

PEOPLE'S SURVEY PILOT 2006

SOLOMON ISLANDS

SUMMARY

Conducted by
ANU Enterprise P/L and
The Australian National University
on behalf of the Regional Assistance
Mission to Solomon Islands
(RAMSI).

Complete copies of the People's Survey Pilot
2006 can be found on the RAMSI website:
www/ramsi.org.
Go to *useful information*



The People's Survey Pilot 2006 interview team.
Photo: Dr Christine McMurray



Fifty-eight Solomon Islanders were recruited and trained to conduct the interviews.

Photo: Dr Christine McMurray

‘The People’s Survey Pilot 2006 provided valuable information and experience in developing tools to survey community perceptions.’

4

Provinces (& Honiara)

58

Interviewers

1085

Questionnaires

31

Focus groups



Men and women from four provinces were interviewed in their local village.

Photo: Dr Christine McMurray

‘An important finding was the high value respondents in all four age and gender groups placed on the opportunity to freely discuss and answer questions on issues of central importance to their lives.’

59%

‘Law & order improved’

77%

‘Voted in election’

92%

‘Youth unemployment is a problem’



Photo: Dr Christine McMurray

OVERVIEW

The People's Survey is one of the components of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) Performance Framework that provides indicators for measuring country-level and program-level objectives and outcomes. The People's Survey Pilot 2006 was a voluntary questionnaire-based representative sample survey of a cross-section of the Solomon Islands population, taking into account age, education, gender, income level and geographic location. The Framework listed 10 Performance Indicators for which the Survey would provide data:

Country level:

1. Growth across Solomon Islands
2. Public sector capacity and capability
3. Public accountability
4. Security Peace and order

Program level:

5. Community confidence
6. Community perceptions on level of accountability of the Royal Solomon Islands Police
7. Public awareness of, access to and satisfaction with legal services
8. Public perceptions regarding scale of official corrupt practices and maladministration
9. Levels of public awareness of good governance, roles of citizens and their representatives in government
10. Changes in the public's perception regarding access to their National member of Parliament.

ANU Enterprise was contracted by AusAID to design and implement the People's Survey Pilot in 2006. The survey was undertaken in three distinct phases: design; implementation and data collection; and data analysis and reporting. Its two instruments were a quantitative, questionnaire-based survey that covered the 10 nominated performance indicators, and focus group discussions on selected topics. The survey took place in selected areas of Guadalcanal, Honiara, Malaita, Western and Choiseul, 1 - 8 May 2006, with interviewer training 20 - 29 April.

A total of 1085 respondents completed the questionnaire (45 more than the target), comprising approximately equal numbers of men, women, young men and young women. Thirty-one focus group discussions also took place, and the comments of participants in these discussions help to flesh out the questionnaire data. The three phases of the survey were completed within four months, operating throughout the post-2006 election conflict in the Solomon Islands.

The People's Survey Pilot 2006 provided valuable information and experience in developing tools to survey community perceptions. While the small number of people interviewed means that the results do not represent the views of the whole country, they do provide some valid insights into community perceptions in the surveyed areas and differences between groups.

An important finding was the high value respondents in all four age and gender groups placed on the opportunity to freely discuss and answer questions on issues of central importance to their lives.

The People's Survey 2007 will build on the experience of the Pilot Survey and be conducted in partnership with the Solomon Islands Statistics Office. The People's Survey 2007 will be larger and therefore provide representative baseline data on revised performance indicators. These indicators will measure performance against agreed Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI priorities.



Local household economic issues are critically important to villagers.

Photo: Dr Christine McMurray

KEY FINDINGS

This section summarises some of the key findings of the People's Survey Pilot 2006. The summary percentages presented here are for the entire sample of respondents.

Growth across Solomon Islands

- Perceptions of the level of prices of basic goods and of current household economic situation were generally negative.
- Eighty-seven per cent of respondents said prices were too expensive
- Seventy per cent said their household economic situation was worse than in the previous year while 14 and 15 per cent respectively said it was the same or better.
- The majority expected their financial situation to be the same (20 per cent) or worse (43 per cent) in two or three years.
- Focus group comments provided hard evidence of price increases, e.g. in Guadalcanal the cost of a litre of kerosene had increased from \$5.00 to \$15.00. Malaitan respondents said a kilo of rice cost \$5.00 in 2005, but had increased to \$7.00-8.00 at the time of interview. Bread had increased from 20 cents in 2005 to 50 cents or more in 2006, and soap from \$1.00 to \$2.00 or more. 'Everything we earn is absorbed in the price of goods, which are way too high...we can no longer meet our children's school fees.'

The expected source of assistance for their village/community named by most respondents was the National Government (45 per cent) while 20 per cent named foreign donors such as AusAID, European Union (EU) or JICA.

- Youth employment was perceived as a problem by 92 per cent of respondents. Focus group respondents perceived unemployed youth as a threat to security.
- Focus group respondents tended to be pessimistic about future prospects. A Western Province woman said 'I don't see how things will get better. Another tension has now occurred and with it riots and the burning of Chinese homes and property...In the last tension there was no destruction of Chinese property. Chinese businesses provide income for a lot of Solomon Islanders, including the government. But the most recent riots have completely destroyed all the Chinese buildings and property and most of them have now left the Solomon Islands. For instance, one man employed about 600 people in his hotel and casino. Where are those people now? It looks to me like the worst is still to come. And if things get worse there in Honiara, then they will get worse here too.'

Public sector capacity and capability

- The majority of respondents visited a health facility five times or more in the year preceding the Pilot Survey (58 per cent).
- The main source of health services was the national government (72 per cent).
- Thirty-two per cent of respondents were always satisfied with the services they received and 48 per cent sometimes satisfied.
- Forty-seven per cent thought that health services were better compared with a year ago, and 64 per cent expected them to be better in the future than at present, while 23 per cent did not have an opinion.
- Thirty-five per cent thought the main source of assistance for health services should be the National Government, while 19 per cent thought it would be donors such as AusAID, EU, and JICA, with 38 per cent not answering this question.
- Sixty-four per cent thought schools had improved in the past year, but 28 per cent thought they were worse.
- Twenty-six per cent thought roads had improved, with slightly more saying they had deteriorated and almost half saying they had stayed the same.

Community Confidence

- Thirty-six per cent of respondents rated their village as safe and peaceful, 52 per cent said there were sometimes law and order problems.
- Fifty-nine per cent said the law and order situation had improved in the past year and 9 per cent said it had deteriorated.
- Men in focus groups pointed out that the security situation is variable and attributed many of the problems to *kwaso* (locally brewed alcohol) and marijuana abuse. In Western Province it was said that the presence of logging operations was contributing to insecurity because they led to land disputes and conflict within clans.
- Forty-six per cent perceived the level of property crime as less than a year previously and 26 per cent as the same.

- The level of violent crime was perceived as less by 48 per cent and as the same by 25 per cent.
- Sixteen per cent thought property crime had increased and 12 per cent said violent crime had increased.
- Marked variations by age and gender group and substantial 'Don't know' responses suggest that women and young people may feel more vulnerable to these crimes or have less confidence that they are under control.

Police accountability

- Forty-eight per cent of respondents had experienced a robbery or theft from their garden in the past year, and 28 per cent said the crime had been reported to the RSIP.
- Of those who reported, 25 per cent were satisfied and 63 per cent were not satisfied with the action taken by the police, while 59 per cent said they were treated with respect. Women were less likely to report that they had been treated with respect (48 per cent).
- The most common reasons for not reporting a robbery or theft was that it was not expected that the police would do anything (26 per cent), there were no police in the area (16 per cent) or there was no evidence (14 per cent).
- Forty-three per cent of respondents would complain directly to the police if they thought a police officer was corrupt, but 20 per cent would prefer to report to their village chief.
- Sixty-three per cent thought it safe to complain against a police officer, but women, both older and younger, were less likely to say they would feel safe (53 and 44 per cent).
- Virtually every respondent had heard of RAMSI, 92 per cent had seen a RAMSI officer in the past three months, and 32 per cent had spoken to one.
- More preferred to report a crime to the RSIP (44 per cent) than to RAMSI (35 per cent), with 17 per cent saying it would depend on the circumstances.

- Sixty-five per cent thought violent conflict would return to Solomon Islands if RAMSI left in the near future, and 21 per cent were not sure.
- Seventy-five per cent thought RAMSI should intervene if there is violence in a village. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents knew that RAMSI's mission is to strengthen and improve government as well as to help keep the peace.
- The preferred method for RAMSI to assist with service provision was for it to train Solomon Islanders to provide services rather than to provide them.
- Some focus group respondents thought that RAMSI and RSIP had similar roles regarding maintenance of security and said both were providing these services, but some would have liked to see a greater RAMSI presence in their community. Most shared the sentiment of a Malaita man 'People in our community want RAMSI to stay on and monitor what is going on in our communities. Our country is not straight yet.'
- on the case, and 75 per cent of those (44/59) said the lawyer was satisfactory.
- Fifty-eight per cent of the reported crimes went to court (81/139 reports), and 57 per cent of respondents who said a crime had gone to court said the trial was fair (46/81).
- The main reasons given by 118 respondents for not reporting more serious crimes included not expecting the police to do anything (25 per cent) and no police in the area (12 per cent).
- Nine per cent of respondents who did not report a crime said they were scared of the police.
- From 50 to more than 60 per cent of those who reported the crime to their chief, other leaders, church leaders or 'local boys' said they were satisfied with the outcome, which is similar to the 57 per cent who thought the outcome of a court trial was fair.
- Since only 24 per cent of respondents had a victim of a major crime in their household in the past year and no details were asked about the nature of the particular crime being described, the findings on how crime is handled are less robust than other parts of the Pilot Survey.

Access to justice

- Forty-one per cent of respondents said they would prefer to use custom law rather than modern law to resolve a dispute with a neighbour, and 47 per cent said it would depend on the circumstances.
- Twenty-one per cent had wanted to take a case to court, and of these, 51 per cent had done so.
- Thirty-seven per cent of all respondents said they knew someone who was prevented from using the court system by the high costs.
- Thirty-seven per cent of all respondents knew that free legal assistance is available.
- Twenty-four per cent of all respondents (263) had a victim of a major crime such as robbery, assault, murder, rape or inter-group fighting in their household in the past year.
- Of these, 69 per cent (139) said the crime had been reported to the police.
- Forty-two per cent (59) of the 139 who reported a crime said a lawyer had worked

Public accountability

- Fifty-seven per cent of respondents thought corruption in the National Government had increased.
- Thirty-nine per cent thought corruption had increased in the Provincial Government and 30 per cent thought it had declined.
- Seventeen per cent thought corruption had increased in their village, and 24 per cent said they had never had corruption in their village.
- Twenty-six per cent of respondents said they would report a corrupt government official to the police, and 25 per cent to the Ombudsman or Leadership Commission.
- Fifty-nine per cent said they would feel safe making such a complaint, but half as many women as men said they would feel safe.
- Fifty-eight per cent thought the Auditor General's Office can help fight corruption, and 57 per cent thought Parliament can help fight corruption.

- Focus group respondents had much to say on corruption, citing many instances within their communities. Most shared the view of the woman who said ‘Corruption is everywhere, not just in the government. It starts in the home, goes on in the community and in the provincial and national government, even in the churches...because the Chief has accepted money, he simply says the other side has won the case.’ Some, however, regarded corruption as a foreign concept, and said that giving gifts in return for favours is an intrinsic part of Melanesian culture.

Acknowledgements

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We look forward to working again with Solomon Islanders early next year to conduct the People’s Survey 2007.

Parliamentary representation

- Seventy-seven per cent of respondents had voted in the 2006 election,
- More rural than urban respondents voted in the 2006 election (84 per cent as compared with 61 per cent).
- Eighty-three per cent knew about the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF), and 37 per cent said their MP had spent RCDF funds in their electorate prior to the 2006 election.
- Eighty-two per cent were aware that MPs are required to represent their interests in Parliament, and 30 per cent thought their MP prior to the 2006 election had done so.
- Forty-five per cent said their candidate in the 2006 election had visited their village before the 2006 election, 35 per cent expected another visit, and 39 per cent expected their MP to serve them well in the next or three years.
- There were high levels of ‘Don’t know’ responses as regards future expectations (42 and 38 per cent).
- Focus group participants were concerned about corrupt representatives and spoke of candidates bribing voters during the 2006 election. They also said it is unsafe to report corrupt officials ‘because of what will be done to us in retribution. If you report them they might come back and beat us up...If you are the reporter you will feel more insecure reporting an MP or Provincial Government member because the retribution will be even stronger.’