



Report

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The Voices of Central Bougainville's Unheard Veterans



**CONCILIATION
RESOURCES**
working together for peace



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Contents

Acronyms	4
Terminology	4
Foreword	5
Executive summary	6
Introduction	9
Research findings	11
Recommendations	11
Broader findings	16
Conclusion	19
Annex I: Methodology	20

Acronyms

ABG:	Autonomous Bougainville Government
ABG-DPAI:	Autonomous Bougainville Government – Department of Peace Agreement Implementation
BPA:	Bougainville Peace Agreement
CR:	Conciliation Resources
PNG:	Papua New Guinea

Terminology

The crisis: From November 1988 to 2001, Bougainville experienced a violent conflict often referred to as 'the crisis' or Bougainville conflict.

Listening methodology: A listening methodology that involves flexible and non-prescriptive conversations gathering people's direct experience as evidence.

Listeners: The listening research process relies on teams of researchers from the geographic area in which the project is being conducted. These researchers are referred to as 'listeners'.

Veterans: In this publication, the term 'veteran' refers to someone that was engaged as a combatant in the Bougainville crisis. Veterans are almost exclusively male and, of the estimated 150,000 people living on the islands at the time, most men were engaged in a combatant role in some way. Differentiation is made between *leadership veterans*, who held hierarchical positions within armed groups in the crisis, and *non-leadership veterans*, who were members of armed groups but did not have a rank or leadership position.

Reconciliation/s: In Bougainville, reconciliation has many aspects, including customary, religious, spiritual, personal, psychological, and economic. It includes concerns for history, memory and justice. These qualities have been evident in the many reconciliation efforts made in managing and resolving localised conflict, and inter-community, clan and family disputes. In the wake of the Bougainville crisis, traditional reconciliation processes have been, and continue to be, held to reconcile crisis related violence and to support individuals, families, communities and clans to resolve divisions created during the crisis.

Rehabilitation: Rehabilitation is a process to restore a veteran's physical, psychological, social and vocational abilities to ensure they can integrate and actively participate in their community. While rehabilitation can be understood in different ways, it often involves a whole-of-person approach to deal with and recover from injuries and trauma, which is tailored to meet individual needs.

Reintegration: Reintegration is a process where a veteran re-enters their daily life, family and community after participating in conflict. Reintegration processes usually include veterans transitioning from combatant roles to civilian/community roles. Within the scope of this project, reintegration focuses on how veterans understand themselves in their changing roles in the community and how people in the community perceive and engage with veterans.

Foreword

This publication is a result of an initiative by the Autonomous Bougainville Government's (ABG) Department of Peace Agreement Implementation (DPAI) to inform Weapons Disposal and Veterans Rehabilitation plans. Veterans rehabilitation is a legacy of the Bougainville Conflict and we have a responsibility to address this challenge through collaborative partnership and engagement with relevant stakeholders including veterans.

In implementing the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) and the wider transition to a more peaceful future, those who fought in the crisis must join the transitional process and together we must support veteran rehabilitation. Bougainvilleans may have differing perceptions and attitudes towards veterans but we recognise the importance of their contributions. Engaging with these veterans by listening to these different individuals and groups and of taking inclusive approaches will help build the future of Bougainville together.

It is integral to these processes that all veterans, both leaders and non-leaders, have the opportunity to voice their opinions, share their experiences and challenges, and suggest ways forward. This research endeavoured to hear some of these stories and to identify ways that Bougainville can practically move forward to sustain peace and stability.

The challenges that veterans face also impact on communities in Bougainville, so we also need to provide an opportunity for communities to share their stories and be heard on these issues and on their desires for the future. That is why this project focuses on the voices of both veterans and community members – to hear a range of voices and experiences.

While this project was designed to inform ABG planning, the publication really belongs to the veterans and community members who participated in the listening process and shared their stories. We hope that this publication can be a starting point for further dialogue and engagement for the people of Bougainville to develop an inclusive people's history and to create a shared vision for the future and collective identity as one Bougainville.

This publication is a reflection of stories heard from the "unheard" veterans and community members in Central Bougainville. While we

appreciate the cultural diversity, we feel that the stories are a reflection of majority veterans throughout Bougainville.

This publication is aimed at promoting dynamic dialogue as a space to help rehabilitate and reintegrate our Bougainville veterans into our Bougainville civil society.

Dennis Kuiai

Acting Secretary,
Director for Veterans Affairs & Weapons
Disposal,
Department of Peace Agreement
Implementation.

Executive Summary

In Bougainville, veterans from the conflict of the 1990s (commonly known as 'the crisis') still face significant post-conflict challenges. These challenges often inhibit veterans from living cohesively and peacefully within their own communities. This issue has not only impacted on Bougainville communities but on political stability more broadly, including contributing to localised violent and anti-social behaviour. Some veteran leaders continue to hold localised or district-level influence and often maintain dominant leadership positions through their role as combatant leaders during the crisis.

Throughout this project, non-leadership veterans explained that during the crisis they felt a sense of belonging and shared purpose through their role as combatants; they felt they were valued, respected and that there was a structure and social environment in which they could meaningfully participate. Since the end of the crisis they have felt excluded and ignored; they often feel isolated, which is compounded by trauma, and do not feel that there are institutions or leaders that represent them or with whom they can engage and identify with. Some veteran leaders are engaged in decision-making processes (such as through the three former-combatant ABG parliamentary seats provided for in the Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and through Veterans Associations), but non-leadership veterans are largely excluded from decision-making processes.

It is clear that veteran-related challenges cannot be addressed by veterans alone. Given that such issues impact on communities across Bougainville, joint efforts to address these challenges must be developed. These efforts should engage with the perspectives of a wide range of veterans as well as community members including youth and women.

The Research

The research was an initiative of ABG-DPAI to inform planning processes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans in Bougainville. Conciliation Resources (CR) supported the ABG-DPAI to conduct a listening research project focused on capturing the voices of Central Bougainville's non-leadership veterans and community members. Using this listening approach, this research project engaged 115

non-leadership veterans and community members in non-prescriptive, open-ended conversations from February-March 2018. The research asked veterans and community members to share their perspectives and desires for the future and to suggest ways forward on issues related to the rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans, as well as their future roles more broadly.

Main Findings

Veteran and community divisions

While most veterans have been living back in their communities for many years, divisions between veterans and other community members remain. A lack of community cohesion was identified and perceived to be a result of ongoing and unreconciled crisis-related divisions.

Many men are still identified by community members, and self-identify, as 'veterans' and 'ex-combatants'. Both veterans and community members expressed a strong desire for these identifiers to be broken down. As the crisis ended almost two decades ago, participants emphasised that militarised structures and terminologies should no longer be used and that this change is needed for Bougainville to move on from the crisis.

There was also a strong desire for crisis-related violence and divisions to be addressed. Participants highlighted the interconnected post-conflict challenges they faced within communities, including:

- Ongoing hatred and division in communities caused by unreconciled violence that occurred during the crisis;
- Opposing allegiances from the crisis that still exist within families and communities;
- An increase in anti-social behaviour such as alcohol and drug use, and;
- A general break-down of the traditional family unit.

There was a strong sentiment that Bougainville will struggle to move forward with unity until these issues are resolved.



Reconciliation and rehabilitation challenges

Traditional reconciliation processes were seen as the first step to addressing community divisions and working towards social cohesion and longer-term peace. However, it was highlighted that there are problems with current reconciliation processes, particularly related to the commercialisation of reconciliation ceremonies. Reconciliation processes were perceived to be conducted too quickly and, in many instances, motivated by the desire to receive money from external funding sources. Often, 'funded' reconciliation ceremonies remove many of the traditional restorative elements of the process.

Further, many veterans need rehabilitation support, including counselling and trauma related support, before they feel able to engage in traditional reconciliation processes.

Participants strongly expressed that reconciliation processes need to be completed before the referendum on Bougainville's political status takes place. This leaves Bougainvilleans

in a difficult position as the referendum date approaches, as the restorative elements of traditional processes require substantial time to arrange.

Weapons disposal

Participants strongly supported the removal of weapons from communities, potentially through a process of memorialisation. Most participants felt weapons posed a danger to communities, noting that they are likely to be used in criminal activities and family disputes. There was strong sentiment that weaponry should be preserved in a museum or public monument as a means to deal with the past and at the same time ensure that future generations do not forget the impact that the crisis had on Bougainville and its population.

Wider social and governance issues

Participants highlighted the need for greater inclusion of veterans and community members in decision-making processes, as well as the need for transparent and accountable leadership from both veteran

leaders and the ABG. There was a desire to see leaders share more information with communities about future plans and take more participatory, transparent and accountable approaches. Supporting the capacities of community government representatives through training and funding was proposed as one way this could be improved.

Participants felt that community divisions and challenges could also be addressed through increased access to services, including quality education and economic opportunities, which would provide people with an opportunity to build a better future.

Ways Forward

Dealing with the past

Memorialisation: Memorialisation can support groups of people to remember and understand the past so that they can begin to create a collective vision for what the future may look like. Transforming weaponry into artwork or the establishment of a museum and/or memorials to tell the stories of the crisis and the peace process could support veterans and community members to deal with the legacy of the crisis.

Shared identity and collective approaches to trauma: Many veterans have a shared identity tied to their role as combatants during the crisis. Equally, many community members identify veterans collectively and perceive behaviours of some veterans to represent the wider group. In recognising this shared identity and community perceptions of veterans, collective approaches to dealing with trauma should be explored, such as arts-based approaches, community ceremonies and community dialogues. These approaches would provide a space for veterans and communities to collectively process the events that took place during the crisis, including the impact on communities.

Collective vision: A collective vision for the future can help to move forward in the peace process and enhance community cohesion. In the context of the upcoming referendum, it is important to understand the roles and interests of different groups and work together to foster a collective vision for the future. This could be achieved through community dialogue processes or contributed to through the collective approaches to trauma healing, detailed above.

Traditional and integrated reconciliation

processes: It is important to support the inclusion of restorative elements of traditional reconciliation processes, including ensuring full community support for the process, fundraising and production of ceremonial exchange goods. Some reconciliations are a mixture of traditional, Christian and modern reconciliation processes. There has been positive impact where properly conducted. There should be well planned integrated reconciliation processes to deal with complex issues. Memorialisation and collective approaches to address trauma, detailed above, will likely support more people to engage in traditional reconciliation processes, including those who currently feel they are not ready to do so.

Looking to the future

Understanding veterans' perspectives: Efforts to understand a wider range of veterans' perspectives and perceived challenges should be supported. There needs to be more opportunities for non-leadership veterans and communities to engage in dialogue and decision-making processes to increase inclusion and develop relevant solutions to challenges associated with rehabilitation and reintegration.

Community government to provide leadership for communities: Community government representatives (which often include veterans) should be given the skills, knowledge and support to effectively represent communities, enabling people to understand political processes more effectively and connect with the ABG and other leadership groups. The intersections and connections between customary leadership, religious leadership and formalised government need to be better understood for community government structures to operate most effectively.

Support and training should be tailored to Bougainville's post-conflict context so that community government representatives can analyse and manage community conflict challenges and support longer-term transitions to peace and stability. These representatives should provide information to communities and support veterans and communities to engage in decision-making processes.

Veterans to engage in community government roles: The community government structure also provides an avenue for veterans to engage in formal, community-based

leadership roles. Veterans may occupy other leadership roles in the community, including in the church or customary roles. Veterans who seek formal leadership positions in the community government structure should be enabled to run for positions in fair and open election processes.

Socio-economic opportunities: Economic opportunities and the provision of basic services are essential to support both veterans and

Introduction

Almost two decades after the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) in 2001, significant progress can be seen in Bougainville as the region transitions out of conflict and towards a more peaceful future. Since the signing of the BPA, civil society groups, who played a prominent role in ending the conflict and supporting peace talks, have grown in strength and are active across Bougainville in areas such as human rights, empowerment, livelihood support and peacebuilding. Churches in Bougainville have maintained a strong presence in communities since the early 1900s and are supporting education, health and community programmes. The Bougainville constitution has been established, the ABG is now in its third term and the Bougainville Police Service has been established. New local governance legislation has been passed to establish the Community Government Act (2016) and representatives have been elected.

However, significant challenges remain. The conflict that took place through the 1990s was widespread and impacted everyone in the region. The number of people killed, either directly or indirectly, during the crisis is cited as being as high as 20,000¹ people. Over half of the population were displaced during this period.

Legacy of the crisis for veterans and communities

The crisis in Bougainville has had far reaching consequences for those who lived through it and for subsequent generations. The crisis affected all Bougainvilleans, to varying degrees, and multiple

1. The number of people who died during the crisis is disputed and the estimated figure of 20,000 includes battle-related deaths and people who died due to malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and contracting preventable illness.

community members to engage meaningfully in society and to shape Bougainville's future. Following the crisis, veterans have had varied opportunities and abilities to access economic opportunities and services. While some veterans have improved their socio-economic status, often through business opportunities, others have struggled to progress. As such, support is needed to ensure all veterans and communities have access to services and economic opportunities.

post-conflict challenges remain alongside the original drivers of conflict.

Due to the widespread nature of the conflict, almost all men in Bougainville participated as combatants in some way. Many former combatants now identify under the term *veterans*. While conflict ended with the 1998 ceasefire – followed by the signing of the BPA in 2001 – multiple militarised groups (factions) remain and veterans continue to align under these leadership structures. Some reconciliation has been carried out between group leaders but this has not yet reached all levels of society and will remain a major challenge for some more years.

Within districts and communities in many parts of Bougainville, veteran leaders have considerable influence and authority. Some veteran leaders have joined the peace process and are actively engaged in decision-making related to the implementation of the BPA, whilst others are yet to engage and are distrustful of the process. Outside of the former combatant reserved seats in the ABG, however, most veterans have not been engaged in decision-making processes, although there are legally established Regional Veterans Associations.

There are significant challenges related to the reintegration and rehabilitation of veterans into civilian life, including incomplete reconciliation processes, domestic and localised violence, the presence of weapons in communities and other issues related to community divisions and disputes. These problems affect not only the veterans themselves, but also their communities and Bougainville more broadly. Thus, they need to be addressed if Bougainville is to move towards a stable and peaceful future. Collaborative efforts which engage and listen to the perspectives of

a wide range of veterans must be undertaken to support this.

Value and aims of a peacebuilding and listening approach

Decision-making processes that involve diverse groups of people are more sustainable and robust; they provide the opportunity for more appropriate decisions to be made that can meet the needs of more people. In Bougainville, it is important that non-leadership veterans, as a group of individuals, be included and consulted on decisions that will affect their futures and the future of Bougainville. Furthermore, non-leadership veterans are one group within Bougainville that need to go through significant personal transition – dealing with trauma and their changing roles and identities – if they are to fully integrate and live cohesively in communities.

It is crucial to support the engagement of all veterans with this transition process. As a first step, non-leadership veterans must be consulted on their challenges, desires for the future and possible ways forward. This Listening Research project provides non-leadership veterans and community members with an opportunity to share their opinions and concerns relating to issues such as disarmament, rehabilitation, unity building and desires for the future. The aim of this approach is to ensure that these voices are included in conversations and decisions on disarmament, rehabilitation and unity building processes that will directly affect the futures of veterans, their descendants and communities.

As this research will directly inform the ABG's approach to veteran rehabilitation and reintegration, this listening approach provides an opportunity for veteran's voices to influence decision-making. In this way, this research will provide a basis for policy-making that is relevant and responsive to the interests and needs of people who are the target of these policies.

Methodology and research process

This research process involved a listening approach. A team of 12 researchers from Central Bougainville who were familiar with the people and language in the region, conducted this research. A total of 115 veterans and community members participated in the research during February-March 2018, including

people from Panguna, Kokoda, Metora, Bovonari, Wakunai and Arawa.

Listening methodology employs a flexible conversation-style approach – rather than a more formal interview process – supporting guided conversations that capture the topics that are most important to the group of people being engaged. These conversations, while flexible and open to a wide range of topics, were framed around the following eight questions:

- What are the main rehabilitation challenges for you personally/your community?
- What solutions can you see to these challenges?
- What could be done by you/your family/your community to solve these challenges?
- What other challenges are there for you as a veteran or what other veteran related challenges are there in your community?
- What solutions can you see to these challenges?
- What could be done by you/your family/your community to solve these challenges?
- What you want to see in the future for you/your family/your community?
- What are the steps to get there for you/your family/the community?

The research team first attended a listening research training workshop in January 2018 and then travelled to villages and communities in their respective areas to speak with a cross-section of veterans and community members. After engaging in these conversations, listeners returned to an analysis workshop in March, where the main themes and common issues were identified and prioritised and key differences and one-off stories recorded. A final analysis process was conducted after the workshop by the Conciliation Resources team and results were checked with ABG-DPAI members of the facilitation team and listeners.

Research Findings

Recommendations

Some emerging themes came through in the conversations, which have been synthesised and summarised into ten key recommendations. Framing these themes as recommendations allows acknowledgement of the experiences and voices of veterans and communities but also focuses on ways forward.

Recommendations: Veterans Rehabilitation and Reintegration

1. Support is needed for veterans and community members to heal division and live cohesively.
2. Reconciliation between veteran factions is needed.
3. Veterans have a role to play in the removal of weapons from communities and the memorialisation of weapons.
4. Reconciliation within communities, using traditional processes, is needed and veterans may need rehabilitation and support to engage in these processes.
5. Collaborative and consultative approaches to decision-making around mining are needed.
6. Veterans need increased access to reliable healthcare, including counselling and trauma services.
7. Trust must be developed between veterans, community members and the ABG.
8. All veterans must be included and informed of decisions that are being made.
9. Documentation and repatriation of missing persons is needed.
10. Widows' organisations and co-operatives should be supported by the ABG.

1. Support is needed for veterans and community members to heal divisions and live cohesively

"I fear veterans every time I see them"
Anonymous participant

The most prevalent theme spoken about by participants was the need for veterans and community members to heal divisions and for veterans to be seen as community members instead of veterans belonging to different factions. Veterans and community members felt 'something needs to change' for veterans and communities to move forward together.

"I want to create a good future. I don't want to run into another crisis again... I want all of us and all veterans to be respectful and kind to each other." Adult Male, Kieta

Some participants expressed that communities and veterans must work together to support veterans to heal divisions. Veterans need to be willing to relinquish their connections to former militarised groups and community members need to be willing to support veterans and welcome them back into communities. As some community members expressed that they were fearful of veterans, trust needs to be built within communities.

For veterans to continue to be integrated into communities, they also require access to services and economic opportunities. Some participants suggested vocational or skills training to support their participation in community economic activities.

"He has not done anything, and lives and prays with us, but there is a barrier and a lack of trust, like a sore festering." [Community member speaking about a veteran]
Anonymous participant

2. Reconciliation between veteran factions is needed

"Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the Resistance must unite in thought before referendum. Veterans must not overrule our government. Veterans must submit under our government after we gain independence."
Adult Male, Kieta

Many participants felt divisions between different veteran factions continued to cause tensions within communities. While some participants were aware that various

reconciliation processes have occurred between veteran leaders from different factions, in general participants were uncertain about which leaders had been involved and desired more information about these processes.

“I want the commanders of each platoon to reconcile with the soldiers. So much injustice has been faced. Ex-combatants are not happy because commanders think only of themselves. So that is why commanders need to reconcile with the people.”

Adult Male, Panguna

Adding to the desire for reconciliation between all factions, there is concern that young people are aligning themselves with different factions and idolise and respect veteran leaders. With relatively easy access to weapons, these young people were perceived to pose a potential threat of violence. Participants expressed additional concerns that community positions and decisions over mining were being aligned with former factional groups.

3. Veterans have a role to play in the removal of weapons from communities and the memorialisation of weaponry

“Weapons should be disposed of so that we women can walk freely to anywhere we wish.”

Adult Female, Wakunai

Concerns around weapons varied between locations, but overall there was support for weapons to be removed from communities. Participants felt that weapons posed a threat of violence during inter-personal or family disputes. In many instances, weapons disposal was seen as the responsibility of veteran leaders or ‘commanders’, who should have the final say on what happens to weapons. Communities and veterans supported the memorialisation of weaponry as a means of dealing with the past, to ensure that future generations understand their history and resolve never to return to conflict. Transforming weaponry into artwork or disabling weapons and displaying them in a museum were suggested as options for memorialisation.

“As a mother of late veterans who have lost their lives in the Bougainville Crisis, I want the weapons to be kept in a museum for Remembrance Day.” Adult Female, Wakunai

A minority of participants felt that weapons were not an issue for their villages. Although there are weapons present in their communities, they saw these weapons as ‘silent’ and indicated that weapons are more likely to be used in urban areas.

“Our guns don’t make noise, the ones from town make noise.” Anonymous participant

One community felt that their weapons were valuable property that should not be taken away without compensation. There was also an acknowledgement that it is easy to manufacture new weapons and that removing existing weapons, therefore, would have little impact on incidences of violence.

“Why should we dispose of our weapons? We paid money for them and they are for security.”

Adult Female, Kokoda

4. Reconciliation using traditional processes is needed and veterans may need rehabilitation and support to engage in these processes

“This is the step that we can take: if we have veterans within our families, we must talk to them to open their hearts, to really forgive and forget. After that we will go into communities and talk to all veterans about the same thing, that is, to conduct reconciliation. When that is done, we can liaise with the Community Government for reconciliation to take place.”

Adult Female, Kieta

Conducting traditional reconciliation processes was a priority for participants. It was seen as an essential step to enable communities to move forward from the crisis in the lead up to the referendum. This included reconciliation at all levels and between all those affected by the crisis, including veterans, families, clans and communities.

“I want to see my children accepted and begin talking with my family.”

Anonymous participant

In addition to crisis-related reconciliation, participants saw the need for the completion of traditional reconciliation processes for issues relating to land, sorcery and outstanding family



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disputes. Many people who have not reconciled with their families and communities are unable to return to their land, either because of incomplete reconciliation or due to competing land ownership claims, impacting on their own future and the future of their children. This was noted as particularly difficult for widows, veterans and people who grew up outside Bougainville during the crisis as well as groups that lived around the care centres or moved away because of the crisis.

“My husband was beaten by the resistance force...he was beaten because we were on the BRA side... Then he died. I was left with seven children to look after...There is no reconciliation with the guys that beat my husband up until today.”

Adult Female, Panguna

Participants perceived that completing reconciliations was important to heal divisions between veterans and communities, develop trust and to support unity and stability in preparation for the referendum.

“When the blood is still crying out, it is not good to vote for referendum. [We] want a referendum but people are not together.”

Anonymous participant

“Customarily for reconciliations to happen, especially on huge issues, there is a time period for healing and trust is able to develop.”

Anonymous participant

Traditional reconciliation processes

Veterans and community members strongly emphasised the need to use traditional or customary reconciliation processes. Participants felt that these processes result in more genuine and sustained outcomes. Traditional processes require both parties, and in particular the perpetrator, to invest time and labour, and strengthen community accountability by involving family and community members. This builds a foundation to heal divisions once the reconciliation process is complete and allows time for wounds to heal.

Customary reconciliation

“In customary reconciliation processes a price or payment is agreed upon, usually a certain number of pigs or some taro. The perpetrator must then raise the pigs or grow the taro needed and during this period there is time for reflection and healing so that trust can develop. When the formal reconciliation process (an exchange and feast ceremony) takes place at the end of this period, the underlying issues have been processed and both can move forwards. Customary reconciliations are about investing time and energy to understand the other person and make reparations.”

Listening researcher

Participants were concerned that reconciliation processes have become overly transactional and have lost these elements of accountability and commitment. Participants noted that instances of people engaging in externally-funded reconciliations to receive money were becoming common place. This detracts from the personal and community investment involved in traditional reconciliation processes that is so integral to a successful outcome and also reduces the healing and restorative elements of the process.

“When reconciliation is funded by the government, it does not come from deep within people’s hearts. When you feel the pain of it, you feel it in your heart and things are done completely.” Anonymous participant

Support for veterans to engage in reconciliation

“We have scars because of the war. We fought. We need counselling because we are traumatised. We must put an end to our problems and reconcile.” Adult Male, Kieta

Participants believed that many veterans were inhibited from engaging meaningfully in community activities, and in particular in traditional reconciliation processes, due to a lack of rehabilitation services, such as psychosocial care for crisis-related trauma. Many veterans and community members stated that trauma created a barrier to engaging in reconciliation. Veterans felt that whilst strong community leadership could support reconciliation and community cohesion, wider services and social support are needed for all veterans to be able to engage in these processes.

Rehabilitation centres and vocational training for veterans and youth²

“I do not provide enough for my children; I get angry easily because I got traumatised during the crisis and I need counselling.”

Adult Male, Kieta

The creation of rehabilitation centres to provide counselling, adult education and vocational training for veterans and youth was highlighted. A number of participants recognised that veterans need trauma related support and counselling.

“It would be good if there were some mechanisms put in place so that those who had been combatants could get some rehabilitation. Maybe this is why they still have a feeling of disconnection.”

Anonymous Participant

Some participants suggested that veterans and youth should be supported to gain vocational skills to help them live more cohesively in communities. Agricultural practices – such as advanced farming techniques, inland fishing and small goods manufacturing – were also identified as possible training options that would support veterans to engage in economic activities.

“My problem is that I did not complete my schooling during the crisis – now I regret it. If the crisis hadn’t happened, I would have completed it.” Youth Female, Kieta

5. Collaborative and consultative approaches to decision-making around mining are needed

Another challenge highlighted by participants is the role and influence veteran leaders have in decision-making around mining. Engagement with mining companies and decisions on whether mining will go ahead has, in many cases, been led by veteran leaders, causing new factional affinities to emerge or re-form based on attitudes to mining.

“The mining talks have created divisions among families, even brother and sister. This is bad. These two leaders must come together if both of them support the referendum.”

Adult Female, Panguna

There was a strong feeling among non-leadership veterans and community members that decisions on the future status of mining must be made in consultation with communities and a consensus must be reached before any decisions are made. There was also a perception that there has been too much focus from the ABG and veteran leaders on mining and not enough attention given to the referendum. Participants saw the need for increased information about the referendum (referendum awareness) instead of continuing discussions around mining.

2. In this project, the term youth was used to refer to individuals up to the age of 35.

“Firstly [we must] concentrate on the upcoming referendum, then after referendum we talk about mining or the economy. We are for referendum and that was the main goal of the crisis.” Adult Male, Panguna

Participants expressed a strong desire to have access to a range of markets and other economic opportunities unrelated to mining; some suggested that the ABG should develop alternative industries, such as fishing and agriculture.

6. Veterans need increased access to reliable healthcare, including counselling and trauma services

Participants noted that veterans have specific healthcare needs arising from their experiences as combatants. This includes psychosocial support to deal with the trauma associated with the conflict. The need for medication and medical care for injuries sustained during the conflict was also raised in conversations, particularly in regards to cases where a lack of treatment has led to amputations.

7. Trust must be developed between veterans, community members and the ABG

“There are some people in high positions in the structures of the ABG and Me’ekamui who don’t seem to have a clear understanding of why we fought the war on Bougainville. Their main concern is that they must have a large amount of money in their pockets to benefit themselves.” Adult Male, Panguna

Participants expressed the need to build trust between the ABG, veterans and communities. The ABG was encouraged to take honest, respectful, disciplined and transparent approaches to leadership as a way to develop trust with communities and veterans. This was also linked to a desire for increased government services and for these services to be fairly distributed among communities.

“The ABG must concentrate on strengthening good governance both at the high level and community government levels and wards.” Adult Male, Panguna

Some participants linked distrust towards the ABG to a lack of communication and limited information about ABG plans and policy-making. Veterans and community members felt they did not have enough information about what the government is doing in areas such as service delivery, economic support, referendum and future planning. Participants emphasised their desire for the ABG to support the village assembly and community government representatives in their areas. They saw this as one way that government processes could connect more strongly to communities, in the long-term building the trust that is currently lacking.

“The government must listen to people more.” Anonymous participant

8. All veterans must be included and informed of decisions that are being made

Participants expressed a need for non-leadership veterans to be included and represented in decision-making. Veterans felt that they were not receiving information on reconciliation and other referendum preparation processes. Agreements and negotiations that take place between veteran leaders are often not communicated to those in communities, meaning localised divisions can continue even after agreements have been signed by leaders. It was also felt that benefits allocated by the ABG to veterans were only benefiting higher ranks and leadership veterans.

New leadership roles for veterans

There was a desire to see veteran leaders supporting referendum awareness, weapons disposal and to have a formalised role in leading these processes. Community members wanted veterans to guarantee safety during the referendum and felt this would build trust between communities and veterans. Others suggested that veterans should work with legitimate government authorities to promote trust. While specific suggestions were not proposed, participants felt veterans needed to engage in different or ‘civilian’ leadership roles.

“Veterans must guarantee our safety if they want, or think of starting, another crisis. We want our safety guaranteed because we are tired of running away from war.” Adult Female, Kieta

9. Documentation and repatriation of missing persons is needed

“My husband was killed by the BRA in Buka; an old man called him at night when we were asleep at around 3am and he was killed. He is categorized as a ‘missing person’. We do not know where his body was left; during the Missing Persons Day, we just placed flowers.”

Adult Female, Kieta

Both veterans and communities expressed a strong desire for the documentation of missing persons and the repatriation of remains. Some participants were dissatisfied by the lack of progress, or any visible efforts by the ABG, to address this issue. In some cases, missing persons and incomplete repatriation cases are preventing reconciliations from taking place. As such, the status of missing persons and location of remains must be established before the process can begin.

10. Widows organisations and co-operatives should be supported by the ABG

“I have a problem with school fees. I lack finance to pay for my child’s school fees. I want to make money to pay the fees.”

Adult Female, Kieta

Participants were supportive of organisations to help widows. Some suggested that widows’ organisations could provide group economic opportunities, such as cooperatives to support market trading, through shared rental of vehicles and fundraising for school fees and medical expenses. Participants suggested the ABG could provide school fee subsidies through widows’ organisations and that such organisations could help widows to develop vocational skills – like fishing, sewing and tailoring – as well as life skills – like cooking and good hygiene practices.

Some widows’ organisations have already been established and are perceived as successful, in large part, because they were set up and led by the women themselves. Participants saw a need to support more women to establish similar organisations in other communities.

Broader findings – other themes and recommendations

Outside of discussions of veteran rehabilitation and reintegration, five other themes emerged from the listening conversations.

Other themes and recommendations

1. Greater referendum awareness and information sharing is needed.
2. Communities need increased access to basic service delivery and economic and livelihood opportunities.
3. Law and order needs to be strengthened within communities.
4. Transparency in governance and increased resourcing for community government are needed.
5. Issues related to anti-social behaviour should be addressed through families.

1. Greater referendum awareness and information sharing is needed

“Not enough awareness has been done to prepare people [for the referendum] especially in my ward area. Everyone must be well-informed to vote freely.” Adult Female, Panguna

Overall, participants felt that there was limited awareness about what the referendum is and the process that will take place. Some suggested that the ABG should strengthen efforts to support public awareness around the referendum and veteran leaders should share information and strengthen communication with non-leadership veterans. Communities and veterans expressed a desire for the ABG and veteran leaders to be involved in awareness-raising activities around the referendum.

“There is a lack of connection from the top level down to village assembly level in the veterans’ and government level. We want connections from the top-level veterans down to village veterans.” Adult Male, Kieta

It would be good for the resource people within the government sector to talk to the people. They need to hear different voices because they don’t listen when I speak to them.”

Female, Kieta

2. Communities need increased access to basic service delivery, economic and livelihood opportunities

Participants felt that most communities lack government services as well as economic and livelihood opportunities. Participants expressed interest in receiving information on future plans in these areas.

Basic service delivery from the ABG

During conversations, participants emphasised their desire to see fair distribution of public services across Bougainville, prioritising quality education, health services and road infrastructure/transportation services.

“[We] have not enough schools in the community for our children to attend. That’s why most of our children don’t go on to higher education.” Adult Female, Wakunai

In all areas, participants expressed the desire for high-quality education in Bougainville, including adult education and greater access for young adults to education.

“I did not complete my education because of the crisis. I think that if the crisis had not happened, I would have completed my education, have a good job and be a help to my family. My big problem is with education.”

Youth Female, Kieta

Limited access to education was seen to contribute to young women and men using drugs and alcohol, particularly in remote areas. Lack of education prevents young people from being able to access formal employment and was seen to limit prospects for a better future.

Maternal health was seen as a priority in improving health services. Participants spoke of mothers dying in childbirth because they could not reach the hospital. Some also discussed the difficulty of paying medical fees, in particular for widows.

Participants expressed the need for improved road infrastructure. Many people have difficulty travelling to medical centres and to food markets. Women often have to walk long journeys carrying heavy items to sell, sometimes during the evening and night which adds to security risks. Many communities do not have road access and, in some areas, access is only available by boat.

“[It is] very difficult for them to bring the local produce to market, mothers have to carry produce down to sell... it is costing them money because they can’t sell.”

Anonymous participant

Improved economic opportunities including livelihoods projects

Participants wanted to see economic development and wanted to be self-reliant, but needed support from the ABG to create further opportunities. Some expressed interest in increased access to markets to sell cash crops locally and internationally.

“[It would be] good for the government to give projects to communities or interested groups like youths and women. The women can manage them and look after the youths and help families earn income.” Youth Female, Kieta

Tourism was another potential industry that was mentioned by the participants in Kieta and Wakunai, particularly as an alternative to mining. In general people expressed a desire to explore income-generating avenues unrelated to resource extraction (mining and logging).

“The government is not coming and getting our views so we cannot co-operate with the government to open up tourism and they have many attractions that could be marketed.”

Anonymous participant

“The government can run projects such as poultry, piggery and fisheries for youths and women. This will help provide opportunities for involvement for youths to avoid them causing problems.” Anonymous participant

3. Law and order need to be strengthened within communities

“No one talks about law and order too, that’s why people misbehave.” Youth Female, Kieta

Participants expressed the need for a greater presence of law enforcement in communities, to prevent petty crime, drug and alcohol production and sorcery-related violence. There was a desire for ABG security forces to better respond

to these issues and be seen to 'take care' of the community. Communities and veterans expressed a need for training and support for the Bougainville Police Force that meets the unique context and challenge of policing in Bougainville.

Strengthening the capacity of the justice system was also highlighted as a way to enable timelier processing of cases. Participants were concerned that young people engaging in anti-social activities were not held accountable for their actions.

"...Drugs, homebrew and alcohol are common. Many youths involved with these things, when they take them to the police station the police just release them. That's why they keep doing it because they know there are no consequences – it becomes a habit." Anonymous participant

4. ABG information sharing and increased resourcing for community government is needed

"When will the leaders of the community display maturity and lead us in the right direction and provide good advice? They don't treat us well." Adult Male, Kieta

Communities and veterans felt that there was a lack of communication and public awareness regarding the government's role and policies. They indicated that people desire more information about decisions being made and the ABG's plans for the future.

"The leaders in the government must decrease their salary a bit, they must not earn so much. It would be good for them to decrease their salary and give the remainder to the men in the village to help them start projects in their communities." Adult Male, Kieta

Participants expressed a desire for the ABG to engage with communities more and to support the community government structure to enable it to play a key role in connecting the ABG government with communities.

"The ABG must concentrate on strengthening and empowering the community government." Anonymous participant

The community government structure is seen as an important opportunity; however there has been no financial support or skills training for its representatives since it was set up. Participants perceived community government representatives are having limited leadership capacity and emphasised the need to support them with training and funding.

"[The] leadership capacity of ward members is limited; they need training and funding support." Anonymous participant

5. Issues related to anti-social behaviour should be addressed through strengthening families

Participants expressed concerns about the prevalence of anti-social behaviours including drug use, alcohol abuse (particularly the production and consumption of homebrew), incest³ teenage pregnancy (both due to a lack of family planning mechanisms and the rape of young women), and polygamy.

"Mothers and fathers [are] leaving the house and causing their kids to become raskols." Anonymous participant

Overall, participants expressed strong feelings that the function of the family unit is breaking – or has broken – down and there is less participation and commitment to support families and communities (including not supporting community projects). Some suggested that family values need to be instilled once again to address the causes of anti-social behaviour. A need to restore customary and cultural values was also highlighted, including visits to extended family to prevent incest through understanding who your relatives are.

"We need resources from outside the community to help us conduct awareness or educational promotion and family life awareness so that people can be motivated through the program and discover the importance of life." Adult Female, Kieta

3. This often relates to marriage within clans, rather than with an immediate family member, but can also include rape by a close or extended family member.



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Participants felt the government should work with churches to address some of these issues, particularly around substance abuse. Some churches already have programmes for promoting family values and there was a request for the government to help make such programmes more widely available.

“Family awareness programmes should not be restricted to the Catholic Church but should be available to all.” Anonymous participant

Conclusion

The listening approach used in this research has helped to understand the perceptions, opinions and experiences of veterans and community members from Central Bougainville.

Veterans expressed a range of challenges, including transitioning from a combatant role during the conflict to living in communities. Many veterans shared their challenges in adjusting to new roles and linked this not only to their individual identity but to shared identities and a sense of purpose. While many veterans are currently living in communities, strong divisions remain and many people feel they do not know how to move forward. Both veterans and community members felt veterans had not received adequate support to make these transitions and to reconcile experiences from the crisis.

While both veterans and community members discussed the challenges of reintegration, emphasis was placed on developing practical solutions to support veterans and community members to deal with the past. This included traditional reconciliation processes and increased support to engage veterans in community life, through the provision of services (including health services and veterans’ rehabilitation centres), skills training (such as adult education) and economic opportunities.

Beyond challenges for veterans, general societal challenges – such as limited access to education and economic or livelihood opportunities for communities – were highlighted. Communities and veterans expressed dissatisfaction with leadership, felt disconnected from the ABG and were frustrated by limited access to information

about government policies and current events. Whilst the community government structure was seen as an important opportunity to connect communities with the ABG, overall there was a sense that people feel stuck, and that while they want to engage in decision-making regarding the future, they do not know how to begin.

Overall, this listening process has identified some of the key challenges facing non-

leadership veterans and communities and has also provided space for people to discuss opportunities and ways forward. These conversations provide a starting point to address issues facing veterans throughout Bougainville as they continue to negotiate their changing roles in their communities. Listening to these voices is essential for policy-making around rehabilitation and reintegration going forward.

Annex I: Methodology

The aim of this project is to focus on the voices of non-leadership veterans and community members from across Bougainville and to give them space to share their opinions and concerns relating to issues such as disarmament, rehabilitation, reintegration, unity and the future more broadly.

Listening methodology is a qualitative, subject-oriented research approach recognised as an effective method of gathering a range of individual opinions and identifying key themes from wide groups of people. The methodology recognises that people living in any given context have first-hand experience, knowledge, and often the best understanding of contextual dynamics.

This listening methodology was initially developed by CDA Collaborative Learning Projects in Cambridge, Massachusetts as a feedback mechanism for communities receiving humanitarian aid.

The methodology provides a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the ideas and insights of people who live in, or are affected by, a situation such as violent conflict. Conducting informal conversations, rather than using a more formalised interview process, creates a space where participants feel comfortable sharing concerns and messages that are important to them with less likelihood of self-censorship.

Participants remain anonymous and age, gender, occupation, marital status and other general demographic details are used to describe participants and to document and record characteristics of the project participants.

This methodology engages individuals who are directly experiencing a situation – in this case veterans and community members who are

experiencing veteran-related challenges. In this way, the most prevalent opinions, concerns and desires of this group of people can be identified and shared.

Research Design

In the listening research approach, a team of researchers from the context area are trained in the methodology and conduct conversations with participants. Working with researchers from the context allows for more trusted conversations and the use of language with which participants are most comfortable.

In this listening research project, a team of 12 researchers from Central Bougainville were identified by the ABG-DPAI as being familiar with the people and language in central Bougainville and were asked to support the project as listening researchers. Working in teams of two, these researchers formed six listening research teams.

A two-day workshop in Arawa was held in February 2018 to equip listening researchers with the skills and knowledge needed to carry out the listening conversations with veterans and community members. The workshop focused on understanding the methodology, and skills training in communication, conversation and listening skills, and bias-mitigation techniques.

The listening teams travelled to villages and communities in their respective areas in the two weeks following the workshop. They were asked to speak with a cross-section of people living in these areas who were non-leadership veterans or affected by veterans' related challenges. Listening conversations are non-prescriptive and allow flexibility to cover topics most important to participants. Key topics are used to support a level of consistency across conversations.

Listeners did not record data during conversations but used a series of daily processing tools to record and process information after each conversation and at the end of each day.

Synthesis and analysis

Following the two weeks of listening conversations, listening teams came together with a CR facilitation team and representatives from the ABG-DPAI to share what they had heard in a two-day analysis workshop. Through a participatory synthesis and analysis process, broad themes and common issues from all areas in the project area were identified and prioritised and key differences and one-off stories that emerged during conversations were highlighted. A final analysis process was conducted after the workshop by CR and results were checked with ABG-DPAI members of the facilitation team and listeners.

Participant demographics

Six listening teams held conversations with 115 participants in Central Bougainville. These conversations took place in six areas: Arawa, Bovonari, Kokoda, Metora, Panguna and Wakunai.

Table 1. Number of participants by area

Location	No. participants	%
Arawa	23	26.45
Kokoda	21	24.15
Bovonari	20	23
Wakunai	20	23
Panguna	16	18.4
Metora	15	17.25
Total	115	100

The areas covered in this research include the districts of Kieta, Panguna and Wakunai, Arawa Urban Community Government area, Kokoda Community Government area, Bovonari ward in the Panguna district and Metora ward in the Kieta district.

The majority of the participants were male (60% or 69 participants) with females comprising the remaining 40% or 46 participants. The majority of participants were married (61%) and some were widowed (10%), although this data was not collected for all participants and 18% did not provide information about their marital status.

The gender breakdown of the participants varied by area, with Kokoda and Wakunai showing

greater representation of male views (71% and 70% respectively) compared to Bovonari where there was equal representation of men and women.

Table 2. Number of male and female participants by area

Location	Women	Men	Total
Wakunai	6	14	20
Bovonari	10	10	20
Panguna	5	11	16
Metora	6	9	15
Arawa	13	10	23
Kokoda	6	15	21
Total	46	69	115

Participant age was not recorded consistently across areas, with some listeners recording precise age, some designating an age range and some designating participants as either 'adults' or 'youths'⁴. 63% or 72 participants were recorded as adults (above 35 years old), 17% or 19 participants were recorded as youth (18-35 years old) and age-related data was not recorded for 21% or 24 participants.

All of the participants were either veterans or community members, although these distinctions were not recorded consistently. 23% or 27 participants were specifically classified by listeners as 'veterans' and 42% as having 'other roles'. Data on this identity marker was not collected for the remaining 35% of participants. Over 60% of participants were identified as over 35 years, indicating that most participants were impacted by the conflict during their life. Participants' livelihood or occupation was recorded for 29% of participants (33 people). For individuals whose occupation was recorded, farming was the most common occupation (39% of recorded occupations).

Limitations of the Research Methodology

The aim of the project was to access a diverse and representative group of veterans and community members in Central Bougainville. As the section above shows, this was achieved to varying levels in each area however there are limitations. One notable limitation was around the collection of data on participant

4. In this case the term youth refers to individuals up to the age of 35.

demographics and identity markers, specifically their status as 'veterans' or 'community members'. A listening approach typically collects details on age, gender, occupation and marital status to then be able to describe participants and analyse the representativity of the research. While such characteristics were taken into account by the listeners, this data was not consistently recorded.

To increase the diversity of participants, a demographic mapping session was held with the listening research teams before they had conversations, to help them identify the different groups of people living in each of the areas and an estimate of the proportion needed to gain representative views.

This research was conducted with participants from Central Bougainville and sheds light on some of the most important challenges, opinions and ways forward for veterans and community members. It should be viewed as a pilot project indicating areas for further dialogue, engagement and research with a wider group of people from across Bougainville. This publication is not meant to be an exhaustive account of all

opinions, concerns and suggestions, rather it synthesises and summarises some of the emerging themes.

This research is based on one-on-one discussions with veterans and community members, but it should be noted that participants were not given time to prepare before the conversations. Participants may have developed their thoughts about some of the topics discussed after the completion of the conversations and these opinions are not captured in this project.

The listening methodology is a subjective process. It relies on the listeners' capacity to record what they had heard from their memories. Several mechanisms were used to offset bias, such as training in bias mitigation, identification of listener bias prior to the project and using listening teams comprising two listeners being present at the same conversation but recording data independently. The facilitation team also made use of additional techniques during processing workshops and in further analysis of recorded data. Even so, there is likely to be some subjectivity present in the results that are recorded.

Table 3. Guiding questions for listening conversations

	Guiding Question	Key topics
1.	What are the main rehabilitation challenges for you personally/your community?	Veterans, rehabilitation challenges
2.	What solutions can you see to these challenges?	Veterans, rehabilitation challenges, solutions
3.	What could be done by you/your family/your community to solve these challenges?	Veterans, rehabilitation challenges, actions to be taken by you
4.	What other challenges are there for you as a veteran and what other veteran related challenges are there in your community?	Other veterans' challenges
5.	What solutions can you see to these challenges?	Other veterans' challenges, solutions
6.	What could be done by you/your family/your community to solve these challenges?	Other veterans' challenges, actions to be taken by you
7.	What you want to see in the future for you/your family/your community?	Future hopes
8.	What are the steps to get there for you/your family/the community?	Future, action to be taken by you

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Burghley Yard, 106 Burghley Road, London NW5 1AL United Kingdom

☎ +44 (0)20 7359 7728 ✉ cr@c-r.org 🌐 www.c-r.org

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