

EVALUATION OF AUSAID'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IN VANUATU

COUNTRY CASE STUDY

SEPTEMBER 2010



Australian Government

AusAID

Office of Development Effectiveness

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ACRONYMS

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
NGO	non-government organisation
ODE	Office of Development Effectiveness
VNCC	Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs
VWC	Vanuatu Women's Centre

SUMMARY

This report considers the relevance and effectiveness of AusAID support to civil society in Vanuatu and forms part of a broader evaluation of AusAID's engagement with civil society. Around nineteen per cent of Australia's aid to Vanuatu is spent on work related to civil society. A 'drivers of change' analysis, carried out jointly by Australia and Vanuatu in 2007, provided the rationale and basis for selecting and working strategically with civil society actors. AusAID's civil society support in Vanuatu centres around governance issues and service delivery. It has established four key partnerships, with the Vanuatu Women's Centre, a local NGO (Wan Smol Bag), the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs and the churches through the Church Partnership Program. This has led to a range of achievements, although issues of reach, social and political exclusion, rapid social change, connectedness across different authoritative institutions, and weak formal political institutions continue to present challenges.

Five key conclusions are drawn:

1. AusAID's engagement with civil society is relevant to the social and political context of Vanuatu and builds on the findings of a contextual analysis of the key strategic actors shaping economic, social and political processes. Extending the reach of this engagement to other sectors and geography will be the next challenge for the program.
2. AusAID has supported initiatives that encourage greater interaction between civil society and the state. AusAID's support to key non-government actors that are addressing sensitive social issues such as violence against women or HIV is highly relevant as is support for the churches and chiefs.
3. Recognising the dynamic nature of chiefly systems in Vanuatu will help capitalise on their potential to work alongside and with government on issues of social order and wellbeing in a rapidly changing context. Although AusAID in Vanuatu has been keeping gender issues at the forefront, it will be important in its future work with civil society groups involving chiefs and churches to ensure that 'tradition' does not get reshaped in an entirely male voice and that inherently conservative church groups are willing and able to adopt good development practice
4. AusAID's move towards longer term partnership agreements and core funding representing good donor practice. In addressing the challenges of donor harmonisation, AusAID has a role in pushing the boundaries on its own flexibility on processes and procedures and encouraging other donors to do the same.
5. AusAID in Vanuatu has been innovative, strategic and risk taking in its reshaping of its engagement with civil society. There are lessons here for other countries and for AusAID offices in other countries. There is a need for AusAID in Vanuatu to articulate its strategy for engaging with civil society as a tool for guiding program decisions, measuring progress and communicating across the whole aid program and among whole-of-government partners.

BACKGROUND

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) embarked on an evaluation of AusAID's engagement with civil society in 2009. This began with a review of good donor practice, which sought to distil aid effectiveness principles for donor work with civil society by looking across the work of international bilateral and multilateral donors, foundations and non-government organisations (NGOs).¹ The evaluation subsequently targeted three countries—Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, while making use of existing evaluations and a broad advisory group to generalise the findings. Five aid activities involving civil society in these three countries were evaluated in 2009². An analysis of these five case studies looked at elements of good practice from this sample.

The last phase of fieldwork involved country case studies in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. This report is the case study for Vanuatu. The methodology for each phase of the whole evaluation is summarised in Appendix A. The country case studies focus heavily on the question of relevance, but address all three key evaluation questions for the ODE evaluation:

1. What have been the intended or unintended results of AusAID's engagement with civil society?
2. To what extent is AusAID's engagement with civil society relevant to the development context?
3. To what extent does AusAID's engagement with civil society in partner countries reflect other aspects of good donor practice?

This report examines the context in which civil society operates in Vanuatu, AusAID's programmatic engagement with civil society, the results of this engagement in terms of six development pathways—better services, less conflict between and within communities, more connected communities, greater social inclusion, more informed and active citizens, and more effective, accountable and transparent government—and the relevance of AusAID's support.

Jude Howell, Director of the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics, and Jo Hall, Director with ODE in AusAID, undertook the document review, interviews, and analysis of findings for this country case study in May 2010, also drawing on the *Kastom* Governance Partnership case study undertaken in 2009.³ This was done by triangulating and analysing the main findings against each evaluation question from each interview and document (as relevant). The report was then written on the basis of these findings, and factually checked with AusAID staff at the High Commission in Vanuatu. Thanks are extended to Donelle Parks from ODE and staff at the High Commission in Vanuatu, particularly Obed Timakata, for their assistance in facilitating the country case study.

¹ Office of Development Effectiveness. 2010a

² See for example Office of Development Effectiveness. 2010c

³ *Kastom* is a Bislama word derived from the English word *custom* that incorporates customary law, traditions and norms.

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTEXT IN VANUATU

To understand the Australian aid program's work with civil society, it is important to situate this within the broader context of civil society and its relations with the state in Vanuatu. Civil society in Vanuatu is made up of a multi-layered set of spaces and groups that have evolved during different periods of history. The missionaries, who started arriving in the 1820s, introduced churches and the concept of the 'chief'. The colonial Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides, established in 1906, consolidated the political category of the chief. The condominium existed primarily to provide legal systems for dealing with the claims of those who alienated land from customary landowners.⁴ The colonial powers had little interest in administering the local population. They thus had little impact on the everyday lives of islanders, the prime external influences being the churches and European planters and employers.

The independence movement in the 1960s and 1970s built on the land issue, making it the key unifying national program. Following independence and formal statehood in 1980 and the inflow of official developmental assistance, a new layer of development-oriented NGOs emerged. In the last decade there has been an influx of evangelical Christian groups from the United States, who are located primarily in rural areas.

The newly established state, like the colonial state, faced the challenge of establishing its power and authority across 68 inhabited islands, where villages were widely dispersed in often remote terrain. The introduced system of liberal, democratic government was disconnected from the diverse, clan-based political, social and economic orders. Though the state took over some of the church schools from the 1960s onwards, in rural areas the churches continue to be a dominant provider of schools and services. The key politico-economic forces shaping civil society in Vanuatu have thus been the spread of Christianity, colonialism, the establishment of the post-colonial state and external aid.

Civil society in Vanuatu is concentrated mainly in the cities and primarily in Port Vila. Most of Vanuatu's 245 000 people—70 to 80 per cent—live in rural villages. In the everyday lives of rural people, the prime institutions of authority remain the churches and the chiefs, and to a limited extent the state. The chiefs play an important role in realising customary law, addressing disputes about land ownership and maintaining peace and social order within and across tribes. Vanuatu is a patriarchal society, with considerable rates of gender-based violence and discrimination. Gendered practices and norms, tribal affiliations and age are social factors that shape both state and civil society institutions.

Chiefly systems and practices are localised, whereas churches have connections that extend from international to national and local levels. However, church denominations tend to be associated with particular geographical areas so that, although churches have connections at different levels, their coverage across the country is still limited. Nevertheless, the Vanuatu Christian Council links five of the mainstream churches, creating an extensive network across the country.

⁴ Brown and Nolan 2008, p. 1

The churches have focused on delivering services, mainly health and education, as well as on spiritual development. However, the churches have tended to work apart from the state and there has been little dialogue between the churches and government. Although there is a degree of tension over the contradiction between some kastom practice and Christian values, Christian churches generally support customary leaders, most of whom share Christian beliefs and values and blend these with traditional beliefs, values and practices. Some chiefs are preachers, and some also hold political positions.

Apart from the churches there is a range of civil society organisations active in the cities, working on issues of security and social order and on enhancing participation in governance processes. These include media groups, professional associations, trade unions, international NGOs, local NGOs, women's groups, business associations, trade associations, research institutes, think tanks, sports clubs, cultural groups, and community-based groups. NGOs are required to register. The state has had an ambivalent approach to different parts of civil society. While there is a relatively free press and some investigative journalism, there are also reports of some intimidation and harassment of groups critical of politicians.

There are few avenues for formal engagement between civil society actors and the state, apart from voting periodically in elections. However, there are some bridging institutions that seek to link the government to society. The Vanuatu Cultural Centre, established in 1956, plays a key role in national policy discussions and debates on some critical issues and is a significant vehicle for linking traditional local practices to the national conceptualisation of 'kastom'.⁵ The Malvatumauri, the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs (VNCC), plays an informal role in bridging various aspects of customary life with non-church-based civil society and works with government on land tenure issues.

⁵ Brown and Nolan, 2008, p. 7.

AUSAID'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Australia is Vanuatu's largest aid donor and main source of tourists and investment and there is a significant resident population of Australians in Vanuatu.

Following independence in 1980, Vanuatu experienced more than a decade of political instability, law and order problems and economic decline. With a substantial Comprehensive Reform Program to restore the separation of powers, Vanuatu has made headway in stabilising its social and economic position since about 2003. As a result of the global recession, economic growth slowed in 2009 but remained positive, at 3.8 per cent. The Government of Vanuatu has forecast gross domestic product to grow by 4.6 per cent in 2010.

Relations with Australia have been determined in large part by the political leadership in Port Vila. In 2004, Vanuatu's then Prime Minister Vohor attempted to wind back reform and to expel Australian advisers. Vohor's government was removed by a motion of no confidence in December 2004 and Vanuatu enjoyed relative political stability from 2004 to 2008 under the government of Prime Minister Ham Lini. During this period the Vanuatu Prime Minister and Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs signed a joint Good Governance Statement of Principles, which reinforced Vanuatu's commitment to good governance, transparency and democracy. In 2008, Edward Natapei was narrowly elected Prime Minister. His multi-party coalition government has since survived a number of parliamentary motions of no confidence, changing composition several times as a result.

The challenge for the Government of Vanuatu is translating its economic growth and significant aid flows into new jobs and improved service delivery across the archipelago. Australia remains concerned about the potential for political and civil instability as experienced across Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Solomon Islands.

During the past decade, Australia remained Vanuatu's largest development cooperation partner, providing official development assistance totalling A\$287.5 million to support health, education, economic governance, public sector reform, law and justice, rural development and natural resource development. Australia's annual official assistance essentially tripled in the past 10 years and is estimated to have reached \$56.3 million in 2009–10, which included \$41.6 million towards the bilateral country program managed from Port Vila.

Australian support focuses heavily on central government reforms, economic growth, and law and justice, with some support for education and health, including a community health program. Since 2005 the Governance for Growth program has been a key feature of Australia's development cooperation program with Vanuatu.

In 2007 AusAID supported a major 'drivers of change' analysis, which it undertook with Vanuatu to strengthen the diagnostic basis for development assistance.⁶ This analysis has contributed to reshaping Australian support, broadening the sectors of engagement and improving the way that support is designed and delivered. For example, attention is now

⁶ Cox, M., *et al.*, 2007. 'Drivers of change' is an analytical tool to assess the prospects for and constraints on development in a particular country context. Taking a political economy perspective, it assesses the interaction among structural features (economic, social and cultural systems), institutions (formal and informal rules and incentives) and actors (individuals and organisations).

being paid to reforms that strengthen links between central and provincial levels of government.

The Australia–Vanuatu Joint Development Cooperation Strategy 2005–2010 does not have civil society engagement as a specific objective. However, the strategy does recognise the role of civil society in assisting with the achievement of the three prime objectives of improving governance, raising productivity and delivering services. In practice, AusAID's involvement with civil society relates primarily to the objectives of service delivery and improved governance. The focus on civil society in relation to improved governance is built on a tradition of AusAID programs in Vanuatu that have promoted community participation and consultation and is supported by a new measure from the 2006 white paper to improve the demand for governance.⁷ The 2007 report on drivers of change articulated more clearly the strategic importance of engaging with civil society actors such as the churches, chiefs, media, women's organisations and youth groups, both in urban and rural areas.⁸ On the basis of that report AusAID identified key strategic actors in civil society to work with so as to foster citizen participation, accountability and public dialogue, particularly among marginalised and vulnerable groups such as women, youth and the unemployed.

The Vanuatu–Australia Partnership for Development, signed in May 2009, provides additional assistance to mitigate the impact of the global recession and accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. The initial priority areas of the partnership are education, infrastructure, economic governance, health, and policy dialogue in the law and justice sector. The partnership makes no explicit reference to the role of civil society in Vanuatu's development process. Nonetheless, there is scope under the priority areas to consider the role of civil society and the role of Australian aid in supporting it.

An analysis of Australia's aid program with Vanuatu in the 2007–08 financial year revealed that 15 program initiatives in Vanuatu involved work with civil society.⁹ These accounted for 19 per cent (\$5.7 million) of total AusAID expenditure of \$30.3 million in that year. Thirty-five per cent of the expenditure to assist civil society was through direct financial agreements with Vanuatu civil society organisations and 65 per cent was via intermediary organisations that then engaged with Vanuatu civil society organisations. In addition, there was significant expenditure on 13 projects funded under the AusAID Non-Government Organisation Cooperation Program, totalling \$1.2 million of AusAID funds and \$280 000 of Australian NGO funds. AusAID also funded several regional initiatives through the Pacific Fund—such as the Pacific Institute for Public Policy, the Australian Sports Outreach Program and the Regional Rights Resource Team—that work with ni-Vanuatu civil society. Finally, of the 43 Australian-supported volunteers in Vanuatu in 2007–08, more than half were assigned to civil society organisations.

⁷ In 2007, AusAID introduced the initiative *Demand for Better Governance*, which aims to increase the ability of citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives, to influence and act on how development challenges are met and to hold governments or other institutions to account. AusAID's intention is to encourage a fundamental shift in its understanding about communities—from passive beneficiaries of government services to active stakeholders in how governments function.

⁸ Cox, M., *et al.*, 2007 pp 68-9

⁹ Office of Development Effectiveness. 2010b

The intermediaries that managed the bulk of the funding to Vanuatu civil society groups were primarily faith-based organisations (five organisations), private companies (three organisations) and international NGOs (two organisations). The intermediaries also included the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, two Australian research institutions and the World Bank. In one significant case AusAID funds were channelled via the Government of Vanuatu to the Save the Children Fund for a village health worker scheme (discussed elsewhere).

The prime modality for funding was projects. Core funding (that is, general operational support to achieve the organisation's objectives, not activity objectives) was provided to the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC), though funding for administrative support was also provided to Wan Smol Bag (meaning 'One Small Bag' in Bislama, the language of Vanuatu) and the VNCC.

AusAID currently directly funds four civil society organisations in Vanuatu—Wan Smol Bag, the VWC, the VNCC and the churches through the Church Partnership Program. These four groups are key components of AusAID's engagement with civil society on governance issues.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE RESULTS OF AUSAID'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY?

AusAID's engagement with civil society has yielded significant results, although largely these have been measured only as outputs rather than contributions to more effective governance systems, for example. These results are examined in this chapter in the context of the constraints that civil society actors face in contributing to more effective state institutions.

Key functions of an effective state are to provide basic social order and security, to provide an enabling framework for economic sustainability and to foster an enabling environment for people to shape decisions that affect their collective lives. Thus improving service delivery and reducing conflict are important elements in ensuring social order and the security of a population. And working towards better connected communities, greater social inclusion, more informed and active citizens, and more accountable and transparent government are key ingredients for an enabling environment for citizen participation in decision-making. However, the contribution of civil society to these processes in Vanuatu faces a number of constraints. We have arranged the constraints facing civil society in fulfilling its role and the results that AusAID has achieved according to the six main reasons or "pathways" that AusAID engages with civil society.¹⁰

Better services

To improve services in Vanuatu, civil society actors, like the government, need a greater reach across the country. AusAID's support for civil society in the health sector has achieved some promising results. AusAID has supported village health workers in Vanuatu through the Save the Children Fund for several years. The Ministry of Health is now managing the contract with the Save the Children Fund to support these workers. As a result, provincial governments are now directing increased resources to support the village health workers. More than 10 000 people a year now use the Wan Smol Bag reproductive health clinics on the two main islands plus a mobile clinic, with women as their main clients. Requests for voluntary confidential counselling and tests for HIV/AIDS have increased and people are finding it easier to discuss controversial health issues. However, AusAID's broader work on health systems does not include NGOs or churches. Similarly, AusAID's education programming does not include civil society.

Other service delivery results arising from AusAID's support for civil society are substantial but scattered. In 2008, 74 young people found employment using skills gained at the Wan Smol Bag Youth Centre in Port Vila. Two communities have successful ecotourism projects, which are providing income and/or employment for people in the village. The Vanua-tai resource-monitoring network, which started with a handful of members now has around 400. The network is active in monitoring turtle nesting sites and in promoting community-based conservation areas on land and at sea. Conservation activity is also apparent in the

¹⁰ Through the course of this evaluation, a 'theory of change' has been iteratively developed with internal AusAID staff and external advisory group members from academia, Australian NGOs and others to articulate the reasons why AusAID engages with civil society and identify the theoretical pathways by which AusAID support translates into development outcomes.

Blacksands community on the outskirts of Port Vila through tree planting and waste management. Blacksands villages now run their own waste management and recycling system with the support of Wan Smol Bag.

Less conflict between and within communities

Land development in Vanuatu is driven by the needs of government and the demand of international investors for residential or tourist development. Customary practices have interfaced poorly with the cash and market economy, and there is considerable pressure on customary land surrounding the major urban areas. In some cases there is evidence that traditional systems are being undermined by conflicting claims or exploited by unscrupulous individuals. The government has been unable to keep pace; compliance with lease negotiation requirements is poorly enforced, lease registration faces a huge backlog and allegations of corruption are common. Generally it is the less powerful, less vocal and more vulnerable segments of communities that suffer most. This has inevitably led to significant social tensions and the possibility of future conflict.

Land sector work in Vanuatu is complemented by the AusAID-funded Justice Blong Everiwan Program, which is led by the World Bank. This program supports research to complement the implementation of the 2006 National Land Summit Resolutions—for example, revising lease templates to provide better protection for custom landholders.

Community leaders are increasing their understanding of the kastom governance system in Vanuatu. AusAID's funding of the VNCC has contributed to its greater capacity and authority to implement a stronger chiefly system. However, the role of the chiefs and customary law has not been actively included across AusAID's full range of activities in law and justice. A 2008 mid-term review of the Vanuatu Police Force Capacity Building Project implemented by the Australian Federal Police illustrates that the program has not taken into account the role of the chiefs in maintaining the peace and recommends a stronger emphasis on operational partnerships with non-government partners, including the Council of Chiefs and the VWC. Reports on the program of assistance in the legal sector make only peripheral mention of the role of the chiefs even though their role is articulated in the 2005 design of the program.

More connected communities

To build more connected communities, civil society actors, like the state, need broad communication networks. Until recently, communication across Vanuatu relied on radio coverage. World Bank and AusAID support to an alternative mobile phone provider, Digicel, has significantly extended mobile phone coverage and use across Vanuatu.¹¹

The transport network in Vanuatu is very limited. There are flights to only 10 islands, the main means of transport being boats. The road network is not only limited but often poorly

¹¹ AusAID provided support to end the telecommunications monopoly in Vanuatu in 2007–08, which has massively expanded access to telecommunications in rural areas. The introduction of competition has led to greater coverage (the proportion of Vanuatu's population with access to mobile telephony increased from 20 per cent to 75 per cent during 2008) and a decrease in costs.

maintained. All this makes it expensive for international NGOs, local NGOs, churches, government and chiefs to operate across the country, and in particular to extend services to rural populations.

The capacity of Radio Vanuatu, the national broadcaster, is growing as a result of Australian support. Its representation of different opinions, issues and political views is developing. Talkback radio shows have been very successful with up to 38 callers in an hour. Coverage of the 2008 elections supported open debate and discussion not heard in Vanuatu before. Rural villagers indicated that they feel more a part of the country when they listen to the radio and participate in talkback, media forums and live telephone dedications. Drama-based education techniques by Wan Smol Bag are also contributing to community connectedness.

Greater social inclusion

To improve social inclusion, whether in service delivery or in political life, civil society organisations need to be alert to the broader processes that lead to exclusion and discrimination. In particular, churches and local customary structures tend to be male dominated in their leadership and decision-making processes. This leads to the exclusion of the interests, needs and concerns of women and youth, which is exacerbated by the lack of women in leadership positions in government and in politics. Though there are local NGOs emerging that are addressing the issues of women and youth, these tend to be concentrated in urban areas and limited in number and therefore reach.

AusAID's long-term support for the VWC has yielded significant results. The centre is reaching both urban and rural women with integrated, rights-based approaches to reducing gender-based violence. Of particular note are the Committees Against Violence Against Women and the Male Advocates Program. The committees assist in raising awareness of the violence and building community support against it as well as identifying women and children in need of assistance. They now operate in 35 locations across Vanuatu and the number of male advocates continues to increase (400 by end of 2009). Many of these advocates are police officers, church leaders and chiefs, including five in the VNCC. While male advocates tend to be concentrated on northern islands, they often provide important support to the Committees Against Violence Against Women, which took some time to gain community acceptance, and can be useful links to government.

The involvement of the VWC was crucial in advocating the gazettal of the Family Protection Act in 2009, which, for example, extended the definition of rape so that rape in marriage is not precluded. The VWC lobbied for more than 10 years against substantial opposition. It provides ongoing advice and advocacy to the Vanuatu Police Force in applying the Act, including the new Police Domestic Violence Unit based in Port Vila. The VWC's client numbers are increasing; they provided counselling and support to 345 women from July to December 2009 compared with 114 women in the corresponding period of 2008. There is anecdotal evidence of emerging community acceptance that some forms of violence against women and children are unacceptable.

These significant results are not mirrored across the breadth of AusAID's support, however. While the design of AusAID's Governance for Growth program states that it will explore links with churches and NGOs, this has not been evident in reporting.

More informed and active citizens

To contribute to informed and active citizenship, there need to be more mechanisms at national and provincial levels for allowing ni-Vanuatu to have a say in government policy processes. Though potential mediating organisations exist, such as the National Council of Women, the Vanuatu Christian Council and the VNCC, there are no established procedures whereby different social groups can participate in governance processes, make demands on government or hold government to account beyond periodic elections. Societal influence on government thus relies predominantly on informal networks along chiefly, religious and geographic lines. Possibilities for access and influence are unevenly distributed across society and lack predictability. Furthermore, civil society actors lack information about government policy, budgets, structures and legislation, which affects their capacity to contribute to building more transparent and accountable state institutions.

AusAID support has promoted greater knowledge of governance and development issues among citizens. Chiefs from across at least four islands who engaged with Wan Smol Bag have shown that they understand human rights better and take them into account in making decisions at the village level. Some are promoting discussion and action on controversial issues; others have become natural resource monitors through contact with the Vanua-tai team.

Follow-up studies with village communities who took part in election awareness activities showed that those communities have a greater understanding of the electoral system and the work of members of parliament. Surveys following workshops on the Domestic Violence and Family Protection Act show that people want more information and discussion to help them understand how the Act works. Information on radio is clearly of interest and use to women. For example, the Sanma Counselling Centre (women's refuge) in Luganville indicated that approximately 40 per cent of its clients visited the centre after they had learned about its services through the radio.

Wan Smol Bag activities have contributed to improvements in human rights and gender awareness in Vanuatu. Wan Smol Bag's core theatre program has increased awareness of HIV/AIDS through TV series, publications, workshops and the health clinics. Their educational soap opera series is shown across the Pacific. The environment program has enhanced conservation awareness in schools and communities.

More effective, accountable and transparent government

Civil society actors face administrative, financial and managerial constraints that limit its contribution to building more effective state institutions and make it risky for AusAID to provide direct funding to these organisations. As a result, Australian NGOs and faith-based organisations play a key role in providing an intermediary channel for funds to these organisations, managing their expenditure and accounting, and providing financial oversight.

Apart from these administrative challenges, there is a lack of local funds to support urban and rural community development or to support the running of an intermediary civil society group, there are few government resources available to fund community-level initiatives, and there is no philanthropic institution or individual philanthropists to support social welfare. As a result, local NGOs or community-based organisations rely predominantly on external donor funding for their organisations and activities, which creates its own set of problems. Added to this, civil society organisations often operate within silos that are themselves disjointed. Thus churches, NGOs and chiefs may not work with each other to address common interests or needs. There is little dialogue across different church denominations at national or local levels. The need to compete for donor funds limits the possibilities for greater cooperation and coordination or joint advocacy on particular issues or enhancing the environment within which they work.

Australia's support has strengthened the reach and performance of key institutions and fostered civil society participation in leadership and decision making. AusAID's move to partnerships and core funding has been positive. However, specific results in terms of encouraging networking across civil society could not be identified.

To sum up

Civil society actors face considerable constraints related to access to government, financial sustenance and sustainability, administrative and managerial capacity, and social and geographic reach that limit their potential to contribute to building effective governance institutions and processes. AusAID's work with civil society has achieved significant results. However, if AusAID's program were more deliberately designed to address the constraints faced by civil society, it would be more likely to achieve lasting impact. Despite AusAID's intention to build stronger partnerships between non-state actors and government, this is not articulated clearly and there is little evidence that this is happening across the aid program. The majority of the program remains relatively untouched by otherwise progressive work with civil society in Vanuatu.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS AUSAID'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY RELEVANT TO THE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT?

AusAID's engagement with civil society is relevant to the social and political context of Vanuatu in several ways. First, AusAID's partnership with the VNCC and its support of the Vanuatu Christian Council are an important new direction that recognises the diversity of the drivers of change. Both churches and chiefs are institutions that command considerable authority and legitimacy, particularly in rural areas where the majority of the population resides. Support for these institutions runs alongside support for the government, which struggles to extend its reach beyond the urban areas of Efate Island. Provincial governments are weak, lacking staff, facilities and funds for developmental interventions. The larger churches in particular have a national network through which educational and health services could be delivered. They are a source of service delivery that could be used by the government within a broader sectoral policy framework to meet the social welfare needs of the population.

Second, AusAID's recent engagement with civil society has built on a contextual analysis of the key strategic actors shaping—or with the potential to shape—economic, social and political processes. The 2007 report on drivers of change identified churches and chiefs as key actors in the everyday lives of ni-Vanuatu, particularly in rural areas.

Third, chiefly systems in Vanuatu need to be recognised as dynamic, fluid and adaptive systems that can work alongside and with government to address issues of social order in a rapidly changing context. Though chiefs command authority and legitimacy in rural communities, the processes of urbanisation, commoditisation and governance through introduced institutions have weakened the chiefly systems, leading to confusion about their roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, in cities where people from different clans, tribes and islands are thrown together, chiefs have tried to establish mechanisms whereby communities belonging to particular tribes are represented by chiefs from their locality living in the cities, thus filling the vacuum of authority. Though such mechanisms are still evolving, they illustrate the dynamic, adaptive potential of the chiefly system. In contrast, the introduced Westminster-style state institutions are weakly embedded in society and remain dislocated from the majority of residents in the rural areas. And there is growing concern about corruption among politicians, undermining public confidence in state institutions. This all points to an opportunity to harness the creative dynamic of chiefly systems in a positive way to deal with the pressures of urbanisation and maintaining social order.

It is within this fluid context that AusAID's support to institutions such as the VNCC is particularly appropriate. Such institutions can play a key role in defining and strengthening customary identities and practices and in promoting government and public dialogue about the potential of kastom governance. AusAID's support to the VNCC secretariat has helped to strengthen the administrative capacity of the organisation, equipping it to play its bridging role between chiefs and government more effectively. AusAID's support thus contributes to improving processes of governance in Vanuatu in a way that draws on the full range of authoritative institutions.

Fourth, AusAID's support to key non-government actors that are addressing sensitive social issues such as violence against women or sexual health is highly relevant. The NGOs that have recently emerged are important additions to civil society in Vanuatu. While many of them are small scale, rely on donors for funding and lack strong administrative or managerial capacity, the stronger ones such as Wan Smol Bag and the VWC are socially significant. They provide new avenues of participation in social and political life for women and youth, who are otherwise excluded in the male-dominated structures of the churches, chiefly systems and the introduced Western political institutions. Given that people under the age of 18 years constitute 40 per cent of the population, a percentage that is likely to increase, and given that rates of urban youth unemployment are growing, the positive involvement of young people in social, economic and political life is crucial to future stability. Furthermore, because these relatively new NGOs tackle sensitive social issues such as HIV, violence against women, reproductive health and community governance, they are alternative bases of power to the government, chiefs and churches, thereby challenging conservative values that hamper the inclusion of youth and women.

Finally, AusAID's strategic engagement is relevant because it addresses many of the constraints that civil society actors face in contributing to processes of governance and service delivery.

- > AusAID's support to Wan Smol Bag, the VNCC and the media addresses the constraints concerning the lack of access to government information, the lack of government transparency in its legislation, structures, policies and processes, and the lack of avenues through which citizens can shape policy. Its support to the media and Wan Smol Bag has enabled these organisations to raise awareness about social issues and government policies in cities beyond Port Vila and in villages across Vanuatu.
- > AusAID's funding of a partnership arrangement between the Ministry of Health and the Save the Children Fund has strengthened the reach of government health services to villages across Vanuatu. Similarly, its support to the VWC, which has a network through the Committees Against Violence Against Women in rural areas across the country, has enabled civil society organisations to extend their reach beyond urban areas.
- > AusAID has helped to strengthen the administrative and managerial capacity of civil society through, for example, its support to the secretariat of the VNCC.
- > AusAID's shift towards partnership arrangements and multi-year funding cycles is an attempt to improve the predictability of funding to civil society groups and hence their effectiveness.
- > AusAID's support of women and youth groups addresses the issues of exclusion within civil society.
- > AusAID's support to umbrella groups contributes to improving coordination, cooperation and dialogue among different civil society actors. In this context, the new management structure of the umbrella group Vanuatu Association of NGOs, currently supported by New Zealand's aid agency (NZAID), will be worth monitoring in terms of another key emerging institution.

While AusAID has engaged strategically with contextually appropriate and relevant non-government institutions, this approach needs to be deliberately incorporated across Australia's other development assistance programs in Vanuatu, with a view to enhancing the connections between and the debate over the roles of government and civil society across different government sectors. The Ministry of Health agreement with the Save the Children Fund, supported by AusAID, is one example that could be replicated in other sectors and activities.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES AUSAID'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IN PARTNER COUNTRIES REFLECT OTHER ASPECTS OF GOOD DONOR PRACTICE?

AusAID's engagement with civil society reflects several aspects of good donor practice. First, AusAID's move towards funding longer term partnership agreements within sectoral programs allows for greater policy coherence and strategic cooperation among different actors. Illustrative of this is the partnership agreement between the Ministry of Health, AusAID and the Save the Children Fund Vanuatu to provide a network of village health workers across the islands. Though the church partnership program has much potential to improve links between the population and government, this potential is not being realised sufficiently in Vanuatu and requires a deliberate strategy.

Second, the provision of core funding to strategic NGOs has alleviated the administrative burdens on them created by multiple donor funding and reporting requirements. In the words of an employee at Wan Smol Bag: 'Before we had specific donors funding different projects. This put pressure on us in dealing with all the different reporting requirements. When AusAID moved to core funding and partnership agreements, this helped us to consolidate our work and focus more on doing our work'. It has thus enabled them to develop more robust systems of administration and management and to plan more strategically for the medium term.

Third, AusAID has direct partnership agreements with key non-state actors. These include Wan Smol Bag, the VNCC, the VWC and the Vanuatu Christian Council. Such agreements signal an approach that is based on a relationship of equality and respect, that is responsive to local needs, as opposed to the top-down imposition of projects and priorities, and that should involve sharing risks. However, partnership arrangements need to be arranged in a way that is both administratively effective and efficient for all involved. For example, the Church Partnership Program in Vanuatu involves numerous contractual agreements, first between AusAID and the Australian faith-based NGOs that have relations with the Vanuatu churches' development arms and, second, between those Australian NGOs and the Vanuatu churches' development arms.

Fourth, AusAID has moved towards greater harmonisation with donors. It has also provided joint funding to directly supported civil society groups. For example, it provides core funding with NZAID to Wan Smol Bag and the VWC. Though AusAID in Vanuatu has moved in the direction of core funding and donor harmonisation, the meaning of core funding requires further refining. For example, both NZAID and AusAID ostensibly provide 'core funding' to Wan Smol Bag, which covers among other things the administrative costs of the organisation.

However, AusAID and NZAID have identified that specific activities pertaining to their funding and the harmonisation process have been fraught with difficulties. NZAID and AusAID staff do not routinely copy each other into communications relating to Wan Smol Bag, which has led to poor communication. The different expectations and conflicting requirements of the two donors are not only frustrating for the donors but also Wan Smol

Bag. The 2009 mid-term review reports that ‘while the donors encouraged WSB [Wan Smol Bag] to complete a single report, they regularly asked for additional separate reports to meet their own needs. This doubled WSB’s workload’. Such actions contradict one of the key purposes of donor harmonisation. For donor harmonisation to work effectively, donor practices need to match or be complementary in terms of decision-making processes, funding cycles, reporting and monitoring mechanisms. There was little evidence in this example of change on the part of either donor. Getting bogged down in the administrative details of harmonising funding arrangements has used so much staff time that there have been no opportunities for strategic dialogue among donors and harmonising support at a higher level.

Fifth, AusAID has promoted gender equality through its support to women’s organisations and to organisations raising concerns about issues of domestic violence, sexual health and reproductive health. It has provided specific support to four initiatives aimed at increasing equality for women—the Vanuatu Gender and Development Program, the VWC, specific projects funded by the AusAID Non-Government Organisation Cooperation Program such as Reproductive Health Outreach and Education, and the Kastom Governance Partnership.

However, gender issues have not been systematically or strongly addressed in most of the initiatives that involved civil society engagement. Eleven of the 28 initiatives (including ANCP) being funded in 2007–08 made mention of gender equality issues in their designs, but there was little solid reporting of the effect of initiatives on the different needs of girls, boys, women and men. Seven initiatives adopted a more comprehensive approach to gender in their designs and reporting, which was reflected in the use of gender focus groups, gender analysis and gender-based training. Five initiatives did not mention gender at all in the documentation reviewed.

Sixth, AusAID has supported initiatives that encourage greater interaction between civil society and the state. In this way it has tried to improve public understanding of government policy, strengthen governance processes, and create demand for better governance. Its support, for example, of the VNCC and the Vanuatu Christian Council promotes processes of dialogue around the respective roles of government, churches and chiefs in achieving and maintaining social order. Similarly, its support to the media and to Wan Smol Bag is important in relaying information about government policy to citizens and promoting discussion and awareness about social and political issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

AusAID's engagement with civil society is relevant to the social and political context of Vanuatu in several ways. It reflects the findings of a contextual analysis of the key strategic actors shaping economic, social and political processes. AusAID's strategic engagement with civil society in Vanuatu is relevant because it addresses many of the constraints that civil society actors face in contributing to improved governance processes and service delivery.

AusAID has supported initiatives that encourage greater interaction between civil society and the state. In this way it has tried to improve public understanding of government policy, strengthen governance processes, and create demand for better governance. The approaches and models of AusAID's engagement with civil society in Vanuatu tend to be concentrated both geographically and sectorally. The support provided to, for example, high-performing, strategic NGOs needs to ensure that their reach extends beyond Port Vila. In this way it can more broadly raise awareness about social issues and promote the voices of women and youth. Another example of sectoral extension relates to the village health worker model of the partnership between government and civil society. This has enabled the government to extend services across the country down to village level through the intermediary of the Save the Children Fund. Finding opportunities to apply this model to other areas in the health sector and to the education and law and justice sectors would strengthen relations between government and civil society and contribute to improved wellbeing and more national debate and discussion.

Similarly, the innovative work on kastom governance needs to be publicised more widely so that different government departments, churches and NGOs consider involving chiefs more closely in their activities. By looking across Australian-supported sectoral programs, it should be possible to identify opportunities to integrate different civil society actors, extend the dialogue on roles and responsibilities and so contribute to more active citizenship and national policy debate.

AusAID's support to key non-government actors that are addressing sensitive social issues such as violence against women or HIV is highly relevant. It is important to recognise the dynamic, fluid and adaptive nature of chiefly systems in Vanuatu so as to capitalise on their potential to work alongside and with government on issues of social order and wellbeing in a rapidly changing context. In this way AusAID's support can contribute to improving processes of governance by drawing on the full range of authoritative institutions.

AusAID has been innovative and taken risks in its support to churches and chiefs. It has also strengthened several key local NGOs such as Wan Smol Bag and the VWC. An important next step would be to scale up work that provides opportunities and forums for different civil society actors to engage with each other in dialogue and eventually collaborate more in providing services and improving governance. The new management of the Vanuatu Association of NGOs may make this an important group to support.

Although AusAID in Vanuatu has been keeping gender issues at the forefront through its work with the VWC and Wan Smol Bag, it will be very important in its future work with civil society groups involving chiefs and churches to ensure that 'tradition' does not get rewritten

in an entirely male voice and that inherently conservative church groups are willing and able to adopt good development practice.

AusAID's move towards longer term partnership agreements and core funding representing good donor practice. In addressing the challenges of donor harmonisation, AusAID has a role in pushing the boundaries on its own flexibility on processes and procedures and encouraging other donors to do the same. The option of delegated cooperation—when one donor gives funding to another donor and the second donor manages it on behalf of both—should be considered as a way to avoid duplication of effort by multiple donors.

Harmonisation also includes dialogue among the donors at a strategic level so that they have a more collective understanding of the changing roles of civil society in Vanuatu and the role of external support.

There needs to be greater links between NGOs supported by AusAID and the broader AusAID strategy for working with civil society in Vanuatu. Mutual learning from the full range of experience could be gained by involving Australian NGOs in the development of the Australian strategy for engaging with civil society in Vanuatu and in the ongoing review of that strategy through the annual reporting cycle.

AusAID in Vanuatu has been innovative, strategic and risk taking in its reshaping of its engagement with civil society. There are lessons here for other countries and for AusAID offices in other countries. There is a need for AusAID in Vanuatu to articulate its strategy for engaging with civil society as a tool for guiding program decisions, measuring progress and communicating across the whole aid program and among whole-of-government partners. There is also a need for a central resource in Australia where good practice is collated and shared with other parts of AusAID. A centre of civil society expertise could have numerous functions such as collating good practice, providing advice to country offices, advocating for simplified administrative procedures, promoting harmonisation at both strategic and administrative levels with other donors, providing opportunities for learning and exchange within AusAID and with other donors, and developing systems for monitoring the effects of engaging with civil society.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF ODE EVALUATION OF AUSAID'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

The guiding question for ODE's broad evaluation was 'to what extent and how has AusAID helped civil society to contribute to states and other development actors achieving positive and sustainable development outcomes'.

This evaluation question was broken down into three key evaluation questions. Figure 1 presents these questions and summarises the main methods by which they were addressed.

Figure 1. Relationship between evaluation questions and key methods

Key evaluation question	Key methods
1. What have been the intended or unintended results of AusAID's engagement with civil society?	<p>Desk-top mapping of AusAID aid activities with civil society in three countries. This contributes to Question 1 by mapping activities AusAID does to engage with civil society in three countries. It also informs the country case studies.</p> <p>International good practice review. This provides a set of criteria for which to address Question 3 concerning good practice.</p> <p>Iterative development of a theory of change model for how AusAID engages with civil society. This is used as a thinking tool to guide the evaluation – especially concerning how to conceptualise the expected results of AusAID's engagement.</p>
2. To what extent is AusAID's engagement with civil society relevant to the development context?	<p>Activity-level case studies of five aid activities across three countries. This includes document analysis, mapping the theory of change for each activity, observation of aid activities, and semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries and key informants. The case studies address Questions 1 and 2 for specific activities and feed into the cross case analysis which contribute to Question 3. The case studies also contribute to the respective country level studies.</p> <p>Cross-case analysis of the five aid-activity case studies. This places an emphasis on understanding the extent to which AusAID's engagement with civil society reflects good practice. This analysis helps address Question 3 by applying the good practice criteria to the five aid activities.</p>
3. To what extent does AusAID's engagement with civil society in partner countries reflect other aspects of good donor practice?	<p>Advisory Group comprising key stakeholders and experts. The advisory group deliberates on the findings and test their validity for different contexts by participating in peer reviews, theory of change and other workshops. Their role is supplemented by expert evaluation review contesting the quality of evaluation products.</p> <p>Synthesis of 25 evaluation reports of aid activities with civil society. This synthesis examines some of AusAID's and Australian non-government organisations' engagements with civil society for a broader range of activities and countries than are covered by the activity and country case studies. This helps address Question 3 by applying the good practice criteria to a further set of aid activities across a broader sample of contexts.</p> <p>Country level case studies. This includes document analysis and strategic informant interviews in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. This method informs all three questions at a strategic level by considering the relevance and effectiveness of AusAID's engagement with civil society within the development context of each partner country. In lieu of a country case study for the Philippines, the preliminary findings of the evaluation are tested through analysis of a new approach to civil society engagement in the Philippines country program.</p>

Three AusAID country programs were selected as case studies for this evaluation: Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vanuatu. These programs were selected to illustrate different contexts, modalities and means of engagement with civil society¹². This report is of the country level case study for Vanuatu.

¹² For more information on the evaluation methodology, see the evaluation plan at: www.ode.usaid.gov.au/publications

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APPENDIX C: VANUATU KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED

Abong, Marcelin Director, Vanuatu Cultural Centre

Boe, Simon Director, World Vision

Bogiri, George Director General to Ministry of Internal Affairs

Boulekone, Mme Blandine CEO (Office Manager), Transparency International Vanuatu

Beru, Angie Acting Director, Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific

Cumpston, Nick Head of AusAID Country Program, AusAID, Vanuatu

Fleming, Alison Project Coordinator, (Sustainable Community-Based Tourism and World Heritage) Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Volunteer

Garu Vira Tabe, Chief Selwyn CEO of Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs (Secretary General)

Gellard, Linda First Secretary, AusAID, Vanuatu

Kalsuak, Ian Director of Live & Learn Environmental Organisation

MacKeze, Ben Manager NZAID

Mamesh, Kerry Editor, Daily Post News Paper

Moore, Sandra Country Director, Youth Challenge Vanuatu

Mormor, Chief Kalkot of Mangaliliu Village, Vice President, Efate Vaturisu Island Council of Chiefs

Regenvanu, Ralph Member of the Ni Vanuatu Parliament (and Anthropologist)

Tahi, Merilyn Director Vanuatu Women Centre

Taurakoto, Michael Wan Smol Bag Theatre

Tema, Pastor Shem Secretary General to the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC)

Timakata, Obed Program Manager, AusAID, Vanuatu

Toaliu, Hilson Director, Save the Children Fund Australia

Vanuaroroa, Hon. Ham Lini MP for Pentecost and Leader of Opposition (Minister)

Van Trease, Howard University of the South Pacific

Vatu, Charles former Program Manager, AusAID, Vanuatu

Watego, Charlene Deputy Head of Mission, High Commission, Vanuatu