

An Inside Post-mortem on the Southern Highlands: A perspective from Tari¹

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Background

The Southern Highlands Province (SHP) comprises eight districts and more than 14 linguistic groups. According to the 2000 Census, the province has a population of 546,256 and a landmass of 23,000 square kilometres. The population growth rate, at 3.4 per cent, is regarded as the highest in the country.

The 2000 Demographic Survey indicates that there has been no significant improvement in the economic, social and political status of the province. This is clearly evident as the serious law and order problems experienced in the province contribute to the massive decline and deterioration of services — health, education, infrastructure — and deprivation of goods and service delivery.

These poor conditions contribute to a low literacy rate of 20 per cent, low life expectancy of 52 years, increased infant, childhood and maternal mortality rates, and low or nil economic growth.

The political and bureaucratic structure has malfunctioned and ceased to operate. This is leading to a situation in which the general fabric of a constituted system is disintegrating. It will be an expensive exercise to rehabilitate and restore it.

The province has been in crisis and is at the crossroads of its destiny. It is been designated a 'dysfunctional province' by Minister for Inter-Government Relations, Sir Peter Barter. SHP is arguably the most resource-rich province in the country, yet there is nothing to show for that wealth in the way infrastructure and development for the 'grassroots' people of the province.

Years of political faction-fighting and corrupt, greedy and self-serving leadership at every level, from national MPs and local-level government (LLG) presidents, through certain public servants, provincial politicians and even some church leaders, has left the province and its administrative functions ineffective. This has served to create further political divisions amongst a population already bedevilled by traditional tribal divisions. Bribery, corruption and nepotism have been blatant, rampant and entrenched throughout the society. This province, the very last to be contacted by the outside world and brought under civil administration prior to independence, needs to develop a healthier respect for the rule of law and civil order.

Exacerbating the problems associated with the breakdown in law and order in the province, the court system is also corrupted and dysfunctional and in dire need of restoration to cope with crimes among village communities. The current provincial government will need to prove that the civil administration can undertake its duties, unfettered by political intervention, to restore good governance in the province and to re-establish the mechanisms of the *Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local- Level Governments* (OLPGLLG) and ensure they are effectively implemented. Once peace, stability and fiscal accountability and transparency have been introduced, the duly elected and constituted authorities should be able to work together to rebuild the province.

Provincial governments have hijacked the due processes of planning, budgeting, accounting and reporting, as provided under the OLPGLLG. They have imposed their political will on these vital processes and derailed the proper constituted procedures and mechanisms to ensure that all stakeholders participate in the development planning process from bottom up; budgets have not been devised to ensure transparency and accountability in expenditure of public funds.

The losers have been the vast majority of the population. Good road networks, communications, education, health facilities, and goods and services have been denied to 85 per cent of the provincial population, who depend entirely on the subsistence economy. This is because direction, advice, assistance, education and training have not been instigated by our leaders or the Southern Highlands provincial administration. Provincial infrastructure (roads, buildings and public facilities) has been neglected and is in urgent need of repair. The province is too large to manage. The net outcome of these conditions is reflected in:

- poor political and bureaucratic leadership and management;
- tribal warfare, which is increasingly politically motivated;
- lack of employment opportunities for youth;
- insufficient access to quality education and post-secondary education for youth;
- declining education and health services, particularly in the rural areas;
- lack of social activities (e.g. sports and entertainment) for youth;
- a sharp decline in traditional social and moral values;
- endemic bribery and corruption at all levels of society;
- break-down in the court system;
- lack of capacity of within existing law enforcement agencies to cope with the ongoing law and order issues;
- diversion of development project funds from LLGs to the provincial government;

- diversion of recurrent budget funds for day-to-day operations of the provincial administration (divisions, districts, and LLGs) to the provincial government;
- total mistrust and suspicion of the elected leaders by the people;
- little or no respect for the rule of law and order;
- the obvious absence of transparency, accountability and good governance on the part of many senior and middle line public servants;
- lack of cooperation between national and provincial leaders;
- unfair distribution of scarce resources;
- poor human resource planning and management;
- misuse of selection criteria in the recruitment of public servants;
- political interference in the appointment of public servants;
- poor human resource strategic planning;
- poor planning and budgeting each financial year;
- poor financial management and accountability;
- poor organisational planning and management;
- serious law and order problems;
- take-over of state land and properties by landowners;
- need for infrastructure upgrading and development;
- stagnant economic growth;
- poor implementation of the local-level government reforms;
- poor legal advice on matters of importance;
- poor tendering procedures for the awarding of contracts.

These problems continue despite recent efforts to restore services, and are all the more disconcerting because the province hosts some of the country's largest natural resource development projects that are of importance to the nation and province. The wealth and income derived from these developments has not improved the general status of the province. This is a sad state of affairs, and leaders and people of the province should be made accountable.

The failure of the 2002 elections in the province, and related violence, has contributed immensely to the deteriorating law and order problems and to the province's inability to function administratively. This is seen as a result of political instability and poor administration and management of the province. Despite this, new elections were successfully conducted in the midst of these ongoing problems, with heavy security provided by the state.

On several occasions in 1994 and 2003 the national government has sent teams to conduct investigations into the affairs of the province, but no positive action has been taken by the respective line agencies to date.

In this context, *The Way Forward to Recovery* is designed to develop a program to restore and rebuild confidence in the governance and administration of the province, and ensure that trust is regained from the national government, the

Papua New Guinea Chamber of Mines and Industry, the international community, and the people of SHP and Papua New Guinea.

The way forward to recovery

This is seen as a vital strategy for moving forward, as the province is currently regarded as dysfunctional and there is a need to send the right signals to restore trust and confidence. The goals, objectives and strategies of the proposed program of action are set out as follows:

Goals:

1. To restore and rebuild confidence in the governance of the Southern Highlands provincial government and administration.
2. To improve the quality of life and raise the living standards of the people in the Southern Highlands Province.

Objectives:

1. To restore good governance in the Southern Highlands provincial government and administration.
2. To restore peace and normalcy in the province.
3. To review and develop five-year developmental rolling plans.
4. To formulate minimum standards for the province.
5. To restore essential government services.

Strategies:

- identify why SHP has been dysfunctional;
- strengthen provincial and district capacity;
- review the existing plans, and update and develop five-year rolling plans (LLG, district, regional and provincial);
- the selection and appointment of public servants should be done by the Department of Personnel Management (DPM) or an independent body;
- strengthen the law-enforcing agencies — police, Corrective Institutions Service (CIS) and courts;
- appointment of village court officials, land mediators and peace officers should be based on merit and not political influence;
- establish a minimum standard district office complex;
- establish an effective human resource management a development plan;
- review the provincial administration structure;
- upgrade the existing health facilities and three hospitals;
- upgrade the existing education facilities;
- reactivate the court system;
- set up effective communications networks;
- upgrade and renovate all the major trunk roads and bridges;

- upgrade senior management staff housing and establishment;
- purchase reliable plant and transport;
- strictly apply financial management procedures;
- purchase essential equipment;
- install reliable electricity supplies in the districts (e.g. mini hydro systems);
- establish Treasury offices;
- establish networks with NGOs and donor agencies;
- formulate an economic development plan;
- the Electoral Boundaries Commission to review the boundaries and establish two more electorates and Hela Province.

The Way Forward is intended to improve the quality of life and standard of living by restoring normalcy and good governance in the province. This will enable us to create a healthy and peaceful environment for all, through responsive, effective, accessible, affordable, and sustainable economic and social development that is acceptable and relevant to the majority of the people. To effectively achieve this, the province should give priority to five main program areas:

1. Restoration of confidence in the SHP government and its administration.
2. Restoration of law and order.
3. Restoration of education and health services.
4. Restoration and upgrading of existing infrastructure.
5. Restoration of sustainable economic development programs.

These priorities are equally important; one does not outweigh the other. They are briefly analysed below.

Program one: Restoration of confidence in the SHP Government and its administration

Governance in the SHP is vested in our leaders, but the need for close consultation in advising the leaders is important. This has been one of the major problems, as advice from the Provincial Management Team to the Provincial Executive Council has never been sought in order for our leaders to make decisions based on technical, economic and financial feasibility.

The need for our national members of parliament and the Provincial Executive Council to work together is also crucially important. It is felt that politics has been and remains the major factor that has destroyed this beautiful province.

The Southern Highlands Provincial Assembly and the Provincial Executive Council have not sat to address the issues of the province. This raises questions about whether the law has been contravened.

There is a need to have the Southern Highlands provincial government operate from a building other than the Agiru Centre. While the provincial government

and provincial administration work from the same building, there is no clear way to distinguish what provincial government and administrative staff are doing. Prior to the provincial headquarters building being burnt down in 2002 there was a clear separation between the government and the administration.

Political fragmentation is rampant in all sectors of the society — clans, tribes, families, groups, regions, LLG presidents and councillors, and the public service. This is a serious issue and one which contributes to the problems experienced in the province. Indeed it is apparent that the province has developed a culture, embedded into the system, in which a small group of people with authority either in politics or the civil service has manipulated the system to their benefit.

The dysfunctionality of the public service, and the deterioration of services and serious breakdown in law and order are all side effects of this chronic disease, which is contributing to a downward spiral effect in the way the province has been governed and administered over the years, despite the recent efforts made by Minister for Inter-Government Relations, Sir Peter Barter.

The restoration and reactivation of the administrative system is crucial, as morale and functions have badly deteriorated over the years. This is the vehicle that will resurrect the province and determine its ability to restore and rebuild its services. It is evident that the province has failed to meet its constitutional requirements, and as such it has become a failed province. Restoring confidence in the provincial administration will require comprehensive reform.

Appointment of a provincial administrator

The province has had the experience of many provincial administrators and district administrators appointed to suit the national or provincial governments' political interests over the years, with disregard for established procedures. This has contributed to instability in the public service. Governments have simply employed political cronies and provided jobs for *wantoks*.

It has become a tradition in the Southern Highlands provincial administration to have two or more people paid for the same position. As such, the province has regularly exceeded the staff ceiling and salaries bill over the years. The current provincial government has gone ahead to recruit more public servants, with the number in August 2004 at 1,336 people.

The creation of a Public Relations Division in SHP seriously violates administrative processes. It will not only cost the Southern Highlands provincial government dearly to create this division, but is an insult to the peace and good order committee members, village court magistrates, land mediators, peace officers and casual employees who continue to work throughout the province despite not having been paid their allowances or wages for several years. What is the justification for employing more than 500 staff in a new division?

2001 selection and recruitment

The recruitment of new personnel in 2001 created many problems in the provincial administration. It is said that many unqualified and inexperienced people were recruited into the administration, while good experienced civil servants were put into the unattached pool. People who were recruited in 2001 have failed to perform. Despite this experience, more and more people are being recruited today to facilitate political interests. This is a major problem, and nothing has been done about it.

Restructuring of the provincial administration

The division of the province into three zones should be given priority, as past experience shows that the administration has been able to deliver services effectively. In the past the province has been progressive and vibrant, with development taking place and services being delivered. This strategy was deployed to administer the province effectively, given its land mass, population and infrastructure. The need to revisit this idea is crucial to restoring confidence in the civil administration, without political interference.

Establishment of a human resource management development program

The human resource management division (HRMD) of an organisation is the engine room of that organisation. SHP's HRMD has not functioned effectively for the past ten years. Recruitment of qualified HRM officers is an important requirement if the problems experienced in the SHP administration are to be seriously addressed. The poor performance of the public service is a result of poor advice provided to senior management, and this raises questions about the competence of the HRM staff.

There is a need to conduct an audit of the staffing and payroll over the last three years. People have been employed without following standard procedures and a lot of staff have paid themselves large sums of money in the form of allowances or special pay. This is a form of corruption, which is quite rampant and should be investigated; those responsible should be dealt accordingly.

The degree of corruption in the SHP payroll system should be determined by an independent organisation. On completion of this exercise the Provincial Coordinating Unit (PCU) functions of the Department of Personal Management should be transferred to SHP and the following matters be considered:

- effective operational procedure should be put in place;
- people involved in defrauding the SHP by paying themselves salaries over the last three years should be exposed and charged;
- staff of the DPM involved in this also should be dealt with;
- HRMD should immediately establish a computerised HRM data system;

- an audit of the whole public service should be conducted;
- there is a need to retrench staff or retrain and deploy the excess staff;
- qualified and experienced HRM staff should be recruited;
- an effective career development plan should be established;
- the Provincial Disciplinary Committee should be reactivated.

Appointment and placement of public servants to be based on merit

The provincial public service has been politicised over the years, contributing to poor performance and low productivity. Machinery has ceased to operate. Many public servants are living in Port Moresby, Lae or Mount Hagen and collecting their fortnightly salaries. Further, some people are employed in other organisations but are still paid by the SHP.

Politics has eaten away at the fabric of civil administration, with appointments and resources allocated according to political influence. District administrators tend to spend 85 per cent of their time away from the district centres, and it is unclear what they actually do. Often they seem to be living with the MP and not attending to their duties.

My view, after 23 months working in the Hela region, is that this trend must cease, and district administrators and their staff should be at their place of work in the district. One of the major excuses given by district administrators is that they have to attend to joint district planning and budget priorities committee (JDP&BC) meetings which are held away from the district.

I should also note that district support grants, the key source of funds to district administration, are not being made available in the district. As a result district administrators spend a great deal of time chasing these funds. In theory district administrators should have full access to these funds. What then is currently being done with these funds?

In order to improve SHP's administrative capacity a performance appraisal of human resources at the senior level should be conducted so as to assess the qualifications and experience of managers in accordance with the duty statements of the position. Competent people must be appointed to positions of authority, without political influence, if the province is serious about restoring the public service. The Public Service Management Act and General Orders are usually ignored dealing with public service matters.

Reactivation of the district administration centres

The public service has ceased to function in the province, and nothing is happening. An assessment is urgently needed to establish what it will take to restore the capacity of the administration at the provincial headquarters and in

the districts. This should include assessments of what is needed to restore trust and confidence in the administration.

Local-level government reforms

It is apparent throughout the province that no LLG meetings have been conducted since the failed elections of 2002. Added to this, there have been serious flaws in the election of some presidents, which have led to challenges in the courts. Serious questions have been raised about:

- the election of ward councillors and presidents;
- the appointment of LLG officers and staff;
- management of and accountability for LLG finances; and
- LLG reform policy implementation plans.

LLGs have been heavily politicised and their constitutional roles have been totally ignored. At this time, no LLG in the province is functioning as it should.

Review of provincial and district five-year developmental rolling plans

An immediate priority is to review the existing plans, if the province has any. If it does not, there is a need to obtain help from the Department of National Planning and/or a technical assistance package. The province has been operating without a vision and plan. This has led to the mismanagement of provincial resources. As a result the province is dysfunctional.

Effective management of and accountability for the province's finances

The province has experienced major increases in its revenues over the years, due to payments of royalties, taxes, dividends and development levies derived from the resource developments, amounting to millions of kina over the years. To date however, these funds have been poorly managed. Accordingly the wealth of the province has not been realised. Its infrastructure and services have substantially declined and there is no social and economical growth. Several factors influence the situation, among them the following:

- There are two sets of accounts: one for the Southern Highlands provincial government and one for the provincial Treasury. These operate separately with their own staffing and functions. The provincial Finance Division and the SHP Treasury should be amalgamated to overcome problems of poor control and accountability in the expenditure of funds.
- Expenditures are not based on provincial development plans but are determined by political influence and interest. This has resulted in a lack of accountability.
- Funds have been paid out on bogus claims and to buy political support.

- There are large expenditures on staffing, allowances, travel costs and air charters that are never budgeted. Large amounts have been committed to consultancies and for legal advice, from which the province has not benefited.
- Many of the people employed in the two offices are semi-qualified or unqualified to perform their tasks. A clear example is the recent appointments to provincial Treasury positions; these should be investigated.
- In the formulation of the annual provincial budget, the provincial management team is not consulted.
- There is no proper tendering for projects amounting to millions of kina. Bogus companies have been registered to undertake consultancies and provide infrastructure.
- Cases relating to misuse of public funds must be investigated and appropriate action taken.

Most importantly, a strategy should be clearly identified to ensure that finances are managed in accordance with procedures under the *Financial Management Act*. Every effort should be made to address the issues highlighted.

Program two: Restoration of law and order

Good order, peace and normalcy are the ingredients for sustainable societal development. Without peace and harmony there will be continued degradation of law and order, which will deter development and progress in the province. Law and order problems have a negative impact on new investment and expansion of business activities in both the formal and informal sectors, and notably in the tourism industry, which should be encouraged in the province.

Perceptions of law and order in the province should be assessed and analysed, as the province is experiencing serious break down in law and order. My experience over the years suggests that in addressing the problems of law and order the following issues need to be recognised.

Local disputes

Disputes may arise from minor issues: two children might be playing and one hits the other; or a pig's ear is chopped when it enters another person's food garden. These may appear to be trivial matters, but if they are not resolved immediately they can become bigger problems, contributing to instability within villages, clans and tribal groups.

Based on my experience of conflicts in the Hela region, the following are prominent underlying issues in a lot of local disputes, and tribal fights.

- Land disputes.
- Disputes over bride-price payments.
- Domestic violence.
- Rape and forced marriages.

- Stealing of pigs.
- Compensation demands.
- Criminal activities.
- Use of drugs, especially marijuana.
- Political disputes.
- Payback killings.

Tribal fights

Tribal fights have long been a way of life for the highlander, and traditional procedures for conflict resolution are still used today in some isolated parts of the province. However the use of modern, commercially produced and home-made weapons in tribal fights, as evident in recent fighting in the Unjamap/Wogia, Nembi Plateau/Utupia, Parita/Poroma, and Hela regions, is increasing. There is a need to acknowledge and understand the significance of tribal fights, in order for the government to develop strategies to address them.

Political rivalry

The province has had serious problems since 1994, when the Southern Highlands provincial government was suspended, deepening political divisions throughout the province. Politics has been a major influence contributing to the failure of governance in the province. Our leaders do not appear to be working together for the interests of the province; they have become a liability to the province and its people.

Criminal activities

Criminal activity along the Nipa-Tari road is a serious problem, and many people have become victims. The establishment of highway patrols will be an effective measure to police the roads in the province.

The effectiveness of government and the community justice system

Institutions, such as village courts, land mediators, peace officers and community leaders, which at one time were effective in addressing issues of law and order at the community level, are not functioning. The trust and confidence that was established for these vital systems to deal with law and order issues at the community level has eroded. Reactivation of those systems should be given the highest priority if the province is serious about addressing the breakdown in law and order.

Much of the continuing violence stems from the 1997 elections and the competition between former governors the late Dick Mune and Anderson Agiru. This is an issue that needs to be seriously addressed, as the Hela people are continually falling victims when travelling on the road from Nipa to Tari, and

as a result are effectively being denied services. They have suffered for almost ten years, despite the fact that the Hela region hosts some of the largest natural resources projects in the country. This has given them the motivation for a separate Hela province.

Peace for development

Where electorates and communities are peaceful, services should be restored and developmental programs encouraged. This may provide a model for others in the province to follow. Places identified for such initiatives are Upper Mendi, Lower Mendi, Imbonggu, Ialibu, Pangia and Margarima.

Arms build-up

It is public knowledge that the SHP has modern weapons, and there is an ongoing arms build-up. The number of high-powered firearms coming to the province is alarming. It poses a serious threat to national security, and every effort should be made to establish where the arms are coming from. The experience of the 2002 failed election should be ringing alarm bells. Among the reasons for this trend:

- arms been brought in by people with power and authority;
- arms smuggling has been associated with drug trafficking;
- fear of being attacked by an enemy tribe is widespread, so guns are acquired for security;
- individuals, villages, tribes and political groupings gain power and status through having arms.

Agencies responsible for addressing these issues have not done enough; a weapons collection and disposal strategy must be developed.

Status of the law-enforcing system

The Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) is severely constrained in carrying out its constitutional functions, due to lack of funds. Staff housing is in an appalling state of disrepair, and there are not adequate funds for fuel for the aging fleet of police vehicles. It is difficult to attract serving members of the police force to transfer to the province, because of the housing situation and the negative image that has been projected by the recent killing of a policeman in Koroba and the law and order situation generally.

There are in fact only 195 policemen and policewomen to police what is a very large and heavily populated province. Indeed with only one police officer to every 2800 people policing is incredibly difficult, and even serious crimes may not be attended to.

The police force alone cannot restore law and order: a combined effort from all sectors of the government and community is required. Despite the

impediments they face, restoration efforts by the RPNGC in the province are progressing well. The leaders of the province should be thankful that the police and the church have held the province together.

An increase in the deployment of police to the province is vital. However, strategies for addressing the breakdown of law and order in the province should be home-grown rather than derived from nationally-developed programs. The provincial police commander (PPC) has already taken some useful initiatives. Strategies might include:

- training of police recruits in SHP (an initiative developed by the PPC);
- revisiting the law on inter group-fighting;
- giving more powers to the police;
- heavier penalties for crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, and tribal fights;
- using the concept for *peace for development* as a tool in restoring services;
- introducing community policing;
- reactivating the national, district and village court systems;
- establishing three mobile squads, in Mendi, Tari and Ialibu;
- initiating massive awareness campaigns through community policing;
- networking with NGOs in the province;
- funding the peace and good order committee functions;
- improving police infrastructure and adequately supporting with logistics;
- developing a weapons collection and disposal strategy.

The court system

The court system in SHP has been crippled, with no resources and only one magistrate in the province during the last five years. There are no magistrates in any of the six districts except Tari.

Since there are no courts to deal with offenders, people who have committed serious crimes remain on the loose. For example, in the Hela region there are 162 murder cases outstanding. One of the major problems — as for public servants throughout the province — is housing for magistrates.

The reactivation of the court system, with support from the provincial government and the national government, is critical.

Corrective institutions

The two CIS centres in the province, Bui Yebi in Mendi and Hawa in Tari, must be made functional. Hawa was closed for a good number of years; it has been recently reopened but resources must be allocated to enable it to function effectively. The restoration of corrective services will be a step towards addressing the breakdown in law and order.

Program three: Restoration of education and health services

Education

The Education Division is the biggest division in the SHP administration. There are in the province over 300 elementary schools, 150 community schools, 75 primary schools, 12 provincial high schools, 3 secondary schools, 6 vocational training centres, and one agriculture and technical secondary school. The total enrolment of students at all institutions is 83,884, and the average student-teacher ratio is 466:1.

Like other line divisions in the SHP, the Education Division is not functioning effectively. I suspect that 85 per cent of all educational institutions in the province are not providing their mandated functions.

Education reform has contributed to the problems. On the one hand, there has been an overall improvement in accessibility to basic education; however, access in some areas has worsened considerably. This has to do with the fact that the location of schools, teacher appointments and the selection of students is now subject to considerable political interference.

It is also the case that education subsidies from the national government to the province have been poorly used and inadequately accounted for over the years. Recently the Southern Highlands provincial government adopted a 'Free Education Policy' in the province, which in my view is adding to the problems of a poor education system that is trying to deliver. This is a politically sensitive topic, but it is apparent that the 'Free Education Policy' is not achieving its intended outcome.

If lack of access to education at all levels is not addressed successfully, there are likely to be wider ramifications, including:

- a marked increase in law and order problems;
- a marked decrease in the enrolment of SHP students in higher educational institutions;
- lack of incentive for skilled and experienced people to stay in the province, due to poor opportunity and quality of lifestyle;
- a decline in the local economy, impacting on local entrepreneurs, and a lack of well educated and trained personnel to be employed in the SHP government and administration.

Currently in SHP there is a shortage of teachers, and educational infrastructure is in need of maintenance. The SHP's Free Education Policy should be assessed to determine its viability. There is urgent need to appoint a qualified education advisor to help provide leadership.

Health

The Division of Health is similarly compromised. Indeed problems in the health sector are evident throughout the province. The division employs about 315 people of the current 900 or so provincial manpower. There are two district hospitals, at Ialibu and Tari, and a provincial hospital in Mendi. A third district hospital was recently built at Koroba, but has not been commissioned due to lack of staff accommodation.

In addition to the three hospitals, there are 8 health care centres, 2 of which two are currently closed; 56 health sub-centres of which 12 are closed; and approximately 120 operating aid posts, of which 97 are closed for various reasons. There are 6 ambulances operating throughout the province, while several are out of service due to mechanical failure. Ideally, there should be 20 ambulances servicing the districts that have road networks, including 3 based in Mendi.

Mendi has a level 3 referral hospital, with approximately 200 beds. The hospital is run-down, but continues to function despite limited equipment and resources. There is an immediate need to maintain the Mendi Hospital as a referral hospital for the province. There is a further need to have Tari and Ialibu hospitals rehabilitated and functioning.

Tari Hospital, which provides hospital services for the Hela region, does not have a doctor, and there is a need to rectify this. The hospital is in need of major maintenance, and requires essential equipment and drugs.

The Rural Health Service has suffered severely over recent years. There has been a major decline in services and worse may be expected in the event of a major disease outbreak.

If health services are to be restored, though, careful attention should be given to priorities, as so much needs to be done.

Program four: Restoration and upgrading of the existing infrastructure

Upgrading and maintaining existing infrastructure should be prioritised over building new infrastructure. The current status of roads, bridges, administration facilities, public service housing, educational institutions, and health facilities needs to be assessed.

The Southern Highlands provincial government must realise that the infrastructure in the province requires major assessments not only of technical feasibility but also of social and economic returns and the impact on our people. The Tax Credit Scheme and bilateral aid might be utilised to help restore the province's aging infrastructure.

Program five: Restoration of sustainable economic development programs

There has been a substantial decline in economic growth in all sectors throughout the province. The revenues derived from non-renewable resources should be invested in renewable resources. This has been neglected by successive provincial governments. What happens when the natural resources of the province are depleted?

It is important that economic programs give priority to projects that offer a sustainable return. Some that come to mind include:

- coffee production, geared towards smallholder coffee rehabilitation and new development;
- food security development;
- eco-tourism development;
- eco-forestry development;
- Rural micro and macro credit facilities.

Conclusion

If the national government is serious about reviving the province, it must, as a matter of urgency, work with the provincial government and provincial administration to see that the five priority areas identified in this paper are addressed. Furthermore it must:

1. utilise resource people in the province as partners in the decision-making process;
2. develop an action plan;
3. develop a restoration program;
4. ensure that its policies are fully resourced; and
5. carefully monitor the implementation process.

The National Government has a constitutional and a moral obligation to ensure that the SHP restores good governance and sound administration for its societal development and sustainable progress so that the province can compete with the rest of Papua New Guinea.

ENDNOTES

¹ This chapter is based on a presentation to a ministerial delegation to the Southern Highlands Province in August 2004. The same paper was presented to the Central Agencies Consultative Committee at Kiburu Lodge on 16 April 2004.