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he case of the 'Three R' policy strategy in the Bougainville conflict

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Abbreviations

NGO non-governmental organisation

PNG Papua New Guinea

Introduction

The Papua New Guinea government's policy response to the Bougainville conflict has been inconsistent since the conflict began in 1988. The policy has tended to change frequently from reliance on military force to negotiated approaches.

Following a number of failed military operations, there were significant changes to the strategy. Hence, when Sir Julius Chan came to power in 1995 he embarked on the 'Three R' policy strategy. This policy strategy was followed for almost three years, from 1995 until early 1997, when the external military engagement option, involving the Sandline Mercenaries, came about, resulting in what has become known as the Sandline Crisis.

This paper evaluates the 'Three R' policy strategy in respect of whether it achieved its objectives. It discusses what the 'Three R' policy strategy entailed, what its objectives were, how it came about, what happened, assessment and analysis, and the perceived outcomes of the policy.

The 'Three R' policy strategy and its objectives

The three R Policy strategy involved reconstruction, restoration and rehabilitation. Basically, its objective was to bring peace and economic development to the people of Bougainville and thus to Papua New Guinea as a whole. The 'Three R' policy was basically designed to achieve this simple objective. The first objective was aimed towards reconstruction through rebuilding infrastructure destroyed during the eight year conflict. This included rebuilding roads, buildings, and other properties of economic importance. Restoration was sought through the renewed provision of basic services like health, education, water supply, telephone and radio. The rehabilitation strategy, on the other hand, aimed at rehabilitating the people of Bougainville, especially women, children, and the elderly, who had suffered physical impairment or emotional distress as a result of the eight year conflict on the island.

How the 'Three R' policy came about

The previous governments of Papua New Guinea always recognised their political and moral obligation to address the Bougainville conflict. When Sir Julius Chan assumed power in 1995, he turned out to be a bit more serious than his predecessors and made the Bougainville conflict his priority commitment, above all his other political agendas. Incidentally, this issue also coincided with the national elections in 1997, and, like any leader seeking to be re-elected, Chan consequently saw all the more reason to pursue the issue with keen interest.

In 1995, however, the country was facing severe economic problems which had been inherited from the Winghti government and its poor management of the economy. This left Chan without the necessary funds to meet ongoing military operations on Bougainville. Funding institutions like the World Bank had refused to assist the government due to reports of human rights violations by the security forces on the island. Likewise, local NGOs such as the Melanesian Solidarity Union had continuously campaigned against donor agencies providing money to the government, because the government had a tendency to use this money to fund military operations which, in turn, resulted in human rights violations on the island. This placed Chan in an awkward situation. He needed the money to realise his commitments. Although this need had generated some sympathy from NGOs, such as the locally based community Christian groups, which had offered to assist the government, they too, like the World Bank and the other NGOs, were constrained by human rights issues arising from the activities of the security forces on Bougainville.

Capitalising on Chan's unfortunate predicament, the NGOs and the World Bank pressured him to make concessions in the government's policy, facilitating a non-military approach and allowing free flow of humanitarian aid to the people of Bougainville. With little choice, Chan had to succumb to the pressures of the NGOs and the World Bank in order to gain the financial support he needed to meet his commitment to address the conflict on Bougainville.

As a result, the government set up the Bougainville Restoration Committee which consisted of representatives from NGOs and the government. The NGOs were represented by the church and the International Red Cross Committee among others. The government was represented by the Prime Minister, who was also the chairman of the committee, the Minister for Provincial Affairs, the Regional Member for Bougainville, and the Minister for Home Affairs and the Youth Department. The Security Forces and the affected communities of Bougainville were not represented.

As the military approach to the Bougainville conflict had been rejected, representation for the Security Forces on the committee was ruled out. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army, and affected groups and communities of Bougainville were also unrepresented on the committee due to the ongoing tensions between the Bougainvilleans themselves.

The Bougainville Restoration Committee began with representatives going back to their respective organisations in order to gauge their views. They then reported back to the committee on a weekly basis and presented the views of their organisations. This process took two months before the 'Three R' policy strategy was finally agreed upon. The government subsequently approved the policy strategy and scheduled implementation over a period of three years (1995–1997). With this positive response, the government was provided K40 million by the various donor organisations, including the World Bank and the aid agencies.

Implementation of the policy was particularly directed at the government-controlled areas and the places where conflict was not occurring, and took place only upon request of the peoples or communities concerned. Both the government and the NGOs, especially relief agencies like the International Red Cross Committee, agreed to implement the policy jointly.

Implementation of the policy began with reconstruction, followed by restoration and rehabilitation. In practice, however, this order of implementation was not always followed due to differences in local circumstances. In some instances provision of basic services preceded reconstruction due to the urgent needs of particular communities. Likewise, when war casualties needed urgent attention, rehabilitation became the priority.

Reconstruction

The places identified for reconstruction included Buin, Arawa, Torokina, Loloho and Kieta. In Buin, roads were regraded and health centres and schools were similarly upgraded. Reconstruction was concentrated in Buin, because this area was the headquarters of the Bougainville Transitional Government, as well as being the operational base for Papua New Guinea Security Forces. In Arawa the former North Solomon Provincial Government headquarters were rebuilt and are being used as medical facility for all people of Bougainville affected by the conflict. Kieta wharf was also rebuilt to cater for deliveries of relief aid shipped from Papua New Guinea, and these aid materials were stored at Torokina shed. This served as distributing point for all affected people including those in the care centres.

For a while reconstruction appeared to have gone well. Following the killing of two rebels by the security forces in the Central Bougainville area, however, war was resumed. This led to the rebels destroying most of the infrastructure which the government had built under the reconstruction program, causing a major set back to the reconstruction process. Otherwise, Buin was the only government-controlled area in Bougainville showed any progress and success in its reconstruction program. In general, continuous rebel interference in the overall reconstruction program severely hindered the progress of implementation of this policy strategy.

Restoration

The restoration program was directed at areas where basic services like health, education, water, telephone and radio had been destroyed. The areas around Arawa, Buin, Torokina and Hutuzena in particular, had been very dependent on these services for a considerable period of time. These services were destroyed in the course of the war. This left the people in a very disadvantaged situation, especially the women and the children, who had great difficulty going out from their care centres for fear of being killed by either the Security Forces or the rebels.

In Buin, restoration of health, education, water and communication services was quite successful, whereas in areas like Arawa, Kieta, Loloho and Torokina it has been difficult to restore services. In these areas only water has been restored, but it has been restricted to care centres in government-controlled areas. Those people living in the forest have been catered for by the relief agencies. The relief agencies have played a major part in providing health services to victims and other afflicted people who have been able to reach the care centres.

The non-conflict areas, such as Rorovana and Hutazena, have had their aid posts restored and water supply installed. Medical supplies, however, have been difficult to afford and hard to maintain due to security reasons. The school has also remained closed for reasons of security. Sadly, in some places, such as Torokina and Kieta, some people suspected of supporting the Papua New Guinea Security Forces have had their services destroyed by the rebels. In fact, under the continual threat of war and violence it has been quite difficult to restore services for the people.

Rehabilitation

The rehabilitation program was directed particularly at women, children, and the elderly who had been physically impaired or distressed as a result of the war. These people needed special care and professional assistance and support. In order to provide the kind of care required by these people, special homes were needed, as were properly trained people. Unfortunately this was not possible due to the continuation of war, which endangered the lives of both aid workers and the victims themselves. Nevertheless, the relief workers did their utmost to provide the necessary services to these people. The conditions, however, in which these services have been provided has been unsatisfactory, lessening the quality of service these people have received.

Protection, moreover, was not guaranteed by both the groups participating in the war. Normally, those providing such relief services would be protected by a neutral party, but, in the case of Bougainville, there was no neutral party involved, making it very difficult to carry out relief work. Nevertheless, this service was provided in the care centres and, in some cases, in the non-conflict areas, but this was on a minimal scale for reasons stated above.

Assessment and analysis of implementation

As realised in the implementation of the policy, it was difficult to undertake reconstruction, restoration and rehabilitation work under conditions where war continued unabated and lives would be endangered. The situation was exacerbated by the destruction of property and, in some cases, the killing of people who were suspected of siding with the Security Forces. Those delivering relief aid did not receive protection from either of the groups involved in the war. Even if one of the warring parties had offered protection, there

would have been no guarantee that the other party would observe and respect that undertaking. Besides, there was no neutral body, such as a United Nations peace keeping force, to provide protection for relief workers and other such people or organisations providing humanitarian assistance. This made the rehabilitation aspect of the policy difficult to implement.

It was noticeable from the beginning of the policy formulation process that the representatives of three important groups—the Security Forces, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, and the community—had been ignored. Apparently, these groups were the active parties in the conflict on the island. If they had participated in the policy-making process, they would have recognised the importance and the benefits of this policy and what it meant to them. Their lack of involvement in the policy process has hampered implementation of the policy. This is reflected in the Security Forces killing two rebels in the midst of implementation of the policy, which resulted in retaliation by rebels, leading to destruction of property and further killings. This also aroused suspicion amongst the rebels of the would-be beneficiaries of the policy. These rebels had a tendency to sabotage any government-sponsored programs that promoted the Papua New Guinea government.

Apart from securing representation of the respective parties to the conflict, the most important task should have been to explore ways of achieving absolute peace on the island. This should have included wider consultation with the people and negotiations applying Christian and traditional ways of seeking peace.

Having achieved that, the next step would have been to organise reconciliation and peace initiatives, with exchanges of gifts, traditional totems, cash and kind as symbols of securing peace. This would have been backed up by a peace treaty signed by all parties concerned, spelling out clearly the respective commitments of the participating parties. A provision to respect the life and property, intended for the enhancement of the welfare and livelihood of the people, would also have been included in the treaty. In addition, a further provision would have provided for the protection of aid workers or those discharging humanitarian aid to the people. Having achieved that, and showing evidence of general observance of peace, the 'Three R' policy would then have been implemented accordingly. Peace should have been achieved before the processes of reconstruction, restoration and rehabilitation took place.

Has the 'Three R' policy objective been successful?

The 'Three R' policy strategy was based on rebuilding infrastructure, restoring basic services and rehabilitating physically impaired and distressed people from the effects of conflict on Bougainville. The idea behind this policy strategy was to bring about peace and thus pave the way for development on the island and amongst the people of Papua New Guinea as a whole. However, destruction of infrastructure and basic services and the continuous threat posed by the rebels hindered realisation this objective. Buin has been the only place where there has been any progress in the reconstruction and restoration

program. Apart from Buin, the other areas under government control lost most of their infrastructure and basic services as a result of constant attacks from the rebels. Even the Security Forces were involved in destroying property when they retreated from their previous positions.

Therefore, it is not possible to view the Chan government's 'Three R' Policy as successful. This is mainly because of the continued conflict on the island. If this policy has been successful in any way, it has been in Buin where some degree of reconstruction, restoration and rehabilitation has been maintained. The majority of the population in Buin has resumed their normal day to day activities without interference by the rebels or the security. The children have gone back to school, and commerce and trade also have resumed to a degree almost reminiscent of the days prior to the conflict.

On the whole, however, Chan's ultimate objectives of achieving peace and opening up Bougainville Copper and other development activities on the island had not been realised. On the basis of these unfulfilled objectives the 'Three R' policy cannot be considered successful. This conflict has shown that the 'Three R' policy strategy cannot be used to bring about peace. Instead, achieving peace must be the precursor to reconstruction, restoration and rehabilitation.