



BOUGAINVILLE REFERENDUM DIALOGUES ANNUAL REPORT 2017

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INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that I write this introduction for the report on the first year of the Bougainville Referendum Dialogues (BRD). I am extremely happy with BRD's achievements so far. BRD is an important building block of the Autonomous Bougainville Government's (ABG) work towards referendum. This work is based on three pillars – engagement with the communities on the ground in Bougainville, with the government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG), and the international community. It is our three-pronged strategy. BRD is part of the first pillar in this three-pronged strategy, aimed at getting Bougainville communities referendum ready. As such, BRD fits into the ABG's 'Bougainville Referendum Ready Concept', which tasks each of the 33 Constituencies in Bougainville to prepare for the referendum. In the context of BRD, local facilitators and NGOs conduct local Referendum Dialogues in cooperation with my department, the Department of Peace Agreement Implementation (DPAI), and with the Constituency Referendum Committees (CRC) which have been established in each of Bougainville's 33 constituencies. The aim is to make each and every hamlet, village, ward and constituency 'referendum ready'. I am very satisfied that the first constituency that declared itself referendum-ready was Bolave in Southern Bougainville on 7 September 2017, followed by Hagogohe constituency in North Bougainville on 29 October 2017. Others will have to follow this year, with 31 December 2018 as the target date set by the Bougainville House of Representatives for referendum readiness. I am fully aware that work at the local level will have to intensify further in 2018, and I am confident that BRD will play its part.

I am also satisfied with the progress made last year with regard to the other pillars of our three-pronged strategy. The ABG has reached agreement with the GoPNG on important referendum-related issues. Most importantly, agreement on the features of the independent administrative agency which, according to the Bougainville Peace Agreement, has to conduct the referendum, could be reached in January 2017: It was decided that a Bougainville Referendum Commission (BRC) should be formed. The Charter for the BRC was signed on 30 August 2017 by PNG's Governor-General. The BRC is in the process of being established and will commence with its work early in 2018. Furthermore, a crucial meeting of the ABG-GoPNG Joint Supervisory Board took place on 14 and 15 December 2017 in Port Moresby. Its focus was on referendum preparations, and some important decisions were taken, for example, with regard to the invitation of international observers to observe the conduct of every phase of the Referendum process.

Finally, international assistance for the referendum process – the third pillar of our three-pronged strategy - gained momentum in 2017, with the United Nations particularly supportive. To rally the international community behind the referendum process and to secure international support – financially and otherwise - for the preparation and conduct of the referendum will be a major task in 2018.

BRD has to be seen in this broader context of Bougainville's journey towards referendum – and beyond. We have to start now to think about the transition period after the referendum. And again, I am confident that BRD can play an important role in this regard, providing a crucial link between the people in the communities and my Department and the ABG at large. I commend the BRD facilitators for the great work they have done over the last twelve months and I wish them all the best for their work in 2018. I thank the ABG President, Hon. Dr Chief John Momis, and my minister, Albert Punghau, Minister for Peace Agreement Implementation, for their continuous support of BRD, I thank Misereor for funding BRD and Peace and Conflict Studies Institute Australia (PaCSIA) for the fruitful and effective collaboration in BRD, and most importantly I thank my fellow Bougainvilleans, the local facilitators, who made BRD such a great success last year and who will assure its success in 2018. Working together we can make the Bougainville dream come true.

James Tanis, Secretary, Department of Peace Agreement Implementation (DPAI)

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Bougainville has entered a decisive stage of its history. In May 2016 the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) and the National Government of Papua New Guinea (PNG) agreed upon a target date for a referendum on the future political status of Bougainville – 15 June 2019. The referendum, which is one core pillar of the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) of August 2001, has to include as one option complete independence for Bougainville as a new nation state. Peacebuilding on Bougainville will only come to a successful end with the conduct of the referendum and the implementation of the referendum results. Hence it is of utmost importance that the process towards the referendum will be peaceful, inclusive, democratic, effective and legitimate. People and communities have to get 'referendum-ready'. To achieve this, a lot of work has to be done before and after the referendum vote.

Many Bougainvilleans still lack information about the nature of the referendum, the process of referendum and the potential impacts on their lives, communities and society at large. Therefore public awareness on the referendum process has been identified by the ABG and the PNG government as one of the urgent needs for ensuring the credibility, integrity and inclusiveness of the referendum. There is a need for a more coordinated and strategic approach in the conduct of public awareness campaigns and consultation activities. This is where our project aims to make a difference. The Bougainville Referendum Dialogues (BRD) are a partnership between the ABG Department of Peace Agreement Implementation (DPAI), Peace and Conflict Studies Institute Australia (PaCSIA) and the civil society of Bougainville. The project is supported by the Catholic Diocese of Bougainville and funded by Misereor e.V., the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation.

The Bougainville Referendum Dialogues engage communities all over Bougainville in meaningful exchange of information and discussions about all aspects of the referendum, the process towards the referendum and the implementation of referendum results. Dialogues not only provide information about the legal and political processes and potential future impacts of the referendum, but most importantly create the opportunity for community members to express their own concerns, hopes and ideas about a more peaceful and prosperous future for Bougainville, in connection with the referendum. They also give participants the opportunity to discuss local issues in ways that enable building stronger communities and to establish closer links with the ABG. This helps lay firm foundations for post-referendum processes.

DPAI and PaCSIA have recruited a team of more than 80 facilitators from all 33 constituencies of Bougainville who travel through their constituencies and organise referendum dialogues in schools, market places, churches and community government offices. Referendum dialogues provide an opportunity to hear from the ABG and knowledgeable Bougainvilleans about ongoing preparations for the referendum and to voice questions, concerns and hopes. Examples of issues raised include

the following:

- Which question will be on the ballot paper?
- What happens after the referendum vote? Will there be a transition period and what does this entail?
- What is the ABG doing with regards to weapons disposal in Bougainville? Are weapons still a problem for the referendum?

Referendum dialogues provide an opportunity for community members to have input and to make their voices heard by the ABG and the Bougainville Referendum Commission, which has been appointed by the two governments to implement the referendum. BRD facilitators take notes during dialogues and report questions and feedback to the ABG and to PaCSIA.

BRD does not compete with other initiatives of the ABG or the district and community government. BRD assists the Constituency Referendum Committees (CRCs) and the District Peace and Security Committees (DPSCs) where possible, and BRD facilitators discuss their activities with other members of local government and the ABG. The CRCs are tasked by the Bougainville House of Representatives to conduct awareness and consultations about the referendum. Where possible, BRD facilitators can help with that. BRD facilitators also communicate with the Ward level chairpeople of the community government and assist with discussions and dialogue about the referendum. BRD has only a small activity budget for each constituency and is not allowed to directly fund ABG activities. However, BRD facilitators work together with other arms of government where possible. Participation in referendum dialogues is voluntary and BRD facilitators do not conduct dialogues where they are not needed or where they are not welcome.

BRD has the following project objectives:

1. Establishment of a working partnership between the ABG, the Bougainville Referendum Commission and local facilitator teams and NGOs with clear definitions of roles and responsibilities.
2. Local facilitator teams in North, Central and South Bougainville demonstrate that they are able to establish safe spaces for dialogue and deliver referendum dialogues in their local areas.
3. Local facilitator teams in North, Central and South Bougainville deliver 2 rounds of dialogue processes in each of the 33 Bougainvillean constituencies over a period of 2 years to inform village leaders, church leaders, women leaders, youth leaders and ex-combatant leaders so that approved and correct information of the referendum purpose, process and potential outcomes can be disseminated through Bougainvillean society. These dialogue processes are attended by a minimum of 100 people in each constituency per year.
4. Referendum dialogue participants have increased their knowledge about the referendum

purpose, process and potential outcomes and what this means for their participation and for the cohesion of their communities.

5. Information about the concerns, hopes, visions and questions of people in the villages about the referendum is reported back to the ABG and the Bougainville Referendum Commission from all 33 constituencies of Bougainville.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DIALOGUES CONDUCTED IN 2017

BRD activities started in March 2017 when more than 40 key facilitators met with the PaCSIA team and representatives of the DPAI at the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation in Chabai. Over 10 days we developed the program and work plan for the referendum dialogues and the facilitators shared ideas and strategies on how to present the program to the communities of Bougainville. PaCSIA acts as a coordination hub and facilitators send their constituency reports to PaCSIA to be shared and discussed with the DPAI. The DPAI has provided facilitators with a letter of endorsement to show that their work is part of the official ABG referendum preparations.

From Chabai the facilitators went back to their constituencies and started the work. BRD does not have large activity budgets - facilitators often walk between villages and rely on the hospitality of the people of Bougainville. Despite these limitations the facilitators have covered a lot of ground in 2017 and have provided referendum dialogues for people from 30 out of the 33 constituencies. The two outstanding constituencies are very remote and will be covered in 2018.

At the time of writing of this report we have received reports from 20 local facilitator teams. The information we have received shows the significant work that has been conducted.

Constituency	Number of dialogues	Male participants	Female participants	Total participants
Baubake	11	338	283	621
Bolave	10	198	172	370
Eivo-Torau	11	169	77	246
Haku	10	707	974	1621
Halia	10	312	275	587
Ioro	6	85	81	166
Kongara	14	213	261	474
Konnou	14	371	274	645
Kopii	10	124	128	252
Lule	12	216	273	489
Mahari	9	302	260	562
Makis	11	244	210	454

Motuna	10	154	139	293
Peit	2	54	48	102
Ramu	10	175	122	297
Rau	10	151	83	234
Suir	6	277	160	437
Taonita Teop	13	191	216	407
Terra	9	226	268	494
Tsitalato	10	488	448	936
Total	198	4995	4752	9687

FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN THE BRD

BRD facilitators record questions and feedback from the communities they visit and compile brief and anonymous reports with those questions for the ABG and the Bougainville Referendum Commission. This feedback assists the DPAI, for example, in their negotiations with the National Government of PNG and has shaped some of the negotiation positions of the ABG. In the following section we present a sample of the questions and feedback raised by participants in various communities in Bougainville:

Referendum questions on the ballot paper:

- Will the questions take into consideration different levels of education and literacy in rural areas?
- Have one simple question: independence, yes or no. Independence could be symbolised by the Bougainville flag and remaining autonomous in PNG could be symbolised by the PNG flag.

Eligibility to vote:

- Non-resident Bougainvilleans must come here to vote. Non-Bougainvilleans who came here for jobs should not be allowed to vote.
- General eligibility to vote in the referendum should be 15 years or higher.
- General eligibility to vote in the referendum should be 18 years or higher.

Referendum process:

- To what extent and how will PNG and the international community assess Bougainville's achievement of the 3 pillars of the Bougainville Peace Agreement?
- When is the referendum successful? What is the percentage needed for a conclusive answer?
- Can the referendum fail? What does that mean?
- Will there be postal voting for the referendum?
- Will the common roll be updated to ensure everyone can vote?
- A new common roll should be developed for the referendum starting with the Ward Assemblies.

Weapons disposal:

- Many participants were concerned about the disposal of weapons. What happens if not all weapons are disposed before the referendum?
- Weapons disposal is everyone's responsibility. Some ex-combatants and business men are still holding on to weapons.
- Weapons should be put into a museum or should be used to erect a memorial so that people are reminded about the suffering brought by the weapons.

- What will happen to people who do not give up their guns?
- What power will the police have during the referendum process?
- Why is it so important to get rid of the weapons when our problem is lack of development and not weapons?
- Weapons should be registered. The government could buy back guns.
- Are we going to be ok if the Meekamuis keep their weapons?
- Can the Meekamui Defence Force assist in collecting weapons?

Transition forward after referendum:

- What happens after referendum? Is there a transition period?
- What will happen if a majority votes “no” to independence?
- Will Bougainville end up a multi-party state after the referendum?
- After the referendum, if not independence, what will Bougainville’s status be?
- Will a special task force be appointed after the referendum to ensure a free, safe and corruption-free transition?
- How will the education system be affected after the referendum? Can Bougainvillean students continue to go to school and university in PNG?
- Will the ABG be able to improve and guarantee services before a full independence is reached?
- How many years do we have for the transition period? The government must build proper institutions if we want to be independent.
- The government must ensure that there is not going to be another war with PNG or a blockade of Bougainville.
- What if the vote is for independence but PNG does not recognise it? Will there be another crisis?
- Is it safe to become an independent state if there are a number of governments claiming that they speak for Bougainvilleans, including the ABG, the Kingdom of Papaala and the Meekamui Government of Unity?
- If Bougainville remains part of PNG, does that mean that the PNG Defence Force and Police will be deployed here?
- If Bougainville remains part of PNG, what will happen to the people who voted for independence? Will they be in danger?
- Will the amnesty granted in the BPA continue after the referendum outcome?
- Will Bougainville have its own currency?
- Is Bougainville ready for independence with regards to economic, military and foreign affairs capacity?
- Do we have the economic and human resources for independence?
- What will the government do if people do not pay tax?

- How long does it take to get independence after a “yes” vote?
- There should be at least five years of transition and the government should have a plan.
- The transition period should not be specific but rather as long as it needs. We should not be hurried.
- Outside companies should be invited for investment and land should be registered so that it can be leased.

Bougainville’s peaceful future:

- Reconciliations are still ongoing and need to continue. Reconciliation should be the first step before the referendum.
- There are many problems that need to be addressed, including home brew, domestic violence and drug issues.
- Can the government help with bone retrieval from Solomon Islands?
- Self-government needs to be supported by a mix of mining, fisheries, agricultural industry and road-building with a bottom-up village government.
- Bougainville needs a stronger police force.
- The presence of the ABG is not felt in the villages.
- When will the ABG settle the outstanding issues from the crisis including war widows and missing persons?
- Create more opportunities for youths.
- Families, clans, churches and wards should take ownership of minor crisis-related conflicts.

WORK PLAN FOR 2018 AND BEYOND

At the end of the first year of the BRD we are very satisfied with the progress of the project and the work of the local BRD teams. While communication has sometimes been difficult, this was made up through the dedicated work of the local facilitator teams and the feedback that they have gathered from the communities. The BRD is definitely working and is right on track to achieve all of its objectives.

Reflecting on the content of the BRD in 2017 we note that the first year of the BRD has focused on the process of preparing and conducting the upcoming referendum. Discussions were often about the referendum process (e.g. what the question on the ballot paper should be, the voting age or the ratification and transition period). Communities have also asked highly political questions about the future of Bougainville. The feedback from the communities is that the people who participated in the BRD seem to favour independence as an outcome of the referendum. The BRD has approached this potential outcome with an open mind and has not encouraged any particular thinking either way. We will continue to do so, but we also need to take into account that there is the potential for a significant vote for independence. It is time to focus our dialogue on such a potential future.

Inspired by many questions recorded by the BRD teams about the general political, economic and social future of Bougainville, we have formulated the goal of a broader discussion about such issues, hopes and visions for the second year of the BRD. There is much concern among communities about the capacity of the ABG to deliver an independent, peaceful and equitable Bougainville. We believe that it is very important for year two of the BRD to provide an even broader platform for discussion of such future scenarios for the people of Bougainville. Questions need to be raised about issues such as potential and dangers of a new Bougainvillean currency, or questions about potential changes to the political system. We believe that it would be useful, for example, to discuss some projections about potential revenue streams for Bougainville and also the problems that can arise from a lack of revenue. We are encouraged by the sophisticated thinking in the villages that people are ready to face such discussions so that they have a better idea about the consequences of their votes and face potential difficulties with greater resilience.

In 2018 we will also lodge an application to our funder for a continuation of the dialogues. As has been discussed extensively during the BRD, the referendum itself is only a stepping stone in the peace process, albeit a very important one. It is likely that the referendum results will usher in a period of transition and change and the feedback from the communities is that dialogue is the vehicle to provide them with a voice in this period of change. The BRD has established a very capable team of reliable and committed facilitators and they stand ready to continue their work for a peaceful future for Bougainville.



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