Solomon Islands
Rural Development Program

Improving agricultural extension services, and economic and social infrastructure in rural Solomon Islands.

Background
Solomon Islands, after a period of civil conflict known as the ‘tensions’, from 1998 to 2003, has begun to move from post-conflict reconstruction to longer-term development. However, raising rural living standards remains a formidable challenge. Roughly 85 percent of Solomon Islanders live in rural areas, relying on subsistence, smallholder agriculture. Agriculture remains the backbone of the rural economy. As such, the Rural Development Program (RDP) is designed to respond to priorities identified by villagers to improve agricultural extension services, and rural infrastructure.

About the Program
The RDP has been prepared as the first phase of a long term program to support the Solomon Islands national rural development goals. With funding from AusAID, the European Union and the World Bank, the RDP, which is implemented by the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in collaboration with the Provincial Governments, aims to raise the living standards of rural households. The RDP has three main components. These deal with rural infrastructure, agricultural support services, and assistance to rural businesses.

Within the first component of improving rural infrastructure, the RDP has established transparent and inclusive community driven mechanisms to identify, select and implement small-scale infrastructure. Grants are being provided each year for the construction or rehabilitation of essential infrastructure such as health posts, teachers’ accommodation, water tanks, foot bridges, etc. The grants are managed and projects implemented by village-level committees. Component one, through its community driven approach, also serves to assist in the development of financial management skills and project organisation within the village-level committees that implement individual RDP projects.

The second component aims at increasing the capacity of existing agricultural institutions to provide essential agricultural support services, such as extension services, veterinary services and quarantine. The program aims to revitalise the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock which was badly affected by the years of unrest during the tensions and also seeks to strengthen its collaboration with other agricultural service providers such as NGOs and the private sector. This component also provides essential equipment and training to the Ministry to further build on its ability to provide services. The training and services provided are driven by demand at the local level, with men and women farmers prioritising their own needs.

Component three focuses on rural business development. This component aims to facilitate the growth and development of rural enterprises by providing financing and offering assorted training and technical assistance to rural businesses. The Solomon Islands Government is committed to improving outreach of financial services to rural areas. This component contributes to broader government initiatives of expanding access to finance and stimulating private sector investment in rural areas.

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