

Research on Bridging the Gap Project – Solomon Islands Component



**This project is funded by the Australian Government
through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).**

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INTRODUCTION

Solomon Islands Development Trust Fund (SIDT) with support from Action on Poverty (AOP) through its Bridging the Gap Program (BTGP) has been working with local communities in various Provinces in Solomon Islands since 2011 to promote community empowerment, community-led development aspirations and inclusive participation. Through BTGP, communities were trained to advocate for their own development needs by which they create action plans, form advocacy groups and hold village forums so they can lobby their governments for essential social services. The BTGP has been ongoing for the last 8 years and will be completed in June 2019. SIDT is an indigenous non-government organisation based in Honiara and is working with local communities since its establishment in the 1980s.

SIDT was commissioned by AOP to implement and manage the BTG programs and be accountable to AOP. With such trust and commitment rendered to a local indigenous NGO to undertake the overall management and implementation, this partnership shows confidence in the local organisation and enables a local, indigenous organisation to share decision-making with regard to project outcomes and dispersing of the budget and also to undertake capacity building and training for SIDT staff which make a real contribution to democratic governance of Solomon Islands.

The overall day to day management of the BTGP is done by SIDT whom also is AOP's Strategic Partner and the implementing agency. The focal point is the Director of SIDT. AOP, in partnership with SIDT over the years, has provided financial support, technical advice and developing of Knowledge management practices. A local consultant was engaged by AOP and SIDT to undertake research and evaluation of the BTGP in Solomon Islands.

AOP support for SIDT's governance project – Bridging the Gap (BTG) was intended to strengthen linkages between local communities and Provincial Governments which over the years, communities experienced “gap” that exists within and between the communities and the Provincial Government, including the National Government. The BTGP has been implemented on various selected target communities in seven provinces in Solomon Islands particularly: Isabel (4 communities), Choiseul (1 community), Malaita (2 Communities), Guadalcanal (4 Communities), Western (1 Community), Temotu (1 Community) and Central Is (1 community). BTGP has been very successful in helping empower local communities in the seven Provinces with its good governance and capacity building trainings to become more able to engage and communicate with the Provincial Government and its departments while their local identity and their community priorities are maintained.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Solomon Islands are comprised of about 1000 very scattered mountainous islands and low-lying coral atolls. These islands have a total land area of 28,370 square kilometres consisting of volcanic peaks rising up to 2,500 metres, and low-lying coral islands less than 3m above sea level. The islands include the large high islands of Guadalcanal, Malaita, Santa Isabel, San Cristóbal, Choiseul, New Georgia, and the Santa Cruz Group with many diverse smaller islands, and including the Central Islands and Rennell and Bellona.

Figure 1: Map of Solomon Islands indicating Main Islands and Provincial Groupings



The island chains together measure some 1,500 kms in total length. Solomon Islands are divided into 9 provinces with a total population of approximately 523,000 (2009 estimate) who are almost exclusively of Melanesian decent.

Since 2011, SIDT and AOP have partnered in implementing the Bridging the Gap project in a number of locations over Solomon Islands. The BTGP works with target communities in 7 Provinces in Solomon Islands (Isabel, Choiseul, Malaita, Guadalcanal, Western, Central Is and Temotu) providing capacity building and livelihood support initiatives at community level. Please refer to figure 2 for the project locations.

Figure 2: A map showing the Provinces whereby the BTGP target communities are located.



There is a gap in the line of communication between village-based population, government and community development practitioners due to the ineffective delivery of development information between these parties. A link is required so that they can collaborate more effectively to address issues of common interest through the alignment of the diverse priority areas of interest among these parties. BTG is an initiative towards rebuilding the confidence that lies dormant within Village, Government and Practitioners in community development in terms of effecting communication and alignment of their respective plans.

Strengthening of good governance initiatives and inclusive participation mechanisms through livelihood initiatives is seen herein as an alternative path at the village setting in the Solomon Islands context to journey into a more practical and visible form of linkages between these parties. Villagers would like to see their views addressed according mainly through tangible forms, though they are often isolated from policy design, formulation and implementation at the Government level. Despite such a situation, their engagement in livelihood programs at their reach can be a beginning for them to address policy matters relating to community development or social service delivery by Government.

The BTG project has introduced to village people the basic knowledge of how to advocate in bridging the gap they (village people) experience when dealing with their leaders at all levels of Government as well as those at the Practitioners setting that includes Civil Society Organisations. The BTG project remains an ongoing project in the Solomon Islands because of the need to expand and extend the message of BTG to the scattered villages on the hundreds of Islands in the Solomon Islands.

Through participation in several capacity building initiatives, local communities have increased their engagement in social accountability activities. The project has also provided a good entry point for local government officers in the Province to engage with communities.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to document and report on the outcome of the BTGP in various communities in Solomon Islands. This documentation is achieved by examining the target communities that have previously been involved in the BTG Project and to trace the intended and unintended outcomes and Project Impacts. This research report is produced in line with the outputs stated in the TOR for the assignment.

METHODOLOGY

The following methods were used to gather information for the research and evaluation of the BTGP:

- i. Desktop study and review of all relevant project documentations, project progress reports and project evaluation reports.
- ii. Focus Group Discussion with project beneficiaries.
A Focus Group discussion was undertaken with community Representatives in KOLAVE and Mangakiki in west Guadalcanal
- iii. Observations during field visit.

BRIDGING THE GAP PROJECT AREAS IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

In Solomon Islands SIDT has been working with partners over the years to design and implement projects that build capacity in existing village governance structures and contribute to improving the quality of village life in all areas affecting the people. This is done by collecting, creating and sharing of information that are useful and appropriate for villages, and contributing to the research and analysis of issues affecting the people of the Solomon Islands. To that, networking and advocacy activities were also provided to the communities that fosters mutual understanding and communication between Solomon Island villagers and the institutions, agencies and individuals who can help them make positive changes to the quality of village life.

SIDT have also provided similar Good Governance and Capacity Building Trainings to various local communities in Solomon Islands in 2008 under the Building Livelihoods Empowerment and Strategic Sustainability (BLESS) project which undertakes participatory community development with a particular focus on empowering women and youth in decision making and governance. Under the BLESS Project, the target communities are six different constituencies across three provinces – Isabel, Guadalcanal (KOLAVE) and Malaita.

The BTGP in collaboration with SIDT and AOP has been working in a number of selected target communities in seven provinces in Solomon Islands since 2011 (Refer to Figure 2). In each of the Provinces, there are target communities that have undertaken either governance trainings, livelihood initiative trainings, or both. The target communities, with the type of trainings received and the years involved in the BTG project is in table 1 below.

Table 1: BTGP Project areas in relation to the type of trainings received from SIDT

Province	Target Communities	Type of Trainings Received	Year
Trainings: Good Governance, Social Accountability and Livelihood Initiatives			
Isabel	Raja, Maina and Kolomamata	Good governance, social Accountability and Livelihood Initiatives	2011 /2012
	Samasodu	Good governance, social Accountability	2014/2015
Choiseul	Voza	Good Governance and Social Accountability	2012/2013
			2013/2014
Malaita	Faumamanu	Good Governance and Social Accountability	2015/2016
			2016/2017
			2017/2018
Guadalcanal	Mangakiki	Livelihood Initiatives	2017/2018
Western	Kindu	Good governance, social Accountability and Livelihood Initiatives	2017/2018
Temotu	Matu	Good Governance and Social Accountability and Livelihood Initiatives	2017/2018

SIDT have also facilitated the Livelihood initiative trainings for its selected communities whereby practical livelihood programs for women and youth groups were established through effective engagement of village people. Five target communities have been supported by BTGP and continue livelihood initiative activities since 2018. This communities include:

- Leitongo Community (Central Islands Province),
- Isi Community (Guadalcanal Province),
- SITAPUNA Community (Isabel Province)
- AGAM Community (Malaita) and;
- Mangakiki Community (Guadalcanal).

The livelihood initiatives for the target communities include fishing and piggery initiatives, growing crops, bakery and so forth.

BRIDGING THE GAP PROJECT OUTCOMES

The good governance, social accountability and livelihood trainings provided to target communities by SIDT has strengthened each target local community's confidence and capacity to advocate for themselves; firstly, to 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.

OUTCOME OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND AWARENESS:

6.1.1 CAPACITY BUILDING EXERCISES CONDUCTED FOR TARGET COMMUNITIES

- **Participatory Rural Appraisal.**

This is a five-day workshop which aims at getting participants to create some village data which allows for village development plans to be derived from. PRA workshop contents allows leaders/participants to explore self-assessment techniques, community development tools and problem synthesis methods, as well as techniques that are seen as useful for villagers to increase participation in their village action plans. Participants during PRAs will develop village maps, access their Village Quality of Life Index (VQLI) and identify natural and manmade resources which are in the village. PRAs will also help target villagers to create village action plans which are aimed at improving village life without outside assistance and guidance. Data developed during PRAs includes the village population, which will be used as baseline for any development action plans to be developed in later project activities like VAP.

- **Effective Meetings**

The Effective Meetings Training is the second set of training conducted straight after the PRA training for target communities. It is expected that participants/villagers should be able to discuss and talk with in-depth views about their village priorities and needs. Wider participation in village planning starts following the acquisition of relevant analytical skills during the PRA trainings, whereby running village meetings effectively is the next set of skills in building village capacity as they start putting priorities into action.

In each of the target communities, it was observed that village meetings are regularly facilitated and how the meeting are conducted are standard and similar in all the villages. It is confirmed by those that were interviewed that conducting and facilitating an effective village meeting which may include proper outlining of agendas for discussion and taking minutes on the issues discussed or raised is lacking. The introduction of effective facilitation and proper note taking skills for village meetings is vital and appreciated by the communities.

Participants are also taught skills of facilitating village meetings effectively, which could produce positive results in rural development. Participants discovered that meetings could provide avenues where decisions are made and actions are agreed on, and also, the village committees were aware of their specific roles when managing their committees. Participants also do practical exercises which helped them to design a note taking template for note taking, as well as identifying possible note takers such as youths and women leaders. Youth participants and women leaders, who are educated, acknowledged the training has enabled them to realize the importance of proper note taking and record keeping. This training has empowered people to know and understand what effective meeting is all about and how to conduct meetings and keep records for future referencing.

From these trainings, participants develop more structured ways of thinking and approach to address village concerns and realise the importance of equal participation and decision making in meetings.

- **Proposal Writings**

Final training on Village Action Plan Documentation in the form of Project Proposal writing is conducted for target communities. Participants are provided with sample proposals designed by training participants as practical exercises, specifically to address target communities overall communal issues and by which participants could use to create a proposal for their own communities. Once communities have created their draft proposals, they are compiled and later revised for additional inputs from the community and once finalized they can be presented to relevant government authorities and other stakeholders who are invited to the village forum.

- **Village Action Plan Documentation Training**

This is also a three-day workshop that focuses on how to document (written) Village Action Plans (VAP). Participants from target communities are taught knowledge and skills on how to present their VAP in an understandable sequence and timeframe. Contents of a VAP report is usually taken from the data collected through the usage of PRA tools. These VAP reports are important in the future development of village level project proposals by villagers (especially participants/direct beneficiaries) themselves with little assistance from outside experts in terms of project designs. From the practical exercises, participants are enabled to design project proposals for village priority needs, as well as those of women, youths and the disabled in their own communities. Such trainings help empower women to participate and also to be an advocate for their own issues and priorities. At the end of each training, communities should be able to create some simple project proposals which will be reviewed and marketed to provincial and national leaders of their respective provinces as well as other donor funders and relevant stakeholders.

- **Advocacy/ Networking**

The advocacy training is also a three-day workshop and it focuses on empowering villagers/participants to possess appropriate skills in building networks with other authorities (especially at the national and provincial level). Leaders and village elders and vulnerable group leaders (especially women and girls) are arranged and encouraged to participate beside the participants. SIDT then facilitates a process to allow villagers to develop their village advocacy plans through the usage of PRA tools that support the village action plans. An advocacy committee is then formed after training (which is comprised of an equal number of men and women) empowered to advocate for their village action plans and village development plans. The networking component has also assisted participants and the newly formed advocacy committee to create and seek new partners who will provide support for them with their plans. This advocacy and networking creates and leads to meaningful and sustainable linkages between development partners and also their development plans i.e. village, provincial and national.

- **Village Forums**

A village level forum for the target regions/villages is conducted by SIDT as part of the BTGP. Representatives from other nearby villages are also invited to attend the forum along with provincial level leaders (i.e. members and Provincial Government workers), churches representatives and other NGOs' representatives operating in the region (hosts targeted audience). Women and girl leaders are allocated time to share their priority issues and promote gender balance in development planning and decision making in the Forum.

From SIDT's perspective, Village forum is an activity that brings about the first point of contact between villagers and their National and Provincial authorities. Ongoing dialogue between these parties is then monitored (by SIDT), with villagers themselves taking leading roles in communicating directly with their National and Provincial government authorities on their village priorities/proposals.

6.1.2 CASE STUDY: VERAHUE'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.

Verahue Community in West Guadalcanal, Guadalcanal Province has greatly appreciated the BTGP trainings on good governance and capacity building that have empowered them to achieve two of their prioritised projects – an aid post and a kindergarten. Verahue Community is one of the three communities that make up KOLAVE (Koviloko, Lambi and Verahue). The KOLAVE Advocacy Committee is made up of representatives from these 3 cluster villages who attended the SIDT's series of good governance and capacity building trainings. The KOLAVE Advocacy Committee has played a vital role in assisting the communities in their struggle to venture into addressing their priority needs with assistance from partners.

Benedeth Agosade Raymond, Chairlady for Verahue -Sub-committee, is one the active and outspoken member of a committee that deals with issues within Verahue under the KOLAVE Advocacy Association. Mrs Benedeth appreciated that the Governance Trainings that they have received was an eye opener for them to many opportunities ahead and from the

training's, men, women and youths have develop the courage to take on leadership roles in community organisations and also to start networking and conduct village forums. One of the achievements of the Trainings was the Community's Initiative to Register KOLAVE Advocacy Association as a local NGO. With the Support from SIDT's seed fund, the Association starts off with its administration work. The association utilises the fund to meet administration and logistics cost and other costs incurred during their advocacy. Empowered with confidence, KOLAVE Association members liaise with partners and work towards achieving their goal. The association members undertake a series of meetings with SIDT and also DSC, the umbrella body of the NGOs and inform them of their plans and seek advice on how to achieve their plan to register their association. With help from SIDT and DSE, the KOLAVE Association finally established their constitution and registered their Association under the Charitable Act on May 7th, 2012. Having a registered local body, sub-committee members continue with their advocacy activities for their respective villages and have achieved support to address their community issues. Some of their achievements are:

- In 2014 the community in Verahue suffered from the flash flood as a result of continuous rainfall associated with tropical cyclone experienced in the Country. After the 2014 flash flood, Mrs Benedeth and her sub-committee members held a meeting to discuss their need for assistance in response to the event which had severely affected the community. Equipped with knowledge from the trainings delivered by SIDT; Mrs Benedeth Agosade Raymond and her sub-committee members drafted a report based on their assessment on the impact of the flash flood. With the draft report, Mrs Benedeth visit SIDT office and delivered their community's 2014 Flash Flood Report for review and inputs and also for SIDT to assist in securing assistance and support for the community. Seeing the community need, SIDT sought financial assistance for the community. After a while, to the Community's disbelief, they saw their community name published in the Solomon Star Newspaper and was prioritised for the Disaster Rehabilitation Project. This Disaster Rehabilitation Project was funded by World Bank and implemented by RDP. From community consultation with the donor with regards to the kind of assistance the community expected, the community prioritised a Kindergarten for the young Children in their Community. Hence, this was approved and a total sum of \$250,000 was awarded for the construction of Verahue Kindergarten project in 2016. The project is still ongoing and should be completed by this year.
- The community in Verahue are appreciative of the training they received from SIDT as a result of the Bridging the Gap Project. The community continues to advocate for their community need and also design their village plans to assist their own communities in development. With knowledge from Trainings provided by SIDT especially the VAPs, the community prioritised a Clinic to be built in Verahue as the uttermost community need. The only Clinic the people of Verahue accessed is in Lambi and it is quiet far. With a common goal, the Community's Advocacy Committee approached Guadalcanal Province and get the Provincial Approval and permission for their plan to build a Clinic. With approval and consent by Guadalcanal Province; the community started their community fundraising towards the construction of their Clinic. Year by year the community continues to raise funds. The community managed to construct the foundation of the Clinic, however, need more funds to continue with their project. Seeing this Community's determination and the need to build a Clinic, the Guadalcanal Province Medical links the Community to KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency). Through the Community's partnership with Guadalcanal Province and KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency) in 2016, it has enabled the establishment and construction of the Verahue Clinic. The clinic was opened in June 2018 and has been operational for 10months now.

The above is achieved by the community from the support rendered by SIDT through the Bridging the gap Project's Good Governance Trainings and Capacity Building Trainings; and the establishment of the KOLAVE Advocacy Association as a local NGO. This has paved way for the association to start networking and advocate for their community needs. SIDT's pivotal role in assisting the communities review proposals before finalising and submission to funding agencies is tremendous.

Figure 3: Aid-post at Verahue



OUTCOME OF LIVELIHOOD INITIATIVES

6.2.1 FACILITATING OF INITIATIVES THAT CAN CREATE EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT FOR VILLAGE PEOPLE

- ESTABLISHING OF PRACTICAL LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH GROUPS.

The livelihood programmes identified and prioritised by the communities' ranges from Fishing, Piggery, Growing Crops, Bakery, and other livelihood programmes. Communities will have to identify their own livelihood projects that are relevant to them given the nature of their livelihood needs and the availability of necessary resources required in order to successfully implement their small income projects. After their priority livelihood needs were identified, it will undergo some screenings and reviews during community discussions. Once screened and approved, the community will have their prioritized livelihood projects. Below is an example of community Prioritised livelihood projects by Isi Community, Leitongo Community, Agam Community and Sitapuna Community.

<p>Isi Community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coconut oil production 2. Pineapple farming 3. Fishing 4. Individual household Canteen 	<p>Leitongo Community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Piggery farming 2. Fishing 3. Selling local farming products
<p>AGAM Community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vegetable farming 2. Group Canteen 3. Piggery farming 	<p>SITAPUNA:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fishing 2. Selling of Cooked foods and local farming products

6.2.2 CASE STUDY: MANGAKIKI LIVELIHOOD PROJECT

Mangakiki is one of the villages, east of Verahue in West Guadalcanal who have participated in the BTGP capacity building trainings. Representatives from Mangakiki who participated in the capacity building trainings include Community Leaders, elders and other selected participants. These community representatives have become the voice and village advocates pursuing people's rights to access fair delivery of government basic services and other development opportunities.

From a series of trainings provided by SIDT, particularly the women's empowerment and financial literacy, women have gained new knowledge and skills on how to manage community-based savings and how to manage livelihood projects. According to key informant Salome Nisi, the community have been provided funding to start their livelihood initiatives. To undertake their livelihood initiative projects, the community was divided into 4 zones and each zone has their own livelihood project as depicted in the table below.

Table 2: Mangakiki Livelihood projects according to their zonings.

Mangakiki Livelihood Project	
Zone 1	Sale of Rice
Zone 2	Fuel Depot (Petrol/Diesel)
Zone 3	Canteen
Zone 4	Second-hand Clothing

From the above livelihood projects, zone 1, zone 3 and zone 4 are not functioning well due to, outstanding credits, stock not selling fast, not enough support from men in the village, zone members not working together as a group, and some members just reluctant to participate due to mistrust. Of the 3 zones, only zone 2 is flourishing in its livelihood initiative project and zone members continue to collaborate and nurture their initiative. Their fuel Depot business has made a profit of \$40,000 and now they are planning to re-invest in a Savings Scheme. Members of zone 2 have appreciated financial literacy trainings provided which enabled them to participate and now they are implementing what they have learnt as shown in the livelihood initiative they have been involved in. Men and women who have attended the consultation, highlight that the rural communities need continuous empowerment to identify, analyse and assess their own needs, set up of their own community governance structures and develop plans to address their priority issues and this would only come true if more advocacy on good governance targets people in the local village setting and also to undertake ongoing monitoring of livelihood initiatives undertaken.

INTENDED AND UNINTENDED OUTCOMES

The intended outcomes that were discussed are perceived to assist the communities to realize their village priorities as well as promoting community developments. These will also measure the level of communities’ and stakeholders’ participation to implement what they achieve from the project successfully. Some of the intended outcomes achieved are as follows:

- Participation of communities in several capacity building initiatives have increased community’s engagement in social accountability activities, which has paved a way for the local government agencies and officers to engage in communities’ activities.
- Communities undertaking the participatory planning training had identified their development priorities, realize their rights and entitlements and engage with local government to present their needs and request for provision of quality services.
- Emphasis on maintaining gender equality has been realised by the community leaders as women were elected to be on Advocacy Committees and women as officer bearers of community project.
- Consultations with stakeholder groups were critical for the project to encourage community ownership as each stakeholder has undertaken key roles in implementing the project activities and ensuring its sustainability.
- Advocacy and network training have not only strengthened links with local and national government but also resulted in formation of village advocacy committees that have built strategic partnership with over 5 key stakeholders to support the projects in Malaita, Guadalcanal, Western and Temotu Province.
- Strengthened capacity of development committees has enabled implementation of several development projects in the target communities eg water, entrepreneurship, livelihood project etc.

The BTGP has been successful in some communities and had achieved the intended outcomes. There are some unplanned outcomes that had been identified in some BTGP sites and are as follows:

- Community commitments on occasional major church events especially during Easter, took weeks of community preparation as well as other cultural obligations, like deaths in communities, also affect the implementation of the community livelihood projects. So the project activities were quite delayed until the situations were back to normal.
- Community members, whom participated in governance trainings, failed to share information and knowledge to other community members.
- Trainings should be provided for all – open invitations and many women to be involved.

- On-going monitoring of community livelihood project is lacking.
- Weak leadership roles from Committee Members resulting in lack of coordination and cooperation as a team.
- Delays in procurement of materials or equipment needed for the livelihood project affects the planned activities of the project.
- Group members are not cooperative and supportive due to misunderstandings that arise during the course of the project.
- Lack of proper management of funds (women's savings Club or saving and re-investing profits from Livelihood initiatives) resulting in projects not being able to achieve its intended outcome.
- Members actively participated in livelihood activities at the start, but the level of participation slowly declined.
- Land Disputes force project implementation to be on hold – Lambi Water Supply Project
- For savings Club, continual withdrawal of loan money for unknown reasons is a great concern for keepers and loan money was never recovered after lending. Borrowers do not simply follow savings rule and guidelines.
- For unknown reasons, women are discouraged to participate in the savings club
- No clear planning for future use of the savings club money and resulting in members having less confidence in engaging in such activities.
- Remote rural communities face great difficulty in communication due to limited network coverages. As a result, they are left out on development opportunities and resources, and many feel neglected by their national and provincial governments.

Despite the unintended outcomes of the livelihood initiatives, communities still find ways to resolve their issues and continue to push for their livelihood initiatives to continue, despite others that may have stopped along the way.

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSON LEARNED

Participation from the catchment communities mainly Community Leaders or Elders and those that had participated in all series of the Capacity Building Trainings had enabled and organized strong village advocates. This in so doing had empowered the advocates to pursue people's rights to access fair delivery of government basic services. Included that other development opportunities have motivated the people from the communities to work together and have helped them to realize and feel a sense of their community, and recognize the benefits of their involvement. Community leaders and those who have participated in all series of capacity building trainings from the target communities are now more organized as strong village advocates. With the knowledge received from the trainings, the advocates become empowered to pursue for people's rights to access fair delivery of government basic services including other development opportunities that continues to motivate people to work together. By doing so, it made people to feel a sense of community and recognise the benefits of their involvement. People see such community participation to assess their needs (issues to address, prioritise goals and negotiating with agencies) as a genuine opportunity to improve their own livelihoods and a community as a whole.

In line with the above, Community people are always willing and ready to participate in any activity or programmes organised. As seen in the case studies, the governance series of trainings delivered have provided participants with new learned skills and have increased people's knowledge and confidence – and participants are empowered that they can make a difference in their community. Communities have also realised that women's roles in the community should be respected and also women should be included in community discussions, trainings and also decision-making bodies. Such working together builds positive relationships across members in the community, identifies common understandings, prioritises issues to address, develops and maintains links to national bodies and promotes partnership working in a way which encourages and equips communities to take part and influence decisions, services and activities which are intended to improve the quality of life in communities and the environment.

The lessons learned from the BTGP case studies showed that:

- Groups whose livelihood initiatives are based on common interest, are most likely to be sustainable and achieves their goals.

- Community members will only participate when there is a focus on issues that address their needs.
- There is no representation of people with special needs or vulnerable people on any committees despite being included in activities, therefore their views or needs are not heard.
- Improved community planning on small livelihood projects need to be prioritized.
- There is a need for ongoing capacity building training on small business management training and also monitoring on their progress.
- Strict rules need to be imposed to discourage credit sales especially with small canteens.
- Community reporting mechanism should be in place to get monthly updates from communities on their work progress, including activity pictures captured.

There is need to always bring stakeholders together, table a challenge and discuss it, thereby bringing long lasting solutions to those challenges.

WAY FORWARD

Looking at the challenges identified from the lesson learned above, the way forward are as follows:

- The focus has to be on the issues that address the needs of the people in a particular community
- Communities cannot rely entirely on partners to fully implement this project
- Community projects or livelihood initiatives belongs to communities and everyone must be fully involved and benefit socially or economically.
- People with special needs or disabilities including vulnerable people should be represented in the committees established in-order to get their opinions on any planned activities;
- Emphasis on prioritizing and proper planning of small livelihood projects;
- Prioritize on – going capacity building trainings on managing small business;
- Continue to encourage community members to be responsible and to realize the importance of the livelihood programmes particularly small businesses;
- Penalties and consequences should be imposed to discourage irresponsible management of small businesses;
- Implement community reporting mechanism to get frequent updates from the communities on the progress of work.

With the above, it is also important to also examine the local needs and the types of resources available. With community-based livelihood initiatives, there needs to be a proper understanding of rural economy for the livelihood interventions being implemented in a better way and this would include: socio-economic baseline survey of conditions of the area, existing livelihoods prevalent in the area, the aspirations of the rural people and the demands of the market and the industries. This will enable communities to gain deeper understanding of their own community, its own needs, their opinions, fears and hopes and how to address them including how to use their own resources to solve issues affecting them and improving community life. With regard to governance trainings, people need to be well informed and trainings should be open to all or whoever is interested so that everyone will understand how or what to do.

CONCLUSION

Bridging the Gap Project in Solomon Islands aims to build the capacity of local communities to advocate for themselves to provincial governments and to other organisations and agencies which may be able to assist them in fulfilling their locally identified development objectives and aspirations. Bridging the Gap Program has been implemented by the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) in a number of communities across Solomon Islands since 2011.

With support from Action on Poverty (AOP), SIDT have provided training workshops in target communities spread across seven provinces in the Solomon Islands. The trainings provided aims to build village people's skills in Governance, leadership and community Planning. Through series of such trainings provided by SIDT, the target communities were able to 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. Also, through the community livelihood initiatives, the communities were able to learn new knowledge and skills on managing community-

based savings and implement livelihood income generating activities. This livelihood initiative has enabled communities to be self-reliant and advocate for their community needs and aspirations.

However, there are some setbacks identified in the program that need more attention from the SIDT particularly in encouraging the participation of community members, disabled people or people with special needs; addressing the issue of managing small businesses and making people realize the importance of such small projects; and implementing a reporting mechanism to get regular and frequent feedback from the community on the progress. These setbacks if addressed are a way forward for the program.

Despite the challenges the program is a success due to the fact that the livelihood initiative programmes and the capacity building trainings has enabled communities to be self-reliant and advocate for their community needs and aspirations for an improved infrastructure such as kindergarten, Clinic and others which was achieved through Community participation. In overall, it had improved their quality of living in the village.