The Centre for Democratic Institutions

Solomon Islands NGO Leadership and Management Study Tour

Between 17-23 September, CDI in association with the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) hosted four NGO leaders from the Solomon Islands. The study tour in Canberra formed part of an ongoing CDI/ACFOA program in the Solomon Islands strengthening NGO leadership and management skills. The delegation was accompanied by Emele Duituturaga, a Pacific Development Specialist and Joan Staples, an International trainer who had previously conducted training on NGO leadership and management with practitioners in four of the nine provinces.

Context

Civil society groups such as NGOs play an important role in the Pacific Islands. Many villages in the Pacific region such as those in the Solomon Islands are isolated from urban areas both geographically, due to distance and poor infrastructure, and in terms of access to information. This isolation, coupled with the Pacific tradition of close affiliation with one’s village or clan, has meant that NGOs and other civil society groups often play a role as service providers. However, many NGOs lack resources, expertise and training to operate effectively. The CDI/ACFOA study tour aimed to assist in strengthening the leadership and management skills of NGO leaders.

Given the current political climate in the Solomon Islands, and the debate this has generated within Australia, the study tour of the four NGO leaders to Australia was particularly relevant. The program complimented the efforts that have been primarily focused in Honiara to restore law and order by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

Participants

The delegation was chosen by their peers as those NGO leaders able to effectively disseminate the information, knowledge and experiences gained during the study tour back to the Solomon Islands NGO community. It was agreed that this delegation would also help represent the Solomon Islands NGO voice while in Australia. The delegation comprised:

1. Abraham Baeanisia, Chairman of the Solomon Islands Development Services Exchange
2. Mr Cherry Galo, Director, Solomon Island Adventist Relief Agency
4. Ms Rose Wale, Co-ordinator, Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women (PACFAW) Project

Study Tour Details

The study tour exposed the delegation to a broad range of government and non-government actors working in the Pacific. As well as the training component of the program, the tour gave the NGO leaders an opportunity to provide input on the Solomon Islands and to familiarise themselves with the Australian aid program, its operation and its relationships. This was facilitated through a number of meetings with government and non-government representatives as well as their attendance and participation in various seminars, forums and roundtables.


The delegation expressed their support for the report in particular its acknowledgement of the importance of civil society. Noting that 85% of the Solomon Islands’ population live in villages the delegation expressed their concern about RAMSI’s focus on Honiara. The delegation stressed that as church and civil society groups are highly influential in the provinces, any mission that is to be successful and sustainable must involve these groups. The delegation expressed concern as to how the benefits of restoring law and order would be sustained once RAMSI pulled out.

The delegation also met with Senator Bob Brown from the Greens Party with whom they discussed the current situation in the Solomons and in particular environmental concerns in the Solomon Islands. While at Parliament House, the delegation also attended question time at the House of Representatives able to view a part of Australia’s democracy in action.

In meeting with AusAID staff, the delegation was able to discuss the Australian aid program in the Solomon Islands. Importantly, this meeting built on a previous liaison that occurred earlier in the year when AusAID staff visited the Solomon Islands and spoke with NGO representatives. The delegation was also accompanied by Felicity Bollen, the Executive Director of the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), who focused more broadly on Australia’s aid program in the Pacific.

The Department of the Parliamentary Library invited the delegation to attend a seminar at Parliament House entitled ‘Australia’s Intervention in the Solomon Islands: A Permanent Solution?’. The delegation shared their views on Australia’s intervention from a Solomons perspective and shed light on the situation on the ground. It was a valuable opportunity to hear the perspectives of Australian specialists and NGO practitioners.
The delegation also played an important role in the ACFOA Forum ‘Shifting Tides in Pacific Policy’. As well as learning about the shifting trends in Australia’s policy towards the Pacific, the delegation was involved in various panels. They made comments and answered questions on the effectiveness of aid and development in the Pacific as well as the changes in, and the future direction of, Pacific policy in Australia.

The program for the study tour incorporated the delegation’s attendance at ACFOA’s annual Council. This was a valuable opportunity to observe the policy making process of Australia’s NGO sector and the functions of an Annual NGO Council. The delegation observed the Australian NGO sector adopting various policies relating to the sector such as Australia’s aid to the Pacific, the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals, and HIV/Aids in developing countries. The delegation also participated in council panel discussions on issues of democracy, rule of law and good governance.

CDI hosted a seminar with the delegation at the ANU on ‘The role of civil society in the Pacific, in particular looking at the Solomon Islands’. Discussions focused on trends and developments of civil society in the Solomon Islands. The seminar looked at issues such as the role of traditional leadership, the presence of conflict between culture and modernity and the impact of the donor dollar on NGO operations in the Solomon Islands.

The delegation agreed that the study tour had provided a unique opportunity to expand their knowledge and experience of the Australian aid program in the Pacific. The delegation valued the opportunity to liaise and build networks with Australian academics, specialists, parliamentary officials, government practitioners and non-government practitioners involved in Pacific aid and development. In particular, the delegation valued this timely opportunity to provide an NGO voice on RAMSI in the Solomon Islands. Following this study tour, CDI will support further training of NGO leaders to be conducted by Emele Duituturaga in the provinces in the Solomon Islands. This training will build upon and compliment the information, knowledge and experiences gained by the NGO delegation while in Australia.
Solomon Islands NGO Delegation
Program

**Wednesday 17 September**

10am  Meet at ACFOA office with ACFOA staff and Joan Staples. Briefing on the program.

10.35 – 11.50am  Training session at ACFOA conducted by Emele Duituturaga and Joan Staples
Included: a review and discussion of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee’s report ‘A Pacific Engaged: Australia’s relations with PNG and the island states of the South West Pacific’

11.50am  Transportation to Parliament House

12.15pm  Morning Tea in the Main Library, Parliament House

12.30pm – 1.45pm  Vital Issues Seminar: *Australian Intervention in the Solomon Islands: A Permanent Solution?*

2.00pm  Viewing of Question Time at House of Representatives, Parliament House

3.00pm – 3.30pm  Meeting with Australian Greens Party Senator Bob Brown

4.30pm  BBQ Dinner hosted by Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) with visiting Pacific ARHA guests and others.

**Thursday 18 September**

8.00am  Briefing of day’s events by Joan and Emele

8.30am  Registration for ACFOA Forum ‘Shifting Tides in Pacific Policy’

9.00am  Session 1: “*Interventionism*” – drivers and public perceptions of changes in Pacific policy

10.25am  Abraham Baeanisia and Rose Wale involved in Panel discussion for Session 1

10.40am  Morning Tea

10.55am  Session 2: *New questioning of the effectiveness of aid and development in the Pacific*
11.45am – 12noon  Guest speaker: Emele Duituturaga

12noon  Verna-Liz Paia and Cherry Galo involved in Panel discussion for Session 2

12.15pm  Transportation to Parliament House

12.30pm  Meeting with Senators from the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
          Chaired by Senator Cook

1.30pm  Transportation back to ‘Shifting Tides in Pacific Policy’ Forum

1.40pm  Session 3: Where to from here? Reflecting Pacific voices in the public policy debate

2.15pm  Forum – delegation involvement in working group discussions

2.45pm  Afternoon tea

3.00pm  Plenary Discussion –
          The delegation, together with other Pacific visitors and Australian Speakers, answer questions from the audience and comment on feedback from working groups.

4.30pm  Close of Pacific Forum

4.35pm  Registration for ACFOA Council the following day

**Friday 19 September**

8.00am  Briefing with Emele and Joan

8.45am  ACFOA Council commences with Indigenous welcome to country

9.45am  Transportation from Rydges to AusAID

10am  Meeting with Natasha Smith, Director of Pacific 1 Branch, AusAID

12.30pm  Lunch at Rydges (Fig Tree Café)

2.00pm  ACFOA Council Workshops
          Workshop No. 3: Adopt or adapt? Investing in democratic institutions and the rule of law
          Guest speakers: Solomon Islands NGO delegation
3.15pm  Afternoon tea

3.45pm  Council Panel and debate
‘Expanding our impact: governance that addresses the rights and needs of the poor’
Guest speakers: Emele Duituturaga together with the two keynote speakers from Nepal and Australia

5.15pm  Close of Council for the day

7.00pm  ACFOA Council Dinner (Rydges, Wellington Room)

Saturday 20 September
9.00am  ACFOA Council:
Greetings from PIANGO and other visiting peak bodies
Felicity Bollen, PIANGO Executive Director and Solomon Islands delegation members

11.00am  Workshops
Workshop 2: Aid in the Pacific and the new interventionism – risks and opportunities
Guest speakers: Solomon Islands NGO delegation members

12.30pm  Lunch
1.30pm  ACFOA Annual General Meeting

3.00pm  Close of ACFOA Council

Sunday 21 September
Free day

Monday 22 September
9.00am  Meet with Graham Tupper, Executive Director ACFOA

10am  Meeting with AusAID in association with Felicity Bollen, Executive Director of PIANGO

12noon  Free time

3.45pm  Transportation to CDI, Australian National University

4.00pm  CDI/ANU Seminar
‘The role of Civil Society in the Solomon Islands and the Pacific’, Coombs Building

5.30pm  ANU Seminar ends followed by farewell drinks at the ANU