationship between peace and conflict actors. The role of the Friends group was for the UNDP team to update attendants and bounce ideas and information within a forum that was knowledgeable and able to provide input on the next steps.

At the end of the multi-layered consultative process draft recommendations were tabled at a Peacebuilding Forum. The forum was a round table on eminent people. Rich discussion was had on the grouping and description of peace and conflict actors, root causes, triggers and issues. The feedback from the forum was then channeled back into the document and the final edit process began. On completion it was presented to the Solomon Islands Government. The executive body, the cabinet decided to endorse the document and its recommendations.

4. What were the main results? How did they differ from the previous understanding that the UN system and the donors' community had of the conflict?

The PCDA refined and put in one document the understanding of various local communities of the drivers of peace and conflict and what priorities they perceive. The Analysis brought many important issues to the fore. Below are examples of a few of the prominent issues.

- The imperative of making progress on land ownership. The lack of clarity is an underlying and systemic cause of conflict.
- The need to reinforce and adapt modern governance structures and bring them closer to the people: executive, judicial, and legislative
- The need to recognize and reinforce the authority of traditional leaders and their reconciliation powers.
- The dangers of “expat wantokism”, referring to the rapid post-conflict programming by the donor community which at times fails to consult and keep in the driver’s seat Solomon nationals.

The core issues identified by the analysis included (i) land, (ii) the clash between traditional and non-traditional authority structures, (iii) lack of access to government services, public resources and information, [was this across the country or only certain regions] (iv) lack of economic opportunities [same question as above] (v) breakdown in traditional and non-traditional law enforcement mechanisms.

The PCDA has helped build an understanding of what the conflict was and was not, and it tore down widely held and potentially dangerous beliefs that the conflict was fundamentally about ethnicity

5. How were the results incorporated in the UN/UNDP strategies and programs?

At the time of writing it was too early to tell the noticeable impact that the results of the PCDA has had on programming and strategy. What has been evident at the country level is the government’s commitment to creating sustainable peace. The government has renewed the mandate of the premier indigenous peace organisation the Solomon Islands National Peace Council for another five years to 2009. Furthermore, donor organisations are listing the document as mandatory reading for new field workers and the discourse of the PCDA is starting to be used by these organisations in their descriptions of the issues and ‘tensions’. In addition discussion is on going between UNDP and the Solomon Islands government about possible ‘next moves’ on the implementation of PCDA recommendations and specific policy. As the document has been endorsed by the executive of government the PCDA has become a useful start for such discussions.

At a regional level UNDP is encouraging evidence based approaches that are specific to Pacific Islands on peace and conflict issues. Conflict prevention and recovery sub-regional programming is also drawing up issues such as traditional and non-traditional authority structures that were brought out in the Solomon Islands PCDA. As UNDP continues assessments in at-risk or recovering Pacific Island countries common themes and issues are resonating such as land, access to government services and public resources and economic opportunity. The sub-regional programme is looking at exploring the utility of traditional mechanisms for conflict prevention and Peacebuilding.

In addition the PCDA has become a reference document which donor missions considering activities in the Solomon Islands consult to inform their proposals. This is true for Australia, the largest of donors and leader of the large peacekeeping work, and the EU, which has distributed this in Brussels as a best practice to other departments working with post-conflict countries.

As the EU represented eloquently put it at the Donor Partners Conference in November 2004, “The PCDA should inform the government on how to guide the many inputs which donors are offering in partnership so as to minimize conflict and maximize development returns” The PCDA thus has had an impact not only at the level of national planning policy and provincial administration, but also at the level of Cabinet and the work of the Ministry of Peace and National Unity and its reconciliatory work.

The PCDA and the Solomon Islands case illustrate that even in a tiny island state of less than half a million people, inequality in the distribution of resources and the lack of respect can result in violent conflict and tension.