Action On Poverty’s Solomon Island Bridging the Gap Project.

Evaluation

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Executive Summary

“SIDT hemi wanfela organization we nao hemi harim man blong graun. Hemi woka wantaim mifela long mekim olgeta samting long mifela barava gud. (SIDT is an organization that listens to the people. They work with us to make our lives better)” (Community leader, Faumamanu, Malaita).

The Bridging the Gap Program (BtGP) has been implemented by the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) in a number of communities across Solomon Islands since 2011/12. SIDT has been supported with funding and a degree of mentoring over this time by the Australian NGO, Action on Poverty (AOP, formerly Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific, AFAP).

The BtGP aims to build the capacity of local communities to advocate for themselves to firstly provincial governments and also to other organisations and agencies which may be able to assist them in fulfilling their locally identified development objectives and aspirations. SIDT works with these communities to help them establish action plans, advocacy groups and to organize village forums which are the presentation of the community’s plans for their own community-led development. These forums highlight the community’s future plans to provincial government, NGOs and churches and any other relevant organisations as an initial contact and notification of what the community intends to do. Government and other organisations can then determine if the community plans align with their own priorities and whether or not they can work with that community.

This SIDT method of working with communities places responsibility for plans and subsequent actions squarely with the community. SIDT is an indigenous NGO and works as a truly ‘grassroots facilitator’. AOP supports SIDT to function in this way by allowing SIDT to use funds supplied by AOP in a manner which is in line with contractual agreements, but dispensed according to SIDT’s BtGP priorities. This partnership arrangement between AOP and SIDT is the most significant finding of this evaluation.

The BtGP enables/assists targeted communities to fulfill locally determined objectives and the partnership between AOP and SIDT enable an indigenous NGO to develop and strengthen Solomon Island civil society in the face of the increasing influence of foreign donor objectives via international NGOs and their increasing geographic and sectoral coverage.

The BtGP has been very successful in helping to empower communities to become more able to engage with the systems of the modern nation state (provincial government and its departments and authorities) while maintaining their local identity and priorities.

This evaluation recommends that indigenous NGOs such as SIDT be supported to continue their work and in the case of the BtGP, makes a number of recommendations which can enhance such
ongoing support. These recommendations are listed here and are the rationale for each is discussed in more detail in the body of the report.

1. Maintain support for indigenous NGOs.

2. Increased support for BtGP/SIDT staff.

3. Establish a locally owned and understood monitoring process which monitors desired change/outcomes.