



New Kokopo office, October 2008, was built through the Church Partnership Program.
Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu

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The Church Partnership Program (CPP) is a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) funded initiative out of Australia, to connect church nongovernment organizations (NGOs) in a way that expands and compounds their influence in the Pacific.

According to DFAT, the aim of the program is "to enhance our longstanding social and cultural links" and their plan is

to “encourage Australian and Pacific churches to work more closely together through a Church Partnership Program. The program will support Pacific churches to provide community services and encourage greater engagement between Pacific and Australian church leaders.”¹ The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been involved in this program through its nongovernment organization (NGO), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia, and has implemented initiatives through the program in both Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

The current phase of the CPP is known as Phase 3 and includes funding of up to A\$23 million for use between 2017 and 2020. According to DFAT, “this phase focuses on an enhanced partnership and collaboration to improve service delivery, build community resilience, and strengthen the institutional capacity of the Papua New Guinea churches and their partners.”² The CPP churches are supported by DFAT to improve their capacity to deliver crucial health and education services, especially in remote rural areas, and are encouraged to deliver on a range of activities in support of peace, prosperity, gender equality, social inclusion, and disaster risk reduction. Phase 3 capitalizes on the extensive church presence in the Pacific to empower communities and influence collective development with the aim to improve service provision, governance, inclusion, and management practice.

The Church Partnership Program brings together various denominations and their Australian NGO partners to work together to improve service delivery and build resilience in rural communities, with support from the Australian government.³ The churches’ involvement in the projects on a local level is determined by their presence and influence in the local area and has varied from country to country.⁴ Churches that have been involved in the program in some capacity include the Anglican, Apostolic, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Catholic, Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventist, and United churches⁵

Churches involved in the CPP must undertake and manage programs that align with the strategic goals of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and that adhere to their project management criteria⁶

The Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea

The Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea engages seven churches by supporting partnerships between them and their Australian church NGO counterparts. These churches include the Anglican, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist (SDA), Salvation Army, Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran, and United churches. These groups cover 73 percent of the 96 percent of the population who identify as Christian within Papua New Guinea.⁷ In Papua New Guinea the CPP supports the SDA Church’s programs to improve human development in the region. The program works in partnership with ADRA to find effective ways of reaching remote communities in PNG. The aim of the program is improved education, enhanced health outcomes, greater gender equality and social inclusion, and the promotion of peace and prosperity. Another important aim is disaster risk reduction and climate change preparedness. The Church Partnership Program in PNG is funded by DFAT and has been operating for more than 13 years.⁸ Other programs were focused on HIV awareness, treatment, and prevention, improved literacy, the training of key church figures in recognizing and dealing with child abuse, business development, healthy lifestyle messaging in schools and youth mentorship.⁹ Programs took the form of workshops in local schools and churches facilitated by ADRA workers, small business loans and entrepreneurial mentorships, health and sexual education workshops, and programs designed to teach leadership skills to young people. These programs were led by both local ADRA workers and program managers from ADRA Australia.¹⁰

All DFAT supported aid in Papua New Guinea adheres to the DFAT *Aid Investment for Papua New Guinea 2015-2019*, which encompasses the following three strategic and interlinked objectives:

Promoting effective governance

Enabling economic growth

Enhancing human development

All programs are also required to integrate gender equality effectively.¹¹

The Church Partnership Program in the Solomon Islands

Despite several discussions and applications to DFAT going back as far as 2007, the Church Partnership Program has not become active in the Solomon Islands. There was some debate over whether or not the various churches would be able to work together, and the churches had less combined influence than the government and local NGOs, and so it was decided that Australian government funding to the Solomon Islands would be given to these sources instead.¹²

The Church Partnership Program in Vanuatu

In Vanuatu the churches involved in the CPP include the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the Apostolic Church of Vanuatu, the Assemblies of God Vanuatu, the Churches of Christ Conference in Vanuatu, the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The six partner churches and Vanuatu Council of Churches work in

partnership with Australian nongovernmental organization partners—Act for Peace, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Anglican Board of Mission, Baptist World Aid (now Transformation Aid International), and Uniting World—to implement the church partnership program.¹³

All DFAT-supported aid in Vanuatu adheres to the Australia-Vanuatu Aid Partnership Arrangement 2016-2019, which established Australia's aim of "promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability," and of achieving the key outcomes:

building resilient infrastructure and an environment for trade and economic opportunity, including the productive sectors

improving early education and essential health facilities

improving community safety and resilience

supporting cyclone recovery and reconstruction.¹⁴

The other core feature of all DFAT-sponsored aid projects in Vanuatu is gender-based, on the evidence that women are particularly disadvantaged in areas of decision-making and economic empowerment. Australia is working with the Vanuatu government and women's organizations to support the empowerment of Ni-Van women.¹⁵

ADRA worked on several programs that were designed to meet these aims, under the leadership of ADRA country director David Cram. These included:

health programs focused on eye and dental health services

health programs aimed specifically at the reduction in and of malaria and diarrheal diseases

building and maintaining rural water and sanitation infrastructure

training and resourcing librarians and libraries

teacher and principal reaccreditation training

community-based literacy and numeracy training

community-based disaster risk management, including drills in local communities and schools, and localized first-aid training and resourcing.¹⁶

The Future of the Program

The plan is to continue this program into a fourth phase, though funding has been significantly reduced. DFAT has announced an A\$2 million budget for the 2019-2023 phase with the intention to localize more of the programs. The aim of the next phase of the Pacific CPP is to build the leadership capabilities of Pacific island church leaders to contribute to development outcomes in the Pacific. The focus will be on capacity building opportunities for Pacific island church leaders and strengthened partnerships between Pacific island and Australian church leaders. The program will have a specific focus on supporting female and young church leaders.¹⁷

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NOTES

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