

# More Than Just Policing: Police Reform in Post-conflict Bougainville



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This brief summarises the findings of an independent evaluation of the Bougainville Community Policing Project (BCPP), which was conducted in late 2012 on behalf of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, the BCPP has two elements, which provide advisory support to the Autonomous Region of Bougainville's two separate but linked policing organisations: the Bougainville Police Service (BPS) and the Community Auxiliary Police (CAP). The BPS consists of approximately 200 officers based in the three urban centres (Buka, Arawa, and Buin) and, sitting under it, are nearly 350 members of the CAP, based in their own communities throughout rural Bougainville.

New Zealand's engagement with these two policing components has generated radically different sets of outcomes, in terms of the legitimacy and perceived effectiveness of each component. Most of the program's accomplishments related to its work with the CAP, with much more sporadic and provisional accomplishments achieved with regards to the BPS.

The BCPP expanded significantly the geographical spread of the CAP, which means more Bougainvilleans now have access to policing services than before. Secondly, BCPP recruitment strategies resulted in a significant increase in the number of women joining the CAP; reportedly from 5% to 21% during the past four years. Thirdly, the program established a non-commissioned officer component, which provides a leadership structure, source of accountability and potential career incentive within the CAP. Finally, the program introduced two simple but effective performance measures that improved

accountability and management in the CAP scheme.

With respect to the CAP, the approach of the New Zealand advisers has been enabling and facilitative rather than prescriptive. Advisers have worked with the grain of local beliefs and practices. Some program staff had lived for significant periods of time in country, attuning them to on-the-ground realities.

The BCPP's work with the CAP is highly relevant and well regarded throughout Bougainville. It also accords with the broad vision of law and justice outlined in the region's post-conflict foundational documents, which foresee security and safety as being co-produced through active collaboration between community-based and state actors. This work has also benefited from high-quality leadership and sufficient periods of time in Bougainville on the part of advisers to acquire a sound grasp of local circumstances and needs. CAP's important policing role is demonstrated by preliminary research, which indicates that CAP generates up to 85% of all BPS crime reports. Their roles appear to go far beyond policing, with many CAP officers performing important and multifaceted roles as awareness raisers, educators, mediators, conflict preventers and managers. While operating within a framework of national law, the CAP works with the grain of local beliefs and practices, including by maintaining a close relationship with local-level government in the form of the Councils of Elders, as well as with clan leaders and chiefs. CAP represents a practical example of hybrid policing that draws simultaneously upon the authority of the state and the local social orders that remain an important frame of reference for most

Bougainvilleans. Moreover, rather than simply reinforcing existing power relations at local levels, the growing number of women officers suggests the potential of the CAP for becoming an active agent of social change. The evaluation concluded that this element of the BCPP constitutes good value for money and is a rare example of a successful international police-building engagement.

By contrast, the other approach, which followed the standard international practice of providing external advisers to help build the capacity of the regular police organisation (BPS), appears to have achieved no more success than similar engagements elsewhere in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific islands.

New Zealand's efforts to transform the BPS have trodden a conventional path. Expatriate police advisers on six-month deployments mentor senior personnel, write procedural handbooks, and develop training modules on activities such as intelligence gathering and criminal investigation. These are the staple ingredients in many institutional capacity-building programs, with a focus on the transfer of technical skills that are seen as deficient or absent in the local policing organisation.

Little measurable success has been garnered from these efforts. Indeed, beyond rhetorical commitment, local officers appear uninterested in the reform process. Problems of resources, leadership, management, accountability, discipline and lack of professionalism afflict the BPS, adversely affecting public perceptions and confidence. Absenteeism is reportedly high, including among the intended beneficiaries of one-on-one mentoring.

A clear message emerging from the analysis is that approaches which are innovative and grounded in local realities are much more

likely to accrue measurable outcomes in terms of improved safety, security and access to justice for citizens. Where New Zealand practitioners attempted to build the police in their own organisational image, the results have been predictably underwhelming. However, where they have gone with the grain of local realities and aspirations, the results have been much more promising.

While, as the evaluation acknowledges, further empirical investigation is required, a number of lessons of broader applicability are suggested by this case study. The first entails the importance of building on local strengths rather than a conventional approach that identifies only local deficiencies and seeks to 'fix' them. The second is that reform efforts should not be driven by blind allegiances to institutional forms that, arguably, bear less and less resemblance to the realities of policing in any socially complex society. The third is that what fits best is, ultimately, more likely to be sustainable than so-called best practice. The fourth is that where a strong local vision exists, more humble, modest and facilitative international approaches work best.

The authors are continuing their research into hybrid institution-building in Bougainville.

### Author Notes

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### Endnote

- 1 This 'In Brief' draws on a larger article of the same name published in *International Peacekeeping* Vol. 12, No. 5 (forthcoming 2014).

