

## Ways To Fund Rotuma's Development Projects

It's pleasing to read that the Rotuma Development Committee, which also includes the Think Tank, met with Government officials on 19 April. They travelled together to Rotuma and have held district meetings before helping to celebrate our session.

Whilst on the 19/4 meeting, it will be remiss of me not to acknowledge the huge contributions that Government has made for the development of Rotuma. Not since independence has a Government invested and done so much for Rotuma as our present Government.

I believe that for the current good work in Rotuma to continue, our present Government needs to stay on beyond the September 2014 election. Personally, I hope for the sake of democracy that people will not ignore the facts but look around them first and seriously think of the growth and the good deeds that have been done when the time for election comes. It will be a real pity and a total disappointment if our present Government is not allowed to complete the good work and the plans already in place. We shouldn't fiddle with or change anything that works; so it should be with a good Government. Give them a chance!

Certainly, any future and further developments for Rotuma will be held up if there is a change in government. The consequences of such a change will be detrimental to Rotuma. Our past experiences with such changes weren't very encouraging. A good example of this is the bold promise made by Rabuka in 1988 to concrete all the roads in Rotuma. This never eventuated, and we later knew that it was a ploy to get Rotumans to back him. The Rabuka coup became a hindrance to many projects that remained incomplete or in a state of impasse.

However, I've read the news releases concerning the 19 April meeting and although I believe that all the development plans are good, they seem to be all long term and wholly dependent on Government to fund. Therefore allow me to make the following observations and suggestions:

Successful planning is usually based on four basic criteria: planning, organising, leading, and controlling, but for the purpose of this exercise, I dwell only on *planning* and *organising*.

Planning is basically the setting the goals and the strategies to achieve them, while organising involves the allocation of functions and delegation of responsibilities.

Plans should be broken down into short, medium and long-term plans that are realistic and achievable. Each of these should be divided into smaller plans that are instrumental to achieving the main goal, since resources may be insufficient or not available in a timely manner. Also there's a need to prioritise plans into four degrees of urgency: urgent, important, wait and deferrals.

A good example to illustrate the above intricacies is the plan to concrete the road around Rotuma. First the work should be prioritised in accordance with the project plan, keeping in mind the allocated time frame. Do the hills first, for the cracked concrete endangers the lives of cyclists and pedestrians. Next, sectionalise the road and do a section at a time, beginning with the worst affected area. Then continue the process whenever resources are available until the road is completed. One will be surprised that in a short time (a few years) the whole road in Rotuma will be concreted. But don't expect the whole road to be done at once, for in reality it won't happen. Delays can also be

expected with regard to the vocational school and the mortuary; upgrades to Rotuma High School, the airport, and the wharf; and the electrification of Rotuma.

Why the delays? Because there are more urgent priorities to attend to within Fiji, and funds are limited. There are 14 other provinces besides Rotuma for Government to cater to, and Rotuma is very fortunate to be under the PM's office and to be the beneficiaries of the many developments done for us by our present Government.

Also, I do know that the Fijian provinces have a similar setup to Rotuma, which is an inheritance from our colonial masters. But there are some differences, the most obvious being that the provinces have committees to organise fundraising functions in order to spearhead development projects in their respective provinces instead of just sitting and waiting for Government to fund all the projects, which makes their goals easier to achieve. But if we Rotumans prefer to sit around and wait to be spoonfed rather than helping ourselves then sadly we are in for a lot of disappointments, especially when there's a change in government. Also Government will be able to dictate terms to us and make us tow the line. So the million dollar question is why can't we do likewise and complete projects like the vocational school and the mortuary?

For the vocational school, Rotuma needs to start by utilising the resources already available, such as the Council computers and the community hall at Ahau for night classes to teach basic accounting, computing; accessing resources on the Internet such as online banking and email; first aid; seafaring certificate requirements; carpentry; plumbing; etc. with the help of WAF and PWD whilst waiting for the actual facilities to be provided. The students will at least have a head start instead of sitting around and do nothing.

As for the mortuary, I believe it is an expense that Rotuma can ill afford. A mortuary will be an added burden and cost to bereaved families because it prolongs the wake and protocol requires more spending and work. Unless the mortuary is run by renewable energy, it will be an extra cost to the hospital to keep generators running at Ahau. Furthermore the mortuary will only benefit the few who can afford to lay their dead in wait for relatives travelling from overseas. Thus we have to be realistic in our *planning* process to ensure that there are no more urgent projects competing for the same resources. I would therefore suggest that before the Committee commits to such project that it undertakes a cost/benefit analysis of a morgue, and that building a mortuary should be deferred until such time that other development plans highlighted by the Development Committee are completed and goals are achieved.

Ideally we can fund these projects ourselves by starting small and either doing our own fundraising or for the Development Committee to submit proposals for each project under the RIC banner to the Funding Agencies and NGOs. Furthermore the Committee needs to draw on our available resources. Around the globe there are Rotuman Associations that can be asked to assist with the development projects discussed on 19/4/12. There are associations in Canada, the USA, NZ, the UK, and six in Australia besides the FRA and the seven districts in Rotuma. But since all these projects will be more beneficial to those Rotumans living in Fiji and Rotuma, the FRA can be apportioned to the seven districts representing Rotuma. Also there are the five clubs in Fiji, namely Sarafui, Ra'esea, Nadi, Lautoka and Vatukoula to keep in mind. I am certain that if they're asked, they can help towards the achievement of the said development plans.

Surely, if the Development Committee is willing to include these associations as stakeholders in some of the development plans, I am certain no genuine Rotuman will decline to assist. Certainly if not all, the majority of these Rotuman associations overseas will be willing to help and all that the Committee has to do is write or contact the various leaders of these associations and request their assistance for a given project.

A good example of such assistance was that afforded by the Brisbane Vailala Group (when asked by the parish priest in Rotuma) which raised more than \$50K to repair the cathedrals and buildings in Sumi and Upu. Also there's the Brisbane Savlei Group which raised about \$30K for Savlei village development, and all those funds were collected by organising three separate island nights.

Also, besides these many Rotuman associations, there are the various Rotary Clubs, the Fly and Build, volunteer and student groups overseas that the Committee can tap into for assistance to either help train the islanders, erect buildings, and help provide the necessary equipment. Many of these groups do annual trips overseas to help others.

But let us never forget our Rotuman protocol that identifies and separates us from the others should we enrol the help of any of these groups for assistance. We must do the right thing and invite them to the completion of such project that they have helped to fund or assist as a gesture of our appreciation.

As for the boat, we all know that Itu'muta district has started fundraising and I believe that over a \$100K has already been raised but that the project is still on but has stagnated. Certainly Itumuta can look to realise this dream and bring it to fruition by forming a company in order to issue a float to raise the much needed funds to purchase that boat. For I know from the people that I have spoken to, many are willing to buy shares for a boat for Rotuma, if there's such a float.

Furthermore I know that there are very smart, experienced and competent Rotumans in the Development Committee and also a wealth of untapped potential amongst us who are willing to help and do the ground and paper work; the Committee needs to co-opt them as adhoc members.

But a word of caution: there are too many well-educated Rotumans with smart ideas that can result in our own undoing. Also for any worthwhile projects to eventuate we need honest and committed Rotumans to organise the fundraising, and any funds received must be wholly utilised for that project earmarked. Transparency must exist at all phases of the plan to avoid rescheduling and redirection of resources to cover for something that isn't in the original plan.

For the sponsors' and peoples' preference and comfort, I believe that whatever funds will be raised should be overseen by our Liaison Officer in the PM's Office, to get it right. Especially given the experiences of the two fuel losses—the Rotuma Investment Co, REMCOL, and now the Biofuel Project, which is stalled and workers have been unpaid for weeks. We Rotumans messed up big time for not asking for an inquiry or for an explanation of what was taking place.

The late Senator Wilson Inia would never have allowed these things to happen. I fear mishandling of funds raised by the community for any development project in Rotuma if there are no checks in place. Our surest bet is for our Liaison Officer to be involved as the principal cheque signatory and guardian of any funds raised.

Whilst on the issue of developing Rotuma allow me to say this: All of Rotuma's developments can be self-funded since we already have a very receptive Government and Rotuma is now a tax free zone and an international port of entry. Therefore Rotuma should take it further and ask the Government to take it to the next step and make Rotuma a tax haven, similar to that of the Cayman Islands and Vanuatu, in order to attract tourism and the much needed investments. We should be allowed to issue licenses to fishing boats that fish in Rotuman waters (similar to the Fijian Qoliqoli). Rotuma needs to properly utilise its wharf as an international port of entry and a home port for the issuance of licenses for boats fishing in our waters. If we don't ask we will never know!

But remember this: *Rome wasn't built in a day*. We can start small and build projects up to what we want them to be. Thus, as Rotumans we need to be organised and be prepared to do more to help ourselves rather than be spoon fed and expect the Government to do everything for us.

Therefore our Development Committee needs also to be visionaries and innovators to help achieve the projects they discussed at their meeting on 19/4/2012 and any future ones.

**Henry Enasio**