

State Society and Governance in Melanesia

DISCUSSION PAPER

Discussion
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STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY TO BUILD DEMAND FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE IN THE PACIFIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF GOOD PRACTICE AND LESSONS LEARNED¹

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A great deal of analytical and practical effort has gone into development in our region, with much of the focus on “strengthening various aspects of governance in the Pacific” (AusAID 2006a, p. 94). However, to date such donor supported governance strengthening initiatives have made little headway (Saldanha 2004, p. 36). There are several reasons for this. One reason is that much of the effort has been directed towards top-down approaches focused on core state institutions and has typically involved institutional or public sector reform. This focus on the supply side of governance has, it is increasingly recognized, met with only limited success (Malena, Forster and Singh 2004, p. 1). Another reason is that the vast majority of governance related reforms have been initiated to meet “conditionality-based lending” requirements rather than in response to locally or internally driven calls for reform (Saldanha 2004, p. 36-38). They have therefore lacked sustained commitment, which has detrimentally impacted upon outcomes. Increasingly, too, it is recognised that strategies and programs to improve

governance “are likely to be undermined if there is no ability for the community to directly demand accountability from their governments (Walker 2007, p. 3).

It is also the case, as *Pacific 2020* (AusAID 2006a) recognizes, that poor political governance throughout much of the Pacific continues to undermine the efficacy and sustainability of broader economic governance and public sector reform, and that without improved political governance economic growth in the Pacific will most likely prove elusive (AusAID 2006a, p. 94).

Pacific 2020 also recognizes that the key to improved political governance is increased attention to the issue of demand, and better linking of the supply side and demand side of governance.² *Pacific 2020* specifically advocates using partnerships with civil society to enhance the demand side of the good governance equation, so that ordinary people and non-state actors might be empowered to act as “watchdogs and pressure groups” to hold governments to account (AusAID 2006a, p. 47).

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It is now well recognized that NGOs (non governmental organisations) and CSOs (civil society organisation) “can contribute to political governance in a number of very practical ways” (AusAID 2006a, p. 98) that help build social accountability³. It is also recognised that they are key stakeholders when it comes to building demand for reform and for better governance. Increasingly, in many country contexts (though much less so in the Pacific) NGOs and CSOs are utilising a range of social accountability practices such as participatory budgeting, participatory public policy-making, public expenditure tracking, and performance monitoring in order to hold service providers, program managers and governments to account. They are also educating people about their rights, introducing them to the various accountability mechanisms available, and becoming involved in citizen monitoring and evaluation that critiques government performance (Malena et al. 2004, p. 3). This provides a solid evidence base for engaging and mobilising citizens to hold governments and other service providers to account (ibid, p. 8).

Oft cited examples of this include the *citizen report card* surveys undertaken to assess the quality and effectiveness of service delivery in Bangalore, India (see Paul 2002), and the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) report cards (which have been utilised since 1989 to evaluate the performance of consecutive governments in the key areas of health, education and land use, as well as forest and marine resources) (see Arroyo and Sirker 2005, p.13-14, 29).

Although the last example was drawn from the Pacific, social accountability initiatives⁴ and the demand for better governance work in this region is not particularly extensive nor well documented. Indeed, to date, the research and evidence basis for demand led governance and social accountability initiatives have relied heavily on American and European institutions (e.g. the World Bank and DFID), which focus principally on the African and Latin American experience. Increasingly, too, there is a lot of social accountability work emerging from India and the Philippines. To illustrate just how little documented evidence there is concerning

the Pacific, it is interesting to note that of the 54 initiatives included in Arroyo and Sirker’s (2005) stocktake of social accountability initiatives in the Asia Pacific region, only two concerned the Pacific.

The purpose of this exercise is to shift the focus to the Pacific, and to bring together the wealth of experience of Australian NGO’s that have been working with local partners to build their capacity to promote social accountability and/or demand for better governance through their programs. This paper employs an evidence-based approach to identify where social accountability practices and demand for better governance strategies (either direct or indirect) are being employed in current practice.

In particular, this paper seeks to identify and analyze the elements of good practice and to collate the lessons learnt through strengthening civil society to demand better governance in the Pacific. This paper also examines the ways and means of strengthening civil society to support home-grown reform initiatives and build demand for better governance, without causing harm or destroying local civil society initiatives in the process. It brings together findings from the existing literature concerning demand led governance and social accountability, civil society strengthening, and case studies from ACFID (Australian Council for International Development) member agencies currently involved in seeking to strengthen civil society in the Pacific region.

It should be noted at the outset that this research exercise was never intended to be a comprehensive study, but rather the initiation of a dialogue that seeks to identify issues for discussion and for further investigation in the Pacific region. As the dialogue continues, in-country case studies, which were outside the scope of this current exercise, will need to be undertaken and the local partners of Australian NGOs will need to be consulted, as will the other non-state actors in the region.

METHODOLOGY

In preparing this paper the existing literature on civil society strengthening and demand for better governance related initiatives in the Pacific was surveyed. Consultations with ACFID members were then undertaken, initially by teleconference (15 December 2006) and then in person in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne (05-07 March 2007). These took a round-table format. Further in-depth interviews were then undertaken in Melbourne and Sydney. As a follow-up to the consultations, several NGOs provided case study material. That material forms the basis of the latter part of this paper.

Despite the wealth of experience that exists within the NGO community, gathering the case study material proved problematic. There were several reasons for this. Some of the smaller groups, for instance, indicated that they lacked the capacity, in terms of time and personnel, to document their experiences. Certainly the majority of case studies were supplied by the larger NGOs – World Vision, Oxfam and Care. Other groups indicated that, because their projects and programs were ongoing, it was premature to document the lessons learnt or just too early to know what was really working. Others were reluctant to become involved without the agreement and participation of their local partners. They were particularly critical that the research exercise did not involve wider consultation within the Pacific.

Conversely, some groups were sceptical about the uses to which AusAID might use the material, and some felt the paper might influence AusAID's decision making when it came time to review and renegotiate their NGO cooperation agreements. There was a view, too, that NGOs are far more willing than donors to take risks or work outside the box,⁵ and that this does not always pay off. There is a concern that, regardless of the importance of the lessons learnt, this aspect of their practice - if documented - might reflect badly on their organisations and NGO practice more widely. Nevertheless, the *Building Demand for Better Governance* initiative was generally welcomed by all the groups who participated in the exercise

and was seen as a key change in the policy environment. ACFID members particularly welcomed the shift towards recognition of more bottom-up approaches.

The most critical explanation for the difficulty in gathering the case study material derives from the fact that few of the projects or programs that Australian NGOs have embarked upon in the Pacific have governance as their focus - certainly none have been designed explicitly to build demand for better governance. Linked with this, demand for better governance is not something the various groups had sought to measure in evaluations of their programs. As such, much of the case study material remains anecdotal in nature.

Early in the process, ACFID members recognised the importance of a steering committee to guide this research. The steering committee included the following members: Australian Volunteers International (Heather Brown); Oxfam (Anne Lockley); World Vision Australia (John Donnelly); PNG Charter Group; ANU (Pam Thomas); AusAID (Sarah Goulding); Chair – James Cox (WVA) and Secretariat Support – Neva Wendt (ACFID).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Defining Governance

Good governance - a concept largely popularized by the World Bank - is now upheld as the cornerstone of aid and development programming in Australia and internationally. *Pacific 2020* (AusAID 2006a) recognizes that governance fundamentally impacts upon the development process and that poor political governance inhibits economic growth and undermines the efficacy of the aid program - so much so that improving political governance is perhaps the most important long-term challenge "facing the Pacific island countries between now and 2020" (AusAID 2006a, p. 99).

The imperative for good governance has seen good governance and donor assistance linked in public debate, with some

commentators suggesting that the latter be conditional on the former. More recently this has been reflected in the aid policies of a range of donors, including the World Bank and DFID (Court 2006, p. 4)

Definitions of governance found in the literature differ somewhat, but all have to do with the way power and authority are exercised. Kaufman, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton (1999, p. 1), for instance, define governance as “the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised”⁵, while Fox et al. (2005, p. v) define governance as “the way in which any social unit – from the smallest community to society itself – organizes itself politically to exercise power to effect change”. Governance is held to include:

the process whereby governments are selected, held accountable, monitored, and replaced; the capacity of governments to manage resources efficiently and to formulate, implement, and enforce sound policies and regulations; and the respect for institutions that govern economic and social interactions (Arroyo and Sirker 2005, p. 4).

Good governance thus requires effective law enforcement and robust institutions and regulatory authorities which seek to monitor and support law enforcement processes (e.g. police, ombudsman, auditor, attorney-general, and judiciary).

Perhaps the most useful overview of the current thinking on governance is that provided by Court (2006) in the ODI (Overseas Development Institute) briefing paper *Governance, Development and Aid Effectiveness: A quick guide to complex relationships*.⁷ First and foremost, Court notes (2006, p. 1) that there is widespread agreement that governance matters, both “intrinsically and for improvements in economic and social outcomes”; that it is about processes – how things are done as much as what things are done; and that it is not just about governments, but rather “relates to the nature of relations between state and society” and the space where state and society come together to make decisions.

As well as highlighting the key thinking on governance, the ODI briefing paper puts forward a practical framework for analyzing governance. The framework recognizes six main political arenas of governance:

Table 1: Governance Fundamentals - Based on Political Arenas and Key Principles

| Principle / Arena | Participation | Fairness | Decency | Accountability | Transparency | Efficiency |
|-------------------|--|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Civil society | Freedom of association | Society free from discrimination | Freedom of expression | Respect to governing rules | Freedom of the media | Input in policy making |
| Political society | Legislature representative of society | Policy reflects public preferences | Peaceful competition for political power | Legislators accountable to public | Transparency of political parties | Legislative function affecting policy |
| Government | Intra-governmental consultation | Adequate standard of living | Personal security of citizens | Security forces subordinated to civilian government | Gov't provides accurate information | Best use of available resources |
| Bureaucracy | Higher civil servants' part of policy making | Equal access to public services | Civil servants respectful towards citizens | Civil servants accountable for their actions | Clear decision-making processes | Merit-based system for recruitment |
| Economic Society | Consultation with the private sector | Regulations applied equally | Government's respect property rights | Regulating private sector in the public interest | Transparency in economic policy | Interventions free from corruption |
| Judiciary | Consultation process of conflict resolution | Equal access to justice for all citizens | Human rights incorporated in national practice | Judicial officers held accountable | Clarity in administering justice | Efficiency of the judicial system |

Source: Court 2006, p. 2.

- Civil Society: where citizens raise and become aware of political issues;
- Political Society: where societal issues are aggregated;
- Government: executive stewardship of the system as a whole;
- Bureaucracy: where policies are implemented;
- Economic Society: refers to state-market relations; and
- Judiciary: where disputes are settled.

The framework recognizes six core principles against which governance is typically measured:

- Participation: the degree of involvement by affected stakeholders;
- Fairness: the degree to which rules apply equally to everyone in society;
- Decency: the degree to which the formation and stewardship of the rules is undertaken without humiliating or harming people;
- Accountability: the extent to which political actors are responsible to society for what they say and do;
- Transparency: the degree of clarity and openness with which decisions are made; and
- Efficiency: the extent to which limited human and financial resources are applied without unnecessary waste, delay or corruption.

By examining the six arenas of governance along with the six core principles of governance, it is possible to assess and measure governance in any given country against 36 indicators or issues (see Table 1). For instance, decency in the arena of civil society might be measured in terms of freedom of expression, while participation in the arena of political society might be measured by determining the extent to which the legislature is representative of society.

KEY ISSUES AND PRINCIPLES TO EMERGE FROM THE LITERATURE SURVEY

Despite the general consensus that governance matters, both “intrinsically and

for improvements in economic and social outcomes” (Court 2006, p. 1; see also Collier and Dollar 2001, p. 22), and that it significantly impacts upon aid effectiveness in that there is a strong causal relationship between good governance and better development outcomes (see in particular Kaufmann et al. 1999), aid is, as Collier and Dollar (2001, p. 22) point out, “a very weak instrument for improving governance” and “not a particularly potent instrument for achieving policy reform” (ibid, p. 21). They find, moreover, that aid is “conditionally effective” and that there are circumstances in which it reduces poverty, reduces the risk of conflict and assists with policy reform (ibid, p. 25). They also find that there has been no “systematic research on the effects of aid on popular participation” (ibid, p. 22). The *Demand for Better Governance* program provides an opportunity to address this research gap.

Perhaps the most critical lesson emerging from international literature and practice is that governance is contextual, being determined, among other things, by: historical context; socio-cultural context; the political economy of the country; ethnic, racial or religious homogeneity; technical capacity and the international environment (see Court 2006, p. 1; Roche 2006, p. 2). Indeed, as Court (2006, p. 1) points out, the concepts and principles against which governance is typically measured do not make sense “without adequate contextual references”. Good governance, then, is both contextual and culturally specific (see McLeod 2007), so much so that local and donor driven notions of good governance can sometimes appear totally incongruous.

Put simply, “country circumstances matter” (AusAID 2006b, p. 96), in that it is the country specific particularities, and indeed local ones, which “provide both constraints and opportunities to improve governance” (Court 2006, p. 1). Local political economies and political cultures also matter and contribute to the success or otherwise of reform and broader social accountability initiatives (Malena et al. 2004, p. 12). For this reason the approach and methodology employed to build demand for better governance must necessarily vary from country to country, locale to locale, and issue to issue.

Moreover the success of efforts will be contingent on a wide range of factors, including the prevailing socio-cultural context; the strength and legitimacy of civil society and media; the level of commitment of the communities and governments involved; the capacity and effectiveness of those governments to respond; the degree of State-civil society synergy (Malena et al. 2004, p. 12-14; see also Arroyo and Sirker 2005, p. 26-29); the issues identified as entry points for engagement (e.g. school or health clinic level performance); literacy levels; levels of internal conflict and violence; and the level of domestic demand for better governance. For instance, Hegarty (pers.com. 2006) suggests that women's organizations and the environment lobby in Samoa have proved so successful due to the prevailing socio-cultural context – one in which the general population tends to be more highly educated, better connected, and have better access to the media than their counterparts elsewhere in the Pacific.

In the Pacific context, factors such as language, culture and history also come into play. Indeed, as Lamour (2005, p. 3) points out:

The best model of political governance for a Polynesian Country, characterized by common linguistic and cultural heritage and a tradition of deference to leaders, may be quite different to that which will work in a Melanesian country, where there is a huge diversity in languages and cultures, and where leadership is more contested.

Experience also makes evident that countries facing similar governance challenges might well determine to deal with and address them in different ways (Court 2006, p. 3).

International experience likewise reveals that governance reform “is a political not just a technical exercise” (Court 2006, p. 3; see also Saldanha 2004). Successful reform requires local buy-in and ownership as well as sustained commitment (Collier and

Dollar 2001, p. 14), and is highly unlikely to be achieved in the absence of government commitment (ibid, p.18). Similarly, conditionality alone has been shown to be a “relatively impotent tool” unless supported by strong political leadership (ibid, p. 19). It is therefore important to focus one's efforts on reforms that are appropriate - i.e. suited to local contexts, capacities and resources (Saldanha 2004, p. 39) and are politically attractive and feasible (Ibid, p. 37; Court 2006, p. 3). Otherwise reform initiatives will fail and/or be abandoned at the first available opportunity.

International experience also informs us that “imported approaches, systems and processes are only as good as their adaptability to local context and capacity” (Saldanha 2004, p. 39). Accordingly there are no one-size-fits-all models that can be implemented or applied in order to improve demand for better governance. The best issues for engagement, then, are those which are locally identified, through a thorough participatory assessment of the existing governance situation, and around which communities are already mobilising. For, as Fukuyama (2004) points out, in absence of strong domestic demand, externally driven governance reforms have largely failed. This is because they tend to lack both local ownership and legitimacy (Van Rooy ed. 2000). It is also the case that large-scale donor imposed technical assistance and capacity building programs run the risk of undermining or stifling locally generated pressure for change (Regan 2005a, p. 11).

Certainly, success is less likely when priorities are seen as imposed or when donors are seen to prescribe roles for civil society (Howell 2001). In practice, then, the most successful reforms are those which are internally driven in response to local calls for reform (Saldanha 2004, p. 38; Regan 2005a, p. 12). The relative success of the reform process in Samoa is a case in point. Saldanha (2004) attributes much of its success to the government's determination to remain in-charge, dictating the “direction, pace and nature of the reform process”.

Ill-conceived interventions can, on the other hand, lead to poor governance

outcomes and “inadvertently change the relationship between states and their citizens” (Roche 2006, p. 11). They also create the potential for backlash and or resistance (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000), as recipient governments may well view donors as meddling in their sovereign affairs (Roche 2006, p. 15). Ill-conceived and insensitive interventions also potentially place local organizations and individuals operating within them at risk (ibid, p. 15), and often do little more than increase frustration at the local level. Indeed, educating people - making them better aware of their rights and providing them with the skills and capability to demand better governance - might well leave them disillusioned and frustrated if demand remains unmet.

Accordingly, donor-led efforts to foster community demand for better governance should be coupled with initiatives that seek to engage and enhance the service delivery capacity of recipient governments so that they might be more directly accountable to their citizens and better able to respond to their demands (Saldanha 2004, p. 40; Roche 2006, p. 12; Oxfam 2006, p. 26).⁸ Such initiatives might also require that greater attention be placed on addressing law and order problems because these not only inhibit the strengthening and effective functioning of civil society, but also the capacity of recipient governments to respond. In addition, external actors, such as donors, should, as Roche (2006, p. 12) points out, help to ensure that external pressures occasioned by structural adjustment programs or some other form of aid conditionality “do not undermine the incentives for governments to be accountable to their citizens” (see also Oxfam 2006, p. 26).

KEY ISSUES AND PRINCIPLES TO EMERGE FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

Many of the key issues and principles that emerged from the literature survey were reiterated in the consultations. For instance, it was repeatedly stressed that the notion of good governance is problematic because it is both contextual and culturally specific. It

was also stressed that desire and demand for better governance in a Pacific context is often little more than the demand for better service delivery, and that the demand for better service delivery is not necessarily a demand for better governance per se. Likewise, it was noted that good governance does not necessarily equate with democratic governance, and many people living in poor rural communities throughout the Pacific are unperturbed by how services come. Indeed, at a local level, good governance and better service delivery might well be achieved or delivered by a self-appointed despot.

It was evident from the consultations that Australian NGOs working in the Pacific are acutely aware that socio-cultural context and country circumstances matter, and that ill-conceived interventions can lead to poor governance outcomes and, at the same time, place individuals and communities at risk. They were also cognisant that strengthening social accountability mechanisms might in fact result in more violence, especially if communities seek to hold corrupt leaders to account.

Participants also stressed that there is no single method or formula that can be applied to build demand for better governance, and that programs and interventions must be determined by context – particularly the country context, local context, and the cultural context. Linked with this, it was also argued that the success or otherwise of a program or project should be determined and assessed through the same cultural lens.

Those who participated in the consultations were very much of the view that Australian NGOs bring values - such as mentoring, respect, established relationships, twinning arrangements, and, most importantly, a Code of Conduct and the shared principles behind it (see ACFID 2004a; 2004b) - to the building demand for better governance exercise. Indeed, it was widely felt that their mode or manner of engagement, which is set out in the preamble to the ACFID Code of Conduct (ACFID 2004a), directly contributes to demand led governance without being so directed. Section 1.2 of the preamble states:

Organisations which are signatories to this Code aim to build creative and trusting relationships with people of developing countries and to meet program standards which:

- *give priority to the needs and interests of the people they serve;*
- *encourage self help and self-reliance among beneficiaries and thus avoid creating dependency;*
- *involve beneficiary groups to the maximum extent possible in the design implementation and evaluation of projects and programs;*
- *respect and foster internationally respected human rights, both socio-economic and civil-political;*
- *seek to enhance gender equity; and*
- *are based on an understanding of the history and culture of the people served (ACFID 2004a, p. 1).*

The importance of relationship building and social infrastructure cannot be overstated, for, as Roche, Kasynathan and Gowthaman (2005, p. 6) point out, bottom-up accountability mechanisms are more likely to be established when “a prior investment in social infrastructure and in relationship building with local organizations has been made”. That said, it was also widely recognised and acknowledged by those who participated in the consultations that good relationships and good governance structures within organisations do not necessarily generate demand for better governance within communities or lead partner organisations to demand better governance from their leaders and elected officials.

EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY TO DEMAND BETTER GOVERNANCE

It is widely recognised that successful and sustained reform requires popular support and domestic demand, but can demand, in practice, be grown? Certainly “attempts by donors to ‘engineer’ community engagement in governance risk weakening the independence and legitimacy that are the hallmarks of an effective civil society” (AusAID 2006b, p. 3). However, recent experience has shown that demand-led governance and greater accountability are possible under the right circumstances.

Roche (2006) cites the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP), Uganda Debt Network (UDN)⁹ and Oxfam Australia’s response to the Tsunami in Sri Lanka as cases in point. In the case of the UDN, civil society campaigning for debt relief led to the establishment of Poverty Monitoring Committees in 17 out of 45 districts and to community based Monitoring and Evaluation systems. Similar Bottom-Up Accountability mechanisms were developed by CSOs with whom Oxfam Australia had worked for many years as part of the Tsunami response in Sri Lanka. Roche et al. (2005, p. 2) report that:

within a day the partners ... set up camp committees that were representative of different social hierarchies and gender. These camp committees took full responsibility for needs assessment and distribution of relief.

These camp committees also took responsibility for child protection, health and sanitation and saw that the specific needs of women were met (ibid, p. 3). Another initiative which benefited displaced women was an action group called Gender Watch, which was established by the Women’s Coalition for Disaster Management with support from local and international NGOs. It provided a forum “driven, run and managed by local women, but supported by NGOs, UN organizations and government representatives” (ibid:4), through which women could report domestic violence,

sexual harassment and discrimination within the camps.

Saldanha (2004, p. 41) offers some further examples, citing the outstanding success of participatory budgeting (which involves engaging citizens in the process of executive decision making at the local level), and citizen charters and report cards (which are now being used in several countries to track and report on government performance, particularly in the area of service delivery). He cites, in particular, the success of participatory budgeting programs in Brazil (where citizens are now actively and directly involved in policy making decisions, such as the allocation of resources, the prioritization of social policies and monitoring of public spending) (see Wampler 2000), and the Report Card approach (which has been used extensively in India) (see Paul and Sekhar 1997). What these approaches and examples have in common is that they involve bottom-up accountability.

The participatory budgeting programs being utilised in Brazil (see Wampler 2000),¹⁰ are of particular interest because they have been shown to be flexible and adaptable to local circumstances. Indeed, participatory budgeting has been successfully implemented in both wealthy and poor areas and in industrialized and rural areas alike. A central feature of the process is a yearly cycle of regional and neighbourhood/community meetings, which involve citizens in identifying and finding solutions to their problems and needs - that is, as "makers and shapers" (cf. Cornwall and Gaventa 2000) of policy, not just consumers. Actively involving communities in such processes not only strengthens vertical accountability (Geddes and Sullivan 2007, p. 15) but has also resulted in the more effective and efficient use of public money. It has simultaneously dampened people's expectations to some extent, in that involvement in the process educates them to the true costs of service delivery. Such a spin-off could be of real significance in the Pacific, where salaries account for up to 80% of government expenditure (Saldanha 2004, p. 35) and, as such, there is limited discretionary funding available for service delivery and other public works, and the

expectations of poor rural communities are often completely unrealistic.

Despite its success, decentralized participatory planning and budgeting has worked on a larger scale only when it has been underpinned by massive capacity building campaigns involving, firstly, investment in social infrastructure and, secondly, the availability of funds. It is also the case that such programs were initiated and implemented, in the first instance, by progressive local governments (see Wampler 2000, p. 6) and their success remains dependent, in many respects, on strong political commitment in the form of resources (Wampler 2000, p. 23). This suggests that widespread up-take of such programs is still a long way off in the Pacific, namely because local governments throughout the Pacific tend to be constrained by limited technical capacity, moribund public service infrastructure, political interference; a paucity of local leadership and very limited financial resources. This is particularly so in Papua New Guinea (cf. Saldanha 2005, p. 9), where such factors have already been shown to impede participatory initiatives (Geddes and Sullivan 2007, p. 24-25). Nevertheless, participatory budgeting and community based performance monitoring have been successfully applied on a small scale in many countries, often by or with the support of NGOs, and implementation on this scale looks to have real potential in the Pacific.

In the Pacific, small scale demand-led improvements to governance and bottom-up accountability are already being achieved through community radio, civil society led voter and civic education, and shadow reporting (Roche 2006, p. 9). Examples of the Report Card approach include the SIDT scorecards on government performance in the Solomon Islands, and the Papua New Guinea Media Councils' War Against Corruption, which involved investigating and reporting on corruption in the public and private sectors following public tip-offs (Philemon 2003; Saldanha 2004). This work is continued by the many Transparency International PNG (TIPNG) Coalition against Corruption Committees which have been established around the country.

Active participation, though, requires access to information. Indeed, international experience alerts us to the fact that poor education and lack of access to information inhibits the development of a healthy, active and questioning civil society – something that has been noted repeatedly in relation to the Pacific (Schoeffel 1997; Huffer and Molisa 1999; Saldanha 2004). Access to information is therefore critical to initiatives that seek to build demand for better governance (Saldanha 2005:12; see also Malena et al. 2004, p. 12-13). In order to hold governments accountable, people need to understand the roll of elected officials, how governments are meant to operate, and the law and how it relates to them. They need to understand their rights and entitlements and also their responsibilities and they need to have access to the media and information about government performance. In addition to knowledge of entitlement, they also need a “credible grievance and redress mechanism and empowerment to access them” (Oxfam 2006, p. 25). A good example of a donor-supported initiative with the potential to promote or enhance other demand led governance initiatives is the *People’s First Network* in the Solomon Islands, which has seen donor funded internet stations set up on several locales within each province.

NATURE AND SCOPE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PACIFIC

It is now well recognized that socio-cultural diversity in the Pacific, particularly Melanesia, has meant little, if any, sense of national identity (Dinnen 2001, p. 1; Saldanha 2005, p. 9; see also Foster 1997) - Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are all cases in point. Often there is very little convergence between national interest and more parochial local ones.

The same diversity, as Saldanha (2004, p. 35) points out, tends to inhibit the coalescing of public opinion that is required to generate the public pressure needed to force governments to be accountable to their citizens. In fact, citizens in many Pacific countries do not expect or necessarily want their governments or elected officials to be

responsive to the wider community’s needs - only to their needs and desires. Indeed, many see the state merely as something to be used, if not plundered (see Regan 2005a, p. 8), and this means very little accountability is actually ever demanded by communities.

Linked with this, communities often seek to undermine good governance initiatives in order to capture the limited State resources. Indeed, despite concerted civic and electoral awareness in the lead up to PNG’s 2007 General Elections, many communities in PNG’s troubled Southern Highlands Province sought to capitalise on the introduction of Limited Preferential Voting and the new era of peaceful and accommodative campaigning it has ushered in by building grandstands and inviting candidates to speak and vie for their votes – at a cost. Communities were seen to collect upwards of K20-30,000 at each of these events.

Needless to say, the pressure from civil society on Pacific Islands governments to improve their governance has been limited to date. Saldanha (2004, p. 36; 2005, p. 10) suggests that there are several reasons for this: the range of socio-cultural traditions, limited education, lack of access to information and the practical and logistical difficulties of mobilizing scattered rural communities. He also suggests (2004, p. 34) that decentralized government may have played a part.¹¹ Other contributing factors include low literacy, traditional mores which discourage the questioning of authority (Saldanha 2004, p. 36; 2005, p. 17; see also Wendt 2007, p. 4), and a dysfunctional political system, which, as Regan (2005a, p. 6) notes, is “characterised by poor links between voters and elected politicians, political parties and governments, and ministers and public servants”. It might also be argued that the good governance agenda is in many respects counter-cultural or culturally incongruous in a Pacific context, wherein notions of truth and concealment are both culturally important (concealment runs counter to the notion of transparency) and wherein the distribution of largesse to kinsfolk and supporters is both expected and highly regarded.

It should also be recognised that CBOs (community based organisations) and NGOs are expressions of the communities from which they emerge. In a Pacific context many of these groups can have a very limited mandate. Often they are born of personal and clan aspirations rather than a desire to mobilise the wider community around issues of greater good. That is not to say that communities cannot be mobilised and that they do not mobilise around issues of concern to them. They readily mobilise, for instance, around bride price and compensation - what we might call clan business - but there is little notion of the collective outside these contexts. So how, then, do you harness people's energies and motivate them to demand better governance and more accountability from their leaders when much of their corporate activity is currently directed towards capturing services for their group at the expense of others?

The Development Bulletin special issue *Effective Development in Papua New Guinea* (Hegarty and Thomas 2005), which documents 30 good news stories and case studies from across PNG,¹² offers some insights and demonstrates that civil society in PNG is becoming increasingly vibrant, is making ever-wider links between groups, and is "slowly but increasingly ... beginning to apply pressure to the state to perform in ways that the society demands" (Regan 2005a, p. 6). Indeed, the case studies reveal that NGOs, CBOs and communities around the country are achieving demand-led governance gains in terms of agricultural and rural development, health, law and order, and in the area of governance. They also reveal that PNG's immense social and cultural diversity - which is generally held to inhibit economic development and contribute to the weak sense of national identity - has encouraged a high degree of self-reliance. This, in turn, is giving rise to innovative community inspired solutions to PNG's governance and development challenges.

For instance, the Development Bulletin special issue documents several case studies focused on localised community level efforts to develop new and innovative approaches to law and justice (see Wai and Maia 2005;

Dikin 2005; Howley 2005; Regan 2005b). Also documented is the remarkable case study of the formation of the East Sepik Provincial AIDS Committee and the many achievements of HELP Resources (a local NGO that has in many respects led the East Sepik response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic) (Cox 2005). Collectively, what these case studies show is that communities, NGOs and CBOs are starting to have some success at building links between communities and groups within society. They also show that they are working at the local level in partnership with local, national and international agencies. They are building links between communities and the state, drawing the government in to local responses, sensitising local officials and politicians to issues of concern, and building pressure for "improved performance by the state" (Regan 2005a, p. 11; see also Hegarty and Regan 2005).

AUSTRALIAN NGOs IN THE PACIFIC

Australian NGOs working in international development are diverse. They differ not only in terms of focus, but in "the way they work, their size, their level of resources, and their supporter base" (ACFID 2006, p. 2). At present there are more than 50 Australian NGOs of varying size and capacity currently operating in PNG, the Solomon Islands and other Pacific Island countries (Wendt 2007, p. 2; see also Appendix 1), and it should be noted that few, if any, of these groups are actively seeking to build demand for better governance per se. Most are focused on community development and basic service delivery activities, and/or building the capacity and confidence of local organisations to supply such services. Most do not implement programs directly, but work through local implementing partners (ACFID 2004b, p. 2). As such, relationship building and civil society strengthening forms an integral component of their programs, regardless of whether their primary mandated activities are focused on health, education, development, environmental protection or social justice. Moreover, what the case studies described below reveal is that Australian NGOs and their local partners are helping to build

demand for greater accountability and with it better governance through their community development activities. Indeed as Wendt (2007, p. 5) points out:

Although an organisation's major focus may be community development/service delivery, it turns to advocacy to overcome problems it meets in fulfilling its service provision role; and it becomes a watchdog in order to prevent a recurrence of the problem.... Advocacy – community development/service delivery – watchdog roles are intertwined.

As a case in point, Wendt (2007, p. 5) cites recent action by the Solomon Islands *Development Services Exchange* (DSE), which mobilised its member agencies to march on Parliament House and “advocate against the Solomon Island Government’s proposed re-armament of the Royal Solomon Islands Constabulary.” The DSE, was not, as she notes, established as an advocacy group, but rather as an umbrella organisation to assist local CSOs to network and share information about their respective activities in order to avoid duplication.

Perhaps even more importantly, many of the key lessons emerging from international literature and practice are already reflected in the way Australian NGO’s operate in the Pacific. For instance, Australian NGOs typically work with local partners “through well-established relationships” and recognise that long-term engagement (over years if not decades) is crucial (Wendt 2007, p. 2) if capacity building and civil society strengthening are to prove sustainable. Their engagement typically extends beyond that of “short-term project and program cycles”, with the average length of engagement in any particular program being eight years (ACFID 2004b, p. 2).

Australian NGOs also see good governance as being more about leadership, values and attitudes rather than immediate outcomes, and often allow their programs to grow gradually and organically (cf. Saldanha

2004, p. 39). They have demonstrated a cognisance that country and local circumstances, and where communities are at, matter. Programs are designed to reflect, support and build upon “what Pacific Islanders know will work in their own context” (Saldanha 2004). Similarly, programs are often structured in such a way to create an enabling environment rather than generating swift measurable results that can be entered on a log frame and demonstrated within a program cycle.

What emerged from the consultations, in particular, was a consensus that it is principles and values that Australian NGOs bring to the exercise and the modes of engagement they employ that contributes most to the success of their civil society strengthening work. Indeed, it was felt that their individual and collective successes could be attributed to the fact that they employ participatory, consultative, and rights based approaches, and that they work in partnership with local NGOs and CBOs. It was also felt that they value and heavily rely upon local knowledge, respond to local needs, employ citizen-centred notions of social accountability, and work within and alongside traditional structures and forms of governance, without necessarily seeking to change them or viewing them as an impediment to good governance.¹³

Most groups also agreed that governance does not stand alone and that you cannot just build demand for better governance; rather, such demand is a by-product of a robust and vibrant civil society. They also agreed that strengthening civil society is a necessarily slow, complex, incremental, iterative and reflexive process that is as much about health and education as it is about civic awareness and social empowerment.

In terms of social empowerment, it was felt that the wide ranging social accountability initiatives modified to suit local contexts that Australian NGOs have embarked upon show the most promise. This is consistent with international experience. Indeed, emerging social accountability practices that encourage active citizenship have been shown not only to contribute towards increased development effectiveness and better informed policy

design, they also enhance the ability of citizens to actively engage with their leaders and service providers as “informed scrutineers” (Geddes and Sullivan 2007, p. 16) - i.e. “in a more informed, organized, constructive and systematic manner” (Malena et al. 2004, p. 5), as “makers and shapers” of social policy, and “actors and agents in the broader processes of governance” (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000, p. 6) - something the *Demand for Better Governance* program seeks to foster.

CASE STUDIES

The case studies examined here all contribute either directly or indirectly to building demand for better governance. Not all the case studies put forward by the Australian NGOs who participated in this exercise actually concerned the Pacific. There were several reasons for this. Many groups felt that it was difficult to demonstrate the impacts of their ongoing projects, and so chose to offer case studies concerning longer term projects. Others felt that whilst they could demonstrate that their projects had contributed to improved governance, they were at a loss to show how their projects or programs had “built demand” for better governance – especially as this was never an explicit aim of their project/program, nor

was it something they had sought to measure in their own evaluations of their programs to date. Regardless, the case studies supplied offer some interesting insights and lessons learnt. The 15 case studies received are listed below in Table 2. In addition, several interesting case studies can be found in the PNG Church Partnership Program (CPP) Annual Program Report July 2005-June 2006.

As noted earlier, most Australian NGOs do not implement programs directly, but work through local implementing partners. This is reflected in many of case studies cited here. The *Social Empowerment and Education Program* (SEEP) run by Fiji’s Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA), and the *Promoting Rights in Social and Sexual Health* (PRISSH) Program run by CARE Cambodia (case studies provided by Oxfam and CARE respectively) exemplify this approach.

Both programs also demonstrate how better governance at the village/community level can be directly enhanced through participatory and consultative programs. Key indicators of the success of these programs include the strengthening of community-level leadership, equity and inclusiveness in what is a participatory approach to community

Table 2: Case Studies Provided by Australian NGO’s

| Case Study Title | Organisation |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Begasin Bugati Rural Development Program | World Vision |
| Bougainville Sustainable Livelihoods Program | World Vision |
| Bulldozing Progress: Human Rights Abuses and Corruption in Papua New Guinea’s Large Scale Logging Industry | Australian Conservation Foundation |
| Children of Romania | World Vision |
| Community Based Performance Monitoring | World Vision |
| Gela Chiefs Using Problem Solving Steps in Settlement of a Land Dispute | Church of Melanesia |
| North Bougainville Water and Sanitation Program | World Vision |
| Oxfam Solomon Islands HIV & AIDS Program | Oxfam Australia |
| CARE Sri Lanka: Plantation Community Development Project | Care Australia |
| CARE Cambodia: Promoting Rights in Social and Sexual Health (PRISSH) | Care Australia |
| Ridim Laip Namba Tu Project | World Vision |
| The Social Empowerment and Education Program (SEEP), Fiji, Run by the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy | Oxfam Australia |
| Vatukoula Consultative Committee, Fiji | Oxfam |
| Wetenngerr Leadership and Governance Project 2005-08 | World Vision |
| Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP) | CPP |

development, and consensus-orientated consultation that responds appropriately to - before it challenges - the cultural framework. The importance of community consultation and engagement is similarly reflected in the second case study provided by CARE Australia. In this case community processes have been strengthened by Community Development Forums, which have involved tea plantation workers and management in needs-assessments, collective decision making and project implementation.

Just as CARE's *Plantation Community Development Project* has given rise to improved dispute resolution mechanisms, so too has the Church of Melanesia's (Anglican) *Inclusive Communities Program (ICP)*, which is funded through an AusAID Cooperation Agreement. The program, which started in the Central Solomons on the island of Gela, saw seven chiefs from the local house of chiefs attend ICP training in January 2005. During a review of the program 21 months later, two of the chiefs reported that they had used the problem solving skills learnt during the ICP training to peacefully resolve a major land dispute and several other social problems using a consultative mediation approach.

The *Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP)* program, run by the United Church in PNG's troubled Bougainville and Southern Highlands

Box 1. The Social Empowerment and Education Program (SEEP), Fiji Run by the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA)

In the aftermath of the 2000 coup, ECREA developed a program to work with local Fijian communities to promote community-level engagement. They identified two major issues that affect community governance – land and leadership. The core aim of the program, which was supported by Oxfam Australia, was to strengthen the capacity of local leaders to deal with external agents (i.e. land leasing units), and to improve community consultation in their decision making processes. As a result of the program, village leaders have adopted more consultative approaches towards decision making and women have begun to present their views in village-level decision making meetings (where previously they had been entirely excluded). Local leaders are also encouraging youth involvement.

Box 2. CARE Cambodia: Promoting Rights in Social and Sexual Health (PRISSH)

PRISSH seeks to promote human rights and responsible sexual behaviour through increased knowledge and awareness of gender based violence and human rights among government officials, police and young urban males, and to improve access to comprehensive care responding to the multiple needs of survivors of gender based violence. It also seeks to increase indictment rates through increased reporting and provision of legal assistance for survivors. The project adopts a three-pronged approach: increasing awareness and knowledge of gender based violence and human rights; provision of comprehensive support in the form of a 24 hour Crisis Centre and outreach service; and providing integrated access to legal services for survivors. It draws on and extends the work of two project partners: the Khmer Youth Association and Social Services of Cambodia. Both NGOs are engaged in activities that reflect CARE's approach to gender based violence in their practice in the field. From the outset the project has employed a participatory approach, which has involved young people in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation. Young urban men have also been trained as peer educators and this has resulted in greater awareness and utilization of sexual health services. Many of these peer educators now hold regular meetings in order to share information and problem solve within their communities.

Provinces, has likewise made peace and reconciliation gains by strengthening the capacity of local communities to resolve serious conflicts without recourse to violence. Their workshops in Bougainville have involved youth, village and church leaders and ex-combatants, while the workshops in Tari, Southern Highlands Province, also included village court magistrates and police.

Several of the case studies provided also demonstrate the important advocacy role Australian NGOs play. The case study offered by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) took the form of a report entitled *Bulldozing Progress: Human Rights Abuses and Corruption in Papua New Guinea's Large Scale Logging Industry*. The report provides an analysis of the governance problems that have beset the logging industry, and makes a series of wide-ranging recommendations which seek to improve forest management. It also gives voice to the concerns of affected

communities by systematically documenting the myriad of abuses reported to ACF and their local partner CELCOR – the Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights.

Advocacy is also central to the Oxfam case study on the Vatukoula Community Consultative Committee, which was established following the December 2006 announcement that Emperor Gold Mines would cease operations at Fiji's Vatukoula Gold Mine. In this case advocacy and support was provided by Oxfam Australia's mining ombudsman.

This case study also highlights the importance of long-standing relationships and the contribution they can make to demand led governance initiatives. Indeed, it was as a direct result of pre-existing relationships between the local NGO and Oxfam Australia that the quick mobilisation of a diverse community network was made possible, and it was through that mobilization that the VCC committee, representative of all sectors of the community, was formed. To its credit, the committee has had real success in bringing the community into the ongoing negotiations between the government and the company.

Several of the case studies provided evidence of the role NGOs can play, not only in building demand for better governance, but in strengthening the capacity and responsiveness of new and under-resourced governments. One such case study, concerning the *Children of Romania Program*, was offered by World Vision. Although the

case study does not concern the Pacific it is interesting nonetheless, as it demonstrates how, through long term engagement, NGOs can help build the capacity of weak and under-resourced governments to provide much needed community services. The project, which has been running for 15 years, began as a welfare intervention that sought to respond to the tragic institutionalization of over 100,000 abandoned children. Over time it has morphed into an NGO/Government partnership that has seen the government assume responsibility for funding and managing a series of programs originally funded and piloted by World Vision.

The overall success of this project can be attributed to its "consistent and constructive engagement with, and support of, government agencies such as the Child Protection Department" (World Vision 2007a, p. 1). Another factor contributing to its success was the project's capacity to remain responsive and to evolve strategically as needed. This allowed the various programs initiated and piloted by World Vision to be successfully integrated into mainstream care infrastructure at the local, regional and national level, as Government capacity and commitment to support developed.

Two specifically Pacific examples that resonate well with the *Children of Romania* case study are the Oxfam Solomon Islands *HIV & AIDS Program*, which likewise involves Government and NGOs working together to develop important public health initiatives – in this case initiatives designed to respond to the burgeoning HIV/AIDS epidemic –

Box 3. CARE Sri Lanka: *Plantation Community Development Project*

CARE Sri Lanka has been working with tea plantation communities for over 20 years. During this time, programming has evolved from a needs-based approach (focusing on income, health, education, and shelter) to a more rights based approach (addressing deep rooted socio economic and governance issues that keep the plantation community one of the most deprived and marginalized in the country). One program that seeks to apply the lessons learnt is the *Plantation Community Development Project*. It seeks to strengthen community processes through Community Development Forums (CDF) and to enhance relationships between men and women, and between the estate management and the workforce. From the outset, the CDFs have successfully engaged workers and management in community needs assessment, needs identification, collective decision making and planning, as well as project implementation. On one estate, this resulted in the construction of "Rest Rooms" with simple dining and toilet facilities for women. At a broader level the project has facilitated the participation of trade-unions and other CBOs on the estates and in adjoining villages. In addition it has helped broaden the scope of their activities and strengthened their capacity and responsiveness. The project has also succeeded in strengthening relationships and is helping communities to resolve disputes without resorting to violence.

Box 4. Vatukoula Community Consultative Committee, Fiji

In response to the December 2006 announcement that Emperor Gold Mines would cease operations at Fiji's Vatukoula Gold Mine, CFF, a local NGO, with support from Oxfam Australia's mining ombudsman, initiated a consultative process that resulted in the establishment of the *Vatukoula Community Consultative Committee*. The committee was established following a meeting at which the Vatukoula communities met to discuss the social impacts of the mine's closure. The meeting, held only 6 weeks after the announcement that the mine would close, was attended by several hundred community members, including: "women, strikers, recently retrenched workers and union executives, some of the currently employed workers, land claimants, Indo-Fijian former workers and sub-contracted labourers". Since that initial meeting the VCCC has met with the company and the Government Taskforce Committee and has raised the communities' immediate concerns - education, electricity, water and redundancy payments. To the committee's credit, they have managed to secure financial and education relief for the affected families, which are very broadly defined as a result of the community mobilization efforts.

and the World Vision *Begasin Bugati Rural Development Program*, which illustrates the critical importance of responsiveness and flexibility.

Increased community involvement in the planning and implementation of the *Begasin Bugati Rural Development Program* through the empowered Ward Development Committees gave rise to innovative community inspired solutions. It also made evident, though, that donor, NGO and community expectations, notions of success and definitions of development effectiveness are very different - perhaps at times irreconcilable, especially when donor reporting requirements and performance measures are rigid. Indeed, as the program progressed, World Vision found that by remaining flexible and responsive to change and innovation it became increasingly difficult to reconcile donor demands with community needs and priorities. It also became apparent that demand led improvements to local level governance are at times undermined by the very donors who seek to encourage such demand.

Another of the World Vision case studies - the *Wetenngerr Leadership and Governance Project* - similarly demonstrates that governance gains can be undermined by unresponsive governments and by external agencies who seek to bypass community consultation procedures and instead pressure leaders to make immediate decisions on behalf of their communities.

It is also important to note that costs of the *Wetenngerr Leadership and Governance Project* have been particularly high in terms of time and resources, in that it was a particularly embedded process involving long term engagement from field staff. World Vision found, for instance, that because they were working in partnership with a kinship based community where reciprocity is critically important, they had to invest considerable time and energy in clarifying obligations in order to manage the tensions and risks arising out of growing community expectations. This constant re-clarification of roles and the embeddedness of staff meant, however, that World Vision had clear knowledge of the context in which they were operating, which ultimately contributed to the project's success. Another important contributing factor was World Vision's willingness to remain flexible and responsive and to explore innovative approaches, which allowed the project to be demand-led and evolve and develop organically at its own pace. Ironically, this approach attracted some criticism by organisations and agencies who felt that the project's objectives could, or perhaps should have been, achieved in a much shorter time frame.

The final case study considered here concerns World Vision's *Community Based Performance Monitoring (CBPM)*¹⁴ initiatives. Like the *Wetenngerr Leadership and Governance Project*, CBPM directly seeks to make governance gains by encouraging and supporting demand-led participatory governance and, by doing so, laying the

Box 5. Children of Romania

This long running and highly successful project was developed initially as a welfare intervention that sought to respond to the tragic institutionalization of over 100,000 children. Initially the project was designed to support caregivers working at various state run institutions. Specifically, they were provided with training to improve the level of individual and professional care they offered. Food, medicines and educational materials were also provided under the project. During the mid-1990s, the program evolved such that World Vision, in partnership with various institutions including hospitals, government departments, local governments and NGOs, developed an Early Education holistic care framework for institutionalized children. World Vision's partners were involved from the start in project design and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation, which ensured a collective sense of ownership. As a result, the framework proved so successful it was later mainstreamed across Romania. Then in 1997, World Vision piloted a number of alternative child care models that involved community and family-based responses to child abandonment. These were coupled with a foster care network and day care centres for children at risk of abandonment. Since 2000, Romania's Child Protection Department has gradually assumed responsibility for funding and running various programs originally initiated by World Vision. This was made possible because, while the programs were being instituted and piloted, World Vision trained and supported various government officers so that they might be in a position to take over the programs in the longer term.

foundations for sustainable and effective development. Specifically CBPM focuses on delivery of basic and essential services such as health and education as "an entry point for other social accountability approaches [which seek] to promote greater understanding of the importance of civic and democratic rights" (World Vision 2007b, p. 2).

To date, CBPM has not yet been trialed in the Pacific, although World Vision is currently working towards a PNG pilot. Existing pilot studies are currently being undertaken in Peru, Brazil, Tanzania, Armenia and Kenya, in addition to the Uganda trial. In each of these countries the provision of government services is decentralized, as it is in PNG. Importantly, though, these countries also offer "conducive political environments [which have] allowed the development of social-accountability approaches such as participatory planning and/or budgeting" (Walker 2007, p. 4). This has significantly contributed to their success.

Indeed CBPM requires a mandated social and political space "which allows for the voice of community members and civil society to be heard" (World Vision 2007c, p. 4).

Given the prevailing political cultures throughout much of the Pacific - which often centre around *Big-man* politics - it remains to be seen whether the success of these projects will be so easily replicated. That said, early indications suggest that CBPM is "scalable, robust and adaptable" (Walker 2007, p. 7), that it can be adapted to different country and local contexts, and that it might successfully be applied in Papua New Guinea and the wider Pacific. The following assessment, offered by Jonathan Treagust, World Vision Australia's PNG Country Program Manager, suggests why:

Governance and leadership in Papua New Guinea remain key concerns in a rapidly changing social and economic

Box 6. Oxfam Solomon Islands HIV & AIDS Program

The *Oxfam Solomon Islands (Oxfam-SI) HIV & AIDS Program* involves a partnership between civil society (Oxfam-SI, local NGOs and program partners) and the Solomon Islands Government (SIG). Solomon Islands endorsed its first National HIV/AIDS Multi-sectoral Strategic Plan (NHPMSP) in March 2000. Prior to this, Oxfam-SI and the Solomon Islands Government undertook a joint situational analysis, involving broad consultation with various agencies. Since then Oxfam-SI has worked to build local NGO and Government capacity to implement the NHPMSP. In addition Oxfam-SI initiated an informal working group comprising of international NGO's committed to HIV & AIDS program development in the Solomon Islands. The group meets intermittently to network, discuss key issues and identify ways to collaborate and share resources. As a result of these meetings, stakeholder roles have been clarified and communication between the various stakeholders greatly improved. In addition, members have been better able to complement each other's activities and this has resulted in improved program effectiveness and the more efficient use of resources at the national level.

Box 7. Begasin Bugati Rural Development Program (BBRDP)

World Vision's *Begasin Bugati Rural Development Program* was a poverty reduction initiative that sought to influence a range of quality of life improvements across a number of sectors including community health, water supply, sanitation, food security and economic livelihoods. The program ran for four years from April 2002. It focused upon three Local Level Government areas in PNG's Madang Province, and was supported by AusAID through the incentive fund. BBRDP specifically sought to secure improvements in primary health, increase food security, improve disposable income and build governance capacity. In many respects the program was highly successful in that 40 out of a planned 41 water supply systems were established, as was a Traditional Birth Attendant Training program. Formal partnerships with the provincial departments of Health and Agriculture were also established. Early on, though, two of the projects local partner NGOs – groups that had been seeking to address the governance issues - ceased to be involved in the program. As it turned out, it was this potentially disastrous turn of events which provided the opportunity for new partnerships - upon which the programs ultimate success was based - to be established. Following the premature departure of the two local NGOs, World Vision field staff had to re-focus their governance strategy. In doing so, they set about invigorating and empowering the existing but under-utilised Ward Development Committees, which were legislated under the PNG *Local Level Government Administration Act 1997* to provide an interface between communities and the government. This ultimately proved successful and as a result the community became more actively involved in the planning and running of the program.

climate. In all parts of the country and in all key service sectors there has been a breakdown in both the State's responsibility to supply adequate and reliable services, and in civil societies demand for improved, accountable governance. There is a wide range of civil society structures, yet many remain relatively weak. World Vision views CBPM as having a great deal of potential to address many of these challenges.

Papua New Guinea is at an advantage in the CBPM process because many services did function and exist within the last 30 years. The breakdown has been relatively recent, but the foundations and administrative structures are in place. Finding out what entitlements are will be much easier in PNG because the national language is English and because systems closely mirror the Australian administrative model.

In Papua New Guinea, communities have a history of speaking out on poor government services. What they lack is the power to transfer knowledge into action. The CBPM process offers a visible and transparent mechanism for managing and demanding change. In the highly collective Papua New

Guinea society, community discussions and dialogue around key issues are very common. CBPM taps into this traditional mechanism and creates a powerful tool, which remains simple to execute and understand. For once, the culture of the 'wantok' system can be viewed as an advantage in facilitating service delivery rather than an impediment.

World Vision believes that where project staff already have strong community connections and trust, CBPM will be adapted and adopted quickly. The very nature of CBPM aims to ensure greater participation and decision making by the whole community. It is this highly inclusive nature which makes CBPM attractive in the Pacific. Youth, who make up almost fifty percent of the population, can be involved - as can non-literate members of the community. The process provides an alternative to the violence and civil disruption which is often associated with a break down of services in Papua New Guinea. Rather than just identifying the growing gap between the government and the people, CBPM offers a chance to permanently bridge the divide (Walker 2007, p. X).

ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS

International experience and that of Australian NGOs currently working in the Pacific reveals, as has been noted above, that governance is contextual and culturally specific. Country and local circumstances matter, in that they provide both the constraints and opportunities for improved governance (Court 2006, p. 1), and will contribute to the success or otherwise of reform and broader social accountability initiatives (Malena et al. 2004, p. 12). By necessity, building demand for better governance initiatives must vary from country to country, locale to locale, and issue to issue. International experience also reveals that governance reform “is a political not just a technical exercise” (Court 2006, p. 3) and that the success of efforts will be contingent upon a wide range of factors, including: the prevailing socio-cultural context; the strength and legitimacy of civil society and the media; the level of commitment of the communities and governments involved; the capacity and effectiveness of those governments to respond; the degree of State-civil society synergy; the issues identified as entry points for engagement; literacy levels; levels of internal conflict and violence; access to information; and the level of domestic demand for better governance.

International experience and that of Australian NGOs currently working in the

Pacific also suggests that the best issues for engagement are those which are locally identified and that demand for good governance is unlikely to be built independent of other capacity. To the contrary, demand for good governance seems to emerge as a by-product of a robust and vibrant civil society and, as such, derives from broader civil society capacity strengthening and confidence building. That said, despite extensive civil society strengthening initiatives, desire and demand for better governance in a Pacific context often remains little more than a demand for better service delivery. Perhaps even more importantly, it must be recognised that the demand for better service delivery does not necessarily equate with a demand for better governance, and that programs which successfully improve service delivery will not necessarily give rise to demand for better governance.

Demonstrable demand led governance gains have, however, been shown to emerge out of NGO confidence building and capacity strengthening programs and modified social accountability programs and initiatives, such as those being developed and refined by international and Australian NGOs. Several case studies of this kind have been documented and described here. These case studies suggest that promoting community demand for better governance through civil society strengthening is a slow, complex, incremental, iterative and reflexive

Box 8. *Wetennger Leadership and Governance Project*

The *Wetennger Leadership and Governance Project* is a demand-led governance initiative which has focused on improving community governance and leadership capability among the Wetennger Aboriginal community near Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. The project emerged out of the community's frustration that they had no voice and that many decisions concerning their well being were being made by external agencies without any form of community consultation. In the first year World Vision focused on building relationships, re-establishing a community committee structure, engaging women in art and craft activities which supported a women's centre, and an in-school nutrition program. In the second year they turned their attention to improving the community's governance and leadership capabilities. Narrative story telling techniques using traditional Alyawarra concepts and language were used to facilitate a cross cultural exchange on governance. These meetings which began as information exchanges have gradually transformed into community decision making forums. Consultation is a key feature of these meetings, but it is also something that now takes place beyond meetings and in broader daily life. Significant outcomes of this journey have been the drafting of a new community owned constitution for the Wetenngerr Aboriginal Corporation and stronger processes for communication and consultation within family groups, World Vision and external agencies. Unfortunately, it has been World Vision's experience that external agencies do not necessarily respect these improved governance procedures and often seek to bypass the processes that have been put in place – choosing instead to pressure leaders to represent and make unilateral decisions on behalf of the community at very short notice.

Box 9. Community Based Performance Monitoring (CBPM)

In 2004 World Vision piloted a demand-led governance initiative in Uganda, using the citizen engagement tool *Community Based Performance Monitoring*. The approach had first been used as a Community Scorecard process by CARE International in Malawi, and then further developed by the World Bank in Gambia. CBPM as utilized by World Vision enables grass-roots communities to identify problems with basic health and education facilities and seeks to empower them to influence the quality, efficiency and accountability with which those services are provided. In practice, CBPM is centered around community gatherings at which communities are informed about entitlements and the targets set by government for the provision of services in their community. Communities then use this information to review, assess and rate the services they actually receive, and then to develop an action plan to improve the service. Community members are encouraged to take responsibility for certain aspects of the action plan, and are involved in ongoing monitoring through further community meetings. World Vision's CBPM trials to date have shown much promise. In Uganda and Brazil, communities using CBPM have successfully secured new health clinics, new schools and/or new teachers. CBPM has also fostered a heightened sense of community responsibility, such that communities have used their own time and resources to build new classrooms and health facilities. In Uganda, action resulting from CBPM activities has been successfully and spontaneously replicated in neighboring communities.

process that is dependent upon extensive relationship building and investment in social infrastructure. Moreover, if citizens and communities are to hold their leaders accountable they require knowledge of their rights and entitlements, not to mention the skills, capacities, linkages and effective mechanisms to convincingly express their views (Roche 2007, p. 7). Such skills and capacities are developed in practice through consultative participatory programs that actively involve community members in program planning and implementation – that is as “makers and shapers” of social policy (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000, p. 6).

Successful demand led governance initiatives are also dependent on an acute understanding of socio-cultural context as well as country and local circumstances. They have also been shown to rely upon strong political commitment in terms of will and resources, and a political and social space that allows the views of citizens and civil society to be voiced and heard. Donors wishing to support local building demand for better governance initiatives should therefore proceed with caution. There is potential for education campaigns to be misrepresented or misunderstood and the potential for backlash against the civil society practitioners on the ground. Whilst donor funds might increase the pace at which gains may be made, they can also constrain innovative community inspired solutions. Indeed as the *Begasin Bugati* case study makes evident, donor, NGO and community expectations, notions of success

and definitions of development effectiveness are often very different - perhaps at times irreconcilable - such that donor involvement can effectively undermine the specific demand led improvements to local level governance it seeks to encourage. Collectively, the case studies presented here suggest that effective and sustainable development is most likely to occur when communities drive the program, NGOs respond to the emerging needs, and donors allow this to happen.

AUTHOR NOTES

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ENDNOTES

1. This paper is based on research commissioned by AusAID (the Australian Agency for International Development).
2. Similar shifts are also evident in World Bank Policy. Indeed as Malena et al. (2004:1) point out, far greater attention is now being paid to “social accountability” and “to strengthening the voice and capacity of citizens (especially poor citizens) to directly demand greater accountability and responsiveness from public officials and service providers”.

3. Social accountability is a concept popularised by the World Bank. It includes a range of approaches initiated by civil society or the state in order to build more “accountable, transparent and responsive government” (Arroyo and Sirker 2005:1). It is used here in its broadest possible sense to refer to the “range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens, communities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent media can use to hold public officials and servants accountable” (Malena et al. 2004:3).
4. Australian NGO’s working with local partners to promote social accountability are not typically using participatory budgeting, public policy making or performance monitoring as such, but rather are employing modified social accountability initiatives that have been adapted to suit local contexts. These have tended to focus on delivery of basic services such as health and education, as “an entry point for other social accountability approaches designed to promote greater understanding of the importance of civic and democratic rights” (World Vision 2007b:2).
5. This aspect of Australian NGO practice is also highlighted in ACFID’s NGO Effectiveness Framework (ACFID 2004b:3), where it is upheld as a core feature of their program strategies: “Australian NGOs will often choose to work in situations where outcomes are less certain, in order to meet the needs of people otherwise poorly served by other aid delivery mechanisms.”
6. Arroyo and Sirker (2005:4) employ a similar definition, describing governance as “the process and institutions by which authority is exercised in a country”.
7. This briefing paper draws heavily upon the work of Hyden, Court and Mease (2004).
8. The need for donor investment in the “demand” and “supply” sides of governance reform is recognised in *Pacific 2020*.
9. See <http://www.udn.or.ug/>
10. Participatory budgeting has also been used extensively in India, and in fact has been institutionalized in the state of Kerala (Arroyo and Sirker 2005:32).
11. The role of decentralized government is not so clear. As Arroyo and Sirker (2005:6) point out, countries such as India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines are all successfully employing social accountability mechanisms which involve citizens in the process of improving the service delivery capacity and responsiveness of decentralized local governments.
12. These case studies were first presented at the joint SSGM-Divine Word workshop entitled “Good News Workshop: Examining successful models of community development, entrepreneurship and governance”, which

was held in Madang in November 2004.

13. This mode of engagement is exemplified in the partnership approach employed by Australian Volunteers International (see AVI:2007).
14. For further information about CBPM see Walker (2007) and World Vision (2007b).

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