



Papua New Guinea Study Tour Report

October 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue (EPLD) Papua New Guinea study tour afforded our group unprecedented access to key stakeholders across the national, local and community levels. During our intensive six day tour of Port Moresby and Lae, the entrenched challenges relating to geography, poverty, language and crime were obvious but what also emerged clearly was the vibrant hope of the leaders and citizens of the country. It is this positivity and pro-activeness that our group has sought to highlight, as much of the challenges are constantly and consistently embedded in the Papua New Guinea development discourse. Our group identified three re-occurring themes during our discussion: resilience, re-empowerment and unification.

Resilience

Despite the lack of government presence in many rural communities through the provision of services such as health, education, electricity, Papua New Guineans have shown themselves to be resilient. This was demonstrated during our visit to Yalu village near Lae, Papua New Guinea's second-largest city. Yalu is a growing community made up of approximately 1000 people. We had the opportunity to listen to the community's local level government councillor, women in the village, the local court judge, as well as a representative of the youth.

Issues highlighted by the villagers included: an increase in law and order problems, lack of access to government services (water, sanitation, electricity and education), urban sprawl of Lae city was also placing increased pressure on the community's land, a rise in health issues such as malaria, tuberculosis, and any increase in cancer affecting women. The people in the village felt that "the government does not care for us". Despite the fact that they no longer enjoy running water to their houses, the people are still paying a charge of K1 per month per household to the government for water. The government has not heeded their pleas for their water supply to be repaired. Consequently, the villagers have had to source their own water from the surrounding hills and mountains.

Despite the various challenges faced by the community, they have on their own initiative taken steps to mitigate against some of the effects of the lack of government services to the village. When talking to the Yalu villagers about politicians, one villager said "yes, they come during elections, but then they go and they go for good." Ordinary citizens expressed frustration with current leaders but also acknowledged changing leadership styles with a few leaders championing more action-oriented approaches. Honorable Charles Abel, Minister of National Planning and Monitoring is one such leader. He spoke to our group about the importance of leaders getting their



'hands dirty', do work and to be seen to be doing work. Where leaders fall short, individuals and communities have been responsive and adaptive to bridge gaps in service delivery and provision.

Another good example of the resilient nature of Papua New Guinean is entrepreneur, Mr. Robert Agorobe founder of Helifix. Helifix provides flight solutions to a range of business and government clients. Mr. Agorobe came from a disadvantaged background, struggled at school (the first time), got into trouble with the law and spent some time in jail. Mr. Agorobe was able to overcome these challenges through work ethic, perseverance and faith. He now runs a successful business that trains and employs a large number of local staff, providing them and their communities with a way to move forward. These sorts of examples should be celebrated and communicated more and held up as a positive example for the wider community.

Re-empowerment

The success of the EPLD 2014 PNG Study Tour would not have been possible without the efforts of Leadership PNG. The group motto *"As I am, so is my community, my organization and my country"* exemplifies their aim to lead by example and demonstrates willingness to effect positive change and re-empower the PNG community. Their members and alumni provide a robust framework in which younger members can receive leadership mentoring, support and guidance by *"providing structured and focused learning programs that will place emerging and current leaders through life changing and learning experiences"*.

The ability of Leadership PNG to re-empower individuals and their respective organisations and communities was clearly visible to the members of the EPLD study tour through all contact with Leadership PNG. Leadership PNG's impressive member, support and alumni networks clearly provide a solid foundation for emerging Pacific leaders to collaborate and synergize their efforts towards re-empowering communities in PNG through increased participation in decision making at a local, regional and national level.

To support re-empowerment at a national level, the PNG government introduced a further tier of government - the Local Level Government which aims at giving the people the financial autonomy to re-empower bottom up planning (BUP) and development. This is a positive step to strengthen community governance and engagement.

The study tour group further observed strong efforts to re-empower PNG through improved governance and responsible policy. The National Strategy for Responsible Development being championed by Hon. Charles Abel aims to re-empower communities by providing a framework for future development to ensure the current needs of the people are met without compromising those of the future. This is to be achieved by maintaining access for all to materials for sustenance,

housing and implement protection for the 'traditional economy' rather than accelerating the development of the 'western' economy. It also provides a framework for PNG's vast natural assets such as fish stocks, mineral reserves, biodiversity and forests to be protected for long-term benefit of the people rather than exploited for short-term gain. The policy objectives resonated strongly with all members of the EPLD Study Tour as it provided solutions for the protection of PNG's vast natural resources whilst securing its current and future development needs. Furthermore, the group felt very strongly that if this policy could be successfully implemented, it would provide a robust example of best practice for the Pacific community.

Unification

National unity is an essential requirement to the progress and development of PNG. With more than 860 languages, PNG is known for its diversity of cultures and customs, but such diversity often leads to fragmented groups and conflicting interests. PNG is a nation made of different tribal groups which were once autonomous and had very limited contact with each other, often there may be divided loyalties between the needs of their tribal groups and the priorities of the nation - hence reconciling the needs to a common interest is fundamental towards achieving a unified opinion on issues and approach. The abundant natural resources of PNG attract many foreign investors. However, in PNG more than 90 percent of the land has customarily been owned by the local tribes, which under the current land tenure system, the registry system is inadequate as there is apparent lack of clarity in determining the ownership and entitlement rights to the land resources which can stifle and hinder development.

Papua New Guineans tend generally to identify with each other based on their provinces as opposed to their national identity. Universities were particularly concerned about the tendency of students to remain in their provincial groups. Students would travel to university from their own communities, and would then join and vote along 'factional' lines with other students from their own region. This meant that issues were being approached on a regional/cultural basis, rather than in a way that perhaps better represented the student body as a whole. To address this issue, they enlisted the services of The Voice Inc., a long-standing student organization. They were forced to conduct a comprehensive education campaign that stripped back individual student's perceptions of their own cultural history and what they expected to gain from university. They then rebuilt that, using their own particular cultural story to emphasise that while you are at university, the wider student body (or The Voice itself) is your 'clan' and your own clan would expect you to work with them. This will benefit the student and ultimately their community too. There is a lesson in this approach. Too often the Western approach to cultural diversity is to say: "how do we overcome it?" when the right question is "how do we take advantage of the strengths of diversity to move forward?"

A big obstacle to the nation of Papua New Guinea unifying and moving in the direction of prosperity is the level of youth unemployment, or perhaps more accurately, the issue of youth disengagement. Over 50% of the population is under the age of 25, which would present major obstacles to a fully prepared economy. In PNG though, there currently do not exist enough jobs for all of these young people to fill. Perhaps the bigger issue here though is the failure of the mainstream education system to adequately prepare the youth with the literacy, numeracy and life skills needed to function in society. This was a common refrain amongst the organisations we visited. The lack of involvement in society is a major driver of the law and order issues in PNG - substance abuse, domestic violence, crime and other anti-social behaviour. Whilst these are perhaps over-emphasised by the media, they do exist.

The National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) just outside of Lae is a government organisation that conducts research into farming practices and food processing techniques. They are attempting to promote more sustainable commercial farming using traditional subsistence crops and methods to build more economic stability in communities. The major issue they face though is communicating the benefits of this approach to all the farming communities across PNG. Access to technology, difficulties of travel, topography and language diversity makes this a daunting task. The vast land mass that Papua New Guinea boasts will be a critical factor in the sustainability of the country on a whole moving forward, and yet this resource seems to be poorly managed and regulated.

The Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress has a vision for a more unified society. Critical to its vision is having more women in senior roles, focusing heavily on skills and training in its collective agreements and the broad goal of increasing the social dividend from major investments. During our visit though, their time was mainly spent battling a large multi-national company that had purchased operations from the PNG government and was refusing to honour the workers' existing leave entitlements, or engage in collective bargaining (which is a recognised right by the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations). Their vision was being stifled by foreign-owned companies who were actively attempting to remove the PNG people (through the workforce of the company) from decisions that affected the whole community.

In Lae, there are recent developments in a new port infrastructure which will improve freight services of PNG's international and domestic trade. In addition, the four lane highway will also stimulate economic growth through enhancing the efficiency of land transportation. One of the main barriers to achieve a more unified progression towards equitable growth and development has been the poor quality of the country's infrastructure (including access to ICT services), which constrains economic activity as well as service delivery.

CONCLUSION

Business models in Papua New Guinea also appear to be quite unique when compared across other Pacific countries. The Port Moresby and Lae Chambers of Commerce and Industries are actively involved community initiatives and activities. Our meetings with the business sector have revealed the business sector in Papua New Guinea cannot function successfully without being 'intrinsically connected' to the communities and advocating strongly for change in the communities within which they operate. While this raises concerns about businesses doing the work of government, in the absence of active government interaction with communities the private sector partnerships and investment is vital.

The PNG study tour learned that it may not be necessary to be employed in the "western" sense in PNG, but there must be something for young people to do - they must have access to land or materials to grow or make goods, and access to a market to sell them in most cases.

Perhaps the key issue for PNG is the challenge of achieving national unity and promoting national identity, while maintaining the country's stability among the diverse cultural and tribal groups. The government of PNG is very much aware of this need to promote national unity, and pledged for a united one nation, through its symbolic replacement of the Totem Pole in the nation's parliament building. We noted the national strategy for responsible sustainable development for PNG, also pledged for "*One People, One Nation, One Country*".

The PNG study tour experienced first hand the challenges relating to geography, poverty, language and crime. However, we remain positive about PNG's future after witnessing the hope and resilience of the emerging leaders and citizens of the country. It is this positivity and pro-activeness that our group will take away with us back to our respective countries as examples of leadership in adversity.

EPLD 2014 PNG Study Tour Group

Rodney Kingmele
Allan Alo
Ralph Erika
Michael Gombar
Josephine Lealasola
Vanisha Mishra-Vakaoti
Snehal Morris
James Roberts
John Smale
Ming-en Wu
Gilford Yune