



INSIGHT SERIES

Benefits of locally-led development approaches in infrastructure

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Overview

Australia's Solomon Islands Infrastructure Program (SIIP) aims to build the capacity of the local construction sector to successfully tender and deliver quality, inclusive infrastructure safely, on time and on budget. Since 2021, SIIP has been working towards this goal through three complementary strategies:

1. capacity building the construction sector through activities such as the [Workforce Skills Series](#)
2. maximising local procurement opportunities on SIIP-managed infrastructure projects
3. on-the-job mentoring of local contractors delivering SIIP-managed projects.

The Tulagi Market refurbishment, undertaken by local contractor Motawa Enterprises¹, is a clear example of how these complementary strategies can build local capacity. Motawa's participation in Workforce Skills Series training and subsequent mentoring sessions helped them understand Australian tender requirements in areas such as worksite safety and tender writing, leading them to successfully tender for the Tulagi Market Refurbishment project. SIIP provided ongoing support, including on-the-job mentoring during the delivery phase to help Motawa meet SIIP's health and safety requirements – something not usually provided by contract managers, but vital to meet capacity building objectives.

The implementation of SIIP-safety practices has since been maintained by Motawa management and staff on subsequent projects. Motawa also report that the experience gained from working with SIIP on the Tulagi Market project has provided them with confidence and the foundation to tender for projects of other development partners.

The Tulagi Market refurbishment demonstrates how quality, inclusive infrastructure can be delivered to standards development partners require, if combined with capacity development activities across the infrastructure life cycle - from tendering, contracting and through construction. As a result, the refurbishment has provided vendors with a safer, more functional environment for vendors to sell produce and earn vital income for their families, as well as features to make it more accessible for people with disabilities.

Context

The Solomon Island construction sector consists of over 100 companies, many of them small and competing for a limited pool of small scale infrastructure projects. Most companies face a range of challenges in tendering and delivering projects for development partner clients. An earlier SIIP Insight Series, [Building Local Construction Sector Capacity](#), explored SIIP's Workforce Skills Series initiative, which aims to help local companies overcome some of the barriers to tendering and winning Australian-supported work.

SIIP not only funds infrastructure projects with a focus on local content, but it also delivers capacity building activities, such as the Workforce Skills Series workshops and smaller group mentoring that help improve the

SIIP's Workforce Skills Series



In 2022, SIIP initiated the Workforce Skills Series to build the capacity of local companies to successfully tender and deliver quality, safe and inclusive infrastructure.

To date (August 2024), the series has delivered eight workshops and six mentoring sessions, attended by over 560 local construction sector workers. In addition, 76 people from the construction sector have taken part in a *Safety at Work* training delivered through the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC).

¹ Motawa Enterprises started in 2015 as an electrical and air conditioning contractor to other construction companies and expanded into construction in 2018.

knowledge and skills of the local construction sector. Infrastructure projects managed by SIIP provide an opportunity for local companies to gain experience in delivering projects to Australian standards, while receiving on-the-job mentoring by SIIP personnel to further build their capacity.

SIIP's [Local Content Strategy](#) and [Capacity Development Strategy](#) detail the approaches taken by SIIP to build the capacity of the local construction sector to benefit from the pipeline of projects that the program will deliver. This approach can be summarised in the following diagram:



Diagram 1: How SIIP's end of program outcomes work together to enhance the Solomon Islands construction sector

The Tulagi Market Refurbishment Project



Tulagi is the capital of Central Province, Solomon Islands. Tulagi Market is a centre of economic activity for the Tulagi community and nearby islands. Small subsistence farmers who are unable to travel to the larger centres of Honiara (Guadalcanal) or Auki (Malaita) rely on Tulagi Market for income.

Tulagi Market was originally built by Australia's Community Sector Program around 2005/06. The market is approximately 350 square metres and accommodates up to 50 vendors.

Tulagi Market was identified for refurbishment as part of SIIP's broader Provincial Markets Redevelopment Program. This was Motawa's first direct donor-funded project. It created work for 22 people, including seven from the Tulagi community.

The refurbishment works included constructing timber railing and a 1.2m brick wall at sections of the perimeter, an access ramp, new roofing and lining, three new water tanks, painting and a 2m security fence around the market.

Capacity Development to Optimise Local Content



Picture: Motawa team with Australian High Commissioner HE Rod Hilton (right) during a site visit.

Motawa’s Managing Director, Rodney Kavamauri, and staff, attended five of SIIP’s Workforce Skills Series workshops.² Rodney’s participation in the Tender Preparation (October 2022) and Contract Administration (January 2023) workshops helped Motawa to prepare a tender response for donor-funded projects like Tulagi Market.

“Responding to the Tulagi Market tender was simple enough because of attending [SIIP’s] Tender Preparation and other workshops.” [Rodney Kavamauri]

The difference between Tulagi Market and previous tenders Motawa has won was that after winning the tender, there was a lot more due diligence of systems, policies and plans. Rodney’s proactiveness and commitment to growing Motawa motivated him to attend SIIP’s training prior to tendering for Tulagi Market, namely on Gender Equity, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Policy (March 2023), Environmental Impact Assessment (June 2023), and Workplace Health and Safety (August 2023).

“If SIIP did not provide the [Workforce Skills Series] training, I would not have had the policies, and I would not have been able to meet the tender requirements”. [Rodney Kavamauri]

As a result of attending the workshops, Motawa developed several policies: Health, Safety and Environment (HSE), GEDSI, Safeguards, Environment, Waste Management, Fraud. Following the awarding of the Tulagi Market project, SIIP worked with Motawa to improve some of the policies, and help them develop Tulagi Market-specific plans ahead of signing the contract, such as a Quality Management Plan, Health, Safety and Environment Plan, Waste Management Plan, and Environmental Management Plan).

Motawa has submitted comprehensive Environmental, Occupational Health and Safety, and Quality management plans in subsequent tenders for development-partner funded projects.

Policies and plans are important, but what matters more is their implementation. To this end, Rodney as Managing Director has instituted a cultural change that placed safety at the heart of how Motawa’s personnel undertake their work.

² WSS Workshops: Tender Preparations – Rodney and another staff (2022), Contract Administration, GEDSI Policy, Environmental Impact Assessment, Workplace Health and Safety – Rodney (all in 2023); WSS Mentoring Sessions: Developing a Job Safety Analysis (JSA) and Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS), Rodney; and Safe Management of excavation on Construction (both in 2023); APTC Safety At Work course – Rodney and two staff (2023)

“Before, staff would jump straight into their construction tasks. Now at start of the day, they have toolbox talks, assess the site and situation and look for risks, make sure all the tools are safe, and let me know if I need to replace tools and equipment. These are an expense, but it is money well spent”. [Rodney Kavamauri]

The focus on safety was reinforced through SIIP’s on-site personnel that helped provide direction when needed, and helped identify and resolve risks. Through this direction, Motawa established a structured approach to daily/weekly site planning, including:

- Daily site reports (both SIIP and Motawa)
- Daily pre-start and planning meetings
- Weekly and monthly reporting templates
- Worksite safety reviews and the correction of poor work practises
- Positively reacting to safety observations and improvements.



Picture: “Worksite safety was proactively embraced by Motawa, and specifically Rodney, as the company owner”. [James Hogan, HSE Manager SIIP (pictured left), with Rodney and staff at a mentoring visit.]

According to Rodney, the Tulagi Market project involved a lot more client supervision compared to other projects, such as SIIP coming on site to monitor progress and checking the quality of materials used. SIIP nearly always had a supervisor on site, who were able to answer questions and help facilitate on-site progress. Enoch Paekera, Motawa’s engineer, noted that the line of communication from SIIP to the contractor was very clear.

“If there is a management issue, we talk to Rodney, and he forwarded it to SIIP. With technical issues, we talk to them [SIIP site personnel], so it is easy for us to communicate.”

“Having SIIP staff on-site helps us build our capacity and be able to answer our questions regarding some of the tasks we are doing”. [Mickey, Motawa Site Supervisor]

SIIP personnel were also able to increase workers’ knowledge of safe work practices, and make sure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was used all the time. At first, some workers found it hard wearing PPE on hot

days, but now appreciate it as common safety practice. Rodney makes sure that PPE is mandatory even on subsequent projects for other clients:

“If they don’t have safety boots on, they go home”.

This change in safety culture was also noted by Motawa’s Site Supervisor, Mick Tufunga:

“We were not used to, or comfortable wearing PPE during work in our previous projects. Now we put them on every day and it has become normal for us.”

The Tulagi Market project provided Motawa with their first experience with reporting requirements for Australian-funded projects (e.g. incident reporting and regular contractor reports). Whilst Motawa had reporting requirements in previous projects, they were less extensive. Rodney noted that he now sees the value of reporting, for example in keeping a record of issues to learn from. Rodney indicated that reporting now forms part of how Motawa works, even when not required by the client.

“The practices put in place are now the way forward. There are so many contractors, this helps us stand out.”

The Tulagi Market Master observed that this project demonstrated better management than other previous local projects, with the project not being delayed by insufficient or lack of materials.

A refurbished, safer and more inclusive market

The Tulagi Market refurbishment demonstrates how quality, inclusive infrastructure can be delivered to required development partner standards when combined with capacity development activities across the infrastructure life cycle- from tendering, contracting and through construction.

There has been positive feedback on the refurbishment from market vendors, the Market Master, and the Provincial Government.

“The market has been restored and even improved – bringing a revitalised place for our community to buy and sell fresh produce. I’d like to thank the Solomon Islands Infrastructure Program team, as well as local contractor Motowa for their efforts to deliver the market on time, and to such a high quality.” [Premier for Central Province, Hon. Michael Salini]

Increased safety

Market vendors noted that improved safety, mainly due to the installation of a perimeter security fence, was the most important outcome of the refurbishment. The fence was requested by mostly women vendors, during scoping. Like many markets in Solomon Islands, women travel to the market from distant communities and remain at the market until their produce is sold. Tulagi Market can have between 10 and 20 vendors sleeping overnight, sometimes with children. Before the refurbishment, these women faced safety issues at night with drunk people sometimes disturbing them as they slept. Inclusion of infrastructure users in project design, in this case women, has alleviated this problem.

“I am very happy with our market, now I sell my products in market that is new and clean, access to water and safe.” [Local vendor, Rose Prudence]

Improved inclusion

The original market was inaccessible to wheelchair users and others not able to use the steps to the market floor. The refurbishment installed a new ramp and handrail, along with concrete pavement, to improve accessibility, and people with disabilities can now better access the market.

The refurbishment also installed and connected three new rainwater tanks, and fixed an existing water tank. This has allowed vendors to easily access drinking water. Prior to the refurbishment, vendors, especially those from distant communities, would need to visit ‘wantoks’³ within Tulagi township to access water.

³ Kin, whether relatives or community members speaking the same language

Enhanced climate change adaptation

The increased water storage provides more water for market users as well as the Tulagi township, enhancing their resilience to low rainfall and periods of drought.

The market's new roof and brick walls around the perimeter of the market floor also provide improved protection against rain and sea spray.



Picture: “We used to brave very harsh weather conditions at our temporary market site, so that is why we are very happy with this new market.” Market vendor, Lilian Aitora

“At the temporary market site which we have been using for the past months we face harsh weather conditions. When it rains, there will be no market as we the vendors from nearby villages cannot come into Tulagi with our produces. Which means people in Tulagi residents are without their source for local produces and us the vendors miss out on a day’s income to meet basic needs for our families. [Market vendor, Hilda Kui]”

As noted by the Provincial Government engineers, the refurbishment used quality materials, in particular the roofing which will be more resilient to rusting. The Provincial Government will fund six-monthly proactive maintenance to ensure the benefits of the refurbished markets are realised into the future.

Conclusion

The Tulagi Market refurbishment demonstrates the positive outcomes that can be gained through locally led development strategies and complementary capacity development to enable greater levels of local participation.

SIIP’s objective to maximise opportunities for local contractors to benefit from infrastructure projects still requires contractors to meet certain requirements, for example around safety policies and plans, that are not always necessary for other local clients. SIIP’s Workforce Skills Series, encompassing large workshops, and smaller mentoring sessions, have demonstrated positive outcomes for local companies.

Motawa Enterprises has used capacity development opportunities provided by SIIP as a springboard to successfully tender and deliver their first development partner funded project. Critically, Motawa has demonstrated a commitment to learn and institute changes within the company to ensure that the new practices are maintained and allow the company to grow further. Their improved policies and plans have been noticed in subsequent tenders.

Summary Lessons



- **Capacity development needs to be tailored to the barriers faced by local contractors across the different phases of a project** – tendering, contracting, and project delivery. SIIP has undertaken its own research as well as working with other stakeholders to identify common areas of improvement needed, for example in responding to tenders, in order to shape the content of workshops.
- **Small group mentoring is an important complementary activity to larger workshops.** Such sessions, accessed by motivated companies, allow capacity building in different formats and can focus on more specific topics and allow more discussion. SIIP added mentoring sessions to the Workforce Skills Series in 2023 and local contractors attending them have provided positive feedback.
- **On-site capacity development is important to reinforce group-based learning.** SIIP's site supervision provides a means for worksite-based mentoring that helps reinforce previous capacity development, as well as responding to new learning opportunities. Whilst the Tulagi Market refurbishment was a relatively short project, longer projects provide an opportunity for on-the-job learning across trade skills and project management.

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