

Triangulating Success: A Synthesis of Observations on Building Post-Crisis Capacity in the Solomon Islands

To the Reader

This note, and the attached summary table, synthesizes observations on four capacity-building interventions in the 2003-2008 post-crisis period in the Solomon Islands. While this Synthesis Note may be read independently, a fuller understanding of the observations presented here will be gained by first reading the four mini-cases, each of which summarizes a specific project and provides a level of detail not possible in this summary. Visit the OPCFC website:

www.worldbank.org/fragilityandconflict

During the period of 1999 through 2003, the Solomon Islands experienced a governance crisis heightened by economic pressures that exacerbated tensions between Solomon Islanders of different island origins. Physical security deteriorated as the integrity and independence of security organs (including the Solomon Islands Police Force) failed, and key government institutions from schools to the Central Bank were compromised. On 24 July 2003, with a mandate unanimously approved by the Solomon Islands National Parliament, a regional peacekeeping force (RAMSI, the Regional Assistance Mission for the Solomon Islands) was deployed with the goal of helping the Solomon Islands Government restore law and order, strengthen government institutions, reduce corruption and re-invigorate the economy. In the five years since RAMSI deployed, attention of all international partners has gradually shifted from emergency stabilization measures (which have largely been successful) to a stronger focus on building capacity in institutions that deliver core state functions and support economic growth.

What is the paper? How were the cases chosen?

This synthesis note pulls together observations from a review of four projects in the Solomon Islands that have been referred to as “successful capacity building” or “successful approaches to capacity building”. They were not selected as a representative sample of capacity development interventions in SI, and are neither a cross-section of all donor efforts nor a sample of one partner’s portfolio; instead, they were chosen opportunistically to investigate these reports of alleged “success”, with the intention of triangulating the reality of that perception from a range of stakeholders involved.

- The ***Parliamentary Strengthening Project*** (PSP) seeks to improve the capacity of SI Parliament to efficiently and effectively performance its oversight, accountability, legislative, and representative functions and roles, by working with the National Parliament Office (NPO).
- The support to the ***Office of the Auditor General*** (OAG), part of RAMSI’s overall Accountability Program, seeks to strengthen this key Solomon Islands institution charged with ensuring accountability in the conduct of public accounts and administration.
- The Phase 2 Solomon Islands ***Government Housing Management Project*** (SIGHMPP2) seeks to assist key SIG agencies to manage government housing through the implementation of accountable and transparent polices and management practices in the Government Housing Division (GHD).
- The ***Production and Marketing of Quality Vanilla*** sub-project works along the entire value chain from farmer to buyer to processor to wholesaler to improve sustainable returns from high-quality vanilla production and sales.

As a trilateral donor team made up of headquarters staff from AusAID, World Bank, and UNDP¹, visiting the projects for only 8 days, our observations are clearly limited; we focused on success stories that have a potential to inspire further efforts in Solomon Islands and in other fragile post-conflict situations. We did not try to corroborate these stories as factual, and we did not try to identify or explain failure. The genesis of this “investigation of success” came from the discussion during Professor Francis Fukuyama to the Solomons in March-April 2008, and his subsequent paper on statebuilding². In particular, Fukuyama

¹ John Davidson, Assistant Director-General, AusAID; Christian Lotz, Peacebuilding Specialist, UNDP; Laura E. Bailey, Senior Operations Specialist, World Bank.

² See “State-Building in the Solomon Islands”, July 9, 2008, Francis Fukuyama, World Bank, mimeo.

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discusses the role of mentoring as an approach to capacity building in Solomon Islands, and he suggests that the current generation of middle managers seem to have lost the opportunities or abilities to receive and provide effective mentoring, and that this might be part of the explanation of the capacity loss since the early 90s. He also posits that a shared discussion of where capacity had been, or is being, built, is an essential ingredient to reaching a shared understanding between Solomon Islanders and international donors regarding the trajectory of RAMSI and other external assistance.

We did not have strong initial hypotheses; instead we listened and observed, asking the same questions of different stakeholders, and then tried to identify patterns. This is different from an evaluation that would have sought to test the assumptions of original project design. We had no *a priori* focus on statebuilding, but the three public sector cases did provide some evidence of common dynamics in capacity development for core state functions. We saw this in the focus on certain functional capacities (leadership, accountability, inclusion), and in the systems impact (actual or potential). We did have an *a priori* interest in how capacity development was situated in a post-crisis context, and we were curious to see whether evidence would emerge that supported the hypothesis that the ways in which we approach the challenge of (re)building core state functions can help repair the state-citizen interface and thus contribute to a consolidation of the fragile peace; is there evidence of statebuilding in support of peacebuilding?

Why is capacity important? What do we mean by capacity?

We approached capacity development by seeking to understand it as a complex process. We believe it involves individuals (and their skills and knowledge), organizations (including their constituent systems and processes) and the enabling environment (including norms and values that may define attitudes and behaviors). We chose to explicitly think of capacity **not as** a convenient “catch-all” term for training courses, computers, and office space. Capacity here is “the ability of people, organizations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully”³ – not something external to or separate from people, but rather a collective product of system dynamics (influenced by and influencing attitudes and behaviors) that manifests as joint performance (comprised of individual competence and skill, deployed alongside others’ competences).

Knowing that a keystone of several of the projects to be reviewed was “leadership”, we approached the discussions with an explicit appreciation of three dimensions of leadership capacity (vision, competence, and integrity) and wondered if the projects we reviewed would exhibit patterns of growing institutional capacity that “mirror” those three dimensions of individual leadership

Patterns, generalizable observations, potential lessons?

Can opportunism leverage ownership? The post-crisis environment presented opportunities and openings for targeted interventions in areas where capacity was very low as a result of the crisis, while demand for support was high. For the last ten months, the projects have operated in a permissive political environment, but for their initial periods they were being launched in a context of extreme political polarization both within the SI political system and between SIG and donors.

The three public sector projects were all derived from modest, focused initial interventions that generated specific value, leading to a second phase with a more ambitious but still focused project scope – and in the two most mature projects, OAG and Parliament, those early focused interventions have had enough time to produce impact with potential spillover, leading to broader ‘systems’ impact. This stair-step project evolution seems to help build true ownership on the part of key SIG counterparts, who see their own role in defining the iterative work approach as evidence of their investment in the project.

The projects were all designed to be highly focused at limited organizational entities with relatively small numbers of people. However, they also presented opportunities for much wider systems impact. The projects had limited time horizons and were focused on achieving quick wins, but they also contributed to

³ OECD/DAC 2006.

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a strengthening of longer term institutional resilience. This appears to be the result of an attention to process in project implementation rather than just reaching planned outcome objectives.

The projects created virtuous cycles of interaction between direct efforts with quick and visible results, resulting in significantly increased status and influence that in turn led to strengthened prospects for institutional sustainability, including replacement of staff, budget allocations and political support.

Importance of clarity on the question of what capacity is being built; including a ‘deconstructed’ view of “capacity” as systems and processes **plus** the individual skills and knowledge needed to make them work; OAG and housing team members attest to the importance of these systems and processes, and the value-added of the “skilled-up” Solomon Islanders who operate and manage them. It is instructive to note that interlocutors raise two kinds of questions about the sustainability of the capacity built thus far in GHD: the resilience of the built capacity to sustain high performance levels in the face of “shocks”, and the vulnerability of a small but enthusiastic group that does not yet have critical mass (both in numbers and skills levels) nor a long enough track record of working as a team. These might well have been the same questions raised about OAG and National Parliament Office 12 or 18 months ago, but today interlocutors point instead to clear evidence of those teams demonstrating early signs of resilient capacity.

Critical mass – how to acquire, nurture and maintain a team where capacity can reside. At NPO and OAG, the staffers form a team with a high degree of cooperation and trust that results in high levels of job satisfaction. The opportunity afforded to recruit a mixture of highly competent and experienced Solomon Island civil servants and recent graduates, appears to have created teams characterized by high levels of competence and corresponding high levels of energy and enthusiasm. Young staffers were quickly given responsibilities and visibility among Members of Parliament; NPO staff pointed to support they received to make presentations to MPs and the Speaker, and to serve as members of interview panels, which built their confidence and sense of professionalism – this underlines the importance of balancing the pressure on deliverable ‘results’ or products with a more nuanced and context-specific focus on process, which delivers its own results. While this dynamic is self-reinforcing and contributes to a virtuous cycle, it is important that this balance be understood; and the challenge will be to exhibit resilience to change as the team seeks out to fill positions as some members of the current staff choose to leave for better paying positions and new challenges.

Style matters. Across all projects reviewed, including the private sector vanilla project, multiple stakeholders emphasized the critical ‘coaching and partnering’ style of the skilled advisors/trainers. Project staff in OAG, SIGHMPP2, and PSP are entirely co-located and integrated with “their” SIG units’ staff; although the expatriate advisors in GHD appear to be a bit more forward-leaning than the project teams in OAG and NPO in terms of handling complex tasks themselves, all three teams are characterized by coaching, congenial support, and an inclusive approach. SI staff commented that they were proud of ‘their’ TA, both in terms of their skills and attitude. Formal training is based on a skills-gap analysis that includes self-assessment, and training modules are specifically adapted to fit the SI context⁴. In both the OAG and SIGHMPP2, quasi-formal in-house training and computer skills sessions are closely linked in time to actual tasks needed for the unit’s work program in that week or month.

Tension between product and process – and between direct and indirect TA. Substantial debate in capacity-building discussions centers on the role and value-added of ‘direct’ technical assistance, where advisors perform line functions. We found a more nuanced reality in the projects we reviewed, including evidence of a transition from ‘direct TA’ to an ‘indirect’ model in a process that established credibility by delivering ‘product’ first. The move from direct TA to a more hybrid ‘direct-indirect’ model also appears to be advancing well in the NPO and SIGHMPP2. Employing training that is adapted to the context, TA

⁴ The level of context-specific adaptation is impressive, and speaks to the up-front investment that may be required to ‘really’ develop skills and knowledge that are useful and deployable: for the Auditor General function, the international standards from INTOSAI have been regionally customized for the South Pacific, and those already-contextualized standards were taken in by the OAG advisor team and **further contextualized** for use in operations and in training in the SI-OAG.

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increasingly working in partnership with country personnel, jointly determined work programs, and a range of other collaborative decision-making processes have been important. Critically, this transition appears to be built on an understanding that while product is clearly important, it is supporting the emergence and consolidation of the process that leads to product that is likely to hold the key to a resilient and competent system.

The use of corporate processes such as the development of the Corporate Plan (at OAG and NPO) has been one process-product example that has seen staff increase in confidence as they ‘design their workplace’, understand and internalize mission and goals. This shift in balance is not linear and will be subject to constant shocks from other parts of the operating environment.

The window provided at the end of the period of conflict to recruit en masse a selection of competent SI public servants, mixed with the best that SICHE had to offer, appears to have created an OAG team characterized by high levels of competence and corresponding high levels of energy and enthusiasm. Again, the competence, respect, friendship and trust felt towards the TA sits well within this system, and the absence of any of these key ingredients would signal an environment unlikely to produce enduring results for the OAG: the balance of this system will be important to maintain.

Context-sensitive approaches for complex capacity gaps. Significant importance was attached by SIGHMPP2 stakeholders to the cross-government task force approach as a platform for effective capacity; the key elements here appear to be consistency of advice across levels and areas supported by advisors, adding value in navigating complex and politically sensitive issues through the system, and providing a useful method of ‘buffering’ by building coalitions across the system. If the public service payroll is reduced (as predicted as logging revenues fall) then this could represent an innovative way to harness additional capacity outside the lead agency, especially when tackling interrelated issues affecting public service management and service provision without being held hostage by ministerial ‘turf’. However, given the political complexities that confront the proposed policy changes in areas such as PSRS and illegal occupancies, the question must arise: does new capacity in policy development have sustaining value if the underlying policy does not advance? Is there then a “backlash” against investing in policy debate? While capacity to formulate policies can be separated from capacity to implement them, the OAG and Parliament projects showcase the importance of the team experiencing a sense of respect and pride from seeing the results of their “built capacity”.

Acknowledging the importance of leadership – the heroic and politically savvy individual supported by a broader coalition. The ‘success stories’ at OAG and Parliament are, in no small measure, due to the charismatic professionalism of approach of their leaders supported by a network of Solomon Islanders across society, and ‘staffed’ by direct TA delivered with a very specific style: open, inclusive, approachable, and nurturing. While the ‘heroic leader’ storyline is well-known in both cases, a modest amount of discussion generates the more complex dynamic underpinning their success: resilience of their hard won gains and of the system of which they are an integral part comes from support from a coalition of forces – in the case of the OAG and NPO from prominent members of parliament, a small number of senior SI public servants, some powerful sections of the SI community, and the media. Both examples demonstrate the potential role for the donor community in providing the resources to enable early and demonstrable success, supporting the legitimacy of both the leaders and this developing system.

The capacity of Parliament has been strengthened at an institutional level through the introduction of procedures and resources that are independent of individuals. The leadership function of the Office of Speaker has become more institutionalized through the buffer that NPO provides between the Speaker and Members (as well as the Executive), most particularly through the establishment of systems and processes linked to the Constitution and Standing Orders and not just reliant on the personal integrity of the Speaker. The office held by this charismatic and respected leader, whose reputation at first provided the necessary ‘space’ for the NPO team to begin demonstrating their value, is now protected by the anchoring of standard and ethical practices to the office, not **only** to the office-holder.

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An awareness of systems, both within the agency and across Solomon Islands institutions. All three public sector projects showcase the ‘systems’ linkages across different SIG entities; the National Parliament Office was more able to deliver its core support to the Public Accounts Committee because of the capacity deployed by the OAG, while the AG had a valuable “accountability ally” in the NPO. Similarly, the audit process was reinforced through a strong interaction between the housing project, the GHD and the Auditor General’s Office following an extensive audit of housing entitlements and their management – the Acting Auditor General regards the follow-up by GHD as the best they have experienced, whereas the Ministry’s leadership, the Housing Division, and the project team all regard the OAG inputs as essential in their efforts to base the government’s policy debate on analytics. Similarly, the Integrity Group Forum, which sees the Solomon Islander leaders from key accountability agencies meeting periodically to discuss issues of mutual and reinforcing concern, is a recognition of the larger ‘system’ in which they must connect with each other to leverage coordination and collaboration. This system wide collaboration also brings significant benefits in producing and implementing coherent policy and advice.

Deeper in the plumbing of government, we found evidence of the OAG project embedding capacity results as rewards in the larger SIG system to “evolve them from within”; the project team advisors successfully advocated to link documented individual success in skills development (substantiated by periodic written assessments) into the public service review and promotion process. And even in the vanilla project, farming and curing of vanilla beans are seen as only one part of the ‘system’ of the value chain, and is structured in ways that recognize (and indeed take advantage of) the dynamics of the private sector market system.

Final Observations

The three Government projects had a focus on building and supporting functional capacities for leadership, accountability and inclusiveness - all key dimensions of resilient and responsive state-society relations, and they may contribute to an endogenous and domestically driven statebuilding process. All the projects have benefitted from a generally improved enabling environment and the overall stabilization that RAMSI has provided, and they have reached a certain level of sustainability as a result of institutionalization, teambuilding and the strengthening of technical skills at the individual level. This has allowed them to reach a point where their impacts have begun to interact in critical ways; there is evidence of synergy and systems impact that should allow for an increasingly programmatic and strategic support for capacity development with a specific focus on statebuilding in support of peace – building core state functions in ways that explicitly rebuild trust and confidence between citizens and the state.

The vanilla project offers three key lessons that echo those observed in OAG, housing, and Parliament: importance of clarity on capacity for what (and what not); a ‘coaching and partnering’ style; and grounding training in operational tasks. In contrast, the vanilla intervention displays a different sense of “demand-driven”, where demand is demonstrated commitment from the “targets” of the process (farmers), rather than demand as concurrence or signals from proxies in Government. Given the context in which each operates, the vanilla project’s approach of withholding physical assets until farmers commit and invest, thus building on early capacity, seems context-appropriate, just as the use of physical assets (office space, computers) seems to serve as a ‘ground floor’ for early capacity to be built in OAG and GHD.

One final word on the socio-cultural context of the Solomon Islands: in an environment where frequent mention is made of the Melanesian cultural norm of sharing physical resources but guarding or hoarding knowledge, we note that there is a transformative power created by sharing information vertically within SIG and horizontally/diagonally from advisor to SIG team members. Seen within this context, the type, quality and access to sharing information within a donor-supported capacity-building project may be as instrumental in changing the way in which people work as any skills training or short course.

Triangulating Success: Descriptions and Observations of Four Capacity Building Interventions

	Accountability Program: RAMSI support to Office of Auditor General	Parliamentary Strengthening Project: UNDP and RAMSI	Production & Marketing of Quality Vanilla	Government Housing Management Project
<p>Successes</p> <p><i>What?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of direct TA in establishing strength and tone of the OAG - Addressing tension between 'product' and 'process' in a transition from direct to hybrid 'direct-indirect' TA - Early signs of resilient capacity - Ability to attract and retain good staff - OAG seen as highly competent across SIG and private sector - Embedding rewards in PSC system - Appreciation of accountability as a system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening of skills of individual NPO staffers and strengthening of the NPO as a unit based on teamwork and professionalism - NPO management group institutionalized - Performance of Parliament improved. Strengthening of procedures and institutions, including the office of Speaker - Individual Members of Parliament empowered - A tendency of changing attitudes and values among Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunistic response to early adoption of a niche crop in a high-needs post-conflict context - Recognition of need for whole of value chain capacity - preliminary hints of both economic results and capacity results: - modest quantity but high quality sold to local buyers in 2007, estimates for 2008 are for 3- to 5- fold increases - processor capacity developed but fragile - connective capacity between farmers and processors - some evidence of lead farmer links to smaller farmers generating learning without direct project action, - also transformation of knowledge acquired by lead farmers into innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project seeks to explicitly build capacity in property management and implicitly build capacity in policy formulation and implementation - Mix of capacity elements required for improved government housing management - "capacity" cited is systems and processes plus individual skills and knowledge to make them work; enabled by supportive advisors, strong PS + US - project also delivered important intermediate results in policy analysis and formulation, but aside from inter-ministerial taskforce results are not emblematic of process capacity being institutionalized, and policy adoption/ implementation is still uncertain
<p>Observations and Explanations</p> <p><i>Why?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence of an activist, visionary and politically astute leader - Leadership embedded in broader coalition of support - Leadership, coalition and competence driving outcomes across the integrity system - Window post conflict to recruit a balance of competence and energy in staff team - Use of corporate processes to drive shift from direct to indirect TA - Nurturing distributed leadership - Sense of 'National' Audit Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on teambuilding - Meritocratic hiring and focus on needs rather than seniority in access to training. Young and energetic staffers given responsibility and visibility - Strong technical and interpersonal skills of the Project Manager - Enabling and supportive political environment - Wider impact on the performance of Parliament achieved through narrow focus on strengthening NPO first 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leading with information, knowledge, iterative support not using tools/equip - Focusing on farmers who have already made the choice/commitment to invest significantly in vanilla vines - Linking smaller farmers to lead farmers in nucleus model - Deploying credible expatriate and local expertise that combines technical credibility, practical skills ("do not talk"), and a collaborative 'coaching' style. - Harnessing private sector dynamics directly rather than building proxy technical capacity in government where niche products are not a current priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designed around an intimate knowledge of SIG needs and environment; - Question of "capacity for what" was answered inside SIG rather than by an outside 'design team' - Inclusive egalitarian style of advisors and physical integration - Purposive joint diagnosis of skills gaps addressed through: task-specific classroom training, on-the-job coaching and mentoring, confidence-building and culture relevant short courses - Effective inter-ministerial grouping modeling 'capacity' (process) aligned to the complex "whole of gov't problem"

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Generalizable Observations	<p>Importance of Context and ‘Fit’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – openings and opportunities in the post-conflict environment: baseline low, demand high, window for action; enabling political environment – importance of the right mix of new graduates (“untainted”) with competent SI staff - how to attract, nurture and retain this mix – leadership that is part of a broader coalition (strategic networking beyond the specific agency) and politically astute – use of direct TA to get early wins, attract good staff and establish position of the Agency; critical mass created by virtuous circle of quick and visible results that lead to more support and better access to critical resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ evidence of effective opportunistic transition from direct TA to a hybrid “direct→indirect” model of support <p>Collaborative and Team-Building Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – use of empowering mentoring and coaching approaches; careful attention to style of advisor-SIG staff interactions – importance of an appropriate process / product balance ... “what” can swamp “how”, but “how” probably has more to do with sustainable capacity (although CB without delivery of results that have value don’t foster the positive feedback loop that these ‘successes’ demonstrate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to nuance goal statements in results frameworks in order to confer legitimacy and monitor-ability on process outcomes? – importance of trust, confidence and openness in the national staff TA relationship <p>Institutionalization and Systems Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – buffering of critical positions at particular junctures that supports the institutionalization of functions and make them independent of individual office-holder <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ in OAG, the office-holder protected the TA team and the office/function; in Parliament , the leader was increasingly protected by the team and the systems with processes that are being purposively de-linked from personality of Speaker ○ in the short-term, this shelters quick wins and keep space open for brave change and team building; in the medium-term this can lead to de-personalizing and institutionalization ... “it’s the office, not the office-holder” – importance of leadership as distributed, shared and embedded, rather than one heroic individual – projects highly targeted and limited in objectives, timeframes and organizational scope, yet with a strong potential for wider systems impact – level of institutionalization, team building, functionality, which contributes to system-wide impact and hints of resilience ... spillover and demonstration effects across other parts of SIG – embedding of Agency process into reward system of the SIG – use of OAG capacity assessment framework for promotions in wider Public Service system – importance of cross-cutting fora with participation of Solomon Islanders only, to discuss issues, learn lessons, develop consistent approach and advice – attention to connective capacity is what enables individual projects focused on individual entities to contribute to whole-of-systems results
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