

## **ISS Report: Anglican Church of Melanesia**

### **1. An analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges facing the organisation.**

The Anglican Church of Melanesia's presence in Vanuatu dates back to the late 1800's. Its work is based around two dioceses, one in the Banks and Torres (DOBT) where there are approximately 7000 members and the other called the Diocese of Vanuatu and New Caledonia primarily covering the islands south of Banks to Efate and representing about 20,000 people. In total its population is estimated to be around 13.4% of the population. Both dioceses are part of the international Anglican Church. Vanuatu together with the Solomon Islands makes up the regional Anglican Church of Melanesia. The churches headquarters are in Honiara. The data identifying weaknesses and strengths of the church comes from both the baseline study done in early 2008 and subsequent discussions within the church.

Church members are able to identify a range of strengths that have been built up over a century as well as identifying many weaknesses that inhibit its growth. They also recognise that sometimes one issue can be both a strength and a weakness.

#### **1. Structure**

##### **Strengths**

- The structure of the church replicates other Anglican churches the world over. This means it has a clear agreed on structure where roles are defined, decision making responsibilities are enacted in canon and the structure reaches down in tiers to the parish level so that every level has a voice and role.
- Organisations within the church such as the main women's group, 'mothers union', youth groups, sisters and brothers and companions attract large numbers of active participants and all have as part of their focus a goal of bettering the lives of their members. Members from each organisation or institution have some awareness of the policy of its organisation.
- Where there is confident leadership, this structure allows service development from villages up to Dioceses. Schools, clinics, rural training centres are scattered in both dioceses.
- The international links provide support and broadens what might otherwise be a parochial focus. Recently a central headquarters mirroring that in the organisations headquarters in the Solomon Islands has been established in Santo to help co-ordinate work. The most recent employment of a mission worker is giving new energy and focus to help co-ordinate development work.

##### **Weaknesses**

- This structure however also has key weaknesses. It is hierarchical. Most people live in the villages a long way from the main powerful decision making sites. Because communication between islands is difficult people often are not aware of how and why particular decisions, especially those that are contentious are made.
- Even though it's a big organisation, parishes often feel they do not get sufficient support or have access to resources to change their lives for the better. A big organisation takes a lot of money to run and finances do not trickle down to the villages. Priests often do not have sufficient education to lead their members wisely.
- People often do not have the confidence to take on leadership roles.

## **2. Human resources (leadership, management, administration)**

### **Strengths**

- The church has been sending out its brightest to train overseas and in country for decades. It has been able to build up diocesan and district teams led by relatively educated men and the occasional woman. Most of those trained have been priests and catechists but increasingly the church has seen the value in training lay people. In particular the mothers union has invested in strengthening the leadership skills of its leaders down to district level and increasingly these women are offering their knowledge and facilitation skills to other church groups.
- The church has invested in management, establishing offices for each diocese, a management structure and some leadership training so that the work of the church can be properly managed.
- Increasingly as government has struggled to manage core education and health programs the church has also taken on responsibility for basic services in some areas where members lack them. It has been helped in this role by support from overseas church partners who have acted as small donors or capacity builders.

### **Weaknesses**

- However there are also significant weaknesses in the churches leadership, management, and administration systems. Its strengths are relative. Not enough women or youth get access to leadership and management roles or the scholarships to train for those roles. There is a large turnover of leaders.
- Many appointed managers are relatively inexperienced, lack confidence, and find the responsible roles stressful. Alternatively they flounder when conflicts of family and community responsibility make them vulnerable to poor decisions or handling of finances. Frequently it seems that there are insufficient proven people to fill the many leadership roles and wisely mentor new managers coming on.

## **3. Systems (planning, budgeting, finances, monitoring) system**

### **Strengths**

- Over the last five years the church has put in place at central and diocesan level planning, budgeting, financial and monitoring systems to ensure more effective management. A three year strategic plan for the whole church provides overall direction and recent consultations around how the church should involve and support women and youth and a coming review of rural training centres helps set strategic direction.
- In terms of budgeting, annual budgets are set centrally and down to the dioceses, and each office has finance workers to keep records of spending. Many sites are using the Attaché accounting packages, there is auditing of the work of central and donor programs and the use of agreed salary structures. The structure can usually sort out what to do about members who are not working well.

### **Weaknesses**

- In terms of weaknesses sometimes monitoring and management skills are not rigorous and plans are not implemented. There are also not enough resources to fund all the needed programs.
- There is a shortage of qualified accountants and auditors and people with basic financial skills as well as community development workers and skillful teachers. Sometimes money allocated

to parishes doesn't get past PHQ or the dioceses because it needs to be used for more pressing issues.

#### **4. Communication, including issues of transport**

##### **Strengths**

- There is basic telephone access to both dioceses although DOBT has major problems with the consistency of its service. To try and strengthen contact the ACOM Santo office ensures messages get through via plane flights. Some districts have radio but there are insufficient funds to repair or extend the few that exist.
- Email contact is reasonably consistent between DOV and the Solomon Islands but the DOBT email link is poor. DOV have recently been able to take advantage of the new mobile network and use mobile phones to link their district priests.
- Both dioceses have at least one computer and a printer.
- DOBT have until recently had access to a boat to service closer parts of their diocese but this has become too old to use. Once a year the bishops have access to the larger boat the Southern Cross to move around their diocese.

##### **Weaknesses**

- Communication and transport are one of the biggest weaknesses in that it is so expensive to provide an accessible service. Both dioceses struggle to supply working computers and printers. It is especially difficult to keep them maintained and repair them when they break down because there is a lack of knowledge about how they work and no spare parts. Often they purchase reconditioned ones but these break down earlier.
- DOBT in particular struggles to communicate with their many scattered parishes. It is hoped that once the telecommunication system improves in the north that this can be improved.

#### **5. Participation**

##### **Strengths**

- Many people are involved in policy making, for example at Church Council right up to synod level. Increasingly there is the recognition that women and youth should have roles in these bodies. Mothers Union is inside the COM structure, it gets some finance from COM and it has one representative at the diocesan council and also at synod the highest decision making level for lay people. The female heads of the two orders of religious sisters are also represented.
- There is broad involvement of youth at parish level, with them frequently taking leadership roles in building projects, social activities and running their own groups. As well most of the religious orders are made up of youth and while they are relatively a small number in Vanuatu they play a significant and respected role in mission outreach. The plan is for their numbers to steadily increase particularly by opening up households for the sisters in both dioceses.

##### **Weaknesses**

- Having said that women and youth are represented at decision making levels, in reality they make up only a small proportion of the representatives with older men dominating membership and discussion.
- Most significantly for some women is the fact that the church has not yet accepted women's right to be ordained. While many leaders see this as an important step the majority of lay and priests are reluctant to go ahead.

## **6. Relationship to Government and chiefs**

### **Strengths**

- Historically the church and government have had close ties. The first President of the country was an Anglican priest and an ongoing relationship continues.
- At provincial level the relationship is probably strongest in Banks where the government is based at Sola, is small and because the population is largely Anglican there are many members serving government.
- The both dioceses relationships are maintained through partnerships in schools where government and church share costs and roles. The government pays for teachers' salaries, the church runs the school. Equally in the few health services the church is involved in the government pays staff salaries and supplies drugs and the church builds and manages the infrastructure
- There are also many examples especially in DOBT where there is a sharing of assets with provincial government such as transport, land and resources, and the church also has a voice at the provincial tag.

### **Weaknesses**

- In reality the strength of the relationship varies with government and with the government's capacity to actively support services with funds. At times the relationship and communication between the two especially at national level would be described as weak.
- In particular the relationship overlooks the need for informal education for example, literacy for youth and adult and life skills training
- There are also policy tensions, for example ACOM school lose some teachers when they go to teachers' college because they have to teach in government schools afterwards so this is a disincentive for increasing teachers training.

### **The opportunities and threats that have been identified include:**

#### **Opportunities**

- CPP funding can be used to strength capacity and especially train workers in how best to do their work as well as strengthen skills related to working along side government, donors, civil society and other NGO's.
- Partnership with other churches allows sharing of ideas and resources,
- VCC can act as a lobbying body to government and take up a number of the policy areas that need to be sorted out. The VCC can also advocate for good governance.
- The program can take further development opportunities down to the parish and village level and engage people in determining what a good quality project is.

#### **Threats/Challenges**

- The down turn in the economy will severely affect the programs capacity to reach village level unless we think carefully about how best to use the resources.
- Maintaining clear transparency regarding decision making and spending of funds and keeping peoples confidence in the decision making process will be a challenge unless we use training and make clear the expectations behind accountability.
- Similarly getting accurate financial records back in time will be hard unless this task is given priority and monitored closely.
- Making sure project quality is good is also important otherwise the funding will be wasted on ineffective programs. Building in good monitoring and evaluation will be part of avoiding this threat.

- Ensuring CPP workers and projects at every level feel supported so that they can reach out when uncertain of their role. This will require a strong, confident and participatory manager to build this support.

## 2. A set of key priorities for strengthening are identified as being:

### **A. Strengthen ACOM participation in VCC & co-ordination between VCC, ACOM and ABM**

- Travel costs covered & expectation of active participation built into roles of ACOM Manager

### **B. Build up capacity of ACOM to facilitate effective development projects**

- Employment of ACOM CPP co-ordinator & establishment of office with budget sufficient to work up and down
- Appointment of Technical Adviser to support and capacity build CPP workers

### **C. Strengthening co-ordination between diocesan centre and each region**

- DOV: By training secretaries in what is expected of their role, strengthening their communication skills and giving them basic computer word processing training.
- DOBT: By appointing diocese CPP co-ordinator who will work down into the regions

### **D. Improve technology access and computer skills for key church workers**

- DOV: Ensure diocese CPP co-ordinator has computer. Slowly introduce more computers into regions.
- DOBT: Ensure diocese CPP co-ordinator has computer

### **E. Strengthen effectiveness of service delivery**

- DOV: Ensure RTC has a functioning computer

### **F. Training community leaders; chiefs, women and youth in their leadership roles.**

- Future funding

## 3. A method for reviewing how change is occurring in that organisation

### **At the end of 12 months**

- Have developed an interview and focus group tool with the VCC M & E adviser that can be used by all churches over the three years to assess change.  
Suggestions would be for the ACOM Program to:
- Interview Bishop, and workers in each diocese office to discuss observations on outcomes
- Get regional feedback, (focus groups run where Institutional strengthening projects have started) regarding outcome of training/co-ordination/projects. Questions need to cover each strategy for strengthening church capacity.
- Look at the transparency of decisions about money – to donor and back to communities and dioceses and review financial records and acquittals and whether we are meeting the timeframes.
- As well gather data by : Reviewing quality of proposals being submitted & feedback from training done
- Steering committee: get feedback on observations regarding how things are progressing
- Feedback from other churches about outcomes ...(peer review)
- ABM (Chris Peters) asked to comment on observations and learning