

Mutual capacity building: Mt Hagen local government and Orange City

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1. Context

Orange City Council and Mount Hagen Urban Local Level Government (MHULLG) in the Papua New Guinea Highlands have had a strong history of working in partnership to build capacity. This is based on a Sister City relationship extending to 30 years founded on the acceptance that to build better communities more than just physical infrastructure is needed. The Australian Government AusAID organisation funded the capacity building program, supported by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum who provide back-end administration and acts as a broker in drawing together a number of partnership agreements and AusAID funding applications in addition to information exchange. Council's work has been recognised and supported nationally in PNG and by AusAID, and there has been a tight focus on assisting the 60,000 people that live in and around the township of Mt Hagen. So far, Council has worked on numerous issues including waste management, sanitation, traffic and pedestrian plans and governance.

Orange is a regional city in Central NSW. It has a population of 38,000 people and with its surrounding towns and villages, supports a population of 100,000 through industrial, commercial and service resources. The city has grown from its rich mining past - Orange was the home to Australia's first payable gold discovery at Ophir in 1851. The Orange Local Government Area is 290km².

Mount Hagen is third largest city in Papua New Guinea. It is the capital of the Western Highlands Province and is located in the large fertile Wahgi Valley in central mainland Papua New Guinea, at an elevation of 1,677 m (5,502 ft). The Highlands Highway is the main arterial route to connect Mount Hagen with the coastal cities of Lae and Madang. The city is named after the old eroded volcano Mount Hagen, located about 24 kilometres to the northwest.

2. Recent initiatives and outcomes

There has been a recent, renewed focus on capacity building opportunities for both the Mt Hagen local government and community, and skills of Orange City staff. In 2009 an Orange City Council delegation of senior staff and a councillor travelled to Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea (PNG) to re-scope the existing Sister Cities program and AusAID capacity building program. The following outlines the outcomes achieved during the trip and the future steps required to continue the capacity building of the Mt Hagen local government and community, and skills of the Orange City staff.

Urban planning project

Orange City Council has been working collaboratively with the Mt Hagen Urban Local Level Government (MHULLG) and community for the past five years to develop an Urban Plan for Mt Hagen city. This new plan has been approved by the PNG National Physical Planning Board and provides a framework for the development of control plans and civic and civil infrastructure planning and development. Planning for the redevelopment of Mount Hagen Airport to facilitate international flights, an associated business park, redevelopment of the City's bus bay, a major civic square with an arts centre, civic facility and housing are also complete. As part of this plan, \$3mil Australian dollars was gained for a new market in the city, and building a pedestrian safety garden project that has reduced pedestrian fatalities and injuries.



Figure 1. Mount Hagen



Figure 2. (l-r) Mount Hagen Lord Mayor, Titus Doa with Mount Hagen ULLG, General Manager Victor Megauo.

Key elements of the Plan which Council will continue to focus on in conjunction with Mt Hagen City Council include:

- Urban development planning;
- Waste management;
- Water and sewerage supply;
- Transport facilities, particularly relating to public transport;
- City beautification;
- Sporting and recreational facilities; and
- Capacity building for women's groups.

This Plan is the first of its type in PNG and sets the strategic direction for the city of 60,000 residents - the third largest in PNG - and opens up significant opportunities to attract international aid funding and commercial investment. This will address many infrastructure and service issues in the Mt Hagen region. This Plan was launched and placed on public exhibition during the delegation's visit to PNG and the Mt Hagen community now has the opportunity to comment on the plan prior to it being adopted by the PNG Planning Department.

Impact of the plan today

Local Mount Hagen Council employee Wak Kewa has had a significant role in the development of the plan. He is well qualified to understand the development and plan delivery process in PNG today and his skills in ensuring the plan's base work was completed and then getting the plan approved have been recognised. The City Plan was launched by the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Sir Michael Somare in Hagen,

October 2010. The launch also identified a number of activities set out in the plan and the national government has allocated over K125 mil (AUD \$50 mil) over 5 years which may be augmented by AusAID, European Union and World Bank funding, with K20 mil allocated by the PNG national Government (AUD 8 mil) in the first year. The primary targets for action are now about delivery of infrastructure through the partnership between the local, provincial and national governments. Council's role will now focus facilitating specific community projects to do with a range of administrative and governance capacity building.

Sydney based firm Crone Partners (headed by Greg Crone) has been working closely in a partnership with the Governor of the Highlands Tom Olga, MHULLG, Mayor Doa, his Assistant General Manager Wak Kewa, and Orange City Council to construct a business model that ensures effective project delivery. Orange City will participate in the probity and governance role in the business model.

Future program organisational issues

A review of Orange Councils' staff involvement is mooted as the work with Mt Hagen is now moving from a planning to an operational phase. The plan is to now focus the majority of the work on the delivery of specific projects, particularly those relating to the delivery of infrastructure projects and ongoing capacity building projects involving women's groups in Mt Hagen. The overall co-ordination of the delivery of these projects and liaison with the CLGF will be undertaken by Council's Directors supported by other staff at Orange City Council. Specific project delivery will be undertaken by community volunteers with identifiable skills who will be available to travel to PNG on a more regular basis to deliver these projects. There is continued opportunity for individual staff members (and possibly strategic involvement by staff from local business) to travel to PNG to provide assistance relevant to their roles at Council. This also allows staff to gain valuable experience in different and challenging work environments that can broaden overall skills and provide a different perspective for their local government careers.

This current project administration organisational structure will enable the existing relationships (which have developed between Mt Hagen and Orange over a 20 year period) to continue whilst also ensuring key projects identified in the Mt Hagen City Plan are effectively delivered. To support Orange Councils advocacy work, the project uses video as a means of recording the events and communicating to all stakeholders. It has

been found that this is an effective process when language issues arise, particularly when relaying matters of a technical nature.

Sister city discussions

Orange City Council has had a Sister City Relationship with Mount Hagen in Papua New Guinea for some 15 years. The relationship is founded on an intrinsic acceptance that in building better communities we need to do more than provide physical infrastructure. As the divide between rich and poor in world regions and within developed countries widens, the need to build skills grows. Without capacity building Mount Hagen might be tempted to look to use non-renewable resources instead of sustainable economic futures to survive in a difficult world economy. Such skills range from building inclusive planning processes to creating environments for learning and problem solving that are self-sustaining and lead to empowerment.

During a recent visit Orange Councillor Chris Gryllis held discussions with a number of groups to further the ongoing Sister City relationship between Orange and Mt Hagen. A possible key point of focus is the Mt Hagen Cultural Show, a bi-annual celebration of traditional dance, music and culture from the central highlands region of PNG.

Women's capacity building project

The Human Services Administration Assistant coordinated the women's capacity building program. This is an on-going program designed to provide new skills to women of Mt Hagen so they can gain greater independence. The Human Services Administration Assistant facilitated the group, advising on a simple, workable and achievable structure which would not only empower women but also facilitate the transfer of their skills to other women in their particular clan, school, church or ward group. Each of the women in the initial group has made an undertaking to transfer her skills to a further ten women and so on to exponentially increase the knowledge transfer of these skills to the women of Mt Hagen. .

A practical session involving food hygiene, preparation and costing of jams and preserves was undertaken over two days. In these sessions, women learned how to identify and source the best fresh produce, prepare various fruits for conserve making and to take part in the physical preparation and bottling. This project will continue with Council representatives mentoring and advising. Positive results have already been

achieved and it is hoped that the skills and earning capacity gained by the women will assist them greatly in generating income to support their families, in particular their children's education. A considerable achievement has been women from diverse social backgrounds working as a cohesive group.

3. Future working prospects and lessons

Papua New Guinea and the highlands are experiencing significant resource activity with gold, minerals and natural gas discovery. With a strong focus on mining, civil infrastructure and civil works too, Orange has a number of companies that can advise on infrastructure within the Western Highlands as its resource work unfolds. To capture these mutual opportunities, an Economic Development Agreement between Orange Council and the Western Highlands Provincial Government was signed in August 2010 to facilitate future business opportunities. This includes proposals to:

- support the development of partnerships with businesses in Orange with a special focus on the mining industry, environmental protection and governance support industries
- facilitate business networks with private sector providers in WHP and Orange area business in the provision of infrastructure planning, governance and development
- facilitate business introduction in Mount Hagen, Port Moresby and across PNG when appropriate
- for Orange to conduct business forums to inform appropriate business of opportunities and processes for engagement
- facilitate contact of Orange region business' with the key stakeholders in the WHP
- encourage local farmers to access itinerant workers from the WHP in consultation with the WHP Governors Office

The existing relationship of Orange City Council in the region can provide a springboard for local Orange companies to expand into international business. Similarly, opportunities to engage seasonal workers from the Highlands region can also be explored under current international agreements between Australia and Papua New Guinea.



(L-R) Orange Mayor, Cr John Davis, Stephen Sykes, Western Highlands Province Governor Tom Olga, Mt Hagen Lord Mayor Titus Doa

Lessons and approach

The Mt Hagen work demonstrates a drift from north/south capacity building (from developed to undeveloped countries), to a more regionally focused approach that stresses networking *between* neighbours with similar challenges. Such relationships can generate benefits *beyond* capacity with important cross-cultural, ‘social capital’ oriented lessons to be gained, in addition to and extensive inter-organisational learning. In the case of the Mt Hagen-Orange partnership, an open exchange has been pivotal to its success and continuing relationship. This approach has so far engendered mutual commitment and goodwill, and ‘power’ has been exercised with a view to harnessing mutually benefits for all stakeholders.

One of the important lessons in such cross-council working is the value of collaboration, and that key collaborative elements have structures that are flexible, responsive and open. These must be developed from a voluntary basis and should remain ‘organic’, ie, the collaborative structures need to grow to meet the needs of the stakeholders. Imposed structures, either from government or statute, will not engender true ownership and will fail unless stakeholders embrace facilitation, emissary or almost diplomatic values in managing outcomes.

Options for meeting community need that facilitate empowerment, ownership trust, goodwill and commitment is in the hands of communities since it is not government that empowers people: people empower each other. The Mt Hagen Urban Local Level

Government is very positive about the future of their city and can see the significant opportunities for improving the quality of services for the residents of the city and the central highlands region of PNG.

Further reading about Mt Hagen-Orange

- Building capacity for sustainable resource management through Sister City arrangements: <www.regional.org.au/au/soc/2002/3/sykes.htm>.
- Action plan to improve Western Highlands Province:
<www.renewsw.com.au/PDFs/Action%20plan%20to%20improve%20WHP,%20PNG%20oct.pdf>.