

ORO BRIDGES RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT EVALUATION STUDY – MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This evaluation study sought to assess outcomes and impacts that have occurred from the Oro Bridges Reconstruction Project in transport, agriculture, tourism, the local economy, government services, NGOs and communities. The Oro Bridges Reconstruction Project was a substantial project made possible through a high level agreement between the Governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia following Cyclone Guba in November 2007.

The project cost more than PGK140 million including supervision costs and was delivered through the PNG-Australia Transport Sector Support Program (TSSP) in partnership with the Department of Works and Implementation (DoWI). The project replaced bridges at Eroro, Girua, Ambogo and Kumusi rivers. Two smaller bridges at the Martyrs and Auga Wet Crossings were also reinstated. Construction started in December 2013 and all bridges were fully operational by November 2016.

While the evaluation study was conducted relatively soon following the opening of the bridges, evaluation findings suggest that the reconstructed bridges have contributed to improved economic growth and service delivery in Oro Province. The evaluation study reports positive outcomes in a range of areas including: increased activity by transport service providers; supporting local agribusiness; a more conducive business environment, as evidenced by loan take-up rates; stronger local economic activity, in particular access to larger markets on a more regular basis that has enabled increased and more diversified disposable income; increased school enrolments; supporting Kokoda-related trekking activities; improved NGO and financial service sector access to remote villages; supporting Government operations in the sectors of law and justice and health; and greater mobility, including for women.

The report also provides a number of important lessons for stakeholders and our program. A critical lesson, which remains a key pillar of TSSP, is to encourage a ‘maintenance first’ approach by PNG for its transport infrastructure. Optimally timed maintenance can save on future costs of rehabilitation, and helps to ensure important assets such as roads and bridges provide a safe, secure and reliable transport service for the communities and business of Papua New Guinea over the long term. The Government of Australia will continue to work with DoWI on scoping longer term maintenance and rehabilitation projects on the Kokoda and Northern Highways so that Oro Province can continue to benefit from the bridges built through this project. Australia will follow-up with PNG authorities to ensure appropriate maintenance is undertaken on the bridges built under this project.

The evaluation study also highlighted the importance of infrastructure to enhance connectivity, and the critical role of planning to fully leverage infrastructure assets for service delivery. A number of critical infrastructure developments in Oro Province, funded from various sources, have occurred concurrently in recent years, or are in progress. Outcomes from infrastructure investments can and should become mutually reinforcing, and good planning can enhance positive outcomes. Recent major projects include: the Oro Bridges Reconstruction Project; upgrade to Oro Port, the Girua International Airport; PNG Power construction of Divune Hydropower Project at Kokoda; completion of new secondary schools in Oro Province; completion of a new operating theatre at the Popondetta General Hospital; and a Rural Electrification Program from Girua to Oro Bay.

The evaluation study highlighted a key limitation in respect of data. Improved data and statistics gathering across PNG will greatly enhance evidence-based decision making by a wider group of stakeholders in government and business. The Government of Australia is working with Papua New Guinea to continue reforms and efforts aimed at improving data collection. Australia will continue to support DoWI to improve its data collection and analysis on the condition and performance of the

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national road network. Australia will also continue to improve our own monitoring and evaluation and baseline data collection to inform future programming decisions.

The Government of Australia would like to thank the Institute of National Affairs for its work on the evaluation. The Government of Australia is also highly appreciative of all those who gave their time to help inform this evaluation, especially the businesses and communities of Oro Province, many of whom sadly experienced severe hardship for a long period of time following Cyclone Guba.