

## PNG ADVISORY SUPPORT FACILITY II: EXPERIENCES OF SOME CURRENT ASF ADVISERS



**Rob Collocott,**  
**Management Information Systems Adviser,**  
**PNG Forest Authority**

### **The perspective of an Adviser with accompanying family**

Originally from Perth (Western Australia), my family and I have been living in PNG (Port Moresby) for over six months and the whole family has enjoyed the experience immensely. My wife is focused on her role as mother to our three children, aged five to 14.

After a brief visit to PNG in 2003, and after seeing the benefits of work and life in this unique country, I did not hesitate to apply for my current position as Adviser at PNG Forest Authority. My attraction to this type of role was based largely on the opportunity to have a direct influence on significant and positive changes in organisations that have an obvious and dire need for improvement.

Life in Port Moresby has been busy yet relaxed. This new and different environment has brought a treasure of new experiences and pleasant memories for the whole family. We have been actively involved in water sports that are centered at the Royal Papua Yacht Club. Most weekends are spent sailing Hobie 16 catamarans, fishing, water skiing or relaxing on beaches located on nearby islands.

Despite perceptions of poor security in PNG (and in particular Port Moresby), we have had no threatening experiences and we are able to travel around the city area and visit shops, restaurants and other places of interest without fear. We follow a few basic security rules such as staying away from known security risk areas and remaining aware of situations around us whenever we move around in the area. We believe that this behavior is no different to the way that we would behave in most urban areas in other countries.

There are many sports clubs and interest/ social clubs that go out of their way to welcome new members. I personally join the Port Moresby Road Runners Association for a race every Saturday and I normally get in a 5 km training run twice a week along the streets in our neighborhood. The children have regular tennis coaching and are involved in soccer, netball, drama and cricket programs through their respective schools. Debbie is involved in a number of interest/ social clubs.

We have found the academic standards at the International Schools to be more than satisfactory. Our children can't wait to go to school most days which is something that Debbie and I are still trying to come to terms with. We believe that the friendliness and warmth of pupils and teachers and also the many different and interesting cultures has something to do with this strange phenomenon.

As an Adviser, one can provide support and guidance for improvement initiatives but the real value comes from allowing the personnel in the Agency to "learn by doing". This builds true capacity and sustainability. I have found this aspect to be particularly challenging as it can be slow and frustrating at times, requiring much perseverance and patience. The end result is very rewarding however.

I have enjoyed the creativeness and improvisation that is often required to make improvements in a situation where there is little or no organised infrastructure and resources. Starting with a clean slate and being able to influence the design and implementation of significant improvements has been most satisfying. More often than not it is small changes that are required to make huge improvements to the organisation. Our time in PNG has been very pleasant and the support that we have received from the Coffey International Development support team has been exceptional. From a work perspective, I have enjoyed the challenges and I have already experienced some satisfaction from improvements that have been made since my engagement. Life is good as an Adviser in PNG.

photo not available

## **Elise Skinner, Recruitment Manager ASF**

### **The perspective of a less experienced professional**

Some potential candidates may read this and think I am a little biased....I am after all the Recruitment Manager for the Advisory Support Facility, and it is therefore in my best interest to attract you to work and live in Port Moresby!

When I considered the option of moving here to work with Coffey International Development's programs I will admit as a young female it was a little daunting. I was lucky enough to have the support and encouragement of those that had experienced life here first hand and in many ways this is why we felt it important to include this section on our website. I have lived in Port Moresby for two years and will be staying for a third; I just can't bring myself to leave yet.

Papua New Guinea is a beautiful country, and I am lucky to work with some of the most interesting, vibrant individuals I have ever met. Working as a development professional offers many challenges, but equally as many rewards and no one day is the same. Soon after moving here I was enjoying work so much that I had forgotten what life was like back in Australia ...did I really sit in traffic for 40 minutes every morning? Did I really spend all day staring at my computer screen? How boring!

My contribution to the ASF differs from that of an Adviser, but working with representatives from such a broad range of PNG's Government Agencies and seeing the many successes our Advisers achieve when working with their counterparts has been an incredible experience. It is fair to say that if you take up this type of career move while a less experienced professional, your expertise and competency grows exponentially from day one such is the complexity and diversity of the environment.

Life here is not all work and no play! Even in the time I have lived here, I have noticed more and more young professionals are moving to Moresby and it is relatively easy to join a fun social network early on. Most people are accepting of the fact it is a difficult place to be the "newbie" and will go out of their way to include you in activities. There are plenty of opportunities for sport, exercise and outdoor activities and considering our fabulous climate there is no excuse not to get involved.

Travelling to the provinces is also a great experience, with beautiful beaches, islands, mountains, rivers etc – the list is endless. PNG is renowned for some of the best diving in the world, and even humble snorkelling offers spectacular sights. As with any place you live, it is up to you to find your own fun, and with the good friends you make it is not hard to have a good time.

Security is one of the concerns I am asked about most often. It is an issue, but it is likely that you have heard only the horror stories. Most large cities have issues with crime, ours may be a little more complicated but Port Moresby can be a comfortable, enjoyable place to live – you do have to be mindful of your safety and adjust certain aspects of your lifestyle, but this by no means diminishes the experience. I have loved every minute.



**Reg Sanday,  
Monitoring & Evaluation Adviser,  
Department of National Planning & Monitoring**

**The perspective of a male Adviser**

Having worked previously in PNG on a number of consultancies and developed a liking for the country and its people, I was very interested in applying for the position in the National Disaster Centre. The possibility of contributing my skills and experience to PNG in a longer term role attracted me so I was thrilled when I was successful in being appointed to the Prepared Communities Adviser position.

Being an ASF Adviser is financially rewarding and professionally the work is a challenge. ASF Advisers are first and foremost change managers. We observe, try to understand work practices and systems and then work with local counterparts and other stakeholders to develop better ways of doing things. The challenge always is to ensure that whatever systems or approaches are introduced they will not be abandoned after you leave. It's a bit of a paradox that from the day you start work you also start planning to do yourself out of a job. There is a strong emphasis on capacity building and satisfaction comes when you start to see the results of your efforts in the work of your counterparts, and also in improvements in the outputs of your host agency.

I live in one of the many apartments that line Touguba Hill overlooking the magnificent Port Moresby harbour. The view from my balcony is striking and especially soothing after a long day in the office. Shopping is not a problem. There are numerous good supermarkets that are as comfortable and well stocked as any that you'll find in Australia.

One of the first things all advisers have to face when arriving in Port Moresby is the security situation. Like many cities in the developing world that have had a large influx of rural migrants, there are certain parts of Port Moresby that one would not normally go to especially at night. However, in the time that I have lived in PNG I have never felt threatened. Almost all apartment blocks have 24-hour security guards and Coffey International Development equips all its advisers with 2-way radios linked to a 24/7 security service.

As an ASF Adviser you are surrounded by a supportive network of staff from your host agency, other ASF advisers who are available to share their experience and also staff from Coffey International Development's office in Port Moresby who are always ready to help with any difficulties you may face.



**Erika Mieser, Human Resources Adviser, Department of Treasury**

**The perspective of a female adviser**

I joined the ASF team of Advisers in November 2007, after having lived and worked in Australia for an extended period of time. I moved to Papua New Guinea alone and have found my experience to date both challenging and rewarding.

As HR Adviser at the Department of Treasury I work with a wonderful team committed to HR and public sector reform. The expertise an Adviser brings to Treasury is valued and appreciated, and I have found my peers in Corporate Services to be hardworking, professional and fun to work with.

There is a robust social life here in Port Moresby, not only within the expatriate community, but more importantly, through experiencing the rich social culture of the Papua New Guinean people, both in the work place and broader community. There are many groups and clubs that work to improve the quality of life of the Papua New Guinean people which you can join, as well as an extensive sporting network including running and walking clubs, yachting, canoeing, gyms, netball, diving and many more.

My greatest challenge has been through a perceived loss of my personal freedom. Whilst you may not go for an early morning walk by yourself and other similar independent activities common to Australian life, you will instead focus on joining in with others and going out to dinner at one of the many restaurants; snorkelling at local islands; shopping for groceries, giftware, jewellery, and homewares in shops and markets; or having a massage and treatment at the spa. An acute awareness of security is necessary, but is quickly learnt, seldom getting in the way of experiencing a rewarding life both in and out of the workplace.

The support of the ASF Coffey International office here in Port Moresby has been of a high standard, commencing with a significant induction process that establishes you at work, provides extensive information about life in Port Moresby, and equips you to identify and manage any of the possible cultural and security issues you could face.



**Peter Bell,  
Department of Treasury**

**The perspective of an Adviser who has returned to PNG for a second assignment**

I am working with the Department of Treasury and have been living in Port Moresby for over two years. This is my first overseas posting and it was also my first trip to Papua New Guinea. With 18 months experience here, I can say that coming to PNG and working as an ASF adviser have been amongst the most rewarding professional and personal experiences of my life.

At Treasury, I work with a team of Papuan New Guineans who have the role of identifying financial malpractice in the public sector. I have found the opportunity to assist the team in developing their skills and processes extremely satisfying. Here, unlike in large private and public organisations in Australia, your work can produce results that have an almost immediate and significant positive affect on the quality of service delivery to the public.

If you are finding the every day routine of work a grind and you are not getting the job satisfaction you once had, then joining ASF as an adviser is the tonic. Joining ASF also gives you entry into the worldwide market that exists for experienced international development professionals.

Away from work, life here is very good. There are excellent recreation facilities and a well developed social scene. A Friday night could find you at any of the very good restaurants enjoying a great, cheap seafood meal, at the local theatre watching a play or out clubbing at a first class open air night club! The weekend could involve exploring the rich and diverse culture in the provinces, diving in tropical fjords or sailing from the Royal Papua Yacht Club to one of the local islands for a beach BBQ.

Port Moresby is a good spot for your first posting overseas. Same time zone, same language, same TV stations and familiar Australian products and brands everywhere, help you settle in.

While as in any large city, personal safety is an issue, I have not found it to be as overwhelming as is often portrayed and have had no issues so far. Most accommodation and offices have a more than adequate security infrastructure.

The ASF office here provides good support to the advisers, particularly in assisting new advisers and their families settle in. Since its commencement ASF has developed a reputation for professionalism and achieving results and that is something I will be glad to have on my resume!

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**Deb Collocott,**

**ASF Non working partner with family**

**The perspective of a non-working partner with all family members living in Port Moresby**

When my husband, Rob, was offered his position in Port Moresby we initially decided that myself and our three children would stay in Perth . That notion lasted all of 2 weeks!! After I was happy that Rob had done all the “homework” I set for him re finding out about schools etc we made the move.

I have not been able to work as I am on a non working visa. When we first arrived our three kids were at three different school sites so I was happy to be able to fetch and carry and be around for them. I joined an aqua-aerobics class and was soon roped into the All Nations Womens Group, as President! I have also become quite involved with the Junior Sailing Program, although I know absolutely nothing about sailing!! During our stay in Moresby we, as a family, have met some fantastic people from all parts of the world and have made some really good friends. There are lots of social groups and clubs as well as more serious fundraising concerns and volunteer type programs which a lot of expat women get involved in. There is absolutely no reason for anyone to be bored while living in Port Moresby !

Our kids settled into the Moresby way of life very quickly. Our eldest daughter soon became entrenched in the International High school and has enjoyed being part of 2 school musicals and UN concerts, major events on the school, and community, calendar. Our son tried his hand at sailing, something he would never have done in Australia , and excelled, representing PNG at the Oceania Championships in 2006, he is also enjoying being involved in the local squash league competitions and plays golf. Our youngest daughter started her formal schooling here and has loved every minute of it. She has an active social life, playing tennis, going to ballet classes and generally enjoying life. We have found that all three have adjusted to the different environment and have enjoyed the experience of meeting and dealing with so many different nationalities and cultures.

Living in Port Moresby is different but as long as one is sensible and aware there is no reason why it cannot be a fantastic experience. Where else can you have gorgeous warm water, coral reefs and fantastic scenery right on your doorstep. Our experience in Port Moresby has been a positive one and one which we will remember forever.