

EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY OFFICER PROJECT IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

SINCLAIR DINNEN AND NICOLE HALEY



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Acronyms

AC	Area Constable
BPS	Bougainville Police Service
CAP	Community Auxiliary Police
CO	Community Officer
JDL	Justice Delivered Locally
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OBM	Outboard Motor (Boat)
OIC	Officer in Charge
PGSP	Provincial Governance Strengthening Program
PPC	Provincial Police Commander
PPF	Participating Police Force
PS	Provincial Secretary
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RCDF	Rural Constituency Development Funds
RDP	Rural Development Program
RSIPF	Royal Solomon Islands Police Force
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist (Church)
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SSEC	South Seas Evangelical Church
ToR	Terms of Reference
VO	Village Organizer

Notes about the Authors

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Questions and comments are welcome and should be addressed to Daniel Evans at devans3@worldbank.org.

Glossary

Kastom/kastom systems: *kastom* (Solomon Islands pijin) is used here to refer to systems of authority and regulation whose legitimacy lies in appeals to custom or tradition rather than, say, state law. *Kastom* systems are the assemblages of mechanisms, actors, and processes involved in administering local forms of dispute management.

O2: popular term in Solomon Islands used to refer to a partner in an extra-marital relationship. Female relationships in a male's life are colloquially referred to as "01" (wife or first partner), "02," "03," etc., in accordance with the order in which the relationships began.

Special Constables: Special Constables are appointed by the RSIPF as sworn officers to undertake policing duties for specific periods of time. They have traditionally been used to supplement police numbers for particular events such as the conduct of national operations. During the "tension" (see below), former militants were appointed as Special Constables as part of the strategy to demobilize members of the main militant groups. There were widespread allegations of human rights abuses and other abuses of power directed at Special Constables appointed during this period, which has contributed to negative views of Special Constables in some communities and areas.

The "tension" or ethnic tension: local term used to refer to the period of civil conflict and disorder that befell Solomon Islands from 1998 to 2003.

Village Organizer (VO): a colonial office retained in Western province, Solomon Islands. The role of village organizer includes acting as a liaison between communities and the provincial government. VOs work closely with chiefs and are said to perform a community policing type role. Today there are around 40 VOs on the Western province payroll.

Wantok/Wantokism: the term *wantok* (Solomon Islands pijin) means literally "one who speaks the same language" ("one talk"). *Wantokism* is used to describe the relationships of mutual obligation and support between near and distant kin, and those sharing other kinds of social and geographical associations (e.g., from the same village, area, or province).

Executive Summary

Introduction and Methodology

This evaluation assesses the performance of the Community Officer (CO) project, a trial community policing mechanism initiated by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) in late 2009, with assistance from the Participating Police Force (PPF) of the Regional Assistance to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Current interest in community policing in Solomon Islands is occurring in the larger context of the rebuilding and reform of the RSIPF that has been taking place with the assistance of RAMSI. The Solomon Islands Government (SIG) and RSIPF are committed to introducing a viable form of community policing across the country.

Fieldwork for this evaluation was conducted from August 8–26, 2011. Consultations were held with a range of government, donor, civil society, and community stakeholders at the national, provincial, and village levels. Four provinces were visited: Guadalcanal, Isabel, Malaita, and Western provinces. A key feature of the fieldwork was capturing the views of communities where COs are located. Community consultations occurred in selected villages in each province, and where possible, separate meetings were held with men, women, and youth, respectively. Discussions covered a range of issues, including: the selection and establishment of COs; local understandings of the role of the CO; what the CO actually does; how the CO interacts with different groups; interactions with the RSIPF; strengths and weaknesses with current arrangements; and community views on the future of the scheme.

Reform Context and Operational Environment

Among the contextual factors relevant to considerations of how best to meet Solomon Islands' policing needs are: the country's archipelagic geography and associated challenges of transport and communications; the rural location of the bulk of the population and its widely dispersed character; high population growth rates; processes of urbanization; the prevalence of relatively autonomous local (nonstate) systems of conflict management and social regulation throughout the country; specific legacies from the "tension" (see glossary) period in some areas; future economic prospects; the likely character and distribution of conflict stresses; and the limited capabilities and reach of the RSIPF and modest levels of financial and administrative support that can be realistically expected from the SIG in the years ahead.

A substantial gap exists between the aspiration for an accessible and efficient nationwide policing system and the actual capacity of the RSIPF to provide this, given its circumscribed condition and existing levels of government support. RAMSI currently provides approximately two-thirds of the costs of policing in Solomon Islands. Policing resources are overwhelmingly concentrated in Honiara and other urban centers, leaving the rural population with limited or no ready access to the RSIPF. Even where access is available, there is still reluctance on the part of many groups to engage with the police. Lack of public confidence in the RSIPF is, in part, a legacy of the role played by elements of the police during the "tension," and also reflects dissatisfaction with the police's lack of responsiveness to reported crimes and requests for assistance. In fairness to the RSIPF, however, the inadequacy of police responses is often related to resource and other constraints, including problems with the wider justice system, such as the absence or irregularity of court sittings.

For most citizens, the first resort in the case of disputes are local “*kastom* systems.” These vary significantly between different areas but are typically equated with the exercise of some form of “customary” or “traditional” authority by local leaders or “chiefs.” They remain the preferred option for dealing with most local disputes. While resilience is a notable quality of local systems, there is evidence of their growing fragility in many areas, reflecting the corrosive effects on social cohesion of the broader processes of socioeconomic change associated with globalization. It is also clear that local systems cannot cope effectively with new forms of antisocial behavior and contestation, most obviously those linked to substance abuse and commercial resource extraction projects. Despite this, local communities continue to desire to “take control” of their own problems and actively participate in their amelioration. External assistance is sought to help manage problems that these local systems cannot or should not (under state law) deal with, such as substance abuse and serious crimes.

Local observers often talk about a progressive “withdrawal of state” from rural areas that has taken place in the post-independence period (1978 onwards) and contrast this with what is still viewed by many as the more effective delivery of policing and justice services under the colonial administration. These services were part of a system of indirect rule administered by the British but continued in adapted form in some later initiatives, such as the Area Council system, that embedded policing and justice in broader local governance systems. Aspects of these older systems, including the office of Area Constable (AC), are evoked regularly in contemporary discussions about community policing in Solomon Islands and were often raised during the fieldwork.

The Community Officer Pilot

The CO project was initiated on a pilot basis in selected parts of Solomon Islands in late 2009. It sought to establish a link between the RSIPF and existing local leadership structures, and serve as a mechanism for addressing law and order issues that currently are not reported or investigated.

The CO is loosely based on the existing Community Auxiliary Policing (CAP) model from neighboring Bougainville and the colonial period AC model (retained in Renbel province). A three-month trial was undertaken from December 1, 2009, initially in four locations. COs were selected after consultations between the RSIPF and community leaders. They were issued with special uniforms and instructed to work with local chiefs to resolve minor disputes and to report serious offenses to the RSIPF. All of the initial recruits were men and worked on a voluntary basis, without the provision of any special legal powers.

At the conclusion of the trial, communities were generally supportive and the project was rolled out to an additional 23 communities covering all nine provinces of Solomon Islands. In September–October 2010, a four-week training course was held for COs in Honiara, at the end of which they graduated in a ceremony attended by the Commissioner of Police. While most COs continue to perform their duties, the status of the project has remained uncertain since the trial ended.

Key Findings

- Members of communities hosting COs envisage two broad dimensions to the role. One involves working closely with local leaders and chiefs in helping to resolve minor disputes and settle *kastom* matters, and the second is acting as a liaison with the RSIPF.
- Local expectations about improved police responsiveness and the forging of close working relationships between the COs and the RSIPF have been disappointed. This is largely because the RSIPF has so far been incapable of providing adequate levels of support.
- Although it is difficult to establish categorically whether or not COs are contributing to improved security in the communities in which they operate, there is nevertheless evidence of community perceptions of improved safety that are linked to the presence of the CO. This relates to the deterrent effect provided by COs and, more broadly, the “shadow of law” that they represent.
- The CO scheme holds considerable potential for improving access to justice in rural communities. However, realizing this potential is dependent on a further devolution of government justice services.
- COs have generally worked well with existing community structures, such as chiefs and community leaders. Good working relationships have also been forged with local churches and, in some cases, this has strengthened their role in helping to manage community problems. Relationships with other locally based government organizations, such as schools and health clinics, can provide an important source of practical assistance to COs.
- Almost without exception, the RSIPF we consulted in the provinces spoke highly of the work of individual COs. RSIPF officers who interact directly with COs appear to enthusiastically support and endorse the scheme and wish to see it rolled out further. However, each of the COs encountered wanted a much closer working relationship with the RSIPF, as COs have received little supervision and many have little or no ongoing engagement with it.
- Several communities were highly critical of the initial CO appointment process, though not of the individual COs themselves.
- There is broad-based community support for the appointment of female COs.
- Apart from strong community support and the enthusiasm of individual officers, COs have very limited resources. There is strong community sentiment that COs should receive some kind of allowance.
- To be sustainable the CO scheme needs to be embedded within SIG systems (national and/or provincial).

- The CO scheme is not an alternative to an effective and professional police force. In its current form, it has done little to restore confidence in the RSIPF, and it should not be seen as a retirement plan for ex-police officers.

Recommendations

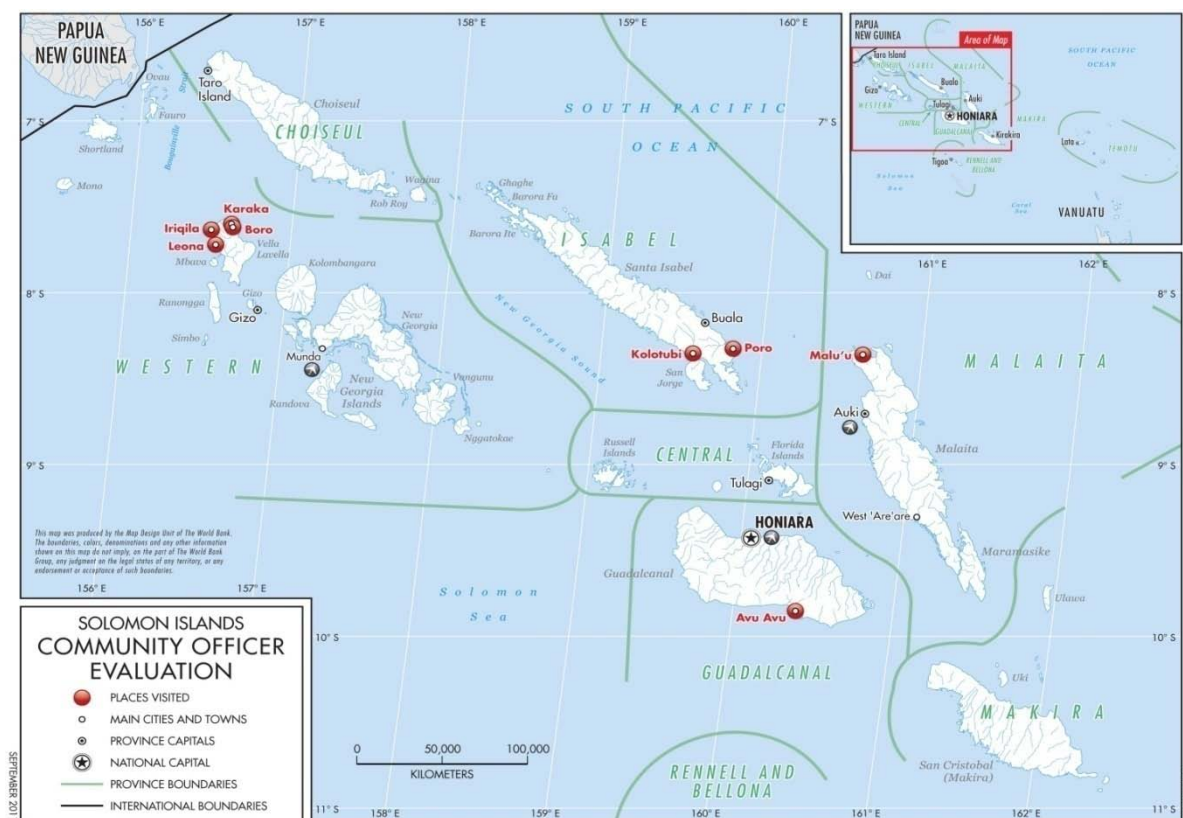
A full outline of recommendations appears in section 5 of this evaluation.

- 1. The CO scheme should be continued, but its further development should occur incrementally on a province-by-province basis.*
- 2. COs should receive a modest monthly allowance to be determined in accordance with relevant provincial government pay scales.*
- 3. The CO scheme should be embedded in SIG systems. Specifically, it should be funded and administered through provincial government systems, while supervision should be provided through the province-based RSIPF.*
- 4. Training of COs should also occur in the provinces as determined by provincial authorities and the RSIPF.*
- 5. The initial appointment of COs should be preceded by adequate consultations in the communities concerned.*
- 6. Every effort should be made to ensure that more female COs are appointed.*
- 7. The RSIPF in the provinces should be encouraged to prioritize regular visits to COs as part of its routine patrolling schedule.*
- 8. Wherever possible, COs should not be deployed beyond their allocated working zones, the areas and communities that they know best and in which they are best known*
- 9. There appears to be no immediate need for new legislation or legislative amendments.*
- 10. Further analytical study of the work of the female COs in West Kwaio, Malaita, be undertaken. Their success, particularly in the area of gender and youth outcomes, is an important story and the sophisticated manner in which they are operating merits further investigation.*

1. Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken from August 8 to August 26, 2011 by a team consisting of Dr. Sinclair Dinnen (Team Leader, the Australian National University), Dr. Nicole Haley (the Australian National University), Mr. Robert Piringisau (formerly RSIPF), Ms. Carol Pitisopa (Justice Delivered Locally Project), and Mr. Ali Tuhanuku (Justice Delivered Locally Project). Mr. Tobias Haque (World Bank) was with the team during the Honiara meetings and has prepared an economic and financial analysis of the Community Officer (CO) project. Consultations were held with a range of government, donor, civil society, and community stakeholders at the national, provincial, and village levels. Beyond the national capital, the team visited the following places:

Location of Field Visits



- Avu Avu, Weather Coast, Guadalcanal (August 11–12)
- Malu'u, north Malaita (August 13–15)
- Manakwai village, Malaita (August 14)
- Auki, Malaita (August 15–17)

- Buala, Isabel (August 19–20)
- Poro village, Isabel (August 20)
- Kolotubi village, Isabel (August 21)
- Leona and Irigila villages, Vella Lavella, Western province (August 23)
- Boro and Karaka villages, Vella Lavella, Western province (August 24)
- Gizo, Western province (August 22 and 25)

In Honiara, the team had discussions with senior officials from the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), the Participating Police Force (PPF), the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the World Bank, the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services, the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, and the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening. Individual meetings were held with the RSIPF Deputy Commissioner (Administration and Support), the Chief Justice, the Deputy Chief Magistrate, the Catholic Archbishop of Honiara, and the President of the National Council of Women. We also consulted with advisers from the Provincial Governance Strengthening Program (PGSP), the Rural Development Program (RDP), and representatives from Save the Children.

In the course of our provincial visits, we had discussions with RSIPF officers located in Avu Avu, Malu'u, Auki, Buala, and Gizo, including with the provincial police commanders (PPCs) for Malaita, Isabel, and Western provinces. The premiers of Malaita and Western provinces met with the team, as did the provincial secretary of Isabel. In Auki, we also met with the Director of Provincial Medical Services in order to gain an understanding of the structure and logistics of devolved health service delivery in Malaita province.

The conduct of our community consultations was informed by the *Field Guide for Community Research & Consultations* prepared by the “Justice Delivered Locally” (JDL) project of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, with the support of the World Bank.¹

During the fieldwork, separate interviews were held with COs, who were specifically requested not to be present during our discussions with community members in order to allow a free exchange of views. Our usual community consultation format was for the research team leader to introduce the team and the purpose of the evaluation in an open meeting. After responding to questions, we divided into smaller groups and held separate meetings with men, women, and young people. Our female team members facilitated discussions with women and female youth, while our male members did the same with men and male youth. The separation of these categories was often less strict in practice, with men and women sometimes choosing to attend meetings of the opposite sex. Individual interviews were conducted with those who expressed a

¹ “Field Guide for Community Research & Consultations 2010–2011,” Justice Delivered Locally (Honiara, Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2011).

preference for this approach or with those whom the team considered worth interviewing separately.

Discussions covered a range of issues relating to community organization, well-being, and safety, but they were deliberately facilitated to elicit views about the CO project relevant to the terms of reference (see Annex). In particular, we discussed the selection and establishment of the CO in the community in question; community understandings of the CO's role; what the CO did in practice; how the CO interacted with different groups and with the RSIPF; the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements; and community views on the future of the scheme. The fieldwork narratives in section 3 (below) were compiled from the field notes prepared by each member of the evaluation team. We have attempted to retain the diversity of the views and opinions expressed during the consultations.

The evaluation team was also given access to various documents that touched, directly or indirectly, on the origins, establishment, operations, and projected future of the CO project. These included documentation from the RSIPF and the PPF, as well as from relevant government ministries and other stakeholders consulted. In addition, the team was able to view some of the preliminary research reports of the JDL project, which is engaged in documenting local dispute-management systems in different parts of Solomon Islands, relations between nonstate and government justice systems, and the ways Solomon Islanders exercise their justice choices. We found this research particularly helpful given the purpose of the evaluation, and the fact that the JDL research had already been undertaken in three of the provinces that we visited. Synergies with the JDL research were further reinforced by the close involvement of two of our evaluation team members in that work.

The terms of reference for the evaluation, which were drafted in collaboration with the World Bank and representatives of the RAMSI, PPF, and RSIPF, are contained in the Annex to this document.

2. Background to the Community Officer Project

2.1 The Reform Context and Operational Environment

The RSIPF has made clear its commitment to introduce a viable community policing model across Solomon Islands. Key policy settings, including the Solomon Islands Government (SIG)-RAMSI *Partnership Framework 2009*² and the RSIPF's *Strategic Directions Plan 2010–2013*,³ envisage a growing police/community engagement with a view to extending police coverage, rebuilding community confidence in the RSIPF, and strengthening the preventive and problem-solving capabilities of local communities.

Recent discussions and initiatives around community policing in Solomon Islands have been occurring in the larger context of the rebuilding and reform of the RSIPF that has been taking

² *Partnership Framework Between Solomon Islands Government and Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands*, April 2009.

³ "Strategic Directions Plan 2010–2013" (Honiara: Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, 2009).

place since 2005,⁴ with the assistance of RAMSI. While the main focus of this assistance has been on restoring the core organizational, infrastructural, and human resource capabilities of the RSIPF following its earlier collapse during the “tension,” preparing the RSIPF to undertake its mandated role will require much greater clarity about the kind of policing model best suited to Solomon Islands’ present and future circumstances. As pointed out in a recent review of the PPF, the lack of a clear policing model for Solomon Islands is a “major impediment” for both the RSIPF and PPF: “Without a clear sense of the policing model, it is very difficult for PPF and RSIPF to be sure that effort and resources are being directed in the right place.”⁵

Such a model would need to be tailored to the specific challenges posed by Solomon Islands’ distinctive operating environment, including the existence of significant constraints on the fiscal and administrative capacity of government to support the RSIPF. The need for a coherent vision for the future of policing is made all the more pressing against the backdrop of RAMSI’s ongoing transition and the graduated drawdown of the PPF from provincial outposts.⁶ Solomon Islanders are understandably apprehensive about the prospects for policing and security in a post-RAMSI scenario. A commitment by the SIG in October 2010 to undertake a comprehensive review of the RSIPF appeared to be an opportunity to formulate strategic options for a forward-looking policing policy. However, our understanding is that this review has not gone ahead, which has hampered our evaluation of the CO project, insofar as there is no strategic roadmap to guide the development of the project within a broader policy on policing in Solomon Islands. During the course of our evaluation, we also became aware of the existence of other community policing initiatives, particularly in urban contexts, which are quite distinct from the CO system. These include neighborhood watch schemes in parts of Honiara,⁷ and crime prevention schemes involving collaboration between the RSIPF, Save the Children, and community leaders in Gizo.⁸

Meeting policing needs

There are many factors to be taken into account in considering how best to meet Solomon Islands’ future policing needs. These include the country’s archipelagic geography and associated challenges of transport and communications; the rural location of the bulk of the population (approximately 83 percent) and its widely dispersed character;⁹ high population

⁴ While the mission was first deployed in July 2003, RAMSI’s capacity development with the RSIPF only really commenced in January 2005. See “Independent Review of the RAMSI Participating Police Force’s (PPF) Capacity Development of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF),” Final Report (2009), 11.

⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶ The current timeframe for the PPF’s transitional planning is 2011–2013. It is understood that the number of PPF members will drop to under 150 by June 2013 (from a figure of approximately 250 as of February 2012). Since August 2011, the PPF have been progressively withdrawing from provincial locations. Throughout 2012, they will withdraw from all but four places across Solomon Islands: Honiara, Auki, Gizo, and Lofung (the border of Papua New Guinea).

⁷ Interview with President of the National Council of Women, Ms. Jenny Tuhaika, in Honiara, August 18, 2011.

⁸ Discussion with Sergeant Andy Fomani, RSIPF, Provincial Police Headquarters, Gizo, August 22, 2011.

⁹ The population of Solomon Islands is very scattered compared to most small states and average density is extremely low. Only 18 people live on each square kilometer on average, compared to more than 200 on average in other small countries, or more than 70 for the median small country. See World Bank, “Solomon Islands Growth Prospects: Background Materials and Analysis” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010), 20–21.

growth rates (reported to be about 4.2 percent per annum);¹⁰ processes of urbanization (estimates ranging from 2.8 to 6 percent per annum for Honiara);¹¹ the prevalence of relatively autonomous local (nonstate) systems of conflict management and social regulation throughout the country; specific legacies from the “tension” in some areas; future economic prospects; the likely character and distribution of conflict stresses; and the limited capabilities and reach of the RSIPF and modest levels of financial and administrative support that can be realistically expected from the SIG in the years ahead.

Research undertaken on behalf of the RSIPF into the “true cost of policing”¹² and a recent strategic assessment of the capabilities of the force known as the “*Mekim Senis*” report¹³ reveal a massive gap between the aspirations for an accessible and efficient policing system providing nationwide coverage and the actual capacity of the RSIPF, given its circumscribed condition and existing levels of government support. RAMSI currently provides approximately two-thirds of the costs of policing in Solomon Islands, roughly double the amount of support provided by the SIG. The single largest item of expenditure is transportation, specifically, aviation and maritime support, amounting to nearly half of all police and security resources spent. The SIG allocations to the police and justice sectors have, in fact, been flat or declining in real terms in recent years, although the most recent SIG recurrent budget (2012) has seen an increase in police spending.¹⁴

While the current police to population figure for the RSIPF is consistent with other Pacific police forces, significant inequities exist in the distribution of police personnel and other assets in different parts of the country. For example, only 7.5 percent of RSIPF resources are allocated to Malaita, even though it is home to 30.3 percent of the national population. Regarding transport assets available to the RSIPF, the capability assessment found that around 38 percent of all RSIPF vehicles are unserviceable and 75 percent of boats are out of service,¹⁵ effectively leaving patrolling by foot as the only means of mobility in 15 out of a total of 22 police locations.

There are other factors beyond the control of the RSIPF that have implications for the kinds of challenges they are likely to face in the years ahead. Many of the underlying factors that contributed to the “tension” remain unaddressed and, as data from the RAMSI-commissioned *People’s Surveys* indicate, Solomon Islanders remain concerned about a recurrence of conflict

¹⁰ Although reliable data has to await the finalization of the 2009 census, this rate of growth would confirm that Solomon Islands has one of the fastest growing populations in the world. See World Bank, “Solomon Islands Growth Prospects,” 32.

¹¹ The National Statistics Office estimates the population of Honiara to be 63,311, based on pro-rata population growth of 2.8 percent since the 1999 census. The last Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2005/06) estimated the Honiara population to be 69,189 in 2005/06, suggesting a growth rate of 5.7 percent per annum between 1999 and 2006. This estimate loosely reconciles with the Honiara City Council’s 2000 population growth estimate of 6 percent per annum.

¹² Jonathan Gouy and Matthew Harding “‘True Cost’ of Policing in the Solomon Islands. Identifying Policing and Security Expenditures and Costs Borne by External Agencies,” Final Report (2011), unpublished.

¹³ “*Mekim Senis: Resourcing Change 2010-2013*” (Honiara: Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, 2010).

¹⁴ See the separate Economic and Financial Analysis of the CO Scheme prepared as part of this evaluation: Tobias Haque, “Evaluation of Community Officers Program – Economic and Financial Analysis” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), available upon request. Also, Solomon Islands Government, “Solomon Islands Budget 2012, Budget Strategy and Outlook,” Budget Paper, vol.1 (Honiara: Ministry of Finance, 2012), 38.

¹⁵ “*Mekim Senis*,” 9.

should RAMSI depart in the near future.¹⁶ Recent analysis by the World Bank confirms these findings.¹⁷ Economic growth in Solomon Islands since 2003 has been largely driven by the influx of international assistance and a boom in the export-led logging industry. The global financial crisis has since reduced growth rates, and RAMSI's drawdown is likely to be accompanied by reductions in the aid flows associated with the intervention. In addition, Solomon Islands' commercial logging stocks are, by some accounts, expected to be exhausted by 2015. As a result, significant dependency on international development assistance is expected to continue in the short to medium term. Future commercial activities are likely to have a distinctly localized or enclave character, including mining and other forms of resource extraction, while Honiara is set for continuing growth, as migrants leave rural areas in search of economic opportunities and access to services. This pattern of uneven development is likely to generate local stresses and divisions between and within different groups and regions, similar, in many respects, to those underlying the rebellion in rural Guadalcanal that marked the beginning of the "tension."

External support, which has been essential in sustaining local policing services since 2003, will clearly be needed for many years to come. The vast majority of the rural population still does not have ready access to the RSIPF, and this situation is unlikely to change anytime soon. Even where access is available, many groups remain reluctant to engage with the police. While there are recent signs of improvement,¹⁸ lack of public confidence in the RSIPF is, in part, a legacy of the partisan role played by elements of the police during the "tension." It also relates, in many cases, to perceptions of nepotism (or *wantokism*, see glossary) on the part of officers, as well as dissatisfaction over the lack of police responsiveness to reported crimes and requests for assistance. In fairness to the RSIPF, it is also widely acknowledged that the inadequate police response is often related to resource and other constraints, including problems with the wider justice system, such as the absence or irregularity of court sittings.¹⁹

Public confidence in the RSIPF has also been inadvertently affected by RAMSI's dual policing model. The existence of parallel systems of administration inevitably gives rise to moral hazards, including the risk of undermining confidence in local institutions.²⁰ While the perception and reality of two separate police forces (the PPF and the RSIPF) were necessary in the initial phase of the mission to restore basic security and clean up the RSIPF, the separation became increasingly counterproductive as the focus of policing assistance switched to building self-

¹⁶ While the figure appears to be declining over time, 50 percent of respondents expressed this opinion in 2010. See "People's Survey 2010" (Canberra: ANU Enterprises, 2010).

¹⁷ World Bank, "Solomon Islands Sources of Growth: Summary of Findings" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010). See also: M. Allen, "Long-Term Engagement: the Future of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands," *Strategic Insights* 51 (Barton, ACT: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2011).

¹⁸ The dramatic rise in "satisfaction with RSIPF" responses between 2008 and the following two years appears to be directly contradicted by focus group discussions for the 2010 survey that found that "[m]ost groups reported no improvement in local police services to communities in recent years" ("People's Survey 2010," 13). Moreover, the 2011 Survey (p. 86) records a drop in the satisfaction rates from those who received help from the RSIPF to 44 percent (down from 55 percent in 2010).

¹⁹ For example, Deputy Chief Magistrate Emma Garo stated that there was currently only one resident magistrate for the whole of Malaita (Interview, Honiara, August 9, 2011). At the time of writing, this magistrate has been withdrawn, meaning there are no permanent resident magistrates posted in the province.

²⁰ S. Dinnen, D. Porter, and C. Sage, "Conflict in Melanesia: Themes and Lessons," Background Paper for *World Development Report 2011* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010), 20–21.

reliance in the local force. Persistent local perceptions of a strong PPF have served to reinforce negative assessments of the RSIPF as a less efficient, competent, and trustworthy force. With the RSIPF and the PPF still largely evaluated in relation to each other, the RSIPF invariably fares worse when compared to the well-resourced and professionally managed PPF. RAMSI's policing presence has not only created high levels of dependency within the RSIPF and those parts of the SIG responsible for supporting and providing it policy leadership, it has also contributed to unrealistic expectations on the part of many ordinary Solomon Islanders.

Local systems

For most citizens, the first choice in the case of disputes and infractions are the local *kastom* systems (see glossary) that are found in communities throughout Solomon Islands. These vary enormously between different areas and groups. Contrary to their depiction as rigid and unchanging, *kastom* systems are fluid and dynamic and continuously adapting to new circumstances and processes of change. These qualities have been illustrated over the years, including, for example, in their creative adaptation to introduced Christianity.²¹ In practice, they are typically equated with the exercise of some form of customary or “traditional” authority by local leaders or chiefs. Particularly in the case of socially embedded and contextual disputes, these systems remain the strongly preferred option and are seen as offering a better prospect of resolution than the state legal processes, even where the latter are accessible. This is especially so in matters relating to *kastom*, including issues over land.

While the resilience of local problem-solving capabilities remains a major strength of community-based structures in Solomon Islands as elsewhere in Melanesia,²² findings from the JDL work, as well as fieldwork for this evaluation, indicate the growing fragility of these systems in many areas. Although this may be a legacy of the “tension” in some places, it more generally reflects the corrosive effects on local systems of the broader processes of socioeconomic transformation associated with globalization. The same forces have also contributed to new forms of infractions and disputes in many rural communities that are not easily resolved through existing local systems. This is borne out in evidence from successive *People's Surveys* that indicate a progressive worsening in community perceptions of safety in recent years,²³ a finding that is also confirmed by JDL research and this evaluation.

While “traditional” justice is often talked about as a discrete phenomenon, local justice practices have always been embedded in the larger social systems used to govern all aspects of social relations in traditional Melanesian societies. For example, in addition to managing conflict, these systems regulated gender relations and provided the socialization processes that guided the passage of young people into adulthood. The erosion of critical aspects of these encompassing systems has also weakened local regulatory practices, including the capacity to effectively

²¹ D. McDougall and J. Kere, “Christianity, Custom, and Law: Conflict and Peacemaking in the Postconflict Solomon Islands,” in *Mediating Across Difference: Oceanic and Asian Approaches to Conflict Resolution*, ed. M. Brigg and R. Bleiker (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

²² M. Anne Brown, ed., *Security and Development in the Pacific Islands – Social Resilience in Emerging States*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).

²³ The percentage of respondents describing their community as “safe and peaceful” declined markedly from 2007 to 2010: 46 percent (2007); 37 percent (2008); 30 percent (2009); 31 percent (2010 and 2011). See “People's Surveys” (Canberra: ANU Enterprises, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011).

manage local disputes. Contemporary discourse about individual rights and citizen entitlements has also encouraged resistance to older forms of authority, particularly among those who might feel disadvantaged or marginalized by aspects of their practice, including many women and youth. The bad behavior of some chiefs and their recurrent entanglement in parochial and self-interested local power struggles have given rise to further disenchantment. In addition, most local systems are by themselves simply inadequate in the face of challenges presented by the new forms of antisocial behavior and disputation that are seriously eroding social cohesion and harmony in many communities. These include behavior associated with endemic substance abuse and the growing levels of contestation around resource development projects. Solomon Islands' recent history is a dramatic reminder of the potential for escalation when stresses and divisions in rural communities are allowed to fester due to the combined weaknesses of the local and state justice systems.²⁴

It would be a mistake to underestimate the significance of these local *kastom* systems and their contribution—actual and potential—to the maintenance of order across Solomon Islands. Even when they are not working well, local critics are generally calling for them to work better, rather than rejecting them outright. For example, it is often proposed that chiefs undergo awareness and other forms of training, and that appropriate accountability mechanisms be devised to prevent abuses of chiefly power. A recurrent refrain in consultations during this evaluation, as well as in the JDL research, is the communities' strong desire to “take control” of their own problems and actively participate in their amelioration. The elaboration of informal community laws and bylaws aimed at enhancing local governance and safety is one manifestation of this aspiration, as is the proliferation of local committees in many places. At the same time, communities are calling for external assistance with problems that these local systems cannot or should not (under state law) deal with, including, for example, the social problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse and serious crimes. Beneath the ambivalence often expressed towards the RSIPF is a wish for the force's greater responsiveness to forms of insecurity directly affecting these communities that are self-evidently not amenable to local resolution alone.

Colonial “hybrid” systems

There is a long history of community policing in Solomon Islands that has, at various times and in different ways, sought to address similar issues. Memories of colonial policing practices, including schemes carried over into the post-independence period but later abandoned, are evoked regularly in current discussions.²⁵ These older colonial approaches were part of a system of indirect rule devised by the British to administer colonized populations at minimal cost to the imperial state and using a limited number of personnel. Contemporary nostalgia for these past approaches in Solomon Islands²⁶ does not reflect a yearning for a return to colonial subjugation but instead draws attention to how those systems, including their policing dimension, were capable of projecting their administrative power throughout most of the country, in a way that the postcolonial state has singularly failed to do. As such, these older systems are seen as a

²⁴ Dinnen, Porter, and Sage, “Conflict in Melanesia,” 20–21.

²⁵ See, for example, the Government of Solomon Islands, Foreign Relations Committee, “Inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice 2003 and RAMSI Intervention” (Honiara: National Parliament of Solomon Islands, 2009), 174–76.

²⁶ See, for example, Sir Peter Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is – Autobiography of Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Kenilorea, KBE, PC, Solomon Islands' First Prime Minister* (Taipei: Centre for Asia-Pacific Area Studies, 2008).

potential source of insight into how devolved administration, including policing, might be achieved in contemporary times.²⁷

Moreover, insofar as the earlier policing models appeared to work reasonably well in terms of community engagement, this is often attributed to their intentional hybridity in bringing together both state and local (nonstate) actors, and different sources of authority, in pursuit of the maintenance of order at the community level. In many rural areas, local officials, such as district headmen, assistant district headmen, and village constables or *ples men*,²⁸ served as critical linkages and intermediaries between the authority of the colonial state and local *kastom* systems. A more recent example, and one that was mentioned approvingly throughout our consultations, was the position of Area Constable (AC), which linked with the local area council system that operated until 1998.²⁹ Associated with these councils were local courts that dealt with a variety of disputes (including land disputes) if customary settlement failed, as well as the administration of council bylaws.³⁰ The AC assisted in the enforcement of bylaws and local court decisions, and could call upon police intervention for more serious matters.

In the view of some observers, the demise of these intermediary mechanisms between local and state policing and justice systems is an important contributing factor to the unrestrained growth of antisocial behavior and instability in rural communities.³¹ It should be noted, however, that none of these mechanisms were stand-alone community policing initiatives. Just as customary conflict-resolution practices were integral parts of more encompassing social systems, these intermediary mechanisms were also embedded in larger systems of district or local administration that sought to coordinate a range of agency and service delivery functions. Their relative success was not simply due to their ability to link local and state policing, important as that was, but also derived from their linkages to local courts and other government services operating in rural locations. The same is true for Bougainville's community policing model (see below), which has been influential in shaping the initial CO trial in Solomon Islands. Bougainville's Community Auxiliary Police operate in a context where other justice services, including village courts and community-based corrections, are being gradually rolled out as part of wider efforts to devolve service delivery and strengthen local-level governance. The presence or absence of related services will impact significantly on the shape, effectiveness, and sustainability of community policing in rural areas.

2.2 The Community Officer Pilot

The CO project was initiated on a pilot basis in selected parts of Solomon Islands in late 2009. It appears to have come about largely at the initiative of a small group of PPF advisers, working

²⁷ J. Braithwaite and others, *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 66–68; Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is*, 153–77.

²⁸ See Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, “Westminster Meets Solomons in the Honiara Riots,” in *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*, ed. Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), 98.

²⁹ Renbel is the only province to have retained Area Constables.

³⁰ D. Evans, M. Goddard, and D. Paterson, “The Hybrid Courts of Melanesia: a Comparative Analysis of Village Courts of Papua New Guinea, Island Courts of Vanuatu and Local Courts of Solomon Islands,” Justice & Development Working Paper Series 13/2011 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010).

³¹ I. Scales, “The Flourishing of Local Level Governance after the Coup in Solomon Islands: Lessons for Reform of the State” (workshop paper, Development Research Symposium, Australian National University, Canberra, September 30–October 2, 2003).

with the approval of the RSIPF commissioner, who wished to explore ways of improving linkages between the RSIPF and local communities and ideally, developing a mechanism that could help address law and order issues that otherwise went unreported or unaddressed. Specific considerations informing the project included concern about the limited police presence in rural areas, the need to improve community confidence in the RSIPF, and the prospective drawdown of PPF personnel from selected rural outposts. Preliminary discussions, as revealed in PPF/RSIPF documentation, had identified the lack of connection between the RSIPF and local communities as a major deficiency in the existing policing structure. The problem of the “missing link” was seen as requiring the establishment of a locally based mechanism that could connect the RSIPF and community leadership structures, such as that provided in earlier times by the headman or village constable during the colonial era, or by ACs more recently.³²

Neighboring Bougainville, with a broadly comparable sociocultural landscape and also emerging from serious internal conflict, had established its own community policy model, with assistance from New Zealand.³³ From its beginnings in 1999, the scheme had been gradually extended across Bougainville’s three regions and expanded to its current approved ceiling of 350 Community Auxiliary Police (CAP) officers. CAP officers, working closely with local chiefs, perform a critical liaison role between the Bougainville Police Service (BPS) and local *kastom* systems. Candidates for this position are nominated by village chiefs; their nomination must be endorsed by the council of elders for the area, and is then forwarded to the BPS, which makes the final decision on appointment.³⁴ These officers, comprising mainly men but also some women,³⁵ receive a modest monthly allowance provided through the BPS finance system. The CAP officers do not have special police powers but can use a citizen’s power of arrest. Supervision and other support, including on-the-job training, is provided by the BPS. A Bougainvillean police officer with direct experience of the CAP scheme was recruited as a PPF adviser to help establish the CO project in Solomon Islands. With the exception of the allowance payment, the CO project is closely modeled on the Bougainville scheme.³⁶

PPF and RSIPF officials discussed the proposed CO scheme with a small subsection of community leaders in selected areas. On the basis of feedback received during these consultations, a three-month CO trial was undertaken from December 1, 2009 to March 1, 2010 to test the viability of the model, initially in four locations across Solomon Islands: Avu Avu in Guadalcanal, Malu’u in Malaita, Sandfly Island in Central province, and Vella Lavella in Western province.³⁷ The project was managed centrally and coordinated by a CO coordinator based at the RSIPF headquarters in Honiara, with the Bougainvillean PPF adviser playing a

³² *Community Policing Trial – Community Policing Trial in Avu Avu and Malu’u*, RSIPF/RAMSI, 2009.

³³ Emmart Tsimes “Bougainville Community Policing Model Paper” (2010), unpublished.

³⁴ This is primarily about the suitability of the individual nominated, ensuring that s/he does not have a criminal past.

³⁵ According to a background paper by Emmart Tsimes, the BPS is seeking to achieve a target of 25 percent women CAP officers. In late 2009, reportedly there were some 57 female CAPs. See New Zealand Agency for International Development, “Review of the Bougainville Community Police Project (Phase 4)” (Auckland: New Zealand Agency for International Development, 2009), 48.

³⁶ This influence is also evident in forms and guidelines issued to COs, which are written in the language of Papua New Guinea, *Tok Pisin*, rather than Solomon Islands Pijin.

³⁷ Emmart Tsimes, “RSIPF Community Officer Project Initial Report-2010” (Honiara: RAMSI/PPF Community Relations, 2010), 1–12, unpublished; and “Community Officer Project Handover Brief-2011” (Honiara: PPF/RSIPF, n.d.), 1–13, unpublished.

leading role. Funding was provided from existing RAMSI/PPF-administered budgets rather than SIG sources. COs selected for the pilot were issued with special uniforms and some basic equipment, and instructed to work with local chiefs in resolving disputes and to report serious offenses to the RSIPF. All of the initial recruits were men. COs were to work on a voluntary basis, unlike CAP officers in Bougainville, and without the provision of any special legal powers.

Reviews of the trial

RSIPF/PPF assessments of the trial were generally positive. COs were expected to operate at ward level in their respective provinces. Communities where COs had been appointed were supportive, viewing the initiative as a link to the police and a way of building their own capacities to manage disputes and minor infractions; they also felt that the COs should be paid. The trial scheme did not result in any significant increase in the number of serious crimes reported to the RSIPF. On the basis of these early results, and maintaining the same form, the project was rolled out to an additional 19 communities covering all nine provinces. According to RSIPF documents, the RSIPF is committed to extending the scheme to most of Solomon Islands' 186 wards by 2013.

COs were brought to Honiara from September 20 to October 8, 2010 to undergo training, as well as participate in a two-day conference to review the experience of the scheme to date and its future development.³⁸ Training was provided by the RSIPF and focused on basic policing knowledge and other skills deemed relevant to CO duties. Topics included first aid, crime scene attendance, dealing with victims and offenders, statement taking, criminal offenses, human rights, substance abuse, crime prevention and restorative justice, child rights, sexual offenses, gender-based violence, information gathering, discipline, and powers of arrest.

Discussions with the officers after the training revealed a number of common issues.³⁹ These included the need for greater clarification of the CO's role, an almost unanimous view among COs that they should receive payment, the need for logistical and other forms of support, consideration of accountability mechanisms, the question of whether COs should be recognized legally and vested with policing powers, the need for awareness building with other stakeholders (such as communities, provincial authorities, and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]), the provision of regular skill and training updates, and the possibility of recruiting women COs. Discussions also covered the kind of threats to local cohesion and safety experienced in their communities, including offenses and disputes associated with substance abuse; conflict around logging, mining, and fishing projects; disputes arising from marriages between parties from different cultural groups; incest; land disputes; and tensions between different church groups. While common challenges were identified, it was also clear that circumstances varied considerably between—and sometimes within—provinces, with respect to both the kinds of local problems experienced, as well as the availability, configuration, and capabilities of local and government resources to manage such problems. This served, in turn, to indicate that a “one size fits all” approach was unlikely to work.

³⁸ The team leader of the present evaluation attended this conference and participated in discussions with the community officers.

³⁹ T. Krone, “Results of Community Officer Discussions Following Training in Honiara Sept-Oct 2010: Challenges and Possible Solutions” (2010), unpublished.

Selection and duties

The initial selection of COs did not follow a set pattern but like the practice in Bougainville, was usually initiated through some form of preliminary consultation between the RSIPF and community leaders. In Malu'u, communities put forward eight names for two CO positions, and a subsequent meeting of chiefs at the Malu'u Police Station finalized the appointments. In Vella Lavella, the local member of parliament (MP) was keen to see COs appointed in wards in his constituency and appears to have played a role in the selection process. In some cases, the police expressed a preference for the selection of former police officers to the CO position. Selection criteria specified in RSIPF/PPF documentation, again following Bougainville practice, emphasized personal attributes, including good character, leadership, maturity, high standing in the community, fitness, discipline, and ability to do hard work, as well as education and literacy and the absence of a criminal record. The current batch of COs come from a variety of backgrounds, including former police officers, chiefs, church leaders, and former youth leaders, with some combining a number of these. Following their selection, COs received a letter of appointment signed by either the RSIPF Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner, and a document outlining their role and duties.

Duties are described as follows:

- To attend all community meetings
- To assist and be involved in community-organized activities
- To inform RSIPF of major activities in the community, such as church festival days, games, and so forth
- To attend and record all complaints reported to him/her by the community
- To refer all major crimes reported by the community to the RSIPF, including murder, rape, robbery, incest, domestic violence, and serious assaults
- To refer minor crimes to the village chief to resolve, including minor assaults, nonviolent domestic disputes, and land disputes
- To report all incidents and offenses to the RSIPF
- To support and assist the work of the village chiefs
- To collect all information relating to criminals and criminal activities in the community and provide such information to the RSIPF
- To wear the RSIPF CO garment as appropriate for identification purposes

In addition, once up-skilled through training and briefings, it is expected that COs will be in a position to assist the RSIPF “first responders” to any crime by:

- Preserving crime scenes
- Locating and identifying witnesses
- Identifying and pointing out suspects
- Assisting the attending RSIPF investigators

COs are also expected to prepare monthly performance reports that follow a standard template and list details of local events, such as reconciliations, awareness programs, meetings, local court duties, and school visits, as well as incidents attended. These reports are submitted to the community policing coordinators at provincial police headquarters and, from there, are supposed to go to the director of community policing at the national headquarters in Honiara.

It is now over two years since the original CO pilot was launched. Since it officially ended in March 2010, the status of the scheme and its future have remained uncertain. A number of the key PPF personnel associated with its establishment, including the Bougainvillean adviser, have completed their rotations with RAMSI and returned to their home countries. Nevertheless, the PPF officers currently responsible for the scheme remain strongly committed to seeing the pilot succeed. While most of the COs visited during the course of this evaluation continue to attend to their duties, there has been a noticeable drop-off in energy levels from their high starting point. This may be, in part, a consequence of the continuing uncertainty over the future of the scheme, but it also reflects growing frustrations among most COs that they are not compensated for their services. Although payment was never offered or promised, COs, and many in their communities, contend that some form of remuneration is both justified and necessary. While communities have been supportive, their capacity to provide material support is severely circumscribed in most cases, making it unreasonable to expect them to provide more support than they currently are. Another significant factor for diminishing work rates has been the lack of regular contact between the RSIPF and COs in some areas, and the limited support that the RSIPF has been able to provide even in those places where there are no major logistical or transport issues to be overcome.

3. Fieldwork Narratives

The following narratives from our provincial fieldwork are reproduced in detail in order to document the diversity of views, experiences, and local circumstances in different parts of Solomon Islands that have a bearing on consideration of the future of the CO project. They also contain voices that appear rarely in policy discussions, whether with regard to policing, justice, or indeed, most other areas of service delivery.

3.1 Guadalcanal Province

Avu Avu

Community meeting

A community meeting at Avu Avu on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal on September 11, 2011 was attended by approximately 14 people, including two young girls. Most of the other attendees

were chiefs. They reported that there were still unresolved tension-related problems in the area, that there had been a significant period of unrest before the arrival of RAMSI, and that relations with the police were—and in many respects remained—poor. Police were viewed as remote, ineffectual, and irregular visitors to local communities. In Avu Avu it is the chiefs and leaders who bear responsibility for resolving problems, and they do so with reference to *kastom*.

As in other areas, there was some confusion about the role of the CO and how it relates to other roles, particularly those of the chiefs and the RSIPF. Evidently there had been no awareness or community consultation prior to the initial appointment of the CO, and little since. That said, participants reported that the CO has been helping the chiefs deal with family problems, as well as educating people about law and order, spiritual matters, and *kastom*. The CO had, they said, put considerable effort into working with both the youth and leaders, which was seen as positive. Despite uncertainty about the CO's role, there appeared to be general consensus about the sorts of problems that should be dealt with by the police (serious crime) and those that were better dealt with locally (minor disputes and *kastom* matters).⁴⁰

Comparison was made between the CO and the old AC model, although it was noted that the AC had a broader mandate (including, for example, health promotion) and also had powers of arrest. Attendees believed that the ACs worked well and welcomed a similar role for COs. They also felt that the CO could support the chiefs and other local leaders, who have detailed knowledge about culture and *kastom* but considerably less knowledge about state law. An effective CO might assist chiefs in being more decisive, they suggested, as well as help to enforce their decisions.

Speakers considered one CO insufficient to cover wards on the Weather Coast, given their remoteness, inaccessibility, and size.⁴¹ It was also noted that COs are likely to be most effective in communities with which they have close ties and thus not necessarily all communities in a large ward. People wanted to be involved in the selection process should further COs be appointed. Individuals appointed should be of good character, be well-respected, have some education and, not least, have the support of local chiefs and leaders. When asked whether women might perform the CO role, the group (dominated by older men) agreed that they could nominate a woman if they were told to, but that in their view, it was really men's work.

In terms of further improvements, the people at Avu Avu were strongly of the view that COs should be remunerated, given that this work takes time and there are real costs involved, not to mention the loss of other income-generating opportunities. They also felt that if the CO were to receive payment, s/he would be viewed differently and would have a stronger mandate. Conversely, they felt that if the role remained a voluntary one, the CO would be reluctant to operate outside of his or her own community. The group also felt that chiefs should be rewarded

⁴⁰ This statement appears to be at odds with earlier research undertaken by a team from the University of Queensland that noted that people in Avu Avu are “struggling with the relationship between *kastom* and introduced law in their communities.” See Morgan Brigg and Anouk Ride, “Avu Avu Field Research Report” (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2010), unpublished. This might be related to the fact that the opinions expressed during this meeting were coming primarily from local chiefs with whom the CO (also a chief) was working closely.

⁴¹ The service area of the police post at Avu Avu includes the wards of Vatukulau, Talise, and Avu Avu, with an estimated combined population of 7,627. See “*Mekim Senis*,” 69.

with a small allowance in recognition of the important role they play and the support they have given the CO over the past two years.

Women's perspective

Separate consultations with women shed further light on the sorts of problems encountered in the community. Alcohol (including *kwaso*, a homemade distilled liquor) and marijuana headed the list. Concern was also expressed about adolescent relationships, premarital sex, and teenage pregnancy. These issues were also voiced by health workers at the local health clinic, who raised the additional but related problem of unwed mothers. Such matters seemed to be a source of considerable intergenerational tension within families, occasionally resulting in adolescent suicide attempts. There was a general denial of domestic violence or intimate partner violence, but the discussion about adolescent relationships revealed that children's behavior is closely monitored and policed—sometimes violently—and that adultery, which is held to be on the rise, precipitates domestic and family violence, as well as violence between wives and “O2s” (see glossary).

Avu Avu Health Clinic

Interviews with government health staff at the Avu Avu Health Clinic revealed the existence of a close working relationship between the CO and clinic staff. This is an example of how the scheme can develop productive linkages with other (government and nongovernment) organizations operating in rural areas. The Health Clinic, which is both rural and remote, is a two-hour walk from the Avu Avu Police Post and is staffed by four health workers: two nurses and two nurse aides. Clinic workers reported that the key health issues they deal with regularly include pneumonia, malaria, and diarrheal diseases. They also mentioned instances of drug overdoses by battered women and young girls.

The presence of the CO means that there is now an avenue for reporting cases of abuse/domestic violence that result in suicide attempts or attendance at the clinic. Several examples were provided. One included the case of a pregnant woman who was beaten and kicked by her husband and brought to the clinic for treatment; the matter was then referred to the CO, who subsequently reported it to the police at Avu Avu. Other matters referred to the CO over the past 12 months included rape cases, violent assaults, and knife fights. One particular knife fight referred from the center to the CO involved two brothers. On the evening of the fight, the CO, health workers, and chiefs separated the parties and attended to their injuries. The following day, the CO reported the matter to the police post at Avu Avu. He was told to go back and bring the chiefs and those involved in the fight. He did this, at which point they were all told to take the matter back to the village and resolve it there.

Community Officer Francis Henry

Francis Henry was variously described as a *kastom* chief, respected local elder, and church leader. His appointment as CO was recommended by the Avu Avu House of Chiefs, and came into effect in October 2009.⁴² Francis reported that he received no training for the first 12 months, but that he subsequently attended the course in Honiara in September 2010, at which time he received his uniform and letter of appointment. Francis is generally regarded as doing a good job and we were told that he reports to and meets with the police at Avu Avu on a weekly

⁴² The CO schemes in Avu Avu and Malu'u (north Malaita) appear to have been initiated prior to the commencement of the official pilot in December 2009.

basis. This involves a three-hour walk in each direction from his village. He also conducts regular community-awareness meetings on Thursday, and attends Friday meetings at which chiefs deal with disputes. Francis estimated that he was currently spending an average of two days per week on his CO duties. He indicated that these activities are focused in his own local area and not the ward as a whole. After his training, Francis had expected to work more closely with the RSIPF, but this has not eventuated.

RSIPF perspective: Avu Avu Police Post⁴³

The two RSIPF officers stationed at Avu Avu described the CO as hardworking and spoke enthusiastically about his work. They feel the CO's role is important, and see it primarily as a liaison or bridging role, someone who extends his or her limited presence while also actively contributing to the resolution of small problems in the community. They reported feeling "lucky" that the CO is willing to walk three hours to bring in his reports, but went on to explain that there is still a backlog of unresolved cases, some dating back to the "tension," and that the state justice system does not reach the people. Specifically, they noted the lack of magistrate's court circuits, which has led to community dissatisfaction, mainly directed at the police. Most of the problems encountered by the police are alcohol related, including drunk and disorderly behavior, stealing, and domestic violence. The police were generally in favor of female COs, though noting that women often find it difficult to talk to men. They were also in favor of an expanded CO scheme, but suggested that it would work better if it sat alongside functioning local courts.

3.2. Malaita Province

Malu'u

Community meeting, Manakwai village

A community meeting was convened at Manakwai village, Malu'u, north Malaita, on September 14, 2011. It was not particularly well attended, due to the lack of advance notice. Around 16 people (seven women, nine men) were present. Before the meeting, the team had the opportunity to interview the CO for Ward 8, Mike Maekali. The other CO, Willie Eliata, was away on church business and unaware of our visit.

Prior to the "tension," Malu'u was a productive agricultural area. Services are now significantly degraded, as reflected in the disrepair of the road between Auki and Malu'u. The general feeling is one of marginalization and disconnect from the larger Solomon Islands. The RSIPF are not trusted and are seen as slack and directionless, while local *kastom* systems are frequently weak or broken. Disputes within the community (swearing, fighting, and *kwaso*-related incidents) are not being dealt with and are festering, with the potential for future escalation.

Two COs service Ward 8, which is a large ward, extending from Bitu'ama in the west to Mathaua in the north and containing more than 30 communities, with a total population of

⁴³ The "*Mekim Senis*" report noted that there was only one RSIPF officer at Avu Avu, so the addition of an extra officer is a recent change. It also notes the sensitive location of the post in an area that was directly impacted by the "tension" and subsequent divisions within the Guadalcanal militia groups. According to the report, there are no mobility assets available to RSIPF at Avu Avu and mobility is confined to foot patrols. It recommended that RSIPF numbers be increased to four, with adequate support and resourcing. "*Mekim Senis*," 70.

around 4,333.⁴⁴ The CO pilot was initiated following a visit from senior RSIPF officers, who asked communities to put forward a nominee. Eight names were proposed, after which the chiefs were invited to a meeting at Malu'u Police Station where the two COs were selected. The message from the initial awareness was that the CO would work in a liaison role between the chiefs and the police, similar to the former ACs. Although the local chiefs participated in the selection of COs, they were initially confused about their role, somewhat critical of their performance, and concerned that the CO pilot was an attempt to usurp their authority as chiefs. These concerns have since been assuaged by awareness conducted by the COs themselves. Rather than undermining the roles of chiefs and existing village committees, it seems that the work of the COs has helped give these structures a new sense of direction and purpose.

In the months following their appointment, the COs worked closely with the Malu'u police to address the *kwaso* situation. In total, 12 *kwaso*-producing units were confiscated and dismantled. The destruction of the *kwaso*-producing equipment was well received and resulted in the disappearance of most of the locally brewed *kwaso* from the community.⁴⁵ However, *kwaso* remains a problem and continues to be made in Ward 8 and brought into the ward from other areas. This is an ongoing source of frustration for the COs and the broader community, and one they feel they have little control over. Another source of frustration is the failure of police to respond to complaints brought to them by the COs. One woman said:

In the past when serious problems came up we would report them to the police, but nothing happened. Now we report things to the CO and he reports them to the police. Still there is no action on the police part. The good thing is we don't have to go all the way to Malu'u to report our problems now, and with the CO here, there is a chance our matter will be dealt with locally by the CO and the chiefs.

There was widespread agreement that the lack of police responsiveness to complaints not only undermines CO credibility but also that of local chiefs and village committees who have been supporting their work.

In the face of these concerns, particularly the ineffectiveness of the RSIPF and the moribund local and magistrate's courts, there is continued support for the CO scheme. The CO is seen not only as a law enforcer but someone who can help prevent problems from escalating, provide general awareness, and connect with broader governance structures where they exist. It was noted that unlike police, the CO is generally present in the community and has demonstrated a willingness to respect *kastom* and work closely with the chiefs.

Overall, the community was supportive of the scheme, wanted to see more COs appointed, and was strongly in favor of COs being paid. They noted in particular that the COs were helping to

⁴⁴ Solomon Islands Government, "Report on 2009 Population and Housing Census, Basic Tables and Census Description," Statistical Bulletin 06/2012 (Honiara: National Statistics Office, 2012), 6.

⁴⁵ Earlier JDL consultations in the same area suggested that an advantage of using the COs in this case was that community members did not fear retaliation from the *kwaso* producers, which would have been the case had the police acted alone. See "Community Officers in North Malaita," Case Study, Malaita Fieldnote (World Bank and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2011), unpublished, available upon request. Work in Malu'u by University of Queensland researchers confirms that fear of retaliation from offenders is a significant inhibitor when it comes to reporting offenses to the police. M. Brigg, V. Boege, and J. Curth, "Malu'u Field Research Report" (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2010), unpublished.

promote peace and stability in communities, and where police and chiefs seemed to be scared of local troublemakers, the COs have shown a willingness to stand up to them, despite personal attacks (they have each had their gardens vandalized) and threats of further violence.⁴⁶ The community felt, quite understandably, that the resolve of the COs had slackened in recent months, but they attributed this directly to the lack of payment and felt it would be dealt with if allowances were provided. They also advocated the revival and strengthening of local courts, noting that any efforts to boost policing without strengthening the justice system would not work for the community in the long term.

Women's perspective: Manakwai village

Separate consultations were held with women at Manakwai following the community meeting. Although only seven women had attended the open community meeting, 14 women attended the women-only focus group discussion. Initially the women reported that *kwaso*, stealing, and drunk and disorderly behavior were their key concerns. When asked specifically about sexual offenses and domestic violence, they asserted that these were not problems in their community as they were “good Christians.” That said, further discussion of the problems associated with *kwaso* and drinking revealed that domestic violence, sexual assaults, and unwanted sexual attention, including direct requests for sex from nonmarital partners, are commonplace. In relation to domestic violence, one woman reported:

The men here go drinking, often for days at a time. They come back without warning and expect to see food prepared for them. They often come back angry and beat the wives and chase them from the house. When this happens the wife often fears that the husband will beat her. They can do nothing. They just run away bleeding and screaming...We are church people and good Christians, so we can't speak out and complain against our husbands. If our husbands beat us we know we need to become better wives, so we come back, pray with our husbands for forgiveness and it is finished.

Her comments reflected a real tension that was evident in many of the comments and observations made during the course of the focus group discussion. For example, when asked for their views on the appointment of women COs, the focus group participants initially responded enthusiastically, with one woman saying, “It would be really good if there were female COs here. We could take our problems to them, especially those problems with our husbands that we can't solve. It would be much easier to talk to a woman about such things as our husbands beating us.” Her comments were greeted with much head nodding and verbal agreement. However, another woman quickly countered by cautioning:

According to our *kastom*, women should not talk about private family matters all over the place, and they should not leave the family home, even if their husband is beating them. Instead they should pray and solve these problems directly with their husbands. Women COs would be good, but if they were seen to be encouraging women to talk about domestic violence, family problems and other such things, then they would face a very hard time

⁴⁶ JDL work in Malu'u confirms that the two COs are often abused by youth in the communities in which they work and usually travel together for safety purposes. See “Community Officers in North Malaita,” Case Study, Malaita Fieldnote (Honiara: World Bank and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2011), unpublished, available upon request.

from the men.⁴⁷ I don't think the men would respect or listen to a female CO, and most likely they would spoil her things. She would have to be a really tough strong woman to do this job.

Her comments, too, drew general agreement from the group. We observed that for women at Manakwai, the church and *kastom* had the potential to reinforce each other in ways that appeared quite oppressive. Further discussion with the women, and subsequently with the CO, revealed that both COs seek to resolve family problems with reference to *kastom* and church, meaning that female victims of violence are encouraged to return to their husbands and seek forgiveness for "taking family problems outside the home." Oftentimes they are also required to make a *kastom* payment to their husbands to seek amends for having shamed him by leaving the house in the heat of an argument or beating.

Community Officer Mike Maekali

Prior to being appointed CO, Mike Maekali worked for eight years with the National Peace Council, and prior to that, with the Peace Monitoring Council. Through this work he had gained considerable experience, especially in the areas of community awareness and mediation. He sees his CO work as very similar, although it involves working more closely with the police. Mike described himself as a "former youth leader" and reported that he works well with local youth. With regard to his ongoing relationship with the RSIPF, Mike said that he reports to the local officer in charge of the Malu'u Police Station on a monthly basis. He has generally found the RSIPF to be supportive of his work, but noted that they have real problems responding to the crimes reported. He feels RSIPF's lack of response jeopardizes his standing and that of his fellow CO and serves to undermine their work in the community.

Mike reported that there are lots of problems in the community: stealing, attempted rape,⁴⁸ defilement of underage girls, domestic violence, and a substantial amount of violence related to *kwaso*. Sexual infractions (including premarital and extra-marital sex) tend for the most part to be settled by compensation between families. In the past, such cases were not reported because of shame, but because the COs have demonstrated a willingness to work with the chiefs and resolve these matters using *kastom*, they are increasingly being reported to the COs. Specifically, Mike reported that he had dealt with 22 cases of attempted rape and defilement since being appointed as CO. He expressed some unease about dealing with such matters through *kastom*, recognizing that they are serious offenses, but claimed he would lose the communities' trust if he were to refer sexual offenses to the police.

When asked how he deals with domestic violence and other family problems, Mike reported that he mediates them together with chiefs and church leaders. He said the aim is to have the family reconcile, which often involves encouraging the woman to return and seek her husband's

⁴⁷ The women equally pointed out that women COs would face difficulties from men in dealing with nondomestic violence and non-family-related matters.

⁴⁸ We specifically asked Mike what he meant by "attempted rape." He responded by giving an example of an incident of what an attempted rape may entail: "This generally happens when men have been drinking. It is when a man, armed with a knife, directly asks a woman for sex. If she refuses the man often chases her and tries to force her to have sex. That is how I understand attempted rape. In my view a drunken man chasing a woman with a knife, can only want one of two things – either to kill her or rape her."

forgiveness. Confirming what was said earlier in the women's discussion, he explained that prior to her return, the woman (or her family) was expected to pay compensation to the husband for having shown him disrespect by leaving the family home or speaking about family problems outside the home. For members of the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC), he said the compensation paid is equivalent to 20 percent of the bride price paid to effect the marriage. Mike also explained that even when a woman is being beaten, her family will encourage her to return to her husband. Moreover, when young women marry, they are told they should not return home, even in the event their husbands turn out to be violent. Specifically, he had this to say:

When young girls here get married, we tell them, "if you want to marry this man then go. But if you go, don't come back. If he hits you it is not our concern. It doesn't matter—don't come back. Once we accept this payment you are gone for good. If he hits you don't come back crying to us. The only way you can come back to us now, is if he swears at your mother or father. If you go, you go for good and you stay till you die, even if he kills you."

Mike's comments and those of the women in the focus group suggested to us that church and *kastom* practices discouraged women from leaving violent relationships. Given that both COs seek to help resolve problems in the community with reference to church and *kastom*, this implies poor outcomes for women. That said, none of the women we spoke to explicitly complained of this.

Mike estimated that in his role as CO, he currently receives two complaints each day and that the majority of these are resolved through mediation. He further reported that mediation takes a long time and that his CO work places heavy demands on his time. Due to the large size of the ward and his lack of familiarity with all the communities, he concentrates his attention on his own local area, though he is increasingly getting requests for assistance from nearby villages, beyond his home area.

RSIPF perspective: Malu'u Police Station⁴⁹

The RSIPF personnel stationed at Malu'u consider the two COs to be doing an extremely good job. It was specifically noted that they work closely with the chiefs and try to resolve matters through *kastom*, only calling on the RSIPF for more serious matters. Importantly, COs "know the communities well" and "know the local *kastom*," which enables them to deal with matters locally and prevent their escalation. In terms of broader policing, the COs are reportedly often tasked with undertaking initial police investigations, in relation, say, to a breaking-and-entering, with the express purpose of identifying offenders. Having done this, they are further tasked with the responsibility of "solving the matter on the ground." The police reported that they are often unable to do this, due to a lack of transportation⁵⁰ and because they are viewed so poorly in the community.

⁴⁹ The "*Mekim Senis*" report noted that the 2009 police establishment figure for Malu'u was 10 officers. As of July 2011, there were seven RSIPF officers stationed at Malu'u. In view of high population density in Malu'u and its environs (estimated to be 20 percent greater than the provincial capital of Auki), as well as hostility toward the police in local communities, the report recommended that the local establishment be increased to 33 officers with requisite support. See "*Mekim Senis*," 79 (see n. 13).

⁵⁰ The RSIPF at Malu'u reported that the vehicle provided by RAMSI had never returned from maintenance work undertaken in Auki and was believed to have been taken for use by police at the provincial headquarters. The

A major strength of the current collaboration between the COs and the RSIPF, according to the officers, is that it extends police reach at little extra cost. This is interesting, as the COs face similar difficulties with transportation and, moreover, work on a voluntary basis. Evidently this has not deterred them.⁵¹ The local RSIPF also stated that the CO's role could be expanded further with training to enable COs to take official statements, make arrests, and do various other duties that might "help the police." Specifically, it was suggested that COs be given the powers of Special Constables. Although serious crimes should be reported to the police and then dealt with in the courts, the Malu'u police said that they often pass serious assaults, unlawful woundings, and sexual offenses back to the COs to be solved locally. In their view, if the parties to a dispute are happy with the outcome of local resolution, there is no need for the police to become involved. The police were fully supportive of some form of remuneration for the COs and, indeed, felt that the success of the scheme in the long term was dependent upon it.

Auki

RSIPF perspective: provincial police headquarters

The most vocal critic of the CO scheme we encountered was the provincial police commander (PPC) in Auki, John Walenenea. He reported that there had been no consultation with PPCs, that there are no clear supervision and oversight arrangements for COs, and that the critical lines of reporting bypass the province. In addition, he stated that he was not entirely sure what COs do, and admitted that he had never seen their role statement prior to our visit. He understood that the scheme was based on the old AC model, but noted that ACs were part of a broader system of governance.

The PPC for Malaita emphasized the need for a substantial increase in police numbers and resources on Malaita. This is, without a doubt, warranted given the inequitable allocation of RSIPF resources to Malaita highlighted in the "*Mekim Senis*" report mentioned above. A table displayed on the wall in the PPC's office indicated that there are currently only 23 police officers posted to Malaita, 11 based at the provincial police headquarters. Of the remaining 12 officers, four are posted to Auki, four to Malu'u, two at Maka, and one each at Atori and Atoifi.

The PPC stated that he would prefer to see Special Constables reinstated. He explained that provision for Special Constables already existed in the Police Act and there were established mechanisms for paying them. He felt that the lack of remuneration and support for the COs would diminish the program's likely sustainability over the longer term. He also felt that if the program were to continue, the issue of remuneration would need to be addressed, and if COs were paid, chiefs would also seek payment, leading to the need to tackle the ultimate question of where the money is going to come from.

Views of the provincial coordinator of community policing

In contrast to the views expressed by the PPC, the coordinator of community policing in Auki, Constable Solomon Sisimia, was a strong supporter of the CO scheme and advocated more

outboard motor for the local boat was believed to have suffered a similar fate. A Malu'u-based PPF adviser also reported that the PPF Rapid Response Boat could not be used because of the lack of a licensed operator.

⁵¹ Other conversations with people in Malu'u suggested that police were reluctant to leave their station and interact with surrounding communities, an activity that would not require transportation.

community policing in the province. Constable Sisimia had returned home to Auki during the “tension,” and was instrumental in establishing the highly regarded self-help community at Kilusakwalo. During the “tension,” he acquired a reputation for getting things done and for helping build a stronger community. Constable Sisimia was strongly of the view that the CO scheme had been successful, so much so that he had, in consultation with the chiefs and broader community in East and West Kwaio, appointed seven additional COs whom he had trained himself. That said, the CO scheme is, in his view, a challenging scheme, not least due to lack of support from the PPC.

Of the seven additional COs appointed and trained in Malaita, five are from West Kwaio and two from East Kwaio, both of which are viewed as highly conservative *kastom* areas and hostile toward introduced systems. Constable Sisimia reported that he had undertaken awareness in these areas and had sought to appoint COs there, as these had long been regarded as problem areas. In his consultations, he had found the chiefs and broader community to be very supportive of the scheme.

Of the five COs appointed for West Kwaio, three are women. Constable Sisimia reported that the feedback received from the House of Chiefs in West Kwaio is positive, and chiefs are now routinely hearing civil cases in the presence of COs. Evidently, the House of Chiefs is supportive of an active role for COs in community affairs and will not sit to mediate *kastom* matters unless one of the COs is present. They view the COs (both male and female) as police officers and refer to them as such.

According to Constable Sisimia, this new batch of COs, who were all appointed after extensive community consultation, are playing a constructive role in facilitating the resolution of local conflicts. Of the seven recent appointees, all four male COs are local chiefs, while the female COs are younger single women—church and youth leaders from the Catholic, Anglican, and SSEC churches. The women appear to be doing well and are respected in the community. Their efforts have included organizing sporting and church activities, particularly for the youth. Constable Sisimia further reported that when the women COs were appointed in November 2010, he had briefed them on dealing with women’s issues. They appear to be successfully managing a whole range of community matters but have had particular success engaging with youth (see “Louisa Kenny’s Story” below).

As in earlier consultations, the issue of remuneration loomed large. When chiefs sit to hear *kastom* matters in Kwaio, they are each paid SBD\$150 by the disputing parties, while the COs who facilitate and attend the hearings are not paid. Constable Sisimia would like to see more formal recognition of the role they are playing, so that they are legally protected in the event of any injuries sustained while carrying out their duties. He was also strongly in favor of an allowance for COs, noting that they all spend their own money bringing in reports or phoning in information that allows the RSIPF to better perform its duties. He gave a number of examples.

One example involved an arson case where a non-churchgoing family was chased out of the village and forced to flee to the bush after their house was burned down. The CO phoned in a report and Constable Sisimia was able to arrange for the police at Atori (the nearest police post) to go and rescue the women and children and arrest the culprits. He insisted that it was the “first

time” in his experience that the police had been able to respond so promptly and effectively, and all because they received timely and reliable information from the CO.⁵²

A second example related to an incident the night before our visit. One of the female COs was asked by the local chiefs to arrest some local youths involved in making *kwaso*. Knowing she did not have the power to arrest, the CO recorded the names of the *kwaso* makers and then traveled to Auki at her own expense (SBD\$100) to report the matter to Constable Sisimia. He wrote a warning letter to the offenders, instructing them to cease their activities and threatening a police raid in the event of noncompliance. The CO was to deliver the letters to the local chiefs, who in turn would serve them on the *kwaso* producers. Constable Sisimia had used similar strategies in the past and felt this was a good example of the police, CO, and chiefs working together.

Louisa Kenney’s Story

Louisa Kenny is a 26-year-old woman from Kwa’a village, Ward 27, West Kwaio. She is one of three female COs in Malaita and has been working in this capacity for the last six months. The daughter of a local chief, Louisa finished school at Form 3 and then trained at the Nazarene Apostolic Centre, after which she worked for a number of years on the Weather Coast. She has since been a youth leader at Buma Parish, West Kwaio. Louisa applied to join the RSIPF, and learned of the CO program on one of her many visits to Auki to follow up on the progress of her application. She told local chiefs about the scheme, and arranged for Solomon Sisimia to conduct awareness within the community. The chiefs subsequently requested that Louisa be appointed CO for their area, and it was on the basis of their request that she was selected. Louisa reported that her father and the other six chiefs in the area are supportive of her undertaking this work, which she felt would be more difficult for a married woman to do.

Louisa described her role somewhat differently from the male COs interviewed as part of this evaluation, although like many of the others, she is working very closely with the local chiefs. In particular her role seems to be less about the rigid enforcement of *kastom* and more about mediation and counselling, and an attempt to resolve issues without attributing fault to one party or another. An example of this is Louisa’s work as an intermediary between youth and leaders. She explained this as follows:

It is hard for the youths to go direct to the chiefs. They can’t speak to them. So they come to me and I go to the chiefs on their behalf. This is particularly so on issues that youth do not agree with the chiefs on. For example they recently imposed a curfew for young people. A few young people were subsequently caught in other people’s homes during random inspections by the chiefs. They felt they had legitimate reasons for being there, and as such felt they should not be punished. Unfortunately they did not feel they could explain this themselves. They came to me and asked me to explain their reasons to the chiefs. I did so and the matter was resolved.

Louisa also deals with family issues, far more than her male counterparts. She explained that a great deal of what she does involves mediation within families, particularly between young, newly married women and in-laws. She reported that many young women come to her because they are finding it difficult to settle into married life, often because the young woman moves into her husband’s family home and they do things differently. She helps the family to communicate better. She is also

⁵² This case also demonstrates the importance of mobile phone technology in areas where phones can be used.

proactive, encouraging young men to build a house for themselves and their new wives prior to their marriage to reduce the prospect of intergenerational conflict within the home. She finds that many problems are small and can be dealt with successfully through counselling and prayer.

Louisa also reported that she is rarely called upon to deal with problems concerning domestic and family violence, but has been approached to help sort out problems between wives and O2s, and to help solve adultery cases that involve fights between women. That said, she reported that all such problems are viewed very seriously and are often dealt with in an expeditious manner by the chiefs. In fact, when she receives such cases, she hands them directly to the chiefs.

Louisa works very closely with both the police and the chiefs. In relation to the chiefs, she sits with them when they are hearing land and *kastom* cases, and has input when they are developing community laws and chiefs' rules. She is also actively involved in undertaking awareness about chiefly rulings. When they want to refer something to the police, the chiefs ask Louisa to sit with them and put their concerns in writing. She then relays their concern to Solomon Sisimia and the RSIPF in Auki.

Provincial administration perspective: Auki

The premier for Malaita province, Edwin Suibaea, was keen to explain how the CO scheme might be incorporated into provincial plans for decentralized government. He started by explaining that Malaita has a large population but is poorly developed compared to the rest of Solomon Islands. Specifically, he noted that there are some 33 wards, each with an average population of 5,000 people. To address the lack of development in the province, the Malaita provincial government is working on decentralizing service delivery to five provincial zones or regional governing centers, to which a range of powers, including community policing, will be devolved. The premier further explained that a regional council in eastern Malaita had already been established that comprises chiefs, women representatives, and ward members, and could, he thought, conceivably include COs. The premier explained that his government is interested in supporting restorative justice processes and felt that the CO scheme would fit in well with his government's plans for devolving powers within the province.

In terms of resourcing the scheme, he thought there was a role for donors but that it could also be supported via the provincial government budget. The premier did not wish to see the return of Special Constables, nor was he in favor of policing powers for COs, pointing out that people in Malaita do not trust and have little confidence in the police. Instead he was of the view that if COs need special powers, these might be better established through a provincial ordinance. He also felt that COs need logistical support if they are to be effective and that the provincial government, through its regional councils—which will control the allocation of provincial transport assets (vehicles and outboard motor boats)—will be better positioned to provide this. Overall, he was generally supportive of a broader rollout of the CO scheme.

3.3 Isabel Province

Consultations were undertaken at three locations in Isabel province over three days, initially in Buala, the provincial headquarters, and then in Poro and Kolutubi villages.

The existing system of governance in Isabel province is referred to locally as the “tripod,” which recognizes the tripartite authority of the church, government, and traditional leaders (chiefs). Various chiefly structures operate at different levels within the province, including: the Isabel Council of Chiefs, district houses of chiefs, and ward houses of chiefs, as well as village chiefs. In addition, larger villages often have a profusion of committees, representing particular groups such as chiefs, church, women, and youth, and dealing with matters such as health and education. Some chiefs appear to be hereditary (*kastom* chiefs), while others are appointed on account of individual skills or qualities. A lively debate is currently going on over who should be entitled to call themselves a chief, evidence of the dynamic way in which traditional structures are being actively contested and reshaped. It also points to the intensity of local interest in developing and driving its own hybrid structures, linking different forms of authority and levels of governance.

Buala

*RSIPF perspective: provincial police headquarters*⁵³

While the PPC for Malaita remained skeptical of the CO scheme, the PPC for Isabel, Gabriel Manelusi, is a strong supporter, having witnessed its operation in the province over the past 12 months and having had the opportunity to go to the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in July 2011 and examine its community policing model.

During our visit, Superintendent Manelusi outlined his plans to roll out the CO scheme to the whole of Isabel. He reported that the COs are playing a very important role in rural areas, and that having them on the ground helps the police. He also reported that the provincial government is happy with the way the COs have been performing and that they, like the police, are keen to see the scheme expanded. It was evident that the PPC had excellent relations with the leadership of the provincial government and was liaising closely with it on the CO scheme. This was confirmed in a subsequent meeting with Adrian Toni, the provincial secretary (PS), who reported that the *Provincial Law and Order Sector Plan*⁵⁴ envisages an expansion of the CO scheme by a further 22 COs, including nine female COs,⁵⁵ and that the province has included some financial (SBD\$300–\$400 per month allowance) and logistical support for the current COs in its 2012 budget.

Superintendent Manelusi is strongly of the view that the RSIPF should take the lead in the CO scheme, but that in the long term, it should be embedded within broader systems of justice and governance. He noted for instance that at present, there is no resident magistrate in Isabel, and that ultimately, a resident magistrate in Buala and two local courts—in the east and the west of

⁵³ The “*Mekim Senis*” report noted that 22 of the 23 RSIPF officers in Isabel are based at the Buala Police Station (one is located at the Kia Police Post). With an estimated population of 23,674 across the province (26,158 according to subsequently released census figures: see n. 44, 3), this represents a police to population ratio of 1:1,076. Policing concerns include land disputes between logging companies and landowners, *kwaso* abuse, and sexual offenses such as incest and defilement. The absence of any independent maritime capability at Buala means that the RSIPF are unable to patrol or respond beyond the provincial capital. The report recommends a reduction in RSIPF strength at Buala from 22 to 12 members, with a redistribution of police to other parts of the province. “*Mekim Senis*,” 49.

⁵⁴ Isabel Provincial Law and Order Sector Plan, 2011–2015.

⁵⁵ It is envisaged there will be one male CO for each of Isabel’s 16 wards, with the nine female COs located in key places.

the province—will be needed. Again his views were echoed in our subsequent consultations with the PS, suggesting that considerable thought on the part of the local RSIPF and provincial administration has already gone into how to make the CO scheme work in Isabel.

Superintendent Manelusi would like to see an expanded CO scheme piloted on Isabel, and the up-scaling of the current exercise to coincide with the imminent scaling down of the PPF in the province.⁵⁶ He feels this will help allay community concerns about the PPF drawdown. In his view, there is strong community support across the province for the COs and for the appointment of new ones, including women. He claimed to have had requests from each and every ward and that people are of the view that the COs are effective in facilitating the work of the chiefs. In relation to female COs, he reported a strong push from the provincial Mothers' Union (a woman's organization of the Anglican Church). Superintendent Manelusi also reported widespread community concern that "RAMSI is going but leaving nothing behind." He sees the CO scheme as potentially filling this void, as a tangible legacy of RAMSI.

Provincial administration perspective: Buala

In addition to the points raised above, the PS reported that the premier is also a strong supporter of the CO scheme and is keen to see it expanded. He also reported that the three existing COs had worked alongside the RSIPF in providing security at the recent Premier's Conference in Buala. In terms of improvement, he felt that there was a need for more effective and reliable communication between the COs and the police in Buala, citing a few recent cases where reports did not get through to Buala in a timely manner. The issue of communication was also raised consistently in our community consultations (see below). The PS also felt stronger oversight of the COs was needed, as he had heard rumors of some questionable behavior on the part of one of the COs.

Although generally supportive of the CO scheme, the PS did voice one more serious criticism, namely that current COs were appointed in Honiara without community consultation. He noted that all of the COs are ex-police and that this seems to have shaped the project thus far in Isabel. For example, John Leamana, the CO at Kolutubi, is a retired superintendent and a former head of the Special Branch. In his view, if the scheme is to be expanded, the appointment process must be reviewed and nominations should come from the community and not just from the police—or the chiefs, for that matter. Indeed, as our consultations progressed, we encountered the perception that chiefs are part of the problem in some areas, with some described as sexual predators, others allegedly involved in illegal activities of various kinds, and still others reluctant to perform their duties and help with community problems. The PS reported that the provincial administration is keen to improve the overall performance of chiefs and strengthen their role in the maintenance of law and order.

Buala village

Consultations were undertaken at two separate locations in Buala on August 19, 2011, one with a group consisting of five chiefs and eight women at Buala village, and one with eight women at the Mothers' Union guesthouse.

⁵⁶ PPF officers withdrew from Isabel province in September 2011, subsequent to the field visit.

The meeting at Buala village was attended by Paramount Chief Lionel Longa and four other chiefs. Although both meetings consisted of only a handful of participants, we encountered a range of opinions about the CO pilot and its possible scaling-up on Isabel. At the Buala village meeting, there was a lack of consensus about whether the village would benefit from a CO; interestingly, the JDL work had previously indicated that this village was not seeking to appoint a CO. Residents of Buala village stated that their chiefs are doing a good job of maintaining law and order, but it should also be noted that the village is situated “right next door” to the provincial police headquarters and access to the police is definitely not a problem.

Women’s perspective, Isabel Mothers’ Union

We were fortunate to be able to meet with Moira Dasipio, chair of the Isabel Mothers’ Union, and several of group’s members, following a three-day health workers training workshop at the guesthouse. Moira and her fellow members had some strong views about the CO pilot and how it might evolve in Isabel. In the first instance, the group was generally supportive of the CO initiative, noting that the existing COs seem to be “doing okay.” They insisted, however, that there should be greater gender balance because there are many issues that women cannot talk about with men. The women were also critical of the lack of consultation over the appointment of the three existing COs and the fact that they are all ex-police officers. They felt that ex-police are not necessarily the right people to undertake CO work, and rejected any notion that the CO’s role is only a policing one, since this emphasis frequently results in the disenfranchisement of women and youth. They argued that the CO should instead be someone who is already working with the community and is resident there, unlike the current CO in Poro (see below).

The women also asserted that women are the real problem solvers in Isabel. They were somewhat critical of the chiefs, saying, “they are good at talking, but we don’t see much action,” and “they contribute to the problems in lots of places.” In particular, they were insistent that any scaling-up of the CO initiative should occur in close consultation with the Mothers’ Union, which is the key organization representing the interests of women and children. They also suggested that many of their members would make excellent COs, as they are already working on a voluntary basis to help solve issues that arise within communities. They pointed out that while chiefs and the church have a good track record on sorting out problems that arise at the community level, it is the Mothers’ Union that deals with family and children’s issues—by placing a strong emphasis on counseling and mediation, as opposed to enforcement.

The women agreed that the main social problems facing communities in Isabel include drinking/alcohol abuse and petty stealing, and that domestic violence “is not a major problem but that it is certainly increasing in the face of widespread drinking.” Drinking gives rise to other forms of violence, including brawls and knife fights between men, and men in Isabel often drink for days at a time. They reported that women, especially in Buala, also engage in binge drinking over extended periods, often leaving children unsupervised and uncared for.

When asked why women are now drinking like this they observed that adultery is on the rise and suggested that women are now drinking “to keep an eye on their husbands.” They noted that domestic and family violence is of particular concern in families where both parents drink. Drinking has been a problem with male youth for a long time, they said, but young women are also drinking in increasing numbers, giving rise to an increase in the number of teenage

pregnancies. Young women who drink were also seen to be contributing to the apparent rise in adultery, referred to locally as “the O2 problem.” The women we interviewed reported that they are increasingly being asked to mediate disputes between wives and O2s, and insisted that the chiefs are not effective in dealing with these sorts of issues because many are part of the problem. They also reported an apparent rise in child abuse and incest but insisted that unlike domestic violence, these issues do not seem to be linked to alcohol abuse but rather to a breakdown in social mores.

Members of the Mothers’ Union expressed concern that the scaling-up of the CO scheme might inadvertently undermine the good work they are doing. One suggestion was that in addition to appointing female COs, some financial support should be given to the Mothers’ Union to support its ongoing work with families. They also felt that if not managed well, the CO scheme might place additional pressure on their system of matrilineal descent and land tenure; already, men are challenging this and women are being left out of contributing to important decisions.

Poro village

A community meeting was convened in the Mothers’ Union Hall in Poro village on August 20, 2011. This meeting was well attended, with over 50 men and women present. It became apparent that there was considerable confusion over the CO role. Having been initially introduced by the PPC as a community police officer, the CO was expected to perform a policing role. As one woman explained, “when the PPC and RAMSI came here they said, ‘Buala is a long way, and before you didn’t have any police here. But now you do, this is your community police officer.’”

While there was widespread community support for the CO scheme, there was much discussion about how it might be improved. Many felt that it was unrealistic to expect a single CO to serve a village of 700–800 people, such as Poro, let alone the larger ward in which it is located. Two or three COs per ward would be more appropriate, and the CO should be resident in the main village or population center. They also felt that the CO needs communications and logistical support in order to liaise effectively with the RSIPF in Buala.

All sections of the community were critical of their limited say in the selection of the current CO, who was not their first choice. After extensive discussions, the community had initially decided to nominate a youth leader for the role; however, when the police came to collect the CO for the training in Honiara, they insisted on taking Ellison Maeheta, a retired police sergeant, saying “we only want experienced police officers, they will pick-up on the training quickly and are fit to perform as community police.”

Throughout the community there was general agreement that the CO should be paid, and that it is unreasonable to expect anyone to do this work without some form of remuneration. As in other communities visited, people noted how the initial enthusiasm of the CO had waned over time. There was strong support for the appointment of female COs.

Women’s perspective

Women reported few major problems within the community, noting instead that fights within and between families and alcohol-related disturbances are commonplace. Family problems are

often resolved within the family, sometimes with the assistance of the Mothers' Union, while arguments between families and alcohol-related problems are referred to the chiefs or the CO.

As in other places visited, there was a general denial of domestic violence or intimate partner violence, but women's responses to questions about the kinds of family and alcohol-related problems suggest that domestic violence is indeed a concern, albeit one they are uncomfortable talking about. For instance, they reported that men's drinking often leads to violence within families. Another "big problem" is the "O2 problem"—adultery and extra-marital affairs. As in Buala, the women at Poro also felt that adultery is on the rise, not just in town but also in the village. Chiefs were seen as largely ineffectual in dealing with the family disputes associated with adultery, and female COs might prove better at dealing with such problems.

Overall, the women at Poro felt that there had been an improvement in law and order since the CO had been appointed. We were somewhat puzzled by this, because the women also complained that the CO often refuses to attend to problems in the main village (he lives about an hour's walk away) and that even when he does attend and report matters to Buala, there is never any follow-up by the RSIPF. Why then has law and order improved? The women felt that there has been more self-regulation of behavior since the CO was appointed, as there is now "a chance" that he might arrest them if they do something wrong or that he might be able to bring in the police.⁵⁷

Community Officer Ellison Maeheta

Ellison Maeheta is a retired police sergeant. The Kaloka ward has a population of roughly 5,000–6,000 people and includes at least 10 big villages, including Poro. Common problems are land disputes, drunk and disorderly behavior, and domestic violence. Ellison works closely with local chiefs, helping to enforce their decisions. Ellison shared the wider complaint about lack of support and regular contact from the RSIPF, specifically mentioning that, for example, he had run out of forms to complete his monthly reports.

Kolotubi village

The community meeting at Kolotubi village was attended by around 70 people. It was opened by CO Johnson Leamana, a retired police superintendent and current secretary of the Hograno District House of Chiefs.

Different views were expressed on the role of the CO. Some speakers noted similarities with the old ACs, but also noted that ACs engaged in a much broader range of activities. One chief expressed concern that the CO scheme might weaken the authority of chiefs, although it was also noted that there is already an excess of chiefs in Isabel and that there is quite a bit of ongoing disputation over who is a chief in the province. Most expected the CO to work closely with the chiefs and the police.

As in Poro, the CO at Kolotubi had been introduced as a community police officer and is widely seen as an enforcer of community rules and chiefly decisions. One woman said:

⁵⁷ The role of the CO scheme in providing a "shadow of law" and thereby a new source of deterrence was widely noted in most of the communities visited.

Before this guy was appointed, the people here didn't listen to the chiefs. Now they do, because when the Community Police Officer talks people obey. They are afraid of him. The youth in particular are afraid of him. If people are drinking he gives them a warning, after that he threatens to arrest them and hand them over to the police in Buala.

One young man complained that the current CO does not represent the views of youth and suggested that some younger COs should also be appointed. In their separate discussions, women reported that they have not referred anything to the CO, as they are afraid of him. Domestic and family violence matters tend to be dealt with by the Mothers' Union or chiefs rather than the CO.

As elsewhere, the people of Kolutubi were adamant that the CO should be paid. They also saw the need for better communication between the CO and the RSIPF at Buala (over three hours away by motorized canoe or half a day's walk), logistical support, and regular visits. Men were open to the idea of women COs, but remained a little wary, because many of the problems in the community involve drunk and disorderly behavior, loud music, after-hours fighting, stealing, destruction of property, and rape. They were not sure that women could effectively deal with such problems.

Women's perspective

The women at Kolutubi supported the idea of a female CO, noting that Isabel is very much a “*kastom* place” and as such, there are many things women find it difficult to talk to men about—domestic violence being a case in point. They also recognized that there is a great deal of intergenerational conflict, especially among men, and felt that women would be better able to accommodate the interests of youth. As noted above, it is the Mothers' Union and chiefs that currently work together to solve family problems, which involves working with, and trying to engage, wayward youth.

3.4 Western Province

Leona village, Vella Lavella

Leona village, home to around 700–800 people, is two hours from Gizo by outboard motor boat. There are a number of government employees resident in the village, mainly teachers at the primary and secondary schools, and a health worker at the clinic. Our arrival was unexpected and the CO was heading off to his garden. He quickly informed the chiefs and managed to convene a well-attended community meeting.

The CO scheme started in Vella Lavella in 2009, following a visit by the police commissioner and the national MP to announce the introduction of the plan and the appointment of four COs in two wards. People from across the island gathered at Leona to witness the announcement. For the most part, people in Leona consider the scheme a good initiative, although they noted the familiar difficulties associated with lack of pay, transportation, and effective communication. One speaker expressed the view that that introduction of the CO scheme marked the “return of government”—something that is welcomed. Another said, “the CO makes us feel like the government is now with us.” Nevertheless, they had been disappointed by the lack of RSIPF engagement, and insisted that the police need to back up the CO and respond to his reports.

Overall, people felt that the CO was doing a good job under difficult circumstances. They reported that there are numerous problems in the community, many of which derive in one way or another from substance abuse, particularly drinking. Chiefs are unable to deal with all the cases brought to them and some matters are now piling up and festering. While there are good chiefs, there are also some bad ones and this too was contributing to problems. There are also new kinds of disputes to contend with—related to homebrew, marijuana, *kwaso*, and beer drinking—that cannot be resolved by chiefs through culture or *kastom*. Substance abuse is said to be destabilizing the community, and it is on this issue that the people look to the CO, as they see him as performing a community policing role, stepping in to help resolve the problems that the chiefs cannot solve on their own.

People evidently respect Matthew Kukuti, the local CO, even though he is originally from another province. His policing background is considered very useful but not essential to performing his duties. More important is his character, and he was described as a strong, disciplined, and honest person.

The men and youth at Leona were open to the idea of female COs, pointing out that some women's issues will only be discussed with other women. The women made a similar observation, but in the face of the difficulties Matthew had experienced with the lack of transport and so forth, they were less eager to advocate for female COs. One woman said, "it would be good to have a female CO, but we would have to choose a strong woman." Matthew's wife reported:

I have seen the work he is doing. It is hard work, dangerous work. My husband often has to travel to neighboring villages, and particularly into the next village where the women fight with their hands and knives. I think a woman CO would need to think carefully. She would also need to be able to paddle. My husband often paddles to the next village, which is really hard for him because he is from Guadalcanal.

For the people of Leona, logging disputes are a growing problem. Men and women alike complained bitterly that there is no RSIPF follow-up to reported problems within the community, although they noted that the RSIPF seem particularly responsive to the logging companies when assistance is requested. This is because the logging companies can pay police. The community at Leona has found itself in disputes with logging companies three times in recent years, and in their view, the police are biased towards the loggers. They feel that logging is spoiling the country and do not want any part in it. On each occasion, the police have come in and violently broken up women's protest meetings, with local women reportedly sustaining injuries at the hands of the police and company security.

Women's perspective

The women at Leona complained at length about the RSIPF, asserting, as outlined above, that the police respond to reports from the logging companies but not to reports received from their CO, of whom they spoke very highly. The key problems concerning women at Leona seemed to be related to substance abuse: marijuana and alcohol (including homebrew). They specifically reported that drinking affects women, in that "when men drink they get cranky and row with us." Some women have evidently taken cases of domestic violence to Matthew and as a consequence

of that and the domestic violence awareness said to have been conducted by RAMSI, women felt that the overall incidence of domestic violence had declined.

The women also felt that the presence of a CO in their village had contributed to an improvement in general law and order, noting in particular that the youth are a bit afraid of him. As a consequence, they apparently listen to the CO, because they feel there is a chance he will report their misdemeanors to the police. It is also worth noting that the women perceived that the appointment of the CO has meant that the chiefs no longer monopolize decision making. Having a CO, they said, has also paved the way for the church to play a stronger role, in that the pastor is also working with the chiefs and CO to help solve problems within the community. They see these shifts as positive developments within their community.

Community Officer Matthew Kukuti

The CO for Leona, Matthew Kukuti, is a retired police sergeant originally from Guadalcanal who is married to a local woman. From his appearance, Matthew clearly seemed the oldest of the COs we interviewed. He retired from the RSIPF in 2004. The CO scheme was introduced into Leona, following a visit there by the PPF, RAMSI, RSIPF (Deputy Commissioner Sikua), and MP Milner Tozaka. Matthew reported that Deputy Commissioner Sikua provided some awareness about the pilot, told the community they should work with the CO, and then informed him that he was being appointed to the post. Like the other COs we interviewed, he subsequently attended the training in Honiara in 2010.

Since being appointed, Matthew has encountered some difficulties performing his role. There is no police radio in Gizo, making communication with the RSIPF a major problem. In Vella Lavella there is a provincial radio network, although batteries are often a problem. The radio at Leona is physically situated at the health post and connects with the hospital in Gizo; to get a message through to the police in Gizo, Matthew has to relay it via the health network and this has proved less than ideal.

Since his appointment, Matthew has been left entirely to his own devices. He claims never to have been visited by the RSIPF located in Gizo. He reports that he does some awareness work and acts with the chiefs to help solve local problems. There are six big communities within Ward 10, and Matthew tries to visit them all—sometimes once a month, sometimes less frequently, traveling by canoe and on foot. Matthew reports that he uses people who are traveling to Gizo to deliver his reports to the RSIPF; to date, however, he has not received any feedback on any of his reports. The RSIPF occasionally helps with awareness by providing some outboard fuel, and he has been promised an outboard motor boat by the national MP (Milner Tozaka) but nothing has materialized as yet.⁵⁸

Iriqila village, Vella Lavella

Iriqila village is roughly one hour from Leona and three hours from Gizo by outboard motor boat (OBM). It is a large village of about 2,000 people, most of whom are members of the Uniting

⁵⁸ This raises the possibility that Rural Constituency Development Funds (RCDF), discretionary funds provided by the Republic of China (Taiwan) directly to individual MPs, might be used to support CO activities.

Church. The community meeting at Iriqila was held well into the evening under torch and generator light on August 23, 2011. Interestingly, it was the best attended meeting of the evaluation, with around 100 men, women, and youth present.

During the course of our consultations, we learned that a former RSIPF inspector had initially been appointed to the role of CO for Iriqila, but had quickly left upon learning that there was to be no remuneration. He appears to have been selected in Honiara with minimal community input. Once he left, another CO was appointed. The current CO, Francis Zireo, was selected by the community; he is generally thought to be doing a good job, and was described as fair-minded.

Francis, we were told, has been actively helping the chiefs and church leaders deal with problems that arise within the community and has undertaken a great deal of law and order-related awareness. According to the youths present, this has led to a modification of their behavior, which in turn has contributed to improvements in the law and order situation. Like the youth, the women also felt that Francis was doing a good job, and that he deserved better support from the community, as he had demonstrated a capacity to deal with problems, such as substance abuse. He had also reported a few serious matters to the police in Gizo, one of which involved alleged child sexual abuse. Some people in the community felt he had overstepped his authority by reporting the matter to the police, although others, particularly the women, felt that it demonstrated his resolve to deal with difficult issues. Without exception, there was agreement that the CO should be paid.

Women's perspective

Although the women at Iriqila reported a willingness on the part of the CO to deal with issues affecting women, they wanted to see female COs appointed, as women find it difficult, for cultural reasons, to talk to men about personal and private matters.

Community Officer Francis Zireo

Like the CO at Leona, Francis Zireo is not a local. He is originally from Munda but is married to an Iriqila woman. He was a member of the provincial assembly for Munda and came back to his wife's village in 2005 after losing his seat. In his younger years, Francis had worked as a village organizer (VO, see glossary). Francis described himself as being close to the police, although he had never served as a police officer. Like the CO at Leona, Francis has been promised an outboard motor boat by the local MP. For the time being, he paddles his canoe to other parts of Ward 10 (shared with Matthew).

Francis reported that he has run out of monthly report forms and now makes his own. Since training in Honiara late in 2010, he has had only one visit from the RSIPF, comprising the former PPF adviser Emmert Tsimes and Sergeant Joshua Loko from Gizo. When emergencies arise, Francis uses the radio at the village health center to deliver messages to police in Gizo via the Gizo hospital. This is a very indirect form of communication that inhibits him from providing sensitive information. In order to perform better, he feels he needs transportation, reliable communication, and back-up from the police stationed at Gizo.

Boro village

Consultations were undertaken at Boro village, Vella Lavella, on the morning of August 24, 2011. We arrived in the village unannounced to find that the appointed CO, Douglas Babu, no longer resides in the area, having taken up employment with a logging company elsewhere on the island. The people milling around the village in the vicinity of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church seemed at first to have no knowledge whatsoever of the CO project, but managed to convene a community meeting on very short notice. Our subsequent consultations were undertaken in the SDA church. The initial meeting was attended by eight women and 14 men, although numbers increased when we broke into separate groups.

Collectively, the men and women we consulted at Boro reported that there had been no community consultation prior to the appointment of the CO. Their understanding was that the local MP, Milner Tozaka, had made the appointment in collaboration with the PPF, and that the position was a political one. When we explained the thinking behind the pilot and the role of the CO, people generally agreed that the CO scheme was a good idea and one that if properly implemented, might help promote peace within the community. They felt that an active CO would certainly be welcomed in Boro, because the *kastom* system has, for the most part, broken down.

The women reported that there was no longer a paramount chief and that many of the local chiefs had died without nominating a replacement. They also said that the remaining local chiefs “are hopeless” and no longer provide effective guidance. Leadership, to the extent there is any in Boro, is provided by the church elders, particularly the main committee of the local SDA church, which consists primarily of youth leaders and is chaired by a man named Nolan, who is in fact the VO for Boro. In his role as VO, Nolan mobilizes people for community work and is viewed as doing a good job of keeping the village clean.

The women recalled that Douglas Babu’s father had done some initial awareness back in 2009, announcing to the community that his son had been appointed CO by the MP and RAMSI. This was after the CO launch in Leona. The women reported that the community was initially skeptical, saying, “we don’t know why they chose him. We thought maybe he was tricking us. Unlike the COs for Ward 9, that man was not a policeman before.” The CO appears to have done no awareness and in fact has spent very little time in the community since his appointment. The women also recalled that some people from RAMSI came and collected him and took him for training in Honiara, but that upon his return, he resumed employment with the logging company.

There was widespread agreement among the group that the CO for Boro should be replaced and that the new CO should be nominated/appointed by the community. In fact, there were calls for two COs to be appointed: one male and one female. Men and women alike agreed that there are some things women just cannot talk to men about. The youth expressed a preference for a female CO, pointing out that Boro has some good women leaders, and that these women stay in the village most of the time and are likely to take their job seriously. Their observations about women leaders were echoed by the women themselves, who pointed out that it is women leaders and members of the SDA women’s ministry who are most active in the community. The latter, in particular, already play a role in mediating or solving problems within the community.

Women's perspective

Some 15 women attended the women-only focus group discussion at Boro. These women, like many others we consulted during the course of the evaluation, reported drinking and stealing to be the main concerns and that the chiefs and leaders do not deal with the problems. Their most significant concern, however, was logging and the pressure this places on communities. They noted in particular that though logging damages gardens, landowners are not compensated. The sharing of royalties is also a problem, and one that often results in disputes at the community level.

Particularly worrying for the women we interviewed is that fact that some parents take their daughters to logging camps. The girls, often young girls in their early teens, are expected to have sex with the loggers and the parents receive money in return. This, they said, is causing all kinds of problems within families. The women knew of at least five girls from nearby villages who have had children with Asian loggers. These girls and their children had been left behind by the loggers when they moved camp.

Karaka village, Vella Lavella

Consultations were undertaken at Karaka village, Vella Lavella, on the afternoon of August 24, 2011. Again we arrived in the village completely unannounced, but were nevertheless greeted by the CO, David Rike. Our consultations at Karaka also revealed that there was no community involvement in the appointment of the CO, something of which people were critical. The current CO was seen to have been appointed by Milner Tozaka, the local MP. Some of the men suggested that the CO is a bit negligent, but acknowledged that this may be because he gets no allowance. They reported that he had initially started his CO work with a lot of energy but has subsequently slowed down. Later consultations with the youth and David himself revealed that the community expectations placed on the CO are unreasonable (see below).

Karaka village, we were told, has 13 tribal chiefs who are often embroiled in arguments and political struggles among themselves. There had been a paramount chief, but he passed away in 2010 without nominating a replacement—hence the political struggles. Evidently, the community is dysfunctional in other ways as well, as there are problems associated with alcohol (including *kwaso* and homebrew) and marijuana. Several of the chiefs regularly drink in public and are thus no longer respected. Moreover, the divisions between the chiefs mean they are not able to function effectively and have very little capacity to solve disputes and problems within the community. As a consequence, they prefer to refer all cases to the CO rather than try to sort the problems out themselves, resulting in a huge backlog of cases (including *kastom* matters) passed to the CO. People seemed to feel that because David was single, “he has the time” to solve the community’s problems.

Community Officer David Rike

The CO, on the other hand, feels the chiefs are outsourcing their responsibilities to him. He feels particularly ill-equipped to deal with all the problems referred to him, citing a lack of background information (some of the disputes date back many years), resources, and RSIPF support. David has no transport and finds it difficult to move around, and due to the costs involved in traveling to Gizo (approximately SBD\$200 for the round trip), he has never been there to file his reports, nor have the RSIPF visited him. He reported that our visit gave him

reason to don his CO uniform, saying that this was the first time he had worn it since his training in Honiara.

Women's perspective

The women at Karaka felt that the CO is a good concept but needs much more support than is currently provided, views echoed by the men and youth. Like women elsewhere, they were also keen to see female COs appointed, pointing out that it would be much easier to take their problems to a woman CO.

Gizo

RSIPF perspective: provincial police headquarters⁵⁹

According to the acting Provincial Police Commander, Superintendent John Rove, the CO project is a good one, although he noted that the RSIPF has had problems supporting the scheme. In his view, logistics is the key challenge, because it is very difficult moving around Western province; the RSIPF has provided some fuel and *ad hoc* support, but cannot provide significant assistance on a day-to-day basis. He reported that Matthew Kutiki, the CO for Leona, had visited him and he had supplied him with some OBM fuel.

Superintendent Rove was very much in favor of payment for COs, noting their commitment and hard work and that they are struggling financially with families to support. Getting more support from the RSIPF would be difficult, however, as the patrol roster is often interrupted because of a lack of resources. He also explained that other matters (such as logging disputes) often have to take priority.

According to Superintendent Rove, the RSIPF would like the COs to do as much as possible, given the small numbers of police stationed outside the provincial capital. He explained that in addition to the 34 RSIPF officers stationed in Gizo, there are six police posts in Western province, each with four officers. These include one post in the Shortlands; two in Kolombangara; and one each in Moro, Munda, and Seghe. Noro and Gizo do not have radios, while Noro and Seghe have no OBMs, resulting in communications and transport problems. At the moment, the PPF provide some advice and logistical support, but the RSIPF is trying to reduce its dependence on the PPF.

Under the current arrangements, the PPC has no authority over the COs. The PPC thinks it would be helpful if COs could be sworn in as Special Constables when needed, but recognizes that there are issues of accountability. He also reported that there has been some discussion about the role of the CO at the provincial level, as there is an apparent overlap with the role of the VOs who are funded under the provincial government budget.

⁵⁹ According to the “*Mekim Senis*” report, there are 76 RSIPF officers in Western province, which has a population of 79,597 (76,649 according to subsequently released census figures: see n. 44, 3). The police to population ratio is 1: 1,047. Forty-five officers are based in the provincial capital, Gizo, which is said to have had an increase in crime in recent years associated with urban drift. The Gizo aluminium boat is out of service, while the OBM requires major repair. At the time of our evaluation, the radio at the provincial headquarters was not working. Western province is home to many logging operations, and disputes between loggers and landowners are a major policing concern. The report recommends a reduction in RSIPF strength at Gizo to 35 members and an increase and redistribution of police numbers to other locations in the province.

While in Gizo we also had the opportunity to speak with Sergeant Andy Fomani, the RSIPF training officer who works out of the same office as the officer in charge (OIC) for community policing, Sergeant Joshua Loko. The latter was on leave at the time of our visit, and Sergeant Fomani was acting in his place. She is from Western province, has been working in Gizo for several years, and regularly assists Sergeant Loko with the community policing work. While reporting that she had not had any direct involvement with the COs, she was aware that the CO from Leona had traveled to Gizo on several occasions to see the OIC and felt that he and the other COs were doing a good job: “They help the police, by helping communities mediate and solve problems before they escalate. They help us a lot, and could help us even more if they were more active.” She noted that reports from the COs had become less regular over time and that the OIC had been unable to visit them in the field. However, she and the OIC, Sergeant Loko, had been involved with communities in Gizo through the Save the Children Community Crime Prevention Committees.

Provincial administration perspective: Gizo

The role of the VO was discussed at length in our meeting with the premier of Western province, George Solingi Lilo. He explained that VOs are a “hangover from the Headman times” and that most have been in place for the past 20 years. In Western province, VOs liaise between the communities and the provincial government; they also work closely with the chiefs and perform a community policing role. Evidently, there are about 40 VOs on the provincial payroll. The premier expressed concern about the apparent overlap between the CO and VO roles, suggesting that one might undermine the other. He was strongly of the view that the role of COs needs to be clarified, as do questions of fiscal responsibility. He was initially not overly enthusiastic about a further rollout of the scheme, but following our explanation of the official rationale of the CO project (primarily in terms of its role as liaison with the RSIPF), he began to express qualified support.

4. Analysis and Findings

The following analysis addresses the tasks and considerations identified in the terms of reference (ToR), drawing on the findings from our fieldwork. Specifically, the tasks listed in the ToR under s. 1.2 b-h (see ToR, Annex) are dealt with in section 4.1. Also addressed below are some additional points that, although not specifically mentioned in the ToR, are important to the evaluation.

As the narratives make clear, the CO project has been overwhelmingly welcomed in the communities where COs are located. We encountered no significant opposition to the scheme in any of the communities visited, and the general consensus was that the project should continue and be expanded. Nevertheless, there is still confusion in some places over the role of the CO, confusion that is partly a reflection of the lack of clarity in preliminary formulations and the rapid manner in which the scheme was rolled out. Although consultations took place in those areas where COs were appointed, these were often relatively brief and with selected groups only. More thorough consultation and awareness work with community stakeholders was needed.

In addition, the project was driven largely by a small group of PPF advisers and not embedded in SIG systems, which has inevitably limited the sense of ownership among Solomon Islands' officials at national and provincial levels. Criteria for selecting the pilot locations were not specified. While well-known problems in Malu'u and the Weather Coast made them obvious candidates, the rationale for the other locations chosen was less apparent. Provincial officials aware of the scheme saw value in it and were keen to explore ways it might be integrated into their own plans for local governance structures and the devolution of service delivery.

Rolling out the scheme so quickly with inadequate consultation and awareness was a risky endeavor. It has nevertheless produced some interesting results and raises a number of possibilities for future development. Most of the matters that were overlooked in the earlier rollout can be remedied relatively easily, including the needs to provide COs with some form of allowance and to enable the selection of more female COs.

In our view, COs are definitely providing value in the communities where they operate:

- They are helping local communities manage stresses and are contributing to organic processes of community building.
- They are highly valued within communities, in large part due to the potential they provide to link local governance and local authority systems to the wider political system.
- They represent a bottom-up and community-driven approach to development.
- They are doing different tasks in different places, reflecting differences in local contexts, problems, and priorities, and a capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and stresses.
- They have a flexibility to evolve in different ways, which is an inherent strength of the scheme that should be maintained.

Members of the RSIPF who have had direct interactions with COs are also extremely positive about their role. They view the COs as able to perform an important preventive function, working with chiefs to settle minor disputes and thereby diminishing the prospect of conflict escalation. COs are also valued as a local liaison mechanism, allowing for the dissemination of legal awareness and other messages that can contribute to community safety and well-being, and assisting the police in investigating more serious offenses and apprehending suspects. The RSIPF executive in Honiara is also supportive and wishes to see the scheme developed as part of a broader model of community policing for Solomon Islands.

It would, of course, be a mistake to simply view the CO scheme as an inexpensive way of compensating for the deficiencies of the RSIPF by, for example, creating a proxy police force, since the CO's role is different from that of the RSIPF. Moreover, in order to succeed as a linking mechanism with the police along the lines of the Bougainville CAP model, the CO scheme is dependent on the RSIPF's ability and willingness to provide adequate levels of supervision and support. In our view, this would not be possible without a concerted effort,

prioritizing and, at least in the short term, some form of external assistance. The CAP model is only one way the scheme might develop and, in some respects, the least likely under present circumstances. Nor is it necessarily the most appropriate model in all communities.

A consequence of the limited support that has been provided to COs is that they have been largely left to evolve in accordance with local circumstances. An inherent strength of the scheme has been its flexibility and locally driven character, as illustrated particularly by the way local communities have been able to shape it according to local conditions and priorities. This, in turn, opens up broader possibilities in considering the future of the CO project that might also contribute to improved stability in rural communities. We shall discuss these possibilities in terms of the three possible models introduced below.

4.1 How is the CO Scheme Currently Working?

Two dimensions to the CO's role

Members of communities hosting COs envisage two broad dimensions to the role. One involves working closely with local leaders and chiefs to help resolve minor disputes and settle *kastom* matters, and the second is a liaison role with the RSIPF. For the first, there is confusion in some places about role differentiation, particularly between COs and chiefs. As we have seen, a number of chiefs expressed concerns about the potential of the scheme to undermine chiefly authority by introducing an alternative form of leadership in the community, a concern that appears to be largely unfounded in practice. Apart from the fact that many of the COs are themselves chiefs, those who are not have tended to adopt a highly supportive role in relation to local chiefs. It is noticeable that former police officers have particularly embraced a role as enforcers of chiefly power. While the chiefs have been the principal beneficiary of this practice, it can, as has already been noted, produce less favorable outcomes for others, notably women and youth.

Regarding the second dimension of the CO's role, communities have generally welcomed the prospect of improved RSIPF responsiveness to requests for assistance with serious local problems. The way the scheme was introduced to communities, usually involving a visit from a high-level delegation of senior police officers, reinforced these expectations. Likewise, the uniform and training provided to COs, and in some cases, their backgrounds as former police officers, have added to community perceptions that they will work closely with the police. While some of the COs have adopted a quasi-policing style, it is equally clear that people in the communities visited tend to have a much broader perception of the CO's role. This is, in part, informed by earlier schemes such as the ACs, who performed multiple roles, including but not confined to policing. It also reflects the widespread desire to reconnect with the larger system of government that is pervasive in rural areas, as exemplified by comments from the men in Leona village about the CO scheme marking the "return of government" and making them feel that "the government is now with us."

Three models for the future

The manner in which the COs have been working in different places points to three possible models of how the scheme might evolve over time: the *policing*, *justice*, and *community governance models*. Rather than being discrete and mutually exclusive, these are overlapping

models to be distinguished primarily in terms of their differing emphases. To realize its potential, each model requires other changes to take place, such as, for example, enabling the RSIPF to provide regular and effective supervision of village-based COs (policing), rejuvenating the local courts to allow the COs to develop a paralegal role (justice), or establishing subprovincial governance systems linking provincial administrations to village-based systems (community governance).

Policing model

Under this model, the role of the CO would primarily involve:

- Potentially extending the reach of the police in rural areas
- Enforcement and deterrence
- Crime prevention
- Working with chiefs and other community leaders to ensure peaceful and safe communities
- Intelligence and information gathering
- Reporting to the RSIPF
- Helping police with inquiries
- Representing the RSIPF at the local level

This is the preferred model of most of the RSIPF officers we talked with, who thought that COs should be employees of the RSIPF and be given special policing powers. Implementing such a model would be dependent on the RSIPF's ability to provide adequate supervision and support, and that, in turn, would require considerably more effort and prioritizing on the part of the RSIPF, as well as the provision of external assistance. Although they endorsed a quasi-policing or enforcement role for COs, most of the community members we spoke with had a much broader conception of the CO's role, which, in addition to policing and enforcement, included a community governance role (see below). Moreover, we found little enthusiasm for COs to be given special powers among the villagers consulted, with many still having negative memories of the Special Constables appointed during the "tension" years.

Justice model

This model envisages the CO:

- Performing a paralegal role
- Settling disputes through mediation
- Assisting chiefs in settling disputes, particularly regarding *kastom* matters

- Liaising with devolved justice institutions (local courts, customary land appeal courts, timber rights hearings, magistrate’s courts, the RSIPF, and so forth)

This is the kind of role that was raised by a senior member of the legal fraternity with whom we consulted in Honiara. The CO would, among other duties, be involved in providing advice to villagers, assisting in the preparation of legal documents, delivering summons, and so on. Just as the policing model depends on the RSIPF’s ability to perform its supervisory and supportive roles, the justice model is dependent on the further devolution of justice institutions and, in particular, the rejuvenation of the currently moribund local courts. There was strong community support for the return of such courts in most of the places that we visited. The justice model also raises the possibility of involving the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, the National Judiciary, and others in supporting the CO scheme.

Community governance model

This is the broadest of the three models and envisages the CO performing a role that would include:

- Promoting community empowerment
- Helping settle minor disputes
- Linking community/“traditional” authority structures with the broader government system
- Registering vital community information (births, deaths, marriages, and so on), similar to the role of former locally based officials, including the AC
- Providing awareness on issues, including law and order, health, hygiene, and sanitation
- Operating similarly to the VO still found in parts of Western province, organizing clean-up sessions and other public works, and serving as the liaison point with external agencies and actors

This role would also to a large extent be dependent on the development of broader governance structures at provincial and subprovincial levels. The most appropriate “home” for such a role would, in our view, be within these devolved governance systems.

Quasi-police role: maintained but not expanded

The quasi-policing role—working with local chiefs and liaising with the RSIPF—is common to all three models and, as we have seen, forms the core of the CO’s responsibilities as they have evolved since the scheme was commenced. We believe this should remain a critical aspect of the CO role as it evolves further, although not necessarily its only aspect. The inherent flexibility of the CO scheme and its sensitivity to local context and direction is, we believe, its most significant strength and we would be loathe to jeopardize this by being overly prescriptive.

Despite their quasi-policing role, in our view, there is no real need to vest COs with formal policing powers. As described below, the extent to which the RSIPF are currently capable of supervising and regulating COs is extremely limited, and giving them special powers in these circumstances would be taking unacceptable risks. In addition, as the narratives indicate, communities tend to have a much broader conception of the CO that includes but also goes beyond a policing role. The CO is envisioned as someone who can connect with the police as and when necessary, but more importantly, is also seen as someone who can link with local authority structures and help communities resolve their own problems.

In the end, and consistent with our recommendations in section 5, the preferred model should be determined at the provincial rather than the national level, and we can see no convincing reason for a uniform model across Solomon Islands. Again, in line with our recommendations, the key government decision makers in determining the shape and direction of the scheme at provincial levels should be the provincial administration and the provincially based RSIPF, acting in concert and through consultation with community-based leadership.

4.2 The Future of the CO: Specific Issues

Relations with the RSIPF

Almost without exception, the RSIPF we consulted with in the provinces spoke highly of the work of individual COs. Moreover, RSIPF officers who interact directly with COs appear to enthusiastically support and endorse the scheme and wish to see it rolled out further. PPCs are also generally supportive, with one notable exception. Police support seems to derive from the fact that the COs serve as a filter, act as a deterrent, prevent the escalation of small problems, help chiefs, and extend some form of policing power to areas where the RSIPF have no regular presence. Without exception, the RSIPF were in favor of additional powers for COs. Many specifically advocated that COs be sworn in as Special Constables, a view that, it should be pointed out, contrasted with those expressed in most of the communities we visited. In general, there was little community support for the COs being given any additional powers, as some communities still had disturbing memories of abuses associated with Special Constables during the “tension.”

COs report inadequate support from the RSIPF

Despite the RSIPF’s apparent positive views, each of the COs encountered had hoped for a much closer working relationship with the RSIPF. Following their training in Honiara in late 2010, COs expected to engage more regularly with provincial police on returning to their home villages. In most cases this did not eventuate. COs have received little supervision and many have little or no ongoing engagement with the RSIPF. Police rarely visited COs in the field and reports prepared by COs received little, if any, feedback, clearly affecting CO morale; several reported feeling abandoned. At the same time, it is clear from our consultations that COs were not necessarily expecting a lot from the RSIPF, but simply some form of reassurance that they were performing their roles satisfactorily, as well as the opportunity to discuss local issues with their RSIPF contacts. In those places where there has been more regular face-to-face interaction, such as Avu Avu and Malu’u, extremely good relationships have been forged.

Communities disappointed in the RSIPF's lack of engagement

Local expectations about improved police responsiveness and the forging of close working relationships between the COs and the RSIPF have been largely disappointed. As the “*Mekim Senis*” report documents, there are many reasons why the RSIPF has difficulties visiting remote rural communities, though as some of the people we spoke to in Malu’u pointed out, limited interaction is not always a consequence of remoteness or lack of transport. Mobility, by foot and small boat, was integral to the former systems of policing that many older Solomon Islanders continue to reminisce about. Whatever the reasons for today’s lack of mobility, it has done little to restore or enhance community confidence in the police, and has also left individual COs isolated and frustrated, potentially eroding their standing in the community. In the long term, it risks undermining the core rationale of the scheme as a linking mechanism between the RSIPF and local communities.

The CO scheme in its current form has thus done little to restore confidence in the RSIPF. To the contrary, in some places, it has caused further reputational damage due to the RSIPF’s inability to respond to the complaints/reports received. It was also observed that the lack of police engagement after complaints were brought to them undermines not only the credibility of the COs, but also that of the local chiefs and village committees who have been supporting their work.

We have noticed that people in Solomon Islands, like their rural counterparts in other parts of Melanesia, often “store up” problems with a view to passing them over to the police at a later date. Delays in being able to communicate these problems to police are acceptable as long as they are not indefinite and the problems will eventually be dealt with. In the case of Vella Lavella, for example, where the COs claimed never to have been visited by the RSIPF since their return from training in Honiara (October 2010), we were struck by how easily this problem could have been remedied. All that appeared to be required was a boat in working condition in Gizo and a clear prioritization of visits to COs in the regular patrol roster drawn up at Provincial Police Headquarters. Each of the three COs we visited in Vella Lavella could have been visited by Gizo-based RSIPF in the course of one or at most two days.

Security and safety

There is simply no reliable data to establish categorically whether or not COs are contributing to improved security in the communities in which they operate. Circumstances in different communities vary enormously, including factors such as social cohesion, unresolved “tension”-related issues, conflict stresses associated with resource extraction projects, and the prevalence of antisocial behavior related to substance abuse. In the most unstable areas, such as Malu’u in north Malaita, there are obvious limitations to what can be realistically expected from the insertion of one or two COs. The broader factors contributing to breakdown and disputation in different communities are simply not amenable to solutions through policing or justice initiatives alone, and have to be understood and addressed holistically. These factors include issues relating to the inequitable distribution of opportunities and services; dysfunction in provincial representation and governance; the weakening of local authority structures; and the need for a more effective management of natural resources.

There is nevertheless evidence of community perceptions of improved safety that are linked to the presence of the CO. These perceptions are sometimes associated with the approach adopted by individual COs in relation to local troublemakers. For example, the women in Leona claimed that youth are “a bit scared” of the CO, whereas they had not been afraid of chiefly admonitions in the past. In such cases, the presence of the CO appears to be having a positive impact in deterring antisocial behavior.

The link with the RSIPF, no matter how tenuous in reality, also offers the possibility of a police response that provides an additional form of security associated with the CO scheme. This is the “shadow of law” the scheme represents. Whereas previously the prospect of police intervention was remote in the extreme and thus of little deterrent value, there is now at least a chance of police action at some future date. This will never be sufficient to deter hardened criminals, but it may, nonetheless, deter the illegal actions of less committed actors, in much the same way that the presence of security guards, security cameras, or security alarms appear to do in other locations. The broader “return of government” was evoked regularly in our community consultations, indicating that such a prospect can have similarly beneficial effects at local levels. Sustaining these effects is, of course, ultimately dependent on more tangible evidence of a growing government presence and activity in rural areas.

Access to justice

The CO scheme holds considerable potential for improving access to justice in rural communities, although realizing this potential is dependent on a further devolution of justice services. The CO position offers people a new channel for reporting serious offenses to the police and thereby accessing the larger justice system. Each of the COs was aware of his or her duty to report serious matters to the police and almost all were diligent in completing and dispatching their monthly reports. Likewise, there appeared to be little reticence on the part of most community members to report issues of concern to the CO. The weak link in the justice chain in this context is not the CO, but rather, the policing and justice agencies with which the COs are expected to connect.

The RSIPF in the provinces regularly reported that in addition to transport difficulties, one of the main reasons for taking no further action on matters reported by COs or referring them back to the community for resolution was the absence or irregularity of court circuits and the existing backlog of unheard cases. Many of the same officers spoke of the need to increase the number of magistrates available to hear cases, and to rejuvenate the local court system.

While the CO is an important first step, substantive improvement in access to justice depends on other reforms in the justice system. The potential of the CO as the first link in a chain connecting rural Solomon Islanders to national courts will not be realized until these reforms take place. If they do occur, the role of the CO is also likely to change, with its quasi-policing aspect possibly expanding into a paralegal role. Deputy Chief Magistrate Garo indicated this possibility, pointing out that ACs used to be involved in delivering summonses and other court documents, as well as serving as a critical link between the police and native/local courts.

Relations with others in the community

COs have generally worked well with existing community structures, such as chiefs and community and church leaders, as many are themselves chiefs or church leaders and all appear to have high standing in their respective communities. Most have adopted a strongly supportive role with respect to chiefs, attending or participating in chiefly forums and helping enforce chiefly decisions, and in that way, helping to strengthen chiefly authority. Bearing in mind that aspects of this authority are increasingly questioned by sections of the community, one of the most interesting findings was the subtle and creative ways in which some COs are moderating the exercise of chiefly power. The standout case is Louisa Kenny in West Kwaio and her impressive work as an intermediary between local youth and chiefs. Another example is Matthew Kukuti in Leona, whose approach was appreciated by local women for, among other things, ensuring that chiefs “no longer have it all their own way.” These cases illustrate the potential of individual COs to go beyond simply reinforcing existing power relations and become a mechanism by which chiefly authority is held more accountable. In these ways, the CO can act as an agent of change and transformation rather than simply reinforcing the status quo.

Good working relationships have also been forged with local churches, which, in some cases, have strengthened the CO’s role in helping to manage community problems. Several COs, such as Francis Henry in Avu Avu, are prominent church leaders. Churches are an important source of moral authority throughout Solomon Islands and take an active part in community governance. As noted above, the churches provide one of the three legs of the local tripod system in Isabel. Through committees and fellowships, they provide important spaces for women and youth to meet separately and engage in a variety of activities. Again, Matthew Kukuti in Leona village, Vella Lavella, provides a good example. His role has placed constraints on the tendency of chiefs to monopolize decision making and, in the process, has enabled the local church to assume a much stronger position in addressing community problems. Women, in particular, viewed this as a positive outcome. Something similar appeared to be happening in Iriqila village, also on Vella Lavella. The prominent and respected role of churches in community life in Solomon Islands also suggests that they could play a valuable role in any monitoring and accountability systems devised for the CO scheme.

Relationships with other locally based government organizations, such as schools and health clinics, can provide practical assistance to COs. We have seen how the local health clinic in Avu Avu has become an important source for referring cases to the CO. In Iriqila, the CO uses the provincial health service radio network to get messages to the RSIPF at Gizo, where the radio is not working. Sharing communications and transport resources is an important practical way of facilitating the CO’s work. If the scheme becomes embedded in provincial systems, as recommended in this evaluation, some of these issues relating to practical assistance should be easier to facilitate, including the development of working relationships with NGOs and community-based organizations, such as the Mothers’ Union and Save the Children. As with the churches, these organizations might be particularly useful in developing suitable local accountability mechanisms for the scheme.

Appointing COs

Several communities were highly critical of the initial process of appointing COs, though not of the individual COs themselves. Should the scheme be continued and extended, it is important that adequate levels of community consultation occur and that all members of the community are given a voice in the appointment of their CO. Communities are in a much better position than external agencies to identify the most suitable local person for the job since, in addition to knowing the strengths and weaknesses of individual candidates, they also know what kind of qualities they are seeking. Their selection will be influenced by whether they are looking primarily for an enforcer, a mediator, a community organizer, a youth leader, or some other kind of individual. It is also clear that communities want to be involved in any decisions relating to the revocation of appointments, should this be necessary. Moreover, many of those we spoke with find issues of accountability difficult to contemplate while the COs continue to work on a voluntary basis. We believe that the provision of some form of remuneration will provide an additional moral basis for developing local accountability mechanisms.

Although people were critical of the lack of consultation in relation to the appointment of some of the COs, they were particularly critical of the appointment of ex-police officers at the instigation of the RSIPF. Many felt that they are not the right sort of people to undertake the CO work, and as noted above, there is a general rejection of the notion that the CO's role is exclusively a policing one. At the same time, there may be some communities where a former police officer is considered the most suitable person. Ultimately, the choice should rest with the community and not with external agencies.

Women COs

There is broad-based support for the appointment of female COs, although people in some communities felt that men were better physically suited to the work, which entails considerable travel by foot and/or canoe and often involves dealing with intoxicated individuals. That said, it was widely agreed that there are many issues that women find difficult discussing with men, and that female COs would better enable women's issues to be aired. More specifically, it was suggested that male COs have been largely ineffective in dealing with domestic and family violence and disputes caused by adultery, and that they also have often had difficulties engaging with youth (although it is evident that male COs are not always utilized when it comes to dealing with such matters). Some felt that women would perform better on both fronts, and Louisa Kenny's story suggests that this may be the case. Louisa's story also illustrates how women COs can become accepted in even the most conservative *kastom* areas where one might least expect it. We suggest that there is a strong case for appointing both male and female COs, as they each bring different qualities to the role and ideally, will be able to complement each other.

More resources—including remuneration—needed

Apart from strong community support and the enthusiasm of individual officers, COs have very limited resources. At present, COs receive no remuneration, despite the fact that there are real costs involved in the CO work, including time spent away from other income-generating and subsistence activities, such as gardening and fishing. Communities were most critical of this aspect of the project. It was reported repeatedly that COs initially undertook their work diligently and demonstrated high levels of motivation, but that over time this has understandably waned. In

some cases, individual RSIPF officers have provided COs with small acts of assistance: a cup of tea, lunch, money for transport home, and small amounts of outboard motor fuel.

If COs are to function effectively, more support will be required. Further training and allowances are essential, while radio communications and mobility assets are desirable. The kind of training required will depend on how the scheme evolves in the different provinces (see the broad models discussed above) but could include general topics such as an introduction to Solomon Islands' legal systems and laws, and basic mediation and conflict-resolution skills. As noted above, there is considerable scope for using existing RSIPF assets more effectively by, for example, ensuring that CO visits are prioritized in the regular patrol rosters. There may also be scope for encouraging supportive MPs to provide outboard motor boats, radios, and so forth from their Rural Constituency Development Funds. Our consultations revealed that Milner Tozaka, the MP for North Vella Lavella, had promised to purchase outboard motor boats for the COs in Vella Lavella. It should be noted, however, that though contributions like this would help COs perform their duties, we are firmly of the view that MPs should not be in any way involved in the selection and appointment of COs.

5. Recommendations

The CO scheme is not an alternative to an effective and professional police force, and should certainly not be viewed as an inexpensive way to boost police numbers. Nor is it an alternative to getting local courts working again or to developing effective local governance systems. On the contrary, the real potential for the CO will not be fully realized until these other developments occur. If the articulations between the CO and the RSIPF can be improved, the CO scheme presents the possibility of extending police coverage in a meaningful way at local levels, as illustrated, for example, in the prompt rescue of women and children by police at Atori following a telephone report from the CO. There will be costs involved in a broader rollout of the CO scheme,⁶⁰ and its success in the longer term will be dependent on RSIPF capacity to supervise and respond, but these should be considered against the potential costs of not taking any action. Without any doubt, the costs of responding to another crisis originating in rural areas—such as the one that arose in rural Guadalcanal in 1998–99—would be immeasurably greater than those associated with extending the CO scheme.

1. We recommend that the CO scheme be continued but that its further development occurs incrementally on a province-by-province basis. Specifically we recommend that current planning for an extension of the scheme in Isabel, involving close collaboration between the provincial government and the RSIPF in Buala, be treated as a pilot for how the scheme can be adequately administered, funded, supervised, and supported in other provinces. Malaita, whose government has also expressed an interest in incorporating the scheme, would be another suitable pilot.

2. COs should receive a modest monthly allowance to be determined in accordance with relevant provincial government pay scales. Precedents include the existing arrangements for paying ACs in Renbel province, and those being currently devised to pay COs in Isabel province. The RSIPF

⁶⁰ Readers are referred to the separate financial and economic analysis of the CO scheme, Haque, “Evaluation of Community Officers Program – Economic and Financial Analysis” (see n. 14).

should retain responsibility for providing uniforms and other basic equipment, including report forms.

3. The CO scheme should be embedded in SIG systems (national and/or provincial). The manner in which the CO project was initially conceived and rolled out has left it largely detached from SIG systems. In our view, the provincial level of government is most appropriate for deciding whether COs are needed and if so, the appropriate remuneration scales and other issues, such as the number and distribution of COs. Accordingly, the scheme should be funded and administered through provincial government systems, while supervision should be provided through the provincial-based RSIPF.

This arrangement reflects the way that ACs used to be embedded in the provincial government system, and continues to be in Renbel province. Although employed by the Renbel provincial government, ACs in Rennell and Bellona report to the RSIPF. A similar model has been proposed in Isabel and is being considered in Malaita. The close working relationship between the Isabel provincial government and the PPC in Buala provides a good example of how collaboration between provincial authorities and the RSIPF might proceed. The manner in which these partnerships take shape may well vary from province to province but could, for example, take the form of a Memorandum of Agreement between the RSIPF and provincial government. We are well aware of capacity constraints at provincial levels, and would envisage the need for donor support, possibly through existing donor programs at the provincial level.

4. Training of COs should also occur in the provinces as determined by provincial authorities and the RSIPF. In addition to RSIPF inputs for basic policing procedures and legal awareness, other inputs could include practical mediation and conflict resolution skills, dealing with local conflict stresses, provincial and local governance arrangements, gender and youth issues, health issues, human rights, and so on.

5. The initial appointment of COs should be preceded by adequate consultations in the communities concerned. If communities are agreeable to having COs, all members of these communities should be encouraged to participate in their selection and, subject to routine police checks, the ultimate choice should lie with the community. In this regard, adequate selection procedures should be devised through the proposed pilots in Isabel and Malaita to ensure that there is broad community participation in the selection and vetting of prospective COs and that the process is not monopolized by particular interests.

6. Every effort should be made to ensure that more female COs are appointed. In addition to being integrated into community awareness undertaken as part of the extension of the scheme, these efforts also need to be directed at provincial authorities and the RSIPF. The example of the existing female COs (and recommended study—see below) can be used in delivering these messages.

7. Links between the COs and the RSIPF need to be strengthened and more clearly articulated, as do the supervisory arrangements. At present there are no clear supervisory or oversight arrangements for COs, and the critical lines of reporting appear to bypass the provincial level. The RSIPF in the provinces should be encouraged to prioritize regular visits to COs as part of

its routine patrolling schedule. While we appreciate the limited assets available to the RSIPF in many parts of the country, we think that providing reasonably regular visits to COs and improving communications could be achieved relatively simply and without significant additional resources. Community expectations in relation to visits by the RSIPF are actually quite modest. One visit every quarter would be sufficient in most areas, and maybe every six months in other places. It is the absence of any visits at all and the total lack of communication between the RSIPF and COs that is the basis of local complaints.

8. Wherever possible, COs should not be deployed beyond their allocated working zones, the areas and communities that they know best and in which they are best known. The COs are local officials, an integral part of their local communities, and we think it inadvisable that they be considered for deployment outside these areas. Significantly, this is also where their accountability lies. Expecting them to operate in other areas is unlikely to be successful. We approve of the current nomenclature—Community Officers—and think this best reflects the basis of their actual and potential role. They are currently expected to work at the ward level, which we believe is the appropriate unit, although the number of COs should ideally be increased in the larger wards.

9. There appears to be no immediate need for new legislation or legislative amendments. Given that we do not see a need to give COs special policing powers, there is no immediate need for legislative change in that regard. It would, of course, still be possible for COs to be sworn in as Special Constables under the Police Act should the need arise, although we would envisage such a move being taken rarely, if at all.⁶¹ However, legislative amendments would arise if COs become employees of the provincial government, which would likely entail changes to provincial ordinances rather than national legislation.

10. We recommend further analysis of the work of the female COs in West Kwaio, Malaita. Their success, particularly in the area of gender and youth outcomes, is an important story and the sophisticated manner in which they are operating merits further investigation. Government authorities, the RSIPF, and donors should be informed of their work. Further analytical work could also be undertaken on the rollout of the scheme in Isabel and Malaita. This would include monitoring the administrative and financial arrangements through the provincial system, as well as examining practical ways of tapping the potential of local civil society organizations, including the Mothers' Union, to be part of local accountability systems.

6. Risks

More work for the RSIPF and other parts of the justice system

This is certainly a risk should the scheme be extended, but evidence from the pilot scheme suggests that it may be overstated. The existence of 23 COs has thus far not led to any significant increase in the number of serious offenses reported to the RSIPF, although it is always possible that a substantial increase in the number of COs might lead to such an outcome. The most effective way of managing this risk in the long term is to ensure that the RSIPF and other parts of

⁶¹ The Police Act is currently being reviewed, with the issue of the retention of Special Constables being explored. See Solomon Islands Government, "Review of the Police Act 1972," Discussion Paper (Honiara: Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services, 2011), 72.

the justice system are sufficiently capable of dealing with the increasing caseload that they may face. This means the continuation of assistance designed to achieve this end, as well as the further devolution of justice and policing services.

Limited buy-in by national agencies including the RSIPF

There appeared to be considerable interest in the scheme among the senior officials we consulted within the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services; the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs; and among the RSIPF executive. We are aware that buy-in at this level is critical to the further development of the scheme and every effort will need to be made to ensure that these ministries and the RSIPF are involved in this process. The same applies to the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, given its proposed role in the development of the scheme. A practical suggestion would be to form an interdepartmental working group or task force comprising representatives of these agencies to guide and oversee the incremental rollout of the scheme.

Limited buy-in by provincial authorities

Buy-in by provincial authorities is also critical, as this is the level of government we see as the most appropriate for initially determining the need for COs, and the manner of the scheme's administration and rollout, should this be considered desirable. Strong provincial support is a major reason behind our choice of Isabel and Malaita as pilot provinces for establishing and testing the finer details of the necessary administrative and financial arrangements. The relationship between the RSIPF and the provincial administration is also critical to the scheme's success in particular provinces. The Premier's Conference is an obvious forum for informing premiers about the development of the scheme and beginning the negotiating process with particular provinces.

Limited buy-in at community level

As we have seen, the evaluation found overwhelming support for the scheme in all the communities where COs have been established. There, the biggest risk to local buy-in would be when the community feels that it has a limited say in the selection and appointment of COs. As the evaluation makes clear, ensuring that the community retains control over these processes is critical to the scheme's success—and to community buy-in.

In the longer term, there is also the risk that the links to broader government systems do not eventuate. As we have made clear, the CO position is unlikely to achieve its full potential until these connections become more tangible and reliable. It should also be plain that not all communities will want or need the CO scheme, a view expressed to us by community members in Buala village, for example. Others suggested that the CO would not be necessary in places like Tikopia, where small, close-knit community structures are said to continue to function reasonably well. In other places, there may already be an equivalent official, such as the AC in Renbel or the VO in parts of Western province. Avoiding duplication is important and requires close consultation with provincial authorities. The essential point is that COs cannot be foisted onto communities without their active consent, as this would fundamentally undermine the basis of the scheme as a bottom-up, community-driven initiative.

Rolling out the scheme too rapidly

Arguably many of the problems with the pilot are a consequence of its having been rolled out too rapidly. Our recommendation is that future development of the scheme needs to be more incremental and undertaken primarily through agreements between different provincial authorities and the RSIPF. Isabel and Malaita become, in effect, the real pilots in establishing appropriate administrative and financial arrangements, as well as determining the numbers and locations of COs in those provinces. As stated above, not every ward and community will need or want a CO.

Accountability concerns

Accountability issues remain an obvious risk for the CO project. The RSIPF currently feel that they cannot exercise any accountability over the CO, as the CO is not a police employee. If our recommendation to embed the CO in provincial government systems is accepted, the CO will become formally accountable to his or her provincial administration.

We also feel that the CO's residency in the community provides another basis for local accountability. COs do not leave the community at the end of the day and are, in effect, under continuous surveillance and evaluation. They are trusted to perform according to community expectations, and failure to do so is noticed and remarked upon—amounting to considerable pressure on individual COs to continue to perform their roles and not lose their local standing. David Rike at Karaka village on Vella Lavella is an extreme example in which all manner of cases are referred to him and he complains of overwork. While we would not recommend this, it does, nevertheless, illustrate the considerable degree of local accountability over COs that is due to their membership in the communities in which they work. When we asked people what they would do if a CO went “bad,” they had no hesitation in saying that they would report him or her to the relevant employer (most people mistakenly believe that the COs are currently employees of the RSIPF). We also think that there is considerable scope for enhancing local accountability in relation to vulnerable groups, notably women and youth, through engagement with relevant NGOs and church-based organizations that operate in the particular province, such as the Mothers' Union and Save the Children in Isabel (see recommendation 10 above).

Gender bias and oppression of specific groups

This has also always been a risk, particularly when all the COs initially appointed were men, and especially because of the close working relationship that is expected to develop between the COs and local chiefs, who are almost exclusively males. The most effective way of managing this risk is to ensure that more female COs are appointed. As we have seen in the case of Louisa Kenny in West Kwaio, women COs can be effective intermediaries for youth and women and, in the best scenario, can subtly work to transform chiefly and other male attitudes with respect to issues of gender and youth. Another strategy is to encourage younger people, male or female, to become COs, and/or to arrange for relevant churches and NGOs that work on gender and youth issues to contribute to the training of COs and/or be involved in monitoring their performance.

Payments for COs mean payments for chiefs

This is certainly a risk that we anticipated when embarking upon our fieldwork and we raised it directly in our community consultations. With the exception of the chiefs in Avu Avu, nobody thought it was a significant issue, since it was generally recognized that chiefs perform a very

different role, operating primarily through *kastom* and fulfilling traditional leadership functions in their community. The CO, on the other hand, was generally seen as linked to authorities outside the community, much the same way as other “government” employees such as teachers and health workers. As mentioned in the evaluation, the payment of an allowance will also enhance the basis of accountability for the CO. Typically, and unlike chiefs, the CO who fails to perform or who engages in unlawful or inappropriate behavior can, in theory, be removed.

Inadequate support from the SIG (and the RSIPF)

We have already seen the risks associated with inadequate support provided by the SIG and the RSIPF. The energy levels of individual COs inevitably drop as they devote less time to their duties and more time to ensuring the well-being of their own families. While none of them have completely stopped working—in large part due to the pressure of fellow community members’ expectations—it should be expected that many of them eventually would. Their standing in the community would also inevitably be affected.

The most critical issue, as pointed out in the evaluation, is that the COs can only fulfill their full potential with adequate levels of support. While there are costs involved, these remain relatively small compared to those that are likely to eventuate if instability and conflict on a significant scale were to return to rural communities. We feel that embedding the CO scheme at the provincial level of government, where there is better knowledge of local circumstances, is more likely to attract the support needed for long-term sustainability.

Annex: Terms of Reference

Objective

The objective of this evaluation is to assess the Community Officer (CO) scheme initiated by the Royal Islands Police Force (RSIPF) in late 2009, with assistance from the Participating Police Force (PPF), as the trial of a new community policing mechanism. The findings of the evaluation are intended to assist the RSIPF ascertain the way forward for the scheme.

Specific tasks

- a) Review the RSIPF/PPF project documentation, operational reports, and paper prepared following the October 2010 Community Officer Conference;
- b) Identify the actual and perceived role of COs through consultations with COs and members of their communities;
- c) Assess whether COs are contributing to improved security, access to justice, and perceptions of safety;
- d) Identify how COs are working with existing community and government structures, such as chiefs, community and church leaders, existing community governance structures, the RSIPF, and provincial governments. This includes consideration of selection and appointment processes, as well as any relevant decentralization prospects such as the revival of local courts;
- e) Consider the prospects for women becoming COs;
- f) Consider existing resources available to COs and what resources, including matters of remuneration and training, are necessary for them to function effectively, bearing in mind likely financial constraints;
- g) Assess RSIPF supervision and management structures in relation to the CO scheme; and
- h) Assess levels of knowledge of and support for COs within the RSIPF and among PPCs in the provinces visited.

The Draft Evaluation report will include:

- Any organizational and resourcing implications for the RSIPF that would arise from the future rollout of the CO project;
- Broadly, any new legislation or legislative amendments required;
- If financial remuneration of community officers is recommended, modalities by which such payments could potentially be made;

- An outline of key risks involved with a possible future rollout of the CO project scheme, and suggestions as to how identified risks could be managed;
- A broad outline of how the future performance of COs could best be monitored and evaluated and the desirability or otherwise of instituting a formal complaint-handling mechanism in relation to COs;
- Gender- and youth-specific analysis, including whether existing community officers are responsive to the gender-differentiated needs of the communities visited;
- Future analytical or programmatic work that may need to be undertaken.

This Evaluation assesses the performance of the Solomon Islands' Community Officer project, a trial community policing mechanism initiated by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force with assistance from the Participating Police Force of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. The Community Officer project sought to establish a link between police and existing local leadership structures, and serve as a mechanism for addressing dispute and grievance at the local level that was not being reported or investigated. The Evaluation finds that the Community Officer project holds considerable potential for improving access to justice in rural communities and presents recommendations for the future possible expansion of the project, drawing on fieldwork conducted by a team of J4P researchers in the second-half of 2011.

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