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Action Research in a Remote District in Papua New Guinea

Final Report

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Action research on gender equity and social inclusion in Abau

Executive Summary

Research team: Terry Evans, Patricia Paraide & Gail Casey

This project investigated whether action research could be used to address ‘grassroots’ community problems in a remote district of PNG. The research team introduced, supported and researched the implementation of a pilot action research project from April to November 2015 in Abau, Central Province. Action research is a form of participatory research often used to enable members of a community to solve current problems in their community. It uses available local resources to improve their own situations with no or minimal use of external resources. Action research involves collaboration—working together—to identify and understand a significant problem that the group would like to solve through the implementation and monitoring (research) of a considered action.

The project was funded by the Australian Government and commissioned through the Economic and Public Sector Program (EPSP) managed by Coffey. The Abau District of Central Province was selected for the pilot project by officers from relevant Government of Papua New Guinea agencies including the Department of Provincial and Local Level Government Affairs, Department of Personnel Management (DPM) and Department of Prime Minister and National Executive Council. Permissions were subsequently secured from the Central Province Administrator, Abau District Administrator and the Open Member for Abau. Given the importance of improving gender equity in Papua New Guinea through measures incorporated in the National Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) policy implemented by DPM, EPSP and the Australian High Commission (AHC) staff in Port Moresby were keen that gender equity was the focus for the pilot project.

The project comprised five visits by the research team to Kupiano in the Abau district. The action research participants comprised people from throughout Abau with interests in women’s and gender equity issues from community groups and agencies in the district. Twenty-five participants agreed to participate at the outset of whom eighteen continued for the entire project. The participants self-selected into five action research groups comprising five people (by chance, four women and one man in each) on their preferred topic. Their topics were: Community literacy, Women in business, Women’s health, Violence against women, and Girls’ participation at school.

The research team provided each participant with a mobile phone connected to a ‘common user group’ (CUG). This enabled each participant unlimited phone calls and SMS messaging to other participants and to the research team. The research team sent weekly sets of SMS messages to all participants to assist their action research work. The use of mobile phones to support action research in remote communities was an important element of both facilitating the action research and of the research on the pilot project itself.

With one exception, each action research group successfully completed a full cycle of action research through to implementing their selected action in their community and
collecting data about its effects. One group spent more time on collecting data to inform its intended action and so the implementation proceeded after the pilot project was completed.

The Abau participants, especially the women, enthusiastically embraced the prospect of learning about, and undertaking, action research on matters of gender equity and social inclusion. Furthermore, the participants, with the structured support—in person and by mobile phone—provided by the research team, were able to enact small action research projects effectively. The mobile phone CUG proved effective although there were some technical limitations and some local problems with phone coverage, but the overall outcome was positive. Future developments in mobile telephony in PNG may enhance the quality and effectiveness of any future action research in remote areas. Future access to social media on phones and tablet computers in PNG may also be beneficial for action researchers in remote districts to network, share ideas and support each other.

The action research teams developed evidence-based understandings of the causes and consequences of the problems that they were addressing through their actions. With such knowledge they were strengthened in purpose and intention to help their own community. This suggests that an extension of this work in other remote areas of PNG may be successful. The following recommendations are offered for consideration.

**Recommendation 1**

*Any future action research initiatives in remote areas address a popular broad community concern that will attract and maintain action research participants.*

**Recommendation 2**

*Consideration be given to future action research initiatives in remote areas focused on GESI.*

**Recommendation 3**

*Consideration be given to ensuring that women are invited, engaged and supported to contribute to future action research initiatives in remote areas.*

**Recommendation 4**

*That future action research in Abau on new topics be considered and that incorporating expertise from the GESI action research be included.*

**Recommendation 5**

*If Recommendation 4 is adopted, then its progress and outcomes be monitored for comparison with the current project reported here.*

**Recommendation 6**

*It is recommended that, in determining action research topics for other remote local districts that a suitable process of consultation and influence over such topics includes national and provincial officials, the local community, and then the novice action researchers exercising final decisions about their topics.*
Recommendation 7
Periodic face-to-face expert support in English and Tok Pisin/Tok Ples be provided for novice action researchers in remote communities.

Recommendation 8
It is recommended that expert face-to-face support in remote communities is designed, structured and sequenced to ensure that the novice action researchers become capable of working independently of any experts.

Recommendation 9
It is recommended that mobile phones within a CUG are deployed for future action research projects in remote districts. This deployment needs to be supplemented with other means of communication appropriate for the district’s circumstances.

Recommendation 10
It is advised that in choosing potential remote districts for action research that good mobile phone coverage is available and, if smartphone, tablet and/or internet facilities are to be incorporated that 3G coverage be available (see, Recommendation 13)

Recommendation 11
If action research is to be enacted on a significant scale, then it is recommended that a central/coordinating agency negotiates in advance for appropriate CUG services and costs with telephone providers. These services should include small group teleconferencing and the ability to add data services and credit for calls beyond CUG calls.

Recommendation 12
It is recommended that planning and provision be made to enable English and, as appropriate, Tok Ples, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu etc to be used in communications for future action research projects in remote districts.

Recommendation 13
It is recommended that the likely developments in, and access to, smartphone technologies and internet-based communications, knowledge access, etc are monitored with a view to appropriate inclusion in the future for action research projects in remote districts and that the mobile phones supplied match the circumstances.

Recommendation 14
That consideration is given to arranging for/assisting local districts to provide a level of continuing communication and practical support for action research teams, providing they sustain their work.

Recommendation 15
It is recommended that planning and development occurs for a PNG action research network.
Recommendation 16

This recommendation relates to options for the development of action research facilitators in PNG: participate in an action research project and facilitate future action research based on that experience; participate in an action research project and complete a planned program of facilitator training; institutionalise formal action research training in a suitable training facility in PNG; and develop an online action research network and resources.

The final report and its recommendations provide a strong basis for further consideration of the use of action research in remote districts of PNG. It is probable that action research can enable local people to identify problems or matters which they wish to address and then systematically to make changes and improvements to such. Given that any such changes are produced in their local communities, they are likely to be effective and sustained. It is important, however, to recognise that local people can only make improvements to matters that are within the power and resources of their community; local action research may identify some problems that can only be solved fully with government assistance. It follows that action research may be a useful component of development for remote districts, but it is not a panacea.
1 Introduction

This report concerns a research project conducted by the authors (‘the research team’) as they introduced and supported the implementation of a pilot project on Action Research in a remote district of PNG. The research project was conducted from April to November 2015 and was funded by the Australian Government through the Economic and Public Sector Program (EPSP) managed by Coffey. Action Research is a form of participatory research often used in community and professional development. The intention was to discover if it could be used to address ‘grassroots’ community problems in a remote district of PNG. The Abau District of Central Province was selected for the pilot project by EPSP staff in consultation with the Provincial and District authorities and with Australian High Commission (AHC) staff in Port Moresby. Given the importance of improving gender equity through measures incorporated in Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) policy produced by the Department of Personnel Management (DPM), AHC and EPSP decided to focus on gender equity for the pilot project.

The project commenced with a meeting at Kupiano in the Abau district in late April 2015. People with interests in women’s and gender equity issues from community groups and agencies in the district were invited to participate alongside District Administration representatives. The meeting comprised about fifty people in total. The research team and staff from EPSP explained the nature of the pilot project to the community members and discussed their views about gender equity matters in their communities. There was a much higher level of interest in the pilot project from prospective participants than expected; the aim was to form one action research group, but the numbers showed that this would be quintupled. People wishing to participate in the pilot project were invited to attend a subsequent meeting four weeks later in early June. Twenty-five participants attended this meeting at which they received guidance from the research team on planning and implementing action research around the gender equity issues identified in the previous meeting. The participants self-selected into five action research groups comprising five people (by chance, four women and one man in each) on their preferred topic. The topics were: Community literacy, Women in business, Women’s health, Violence against women; Girls’ participation at school.

Two further visits (late July, early October) were made to Kupiano with all groups attending, these visits focused particularly on data collection and analysis, as well as providing assistance for each group’s action research, use of mobile phones etc. The fourth meeting in Kupiano was designed as the final visit for the action research. The research team’s fifth and final visit to PNG was originally planned to occur in Port Moresby to release the final report and discuss its implications for the future use of action research in remote communities with AHC staff, the Government of PNG (GoPNG) and others. The third visit showed that the five groups were making such good progress that EPSP and the research team decided that the fifth visit could occur in Kupiano which would enable AHC and GoPNG staff and others to meet the participants and judge for themselves the worth of action research in such communities. Therefore, at the fourth visit, the participants were asked if they wished to meet in Kupiano again in mid November and to present their findings and
outcomes to the assembled guests as part of the research team’s reporting on the pilot project.

As part of the project, each participant was provided with a mobile phone connected to a ‘common user group’ (CUG). This enabled each participant unlimited phone calls and SMS messaging to other participants and to the research team. The research team sent weekly sets of SMS messages to all participants to assist their action research work. Also other messages and calls were to each group’s nominated contact person to check that the group was making progress and to seek occasional administrative responses. The use of mobile phones to support action research in remote communities was an important element of both facilitating the action research and of the research on the pilot project itself. The findings are discussed on these matters later in this report.

The research on the pilot project used qualitative and quantitative methods to collect primary data. Some secondary data were also collected. The report presents and discusses the findings of the research, including a summary of each action research group’s work and outcomes. It shows that the prospect of learning about, and undertaking, action research on matters of gender equity were enthusiastically embraced by the participants in Abau, especially the women. Furthermore, the participants, with the structured support—in person and by mobile phone—provided by the research team, were able to enact small action research projects effectively. This suggests that an extension of this work in other remote areas of PNG may be successful.

After this introduction, the report explains: the project’s brief and aims; the plan, schedule and research design; the implementation; the five action research groups’ work and outcomes; the findings; and the conclusions and recommendations.

2 The project’s assignment, plan, schedule and research design

The project’s assignment was developed by EPSP and the Provincial and Local-Level Governments Program (PLGP) in consultation with AHC in partnership with GoPNG agencies including DPLGA and DPM, and the Central Province and Abau District administrations. The assignment comprised the following elements.

- Develop a strong working relationship with EPSP and PLGP to take advantage of its local expertise in gender equity, media for development, and action research and evaluation to assist the project team and the Abau action research group.
- Create awareness, understanding and secure the support of GoPNG and a provincial administration and a selected district of Papua New Guinea for the introduction of a pilot action research initiative with a focus on gender supported by AHC and EPSP in late 2014.
- Introduce action research to key stakeholders in the province and the selected district as a methodology to explore and understand and improve gender relations in the district.
- Establish an action research group of stakeholders committed to improving the social and economic status of women and girls in the district in 2015.
• Provide regular and on-going technical support to the action research group to conduct its activities for a ten-month period commencing in 2015.
• Ensure regular and adequate reporting from the action research group about the progress of the initiative during 2015.
• Present final reporting of the ten month initiative by November 2015 with findings regarding understanding actions and changes to the social and economic conditions of women and girls; the appropriateness of an action research methodology in a remote district of Papua New Guinea; and the strategies and resources required to broaden the initiative to other provinces and districts in 2016 and beyond.

EPSP consulted with DPLGA and PLGP in the conceptualisation of the project and its involvement led to the recommendation that Abau District in Central Province be invited to participate. This was based on the following criteria:

• the Province and District have active women’s associations;
• Abau is a progressive district;
• there is road access and telecommunications coverage; and
• the local Member of Parliament supported the initiative.

The Central Province’s Provincial Administration, the Provincial Women’s Council (PWC) and Abau District Women’s Association were consulted by EPSP and their agreement obtained to proceed with the pilot action research project.

EPSP and the research team continued during this period to develop the research and implementation plans for the project. It was important to communicate to everyone involved that the research team was not undertaking the action research, but rather it was researching the local participants in Abau as they undertook their own action research. The research team was responsible for teaching the local participants about action research and for supporting them in undertaking their action research. Therefore, the research plan involved the research team collecting data about the implementation and outcomes of the action research conducted by the local participants. The implementation plan concerned how the research team introduced action research to the local participants and assisted them to plan and conduct their own action research on a gender equity topic of their choice. Clearly, there were interconnections between both the (team’s) research and the (participants’) action research.

A further consideration was that if action research was to be feasible for use in remote districts of PNG, it needed to be able to be initiated and supported, at least in the first instance, by people from outside of the district. Two members of the research team were located near Deakin University in Geelong in south-eastern Australia and one at Divine Word University Madang in PNG, a considerable distance from Abau. These geographical circumstances dictated an important practical element of the pilot project: providing support from a distance.

The research plan involved the use of a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect primary data throughout the project, but particularly during the five site visits.
Field notes, documents, photographs (of texts, activities etc), mobile phone data, were the principal means used. Some secondary data in the form of policy documents, reports, mobile phone brochures, service plans etc were also collected to amplify or provide contextual understandings for the analysis of the primary data and for preparation of this report.

The implementation plan was shaped strongly by the project’s assignment (described previously), its schedule with completion due in November 2015 and the research team’s location outside of Abau. It was decided to have a sequence of four visits by the research team to Port Moresby including a field visit to Kupiano in Abau. Kupiano was chose as the optimum location in the district in terms of participants’ travel. A final visit solely to Port Moresby was planned for mid-November to report on the project to EPSP, GoPNG, AHC etc. The day after the third visit to Kupiano a mid-project presentation was given by the research team to EPSP. This presentation canvassed the strong performances of the action research groups to date. This contributed to it being suggested that the public reporting on the project should occur in Kupiano, not Port Moresby, and involve as many of the action research participants as wished to attend. This would enable AHC, the GoPNG and others to meet the participants to judge for themselves the worth of action research in such communities. It was decided to consult the participants about this on visit four and seek their views. They offered strong support for the idea and so the research team’s fifth visit to Port Moresby included a day in Kupiano.

The details of the visits to Kupiano are described below.

3 The visits to Kupiano to support action research

3.1 First visit to Kupiano on 22nd April 2015

The action research work commenced at a meeting at Kupiano on 22nd April 2015. People with interests in women’s and gender equity issues from community groups and agencies in the district were invited to participate alongside Provincial and District Government representatives. The meeting comprised about fifty people in total of whom about 65% were women. After morning tea and introductory remarks by Provincial and District officials and EPSP staff, the research team explained the nature of the pilot project to the community members and the requirements and implications for those who wished to participate. The following points were provided as slides on a screen and in print form.

- The current project is designed to enable a group of members of the Abau community to solve a gender equity problem through action research. The research team will teach the group about action research and assist in the development and implementation of their action research over a period of about six months. This will involve four visits to the community and also, where appropriate, the use of mobile telephone to support the group during the research.
• Action research can be research initiated to solve an immediate problem in a community; or action research can be a reflective process of problem solving by individuals working with others in teams to improve the way they solve problems.

• Action research involves collaboration—working together—to identify and understand a significant problem that the group would like to solve through the implementation and monitoring (research) of a considered action.

• Action research is most productive when everyone collaborates harmoniously to research the problem, agrees to use practical and workable strategies to solve the problem, and shares resources to improve the situation/address the issue.

• Action research enables local communities to use available local resources to improve their own situations with no or minimal use of external resources.

Discussion then followed before and during the lunch break.

After lunch the meeting was split into exclusively men’s and women’s groups to discuss their views about gender equity matters in their communities and ideas they may have for actions that may address such. This was done to enable men and women to share their ideas unfettered by concerns about what members of the other sex might hear or think. Given the overarching policy was for gender equity (and social inclusion) it was anticipated that, although women’s matters and actions would be foremost, there might be men’s matters and actions that could be pursued through action research.

The men’s and women’s discussions yielded many matters and topics for concern around gender equity, some of which were common to both groups. These were shared later in the day in a plenary discussion. The research team members took notes and obtained documents from the afternoon sessions for subsequent analysis.

The day closed with a reiteration of the commitment involved if they were to participate in action research. All of the Abau community members were invited to participate if they wished to do so: participation was entirely voluntary. There was a much higher level of interest in the pilot project from prospective participants than was expected when the pilot project was initiated by EPSP. The original intention was to form an action research group, given that such a group normally might comprise four to six members, the community attendees at the first visit indicated that five or six groups may be formed. People wishing to participate in the pilot project were invited to attend a subsequent meeting four weeks later on 3rd June 2015.

3.2 Second visit to Kupiano on 3rd June 2015

In preparation for the second visit the research team analysed the notes and documents from the first visit to Kupiano. Given the expectation that there may be six groups the gender equity matters that the men and women identified were merged into six themes: Community literacy, Women in business, Women’s health, Violence against women, Girls’ participation at school, and PNG masculinities and gender equity.
In addition, prior to the visit thirty mobile phones and SIM cards were purchased by the research project for exclusive use on a common user group (CUG). The CUG included all the participants and the research team (and the Abau community development officer who organised the meeting venues etc). Most phones were ‘advanced’ mobile phones in that they had a camera and a few other features, such as conferencing, that may assist in action research. A small number of ‘smart’ phones were purchased so that one person known as the ‘contact person’) in each group may be provided with access to internet ‘data’ reliant functions, to help the group’s action research. The research team planned to rely on weekly sequences of SMS messages between visits to Kupiano to participants and, additional messages to the groups’ contact persons.

Twenty-five community participants attended the event, including five men, and also one woman who had not attended the first visit. The research team was accompanied by three EPSP staff (including one with gender equity and one with mobile phone responsibilities). The research team member from Divine Word University spoke Tok Pisin and, consequently, became the principal presenter for the research team during the visits when matters needed further explanation in Tok Pisin.

The visit commenced with a welcome and a review of the gender equity matters raised at the first visit. The participants were asked to indicate which of the matters they preferred to address in their action research. Only two people wished to address PNG masculinities and gender equity, so these were asked to make another choice. This left five action research groups comprising five people including, by chance, one man in each group. Each group was asked to nominate a contact person who had good English skills, familiarity with using mobile phones and access to a reliable mobile phone signal.

The participants were then seated in their groups for the remaining activities of the visit (and usually remained this way for the subsequent visits). They were then asked to discuss, name and describe their particular topics within their group’s theme and then identify and discuss their proposed action(s) to solve a problem (or problems), and/or to make a change(s)/improvement(s) within their topic. The research team and EPSP staff then circulated around the groups to offer assistance in these matters. In particular the research team offered advice on the ‘researchability’ of the topics and actions, and the data and evidence that may need to be collected to substantiate their problem and to verify the success or otherwise of the prospective actions.

Immediately prior to lunch the research team reiterated what was involved in the next five months in order to complete their action research. It was important that they understood that their action research involved working as a group for five months to plan and achieve an action, and to research and document its effects. People were asked to think about and discuss their involvement over lunch.

After lunch people were advised that they were welcome to withdraw from the project if they wished. Nobody withdrew, therefore, five action research groups of five people commence action research projects within the themes: Community literacy, Women in business, Women’s health, Violence against women, Girls’ participation at school. The research team then provided exercise books that included a variety of planning sheets for action research pasted therein (see Appendices 1–4). These
planning sheets were explained to the participants who were encouraged to use them to record their activities in the form of a journal, and for any other note-taking and reflections for their research. The planning sheets included a schedule and helped the participants to develop the first stages that needed to be achieved over the following seven weeks. These planning sheets also provided participants with action research ideas developed from Centre for Enhanced Learning & Teaching (2014); a link to this website was also listed on the planning documents as it provides examples of other community based action research projects. Internet connectivity, however, was extremely limited in Abau; therefore, access to these and other resources was almost impossible.

The research team then distributed the mobile phones and explained the features of the phones and how to operate them. It was explained that they had unlimited calls and SMS messages within the CUG for the duration of the project so that there were no costs involved for them. Information was provided on entering their group’s numbers into the address book and on how to use the CUG for action research. A member of each group with good English skills was nominated to be the contact person with the research team. It was explained that the research team would maintain weekly SMS contact with participants and provide phone call guidance, usually through the contact persons (who received ‘smartphones’), using the CUG.

3.3 Third visit to Kupiano on 29th July 2015

In preparation for the third visit the research team advised the participants via the CUG that they need to come prepared for each group to present a brief report to the attendees on their action research to date. They were also asked to bring their mobile phones with them so that the research team can record the usage data from the phones to supplement the data obtained from the mobile phone network company.

The research team prepared to teach the participants about the types of data that may be collected and analysed, and their strengths and weaknesses for action research. It also planned to teach the contact persons more about the features of their smartphones that may be useful for their groups’ action research.

Sixteen action research participants attended the meeting covering all the action research groups; it was difficult to ascertain how many were just absent on the day and who were in the process of leaving the project. (Eventually, eighteen remained until the end of the project.) The research team was accompanied by two EPSP staff (one with mobile phone responsibilities) and one PLGP staff member (with gender equity responsibilities). The latter was also originally from a local community in Abau and could speak the local language.

After a welcome by the research team the action research groups were given time to discuss their presentation to the participants on what they have achieved to date. They were asked to have 2–3 persons speak for each group and, if they have 1–2 questions, to pose them for the research team to answer by the end of the day. Each group then presented for about five minutes followed by ten minutes’ discussion with the other participants and the research team.
After lunch the research team explained the main forms of data and how to analyse them. Based on what the team noted from the morning session’s questions, this was tailored to the main types of data that people proposed collecting. The research team suggested the types of simple analyses that may be used to help answer their action research questions about the effects and success or otherwise of their actions. The research team used the experience from this session to plan the following weeks’ SMS messages and calls to contact persons.

The groups were given time to discuss their plans and to work on their schedule of activities for the next ten weeks before the fourth visit. The research team encouraged the participants to allocate times to contact each other and to monitor their progress. The importance of declaring, scheduling and achieving individual responsibilities was emphasised as part of the collaborative action research process.

The third visit showed that the five groups were making very good progress, much more than had been expected.

3.4 Fourth visit to Kupiano on 7th October 2015

As described previously, the fourth visit was originally planned as the final action research visit for the participants. Thirteen participants attended for the day. At this point they were expected to have completed one action research cycle. A cycle typically involves: 1 reflecting on a problem and its circumstances (covered in the first visit), 2 planning the action and research (visit 2), 3 implementing the action (between visit 2 and visit 3) and, 4 observing and collecting evidence on the outcomes (between visit 3 and visit 4). So, in this visit it was planned that all the groups would present on their findings. The research team would then emphasise that action research often required returning to another cycle to further refine the solution or improvement to the original problem. (This is often seen as an ‘action research spiral’.)

The participants were advised by SMS message that the first part of the meeting would be devoted to their presentations on their action research and the afternoon would concern the research team’s questions about their experience of, and views about, action research, together with mobile phone use. Again the participants were asked to bring their mobile phones so that the research team could record the usage data from the phones to supplement the data obtained from the mobile phone network company.

Thirteen action research participants attended the day and they represented all the action research groups. Group members advised that four participants were unable to attend the meeting, but were working on their action research. Therefore, eighteen people participated until the end of the pilot project. The research team was accompanied by two EPSP staff (one with mobile phone responsibilities).

After a welcome by the research team the action research groups were given time to discuss their presentation to the participants on the outcomes of their action research project. They were asked to have 2–3 persons speak for each group so that there would be wide participation. Unfortunately, one group only had one member present so the research team provided some conversation with them about their presentation.
The group presentations and a plenary discussion at the end took the majority of the morning. This was followed, prior to lunch, by a survey developed by the research team on the participants’ mobile phone use.

After lunch the research team conducted a form of group interview where each group was posed some questions about their use of action research, use of mobile phones, and their views about the use of action research for gender equity initiatives in their district, province and PNG. Each group then reported in sequence to the meeting on their group’s answers to the questions.

The final session of the day concerned the proposed fifth meeting in Abau and seeking the participants’ consent to attend such. It was agreed that each participant and group should consider their views on the matter and respond through the CUG in the next week. (As stated previously, the participants indicated subsequently that they agreed with the proposal to meet in Kupiano.)

3.5 Fifth visit to Kupiano on 18th November 2015

The fifth visit to Kupiano comprised a presentation by the research team and fourteen action research participants on their work to an audience including the Minister for the Public Service and local member for Abau, the Secretaries for DPM and DPLGA, the Central Provincial Administrator, the Abau District Administrator and other government staff, the Australian High Commission and Coffey. Members of the local community also attended.

The research team and the participants met prior to the presentation to finalise their preparations. The core of the presentation was a sequence of interviews conducted by a research team member with each action research group. A microphone linked to a public address system was used to enable all the attendees to hear the conversation. The interviews were based on the following questions that were sent to the participants in SMS messages two weeks previously.

Why did you choose your issue or problem to solve? Why is this important in your community?

What evidence or information did you decide to gather for your planning? How did you do it? What did your evidence show?

What action(s) did you decide to take? What change(s) were you hoping to achieve? How well did your action(s) go?

What evidence did you collect about the effect of your action? What did the evidence show?

Are you continuing your action research? If so, what are your plans/intentions for your future action research?
The SMS messages enabled the groups to prepare their answers before the visit and then during the preparation time they were able to rehearse their answers together. The conversations were conducted bi-lingually in English and Tok Pisin, thus enabling participants to choose the language in which they felt most comfortable. The participants prepared posters for display that summarised each action research group’s work.

At the commencement of the event, welcoming remarks were made by Mr Trevor Tararau, the CEO of Abau District Administration, with further remarks by Mr Gei Raga, the Central Provincial Administrator. After which, a member of the research team described the research project and its aims and intentions, and the main elements and purposes of action research. Then the aforementioned interviews with the action research groups occurred, followed by a research team member describing the main findings and conclusions from the project, and acknowledging those who contributed to the project’s timely and successful completion.

The gathering was then addressed by Minister for Public Service and Member for Abau, Sir Puka Temu. The Minister described his vision for PNG and Abau, especially in terms of institutionalising ‘rural democratisation’. He argued that the action research projects conducted by the people of Abau were powerful examples of local people taking responsibility in their own communities. He strongly endorsed what had occurred with action research and instructed the PNG government officials to continue with this approach.

Mr Stephen Hills, Acting Counsellor at the Australian High Commission then responded to the Minister’s remarks by expressing his own appreciation of what the action research groups had done. He observed that he was keen for more such activities to occur and that the Australian Government intended to support local community initiatives to enable them to draw on their own resources for their own local developments and improvements.

Concluding remarks were made by Mr Dickson Guina Acting Secretary DPLGA and Mr John Kali, Secretary DPM.

The event concluded with Certificates of Completion being presented to each participant by Sir Puka Temu. This was followed by lunch and an opportunity for the guests to talk to the action research participants about their work.

It is difficult to assess the impact of this event on the people involved. The action research participants appeared delighted to be the focus of such attention from so many important people from the levels of PNG government and from the Australian High Commission. Likewise, these distinguished guests seemed impressed with what had been achieved. The true impact of this event will be discerned in the future when the sustainability of the Abau action researchers activities is known and the extent to which action research is embraced by government and is supported in other remote communities.
4 The five action research groups’ topics, actions and outcomes

Introduction

The participants have varying educational backgrounds. Three of the participants have tertiary education: one (male) is working in the Abau District office and the other two are retired teachers. Of the remaining participants: seven completed grade 10, two grade 9, one grade 8 and two grade 5. It was difficult to establish the educational background for the remaining three participants. Three male participants are employees in the Abau District office.

4.1 Community literacy

The community literacy action research group comprised three women. Two of these women have literacy training experience which was acquired during a past literacy project. Action research was used to address the issue of reducing the number of illiterate adults and young people still found in the Abau communities.

Reason for choosing issue

The group chose to address this issue for their action research project because they were concerned that currently the Abau communities still have illiterate adults and youths. The group reported during the second visit that it was important for social equity and economic participation that Abau people are literate in their own languages—Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu and English—in order to use printed information on health, agriculture, education, church/spiritually, business and politics.

Data collection

The action research participants addressed the question ‘Why are there still illiterate adults and young people in the Abau communities?’ during their action research project. In answering this question they hoped to be able to determine appropriate actions to address the problem.

Data were collected through individual and group interviews. The research participants were of the view that this method of data collection worked well because the participants were able to talk freely during interview sessions. Households were visited to collect data on illiterate youth and adults in them. It was reported that they were nervous when they first commenced their data collection because they felt inadequate. They had never been involved in conducting research and had no experienced with conducting interviews to collect data. However, as they progressed they gained confidence and were able to talk naturally to the interviewees. Data collected showed that the communities in the Abau district still have illiterate youth and adults because they have never been to school or dropped out of school before they could master literacy skills. Those who dropped out of school did so for one or more of the following reasons: difficulty paying school fees, sexual and child labour abuse by relatives with whom they were living to enable easy access to school, illness, some girls not encouraged to go to school, and long distances to travel to schools.

Strategies used to address issue

Tapping into established available resources, such as, church support systems to provided literacy classes for those who are still illiterate, was the main strategy used
to solve this issue. They also used outside support, such as, free printing of literacy resources from EPSP staff. For example, the research participants sought assistance to print literacy materials that can be used in these planned literacy programs.

Evidence of change
It was reported that some illiterate youth and adults have begun participating in literacy classes. At the time of writing it was expected that this would continue and that others may join the classes.

Continuation of action research in future
There are established church programs in the communities. The women have decided that they will use this system to provide literacy programs to those who are interested in learning to read and write in their own languages, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu and English.

It was reported that they will continue to use this system to deliver literacy programs for the illiterate youths and adults. Also the Member for Abau has pledged his financial support for the continuation of the use of action research to solve community issues.

Participants’ benefits from action research participation
The community literacy participants were of the view that their participation in the action research project was interesting and worthwhile. They were also of the view that it enhanced their understanding of the importance of collecting relevant information to deepen understanding of issues during research. They suggested that action research should continue to be applied when researching issues in the communities. The community literacy group have made the decision to tap into existing systems in the church to support literacy work in the communities. The community literacy team had some interaction with the PNG based action research support person during the project. This group succeeded in meeting the target of completing the first action research cycle in the duration of the action research project.

4.2 Women in business
The women in business action research participants comprised three women and one man. One of these women is illiterate, but orally multi-lingual. Action research was used to address the issue of developing ways to assist women starting and growing businesses in the Abau communities.

Reason for choosing issue
The group chose to address this issue for their action research project because they were concerned that currently women in Abau communities have difficulty in developing their limited cash-producing activities into sustainable small businesses using appropriate banking and finance services. Enabling women to achieve these ends would assist gender equity more generally and enable them to have money for their families’ future education, health and other expenses.

Data collection
The action research participants addressed the question ‘How can women grow their businesses?’ during the action research project. The women participants conducted interviews with women in their communities and markets and held women’s group
meetings to collect information on how women are currently running their businesses. It was found that the women interviewed were already participating in generating small income activities in their communities. However, whatever was earned was spent on food or other family needs. Management of earnings was an issue among all women involved. They needed skills on managing what is earned and budgeting for spending and saving in order to grow their business.

Strategies used to address issue
It was reported that the Seventh Day Adventist women’s group made small financial contributions to buy materials for bilum weaving by women. They sold the bilums to earn more money to develop their weaving business. Another women’s group cooked food to sell at markets to earn cash. It was also reported that some women in all the groups sold garden produce, fish, local meat and other wares. The women, however, were unable to save any of their earnings because they spent them all on their families’ needs. In some cases the money was used by the men in the family because the money was not kept by the women. The women also expressed the need to learn about book keeping, budgeting their earnings and to learn about growing small businesses in their communities. It was also reported that some had difficulties with transporting their produce to the markets because transport fares were too expensive and access to transport into town was also irregular. Also there were no markets for some of the items that the women produced like bilums assorted wares, the garden produce and meat. As the action research project progressed, the women began to explore taking loans to start up small businesses. It was reported that this seemed not to work well because of administrative and financial issues. It was noted that these women were not making any profits in their current activities. Therefore, it is uncertain whether these women will be able to make sufficient money to pay off loans if they do receive a loan to start up their business.

Evidence of change
It was reported that women are increasingly interested in starting small businesses. However, they do not yet have the skills to budget their profits in order to save a little and spend wisely on what their families need. It also was reported that a few women have attempted to register for small loans to start up small businesses.

Continuation of action research in future
The action research participants will continue to support women to build up their small businesses. They plan to organise workshops about the basics of running a small business so that the women can start budgeting and begin saving in order to grow their small businesses next year. They also now have financial commitment from the Member for Abau to support women to grow their small businesses.

Participants’ benefits from action research participation
The women in business action research participants were of the view that their participation in the action research project was interesting and worthwhile. They found that this enhanced their understanding of the importance of collecting relevant information which can deepen understanding of issues during research. They, too, suggested that action research should continue to be applied when researching issues in the communities. The team had occasional interaction with the PNG-based member of the research team. This group also succeeded in meeting the target of completing the first action research cycle in the duration of the action research project.
4.3 Women’s health

The women’s health action research participants comprised three women and one man. Initially, the participants explored sanitation facilities; common diseases, women’s health and healthy living in general at the communities. As the participants progressed in the action research process the area for research became more focused. Towards the end of the action research cycle, the participants made the decision to address the issue of increase in population in Abau communities. It was realised that it was more practical to address one issue at a time.

Reason for choosing issue
The group chose to address this issue for their action research project because they were concerned about the increase in population in their communities. They are of the view that this can result in difficulties in maintaining a healthy family, providing sufficient food for the family and providing good education for all the children in the family.

Data collection
The question that this group addressed was: ‘How can couples be encouraged to have fewer children?’ It was reported that data was collected through individual and group interviews, questionnaire and documents such as birth records from the rural health clinic. It was noted during the 3rd visit, that the women in this group did not realise that interviewing is a form of data collection. It was also noted that the AR participants had not understood well that questionnaires take time to prepare and can be costly. However, they were able to collect data using interviews from mothers who had large families and young mothers about family size.

What follows is a table from the Kupiano Health Centre showing births in August and September, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3.1: Record of deliveries for August and September 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No of deliveries</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although this information shows an increase in births it does not really show the history of increase of population in the communities. Also some births that occur in the communities may not be recorded in the Kupiano Health Centre records. However, the members of the communities know that the population is increasing and the best way to collect this data may be through interviews with members of the community and access to church records of births.

Strategies used to address issue
The women started conducting awareness on family planning methods that couples can use to reduce family size and the importance of having smaller families.
Evidence of change
It was reported that the women are interested in family planning, spacing of children and having smaller families. The women were of the view that having smaller families will give more time for the women to do what they want to do and time to explore strategies to improve their own families’ lives.

Continuation of action research in future
It was also reported that the action research participants will continue to work with the women and their husbands with the hope that they will choose to have smaller families. They also now have financial commitment from the Member for Abau to support this group to continue awareness of the benefits of having smaller families in the Abau communities.

Participants’ benefits from action research participation
The women’s health action research participants were also of the view that their participation in an action research project was interesting and worthwhile. They considered that participating in the action research process enhanced their understanding of the importance of collecting relevant information which can deepen understanding of issues during research. This team is yet to complete their first action research cycle; this is expected by late-2015.

4.4 Violence against women

The violence against women action research group comprised three women and one man. Action research was used to address the problem of reducing violence against women in the Abau communities.

Reason for choosing issue
The group chose to address this issue for their action research project because they were concerned about violence against women in the homes. They were of the view that this created unhappiness in the homes and this affected children in the families most.

Data collection
The action research participants addressed the question ‘Why is there continuing violence against women and girls in their homes?’ during their action research project. During the third visit it was reported that the female participants had interviewed mothers who experienced violence in the homes. Data were also collected from elders and pastors/church elders in the communities. It was reported that data collection for this particular issue was challenging because this was a sensitive area to explore.

It was found that some of the reasons for women being ‘bashed-up’ by their husbands include: ‘women talk too much’ (meaning that women say things that annoy their husbands), ‘husbands are jealous’, ‘wives are barren’, ‘wives have extramarital affairs’, ‘wives/husbands gamble’ and husbands are under the influence of alcohol when they hit their wives.

Strategies used to address issue
The women in the team were and are still working with the victims they had interviewed to address their issue. It was reported that they encouraged and worked
with the victims to seek support from the community. What follows are some of the strategies that the research identified that are now used or encouraged by the action research participants to address violence against women: stop fights between husband and wife (community should intervene when husbands and wives fight) and report the matter to the village peace officer; seek advice from elders in the village to support the couple(s); take the wives away to their family to ‘avoid the problem’ (traditional practice—to bring peace through mediation back into the family); seek pastors and church leaders to assist with the reconciliation process: advise customary cooking between the two families (traditional reconciliation activity); ensure church leaders encourage the husband and wife to respect each other as a married couple; identify and create job opportunities for men; encourage husbands and wives to get involved in church activities, such as, camp out, outreach, sing along (people gather and sing); encourage community leaders to organise programs that can involve husbands and wives—sports, video shows, family picnics—to use to provide guidance on harmonious family life.

Evidence of change
It was reported that since the action research participants conducted awareness on violence against women and sought the community support to address this issue, the number of cases of violence against women in homes began to reduce.

Continuation of action research in future
There are established church family support programs in the communities. There are also traditional support systems in place in the communities for families who experience violence in the homes. The action research participants have made the decision to use these systems to provide support for families to reduce violence in the homes. They also now have financial commitment from the Member for Abau to support this group to continue to work for peace among families in the communities.

Participants’ benefits from action research participation
The violence against women team members were also of the view that their participation in an action research project was interesting and worthwhile. They believed that participating in the action research process enhanced their understanding of the importance of collecting relevant information which can deepen understanding of issues and problems. They considered that action research should continue to be applied when researching issues in the communities. This action research group’s members learned that they had to be sensitive when interviewing victims because this is a very sensitive issue. They appeared to cope well and they had regular discussion with the PNG-based member of the research team. This group also succeeded in meeting the target of completing the first action research cycle in the duration of the action research project.

4.5 Girls’ participation at school

The girls’ participation at school action research participants comprised three women and one man. One of these women is a retired primary school teacher. Action research was used to address the issue of lower participation of girls, relative to boys, in primary schools in Abau.
Reason for choosing issue
The action research participants choose to address this issue for their action research project because they were concerned about the number of girls who dropped-out of school and how even fewer advance to secondary and tertiary education.

Data collection
The action research participants addressed the question ‘Why is there low enrolment of girls in schools?’ during the action research project. Initially, the action research participants were of the strong view that pregnancy was the major cause of the low participation of girls in primary schools. During the second visit to Abau, the research team discussed this matter and encouraged the team to collect evidence from the primary schools to verify that this was the reason. (Unlike most other nations, PNG primary school children span grades three to eight (rather than ‘prep’ to grade six). Therefore, some of the older girls are particularly vulnerable to pregnancy.

The group obtained some schools’ enrolment and attendance data and also conducted individual and group interviews with head teachers, retired and serving teachers, parents, and also students in school and those who had withdrawn from school to establish the causes for low participation of girls at this level of education. Also the group initially planned to hold a debate at a school fete between fathers and mothers on why girls should be allowed to receive formal education. This was intended as an action to raise awareness of the matter and also as a means of obtaining information about the community’s attitudes to girls’ schooling. Due to (unexplained) community issues, however, the group decided that the debate should be between mothers who had sons and mothers who had daughters.

The data showed that there were many reasons for girls’ low participation in primary schools. The evidence showed that there were more female than male students currently enrolled in the primary schools because of the recent implementation of the tuition fee free education policy by the PNG government. The data also showed fewer girls were enrolled in school in the past, so the group’s assumptions were correct to that extent. Pregnancy was a relatively minor factor contributing to the reduced participation of girls at primary school. Other contributing factors were child labour, illness, bullying by other students and teachers, and fear of being ridiculed if they made English language mistakes when speaking. Long distances to schools, school fee issues (previously), teacher absenteeism and security issues were also reported as factors. It was also found that school fees for female students’ education at post-secondary level are beyond most families’ financial means. Therefore, female students generally do not advance beyond secondary education even though they may be academically eligible; this also reduces the numbers, therefore, who can qualify for entry to tertiary education.

Strategies used to address issue
The action research participants used the data to plan strategies to assist female students to stay in school until they complete the primary school cycle. Some of the strategies that were used to address the issue of girls’ withdrawal from school included: increasing mothers’ awareness of the importance of their daughters attending school regularly; making mothers aware that girls have a right to be educated and, therefore, should not be used as a ‘little mother’ to help around the home during the school day; encouraging parents to begin saving money towards
secondary and tertiary education fees so that girls with the ability can continue their education at tertiary level.

Evidence of change
It was reported that more mothers are now encouraging their daughters to stay in school. The action research participants identified six girls who had dropped out of school who returned to school to complete their primary education as a result of the actions that were implemented.

Continuation of action research in future
People in the community, including the action research participants and educated retirees, will continue to work together to encourage parents to enrol their daughters in school and to attend regularly. They also now have financial commitment from the Member for Abau to support this group to continue to encourage girls’ education in the communities.

Participants’ benefits from action research participation
The action research participants believed that they benefitted from their action research project personally, both from learning how to perform action research, and from making changes in their community using their own skills and resourcefulness. This group was particularly influenced by the way that collecting evidence and analysing it revealed their misperceptions of the cause (early pregnancy) of girls’ lower participation (than boys’) in primary school. They learned that the evidence, not only revealed the complexity of factors involved, but also that a recent government policy change to provide free basic education had helped reverse the lower girls participation. They showed how action research could be important in the future to address other matters in their communities. This group maintained regular contact with the PNG-based member of the research team during their action research. The group also succeeded in meeting the target of completing the first action research cycle within the duration of the action research project.

5 Findings

5.1 Action Research

As described above, the 4th visit was planned at the end of the first action research cycle. Therefore, the research team undertook some data collection during this visit to seek the participants’ experiences and views related to the following questions on action research: What worked and why? What didn’t work and why? What do you think about doing Action Research? What were the benefits for you personally and as a group? What difficulties did you have in doing Action Research? What could have helped you overcome these difficulties?

During the afternoon of the fourth visit, the research team conducted a form of group interview where each group was posed the above questions about their use of action research—and also some questions about their use of mobile phones, and their views about the use of action research for gender equity initiatives in their district, province and PNG, discussed later in this report. Each group then reported in sequence to the
meeting on their group’s answers to the questions. A summary of their responses follows.

What worked and why?
The participants reported that action research helped them to address their particular topic and the action to address its related problem. The process gave them a means and the confidence to work collaboratively on their action and its associated information and evidence gathering. Some stated that it was good to learn from each other, and that they improved their knowledge and skills during the Kupiano visits.

The participants’ sense of responsibility for their own topics and the work they contributed to researching and addressing their topic was important to them. It was reported that the personal and group commitments had an interactive effect of encouraging and supporting each other.

Some participants—for example, in the community literacy, and the violence against women groups—also reported that they worked with community and church groups to advance their action research to help achieve their ends. Not only were they able to use some physical and human resources from the community and church groups, they also contributed to the effectiveness of these groups in their respective communities.

The women’s health and the girls’ participation at school groups, in particular, used secondary data from agencies in the community (especially, health centres and schools, respectively) to inform their projects. Again there was sense of mutuality in that the agencies supplying the data were interested in the related action research project and in the primary data that was collected. Indeed, the women’s health group saw its ‘action’ as collecting primary data and the research team had to encourage the participants to think beyond this to performing an action to address the health problem that they were researching.

The women in business group used a community-based strategy to collect data and to promulgate their action. The group’s members attended markets in their community to talk to women who sold products about their business needs, typically concerning banking and finance matters. They collected their primary data this way and also provided advice and information to help the women understand how to ‘bank’ their proceeds. Unfortunately, access to banking services was difficult in remote communities.

What didn’t work and why?
Some groups reported difficulties in obtaining information and other assistance from some people and agencies in their communities. Given the topics all concerned gender equity, there was some resistance or apathy reported from some men when they were approached for assistance due to their community or other positions related to the action research topics. In effect, contemporary gender relations and discrimination were the main reasons for the difficulties.

Some groups did not meet face-to-face as much as would have been useful. For some this was due to family commitments and the distances involved, for others, it seemed that it was easier for one or two individuals to work together on particular tasks and to
meet only when the Kupiano visits were held for the project. The CUG was expected to help here by enabling small conference calls within a group but, as is discussed in section 5.3 below, this proved technically impossible.

Other than during the Kupiano visits, sharing of ideas, findings and other information between the groups didn’t occur very often. The CUG enabled this on a one-to-one phone call or SMS basis between the action research groups’ contact persons. The research team had planned that the contract persons’ smartphones connected to the CUG would have enabled simple document and evidence sharing but the difficulties of adding data packs and the lack of conference calling, discussed in 5.2 and 5.3 below, militated against these activities.

What do you think about doing Action Research?
The two main observations by the groups were that they thought they learned a lot from doing action research and that it helped them to address a problem in their community. One group said that it was ‘good to use’ and another observed that it was ‘good to learn from friends’.

The participants learned that evidence, not only informs their understanding of problems, but may change their views about the problem and how to address it. A good example is that the girls’ participation at school group initially believed that teenage pregnancy was a major contributor to girls’ non-attendance at school. The secondary data they collected about pregnancy rates and the evidence they collected from families in the community showed that the former was only a minor factor and the most significant factor was families’, especially mothers’, wishing to keep their daughters at home to perform domestic and garden work. This changed the group’s thinking and their action (see, 3.5 above).

What were the benefits for you personally and as a group?
All the groups reported that they had learned a lot from the action research project. They are now more aware of the purpose of collecting data, how they use the information collected to inform them more about the issues they identify, and tapping into available local resources to address the issues. It has also given them confidence about how to investigate issues and identify appropriate and practical strategies to address them. All the groups said that they have raised awareness in their communities about the various issues they had identified during their action research project and that the communities are beginning to be better informed about them. It seems that the women are able to mobilise support from the communities to assist them in addressing the violence against women, education for girls, growing small businesses and addressing illiteracy in the communities.

It was reported that participants experienced personal benefits, such as increased self-confidence, from learning about action research. Their action research tasks of collecting data—such as asking agencies for secondary data, interviewing families, holding market meetings, developing, implementing and monitoring action plans—assisted their personal development. The women in particular, appeared especially grateful for opportunity to participate in the Kupiana visits: often called ‘workshops’ by the participants. It is probable that women in remote districts are beyond the ‘workshop’ orbit that is popular in PNG government and aid life.
What difficulties did you have in doing Action Research? What could have helped you overcome these difficulties?

Most groups reported difficulties of logistical and geographical kinds. Each group had members that were at least a short distance from others, and some had people who lived in a remote village or on an island. This meant that the Kupiano visits were the main opportunities for groups to meet in person, although distances and other commitments sometimes prevented some members from attending. The mobile phones were often cited as being useful to overcome these difficulties, but for some mobile phone coverage was only achievable when they travelled away from their community. Charging phone batteries was also an occasional difficulty as they had limited access to charging (see, sections 5.2 and 5.3, below)

These logistical and geographical limitations also affected the conduct of the action research, for example, where travel was required to collect data or to participate in the group’s action to address its gender equity problem. It was reported that, in some instances, travelling posed risks, especially for women, and cost concerns. Also all members of the groups stated that funding the mobile phone usage for them was of great assistance to them. Most of them could not afford phone credit expenses. This has implications for their action research projects’ sustainability after the CUG ceases to operate in February 2016.

5.2 Planning and decision-making for the use of mobile phones

An important part of the pilot project concerned the trialling of mobile phone technology to support and facilitate the action research in a remote district. EPSP staff provided information about the use of mobile phones in other aid projects and activities in PNG and offered advice about the feasibility of the options available. Prior to the first visit to Kupiano, it was largely unknown how many people and who would attend as prospective participants in the action research. Therefore, matters such as the prospective participants’ access to mobile phone coverage, their experience and competence with mobile phones, and their ownership and access to mobile phones were unable to be specified. It was expected that much would be revealed in the first visit to Kupiano on 22nd April, however, the research team needed to be prepared to deal with the likely circumstances so that the project could proceed promptly thereafter.

When the project was being conceptualised, it was anticipated that there may be at least occasional internet access in the (yet to be selected) remote district that the proposed action research group could use. It was also anticipated that introduction to the use of smartphones and tablet computers may be feasible. EPSP’s subsequent preparatory work in late 2014 and early 2015 showed that internet access was unavailable for the project’s purposes in the selected district of Abau. In April 2015, EPSP’s advice was that it may be expected that telephone calls and SMS messages would be familiar to most prospective participants, but that there may be some for whom these were unfamiliar activities. It was also advised that smartphone technologies, such as using Facebook or Instagram, would be difficult. EPSP’s recent experience with CUGs suggested that a CUG would be a viable option in Abau.
The research team decided to assess the use of mobile phones by prospective participants during the first visit to Kupiano to establish the level of expertise with, and access to, mobile telephones. This showed that most prospective participants either possessed or had access to a mobile phone and mobile phone coverage. It was also shown that some people had problems with mobile phone access, mobile phone coverage, English language capability, and also literacy. There were also matters to do with the costs of phone calls for participants and, for some, charging mobile phone batteries.

After the first visit to Kupiano the research team consulted with EPSP and also a mobile phone network company to ascertain the best option for providing mobile phone communications between the participants whom, by this time, were likely to number about 25–30. It was decided to provide each participant with a mobile phone connected to a CUG. The CUG included all the participants and the research team and enabled unlimited calls and SMS messages within it. The phones could make calls outside of the CUG, but only if the user added credit to the phone. It was stated that the CUG could support small conference calls if the phones had such a facility. This would enable, for example, some members each action research group to hold a simultaneous conversation (this proved to be incorrect, see 5.2 below). The research team opted to buy standard ‘advanced’ mobile phones as these contained cameras that could be used for data collection. Furthermore, a smartphone was bought for each group to be allocated to the group’s ‘contact person’ who needed to be someone with good phone expertise, coverage and English language skills to enable organisational calls and texts between the research team and the action research groups. The smartphones should also enable the sharing of files and documents with the provision of pre-paid data packs (this proved to be difficult, see 5.3 below).

Although these decisions about the phones and the CUG were appropriate technically, the standard contractual conditions of the mobile phone network company were not entirely suitable for a short pilot project. In particular, the standard contract required substantial ‘deposits’ and ‘pre-payments’ to be made per phone/SIM card, and also a minimum contract period of two years was required. Given the nature of the project and the remote location of the district, the research team had to purchase sufficient phones and SIM cards to distribute at the second visit on 3rd June. This meant purchasing for the upper limit of expected participants and expecting to have some remaining phones, which proved to be the case. The project was only planned to run for a further six months after this date, so even allowing for possible delays, a two-year contract was much longer than required and prohibitively expensive. Fortunately, the mobile phone network company agreed to a shorter contract period of nine months.

In principle, the CUG (which enables unlimited phone calls and SMS messages within the CUG) is potentially an excellent form of communication and support for each action research group and for all the participants. In practice, establishing the CUG with our network company was quite difficult. Issues included several SIM cards were incorrectly enabled and were returned which caused significant delays in getting started for some participants. All phones were conference call enabled. In theory, this allows a person to talk to several people at the same time and would have been ideal for this pilot project. However, after some time in trying to implement this facility, the mobile phone service provider discovered that the conference call facility was not supported on their pre-paid CUG networks. As may be expected, in remote
districts of PNG, there are some coverage/signal strength problems for some participants.

5.3 Participants’ use of phones/smartphones

A range of data was obtained on the participants’ mobile phone communication. Although initially the mobile phone network company indicated that detailed information about call usage for each CUG phone would be available online, unfortunately, this only proved possible for the two post-paid CUG phones held by the research team. After several requests to the company a spread-sheet was produced manually providing SMS and phone call contact data for the seventeen active phone-using participants over approximately thirteen weeks between 27th July and 23rd October 2015. This was very useful because it included the duration between Visits 3 and 4, which was an important communication period for the participants’ action research projects.

Other mobile phone contact data were collected directly from each participant’s mobile phone during Visits 3 and 4. These data were used to supplement and confirm the more detailed data from the mobile phone network company. In examining the data from the network company, the following pie chart, Figure 5.3.1, was created to compare the SMS and phone contacts by the seventeen participants between 27th July and 23rd October 2015. The data provided compares the calls and messages from each participant’s phone and its destination. This figure does not include outgoing communication from the research team. A limitation is that it was not possible to distinguish between action research-focused calls and SMS messages and those for other purposes, such as, personal or work calls and messages.

![Figure 5.3.1: Participants’ phone contact destinations, 27th July–23rd October 2015](image)

Figure 5.3.1 shows that the participants communicated most frequently with their group members. This is to be expected if the action research groups are working together effectively. There was also an important amount of cross-group contact which is an encouraging sign that there may have been some collaboration and sharing between the groups, although some contacts may have been on other matters. There was only a small amount of phone contact directed to the research team and
typically, there were one to three messages from the research team to all participants, plus another one or two to contact persons each week.

The significant proportion of calls to non-CUG phones indicates that some participants were adding credit to their phones to make such calls. Discussion with participants indicated that some such calls were made for action research purposes, such as to key people they wished to contact to obtain data, but that most contacts were for other purposes.

An essential aspect of mobile phone use is access to a reliable mobile phone network signal. In 2015, the mobile phone network company claimed that its mobile phone reception area covered the majority of the Abau district and almost all of the district’s population. Figure 5.3.2 shows the south-eastern mainland of PNG with the Abau district shaded in red. The numbers represent the number of participants’ at each location.

![Figure 5.3.2: Participants’ locations within Abau district (adapted from Google Maps, http://maps.google.com)](http://maps.google.com)

The seven participants living in Kupiano had good 3G mobile phone coverage (which would have enabled email, web and social media use, and document transfer etc). Most participants outside of Kupiano experienced patchy 2G phone coverage with two reporting that they needed to walk some distance to improve their reception. Clearly, the areas that are claimed to be covered by mobile phone reception include locations that, due to the terrain or other factors, do not have reception or have weak reception that leads to intermittent connections. These matters are of concern and require practical ‘back-ups’ when CUGs are used for such community-based action research. The research team regularly used contact through intermediaries in such circumstances.

Turning to a consideration of the ways the five action research groups used the CUG, Figure 5.3.3 provides a comparison of phone usage during the same period as for Figure 5.3.1. It is important to appreciate that each phone call or SMS contact serves at least two people: the sender and the recipient. In the case of SMS messages, there may well be several recipients, such as the sender’s action research group. Therefore,
the persons who benefit from each contact in Figure 5.3.3 (and also Figure 5.3.4) are at least double the number of contacts on the left-hand axis.

Figure 5.3.3 shows that, other than for the (women in) business group, phone calls were more common than SMS messages. It is interesting that the two highest originators of outgoing SMS messages are the business and literacy groups. The former includes the illiterate participant who could not use SMS and was an active phone call user, so the other members must have used SMS considerably. The latter group comprised highly literate participants for whom literacy-based communications, such as SMS, would be easy to do. The violence against women action research group contained participants located in Kupiano, Aroma and Amazon Bay. These participants reported that phone coverage in the latter locations was less reliable and/or difficult to access. The contact person for the health action research group was located in Kupiano and was a very active phone user which boosted the group’s total calls. Although, Figure 5.3.3 shows a majority of phone calls, as noted previously, incoming contacts are likely to have a higher number of SMS messages as this was the most frequent way the research team communicated each week.

Figure 5.3.4 shows individual participant’s calls (red) and SMS messages (blue).

This figure shows a wide difference in the individual use of CUG phones during the period, from over 150 outgoing contacts to zero. Participant 2 is a group’s contact person and also is located in Kupiano. Participant 11 is located in Kupiano as was
participant 6 who had the highest number of SMS messages. There was an eighteenth participant who moved to Port Moresby during the project and no phone data were recorded during the period.

In addition to the data obtained about mobile phone usage, during Visit 4, the research team collected evidence from a group interview of the participants’ use of mobile phones. This included the following questions and the responses are summarised in the following points.

What were the good things about using mobile phones for your action research?
- Direct contact with group members for update information
- Ability to share ideas and check progress
- Free credits to communicate
- General communication with others
- Helped to improve phone usage skills
- Helped to learn about phones
- Improved capacity to use phones for good purposes
- Strolling the Internet
- Learnt how to chat from our friends

What were the problems you experienced with using mobile phones for your action research?
- Network coverage
- Charging of phones
- Did not know how to go to the Internet
- Children wanting to use the phones

It is noteworthy that one group identified, ‘Strolling the internet’ as a good thing. As mentioned earlier, problems with the mobile phone network company prevented the project from exploring the use of data ‘top-up’ or data packs to enable Internet use and communication. Participants, however, were able to add credit to their phones which some of them did to make calls outside the CUG (see Fig 5.3.1). The extent to which this was done for data use purposes is unknown, however, during Visit 1, a large number of participants indicated that they were interested in using/learning more about blogs and/or social media (such as Facebook) during the research.

During Visit 4, a participant who had requested email access during an earlier visit was provided with a smart phone with an email address. This was to explore the possibilities of data and Internet use; this informal trial will continue beyond this project.

Also during Visit 4, the research team surveyed the thirteen participants who attended about their mobile phone experiences during the project. A summary of their responses is provided in Appendix 8.5. This survey did not distinguish between those with smartphones and those with advanced phones. The survey showed that, as expected, most participants needed help to get started with their phones, however, once started they were then able to use the basic functions with relative ease. It was notable that more than half the respondents had little confidence in helping others with the use of the phones. This aligns with anecdotal evidence collected through
discussions and SMS messages that suggested that family and friends were very helpful in supporting some participants in the use of their phones.

All participants claimed that the mobile phones were very useful for their action research. This has strong positive implications for any further use of action research in remote communities. Although three of the thirteen surveyed had significant reception issues, each of these still identified high usefulness of the phones.

It was clear that three different types of support were identified as very useful, these being: phone skills development, group contact person collaboration and the research team’s communication through calls and SMS messages.

Only one participant responded that they had difficulty with finding an electricity source to charge their phone battery. It had been anticipated at the beginning of the project that, given the absence of electricity provision in many areas, including parts of Kupiano, it may be necessary to provide some participants with a solar powered charger. This proved not to be necessary, although, as participants were expected to bring their phones with them for each visit, the research team had portable phone chargers in case they were required. In fact, only one participant in each of Visit 3 and Visit 4 needed to charge their phone on the day which confirmed the single survey response to this effect.

Most participants perceived that their mobile phone skills had improved and only two participants indicated little improvement. It should be noted that these two participants had no problems with reception or charging and both indicated that their phones were used a lot. However, they also indicated that they needed a lot of help to get started. Perhaps this indicates that these two participants, once they had achieved basic mobile phone skills, did not consider basic use of phones as highly skilful. Certainly, the smartphones were Internet and email capable and can appear very complex with many ‘apps’ and settings available.

5.4 Using action research for actions for women and girls

The focus on actions for women and girls in the Abau research allowed women to participate in the actual process of identifying the issues and learn about collected data to understand them better and identify appropriate strategies to address them. The women stated that during this project they learnt about collecting data to inform them more about their particular issues and this process actually assisted them to make appropriate decisions on how best to address them at the community level. They were also able to relate well to the women’s issues concerning women and girls and had the willingness to address them using available resources. They seem to understand better the role of action research to address community issues using available resources than the men in the group who tended to believe that outside resources should be available to help them solve their problems. After discussion with the research team, action research was appreciated as people working together to address issues within their communities using available resources. The action research worked well in Kupiano when the women led initiatives to instigate change to address their problems. One group appeared to be slowed by its male member leading the group into a much bigger preliminary data collection phase than their topic warranted.
Action research focusing on actions for women and girls in the communities may work in other districts in Central Province if they receive support from action research resource people, the issues addressed are viewed as important in the communities, political support from the politicians is provided and good local support personnel and are able to mobilize support from the local community to address the issues effectively. All of the groups stated that this strategy may work in other districts in Central province. Communication via mobile phone, however, may also be a problem in other communities where network coverage is poor or patchy.

The groups stated that action research focusing on actions for women and girls may work well in other districts of PNG, but they were aware of the fact that geographical locations and communities in other districts of PNG are different to that of Abau. It is possible, therefore, that challenges faced during action research projects in other districts of PNG may be different to those faced in Abau.

It was reported in the group interviews that ‘it was good to find out more about women and men’ in Abau. Therefore, action research on other topics in the district was seen as potentially useful as this may also yield greater understanding of such topics and useful actions for change. In this respect, agriculture was recommend as potentially worthwhile area for future action research in Abau.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The research conducted on the pilot action research project and discussed above shows very clearly that the implementation of action research in this remote district was very successful. In this final section of the report the reasons why it was successful are discussed and implications are considered for any future use of action research in other remote (or otherwise) communities of PNG.

People
Of the thirty-five people (other than officials) from the Abau district interested in action research in April, twenty-five commenced the action research process and eighteen successfully completed their projects. As was noted previously, these numbers far exceeded the expectations of those involved in conceptualising the original brief and planning the project.

Why were the numbers above expectations? Arguably, there was little evidence upon which to estimate numbers, so the original expectations were framed by the desire to have a viable action research group which, in the circumstances, would have been 4–6 people. The GESI-focus of the pilot project probably attracted more people than otherwise might have been expected. In particular, addressing gender inequities proved to be a powerful incentive for women to attend; they comprised 78% of those who completed the action research projects. The women who attended were typically involved in women’s groups or associations directed at addressing problems for women and girls and/or supporting women’s and girls’ activities.

It seems likely that there was a powerful interactive effect between the participating women’s interests and the gender aspects of the GESI-focus of the pilot action research. This was also partly the case for the men who participated as they had
interests in GESI and, in some cases, related employment responsibilities. This effect created the conditions for them to attend the first meeting and then, having learned about what action research involved, choosing to participate thereafter. It is likely, therefore, that future action research projects in remote areas would experience similar interest if a strong interaction existed between community members’ interests and a proposed focus for action, and thereby action research, in that community. This leads to two recommendations.

**Recommendation 1**

*Any future action research initiatives in remote areas address a popular broad community concern that will attract and maintain action research participants.*

**Recommendation 2**

*Consideration be given to future action research initiatives in remote areas focused on GESI.*

The numbers and strong participation of women in the pilot action research project raises the matter of the likely involvement and commitment of women to other action research projects. In the case of Abau, maybe other matters of a popular broad community concern might attract and involve sufficient women to ensure the projects’ success. It may be that, within some PNG cultures at least, the role of women is such that they are more disposed and more able to contribute to community actions. Given such, action research may suit women and, due to its collaborative participatory nature, then they suit action research. To the extent that these assumptions hold true, the following recommendation arises.

**Recommendation 3**

*Consideration be given to ensuring that women are invited, engaged and supported to contribute to future action research initiatives in remote areas.*

Given the strong interest in action research in Abau, the endorsement by government representatives expressed during the Fifth Visit (see subsection 3.5) and the experience of action research shared by those people who completed the GESI action research, then this may provide a good basis for future action research, such as on agricultural or environmental topics. If some of the present GESI action researchers could participate as action researchers or as informal advisers to the novice action researchers, then this may assist in a roll-out of action research in Abau and also reinforce the sustainability of action research amongst the GESI action researchers. It is also likely that, given the pervasiveness of GESI concerns, that there will be some GESI threads woven through any other topic areas which the GESI action researchers could inform.

The extent to which these new topics reflect or not the previous GESI action research participation, activity and success, should be explored as this will help inform whether the strong GESI and women connection in the current project contributed to its success or not.
On this basis the following recommendations are offered.

**Recommendation 4**

*That future action research in Abau on new topics be considered and that incorporating expertise from the GESI action research be included.*

**Recommendation 5**

*If Recommendation 4 is adopted, then its progress and outcomes be monitored for comparison with the current project reported here.*

*Action research projects and their topics*

As noted previously, GESI was selected as the particular focus of the pilot action research. Future action research projects in other remote communities may well have different foci, however, GESI appears to be a robust option for any future action research projects in remote areas (and, arguably, throughout PNG). It is also appropriate to use action research in a remote community and enable the community to choose the focus in which it foresees worthwhile actions to solve local problems or undertake particular improvements. It is likely, for the first use of action research in a community, that prescribing a focus, such as GESI, which is already known as a concern for the community may assist people to engage with a project. Once completed, such projects may encourage participants to use action research methodology to address other local problems or to undertake particular improvements.

For the pilot project, the first visit partly served the purpose of inviting community members and provincial and district officials and staff to share their views about GESI matters, problems and actions in Abau. As is described above, the first visit involved men’s and women’s groups discussing their views about GESI which were then shared in a subsequent plenary session. The research team collected the various points, ideas and comments and collated them into six areas of potential action that then formed the basis of the choices participants made at the second visit as to which area each preferred to work within. Five areas were viable in terms of group size and from this point the members of each group determined what precise matter or problem they wished to address. In this way, the national and provincial officials, the Abau community, and then the participants (who were to become the novice action researchers) specifically, exercised layers of influence, with the participants exclusively influencing the final topic of their project. Therefore, GESI was the broad national and provincial concern, the community worked within GESI to nominate its six areas of GESI action, and the participants whittled this to five areas and operationalized these into specific action research projects.

This layered process—which spanned the conceptualisation and planning stages, and then the first two visits—ensured that the successful action research projects should produce a useful action in the local community that conformed to the intentions of national and provincial policy—in this case GESI policy. Given that future action research projects in remote areas will require some support during their first cycle of action research at least, it seems reasonable for government partly to justify the cost and provision of this support within a particular relevant policy implementation—in
this case GESI, but environmental, agriculture etc policies might also be relevant for remote district action and action research. The pilot project demonstrated that this process worked and produced local outcomes that addressed GESI policy.

It is concluded that a similar layered process of consultation and influence over prospective action research projects be used for future action research in remote districts.

**Recommendation 6**

*It is recommended that, in determining action research topics for other remote local districts that a suitable process of consultation and influence over such topics includes national and provincial officials, the local community, and then the novice action researchers exercising final decisions about their topics.*

**Facilitating action research in a remote community**

It was understood by all parties in the conceptualisation and planning of the pilot action research project, that some face-to-face support was required to be successful. The absence of such local expertise, and the distances involved for the research team who could provide the support, and for the participants distributed throughout Abau district, were such that face-to-face encounters had to be planned carefully and efficiently. Although the pilot project involved additional elements (such as the research and reporting) to those that would normally be required for an action research project in a remote community, it was important to endeavour to keep the schedule and logistics as close as possible to what might be expected in any future action research projects. Although thought was given to having four two-day visits, this was dismissed in favour of four one-day visits. The former would have involved the participants in two to three days’ absence from their families and communities, whereas the latter required one to two days’ absence. This increased absence may have contributed to a smaller participation rate for both men and, especially, women.

Given the project spanned several months, it was also important to ensure that there was some continuing support for the participants, as novice action researchers, between the visits. As has been detailed above, it was planned to do this using mobile phone and, if possible (it was not), the Internet. A related consideration was that the intention was to ‘teach’ the participants about action research through doing action research to a sufficient level where they could continue (sustain) action research in their communities thereafter. This suggested that the face-to-face engagement by the research team needed to be more frequent at the beginning of the project and to become less so as the participants became increasingly competent. A related concern was to avoid increasing dependency on the research team for support, to the extent that the participants were unable to think and act for themselves in the future about action research.

A foundational element of the pilot project involved introducing and explaining action research to the attendees at the first visit, partly to assist the community attendees, as distinct from provincial and district officials, to decide whether to participate in the project or not. This was then followed in the subsequent visits by the essential teaching of the basic practice of action and supporting the participants to commence
and then undertake and complete their action research projects in their groups. It was planned to use these visits to enable the participants to learn about the work involved in the particular stage of action research in which they were involved (see Appendix 8.1 Stages of an Action Research Cycle).

The description of the activities for each visit are described above (see, section 3). In keeping with the strategy of reducing participants’ dependency on the research team, each visit encompassed elements of instruction, group work on the congruent activity for its action research, and presentation and discussion of what each group had completed. The weight of activity shifted from the former to the latter over the visits.

Given the Western origins of action research and that English is international language of research and scholarship, it is difficult to facilitate action research without using English. Depending on the level of schooling that participants in remote communities have completed, the level of English language competency may vary from basic English to a high standard. In the pilot project, the use of English to facilitate the action research (both face-to-face and via mobile phone) was generally satisfactory. Commonly, a mix of English and Tok Pisin was used in the visits. Each group contained at least one person with a high standard of spoken and written English and so within the groups there was the capacity to translate and explain using Tok Pisin and/or the Tok Ples as required.

The following recommendations draw on the research team’s evidence and reflections from the aforementioned face-to-face teaching and support provided to the participants to help with completing their first pieces of action research.

Recommendation 7  
Periodic face-to-face expert support in English and Tok Pisin/Tok Ples be provided for novice action researchers in remote communities.

Recommendation 8  
It is recommended that expert face-to-face support in remote communities is designed, structured and sequenced to ensure that the novice action researchers become capable of working independently of any experts.

Using mobile telephony to support action research in remote communities

This report shows that the use of mobile phones was an important part of the conceptualisation, design, operation and research in this project. In broad terms two main conclusions can be drawn: in principle, mobile telephony offers significant opportunities to support, facilitate and communicate action research in remote districts of PNG; in practice, there are cost and technical difficulties that limit the effectiveness of the support that can be provided. Given the developing nature of mobile telephony as a technology, and the spread of the mobile phone cells, networks and use in PNG, then one may expect that the opportunities may increase, and possibly the costs and technical difficulties will reduce.

Most participants possessed or had access to mobile phones prior to participating in the project. Generally, all participants had at least a basic understanding of using a mobile phone to make and receive calls, with some being quite adept at SMS.
messaging—a key feature of the action research support provided. A few lived in areas without access or with limited access to a mobile phone cell, and these people usually were limited in their skills and/or apprehensive about using the mobile phones provided as part of the project.

Language and literacy was also a consideration. The research team had one member fluent in Tok Pisin, but no capacity in a Tok Ples. As noted above, the action research concepts on which the project drew are in English, a language in which the research team was fluent and literate. SMS messaging support by the team was provided in English in the usual 120 character messages. Most participants could understand some English, but some were reticent or unable to write SMS messages in English and would prefer to call. Some SMS messaging occurred in Tok Pisin between the research team and the participants. If all the research team members had been competent in speaking and writing Tok Pisin, then it is likely that more of the messaging would have been in this language, but English would have been required, too.

Most participants used their mobile phones within the CUG to make calls and send messages to others, usually to people within their action research. Although poor mobile phone coverage rendered frequent phone participation difficult for a few, all participants appreciated having a mobile phone with free calls and SMS messages within the CUG. The participants were also highly affirming of the weekly SMS messages and phone contacts with the research team. There was no doubt that the provision of mobile phones within a CUG was essential to the success of the pilot project.

The administrative difficulties and the technical limitations and interruptions were a significant source of disruption and extra work for the pilot project. If such matters were to occur for future action research projects in remote districts they could disrupt or derail an action research project. The research team was able to manage these matters more readily due to its expertise and access to the mobile phone network company in Port Moresby. These experiences lead to the conclusions that: a person or persons with administrative and technical skills will be required for action research facilitators; and that action research facilitation needs supplementary means of communication with participants, for example, through other district communication networks. When Internet connections become established in remote districts one may expect that these would complement and enhance mobile phone CUG communications. In particular, SMS messaging is limited at present with the practical requirement of a maximum of 120 characters per message. This constricts the advice and support on action research that can be provided, whereas, email communications, together with attached text, audio and picture files, enables much more effective communication for research.

The following recommendations are proposed concerning future action research projects in remote districts.

**Recommendation 9**

*It is recommended that mobile phones within a CUG are deployed for future action research projects in remote districts. This deployment needs to be
supplemented with other means of communication appropriate for the district’s circumstances.

Recommendation 10

It is advised that in choosing potential remote districts for action research that good mobile phone coverage is available and, if smartphone, tablet and/or Internet facilities are to be incorporated that 3G coverage be available (see, Recommendation 13)

Recommendation 11

If action research is to be enacted on a significant scale, then it is recommended that a central/coordinating agency negotiates in advance for appropriate CUG services and costs with telephone providers. These services should include small group teleconferencing and the ability to add data services and credit for calls beyond CUG calls.

Recommendation 12

It is recommended that planning and provision be made to enable English and, as appropriate, Tok Ples, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu etc to be used in communications for future action research projects in remote districts.

Recommendation 13

It is recommended that the likely developments in, and access to, smartphone technologies and Internet-based communications, knowledge access, etc are monitored with a view to appropriate inclusion in the future for action research projects in remote districts and that the mobile phones supplied match the circumstances.

Sustaining and furthering action research

The future sustainability of the action research conducted in Abau is difficult to assess at this time. The participants reported, and declared in the Fifth Visit, in positive terms about their capacities to continue action research and their interest in future cycles of action research within their topics. As was noted previously, the fact that GESI was the broad area within which the action research topics and projects were selected and developed contributed to a strong number (and high proportion) of women being involved. These women, and also the men, displayed a strong commitment to their action research projects. This bodes well for the sustainability of action research in the community, and the research team will support this for a few months via the CUG after the pilot project ceases.

It is to be expected, however, that sustainability will be difficult in a remote community once its CUG ceases unless other networks of support are evident. This is possible in Abau through the established women’s association and community and church groups. If action research is to be pursued more broadly in remote districts in PNG, it suggests that some form of action research network would be useful. It is understood that the PNG Association of Professional Evaluators was formed to sustain monitoring and evaluation work in PNG and some elements of this association may be informative for any action research network. In keeping with
Recommendation 13 above, it is relevant here that a good ‘place’ to ‘locate’ a network is in a virtual space to which people have good access via the Internet. This would provide broad access to resources, discussions etc, and could assist the roll-out of action research. Furthermore, face-to-face action research workshops, conferences etc may be useful, too, especially in provincial centres where people from the districts may be able to meet more readily.

**Recommendation 14**

*That consideration is given to arranging for/assisting local districts to provide a level of continuing communication and practical support for action research teams, providing they can sustain their core action research with their community’s skills and resources.*

**Recommendation 15**

*It is recommended that planning and development occurs for a PNG action research network.*

Sustaining action research in remote districts of PNG partly depends on its successful diffusion to those districts. Depending on the criteria used as many as 56 of the 89 districts in PNG may be considered as remote. Activating and sustaining action research in those districts is a major task for which there are few people with the expertise in action research in PNG. While, as discussed above, there is merit in rolling-out action research in the near future to a few more districts and extending it in Abau to beyond GESI topics, this type and level of development is too slow and limited to provide national diffusion of action research in all remote districts.

A fundamental step requires the establishment of action research expertise dispersed throughout the remote districts. This expertise needs to be of a level of knowledge of, and competence in, action research sufficient to enable the persons to facilitate action research in their own communities. There also needs to be a viable number of these action research facilitators in each community to assist novice action researchers in their communities to undertake action research across a range of topics. This probably means about five or six action research facilitators per remote district, which amounts to about 280–300 nationally.

In considering how to achieve this in the medium term, say five to seven years, this would require developing between forty and forty-five action research facilitators per year. In order to achieve facilitator competency one might expect the person to have undertaken an action project, and to have been provided with training in facilitating action research. Given that, as was acknowledged previously, the literature of action research is predominantly in English and that a facilitator should have a good understanding of the basic literature on the conduct of action research, this suggests that good English literacy is required. One would also expect that Tok Ples and either Tok Pisin or Hiri Motu would be required for most facilitators.

In turning attention to how to achieve the development of about forty to forty-five action research facilitators per annum for seven years the following strategies may be fruitful.
1. The model of action research used in Abau, included the nomination of a contact person per action research group. These persons were expected to be literate in English and to be competent with using mobile phones. Attention could be given to selecting people on this basis to be conveners, rather than contact persons, of their groups with a view to them developing some facilitation skills during their action research projects. This would mean selecting people and briefing them more particularly with the facilitation role in mind, and probably selecting people who are not currently in full-time employment because such people are unlikely to be able to devote time to being action research facilitators in the future. During the course of the action research project, the conveners would need to be provided with particular tuition, reading etc in order for them to develop sufficient competencies and confidence to facilitate action research in following years. (Membership of the recommended action research network would assist them in their novice facilitator year and, eventually, they would be able to provide support to others via the network, see Recommendation 15 above). In the Abau case, there would have been five action research facilitators developed over the course of the project during 2015. If these numbers are matched in the next roll-outs of action research in remote districts, then this makes a significant contribution to the forty to forty-five per year required.

2. Another strategy is to select participants with the appropriate literacy and other competencies to be part of an action research project in their remote district on the basis that they complete and action research project and undertake action research facilitator training during (and perhaps after) their project. Given a group size of four to six is probably optimum, then this also produces about five action research facilitators per annum. Options I and 2 could run contiguously in a district with the external action research facilitators, having one group of potential action research facilitators (who are novice action researchers, too) undertaking a project, and the other groups comprising novice action researchers of whom one is the convener (and also a potential action research facilitator). Again, given the Abau numbers, this would amount to about nine action research facilitators being trained.

3. A further strategy is to identify which tertiary education institutions have staff with expertise in action research and investigate the feasibility of providing a course on action research and its facilitation for intending action research facilitators from districts not involved immediately in action research as part of any roll-out. Such a course should require the institutions to require supervised action to be undertaken by students. Depending on whether one or both of the above options are implemented, it would be necessary for about thirty to forty potential action research facilitators to complete the course per year. The ability of the institution to provide courses (mainly) at a distance for people in remote districts would be essential. Given the financial circumstances of most people in remote districts, funding would be necessary.

4. The development of an online resource site where action research and projects can be shared. It would be valuable for this to be an active or social site where experiences and ideas can be also be shared. This would also open up the possibility of resources, such as that developed for Abau in the Appendices, being further developed and refined for both local and national needs.
Recommendation 16

*It is recommended that one or more of the above strategies be considered for adoption.*

The above conclusions and recommendations provide a strong basis for further consideration of the use of action research in remote districts of PNG. It is probable that action research can enable local people to identify problems or matters which they wish to address and then systematically to make changes and improvements to such. Given that any such changes are produced in their local communities, they are likely to be effective and sustained. It is important, however, to recognise that local people can only make improvements to matters that are within the power and resources of their community: local action research may identify some problems that can only be solved fully with government assistance. It follows that action research may be a useful component of development for remote districts, but it is not a panacea.

Reference


7 Acknowledgements

This project would have been impossible without the voluntary participation of the action researchers in the district of Abau. Their efforts over several months were outstanding and inspirational. The research team acknowledges the assistance of the Australian Government funded Economic and Public Sector Program which provided invaluable advice and logistical support. Central Province and Abau District senior administration staff enabled the project to be conducted within their jurisdictions and gave access to facilities for the project. The partnership established between GoPNG agencies and Australian Aid to conduct action research contributed to the success of the project.
8 Appendices

8.1 Participants’ action research support documentation
The following pages were pasted in each participant’s exercise book. Time was also
given to work through these templates with participants.

This Action Research framework aligns with http://celt.ust.hk/teaching-resources/action-research

Take photos of this plan as it develops – this is part of your
research data.

Date: …………… Time:……….. Cycle __

Right now, I think my issue ……..

Action Research Cycle __
Four steps: 1) Reflect, 2) Plan, 3) Act, 4) Observe
1) **Reflect (Think, Ponder, Meditate):**
   - What do you already know & what stories do you have?
   - Why is this issue important?
   - What would be the benefits of having your issue resolved?
   - ......

2) **Plan:**
   a) Frame your question
      - I’m concerned about….
      - I’ve noticed that….
      - I’ve always wondered why…..
      - ...........
   b) Who does it involve, what, why and when?
   c) What might your collected data look like? Some possibilities include:
      - Written diary or journal entries
      - Pictures and/or Recordings
      - Discussion notes, Interviews and/or Feedback
      - I could use my phone to .....  
      - My phone could ..........
      - .......
   d) What support might you have or need?
      - I/we shall work with .....  
      - I/we would like advice on .......
      - It would be useful if I could have some .....  
      - I/we could use my/our phone to .....  
      - ....
   e) Create a schedule and be realistic (see schedule table)
      - I/we have ..... weeks before Terry, Patricia and Gail’s third visit
      - I/we have ..... weeks before Terry, Patricia and Gail’s final visit
      - I/we ..... weeks before the phones stop
3) **Act (Action Plan/Intervention)**

- …………………………….could meet with ………
- …………………………….could get information from……
- …………………………….could share ………
- …………………………….could make ………
- …………………………….could ………...
- …………….will………
- …………….will………
- ……

4) **Observe (Record what has happened)**

- ……………………….. changed ………….. (Do you know why?)
- ……………………….. improved ………….. (Do you know why?)
- ……………………. surprised me/us ………….. (Do you know why?)
- ……………………….. was upset ………….. (Do you know why?)
- ……………………. were happy ………….. (Do you know why?)
- ……………………….. worked ………….. (Do you know why?)
- ……………………. did not work ………….. (Do you know why?)
- ………
- ……
1) Reflect
Think, Ponder, Meditate
My story is ......

2) Plan
My/our question:
Who, what, why & when?
The first thing I/we will do is ....

3) Act
Make/create/contact/share/meet/do

4) Observe
Record what is happening:

IDEAS for CYCLE __
8.2 Developing an action research issue
Research thinking changes over time and this appendix was used to help participants understand that their issue is expected to change and they should try to document this as it occurs.

Let your issue develop over time

Date: ................ Time:......... Cycle __
Right now, I think my issue .......

Date: ................ Time:......... Cycle __
Right now, I think my issue .......

Date: ................ Time:......... Cycle __
Right now, I think my issue .......

Date: ................ Time:......... Cycle __
Right now, I think my issue .......

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### 8.3 Participant’s schedule

It was important that each participant and each group had a plan and that all members contributed to determining and agreeing to the schedule. These plans were flexible and periodically reviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>My/Our Schedule</th>
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<tr>
<td>3rd June</td>
<td>Visit 2 for Terry, Patricia and Gail</td>
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<td>17 June</td>
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<td>15 July</td>
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<td>22 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 July</td>
<td>Visit 3 for Terry, Patricia and Gail</td>
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<td>5 Aug</td>
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<td>23 Sept</td>
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<td>30 Sept</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>My/Our Schedule</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
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</table>
### 8.4 Sharing phone numbers
A quick and easy method to organise and share contacts, such as phone numbers, was useful for many participants.

**My phone number is 675700 _ _ _ _ _**

**Other contact numbers that might be important to ME:**

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8.5 Participants’ responses to questions on mobile phone use
The first two rows of the following table shows the question asked and each row following provides the responses of a participant. An ‘x’ indicates that the question was not answered.

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<th>Q5</th>
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