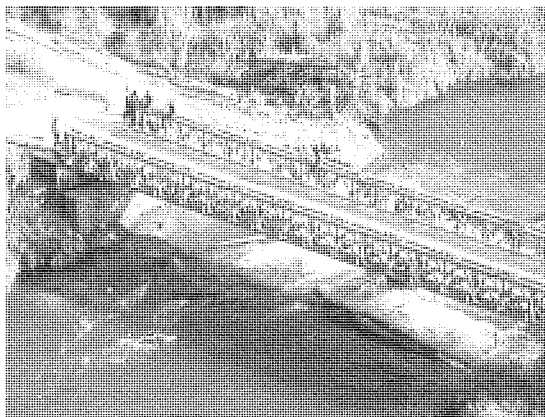


# Aid as an instrument for peace:

## a civil society perspective

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Source: AusAID

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Aid agencies engaged in providing relief and promoting development are faced with difficult questions on how best to respond to the growing number of violent conflicts between civilians and/or between civilians and the state. Bougainville is the first conflict in the Pacific to move towards a political resolution through a process of conciliation, negotiation and compromise, and local and regional aid agencies in their various forms have played a role in this process. The purpose of this article is to draw out a number of principles and lessons for aid agencies from the Bougainville experience in the hope that they may have application elsewhere.

Although aid is generally understood to involve a transfer of funds by a donor to recipients, it also involves non-financial support such as access to information and networks, training for skills development, as well as solidarity and advocacy actions. The transfer of aid of any kind depends on there being a relationship between the parties involved. The quality of this relationship, including the level of trust and mutual understanding that exists, is a key factor in determining the positive impact and sustainability of the assistance given. In the Bougainville case, support for rebuilding relationships damaged by the conflict was a vital ingredient in moving forward into negotiations.

### **The roles of development assistance in efforts to end the fighting**

From mid-1990, until the signing of the permanent ceasefire agreement in April 1998, the Bougainville mainland was isolated from the outside world by a PNGDF imposed blockade. This caused severe hardship and thousands of preventable deaths on mainland Bougainville. Inadvertently, it also fostered a strong spirit of self-reliance and the development of Bougainville solutions to problems.

Some Bougainvilleans made it through the sea blockade to the PNG mainland and Solomon Islands, carrying with them stories of suffering and hardship. Outside of Bougainville, individuals, church and women's groups responded by sending supplies of clothing, medicines and school materials to the island. PNGDF members contributed to, and in some instances initiated these fundraising efforts. This trickle of humanitarian aid coming from citizens on the mainland, though small in dollar terms, cannot be underestimated for its contribution to re-building trust between ordinary Papua New Guineans. In Solomon Islands, an inter-church umbrella agency was formed to give assistance for basic medicines to be transported through the blockade. Humanitarian Assistance to Bougainville Solomon Islands Churches Association, or HABSICA, with support from Australian and German non-governmental aid agencies,

supplied medicines that not only saved lives, but also laid the basis for outsiders to contribute to the peace process.

During this stage of the conflict, outside aid also played an indirect role by facilitating and supporting key internal peace groups. A Women's Forum, initiated by Bougainville women and supported by the Bougainville Provincial Government and the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) was held in August 1996. Seven hundred women from different churches and regions of Bougainville and a delegation of Australian women attended the meeting. The Forum is a fine example of the positive role that an outside agency can play. The UCA gave financial support, but more importantly facilitated a process that brought together existing voices calling for peace. This built trust and relationships between Bougainvillean women and between Australians and Bougainvilleans. The Women's Forum also provided an opportunity for the media to get first-hand information about the situation on Bougainville. This publicity helped to mobilise Australian NGOs and church agencies, which then formed a coordinating body called the Bougainville Working Group (BWG) that lobbied the Australian Government on the humanitarian crisis behind the blockade. The BWG later brought key Bougainville women leaders together for meetings with a range of government and non-government agencies in Australia. The opportunity for community leaders to step out of the intensity of the crisis and to hear different perspectives or participate in training has been cited on a number of occasions as an important ingredient in the reconciliation process.

Outside agencies also facilitated the peace process by providing training and skills in negotiating and peacebuilding. For example, Ruby Miringka, a nurse educator from Central Bougainville, ran a course in Bougainville in 1996 for members of the political wing of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, following her attendance at a University of Sydney diplomacy training programme. Similarly, Australian lawyers Leo White and Mark Plunkett ran a course on negotiation skills for parties to the Bougainville conflict in 1997, which contributed to the success of the Burnham talks. These examples of providing information and tools for key leaders needed very little financial assistance from outside.

Bougainvilleans living behind the blockade relied on their own skills, knowledge and environment to survive. In some parts of Bougainville, ingenious appropriate technology was developed such as fuel distilled from coconut milk and small-scale water-powered generators. Communities ran primary healthcare programmes that combined western and traditional approaches, and village-based schools and training programmes for both children and adults. Out of these self-reliance initiatives,

a new confidence and vision for the development of Bougainville came into being.

Over time, several local organisations grew and provided moral support, training and basic materials for community initiatives and they helped to unite communities and people in Bougainville. They operated with minimal outside financial assistance but had links with agencies such as Oxfam Community Aid Abroad in Australia.

## **International aid: Australia and New Zealand**

In the early stages, Australia's position on the Bougainville conflict was influenced by its historic links to the Papua New Guinea government. Australia had also played a role in the genesis of the conflict, in that it had supported the development of the Panguna mine. In the early years of the conflict, Australia had no contacts with the Bougainville militants and supported the PNG government's dual military and diplomatic strategies for resolving the conflict, notoriously supplying patrol boats and helicopters as well as leading in the first regional peacekeeping efforts in 1994. But its position shifted away from support for the military approach after the 1997 Sandline mercenary crisis. Australia began to use the power of its aid dollar and threatened for the first time to withdraw its support for the national government.

Both the Australian Government and the New Zealand Government approached their roles in ending the conflict in Bougainville through complementary political, diplomatic, defence and aid components. New Zealand, in contrast to Australia, was perceived by Bougainvilleans as politically neutral and played a lead role at this stage with Australian logistical and financial support. Often it was individual actions of government officials that won the respect and trust of Bougainvilleans.

The Truce Monitoring Group (TMG), deployed after the Burnham talks in 1997, was made possible by Australian and New Zealand aid. The TMG itself was initially predominantly made up of New Zealand Defence Force personnel, but New Zealand aid also supported Pacific personnel from Fiji and Vanuatu who formed a small but important part of the group. Australia provided personnel and logistical support for the TMG and the Deputy Commander was an Australian civilian seconded from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

In 1997 the Australian Government set up a Peace Transport Fund (PTF) that provided transport assistance to key players engaged in the peace negotiations and permitted the attendance of large numbers of Bougainvillean leaders and technical officials at peace

talks and negotiations. Despite the enormous financial cost, the PTF was flexible and responsive and it facilitated the movement of negotiating teams at short notice, which was crucial in maintaining the momentum for peace and dialogue. There were, however, times when the Australian Government pulled back its Transport Fund support because of the enormous open-ended cost and misgivings about its administration. Some Australian politicians initially underestimated the depth of mistrust between Bougainvillean leaders and the process which people needed to rebuild their relationships. Patience and diplomacy by Bougainville leaders with Australian officials eventually led to a better understanding and acceptance that the process would be a lengthy one.

## Peacebuilding assistance

After the lifting of the blockade and the signing of the permanent ceasefire agreement in April 1998, a flood of international aid agencies began their assessment missions and feasibility studies for programmes on Bougainville. In this period Bougainvillean control over outside interventions diminished. The wide range of aid agencies working in Bougainville at this stage included the following:

The Australian Government, through its agency AusAID, became the largest donor with A\$ 134 million committed over 5 years from 1997. AusAID's assistance to Bougainville has been described as a 'peace dividend' and there has been an emphasis on restoration of services through projects that deliver tangible and physical evidence of their reward for peace. In the first instance, support was concentrated in former PNG-controlled areas and included aid for very large projects such as the building of schools and hospitals, to small grants for community projects. The Australian government continued to provide transport assistance for negotiations and has also provided technical and legal advisors to both Port Moresby and Bougainville to assist with the negotiation process.

New Zealand Official Development Assistance (NZODA) gave approximately NZ\$ 5.7 million in 2000 and NZ\$ 4.5 million in 2001 to PNG. This was earmarked to support community-based development projects, rehabilitation and re-integration of former combatants through vocational and short term training courses and for infrastructure rehabilitation.

The European Union through various budget lines has committed around 25 million kina (approx. EUR 9.1 million) for 2000 & 2001 largely for cash crop (copra and cocoa) post-conflict rehabilitation and re-building of infrastructure. Funds have been channelled through the UNDP.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been funding a Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development Programme with an initial grant of US\$2 million. The United States and Canada have since made cost-sharing contributions to the project which total approximately US\$580,000. The project has three major components – rehabilitation of agricultural production, small business development and social capital enhancement.

International NGO aid programmes in Bougainville, mostly funded by governments, range in size and budget. Australian NGOs have the largest presence. NGO aid programmes vary in the approach they take, although they usually work through or with local communities. NGO aid agencies initially concentrated on meeting basic humanitarian needs and have gradually moved to programmes focusing on community income generation and vocational training. Some international NGOs have set up their own offices and infrastructure in Bougainville at considerable expense and in stark contrast to the comparative lack of resources available to local NGOs and groups. The display of international agency 'wealth' has caused resentment, apparent in the targeting of these groups at various times by local youths who have stolen vehicles and supplies.

PNG's other large donors are the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, the governments of Japan and the People's Republic of China, with relatively modest programmes from the UK, France and Germany.

For an island of approximately 200,000 people unused to dealing with international aid agencies, the number and varying scale of programmes, their different ways of working, and the complexities of negotiating funding support, have presented their own tensions and difficulties. Assessment missions have often raised expectations that later were not met. Agencies choosing to work with some communities over others have caused divisions, and the concentration of aid agency programmes in coastal areas with easier access has resulted in inequality in the spread of outside assistance.

Many international agencies now operating in Bougainville have been criticised by local NGOs and community-based organisations for setting up programmes that cut across and bypass existing local initiatives. It seems in the rush to establish themselves and their programmes, international agencies have often failed to realise or appreciate Bougainvilleans' resourcefulness and their desire to remain in control of their own development destiny. There is widespread criticism by Bougainvilleans of outside aid agency programmes which create a dependency on outside funds and/or follow a model of development which



many Bougainvilleans believe was the cause of the crisis in the first place. There are also many examples of inappropriate and ill-conceived assistance from outside such as bags of neckties for mountain people or solar powered cold storage facilities for medication that does not exist.

## The long term

Bougainville's future depends on the extent to which the underlying causes of the conflict – the sense of social, economic and political injustice – are understood and addressed. But while Bougainville remains dependent on outside aid for its financial base, there is concern that they will not be able to achieve this goal. There is reason to doubt whether those providing the aid are willing to allow Bougainvilleans to take the lead in implementing development programmes that address these issues.

There is also a concern that the Bougainville leadership may not be equipped to deal with this problem. The protracted political negotiations have kept the focus of the Bougainville leadership on political issues at the expense of post-conflict development issues. The inability of the current provincial Bougainville government to provide coherent coordination of international aid means by and large that agencies can, and do, fulfil their own agendas in relative isolation. The focus of most of the large aid projects in Bougainville has been on re-building infrastructure and the economy while demonstrating a tangible 'peace dividend'. This

focus, while important, risks raising expectations and simply re-building some of the conditions and inequities that contributed to the conflict in the first place.

## Conclusion

The early Bougainville experience showed us that sometimes a relatively small financial contribution can have a seemingly significant impact. It demonstrated that aid is about more than funding – that building trust and acting with understanding and respect for Bougainvillean communities and Bougainvillean priorities ensured the effectiveness of outside aid interventions. Also, we have learned that for aid agencies to play a role in ensuring that the peace is sustained in the long term, it is vital that they be guided by a critical analysis of the root causes of the conflict.

The challenge now is for the experiences of Bougainville to be institutionalised into aid agency approaches. Early in 1998 an old man in central Bougainville said to me 'the crisis has been our university and we don't want to lose what we have learnt'. Aid agencies would do well to follow his advice.