



Community Ranger Program





Empowering Remote Communities

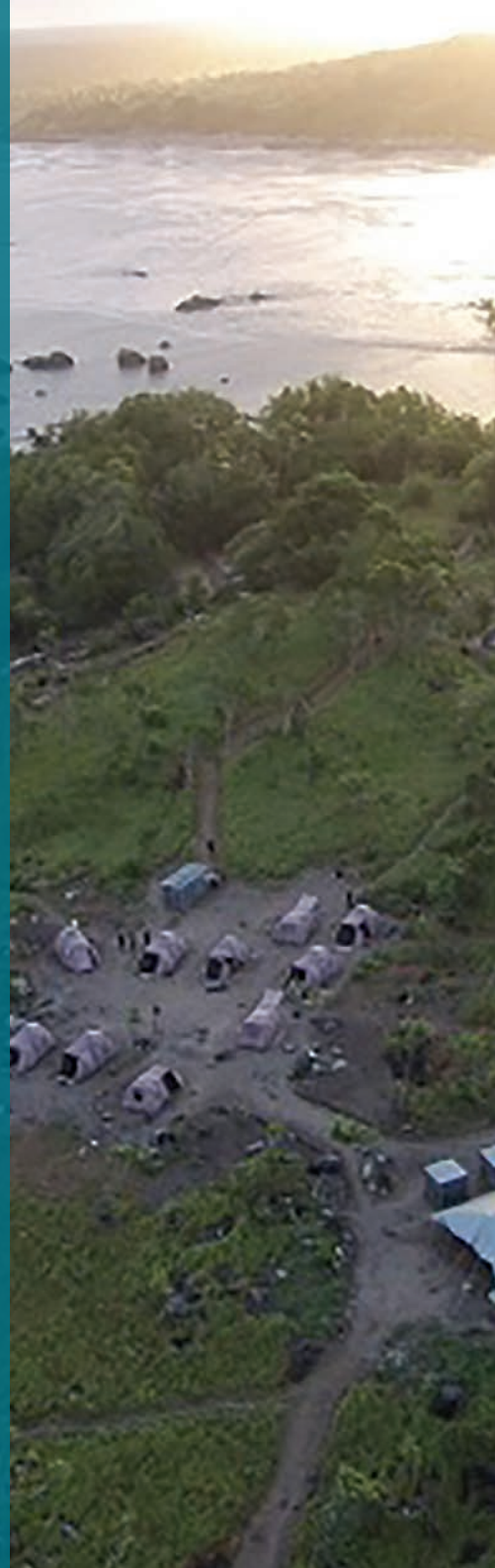
Remote and regional communities in the Australia-Pacific region include some of the most impoverished and disadvantaged people in the world. Many of these communities practice traditional ways of life and receive little support from government, resulting in poor basic services and infrastructure. Conventional approaches to aid have generally failed to improve outcomes for communities in this region.

The Community Ranger Program is a community-driven initiative that addresses many of these issues. The Program helps communities to build their capacity and resilience in the areas of food security, livelihoods, clean water and sanitation, disaster risk reduction, disease prevention and health promotion. It works because local people become key agents and partners in the planning and ongoing delivery of the Program, and 'own' the outcomes. While the tangible "*hard infrastructure*" that locals build – rainwater tanks, wells, medical centers, sanitation facilities – are important, it is the "*soft infrastructure*" – new community leaders – that provides the long-term legacy. New community leaders gain vital skills and the confidence to continue to assist their communities into the future.

Traditional Governance and Leadership

The Community Ranger approach is based on the successful Land and Sea Ranger programs pioneered in the Torres Strait and northern Australian Aboriginal communities over the last decade. It has now been implemented in remote and regional areas of Papua New Guinea and focuses on strengthening traditional governance using a 'bottom-up' approach at a village and clan level. These existing traditional structures support more formal local and national planning and governance driven by the community to deliver:

- Enhanced village governance and leadership.
- Community skills, capacity and access to learning.
- Food and water security.
- Stronger local disaster risk management, response and recovery.
- Livelihoods and livelihood skills.
- Improved infection control, disease prevention and health promoting behaviour.
- Greater women's participation in decision-making and building community.







Ranger Training

Community-driven development relies on the leadership and mentoring of individuals, groups and communities. By fostering the development of local leaders, the Community Ranger Program builds stronger governance within traditional owner-led groups and empowers communities to express and work towards their sustainability goals. Community Rangers in the Torres Strait, northern Australia and the Treaty Villages in the South Fly District of PNG have graduated from the Program and are now actively helping lead their communities towards a better future.



Teaching Skills and Building Capacity

The Community Ranger Program can provide training in a range of locally-relevant skills:

- Job-relevant literacy and numeracy,
- Readiness for work,
- Marine craft handling and safety at sea,
- Engine maintenance,
- Communications and GPS navigation,
- First aid, basic hygiene and disease prevention,
- Maternal health and infant nutrition,
- Disaster preparedness and response,
- Well-digging, plumbing and water management,
- Food garden techniques and sustainable permaculture,
- Agricultural standards to access markets,
- Ecosystem-based approach to marine resource management,
- Seafood supply and post-harvest handling,
- Basic accounting, and
- Tender planning and preparation.

Community Rangers are also able to lead future projects independently through mentoring of other community members. This increased capacity has already allowed some communities to secure external funding for projects with income and other benefits for the entire community. For example, the refurbishment of the Mabaduan Hospital by the Treaty Village Community Rangers in 2016.







Developing Future Leaders

While it is difficult to measure the “soft infrastructure” that is built through the Community Ranger approach, the leadership and mentoring skills that are fostered are critical to long-term success. These skills and capacity are developed during delivery of the “hard infrastructure” that’s essential to address basic human needs of food security, clean water and sanitation, disaster response, disease prevention and health promotion. With these skills and basic facilities, communities have a platform to focus on sustainable management and use of their natural resources, in areas where this is currently impossible.







The Importance of People & Communities

The Community Ranger Program has been highly successful in achieving improved conditions for communities, and laying the foundations for future sustainable development in Torres Strait, northern Australia and the South Fly Treaty Villages in PNG. Critically important for success of the Program is the involvement of community leaders in nominating candidates for ranger training, and whole-of-community involvement in identifying priority issues to be addressed. For example, in the South Fly District of PNG, communities identified drinking water supply, basic hygiene and health promotion activities as high-priority areas. Once Community Rangers had addressed these high priority issues, they began working to tackle second-order problems focused on food security, disaster preparedness and sustainable natural resource management.



Empowering Women

Women are disproportionately affected by increasing social and environmental hardships across the region, yet also have vital specialised knowledge in critical areas such as infant health and nutrition, and childbirth. The specific inclusion of female Community Rangers in the Program empowers women to take on greater leadership roles in public and community life, and participate in the economy, contributing immensely to improving long-term sustainability outcomes for the whole community.



Future Opportunities

The Community Ranger Program is a successful model and can deliver improved sustainability in remote and regional communities throughout the Pacific region. The inclusive, self-determination 'Council of Elders' approach brings clan leaders from each village together for community-level planning and priority-setting with the intent to shield community progress from the vagaries of political change that can impact government processes. This approach empowers local communities to develop skills in areas relevant to their specific needs, and drives future progress towards sustainability goals.

This innovative and flexible approach can be tailored to any local context and produces outcomes for community development that provides for long-term success through:

- Traditional governance approaches and priority setting for community development.
- Existing cultural frameworks.
- Short-term practical improvements, with longer-term systemic changes to deliver sustained benefits.
- New in situ local skills and technologies.





Further Reading

Treaty Village Rangers, South Fly District, PNG: <http://rrrc.org.au/programs/png/>





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