Nurturing Professional Practice: 
Psychosocial support for emerging aid and development managers

This paper is a summary of the Mandala Foundation Pacific Psychosocial Forum that was held in Vanuatu from the 13th to 16th of October, 2008 at the Chiefs Nakamal, Port Vila.

Planning for the Forum was led by a local planning group comprising members of the Vanuatu Interagency Mental Health Network representing local and international NGOs within Vanuatu.

The main aim of the Forum was to increase the awareness of a psychosocial approach to a) staff support and b) program development within aid and development agencies within Vanuatu and the broader Pacific Region.

Key program features of the Forum included:

- Psychosocial approaches to supporting local mental health issues
- Systemic approaches to supporting the health & wellbeing of NGO staff and volunteers
- Special issues relevant to the Pacific (gender, counseling, workplace issues, research)
- Introduction to psychosocial support in emergency settings
- Meetings of local, regional and global peer support networks
- Practical case studies, interactive discussions, playback theatre and youth panel

Emerging from the many and varied Forum discussions and presentations were key points that were felt to be pertinent to working in and supporting programs in the Pacific context.

Key to supporting aid staff in the Pacific:

- Encourage and affirm emerging aid and development managers to consider staff wellbeing as integral to their role
- Identify and strengthen existing staff support and professional development networks
- Plan an integrated system of psychosocial support for staff in communities
- Implement staff support practices and policies that are mindful of cultural context, roles and practices
- Conduct cross-cultural training and preparation for volunteers and aid and development workers
- Schedule in-country briefings with national staff and teams
- Implement effective human resource practices
- Regularly value and support the diverse range and health and disability needs of staff and volunteers

*At the time of conducting the Forum, the Mandala Foundation was branded as the Antares Foundation.*
Key to supporting community in the Pacific:

- Respect existing strengths, cultural context and identity
- Identify and strengthen existing community support mechanisms
- Foster community cohesion and social support
- Support programs that involve both traditional and non-traditional methods
- Recognize the transitional aspects and multiplicities of women’s roles
- Encourage dialogue and provide a safe space to nurture different voices such as youth and women and those with disabilities
- Understand stressors and usual ways of coping in communities in order to help provide culturally sensitive psychosocial support
- Recognize and support the resilience of communities in emergencies and
- Support emergency preparedness

A highly collaborative approach to developing the Forum Program was achieved by working with a local planning committee in Vanuatu who played a pivotal role in determining program content, format and order, presenters, venue and setting.

The benefits of this approach included a strong sense of ownership and empowerment of local planning staff, respect for local cultural context and preferred ways of learning as well as increased relevance of content to the needs of Pacific staff and organizations.

Sustainability strategies

An important aim of the Forum was to ensure that the learning and outcomes that arise from the Forum could be fostered, strengthened and sustained beyond the conclusion of the 3-day Forum.

From this viewpoint, the following approaches to increasing sustainability were and will continue to be applied by the Mandala Foundation Inc. (Australia):

- Involvement of local planning groups to ensure psychosocial content and topics are relevant and guided by local context
- Membership of a local planning group drawn from existing mental health network and NGOs
- Representation on local planning groups from a range of local and international NGOs, thereby increasing scope of influence and involvement
- Establishment of a Pacific Staff Support Coordinator to continue to work post-Forum with existing networks and organizations on psychosocial approaches to staff support
- Consultation with key local stakeholders in determining ongoing support needs
- Ensuring that local network members are involved in and inform ongoing activities such as translation of materials and adaptation to local context
- Linkages where relevant to existing key projects and contacts such as government, NGOs and communities
- Provision of some mentoring, advice and capacity building support to local staff interested in supporting ongoing psychosocial initiatives current work in Vanuatu or broader the Pacific
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation practices to track progress and adapt as needed to meet project objectives and ensure ongoing relevance to local context and needs
- Support to facilitate opportunities for ongoing social connections and sharing of Forum outcomes and staff support momentum.

It was because of the voices of the young Pacific NGO staff, who in 2007, expressed concerns about the psychosocial issues and challenges they faced and the need for support and training in psychosocial approaches to staff support and program development that this Pacific Forum took place. Tankyu tumas to all who supported, attended, sponsored and presented.
FORUM PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Forum took place over three days and comprised a range of interactive activities, presentations, break-out discussion opportunities and applied exercises. The three days were facilitated by members of the Local Planning Committee. An overview of the program commences this report.

### Monday 13th October 2008 – Opening event

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.30pm onwards</td>
<td>Registration and arrivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.30pm-7.30pm</td>
<td>Forum opening speeches/welcome</td>
<td>Chief, MoH, Antares, AusAID</td>
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<td>Entertainment &amp; refreshments</td>
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### Day 1: Tuesday 14th October 2008

**(FACILITATOR: DAVID CHILDSO, Red Cross Information and Dissemination Officer)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.30-9.00am</td>
<td>Registration and arrivals</td>
<td>a) Amanda Allan (Antares Foundation Inc. Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.00-10.00am</td>
<td>Welcome &amp; Housekeeping</td>
<td>b) Ralph Regenvanu</td>
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<td>Introductory sessions:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Psychosocial principles &amp; approach</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Anthropological framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00-10.20am</td>
<td>Morning Tea</td>
<td>a) Amanda Allan (Antares Foundation Inc. Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.20-10.30am</td>
<td>Introduction to &quot;Global Nasara&quot;</td>
<td>b) Ralph Regenvanu</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Split into 2 streams (a) or (b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30am-12.30pm</td>
<td>A: Staff Support Issues</td>
<td>Anthea Toka (Oxfam International)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reactions to theme, relate issues to own context, share perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30-1.30pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.30pm-2.00pm</td>
<td>Global Nasara Report back</td>
<td>a) Amanda Allan (Antares Foundation Inc. Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(15 min each)</td>
<td>a) Staff support issues</td>
<td>b) Ralph Regenvanu</td>
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<td>b) Psychosocial program issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-00pm -3.00pm</td>
<td>Case studies 1, 2</td>
<td>a) Amanda Allan (Antares Foundation Inc. Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2 x 30 min each</td>
<td>Staff support program activity</td>
<td>b) Ralph Regenvanu</td>
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<tr>
<td>case study)</td>
<td>Traditional /local practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.00pm-3.30pm</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
<td>a) Amanda Allan (Antares Foundation Inc. Australia)</td>
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<td>5.00pm</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>b) Ralph Regenvanu</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 6pm</td>
<td>Forum Dinner (Optional)</td>
<td>c) People in Aid (Ben Emmens)</td>
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### Day 2: Wednesday 15th October 2008

**(FACILITATOR: JANET KALTOVEI, World Vision HR Officer)**

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tr>
<td>8.30 -9.00am</td>
<td>Arrivals, coffee &amp; tea</td>
<td>a) IASC (Alastair Ager)</td>
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<td>9.00-10.30am</td>
<td>Housekeeping Presentations:</td>
<td>b) Antares Foundation (Winnifred Simon)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) IASC Guidelines on Mental Health &amp; Psychosocial Support in Emergencies</td>
<td>c) People in Aid (Ben Emmens)</td>
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<td>b) Staff Support Guidelines or mitigating impact of staff stress -</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Antares Foundation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Code of Good Practice - People in Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-10.50am</td>
<td>Morning Tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00-12.30pm</td>
<td>Small workshops</td>
<td>a) IASC (Alastair Ager)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(40 mins each</td>
<td>Applying and implementing guidelines for strengthening psychosocial</td>
<td>b) Antares Foundation (Winnifred Simon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>repeated)</td>
<td>practice</td>
<td>c) People in Aid (Ben Emmens)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) IASC Guidelines®</td>
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<td>c) People in Aid Code of Good Practice ®</td>
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### Day 3: Thursday 16th October 2008

**(FACILITATOR: JANET KALTOVEI, World Vision HR Officer)**

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<th>Time</th>
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<td>Arrivals, coffee &amp; tea</td>
<td>a) IASC (Alastair Ager)</td>
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<td>Housekeeping Presentations:</td>
<td>b) Antares Foundation (Winnifred Simon)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) IASC Guidelines on Mental Health &amp; Psychosocial Support in Emergencies</td>
<td>c) People in Aid (Ben Emmens)</td>
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<td>b) Staff Support Guidelines or mitigating impact of staff stress -</td>
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<td>Antares Foundation</td>
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<td>c) Code of Good Practice - People in Aid</td>
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<td>(40 mins each</td>
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<td>b) Antares Foundation (Winnifred Simon)</td>
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<td>repeated)</td>
<td>practice</td>
<td>c) People in Aid (Ben Emmens)</td>
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<td>a) IASC Guidelines®</td>
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<td>b) Antares Foundation Guidelines®</td>
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<td>c) People in Aid Code of Good Practice ®</td>
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12.30-1.30pm  Lunch
1.30-3.00pm  Practicum : Choose from the options below: (1.5 hrs each)
              Workshop 1  Assessing psychosocial needs (IASC)
              Workshop 2  Peer support (Antares Foundation)
              Workshop 3  Management Tool (People in Aid)

a) IASC (Alastair Ager)  
b) Mandala Foundation (Amanda Allan)  
c) People in Aid (Ben Emmens)

3.00-3.30pm  Afternoon tea
3.30pm-5.00pm  Plenary: What would make a difference to:
               a) Staff support programs (45 mins)
               b) Psychosocial Programs (45 mins)

5.00pm  Close

Day 3: Thursday 16th October 2008  
(FACILITATOR: ANTHEA TOKA, Oxfam International Country Representative)

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
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<tr>
<td>8.30-9.00am</td>
<td>Arrivals, coffee &amp; tea</td>
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<td>9.00-10.00am</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
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<td>Plenary: Introduction to Special Themes:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A) Women’s issues</td>
<td>A: Anthea Toka</td>
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<td>B) Counselors</td>
<td>B: Andy Lynch</td>
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<td>C) Workplace issues</td>
<td>C: Ben Emmens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D) Research/data</td>
<td>D: Jerry Iaruel</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00-10.20am</td>
<td>Morning Tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-11.30am</td>
<td>Small group discussions - Special Interest</td>
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<td>groups as above - Repeated sessions</td>
<td>A: Anthea Toka</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>B: Andy Lynch</td>
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<td>C: Ben Emmens</td>
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<td>D: Jerry Iaruel</td>
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<td>11.30-12.30pm</td>
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<td>12.30-1.30pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.30pm-3.00pm</td>
<td>Networking - Where to from here?</td>
<td>Participant small group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Local networks</td>
<td>discussions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Regional networks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) International networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.00-3.30pm</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.30pm-5pm</td>
<td>Moving forward: Next steps, sustainability,</td>
<td>Amanda Allan, Kate Minto</td>
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<td>evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5pm</td>
<td>Forum closing Speeches</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 5.30pm</td>
<td>Closing - Including entertainment &amp; refreshments</td>
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What follows in this report will be a session by session summary of the presentations and activities over the course of the three day schedule.

SUMMARY OF FORUM SESSIONS - DAY 1:

Psychosocial principles and approach

Amanda Allan, a consulting psychologist and the Operational Director of the Mandala Foundation in Australia, facilitated the development and presentation of psychosocial support principles for aid staff through the medium of Psychodrama.

‘Psychosocial’ is a term that refers to the interactive and dynamic relationship between the social environment or context of a person and the person’s psyche. That is, the interaction between a person’s psychological state such as their thoughts, emotions, behavior and beliefs and their broader context such as their family, team, community, workplace and culture. A psychosocial approach to supporting mental health will consider the range of different individual, social, contextual and cultural factors that may influence physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual wellbeing.

To provide a practical illustration of a psychosocial approach to understanding and managing stress, a psychodrama set in the local aid and community context was enacted. Characters in the psychodrama (and at times the audience too), were asked to identify in each scenario i) possible sources of stress (ie ‘stressors’) and ii) possible ways of preventing or reducing the stressors to enhance a sense of support and wellbeing.
Some stressors of aid staff that were dramatized included family conflict, sexual health concerns, stress at work, management issues, lack of preparation and training of volunteers and staff, impact of a cyclone on communities and local staff, communication breakdowns, and cross-cultural misunderstandings. Some suggested examples of psychosocial support offered by the audience included briefing and preparation, language and cross cultural training, time to rest, someone to talk to and appropriate emergency resources. The psychodrama then became a reference point for consideration in later workshops when discussing practical implications and applications.

Actors from the Women’s Action for Change and Wan Smolbag Theatre participated in a Psychodrama to help introduce and contextualize psychosocial principles of support.

Anthropological framework

This pivotal presentation was given by Ralph Regenvanu, an anthropologist whose prior roles before joining Parliament include Vanuatu Cultural Centre Director, Secretary of the Council of Pacific Islands Museum Association, and UNESCO delegate.

The presentation provided an essential cultural and anthropological lens through which to consider subsequent Forum topics and discussions. Some key issues highlighted for the Pacific context were:

- Community cohesion and maintaining relationships and social networks is culturally important
- Tradition and custom (“kastom”) has been impacted and to some extent broken down by the tools of globalisation such as media, consumer goods, and mobile phones
- Such changes can also enhance ongoing tensions between community and individual rights. For example:
  - with nuclear families, the extended support in the wider community can be broken down in rural areas meaning individuals have less support
  - youth and women often aren’t given a say in decision making by community leaders, or sometimes people don’t raise issues out of respect, but this can actually perpetuate stress
  - disputes are still often solved in a traditional way such as the giving of a pig but when they are for a serious crime or violation against an individual the victim still always carries the burden of it
- Tension often derives from gaps between aspirations and opportunities such as education or employment and
- Ni-Vanuatu can sometimes have a ‘psychology of inferiority’ or a sense of “what I have is not as good”

Key learning:

A key message throughout this talk was that it is important for Pacific people and communities not to just look outside, but to look within and consider what their ways of doing things are, to build upon their strengths, and be proud of and retain a sense of custom and identity even in transition or change. This reinforces an important point that NGOs and others supporting work within the Pacific need to understand and respect the context and culture (whether that be at a country, organisational or community level) and be mindful of this in their ways of working.

Global Nasara

The global Nasara session was facilitated by Anthea Toka, Oxfam International Country Representative in Vanuatu. Anthea has also successfully used this technique in World Aids Day activities and discussions in Vanuatu for 2007.
This was a highly interactive session adapted to the local context from the ‘World Cafe’ facilitation technique. The ‘nasara’ (or nakamal) represents a safe place where people can come together to meet and ‘storian’ or talk. Participants moved between various small groups sitting on mats, and discussed their views in relation to two key Forum themes with people from a range of different background, age, gender and culture (see photos below).

Those who contributed to the first discussion stream on **Staff Support** indicated that NGOs and other development organisations should consider the importance of the following staff support practices:

- Consideration for health and social issues and stress management support
- Provision of a safe space to encourage open discussion and nurture different voices such as those of women especially where values are being challenged
- Respect for relationships and valuing of culture
- Valuing of staff by affirming their strengths, acknowledging their work, ensuring their health and wellbeing, encouraging dialogue, and providing equitable pay and treatment as well as development opportunities
- Emphasis on adequate preparation including induction and/or briefing covering organizational structure, expectations, cross-cultural awareness, ideals versus realities
- Implementation of clear human resource procedures including policies, roles and responsibilities and Guidelines and
- Regular meetings with staff to clarify roles and tasks making adjustments where appropriate

**Key Learning**

An overarching theme arising here was the tension that can sometimes arise between organisational policies and the usual community or cultural approach (for example, a mismatch between cultural grieving practices and bereavement leave policies). Pacific NGO staff also have traditional and community roles outside of work and organisations need to pay more attention to these as these affect team dynamics and organisational culture.

The second stream looked at ways to strengthen **psychosocial community programs** in the Pacific including:

- Identifying and strengthening existing community support mechanisms such as women’s groups, youth, chiefs, churches and NGOs
- Coordinating and working with community leaders such as chiefs, church leaders, provincial and national government and NGO governing bodies (eg VANGO in Vanuatu)
- Ensuring an understanding of the stressors within communities and what the community needs before trying to support them (ie ‘outsiders’ often fail to understand and respect pre-existing social conditions such as conflict, or how trauma is experienced when designing or implementing programs)
- Designing support programs that are creative and adaptable to changing society by being based on both modern and traditional approaches (eg conflict resolution)
- Supporting Chiefs and other leaders to play a more active role in helping communities to deal with stress by respecting each other, showing strong leadership and communications, building positive attitudes and skills, encouraging people not to lose their traditional values, and encouraging shared problem solving
- Helping and encouraging women and youth activators and
- Connecting and networking with other communities and learning from them
Following Global Nasara, a range of case studies were presented by local and regional speakers to provide examples of local or contextual approaches to psychosocial programs or staff support.

Case Study 1: A psychosocial approach to disabilities

The first case study was presented by Andy Lynch, a registered psychologist who has worked in the disabilities sector since 1994. In Vanuatu she started the Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association in 1998, of which she has been National Coordinator since 2002.

This talk covered some history of the speaker’s background and motivation in working in the areas of social work, counseling and psychology originally in PNG and now on an ongoing basis in Vanuatu. Since 1994 this has included a key focus on the disabilities sector, including starting the Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association in 1998 which now has over 300 members and 60 associate members, and is supported by part-time staff and volunteers. In support of their aims they advocate for people with disabilities (within Vanuatu this was estimated as being close to 10% or 23,000 people based on reported WHO statistics) at several levels including lobbying government, supporting individuals and families about their rights and responsibilities, and raising community awareness. Some aspects of their psychosocial approach to disabilities include:

- Adopting a rights based approach, including emphasising human rights to non-discrimination
- Promoting inclusiveness and access to opportunities to take part in community
- Reinforcing that people with disabilities are beings of value who have skills that can enrich the community
- Promoting awareness that people don’t exist in a vacuum, and that there are important social structures and supports that need to be in place within communities and society
- Working together and providing support to one another and
- Addressing the marginalisation of women within disabilities legislation

Case Study 2: Staff support practices at Wan Smolbag

This presentation was offered by Michael Taurakoto who spoke on behalf of Wan Smolbag which is a local NGO that has worked in Vanuatu for close to 30 years. They started as a small group of actors carrying props in ‘one small bag’ and now use drama, film, video and other activities to raise awareness around reproductive health, environment, governance and youth issues.

Wan Smolbag have grown from a small NGO to now having over 100 staff, as well as since 2002 running a youth centre that now has over 1200 youth members. However with this growth they have still retained their principle of management and decision making by consensus. In the current context, this means that some decisions are delegated to smaller committees, although this still involves directly up to 28 staff, plus indirectly more. While this can mean that decisions take time, the benefit is that staff feel consulted and valued. Anecdotal reports suggest that staff often stay a long time with the organisation, or if they do leave it is often due to outside issues.

Wan Smolbag’s psychosocial approach to staff support also includes:

- Awareness of gender issues, such as encouraging women to be involved in decision making
- Acknowledgement of the broader social context that staff face in that sometimes spouses of staff are also involved in discussions and decisions so that they understand and support them
- Providing a pool of funds that staff can apply to access in an emergency and pay back interest free
- If a staff’s family member dies, the organisation assists with some costs and gifts and allows other staff the option to also take the time off to attend the funeral in support of their colleague
- Option of the organisation paying for school fees in advance, to be paid back gradually and
- Anger management and counseling support

Case Study 3: Building staff support practices at World Vision

This presentation was given by Janet Kaltovei is the Human Resources Officer with World Vision in Vanuatu. World Vision in Vanuatu have a program focus on youth and children, in the areas of sanitation, literacy and good governance.

Since joining World Vision a year ago, one of the first things the speaker was involved in was developing staff orientation procedures, an important part of supporting staff. Some other staff support practices in place include:
• Opportunities on occasion for staff to attend training/development activities in PNG
• Personal loans for funerals and education
• Working in partnership with other NGOs in communities, including accessing cross-cultural training for staff
• Encouraging more women to take on program management roles and
• Increasing focus on staff development

Case Study 4: Staff and community psychosocial support in an emergency

This case study was given by Katu Yapi who is the Oxfam International Project Coordinator for the Sepik Mining Mitigation Project in PNG. Prior to this Katu supported the Oxfam PNG flood response in 2007 as well as other public health and safety roles in NGOs.

The presentation and discussion was based on the Oxfam International humanitarian response to the Oro floods in PNG in November 2007. Some photos of the flooded areas were shown in which 167 people were killed, over 70,000 affected and 30,000 displaced. The primary goal for Oxfam was to reduce loss of life, and negative impact on communities and this was part of a broader coordinated response involving local and international staff and NGOs. In this context, the speaker performed a government and community liaison role to try and link the response to the government efforts and to try and strengthen their engagement with the community and the relief efforts.

Some ways in which community support was integrated into the response included:
• Involving community volunteers who wanted to use their skills and resources in relief supply distribution
• Support with physical and material needs such as food, fuel, supplies, boat repair
• Re-establishing proof of identity by issuing ID cards
• Pastoral support with church involvement, recognising that prayer plays a big role in social security
• Building relationships and trust and demonstrating their work was valued
• Supporting communities in linking with government representatives
• Giving space for community volunteer feedback and input, and actioning changes quickly where possible
• Awarding certificates of recognition for community volunteers and
• Seeking to build local capacity within government to continue to support the community volunteers

Some other ways in which staff support was factored into activities during the response included:
• Daily meetings to confirm that staff were working well, to hear their concerns and support them in resolving any issues or problems
• Providing up to date information and facts to prepare staff
• Daily briefing on security measures
• Organisational systems and communications plans shared with staff – eg evacuation or critical incidents and
• Listening to staff and supporting them in working with communities

Key Learning:
The local staff support case studies and related questions and discussion indicated that a number of Forum participants felt that staff support practices and interventions that explicitly acknowledge the broader social context of staff beyond the workplace (such as their families and cultural and spiritual practices) and integrate this into their approach were particularly regarded as examples of good practice within the Pacific context.

Playback Theatre

Playback is a technique involving a facilitator, actors and musicians. It is a participatory approach where the audience was invited to share their thoughts reactions and emotions to issues relating to experiences of stress, staff support and other related issues. These were then ‘played back’ by the actors. This technique was used at the end of each day to help participants reflect on what they had learned, and a variation on this was also used in the context of the Forum evaluation session (refer to Day 3 summary for further information).
The various playback sessions were led by Women’s Action for Change (WAC), a Fiji based organisation who work with forms of theatre including playback, as well as restorative justice and peace building. Their Creative Director, Peni Moore has worked in the women’s movement for over 20 years and theatre for 14 years. She was joined by senior WAC actors Jona Robaiqau and Laura Qalova, and Wan Smolbag actors Annette Charlie and Charlie Falua.

**SUMMARY OF FORUM SESSIONS - DAY 2**

**Introductory Presentations:** The morning opened with an introduction to three different guidelines or tools that relate to key Forum areas such as psychosocial support, staff support and human resource management.

**a) IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings**

The IASC sessions were presented by Dr Alastair Ager, Professor of Clinical Population and Family Health at Columbia University in New York. He is currently chair of the Psychosocial Working Group and Board Member of the Antares Foundation. He has worked in international health and development for over 20 years.

**Introductory presentation**

Dr Ager outlined a background and rationale for the development of the IASC Guidelines. Through showing a series of pictures from various emergency related setting such as cyclones, bombed buildings and destruction, aid workers doing food drops, and affected families and victims, it was highlighted that there are not only a severity and range of emergencies but that within them there are many different people affected and involved and many variables to consider such as health, sanitation, food, security and that mental health is only one part of this.

In 1999, based on a need to get consensus on a good practice approach for psychosocial support in emergencies, a psychosocial working group evolved, which the speaker (and other representatives from INGOs and academic research) participated. They developed a model and subsequently the IASC guidelines as a more practical tool. After much discussion, the group agreed that the approach to support should be based upon a Communities model rather than an individualistic one. They considered in an emergency i) What do communities lose? and ii) What are their strengths?

The model has three integrated and linked areas including:

- **Human Capital:** Mental health, knowledge and skills, livelihoods
- **Social Capital:** Family and peers, community, social and service infrastructure
- **Cultural Capital:** Cultural practices, human rights, religious beliefs

**Key learning:**

The approach emphasises that communities are resilient and not passive, and it is important to listen to them and support them in using the strengths they have, to respect their culture and ways of coping. It is important to consider both what to do, and what not to do.

**Workshop and Practicum**

Participants attending the IASC workshop were given an overview of the IASC guidelines which are a set of minimum responses (ie. what must be done) in an emergency response including 25 action sheets for guidance. They are based on several core principles including: human rights/equity, participation, ‘do no harm’, building on available resources and capacity, and integrated support systems. Core mental health and psychosocial support responses within the guidelines include community mobilisation and support, health
services, education, and dissemination of information. Participants were encouraged to reflect on the Psychodrama presented in Day 1 and consider how the principles might have been used to help prepare the volunteer and local staff in supporting the cyclone response. Some areas of discussion included:

- Coordination and preparedness before an emergency including knowing NGO and agency roles
- Empowering communities to find their own resources as they are more aware of what they have and need
- Integrating psychosocial support within existing health services (eg local ‘klevas’ or custom medicine men) or services such as food provision (ie consider the social aspect of gathering food)
- Churches as safe houses as they are often strongest buildings, plus in the context of the importance of prayer, so link pastors and teachers into disaster plans and responses
- Loss of meaning is often an outcome, so support ways to re-establish power and influence
- Have youths and other groups from village involved in supporting activities (eg digging of latrines) and
- Use local knowledge and networks

The Practicum session was then a chance for a more in-depth look at some of the action sheets within the IASC Guidelines and for participants to talk through an assessment plan using the psychodrama and other examples.

Note that IASC Guidelines can also be downloaded via the Inter-Agency Standing Committee website at: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-products-default

b) Antares Guidelines for Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers

The introductory overview and the group discussion was facilitated by Winnifred Simon, one of the Founders and co-Director of Antares Foundation, based in the Netherlands where she is responsible for psychosocial support programs.

Introduction

Humanitarian workers often operate in a complex and stressful environment, and while some stress cannot be avoided, the Antares guidelines are intended to support organisations in systems for preparing and supporting staff.

An introduction to a systempsychosocial model for staff support was given which has 8 key Principles each with their own sets of indicators that organisations can focus on.

The 8 key principles that the Antares Foundation holds for Supporting Staff to mitigate the effects of stress are:

- **Principle 1:** Policy
- **Principle 2:** Screening and Assessing
- **Principle 3:** Preparation and Training
- **Principle 4:** Monitoring
- **Principle 5:** Ongoing Support
- **Principle 6:** Crisis Support
- **Principle 7:** End of Assignment Support
- **Principle 8:** Post Assignment Support

Note that the Antares Guidelines for Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers including the model above and other tools can be downloaded at: www.antaresfoundation.org.au

A visual of this system is shown:
Small Group discussion

Having previously introduced the Antares model, this second workshop was a chance for participants to reflect and consider what staff support practices they had in place that related back to the model. Some examples shared included local counselors, confidential access to counseling, psychosocial health & wellbeing policy, management training. Participants were also asked to consider in their discussions, factors that make them feel supported at work (responses included sense of belonging, recognition, and role) and factors that make them feel unsupported or stressed (e.g., lack of appreciation, loss of control, not being listened to). The model provides a systemic framework in which to consider these kinds of issues, and how they can be supported at an individual, team or organisational level.

Antares Practicum: Peer Consultation

Amanda Allan, a consulting psychologist and the Operational Director of the Antares Foundation in Australia, facilitated the peer support session.

This workshop introduced participants to a practical peer consultation method. Initially they were asked to consider some key issues and stresses that managers can often face. Some comments included participation of staff; staff with concerns outside of work; manager needing to get balance between workload, own wellbeing and that of staff; insufficient capacity to address staff needs; loneliness of being a manager; leaving behind peers due to different physical location; loss of peer level and terms of references and position descriptions that are designed in country’s outside of the cultural context or without consultation so that they are rigid or not relevant.

Participants then had the opportunity to practice a Peer Consultation method that can help provide peer support to managers in dealing with the kind of challenges they face. In raising an issue for consideration, participants were drawn back to the Psychodrama, where they outlined problems faced by both the manager and a local staff member. Building on the problems faced by the manager, one of the participants role played the manager, and the remainder of the group role played as peers.

The Peer Consultation process demonstrated involved 6 steps: 1. Initial presentation of the problem; 2. Questioning by the group; 3. Group formulates and discusses the problem; 4. Presenter restates the issue; 5. Advice gained from the group and 6. An evaluation by the presenter of the effectiveness of the consultation.
People in Aid: Code of Good Practice

The People in Aid sessions were led by Ben Emmens, Director of HR Services. He is an international human resources specialist with over 12 years experience in HR and management in public, private and not for profit sectors.

The first session introduced participants to People in Aid who are a global, not for profit, HR network of more than 130 agencies working in the international development and humanitarian relief sector. People in Aid were created by NGOs, for NGOs in response to need in the sector. They help organisations increase their impact through better people management and support. Following identified needs from research in 1995 an interagency working group was developed, that in 1997 launched the Code of Best Practice. This was later replaced by the revised Code of Good Practice in 2003. The code is useful in application with all staff whether they are internationals or local nationals.

The Guiding principle of the Code is that “People are central to the achievement of our mission” and comprises seven key principles that are measured by various indicators:

1. Human Resources Strategy
2. Staff Policies and Practices
3. Managing People
4. Consultation and Communication
5. Recruitment and Selection
6. Learning, Training and Development
7. Health, Safety and Security

The People in Aid Code and related information and resources can also be downloaded at: www.peopleinaid.org

Workshop: Implementing the People in Aid Code

In this workshop, participants discussed possible applications of the People in Aid code which included using it as a reference point or guide, possibly using it to structure HR manuals; to audit HR management systems, policies or practices and as a means of demonstrating that an organisation treats their staff fairly and is a good employer. Discussions also covered the benefits of implementing the code such as:

- Gaining peer respect
- Supporting, involving and valuing staff
- Gaining independent and external verification
- Achieving donor recognition
- Showing that you are accountable
- Increasing productivity
- Enhancing the impact of your programs

People in Aid then gave an overview of implementation of the Code which includes commitment, stakeholder engagement, reporting and auditing and continuous improvement. Specific elements of this process include senior management commitment, management review, stakeholder dialogue such as employee survey or focus group, reports, independent external social audit and then certification by People in Aid.

Practicum: Introduction to a People in Aid Management tool: HR Audit

This session introduced a management HR Audit tool with two key components:

1. HR policies, processes & practices checklist
2. HR effectiveness questionnaire

The Audit process has 4 steps:

1. Complete the checklist / questionnaire (the extent to which you agree with a statement)
2. Review and discuss, then undertake a risk assessment to determine implications or impact on service delivery (ie. which issues if addressed would have the greatest positive impact)
3. Prioritisation
4. Implementation & monitoring
Participants had a chance to practice using particularly some of the early stages of the HR audit tool across a number of areas include planning, recruitment, management, deployment and development.

**Youth panel: Plenary discussion: What would make a difference to staff support?**

*Members of the youth panel discussed local views and reactions to staff support issues with facilitation support from the Antares Foundation Inc. (Australia) bursary holder, Rebecca Olul.*

This was a chance to give local youth participants a chance to discuss the various topics and tools that they had seen covered within the Forum up until this time and to consider *what would make a difference to staff support.*

Their ideas and comments included:

- Staff are important to achieve the goals of the organisation, so valuing their relationships with their families is important too. This helps build trust, so that they can share problems that staff have at home, and staff can provide support.
- Staff need recognition and responsibility, not having that can be stressful.
- We need to raise more awareness of staff support issues and share more information amongst everyone.
- Staff support is a big issue and there is a need to boost morale.
- Support for staff includes one to one support, support networks, capacity development and financial support. I hope our manager will take this back to the office.
- Having practical tools (eg the HR Audit tool by People in Aid) will help as it is helpful and easy to use.
- Debriefing of issues and peer support is important.
- In supporting volunteers (eg from overseas) they often don’t get enough information and support so we need to make sure we prepare them.
- When returning to the office I will encourage our staff to have our own ‘global nasara’ to talk over coffee.
- Its important to use existing networks and combine everyone together, not be on our own and
- It would be valuable to have a staff retreat or reflection space to give staff some peace away from the office.
The third day of the program opened with a plenary introduction to key issues of relevance to psychosocial support in the Pacific context – gender issues, counseling, and research – before people moved into small group discussions.

**Women's issues/gender**

*Anthea Toka, Oxfam International Country Representative led the small group discussion around gender. She has a strong background in gender research and advocacy, including having presented internationally in this area, and ensuring that a consideration of gender issues is integrated into Oxfam’s program areas.*

**Introductory session**

Anthea shared some observations about gender from discussions and stories with colleagues and peers, against the backdrop of the Melanesian cultural context of community cohesion including:

- Even with the changing roles of women, it can still be hard for women to attain leadership roles given the emphasis on community and domestic roles and the expectation of obedience to husbands, male leaders
- In the home, women are expected to take on many roles, to be selfless and elastic at times – eg wife, lover, mother, teacher, chef, laundromat, mentor, finance manager, and a shoulder to cry on
- Additionally, within the community, women are the planners, organisers, caterers, entertainers, hosts, information holders, the wailers or grievers
- Then for those women who are NGO managers, there are another whole set of expectations such as balancing needs of staff, delivering expectations, being the public presence on advocacy, programs etc. This can create extra challenges when talking on sensitive issues such as domestic violence, because culturally people are interconnected and see women as part of community and family, not as individuals and
- With education, training and support it is possible for women to reach these positions but this can come at a cost of relationships and families and work/life balance, or other challenges such as territorialness or competition between women leaders rather than supporting and mentoring their peers.

**Small group discussions:**

In the subsequent discussions, other issues emerged. In Vanuatu a participant said that there are about 4000 civil servants however only 400 of these are women. There was also agreement that women’s relationships suffer in this context, while men’s have often improved.

People also considered whether women in other societies outside of the Pacific face similar pressures. While there are different cultural contexts, it was decided that the issues aren’t completely dissimilar. Some examples were given that for Australian women there are still pressures as to whether to have a career or a family and for those who want to have both there are pressures to assume various roles and take a disproportionate amount of responsibility. Or at the other end of the spectrum, single women are often expected to take up extra responsibilities in the workplaces such as working Christmas, holidays, covering extra responsibilities etc. Some examples were also given from Asian societies where women were often involved in quite physical work, although this can also be based on cast in addition to gender.

Some **gender considerations for psychosocial support** from group discussions included:

- Informal or formal peer support for female managers
- Mentoring, and coaching and career development programs
- Proactive collection of gender disaggregated data
- Recognition of gender issues to address as a community issue rather than the issue of a particular group
- Family friendly workplace policy such as flexible hours (for men too), maternity/paternity/family leave
- Child friendly workplace environment and culture
- Broadening linkages and sharing experiences of women
- Doing away with gender specific roles
- Ensuring equal pay and conditions
Ensuring the right to participate in decision making and
Positive portrayal of women’s issues

Counsellors

Andy Lynch, a registered psychologist led the discussion on counselling and related issues. She ran her own private practice in Port Vila from 1993-2007, as well as being Secretary of the Women’s Center from 1992-1996.

In the plenary introduction and subsequent discussion groups some issues identified were:

- We need to learn more about the status of mental health in Vanuatu and the Pacific and also to work with negative attitudes about areas such as mental health and disabilities
- It is important to facilitate a supportive environment for individuals - if one part of a group is ill, it affects everyone
- Try not to reinvent the wheel - adapt psychosocial tools to other contexts
- In the context of providing counseling, there aren’t training or registration processes in-country for psychiatrists or psychologists, so the small number of psychologists have accessed training elsewhere and there isn’t information as to how many social workers there currently are in-country
- At a national level there isn’t a human resource development plan in the counseling and social work area
- Vanuatu medical board needs an overall legal means to follow up on compliance and negligence issues
- Within the national system there are various acts and legislations but people are also governed by custom laws and spiritual practices so how are these reconciled with policies and procedures?
- There are counseling services in Vanuatu via the Vanuatu Women’s Centre as well as in communities via traditional and spiritual healers but there isn’t a clear map of who else is providing psychosocial services

Research

Jerry Jaravel, Mental Health focal point at the Vanuatu Government Ministry of Health, and member of the Pacific Islands Mental health Network facilitated the research sessions.

Jerry gave a brief overview of the research process (including setting objectives, identifying constraints, designing surveys, site identification, approvals, data collection and processing, and reporting) and also how the Ministry of Health in Vanuatu has health information systems that collect health data and information via the hospitals. A brief overview of results from a 2007 research project conducted with 600 staff in Vanuatu workplaces (Luganville and Port Vila) on non-communicable diseases was also given of which some of the key findings were:

- In relation to substances, from the sample, 62.2% smoked (49% on a daily basis) 75% had kava (83% regularly), 66.8% had alcohol (60% had 1 drink per month, with men drinking more than women)
- In relation to physical activity, most rated themselves as quite sedentary or doing just light physical although 78% do walk to work.
- According to Body Mass Index, 66.1% of the sample were either overweight (37.6) or obese (28.5) and
- There were also high rates of High Blood Pressure (15%), diabetes (11.8%), high cholesterol (25.4%)

Key issues raised by the audience following such statistics were enquiry about the underlying reasons for these results and their link to stress as well as the importance of information dissemination by government of data and next steps.

Small group discussions elicited some comments about additional research and findings such as:

- In Vanuatu there is a large anticipated future cost of physical sickness and stress. For example in the last 5 years, people have lost life in service, which has cost 5-10 million vatu (in compensation and medical costs)
- Diabetes, heart attack and strokes are in the in top 10 leading causes of death
• Health information systems (also used in PNG and Solomon Islands) work reasonably well in towns in towns but can be hard to disseminate information in isolated areas or without access to computers and
• Antares is currently conducting research on expatriate humanitarian workers at 3 phases (pre-, during and post-deployment) which includes measures of psychosocial history, work coping factors, measures of social support, stressors in different contexts. They later plan to extend this research to national staff.

Key steps forward suggested in the local context:
• Collate ongoing evidence to back up wisdom and to evaluate practice
• Research key psychosocial factors that contribute to work force stress
• Identify sources of stress (such as management, individual characteristics, relationships at work, government policy, organizational issues), followed by a plan to address them
• Build the capacity of managers to support staff, although staff also need to take some responsibility
• In Vanuatu, review policy in light of research done
• In Vanuatu adopt the WHO tool (mini-steps) which is written for use in the local context and
• Identify responses in Vanuatu (such as physical activity policy for public service) and ensure that monitoring and implementation is consistently carried out by heads of organisations so the message is disseminated and benefits increase

Workplace issues

Ben Emmens from People in Aid facilitated the small group discussions on human resource issues.

This small group discussion was an opportunity for participants to raise issues in relation to the workplace in the Pacific context that were of concern to them or had arisen during the Forum for further discussion. Some of the issues raised included:
• The need for more attention to Occupational Health & Safety and Health & Wellbeing policies in workplaces
• Stress management and staff support isn’t currently given a priority focus in some organisations
• With issues of legislation or employee rights, it can be hard for individuals to access support and
• Interest in further human resource management support tools

Networks

In a plenary discussion, participants identified existing local, regional and international networks:

Within Vanuatu, Local networks include:
• Vanuatu Youth Interagency Group: A monthly meeting of NGO staff working in youth development is held. There is also a moderated online email list to discuss issues.
• HR Network (Vanuatu Government): Meet monthly to discuss HR issues across government. There was discussion about seeing if this could be opened up to NGOs.
• Vanuatu Interagency Mental Health Network: Comprising members of NGOs with some government links, to coordinate and share issues relating to mental health & wellbeing. Some of the members of this network supported the planning of this Pacific Psychosocial Forum.
• Another 9 networks were listed with some like Disabled Peoples Advocacy, Interagency Group (Volunteer agencies eg Youth Ambassadors) and Vanuatu National Council of Women.

Regional networks
• Pacific Mental Health Network (PIMHNET): To improve mental health and coordinate regionally.
• Pacific Youth Network: For youth issues and were involved in the 2005 Samoa Forum.
• Pacific Village: (University of Wellington) HR issues and staff support, HR managers E-network.

International networks included:
• Emergency Personnel Network (EPN): HR network across 60-70 countries to discuss issues relating to managing people involved in humanitarian work.
• Oxfam International Youth Parliament: Network of youth from around the world who work to create positive change in their communities.
• Psychosocial online network: available at www.psychosocialnetwork.net
Following the plenary session, participants discussed ways to improve links with other networks. While this was discussed as two groups (local networks, and regional/international networks), combined responses and potentially good ideas for strengthening included:

- Compiling a directory/list of networks (or ideally a referral service linking members of communities with organisations)
- Mapping of resources
- Good local computer and internet access
- Local organisations available to access lists, provide and print information
- National focal point known
- National organisations to connect with regional and international organisations
- Use donors to connect with other similar organisations
- Diversity in network composition is very important
- Establish an emergency network

**Evaluation and Playback Session**

On the final day, a variation on the playback technique was used whereby the core Playback team coached some of the participants from the youth panel (see separate section) on how to apply the technique themselves. This resulted in participants having the chance to act out responses to questions such as what participants had learnt and what areas they thought were missing in the Forum (one response being that they would have valued the presence of the National Disaster Management Office at the Forum). See Monitoring and Evaluation below for further details.

Forum participants received some coaching from WAC then tried acting in the playback evaluation session.

**Summary/closing session**

In the final session of the Forum, Amanda Allan on behalf of Antares Foundation Inc. (Australia) summarized some of the key learnings and issues raised to take forward following the Forum including the importance of:

- Identifying and strengthening existing community support mechanisms
- Forging connections with community and staff
- Supporting programs that involve traditional and non traditional methods
- Implementing psychosocial support from individual through to organisational level
- Bridging differences
- Briefing incoming expatriate and country staff together with local staff
- Implementing effective human resource practices
- Recognizing transitional roles and multiplicities of women’s roles
- Dialoguing through panel and plenary activity
- Proactively planning and initiating emergency preparedness
- Supporting individuals to make a difference in their organizations for staff wellbeing and
- Maintaining connections and the momentum of the Pacific Psychosocial Forum
Forum feedback and outcomes

Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation:

In addition to the playback exercise that participants took part in, other ways to gather feedback during the Forum included a graffiti wall, feedback box, and brief interviews (or ‘storians’) with participants after sessions. In particular, the latter approach being both verbal and immediate elicited helpful feedback in this cultural context. Additionally, post-Forum further evaluation information was collected by various means including interviews with the Mandala team, planning group feedback meeting, written feedback forms sent to participants, some follow up participant interviews and discussions. While the full information gathered from these sources has been written up elsewhere for internal organisational learning and improvements, some of the key highlights are also provided below.

The value of having a local planning group to inform program development:

The local planning group expressed a strong sense of ownership and pride in their role in planning the Forum:
- “It was a privilege to be part of the (planning) committee, learning how to work together to plan the Forum”
- “At the end of the Forum I felt really proud to have taken part in the committee, and to be involved in helping plan an international Forum. It energised me and made me feel good” and
- (On receiving a Forum T-shirt as a planning group member): I’m glad to have it, every time I wear it I feel good and feel that “hemi wan Forum blong mifala” (translation: that it is our Forum)

Local participants appreciated the local, cultural context in the approach, format and setting:
- “It is good to promote a way of learning that suits our culture” – eg pictures and discussions”
- “The (program) order was good – it meant that the internationals understood the problems here, what we are, what we are up to…after that they approached us in suggesting ideas that are more relevant”
- “The Nakamal is a safe place, and a place of peace – this helps” and
- “The format was good because it allowed everyone to have a voice, and people to hear national staff issues”

General comments about the Mandala Foundation Inc. (Australia) Forum and its value:
- “To have a psychosocial Forum in Vanuatu is a big achievement”
- “The information from the Forum is what Vanuatu needs – it will have a big impact”. (Said in particular in reference to the Principles/Guidelines of Antares and People in Aid).
- “The Forum affirmed for me the importance of staff support for aid and development workers to the effectiveness of the work that we do.”
- “The things that were talked about and dramatized at the Forum showed that everyone experiences stress”
- “I found the Forum extremely valuable and relevant in supporting my work” (youth development worker)
- “The Forum will help me in my work to think about how to support staff, and other things that affect them at work and more broadly – eg their skills, the stresses they face, the right way to do things eg. discipline, support, confidential discussions, HR procedures…” and
- (The Forum showed) “the importance of not harming people at work, recognising they need a good exit and the chance to express themselves”

Other participant feedback
- “It’s a privilege to participate in the Forum. Being a young person, it’s a privilege to be part of a program where you can hear people’s experiences and stories. It’s great to enable young people to learn and be involved.”
Key Forum outcomes to date

**Increased awareness of psychosocial approach to staff support:**
- Strengthening of the understanding of “psychosocial issues” in Vanuatu by Forum participants
- Participant feedback: “It’s very important to have psychosocial work and stress management considered in our work. We need to focus on stress management and prevention”.
- Participant comments about an increased understanding that unless we understand the needs of organisations and staff we can’t support them.
- Raising of these issues in a way that hasn’t been done before (“conscientisation”)
- Manager reported that the knowledge from the Forum helps them in supporting staff and volunteers
- Proactive requests from some Forum participants for further support in relation to using and adapting the materials on psychosocial support for staff within their organisations

**Sense of empowerment and opportunities for skills development:**
- Reported pride by planning group in relation to their involvement in the Forum
- Planning group member reported feeling that has learnt new skills in logistics etc.
- Member of youth panel commented that they felt honoured to be in the panel and that they would like to have more activities like this to make young managers feel honoured
- Participant saw the experience of the Forum as being helpful in working in programs for eg youth, as it gives ideas of ways to make activities more interesting (eg activities, case studies, playback etc)

**Strengthening of relevant networks**
- Reinforced interest in ensuring that the mental health network continues and is strengthened
- Forum participants discussed at follow up meeting wanting to use that network as a means to work together to adapt and translate Forum materials
- Some reports of expressions of interest from new members to join network following the Forum
- Government HR participant committed to follow up and see if NGOs can join the HR network too

**Next steps and sustainability of initiative**

Some key activities that have been put in place to succeed the Forum include:
- A Pacific Staff Support Coordinator in Port Vila appointed to provide ongoing support to build upon outcomes of this Forum, and to continue to support the strengthening of staff support in aid and development agencies in Vanuatu and the broader Pacific region as determined by local consultation and needs
- Analysis of Forum evaluations documented for organizational learning purposes
- This post-Forum summary report written and made available on the Antares website
- An Antares bursary holder selected to attend an Antares psychosocial professional development opportunity in Australia in November 2008
- A post Forum and network gathering to be held in December, 2008 in Port Vila to provide an opportunity to share experiences from or since the Forum, provide feedback, and plan for initial next steps in 2009

Plans are tentatively in place by the Foundation under the coordination of the Pacific Based Staff Coordinator in Port Vila to facilitate:
- Ongoing network coordination, strengthening and support in relation to staff support issues
- Action research and tracking relating to stress in workplaces and organizations
- Training in stress management and staff support tools for NGOs
- Psychosocial training and awareness in communities with youth and young leaders
- Distribution of staff support information to local organizations to use or adapt
- A review of a psychosocial model to consider for local adaptation or translation by the Local Mental Health Network
- Ongoing access to information related to further training to be conducted by the Antares Foundation over the coming months
Acknowledgements or “Tankyu tumas!”

Forum planning committee in Vanuatu

The valuable leadership, collaboration and hard work of the planning group in Vanuatu ensured that the Forum was relevant to the needs of Pacific staff, organizations and communities and in keeping with the cultural context, needs and interests of Pacific staff and organizations. Tankyu tumas!

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Youth & Mental Health Manager
Foundation for Peoples of the South Pacific, Vanuatu

David Childson.
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World Vision International, Vanuatu

Kami Roberts.
Youth Program Coordinator
Wan Smolbag, Vanuatu

Kate Minto.
Organisational Development Officer
Oxfam International, Vanuatu

With support from Angie Beru
Finance Officer
Foundation for Peoples of the South Pacific and the volunteer team during the Forum

The significance of setting and context

Venue The forum was held at the Chiefs Nakamal (Nakamal blong Ol Jif) which is shown in the photo at left. The CEO of the Malvatumauri Chiefs welcomed forum participants to their Nakamal, a symbolic place of peace.

Program content, order and format The planning group highlighted the importance of setting the cultural and anthropological context of the forum early in the program, and selected local and regional speakers to help highlight Pacific Issues. Culturally appropriate learning formats were also included such as theatre and discussions on mats.

Forum opening and closing events These included local music, custom dance and local food served throughout.

Speakers The mix of local, regional and international speakers, presenters and actors as selected by the planning group and Antares made this event a valuable, contextualised learning experience for participants. Thanks to you all.
**Logo:** Daniel Graham Lukai from Vanuatu Young People’s Project designed the very popular and recognizable Pacific Psychosocial Forum logo which appears on the Forum banner, bags, T-shirts and programs. The logo represents the Pacific context of the Forum, psychosocial health and wellbeing, and the development and growth of emerging leaders.

**Bursary holders – Mandala foundation**

Mandala Foundation offered some bursaries to attend the Forum that Pacific staff could apply for by addressing selection criteria demonstrating their interest in psychosocial work and staff support. We would like to congratulate our bursary holders (below) and thank them for their input into the Forum discussions and panels.

**Rebecca Olul:** I would like to thank Mandala for the opportunity. I’m committed to continue being part of the network and I’d like to see how I can be involved in supporting further ongoing Mandala work in order to give something back. I’d also like to find ways to help other participants and staff in their plans after the Forum. Eg helping them understand and translate materials into the local context, and to look at the psychosocial model and how to adapt and apply it in communities. I’d like to see that happen, and the network will provide support in doing that.

**Joel Kalpram:** I found the Mandala Forum really useful and I learned a lot and gained a lot of knowledge about psychosocial support. The knowledge and ideas from the Forum are very useful and help me when working as a manager and supporting staff and volunteers. The mix of speakers and participants with all different experiences and expertise, I found inspiring. In the local context I think we need more awareness about how to better support staff in linking into existing networks and to also make overseas volunteers feel comfortable and safe in this context. Thank you for the opportunity to participate!

Several other participants also received bursaries, including some funded by Foundation of Peoples of the South Pacific, so we congratulate them too and wish them the best in their future psychosocial or mental health work.

**Volunteers, entertainers and behind the scenes**

A huge thank you to our team of volunteers who provided support throughout the Forum - Alice, Bertila, Cynthia, Childson, Jason and Jonah! Thanks also to the entertainment groups including the youth band at Wan Smolbag, the Fatumanu Custom Dance Group and the local catering group.

Also thank you to the Chiefs’ Council for welcoming people into their Nakamal and making it a place of peace.

Thank you to our generous sponsors:

The Pacific Psychosocial Forum 2008 sought to build upon the ongoing work of the Mandala Foundation in strengthening the quality of humanitarian assistance and development through the psychosocial support, advice and training of aid staff.

*The Pacific Psychosocial Post-Forum Report was compiled by our new Mandala Foundation Inc. Pacific Staff Support Coordinator - Kate Minto. Kate can be contacted by emailing* [pacific@Mandalafoundation.org.au](mailto:pacific@Mandalafoundation.org.au)