

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Fostering community well-being and family harmony



Starting in mid-2009, ICP has taken a holistic approach by working with entire communities and helping them support every family they include. ICP has also adopted an asset-based approach to both community and family strengthening. The goal of the program is to help communities and families use their assets to build viable livelihood options for themselves. An important secondary objective is to foster family harmony in a context where domestic violence is common.

Initial funding from AusAID provided ICP with the opportunity to test various strength-based approaches in three communities over a six-month period. Based on this experience, the ICP team agreed on the set of tools and methodology to be used in implementing their version of ABCD.

The ABCD Process

Once a community has agreed to work with ICP, a team of 3-4 ICP field staff together with a representative from a community which has already embarked on the ABCD process and a member of yet another community which is considering ABCD as a future option come to live in the newly-engaged community for three weeks. During this period, community members – organized into groups of men, women, young men, and young women – are familiarized with the ABCD process through a range of activities. They engage in **story-telling** to bring out the community's past successes; they conduct a community-wide **visioning** process to create a shared picture of what they would like to achieve in five years; they carry out **asset mapping** embracing the community's natural, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual resources as well as stakeholder networks that can be used to implement their vision for the future; and they do **action planning** to learn how to effectively mobilize community assets and external resources. Parallel with

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Although Solomon Island residents mostly live in self-sufficient villages with access to adequate natural resources, recent years have seen a growing discontent and frustration among these communities as their expectations of government aid to meet their development needs remain largely unfulfilled and traditional customs and practices – that for centuries provided the basis for social cohesion – are increasingly eroded.

The Inclusive Community Program (ICP), known for its extensive experience conducting skills development trainings across the Solomon Islands, has initiated a strategy aimed to help communities and families build sustainable livelihood options for themselves by leading them to discover, and make effective use of, the various assets they have.

Early results show the potential of an ABCD approach for improving community and family well-being, particularly by way of reviving traditional ways of working together for the common good.

Background

The Inclusive Communities Program is one of the six projects operating under the Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement funded by the Australian Government's International Development Program (AusAID).

ICP motto:
**“One is
too small
a number
to achieve
greatness.”**

that, workshops are held on **power dynamics** and **financial literacy** to help community members realize how power can be used for their common good and how they might interact more advantageously with the formal economy.

Next, ICP staff visit every family to review these community-wide activities and generate a family vision and action plan. During this stage, data is also collected on family health and well-being. Eventually families with similar visions will be clustered for mutual support and to share experiences.

Resulting Developments

The ICP staff work in communities until they are able to conduct the ABCD process themselves. Following the initial phase of engagement, the community elects a “development committee” to oversee the implementation of their plans and a lead facilitator to liaise with ICP and help coordinate additional training and mentoring.

The following case demonstrates typical developments in a community involved in ICP. The village of Pago-Pago (located on an island about a two-hour boat ride off the coast from the capital Honiara) developed a vision focused on improving the overall health and safety standards in the community. As the first step, they resolved to repair all semi-permanent houses to meet minimum safety and sanitation standards within 4 years. At least 60 houses would be repaired, rebuilt, or moved to safer ground. The dominant clan of the village, which owns most of its forest resources, has decided to give every family access to whatever amount of wood it needs for rebuilding. The community decided that every family will make a small contribution towards employing a group of skilled tradespeople from the village to supervise the largely volunteer work of cutting and milling timber, making cement bricks, and constructing improved sanitation and access to clean water. In addition, community members opted to close the nearby 1.4 km-long reef to all commercial use for a 12-month period, whereupon the replenished shell, shellfish, and fish stocks would be harvested at sustainable levels – and sold at the capital city market to generate funds for

implementing their development plans. Further signs of improvement in community well-being include the establishment of a management committee and revival of grassroots activist groups such as Mothers’ Union which seeks to enhance the quality of family life by teaching parenting skills and encouraging young people to become responsible members of their community.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The idea of using an asset-based approach as the key instrument for solving social and economic problems at the community level is new to the majority of people residing in the rural areas of the Solomon Islands. The ICP field staff has found that many residents of those communities which are going through the initial stages of the ABCD process are reluctant to commit to initiatives that do not rely on government handouts or project grants. Even though the process typically generates a surge of enthusiasm and creative energy amongst the communities involved as the progress they are making becomes more tangible and their self-esteem increases, they realize all too well that the journey ahead is long. Many sources of support will be needed to enable them to implement their collective vision, suggesting that the next steps should focus on establishing linkages with outside agencies in government, private, and civil society sectors.



For more information contact Christopher Dureau: c_dureau@bigpond.com; christopherdureau@matrixconsulting.net.au

Written by Christopher Dureau