

Since the late 1980s, a succession of Australian-funded programs has sought to strengthen the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC). Australia is now on its ninth discrete police development program in the past 25 years. The latest program — known as the Papua New Guinea – Australia Policing Partnership Phase IV — sees 50 Australian Federal Police deployed to Port Moresby and Lae, providing advisory support to the RPNGC. The initiative forms part of the deal on asylum seeker processing concluded by the prime ministers of Australia and Papua New Guinea, Kevin Rudd and Peter O’Neill, on the eve of the 2013 Australian election.

Time will tell whether this intervention — currently being reviewed by the PNG Government — will generate any more substantive results than the programs before it. Certainly, the results of previous efforts have, to say the least, been extremely modest in terms of improved police performance or security outcomes for citizens (Dinnen, McLeod and Peake 2008). Indeed, it is striking that the language used to diagnose the RPNGC’s frailties in recent years is practically identical to that used at the beginning of the first program.

With such underwhelming results, the effectiveness, value for money and impact of all these efforts is very much an open question, but so also is the underlying approach, which is focussed primarily on institutional capacity-building. In the past 25 years, proffered solutions have remained focussed squarely on working with taken-for-granted institutional forms, and echo the same types of efforts tried time and again. Few of these solutions — often predicated on the assumption that what ‘works’ in Australia and other metropolitan contexts can be transplanted directly to PNG — have flourished. This indicates a fundamental issue around the appropriateness of the policing model itself — one that cannot be simply overcome with technical or administrative solutions.

The problems within the RPNGC may well be more existential and fundamental than can be solved through the deployment of even double, treble or

quadruple the amount of expatriate advisers, no matter how credentialled these individuals may be. This is because the model of policing embodied in the RPNGC may simply not be relevant or applicable for much of PNG. Uniformed state police constitute only one of multiple sources of regulatory or dispute-resolving power in a country renowned for its normative and regulatory pluralism. Moreover, their reach is extremely limited, with a focus primarily on metropolitan areas, even though most citizens live in rural localities, geographically and socially removed from the police. In these places (as well as in urban centres) the majority of disputes are still addressed through a range of informal, community-based mechanisms that owe more to restorative justice than investigation, prosecution and incarceration. While these locally specific approaches have broken down in some places and are under considerable stress in many others, state policing only amounts to a small part of the larger regulatory picture. A significant and under-researched component of this larger complex is the rapidly growing and largely unregulated private security industry, ranging from transnational providers offering a variety of services to small operators providing static security at commercial premises.

Over the years, there have been a number of voices noting the salience of these other forms of regulation and order-maintenance. However, that message has not translated consistently into donor programming approaches. Despite the calls for innovation and initiatives with catalytic potential, examples of attempts to engage ‘beneath’ or ‘above’ the state, or experiment beyond the conventional policing frame are few and far between. Police reform seems much less of a testing ground for innovative approaches than in other parts of the law and justice sector. A small exception is Bougainville, which is engaging with hybrid local justice and security practices in the island’s still-fragile post-conflict context, and would appear to be generating some positive outcomes (Peake and Dinnen 2013).

Beyond bilateral donor programming, there are examples of diverse and often quite creative local responses in some areas that draw on a mix

of state and other resources with an emphasis on prevention and reduction. For instance, a UN Safer Cities Project in Port Moresby is working with the RPNGC and a wide variety of government and non-government stakeholders in the city's markets. In Eastern Highlands Province, District Peace Management Teams comprising provincial and district officials, police, village court officers and community and church leaders also play an important role in order-maintenance. Trained in non-violent conflict resolution, they mediate between conflicting parties, broker ceasefires and help negotiate the terms of written peace agreements and resolve the underlying causes of local conflicts (Allen and Monson 2014).

Another possible example revolves around security innovations on the part of some in the extractive industries. While more commonly associated with the generation of conflict, it is clear that there is learning going on among certain operators. In the remote areas where they typically work, the presence of government is either weak or absent altogether. The potential for misunderstandings and disputes with local actors in the vicinity of a large extractive project, comprising multiple groups, and including both people from the area and migrants from elsewhere, is considerable. Transnational companies develop their own security capabilities, often co-operating closely with state security and justice actors, as well as with a range of non-state security actors at community levels. Although there has been some research done on innovations undertaken by corporate security in Indonesian Papua (MacKenna 2012), the topic remains underexplored on the eastern side of the island. Further research would help identify if there are measures, initiatives and approaches that could be adopted in terms of better policing and, equally, if the resource companies are able to compel improved practice and accountability on the part of the RPNGC.

The diversity and localised character of such initiatives, as well as their general lack of visibility, makes it difficult to generalise a pattern. However, as well as generally being community-driven and owned, many of these initiatives entail some configuration of horizontal and vertical linkages between

different actors and levels of government. Likewise, most have a distinctly hybrid character, drawing simultaneously upon different sources of authority and legitimacy (e.g. 'traditional', church and state).

A clear message emerging from the literature on policing in PNG is that the more things change, the more they stay the same. On a more hopeful note, preliminary analysis of the dispersed and programmatically unconnected policing initiatives ongoing in various parts of PNG suggests that going beyond the conventional inward focus on institutional capacity-building appears to deliver some promising results. Approaches that are innovative, and grounded in local realities, as in the case of Bougainville's Community Auxiliary Police, would appear much more likely to accrue measureable outcomes in terms of improved safety, security and access to justice for citizens. Institution-focussed capacity development without such alignment offers a low chance of success. At the very least, there would appear to be a strong case for donors investing in police development to look in more detail at such cases of innovation rather than simply repeating what has gone before.

Notes on Authors

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