

# **BOUGAINVILLE: THE PEACE PROCESS AND BEYOND**

*Submission to Joint Standing Committee on  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee Inquiry*

# **Contents**

## **1. Key Points**

## **2. Community Aid Abroad**

## **3. Community Aid Abroad and Bougainville**

## **4. Conclusion**

***"The (Bougainville) crisis has been like a university for us; we have learnt so much about what we are able to do for ourselves and we don't want to lose that."***

## **Key Points**

- The peace process is fragile and delicately balanced. Parties have talked about the issues they can agree on to date but the question of political status of Bougainville remains an unresolved issue.
- There is a great deal of mistrust about Australia's role during the war which carries over to the present; particularly in Central Bougainville.
- The speed, scope and scale of aid going into Bougainville from a range of bilateral and multilateral donors as well as NGOs is of grave concern. While donors (including AusAID) talk about the need for a peace dividend to be seen on the ground; the large numbers of outsiders doing assessments and the aid programs being implemented are seen generally by people as threats to the community based initiatives which have been built during the period of the war. People feel that they are losing control of the process of their own development.

There is a lack of understanding by many of the donors now attempting to implement programs of the complexity of the issues. There is the potential for the divisions which people are attempting to heal to be opened by outsiders insensitive to the political and social complexities and by the inequity which some of these programs are causing. There is also a strong feeling that the kind of aid programs going into Bougainville are 'more of the same as we had before'. That is, everywhere people are clear that the model of development which characterised Bougainville pre-crisis is not the kind of development that people want for the future.

- Decisions about the scale and scope and kind of aid programs are being made before Bougainvilleans have had a chance to talk together and make decisions about what kind of Bougainville they want to re-build. The absence of clear coordinating mechanisms means that people are feeling overwhelmed by the range and number of outside groups in some areas. The issue of self reliance which people feel very strongly about all over Bougainville must be a key component of the policy debates which are still to happen.

There have for example been some extraordinary primary health care programs developed in parts of Bougainville which blend Western and traditional approaches and which have demonstrated extraordinary success in decreasing the incidence of preventable illness and in shifting responsibility for health prevention and education to the village level. People who have been involved in such programs must be part of the discussion about the kind of health programs which are planned and implemented in Bougainville. Likewise, the range of

appropriate technology developed during the war is amazing. These initiatives must be supported, strengthened and built on. The emphasis on re-building infrastructure without recognising the skills, vision and achievements of people during the war is a recipe for disaster.

- Outside groups are negotiating with key leaders who are often self appointed, almost exclusively male and who are concerned about their own political status and power base. The role of women in building the peace process while recognised has not been acknowledged in the structures for consultation.
- The role of the TMG and now the PMG is widely recognised as being very positive and the approach taken by personnel is appreciated and acknowledged almost universally in very positive feedback from Bougainvilleans.
- Overall, caution should be our guide. There is a great deal yet to happen before the process of reconciliation between Bougainvilleans is complete. People need the time and space to continue these processes while at the same time being given the opportunity to make decisions about what is important for them in the future development of Bougainville.

## **Community Aid Abroad**

Community Aid Abroad (Community Aid Abroad) is an independent, community based Australian organisation which promotes social justice and the alleviation of poverty through the funding of development projects overseas in the regions of South Asia, Africa, the Pacific, Central America, Indo-China, South East Asia and in Aboriginal Australia. Community Aid Abroad also sees as part of its role the stimulation of policy debate within Australia. Community Aid Abroad supports advocacy work which aims to address the underlying causes of inequality and powerlessness. Community Aid Abroad is a member of Oxfam International and of ACFID and works closely with our sister organisation in the Pacific, Oxfam New Zealand.

## **Community Aid Abroad and Bougainville**

Community Aid Abroad's contribution to this inquiry is based on 25 years of support for development programs in Melanesia. Community Aid Abroad's strategy in recent years in the Pacific is to concentrate our support on strengthening the indigenous NGO sector. The assumption is that the continued growth and strengthening of this sector as a collective and critical voice is essential for the development of accountability in both the public and private sector. Our strategy is to support NGOs with whom we have relationships based on solidarity, advocacy, networking, information and skills exchange as well as the transfer of small amounts of funding. Community Aid Abroad has had involvement in various ways in Bougainville throughout the past nine years of the conflict. Community Aid Abroad's position on Bougainville has been determined solely by its concern for the people suffering as a result of the conflict. Community Aid Abroad does not take a position on the question of the political future of the Bougainville except that it advocates peace, a negotiated settlement, reconciliation and reconstruction.

Community Aid Abroad has maintained opposition to military activities and human rights abuses on both sides of the Bougainville conflict. Community Aid Abroad opposed the use of a blockade as a political weapon, regarding this as a denial of basic human rights to health care of the civilian population.

Community Aid Abroad' advocacy on Bougainville has included calling for the Australian government:

- to publicly express its opposition to a military approach to solving the problems of Bougainville;
- to review Australia's military support to PNG;
- to support in every way it can the Resolutions of the UN Commission on Human Rights calling for a negotiated settlement to the conflict and urging the PNG government to permit international fact-finding missions access to Bougainville. Our other main advocacy foe is the ACFID Bougainville Working Group which aims to share information amongst agencies working on Bougainville as well as to share information with Australian Government about issues to do with aid, the peace process and encourage greater NGO/Govt cooperation on Bougainville issues.

As well as playing an advocacy role, Community Aid Abroad currently supports the work of two organisations working on Bougainville; The Bougainville Community Based Integrated Humanitarian Program (BOCBIHP) and Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (LNWDA).

The Bougainville Community Based Integrated Humanitarian Program (BOCBIHP) was established as a small NGO in Honiara in 1996, at the time the only local NGO in the region. It's aim has been to provide support for self-help community development programs in the non-government controlled areas of South and Central Bougainville, where the social, economic and political impacts of the blockade were most severe.

Community Aid Abroad was instrumental in the establishment of BOCBIHP and along with APHEDA, we were the only outside NGOs to support them through the critical years of the crisis.

During the nine years of the crisis Central and South Bougainville had little contact with the outside world. Despite the danger and risks involved, BOCBIHP played a life saving role in bringing in supplies of medicines and health and education materials, and by providing desperately needed services. BOCBIHP has done a remarkable job in establishing a highly successful basic primary health program, under extremely difficult blockade conditions, and with only small amounts of support from outside. BOCBIHP has also supported the establishment of a network of education facilities, including village community schools and training centres for Community Health Workers and teachers.

BOCBIHP currently has three projects: (i) Primary Health Care, (ii) Community Education, and (iii) Women's Sewing Project. Community Aid Abroad has provided support for the health and education projects. Achievements under these projects have included the following:

- Since 1996 BOCBIHP has facilitated the establishment of 96 Village Health Clinics in Central, South and Northeast Bougainville to promote primary and preventative health care, as well as the Paruparu Education Development Centre (PEDC), which runs training programs for Village Birth Attendants and Community Health Workers. The project has also supported the transport of basic medical and health training supplies from the Solomon Islands. The program has had spectacular success in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, and rates of preventable diseases in the area in which it has been operating (Statistics compiled by Paruparu Health Centre for the years 1990-1998 show in-patient figures to be reduced by 75% throughout the period, and out-patient figures to have been reduced by 40%).
- BOCBIHP's Education Program has encouraged and supported over 100 village community schools, currently teaching a total of about 7000 students. These schools are providing an education for the bulk of the school age children who have been deprived of an education during the war.
- BOCBIHP has played a key role in supporting the PEDC which runs Teacher Training programs, and vocational courses in Electronics and Communications, Appropriate Technology, Agriculture, Administration and Accounting, Academic Upgrading, Home Management, Mechanics, and Carpentry.
- The PEDC also runs a Women's Training Program which has established 10 women's associations for the purpose of socialisation, confidence building and support, and for training of women and young girls in skills such as home management, traditional crafts, sewing and nutrition.
- The Women's Sewing Project has opened 20 sewing centres, supplied with both sewing machines and basic materials.

BOCBIHP's current objectives are to:

- Improve the standard of basic primary health care in Central and South Bougainville, focussing on maternal and child health and preventable diseases, by expanding BOCBIHP's Primary Health Care Program (PHC);
- Strengthen and improve the quality of BOCBIHP's health training programs in Central and South Bougainville;
- Upgrade the quality of primary education in community and literacy schools;
- Strengthen BOCBIHP's teacher training programs.

They aim to do this through the following activities:

- Extend the PHC program by (i) development of a 5 year manpower resource training plan, (ii) recruitment and training of young people from villages currently without PHC, to enable them to start new programs, and (iii) training of Village Health Committees in villages without PHC, to enable them to monitor implementation of PHC programs;
- Extend PHC awareness campaign to areas where PHC is a new concept;
- Improve the functions of existing health clinics through inservice training and a national training workshop for health workers;
- Reconstruction and repair of classrooms at the Paruparu Education Development Center (PEDC), to cater for the increase in student enrolments;
- Continued running training programs at PEDC for Community Health Workers, Village Health Committees and Village Birth Attendants;
- Provision of equipment for village health centres;
- Provision of resource materials for community and literacy schools;
- Conduct national training workshop for teachers currently teaching in schools;
- Establish Education Resource Development mobile team to visit schools to provide support and monitor their progress;
- Provision of resource materials and curriculum review for PEDC teacher training programs.

BOCBIHP is still operating out of Honiara in the Solomon Islands for logistical and safety reasons. It is hoped that the BOCBIHP Coordinating Committee will be able to relocate to Bougainville to establish a base from which to continue their work at the end of 1999, and a priority for them is to secure premises in Arawa for this purpose.

The focus of Community Aid Abroad's continuing support will be for training materials and resources for both the Primary Health Care Program and the Community schools in Central and Southern Bougainville to be distributed through the existing BOCBIHP network. We will also continue to support transport and administrative costs of the organisation, assist with their relocation, as well as provide direct support for the PEDC and the Aroponari Technical School.

Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (LNWDA) was established in Buka in 1995 for the purpose of conducting educational awareness, campaigning and advocacy, and providing crisis counselling and support for women and men traumatised by the war. To date LNWDA's programs have focussed on gender violence issues, and

increasing the participation of women in decision making processes and rehabilitation activities.

LNWDA is a small organisation, managed by a small core of staff, and supported by a network of approximately 150 volunteers who conduct educational awareness programs. Despite its size, LNWDA runs a range of programs and performs a number of different functions. Current activities include the following:

- 'Homebrew' and AIDS awareness workshops (consumption of homebrew is a major issue related to gender and community violence in Bougainville);
- Coordinating the 'Family Life Program' in cooperation with local church organisations, which provides workshops on general 'life' topics relevant to rehabilitation, including communication, conflict resolution, marriage counselling, and youth issues;
- Training of Trainers (TOT) for both of these programs, which enables Trainers to conduct further awareness programs in their home villages;
- Provision of crisis counselling and support for victims of gender, family and community violence;
- Awareness raising programs for remote communities through Radio Bougainville;
- Coordination of NGOs and local Community Based Organisations dealing with women's development; and
- Advocacy work, to increase the role of women in decision making processes.

LNWDA's activities to date have focussed on Buka, Nissan Island, and North-West Bougainville Island. There is demand to expand LNWDA's programs to other areas of mainland Bougainville, as well as to cover 'special' populations, particularly youth.

LNWDA have recently expanded their work to incorporate youth, who have grown up surrounded by violence and conflict, and who lack education and income generating skills. Their latest project will support a Provincial Youth Workshop and Community Mobilisation training for youth, to bring together youth to promote peace and reconciliation, youth leadership, and to establish youth networks and rehabilitation activities. This project represent a 'first step' towards mobilising and supporting youth, who have not been specifically supported by other rehabilitation programs in the Province.

The Project's objectives are:

- To bring youth together to discuss ways and means of participating in the political, economic and social development of Bougainville;

- To re-establish and organise youth networks in Bougainville;
- To reinforce the importance of traditional culture, and find ways for youth to express their culture through community development activities.

LNWDA plans to achieve this through:

- A four-day Provincial Youth Workshop in Buka, which will include presentations on youth development issues in Bougainville and PNG, cultural programs, networking, and workshops on community development issues;
- Organisation and running of an 8-day Community Mapping and Planning workshop for youth from the Northern parts of Bougainville. The workshop will cover mapping of community needs and resources, planning for community development activities, and general community mobilisation issues. This workshop will be a pilot for this type of youth programme. If successful, this program will be extended to other areas of Bougainville.

The focus of Community Aid Abroad's continuing support to LNWDA will be for youth programs and community mapping workshops as well as administrative support for LNWDA. Community Aid Abroad also supports regional training programs for dealing with violence against women and LNWDA staff have recently sent two women to a month long training with Fiji Women's Crisis Centre with our support.

## **Conclusion**

Community Aid Abroad has been working through local groups on both sides of the conflict throughout the crisis. There has in the past been a mistrust of NGO activity and its motivation within AusAID in regard to NGO involvement in Bougainville (perhaps because there are NGO groups in Australia who are partisan with regard to Bougainville and who see secession as the main issue to be resolved). While the formation of the Bougainville Working Group and agreements about cooperation and information exchange go some way, there is still much room to build Australian Government/NGO relationships so that a meaningful exchange of dialogue on issues of aid and peace building in Bougainville can occur. NGOs are able to access and work in areas and ways that Government is unable to and Community Aid Abroad would like to encourage this inquiry to look at ways of increasing the cooperation and dialogue between Australian Government and NGOs as well as finding ways to support a process on Bougainville of round table discussion which is led by Bougainvilleans and includes key stakeholders and donors (including international and local NGOs) to review the aid process to date and to plan for the future.

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## Recommendations

### A. Continuation of support for peace process

It is our view that Australia has made a significant contribution to the current Bougainville peace process that is recognised and appreciated almost universally by ordinary Bougainvilleans through to the political leadership of all parties involved. In particular, Australia's contribution through assistance for transport for moving people around quickly for negotiations and reconciliation meetings has been considered vital, as has the assistance given through the presence of the Truce Monitoring Group in the first instance and now Peace Monitoring Group (PMG). The presence of this unarmed force has made it possible for leaders from all factions to feel secure enough to participate in peace negotiations and meetings. The fact that the PMG (and TMG before them) has continued to limit its mandate to the peace process is important for the perceived neutrality of this force, as is its interaction with local communities.

The other significant role, which Australia has played more recently has been to maintain pressure on the PNG Government to continue with the formation of the Bougainville Reconciliation Government (BRG) despite the failure of the PNG Parliament to pass the necessary legislation to legalise its formation.

Given the current political instability within PNG, and the uncertain political status of the BRG, we believe it is critical that the Australian Government continues to promote and support the peace process and the consolidation of the BRG, whatever status it assumes in the months ahead.

We recommend that the Australian Government clearly acknowledge and reinforce, both through word and action, that a viable BRG, politically independent or otherwise, is fundamental to the peace process.

### B. Donor Coordination

During the peace process the BIG and BTG have essentially confined themselves to political issues in order to achieve unity and reconciliation. This has meant that many decisions about the kind and scope of aid and development programs have been made on an ad hoc basis before Bougainvilleans themselves have had a chance to talk together and develop a coordinated plan for the development of Bougainville. This has resulted in a number of aid and development activities that people are unhappy with, and a rising suspicion that some outside agencies and governments (including Australia) are operating with a view to re-building Bougainville along the lines of the pre-crisis model. Many believe there to be a 'flood' of aid, coming in too quickly, with too little Bougainvillean control, and which is supporting a model of development which people have already rejected and which was the major cause of the crisis.

While there have been attempts to establish coordinating mechanisms through the Office of Bougainville Affairs, and a combined church/NGO/PMG committee, neither of these have operated effectively. It is likely that the best opportunity for such a mechanism will come through the formation of the BRG.

We recommend that AusAID recognise and take seriously such a local structure if and when it emerges. Otherwise our aid efforts will be largely wasted, and we run the risk of undermining the peace process.

#### C. Strengthening of Civil Society

One concern of Community Aid Abroad has been the lack of opportunity for Bougainville NGOs to share lessons from the crisis, to discuss challenges and solutions to difficulties that are present and to suggest common approaches to the ongoing development of a new Bougainville. The current mechanisms that are being pursued by external donors, including AusAID, do not explicitly encourage the formation of an appropriate stage on which such discussions can occur.

Any such forum would then need specific policy links with the BRG, so that the forum's initiatives and suggestions are taken seriously and are not simply consultative mechanisms.

We recommend that AusAID promotes the strengthening of civil society organizations on Bougainville through the support of a forum for Bougainville NGOs through which practical and policy issues can be addressed. Such a forum should be facilitated by key local NGOs with the assistance of Australian partner NGOs.

#### D. Involvement of Women in ongoing consultative processes

Community Aid Abroad partner organizations have expressed a concern at the imbalance in gender representation in the present consultative mechanisms. As donors seek to support the area of gender awareness and programs explicitly targeting gender, some women's groups are arising to meet this donor interest, rather than arising from a community base.

As part of countering this shutting out of women and dealing with this change in women's organizations, Community Aid Abroad recommends that AusAID explicitly support the coming together of Bougainville women to discuss a national platform for women.