



Papua New Guinea and Human Rights - Universal Periodic Review Online Capacity Building Program¹

Phase 1 Report

March 2021

"...this program was the first ever provided by DTP, PIANGO, CCF-Fiji and OHCHR to collect all the human rights defenders in PNG and join us as a team; and from now on we shall stand together in unity..."²

1. Program Overview

In preparation for Papua New Guinea's (PNG) Third Cycle of the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) developed and delivered an online capacity building program for civil society in PNG. The program objectives were to increase knowledge of, and enable participation in, the UPR process and to build networking on human rights among different civil society groups across PNG. For this program, DTP partnered with the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), Citizen's Constitutional Forum (CCF) and the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The program is being implemented in phases to follow the UPR schedule for PNG in 2021 and 2022. While the COVID pandemic requires the initial phases to be delivered online, it is hoped that later phases may be held face-to-face in PNG and that some CSO representatives maybe able to attend thee UPR session in Geneva.

Over the course of eight online sessions held in March 2021, the first phase of the program had over 90 participants from various regions of PNG come together to gain knowledge and understanding of human rights, engage in dialogue regarding key human rights issues, build networks and work collaboratively to make recommendations to improve the protection and fulfilment of human rights in PNG. The program was one of a number of complementary initiatives to support civil society engagement in the UPR process³. Program participants were able to hear from and engage with representatives from Amnesty International, CIVICUS and Human Rights Watch.

¹ In partnership with PIANGO, CCF, OHCHR

² This and other quotes are taken from participant feedback surveys and written session chats and are available on request.

³ The International Catholic Centre of Geneva also ran a short capacity building program in PNG and coordinated with a range of local civil society organisations to make a submission to the UPR.

With the support of DTP, individuals and coalitions successfully submitted comprehensive documents outlining current human rights issues and detailed recommendations for the UPR to improve a range of thematic issues.

Key human rights issues in PNG raised by participants include:

- Women's rights
- Business and human rights
- Environment and mining
- The right to health
- Rights of older people
- Freedom of speech and association
- Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity
- Civil rights and COVID-19
- Disability and the rights of persons with disability
- Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers
- Children's rights
- The right to education
- Human rights abuses in Bougainville – the legacy of mining and the civil conflict
- Albinism
- The need for a PNG National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)
- Human rights court track law

“The vast experiences of people on this program blew my mind. Hearing a lot of wonder[ful] sharings from others has encouraged me much in my own area of work.”

2. Program Objectives

- To build the knowledge, skills, networks and confidence of PNG CSOs/community representatives on the UPR mechanism, with specific reference to the impacts of the private sector and climate change on all relevant human rights standards
- To provide advice and support to civil society in PNG to draft individual/joint NGO submission/s with specific recommendations for PNG government
- To build the capacity of PNG civil society to link human rights issues raised in UPR, Human Rights Treaties, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for human rights and sustainable development
- To provide advice and guidance to civil society in PNG on engaging United Nations (UN) agencies and foreign missions in Port Moresby regarding UPR review questions and recommendations

- To facilitate Pacific and global networks to assist NGOs in submitting to and engaging with the UPR process, including DTP partners OHCHR (ROP), PIANGO, and CCF.

“Great to hear various issues brought up and learning from both sides. I really appreciate the rich information shared.”

3. Participants

Promotion of the program began in December 2020. DTP and OHCHR in PNG invited alumni from previous human rights training programs to apply for the program. Calls also went out to other networks to encourage key people within their networks to apply. There was very strong interest in the program; 108 applications were received, with 92 applicants accepted.

Partners agreed the program should be inclusive and representative of PNG society. While participants were predominantly from civil society (85, 93%), there were some participants from government departments (5, 6%). 77% of participants identified as female (70), with 8% (7) identifying as a person with a disability. Participants came from all across PNG, with large representation from Port Moresby, Porgera and Bougainville. They represented a number of issues and interest groups, as outlined in section 1 above.

While 91 participants were officially registered in the program, the true number of participants is difficult to know. Due to the accessibility issues and cost of data in PNG, participants in villages would come together around one or more devices to take part in the program. Some of these people were named in the UPR submissions from organisations but the exact number of participants for each session can only be an estimate.

The program organisers included content and advice on COVID safety precautions, and health guidelines.

4. Program Content

Session 1 – Introduction to human rights and human rights reporting to the United Nations

After welcoming participants to the program and setting out the program objectives, session 1 introduced participants to the UN, its human rights mechanisms, UPR submission criteria, purpose of the UPR and the role of civil society in the UPR process. Whilst providing context, this information also created a foundation for participants to understand how to use international law effectively and to utilise collaborations with others.

This session also drew upon learnings from the UPR process in Fiji including creating straight forward submissions with strong cases to highlight issues and demonstrate the need for specific recommendations. It also acknowledged the ongoing challenges associated with the capacity to monitor human rights situations and implementation of recommendations.

Additionally, the floor was given to participants to introduce themselves, share their experiences and state issues of concern to start building networks amongst one another and

collaborate to establish SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) recommendations for UPR stakeholder submissions.

Session 2 – Introduction to international human rights standards and to human rights reporting to the United Nations: Experience from PNG and Pacific

This session provided an introduction to human rights, the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the equal importance of economic, social, political and cultural rights, as well as the purpose of UN mechanisms, such as the UPR, to hold States accountable. Importantly, participants were reminded that States have obligations through customary international law and international human rights treaties to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

Participants were provided with the 108 recommendations for PNG from its Second Cycle of the UPR to consider, to illustrate how to use the process to make practical recommendations for change and draw attention to previously raised issues.

Participants continued to share their experiences and issues of concern, building a shared understanding of the current human rights situation on the ground in PNG,

Session 3 – Building Dialogue and Cooperation for human rights implementation

This session explained the UPR process formally considers three reports; a national report from the government, a compilation of information from the UN and a summary of other reports and issues submitted by relevant stakeholders such as CSOs and NGOs. It also explained the steps of CSO engagement with the UPR process including preparation, interaction, consideration, adoption and implementation.

To effectively engage in the process, participants were encouraged to focus on specific priorities, relevant questions and recommendation to propose to the government.

Prior to our training, the International Catholic Center of Geneva (CCIG-ICCG), together with its partners Edmund Rice International (ERI), the Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI) and the Dominicans for Justice and Peace, organised a three-day workshop in Port Moresby for civil society around PNG to engage with the UPR. They identified four thematic priorities to be addressed in a UPR submission: 1) women's rights, 2) children's rights, 3) rights of people with disabilities and 4) environmental issues. Shirley Abriella Kaupa shared her experience of the workshop and their next steps, encouraging collaboration between participants in both programs.

Session 4 – Key human rights issues in PNG, the UPR, submissions and recommendations

Throughout this session, participants shared issues of concern with the group. Discussion was also focused on explaining what it means to provide SMART recommendations. Additionally, participants were encouraged to collaborate virtually (respecting COVID-19 precautions) by forming working groups depending on thematic issue and region.

Collaboration with the CCIG-ICCG team continued with Duncan Gabi joining the session and discussing their proposed submission.

To assist in creating a UPR submission, participants were provided with a template to set out the issues of concern which connect to any human rights in the UDHR or specific human rights treaty, summary of information whereby facts and examples are detailed as well as providing SMART recommendations to improve the issues raised.

Session 5 and 6 – Preparing submissions and recommendations

These two sessions were primarily focused on providing a platform for participants to present issues of concern. Throughout this process, there was considerable peer engagement resulting in participants forming networks to share experiences and establish strong recommendations to include in UPR submissions.

Session 7 – Preparing submissions and recommendations: Engaging with international NGOs

Along with participants continuing to share human rights issues and recommendations, this session welcomed Kate Schuetze from Amnesty International (AI), Josef Benedict from CIVICUS and Stephanie McLennan from Human Rights Watch (HRW) who discussed key issues raised in their submissions for PNG's UPR.

Accordingly, Kate Schuetze from AI raised the issue of tribal fighting in Hela province and highlighted accountability and weak law enforcement measures as contributing factors leading to the violence and conflict in the region as well as the lack of remedies for those who had their rights violated. Additional priorities consisted of the right to health, including COVID-19 responses along with climate change and environmental rights with particular focus on deep sea mining and the need for environmental protection measures to be built into company responsibilities.

Josef Benedict from CIVICUS focused his discussion on civic space and civic freedoms since PNG's 2016 UPR report did not contain recommendations on the matter. The four broad areas being covered by CIVICUS are: (1) freedom of association (operation and registration of NGOs within the country); (2) human rights defenders (concerns surrounding harassment, intimidation, threats and violence with specific attention placed on protecting human rights defenders and accountability following attacks of human rights and land defenders); (3) freedom of expression (addressing laws and policy which silence individuals including journalists and media); and (4) freedom of peaceful assembly (laws for handling marching and protests, lack of accountability, suppression of protests and training for law enforcement to appropriately handle protests).

Stephanie McLennan from HRW shared insight into their strategy to more effectively present the information in their submission by focusing on recommendations that the PNG government accepted in the last review, and most notably what they did not accept (including LGBTQI+ rights and abolishing the death penalty). Importantly, emphasis was placed on structuring the submission according to recommendations made previously and the government's response to such recommendations to make impactful and direct links.

Key issues discussed included women's rights, children's rights, police abuse, death penalty, disability and LGBTQI+ rights.

Session 8 – Preparing submissions and recommendations

In preparation for the March 25th, 2021 UPR submission deadline, this final session provided participants with additional support regarding technical guidelines for their submissions and gave individuals or coalition representatives an opportunity to present their final recommendations to the group for feedback.

Following the first phase, a number of participants contributed to both individual and joint submissions. DTP and partners also submitted a compilation of recommendations raised by participants during the sessions and their draft submissions.

“All the sessions were conducted professionally and I am very pleased to join in the program to air and express my human rights views.”

5. Phase 1 Outcomes

After completion of Phase 1 of the program, DTP and OHCHR can point to the following outcomes:

- New collaborations between participants from different organisations and different parts of the country
- Greater shared understanding among CSOs on key human rights issues in PNG.
- Linking participants and key international human rights NGOs with each other
- A significant increase in the number of CSO submissions for consideration as part of PNG's UPR.
- DTP submitted to the UPR Working Group a summary of the issues and recommendations raised by participants over the course of phase 1.
- A PNG human rights/UPR network was informally established among program participants. Conversations have continued among participants since the conclusion of phase 1 via the program email group.
- Some participants have formed a new thematic group to promote and advocate on women's rights.

6. Evaluations, Reflections and Next Steps

After each session, participants were asked to complete an online feedback form. The program was positively evaluated by the participants. Feedback highlighted the need and desire for human rights education within PNG and how isolated civil society is within the country, even among organisations working on similar issues.

DTP is still learning how to best deliver online capacity building, especially in countries where internet access is both expensive and the network is unstable and slow. The approach taken in this course was also labour intensive. The interest in the program, the number of applications received and the subsequent number of participants was greater

than anticipated. With a large number of participants, the online environment made interaction and participation challenging at times. A further challenge was faced where 10 or more participants were joining with one device.

Splitting participants into working groups either by number or theme to encourage experience sharing and building practical solidarity and advocacy strategies was impossible.

Similarly, reporting back to the group and peer feedback and discussions were difficult with connections dropping out or delayed. Two-hour sessions limited time to cover the content as well as hear from participants. This was often commented on in participant session feedback. There was a lot of content to cover in this first phase as for many this was their first real exposure to the international human rights system. Subsequent phases can be more directed.

Online courses and engagement with participants over time offers some advantages over face-to-face trainings and should become a more permanent part of DTP's capacity building work – in a hybrid and blended learning model. DTP needs to invest further in developing the platform to enable participants to continue sharing and engaging between sessions and following the program.

“I would like to say, the UPR online course was really useful as it helped us structure our submission and helped us do in-depth analysis... Again we really appreciate this initiative (UPR training) which was a great bonus for us.”

7. Acknowledgements

DTP would like to record its thanks and appreciation to the trainers and facilitators who donated their time and shared their expertise during the first phase of this program, in particular Joshua Cooper. It would like to thank the participants for their work and participation and the OHCHR for funding the program.

More information on course content, materials and outcomes can be found at [DTP's website](#) or by writing to Clare Sidoti at dtp@unsw.edu.au