POLICY REFORM AND ADMINISTRATION

15

Strengthening land administration in Solomon Islands

Douglas Larden » Land Administration Consultant, Australia

Marjorie Sullivan » Visiting Fellow, Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program, Australian National University, Canberra

A snapshot

Strengthening land administration in Solomon Islands

The AusAID-funded project to strengthen land administration in Solomon Islands was recently completed after more than seven years. It improved systems, processes and staff capacity in the Department of Lands and Survey and allowed the public to gain better access to land information. The implementation strategy of this project allowed for flexibility, which meant it could respond to opportunities such as the development of a geographic information system, the initiation of pilot activities in informal settlements and the recording of details of land held under customary ownership. However, the implementation of the project's core activity—to strengthen the capacity of the lands department—was too inflexible, which caused a number of problems.

Land administration systems are fundamental to any economic development related to land-based resources. Such systems must be developed within a strategic framework that supports wider government objectives and outlines clear goals.

This Solomon Islands project provides some key lessons for future land administration activities in the Pacific.

» It is important for the partner agency to own and control the support project, and for the project to maintain effective communication with all stakeholders.

» When working on complex issues such as informal settlements and recording customary land, pilot activities can provide valuable insights.

» Assistance to build the capacity of an agency needs to have a flexible design and to take into account both the constraints imposed by and any changes in the local context.

Contents

Background to the project

Land in Solomon Islands is distributed over nine provinces comprising seven major (provincial) islands and hundreds of smaller ones. The complex task of administering this land lies with the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey. The land administration system was inherited from the colonial period, well before independence in 1980, and although the system was broadly sound more than 20 years of poor governance and a lack of funds meant it had become run down.

By the late 1990s the then Department of Lands and Survey (DoLS) could reasonably be described as dysfunctional. The old colonial buildings were in need of repair, the public inquiry area was scuffed and dusty, there was no protected public waiting area and members of staff were rarely seen at the service counter. Staff morale was low—absenteeism was high, and service was virtually non-existent. Land records, including aerial photographs, registered titles and survey plans, were not maintained and were in decaying brown envelopes. The retrieval of records to meet customer requests was slow, tedious and often unsuccessful. Land transactions were very slow and, correspondingly, customer satisfaction was very low. Most senior managers were aware that the department needed outside assistance.

In 1998 the Solomon Islands Government requested AusAID support for what became the Solomon Islands Institutional Strengthening of Land Administration Project (SIISLAP). The project, which began in January 2000 in the Department of Lands and Survey, focused on upgrading and establishing functional systems for land administration. It had an emphasis on activities to generate revenue and to build the capacity of the department. The project was completed in June 2007.

Forced change—intermittent project development

THE ORIGINAL DESIGN

The project's objective was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Solomon Islands' land administration system. The design approach was influenced by a similar project in Papua New Guinea. An early design proposal included a sophisticated computerised management information system but both AusAID and the land ministry felt this was too ambitious. The focus was restricted to a centralised ministry and to alienated land, even though this represented only 13 per cent of the total land area (AusAID 1999a, 1999b). Customary land was not included as the associated issues were perceived to be too sensitive and complex.

The design team undertook an organisational review of the ministry and the design placed priority on building the technical capacity and skills of DoLS staff where these were low, to enable the staff to meet basic operational requirements such as procedure documentation, land registration, land transactions, cadastral mapping and valuations. Further activities included decentralising the delivery of services through regional land offices, improving customer service and making better use of mapping data.

A HALT AND NEW CHALLENGES IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT

The original SIISLAP design was completed just a few months before ethnic tensions erupted in 1998. Disputes over land were fundamental to the tensions, and land issues were later identified by a UNDP (2004) analysis as a structural cause of the conflict:

> At the root of the tensions, particularly in Guadalcanal and Honiara, was illegal squatting and use of customary lands, the commercialisation of land, rapid population growth and land pressure and poor management of urban growth … (p. 1)

Australia's broad response to the conflict focused on three areas: peace and reconciliation, the links between poverty and conflict, and public sector reform to improve economic management. The land ministry was central to these responses. The SIISLAP design had been based on the assumption that public sector reform would continue, law and order would be maintained, and the operating costs of the land ministry would be stable, but that situation had changed before the project commenced.

When the project began in January 2000 its term was intended to be three years. Unfortunately this period coincided with the peak of civil and political unrest, which undermined the ability of the ministry to function effectively and hampered SIISLAP's activities. Between 2000 and 2003 project staff were evacuated for a brief period to Australia, there were three changes of governments, four ministers, two permanent secretaries and four different project coordinators appointed by the governments.

Some of the consequences of the conflict included:

» forced shutdowns of the public service

» uncertainty and a deterioration of security in the workplace

» a general lowering of staff morale

» frequent instances of opportunism and exploitation

» widespread breakdown of decision making.

SIISLAP continued to 'wobble along', overcoming some of these constraints by focusing on non-controversial components of the land administration system and using contracted national staff. But during those three years few core activities were completed and no sustainable outcomes were achieved.

REFOCUSING THE DESIGN

Once peace and stability had been restored the Solomon Islands Government sought assistance to move the project into a new phase, and in 2003 AusAID revised the project design. The modified design drew on experience and lessons from the first phase as well as from other AusAID-funded land administration projects in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Kiribati and China. It identified the need for political and senior bureaucratic commitment and for a long-term commitment by donors to build confidence and consolidate incremental improvements.

The design advocated the use of simple computer systems—with manual systems to back them up—to support administrative functions, and it included support for improved land administration and improved revenue benefits from that. It also adjusted the original approach to focus more on:

» building the capacity of staff within the ministry

» responding to the growing recognition being given to customary land as a national economic asset

» promoting good governance to underpin the integrity of the land administration system

» strengthening the links between the land and justice sectors in resolving land disputes

» addressing issues of equitable land distribution, land accessibility and security of tenure.

SIISLAP adjusted its plans and approaches to implement the revised design in late 2003, and began to implement its second phase in March 2004, with an increased budget that initially required more resources and skills than the ministry had.

Priorities for the second phase of SIISLAP, which ran until June 2007, were to:

» improve the capacities of both senior managers and supervisors

» consolidate gains made in systems and processes during the first phase

» establish capability in mapping and geographic analysis

» introduce pilot land tenure activities.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN LAND ADMINISTRATION

Because of the unpredictable political and social environment, the revised design was explicitly flexible. Its annual planning process ensured that the project's overall objectives were reviewed every year. This enabled DoLS and SIISLAP to respond to demands that emerged in the land sector. For example, it allowed SIISLAP to support DoLS as it addressed the growing problem of unauthorised settlements in Honiara and took the opportunity to develop a conceptual model for recording and potentially registering customary land.

Activities resulting from the intervention of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003 and subsequent increases in aid led to a huge demand for thematic maps from new development programs. The project was able to respond to this expanding market for mapping products, as it had set up a computer-based geographic information system (GIS). Over the longer term this mapping unit could form the basis of a land resource information system that could help to support more effective use of the nation's resources for social and economic development.

SIISLAP implementation—key achievements

GOVERNANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING WITHIN THE MINISTRY

The approach to project implementation was pragmatic and the pace of implementation reflected the conditions in the public sector. The second phase of the project began at a time when there was a strong emphasis on good governance and staff were returning to a changed workplace after enforced absences during the tensions. SIISLAP's first new activity after the RAMSI intervention was to build up the capacity of the lands department and improve its systems of governance. Capacity building involves strengthening all systems used by an organisation and its staff. That means training staff to improve their administrative and technical skills and to provide new skills, improving the management skills of the senior officers as well as the processes of planning, communication and corporate functions like human resources management, and possibly introducing computer systems.

Capacity building was a major component of the project and was successful within the project's timeframes and resources. The project sought to build the capacity of managers and supervisors by:

» developing an organisational structure to reflect the department's functions[1]

» introducing a corporate plan and budget-based work plans as management tools

» establishing procedures to recruit senior and middle managers

» designing and delivering a significant staff training program

» preparing standard operating procedures.

These activities to improve processes and develop systems demanded a lot of the department's resources. A high enough priority was not put on increasing staff capacity at management and supervisory levels to cope with the workload. So the systems established by SIISLAP are fragile and require ongoing support.

---

1   The current government's policy framework outlines new directions for land reform. Structural changes have already commenced, with the creation of the Land Reform Unit in 2006.

The interaction of project advisers and the DoLS staff had a major positive impact on staff competence, self-confidence and morale. A high proportion of the project's effort went into developing the technical skills of staff to a high level. Training was delivered mainly through on-the-job support from technical advisers hired by the project. Postgraduate distance education programs in spatial mapping and business management were successful despite being demanding on the staff. All advisers were required to develop operational manuals for the upgraded systems, and those manuals are a comprehensive source of information on how to maintain the systems.

LAND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Digital land register and land transaction register

Two key systems implemented by SIISLAP are the computer-based land register to give staff rapid and efficient access to land records and the register to track the status of land transactions. Both systems were designed to bring transparency and accountability to the land administration process. These were major improvements, especially for records that were completed during the period of SIISLAP support, but a few customers continue to express concerns about processing backlogs that affect older registrations and which, in the Registry of Titles Office, could still take up to a year to clear. Additional resources are still needed to deal with the backlog and bring all title records into the computerised databases.

The computer-based land register will need further support to ensure its continued use. Adherence to the system's procedures will be important and the support, motivation and leadership of senior managers will be essential. Commitment from the ministry is also required to keep transaction processing up to date, particularly if the system is to accommodate an anticipated expansion in the administration of customary land.

Regional Land Centres

A strategy to decentralise in stages the management of land administration and the distribution of services was adopted by the ministry during the project.[2] SIISLAP supported the establishment of Regional Land Centres in Gizo, Western Province, in 2003 and in Auki, Malaita Province, in 2005 and the establishment of a Land Office in Taro, Choiseul Province.

These regional centres mean customers do not have to travel to Honiara to undertake land dealings or query land transactions. However, they are relatively high-cost operations, requiring experienced staff. Budgets, staffing and computer support from the ministry remain concerns and the link between the regional centres and Honiara still needs to be strengthened.

---

2   Power sharing with provinces has been the subject of political debate for many years. The term 'decentralise' is used here to describe an outreach delivery mechanism aimed to improve land administration services to local communities. It does not yet involve the devolution of decision-making powers to the provinces from the Minister of Lands.

Spatial information and mapping

Geographic information and mapping products and services in Solomon Islands are now provided by the National Geographic Information Centre. The centre has become a flagship within the ministry, which continues to demonstrate the importance of having good quality maps of all types and geographic reports to support national planning and economic development (SIISLAP II 2006a).[3]

Demand for thematic maps has always exceeded the centre's ability to supply them, and this led the centre to develop service agreements for the supply of products and services. Sales data indicate a modest income stream, not yet sufficient to achieve full cost recovery. A business plan for the centre is now needed to address structural and management options, including prospects for commercialisation or privatisation, as well as sustainability issues (data management, funding, staffing, training and markets).

Survey data and plan records provide the geographic integrity for land administration. This information underpins the valuation and rent collection systems and is the basis for land tenure mapping. The centre now faces growing customer expectations, the need for advanced staff skills and new product specifications, and an increase in the demand for special products such as land tenure maps. It is important that new systems in the centre are affordable and that any cost recovery through sales can be afforded by the users.

REVENUE GENERATION

To support activities that generate revenue for the lands department, a computer-based system was developed for collecting land rents but it was not implemented because government priorities changed (SIISLAP II 2006b). Inadequate staffing was an impediment but the system requires the ministry to formulate specific policies on how it should work and to officially endorse the use of the system. In a market where the value of land has soared in recent years there are concerns about its impact on land rent and land taxes such as city council land rates, which are based on the value of the land or property on it. SIISLAP introduced a formula-based approach for determining valuations but its uptake was limited. The ministry and Honiara City Council need to collaborate to ensure increased land values do not trigger excessive sudden increases in the council rates. The Honiara City Council's system for collecting rates also needs urgent repair as currently only about 25 per cent of a total of more than SI$2 million (A$400 000) a year is collected.

An inventory of government-owned/controlled land was prepared with a view to assessing the value of the land, the extent it is used, and its physical assets. The aim was to identify land not being used and to reallocate it for revenue generation. This was not supported by project stakeholders and was therefore not pursued, but as one of the current government's policies is to optimise the economic use of vacant Crown land this inventory will be a useful information base.

---

3   Clients include RAMSI, AusAID, other donor agencies and non-government organisations and there is still considerable scope for providing services to other government agencies, provincial organisations and the private sector.

LAND TENURE SUPPORT

SIISLAP embarked on two land tenure activities with the potential to realise significant long-term social and economic benefits. The first activity aimed to provide secure tenure through long-term leases to people who had migrated to urban areas, mainly Honiara, looking for work and had settled on government-owned land without any formal permission. The second assisted the land ministry in its role in recording customary land in Malaita Province where the customary owners, with the support of the Department of Agriculture, wanted to devote some of their land to growing oil palm as a commercial enterprise.

Converting tenure within unauthorised settlements

For many years a growing percentage of government land has been occupied by informal or unauthorised settlers, particularly in Honiara City (see also Case Study 5, 'Informal land systems within urban settlements in Honiara and Port Moresby'). The unauthorised settlements in Honiara include more than 3000 households with a population of approximately 20 000. During the 1970s the pre-independence administration had tried to deal with settlers by issuing them with temporary occupation licences. As the number of settlers grew, successive governments stated that they would convert the temporary occupation licences into a more secure form of tenure. However, as the Solomon Islands economy grew and more people moved to urban areas looking for job opportunities the governments stopped issuing the occupation licences. This made the policy issue of tenure conversion even more difficult as now most unauthorised settlers do not have valid or even lapsed occupation licences.

SIISLAP supported a pilot project to demonstrate a way of converting the small pieces of land occupied by households in the unauthorised settlements to a more secure form of long-term lease, known as fixed-term estates (SIISLAP II 2007). International experience shows that when residents in unauthorised or squatter settlements gain security over their piece of land it produces wider social and economic benefits. This is because people with a secure title to their home are more likely to find and hold onto secure employment and then are more likely to invest in improving their living conditions. When this happens to thousands of people and households in a city the positive effect on social and economic development can be enormous.

The pilot project involved creating in three stages 310 parcels of land with secure tenure in Honiara. The task significantly increased the workload of the land ministry, but all survey and registration processes were completed over several months, which implied that there are no inherent barriers in the land administration system. By early 2007 the ministry had begun the process of offering the long-term secure leases (in the form of 50-year fixed-term estates) to individual residents. The leases are not free; residents are required to pay an initial fee for the conversion and a subsequent annual fee for rent. This will create a significant revenue stream for the government and the Honiara City Council. These fees could be used to improve services to households such as water, sanitation, electricity and roads.

The outcomes of the pilot project exceeded expectations because it was well planned and funded and involved local staff with the rapport and skills to conduct public awareness campaigns, consultations and negotiations within the local communities. Previous attempts (with support from the European Union) had achieved little beyond design and land surveys. The project adopted a participatory 'people-centred' approach that focused on the needs of the squatter communities. This well-planned and consultative approach helped to ensure that fears of significant social disruption from the process were not realised.

The pilot project was able to build capacity within the Honiara City Council and the Town and Country Planning Board while focusing on community outreach. It also provided on-the-job training, engaged senior managers, established a land development advisory group, progressed the Site Development Fund and involved private sector survey companies. In addition, planning expertise was improved and it was recognised that an integrated approach to planning, which incorporates social, environmental and physical perspectives, is required. There is now a critical mass of reliable information from which better policies can be formulated.

The pilot demonstrated that the ministry has limited capacity to manage land development in the face of increasing demand for land, and highlighted the importance of community awareness and engaging all stakeholders in the physical planning process. If land tenure and related issues are not managed, a sector of society will be living in unacceptable conditions. Solving these issues is paramount to maintaining peace in Honiara City, improving access to the settlement areas and meeting basic levels of health and environmental control.

Recording and registering customary land

Many people in Solomon Islands want customary land tenure to be formalised but there is no simple framework for developing and implementing programs to achieve this objective. Legislative mechanisms are cumbersome, and their requirements arouse the suspicion of landowners. In response to an oil palm initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Lands was asked to provide support for recording the custodianship of customary land in the Auluta Basin area of Malaita Province.

SIISLAP assisted with the pilot project, which is described in Case Study 3, 'Recording land rights and boundaries in Auluta Basin, Solomon Islands'. Lessons from that pilot could inform the government's new land reform agenda and its impact on policy, procedures and legislation as they relate to customary land. Such reform should involve review, further research, careful monitoring, extensive awareness and information, consultation and other pilot applications in different cultural and tenure settings before the reform is implemented.

Resolving disputes

SIISLAP cooperated with a law and justice aid program run under RAMSI to look at improving the resolution of disputes involving customary land. This cooperation focused on efforts from within the Solomon Islands justice system to establish a Tribal Land Dispute Resolution Panel. This incorporates the Melanesian concepts of consensus resolution as opposed to a western system perceived as adversarial and implemented through the Land Courts. It recognises that a systematic policy on customary land tenure must be developed in concert with procedures for resolving disputes (Hamilton 2006).

THE MELANESIAN LAND GROUP

SIISLAP played an important role in coordinating and providing resources for the initial meetings and workshops in 2004 and 2005 of an informal Melanesian land group. This brought together academics, technical specialists and senior staff from land administration agencies in Solomon Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu and enabled them to share information, experiences and lessons in land administration, and to develop a communication and peer-support network in the Pacific. At a workshop in September 2005 that group spelled out some common principles, including the need to support customary land tenure systems while facilitating the productive use of customary land.

A retrospective overview of achievements

SIISLAP began with a focus on systems of land administration that would provide financial returns—more efficient registration of land titles, lease title verification, urban land valuations, and land rates. It later expanded into thematic (GIS-based) mapping and pilot projects in customary land recognition and informal settlements, with a capacity-building focus throughout all activities. There was some formal training as well as workshops that involved personnel from other Melanesian land agencies to share experiences and lessons.

There were notable successes in formalising titles for unauthorised settlements, in demonstrating a process for recognising and recording customary land, in establishing a highly successful national geographic information centre that can produce thematic maps and reports to meet customer needs, and in consolidating efficient land administration functions.

Ultimately this project resulted in an improved land administration agency, with good functioning systems and improved institutional morale. However, the sustainability of the improvements is not guaranteed. The records management area still had a backlog of work when the project ended, which was likely to increase without ongoing assistance. The required knowledge of the systems and level of operational skills is shared by only a few staff. Without ongoing and extended support what has been achieved through the project will not be sustained.

The circumstances in the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey in March 2003 and the changes since—at the time of a review in December 2006 and at the end of the project in June 2007—can be seen in the table.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE MINISTRY OF LANDS, HOUSING AND SURVEY AND SUBSEQUENT CHANGES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

Factor	March 2003	December 2006	June 2007
Budget	Budget is virtually non-existent.	Budget is available but not released.	Budget is released.
Staffing	Levels are about 35 per cent below approved levels.	Levels are about 15 per cent below approved levels.	Levels are less than 15 per cent below approved levels.
Redundancy program	Staff identified for redundancy and retirement are still on the payroll.	Staff identified for redundancy and retirement are no longer with the ministry.	—
Workplace culture	Staff morale is low, salaries are in arrears, work attitudes are poor, and absenteeism is high.	Staff morale has improved, salaries are paid on time, work attitudes are poor, absenteeism is high but reduced.	Staff morale is high with some concern over sustainability, and absenteeism is slightly reduced.
Revenue generation	Average annual collection rate to 2003 was 28 per cent. Map sales are low (no GIS products).	The equivalent rate to 2006 was 29 per cent. Demand for maps and GIS products is high.	Ongoing high demand for thematic products. A cost-recovery plan is needed.
Governance	Operating environment is unstable, with no transparency and accountability.	Operating environment is more stable and systems to improve transparency and accountability have been introduced.	Transparency and accountability systems continue to function, but support is still needed.
Land equity	Law and order is better than in previous years but issues of land equity have not been addressed.	Law and order is still a major concern and land reform issues are on the policy agenda.	A Land Reform Unit has been established in the ministry.

Implementation issues and problems

Despite SIISLAP's achievements it had some problems and issues during implementation.

PARALLEL SYSTEMS INHIBITED CAPACITY BUILDING

The project was designed to provide on-the-job support for DoLS staff. The best way to achieve this is for project technical advisers to work directly with departmental staff in their work areas but a simple decision on office allocations undermined this approach.

When SIISLAP began there was no secure office. As part of improving the general workplace, which included minor repairs and better lighting, the project set up a locked office for its key staff and expensive equipment. This had the effect of immediately separating the international technical advisers from DoLS staff. A few long-term advisers chose to move into DoLS offices to work closely with their counterparts in the lands department, especially as functions became progressively computer-assisted. Most advisers, however, were encouraged to work in the separate project office, and this effectively generated a separate system. Even as DoLS work-spaces were improved and made more secure the project's technical advisers were not integrated into the workplace.

Some project technical advisers developed work systems and procedures in the isolation of the project office, and where these were complex—for instance, the computing chain of the land administration process—the DoLS staff almost certainly did not attain the level of competence and confidence required to manage and maintain those systems.

As the project was implemented there were several changes to activities for justifiable reasons. But because DoLS staff and most of the support project team were physically separated, there was some uncertainty and confusion about the scope of the project. This might have been avoided if a more participatory and more integrated approach had been used to select activities.

A RIGID PROJECT STRUCTURE IMPOSED CONSTRAINTS

At a broad strategic level SIISLAP had flexibility to take on new project components such as the pilot projects on customary land and the unauthorised settlements. However, the core activity that sought to strengthen the land department had a rigid structure with given timelines and clear outputs. A program design, which is much more flexible and is not geared to timelines, would have been more appropriate, although the political instability at that time did not encourage such flexibility.

With hindsight it is clear that the project design caused several problems. A major problem was that a parallel work-planning system evolved in which the project worked in parallel with the department rather than as part of it. SIISLAP managers and advisers were driven by fixed timelines, an outputs schedule and associated payment milestones, while DoLS remained without clear institutional goals.

Despite project support to address staff issues, SIISLAP never slotted in effectively to assist DoLS to achieve its objectives. Because SIISLAP advisers were driven by relatively fixed timelines and milestones, rather than supporting the departmental staff in doing many of the project's activities, on many occasions the project team did the work themselves to meet the deadlines. DoLS staff were participants, but not the leaders, in improving and developing land administration systems.

There are clear lessons from this on the need for any donor project to have the flexibility to respond to the agency's needs—not to attempt to define those needs and not to be driven by schedules that require delivery of particular outputs. The in-country agency should be the primary partner in developing the design and know from the outset that they own and control the project.

SENIOR MANAGERS DID NOT OWN THE PROJECT AND COMMUNICATION WAS POOR

Because the project was designed during a period of increasing instability there was no strong leadership from within the ministry at that stage. DoLS had no strategic plan or clear goals and objectives that the project could support, so project goals were established in isolation during the design, and the ministry had no real ownership.

Communication between the project team and the ministry was inadequate, particularly in the latter years. Had SIISLAP been better integrated into DoLS workplaces as it was implemented, senior managers might have become more aware of the project's achievements. Many DoLS staff were initially reluctant to use new standard operating procedures because of problems in getting them officially approved. This arose because project advisers had not worked with DoLS counterparts to develop the procedures, nor with DoLS managers to have them integrated into agency operations.

Departmental staff generally lacked basic and routine workplace skills such as report writing, file management, document control, quality assurance and supervision. The lack of these skills was a capacity constraint and undermined the project's ability to introduce more complicated procedures. The high incidence of absenteeism, ongoing high vacancy rates and the lack of counterpart funding made it difficult to achieve some project outcomes. All of these internal issues required senior managers to engage and own the project. Overall there was a lack of political or senior management commitment to consolidate the project's achievements or to endorse key policy and regulatory changes.

Closely associated was the lack of adequate project and inter-agency and intra-agency cooperation. Good relationships are essential for successful project outcomes. In an environment of political and social instability it is easy for relationships to become strained. During SIISLAP there was confusion about the reporting obligations of the project to the ministry, and failing to keep the ministry fully informed undermined acceptance of the project. The government would almost certainly have valued SIISLAP more highly had there been more effective communication and extensive and continuing consultation with stakeholders.

Lessons

ENSURE AID PROJECTS ARE OWNED LOCALLY

LESSON 1	For donor activities in the land sector to be successful, the land agency must be the primary partner in developing the design and be fully involved in implementing the project or program to ensure that it owns the project or program from the outset and that the activities are aligned with government policies.
LESSON 2	Pilot activities are an effective and prudent way of exploring solutions to complex and sensitive land issues but they must use and build on local customs and practices, and include community awareness and full community participation in the activities.

Donor-supported projects in the land sector require a context of clear government policies for both alienated and customary land. Improvements to land policy require political leadership, a champion for change within the land agency and a long-term partnership with and commitment from the donor. Systems being introduced must match the skills and resources of the land agency, and marketable products and services must be affordable to customers, yet cover product costs if they are to be sustainable. All processes used must be culturally appropriate.

ENGAGE AND COMMUNICATE WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS

LESSON 3	A flexible and responsive approach to selecting project activities is necessary, especially when operating in a dynamic environment, but that approach must be underpinned by effective and ongoing communication with all project stakeholders.

All stakeholders need to understand the objectives and benefits of the project so that it is recognised primarily as a process for improving resources, not just a mechanism for providing additional resources. For SIISLAP poor communication between its managers and the ministry reflected badly on the project, but there was effective communication with external stakeholders when activities (conferences, summits, workshops and forums) were organised outside of formal project meetings, involved senior land representatives from the Pacific region and were designed to address specific themes.

BUILD CAPACITY

LESSON 4	Agency resources and the needs and skills of staff should be assessed before undertaking activities such as developing systems and process, to ensure these fit within local expertise and budgets.

<table>
<tr><td>LESSON
5</td><td>For activities that may generate conflict, it is important to identify and use local people who have rapport with the communities as well as the necessary skills and knowledge, or have the potential to develop those skills through appropriate training.</td></tr>
</table>

SIISLAP demonstrated that the competence, confidence and morale of the staff in an in-country agency can be increased through hands-on training to provide technical and organisational skills. It also demonstrated the need to integrate advisory roles into the partner agency's work plans and structure, to provide ongoing support to build the capacity of managers and decision makers, and to engage more with staff to assess their individual needs. Specific skills are needed for work that could generate conflict, such as in settlement areas and involving customary land.

MEASURE PROJECT OUTCOMES

<table>
<tr><td>LESSON
6</td><td>To demonstrate the benefits of strengthening land departments, it is critical to collect a broad range of social and economic data, including baseline data, and measure improvements against economic and social indicators, not just project outputs.</td></tr>
</table>

SIISLAP is able to demonstrate a number of achievements in terms of improvements to land administration services. However, a failure to collect data and measure improvements against economic and social indicators (such as the number of land transactions or level of land disputes) has prevented project evaluators from making an accurate assessment of the value and benefits of the project to the broader Solomon Islands community.

ADOPT FLEXIBLE APPROACHES TO BOTH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

<table>
<tr><td>LESSON
7</td><td>A flexible program design is more suited to future land initiatives in Solomon Islands than a project design.</td></tr>
</table>

Initiatives to strengthen land systems and tenure arrangements depend on human and organisational change. Such changes cannot be easily planned and sequenced in a project design format.

SIISLAP had a flexible implementation strategy enabling new components to be incorporated in the project. But for the core activity of strengthening the land department, once annual plans were approved the project team was driven by timelines and milestones that did not make allowances for the ability of the land agency and related areas of the public service and political system to adjust to the changes.

Unlike a project, a program does not have structured timelines or reporting but does have clear outputs such as the installation of a functioning records management system. It can also allow a stronger focus on broader social and economic outcomes that flow from improved land administration.

Bibliography

AusAID 1999a, 'Solomon Islands institutional strengthening of land administration', project design document, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, June.

——1999b, 'Solomon Islands short term expertise in management of land administration and registration', final report, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, August.

——2000, *Improving access to land and enhancing the security of land rights: a review of land titling and land administration projects*, Quality Assurance Series No. 20, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra.

——2001, *Undertaking land administration projects: sustainability, affordability, operational efficiency and good practice guidelines*, Quality Assurance Series No. 26, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra.

——2003, 'Solomon Islands Institutional Strengthening of Land Administration Project', final report, Technical Advisory Group Mission, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, April.

——2006, 'Solomon Islands Lands Sector Mission', draft report, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, August.

——2007, 'Solomon Islands Institutional Strengthening of Land Administration Project (Phase 2)', final report, Evaluation Mission, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, February.

Deininger, K 2004, 'Land policies for growth and poverty reduction: key issues and challenges ahead', paper presented to UN, FIG, PC IDEA Inter-regional Special Forum 'The Development of Land Information Policies in the Americas', Aguascalientes, Mexico, 26–27 October, viewed June 2007 <http://www.fig.net/pub/mexico/>.

Hamilton, L 2006, *Tribal Land Dispute Resolution Panel issue paper: land tenure policy*, Solomon Islands Law and Justice Institutional Strengthening Program, March.

Land Equity 2007, *Land administration reform: indicators of success and future challenges*, Agricultural and Rural Development Discussion Paper 37, World Bank, Washington, DC.

Scheudler, D, Rajabifard, A & Williamson, IP 2004, 'Evaluation of land administration systems', *Journal for Land Use Policy*, vol. 21, no. 4.

SIISLAP 2003, *Action and policy plan to improve the income from land rent*, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, April.

SIISLAP II 2006a, *Establishment of a National Geographic Information Centre*, milestone report #5, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, July.

——2006b, *Transaction processing control*, milestone report #2, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra, August.

——2007, *Lessons learned: tenure conversion of unauthorised settlements in Honiara*, milestone report #3, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra.

Solomon Island Government 2001, *Economic and Structural Reform Action Plan 2001/2003*, Ministry of Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment, April.

——2002, *Programme of Action Policies, Priorities, Strategies and Target 2002–2005*, National Government for Peace, Unity and Restoration.

——2006, 'Policy translation and implementation document', Grand Coalition for Change Government, August.

UNDP 2004, *Solomon Islands peace and conflict development analysis: emerging priorities in preventing future conflict*, an independent study commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme with the support of the Department of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace and the National Peace Council, United Nations Development Programme, viewed June 2007 <www.undp.org/cpr/documents/prevention/integrate/country_app/sol_is/Solomon_Islands_-_PCDA_Report.pdf>.