

Case Study: Citizens' Education for Good Governance

Location: East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Introduction

Despite Papua New Guinea's richness in natural resources, much of the revenue derived from them has not been invested in the provision of services or the development of infrastructure, due to a mixture of financial mismanagement and corruption in political circles. This has resulted in underdevelopment of infrastructure, and reliance on Australian aid for service provision. This failure of government, shown most strikingly in its inability to pay wages, has led to harmful consequences such as loss of faith in, and withdrawal from the political process and from community affairs non-co-operation with that state, theft of public and private property, and an increase in disorder such as tribal violence, violence against women and children and the burning of government buildings.

Background

The project, Citizens' education for good governance, developed by a coalition of organisations, has worked out a process of dialogue between communities, emerging civil society groups and government in the East Sepik Province. In effect, it is a mass programme of education, using community trainers. The project has worked with selected communities, NGOs, community based organisations and other civil society groups, training institutions and schools, using a range of means of communication and education:

- Popular education involving theatre, song, and community dialogue
- Popular and participatory workshops with small groups of local leaders and activists
- Certificated studies for community based service providers
- Computer-based self-study

Working in selected locations, the project educated and informed people about the rights and responsibilities of government, civil society and citizens in the promotion of good governance. It has produced and written, audio and visual information and in the local lingua franca, Tok Pisin. Issues discussed have included the Papua New Guinea constitution, the role of the Ombudsman, the Leadership Code, reforms in the structure of government, and the Electoral Reform process.

The key theme which emerged was the need for honesty and integrity among voters and among leaders, summed up in the following phrases:

Citizens' Education for Good Governance Culture & Development

Don't Sell Your Vote
(Noken Maketim Vot Bilong Yu)

What Kind of Leader are You?
(Yu Wanen Kain Lida?)

The project also organised the painting of a community mural; a 3-day citizens' festival and training workshop; and a popular handbook on governance issues. It also held a follow-up review and training workshop to support groups who are active in increasing citizen participation in governance.

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Impact

The mass education programme has involved 40,000 people and has led to a number of follow-up activities such as People's Festivals to publicise the issues it has raised. It has led to a cadre of active citizens concerned with good governance and the role that citizens can play. The programme stimulated latent demand among people, leading to people's festivals to consider matters of public concern, such as the constitution, the leadership code, the Ombudsman Commission and its roles, greater participation in governance, corruption and bribery, and electoral reforms. Task groups have been set up as a result, and many people are eager to repeat the experience in subsequent elections.

Lessons

- ❑ Engaging the state is imperative as sometimes civil society organisations only to talk among themselves or withdraw from engagement with government.
- ❑ Certification of participants is important in terms of motivating people to attend and take courses seriously.
- ❑ Usually governments set up structures meant to benefit citizens, but citizens never seem to appreciate or understand them. There is a need for a process of educating citizens on the bodies that they can use.
- ❑ If there are very few empowered people, they are not likely to bring about significant change. Building a movement requires a critical mass and this is what the project is trying to do.