

## **Leadership and Agriculture**

One of the defining moments of the 2008 Olympic Games has been the embracing of the Russian and Georgian silver and bronze medallists, despite their home countries (both members of the former Soviet Union) having lurched into armed conflict during the previous hours.

Interviewed, they both responded that they were old friends and that sport should be above the murk of politics and nationalistic conflict. "If the world were to draw any lessons from what I did there would never be any wars," the Georgian, Nino Salukvadze said. "We live in the 21st century, after all. We shouldn't really stoop so low to wage wars against each other."

"There should be no hatred among athletes and people," she said. "Politicians should straighten out the situation today and if they don't, we'll have to get involved."

Here in PNG the community expects a lot of its leaders (often the wrong things) and blames them when matters go wrong, or services are not delivered. In response leaders, including the Prime Minister recently, seek to pass the buck to 'the system' and the public servants for failures of governance, including prevailing corruption. Everyone seems to pass the buck and no-one takes responsibility for armed tribal conflicts, the atrocious and widely deteriorating infrastructure and basic services, high infant and maternal death rates, and rates of corruption and abuse of public funds.

Problems are blamed on former colonial power(s), donors, foreign companies, people from other provinces, Asians, the media, you name it, they're all responsible! We launch investigations into problems, but then fail to reveal findings, action recommendations or prosecute perpetrators. So we fail to learn, clean up, punish or provide deterrent.

There are indeed many factors responsible for PNG's problems and it is clearly wrong to assign excessive blame on individual leaders. Many, for example exaggerate the powers of a Prime Minister in this country. Even with the Organic Law on Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates, and restrictions on votes of No-Confidence, the Prime Minister remains trapped by PNG's pork-barrel politics and constant demands to satisfy and appease conflicting factions, as well as by a largely ineffective though influential public service.

Nevertheless, in an expression made famous by former US President, Harry Truman, the "Buck Stops here", meaning, once you're in the top public service job, you cannot go on "passing the buck" to anyone else. A Prime Minister (and his Cabinet) must take ultimate responsibility for successes and failures, including performance or failure of the whole government system, including whether suitable public sector managers and Board members have been appointed. But that does not in any way remove responsibility from other Ministers, Governors, MPs, public servants and private sector and civil society members, however wealthy or senior or humble.

Everyone has their part to play, not only in performing their own tasks reliably and honestly, but also contributing to ensuring that the system (including local services) function and abuses are reported and addressed. We must all take responsibility and contribute in different ways to enabling the country to function, whether ensuring peace, law and order, operational schools, health services or local infrastructure. If national or local leaders fail to lead properly, or let their country or local tribes slip into unnecessary conflicts (as in Georgia),

they should stand aside for more responsible leadership within the community, like those two Olympic medalists. In PNG we've found many dedicated civil society leaders, such as Kup Women for Peace, showing greater commitment to community service and accountability than many government leaders

On accountability in agriculture, the National Agricultural Development Plan (NADP) is currently a major concern! PNG desperately needs to boost its underperforming agricultural sector. It provides a third of the country's GDP and the majority's livelihood, but apart from oil palm and some food crops (largely subsistence) there has been no substantial production increase, despite recent price hikes. There are many explanations, notably impassable roads and crime. If you cannot deliver produce to market or it's stolen on the tree or highway, there's little point in making much effort.

It is critical that NADP funding (currently K100 million annually) is utilised effectively to improve the sector's prospects, combined with improving infrastructure (especially access roads) and meeting other sector prerequisites. The agricultural institutions are crying out for funding core programmes and crisis prevention and response, including major pest and disease threats. Most institutions were established in the mid-1980s/early 90s to restore agricultural research, extension and quarantine capacity, with the Agriculture Department's own capacity declining, with lack of operational funding and increased politicization. It was intended to establish industry responsive organisations to:- supplement inadequate government funding with industry contributions; and manage programmes more efficiently and improve accountability, using private sector style management and recruiting high calibre professionals.

Since then, however, government has progressively reduced funding from these institutions, leaving the industries to fund their own organisations. Yet, Ministers and cohorts tampered with Board appointment (even arm-twisting KIK to provide a vehicle for one Minister, in addition to official arrangements). Government even imposed GST on levies charged to farmers for research and extension services, which government hitherto funded. Many agricultural organisations received donor support in the late 1980s/early 90s, which, apart from Stabex funds, (largely) dried up in the 1990s, with some receiving renewed support of late.

Where is the PNG Government contribution, especially now as government revenue has increased significantly? Government has made many commitments over this decade to the sector. It provided counterpart funding to an ADB-funded and potentially valuable Agro-nucleus enterprise project, but staff then proceeded to misuse the counterpart contribution, resulting in project termination. It introduced a Green Revolution programme, which was more of a whimper than a revolution (although including some potentially useful components); and now NADP

NADP comprises a sector review and shopping list of programmes, some potentially valuable others less so. It is not an outstanding document, and is certainly top-down, with little recognition of markets, the private sector or even sector institutions. The envisaged consultation process was reduced to a workshop. Nevertheless it is a long overdue plan, (linked with the MTDS and international commitments, notably MDGs) and provides some basis for sector support, including international and local development partners (like PNGSDP).

But what's happened to this plan and the funds allocated to it over the past 1 ½ years? The commodity institutions, largely operating on shoe-strings (like CIC) have seen no funds yet, including for urgent pest and disease control, let alone needed longer term research and information dissemination. Of the first K100 million allocated, we're told 18 projects have already been funded for K26 million; 28 projects are about to be funded for K31 million, 89 Districts will be funded for K17.8 million through District Treasuries and K17.8 million is committed to buying out an estate in Morobe, leaving a balance K8 million.

It is widely reported that the first K26 million was partly paid out before the 2007 Election, with much of it provided to politicians/party officials for plantation rehabilitation. Much of the K31 million is also expected for that purpose. Funding for Districts could be valuable, but only if accountable District planning and implementation prevails, but, as widely known, the District planning system (using JDP&BPCs) in practice is controlled by Open Members, often with limited accountability (to date).

No details have yet been provided to the public on the recipients of this generous State largesse. As stated, PNG has the opportunity to take advantage of currently higher prices for export crops and local foods, but this requires expenditure being carefully targeted and justified. PNG may shortly experience a major boost in economic activity from LNG development (pipeline and plant) and subsequent production and export. Despite prospective benefits, this massive project would impose severe pressure upon supplies of urban real estate and various skills (e.g. engineers and artisans needed also by agricultural and manufacturing/processing industries), the currency and other weak links, including corruption.

It is now critical to get agriculture, rural infrastructure and services and systems of governance, firmly on their feet, including a major boost to needed agricultural and technical training. It's high time NADP is made fully operational and accountable, and, as the Deputy PM agreed at an agricultural seminar in January, the process needs rigorous participation by the private sector and civil society, including in project process and oversight, as highlighted by Ricky Mitio at the recent National Development Forum.

This is a time for leadership, cooperation and transparency in the agriculture sector and overall. Government must listen and facilitate, rather than being a barrier, and greedy or selfish leaders, as in Russia and Georgia, should stand aside for those with more heart for the issues and the people, like those two Olympic sportswomen.