

Emilia Simoes Fiebel

Sheridan Technical High School

Hollywood, FL, USA

Papua New Guinea, Policy and Governance

Papua New Guinea: Adapting the System to Support the People

Papua New Guinea, or PNG, is a nation consisting roughly of 9,277,844 people located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. As a hot and humid tropical island, there are two distinctive seasons: wet (December to March) and dry (June to September). 13.35% of the country's population resides in an urban area and 86.66% lives in a rural area (World Bank, 2018). The land's geographic features are mostly mountainous and covered with rain forest and large wetlands. Located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, PNG is on the point of collision of several tectonic plates. (Anton, 1) The government is structured as a unitary system of government where the country has a national parliament, and the prime minister governs over the nation as a unit. There is a constitution, but the prime minister has all of the centralized power. The current elected leader and head of the state is James Marape who holds a majority of the executive power. The country was formerly a part of the British colonies in the late 1800s to early 1900s and then an Australian territory from the early 1900s to late 1900s.

25.6% or 118,000 km² of the land is cultivated and mainly used to produce coffee, coconuts, pineapple, palm kernels, sugarcane, citrus fruits, and bananas (Saunders, 1993). Subsistence farming is the most heavily used agricultural technique in PNG which is when crops are grown by the farmers to feed that farmer's family. The major livestock raised is cattle and chicken and major exports of the country include gold, petroleum gas, coffee, cocoa, copper ore, wood, and oils (Saunders, 1993). The household of a typical family in PNG (predominately true for families located in rural areas) is made up of 6-7 people. Most live in houses made of natural materials or apartments made of cement or brick. Food is mostly cooked using Mumu, an oven that is made with hot coals in a hole in the ground. Only 40% of urban households and 20% of rural households have access to safe drinking water. In 2020, only 60.4% of people reported having access to electricity (World Bank, 2018). Employment is found through oil and gas extraction corporations, mining, forestry, agriculture, and fishing.

Although the country is rich with resources, 40% of its population lives in extreme poverty (Human Rights Watch, 2020). PNG, as a result, has been listed with a "high risk" food security index with "56% of its people worried at some time over the previous year about not having enough to eat, 44% ran out of food, and 32% said they went for at least one whole day without eating (Pandey, 3)." Although this country has an abundance of natural resources, the majority of these commodities are being exported and with the lack of skilled labor, difficulty accessing foreign exchange, and low literacy rates, the country isn't knowledgeable on how to use these products to the best of its ability. These trends have only continued to worsen and have been directly linked to smaller yields year after year, stifling market purchases and self-production. These food shortages stem from a lack of stability in the government. The shortcomings of this government have impeded the people's ability to capitalize on their natural resources. The overall structure of the government is flawed because their political hierarchy was dependent on foreign powers for decades. This is where the majority of their funds and resources came from, however, after their independence from Australia in 1975, the government's structure was never changed to accommodate the funds that were lost and the smaller nation that the leadership was now responsible for. The carelessness of legislative and executive duties has allowed for the government to overlook the basic rights of the residents. What contributes to this trend of bad governance is unqualified

and morally questionable people in positions of leadership. Corruption is the glue that has held the abuses of this nation together. In May of 2020, Peter O'Neill, the former prime minister, was charged with misappropriation, corruption, and abuse of his position of power in office. He had purchased two generators for US \$14.1 million from Israel without the approval of the parliament (Human Rights Watch, 13). There has also been speculation that the country has forged numbers to indicate the poverty crisis improved in a positive matter, which is highly unlikely. "Government figures indicate that up to 18 percent of the rural population and 5 percent of the urban population have no access to a hygienic toilet however some experts like Lilian Siwi, head of health in Eastern Highlands Province, estimate the real gap is much wider" (Paney, 3). The inconsistency of the system contributes to the country's failure to provide authorities with leaders who will advocate for the resources that benefit the people.

Corruption in the main government leads to hiring corrupt employees. The police force throughout the country is ill managed and underfunded which has resulted in unlawful actions from these officers like rape, violent physical assaults, and the torturing of children. Prison and jail breakouts are incredibly common and with a lack of transportation and accredited law enforcement, vehicles, and the correct ratio of officers to people is nonexistent. The United Nations has recommended that there should be one officer to every 450 people, however, PNG police has an average of one officer to every 1,145 people (Human Rights Watch, 10). PNG is a terrifying place for women and children, who represent a large percentage of victims of domestic and sexual violence. A 2020 academic study found that over a 19-month period, a specialist police unit set up to receive complaints of sexual violence in Boroko, Port Moresby, averaged 27 complainants per month, 90 percent of whom were female, and 74 percent of whom were under age 18 (Human Rights Watch, 2). The rights of women and children have been repeatedly abused by the police force and the PNG government. Victims of these abuses are less likely to receive help or report their abusers because of a lack of trust in the health care and justice system. If action is not taken, their efforts to report their abusers can endanger their lives.

Age discrimination, unlike gender discrimination, is not a prevalent issue in PNG as poor living conditions and health care have decreased the average life span. The government's desperation for money has inclined the prime minister to hoard resources at the expense of the livelihoods of the natives. The PNG government has taken away more than 5 million hectares of land away from rural Papua New Guineans and has given it to foreign companies who would pay more for the property at the expense of the native's survival. (Human Rights Watch, 17) These foreign companies are coming into the country to exploit the resources that the land provides without giving thought to future generations that will need it. "Land degradation covers a wide range of effects of varying degrees of severity, ranging from the disturbance of soil nutrient balances and fertility to the physical loss of soils through widespread surface exposure and erosion (Nicholls, 28)." The large incoming numbers of international monopolies have increased immigrant and refugee statistics throughout the years from areas like the middle east, Africa, and Europe. As a result, resources have depleted and funds from those areas to support the displaced persons has not been provided. Immigrants have found a home in PNG despite the weak justice and government system and the health, food, and economic crisis and the countries that allowed this should be supporting PNG and their efforts to provide shelter for asylum seekers. This silent genocide of human rights stems from the inconsistencies in the policy and governance.

PNG residents have also witnessed forced emigration from their neighboring country, Australia. Refugees and asylum seekers do not feel safe because of tensions in the county from the lack of protected laws to support the citizens. Violent attacks have ensued between the natives and immigrants and there are no laws to support either one of them. Having seen gender, age, economic, and cultural discrimination, establishing improved policies and programs is essential to the reconstruction of the government. There is evidence of policies protecting some forms of human rights, but they are not enforced by the police or governmental officials on a consistent enough basis to see adequate effects. For this county to effectively support its people and the incoming migrants, the government needs to create a system that supports its people. Not a system that was made for another county. To assume that one way of governing would

support all nations who share different economic and cultural situations only puts the people and system of that nation at a disadvantage.

Another important factor to take into consideration are the indigenous tribes and cultures that reside in the country. Many of them have not been touched by the modern world, making their cooperation important. In this context, we can learn a great deal from them and almost mirror their communities' structure across the country. Understanding of the people's needs and true concern for their people's opinions are an important value in tribal culture, which is something we can incorporate into this modernized government. Inviting tribal leaders to speak and cultivate closer relations with the national government can allow for a smoother transition to other forms of agriculture and governance.

The food insecurity crisis in Papua New Guinea doesn't just stem from one problem like human rights, consumer waste, or education. What makes this difficult, but the most effective way to tackle all of these problems, is to reform the country's current way of tackling policy and governance. The weak government is the domino effect to the local enforcer's abuses and the people's human rights issues which trickles down to economic instability therefore depleting funds for health care and education which are the two largest factors that have led the country into a food insecurity crisis. The first step to the solution is starting from scratch. The United Nations needs to converse with the prime minister of PNG and develop a plan to modify the system from a unitary to a federal government. Power that is centralized in one place, in this instance in the prime minister, is more susceptible to corruption than if the power is broken up. With the help of the UN, power can be peacefully transferred from central power to local power so that corruption is not ripe in one area. Diving the country into micro provinces or districts will allow for the local government to become stronger and give the people more interaction with their local leaders. This will make it easier to govern smaller areas and the leaders of the sections can then form a panel to voice the opinion of each area. Reluctance from the prime minister would be expected which is why offering assurances of a resource that is necessary through trade deals could make the offer more attractive. The UN could broker a potential deal with the ASEAN nations, a group of 10 Asia-Pacific countries who are participating in the world's largest free trade agreement, for things like vaccines, technology, or international money in exchange for abundant resources that PNG can provide. Cambodia, Australia, China, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, and New Zealand are in close proximity to PNG, which allows for resources to come into the country quicker (The ASEAN Secretariat, 1). The incoming food and vaccines can be used to address the health and food crisis. The move from a unitary to a federal democracy would be a long-term goal for the country to achieve over time but trade deals and international funding is the only short-term goal that could present a temporary solution to food insecurity in PNG. The US contributed \$4 million and 302,400 vaccines to help with the health crisis in PNG in 2021. (World Bank, 4) The American Rescue Plan Act is a great effort, but the US cannot be the only country making contributions to end the health crisis in PNG, especially if the corrupted government is potentially holding funds and vaccines instead of proving them to the people. Modifying the government and effectively transferring power with the help of the UN would regain their trust after years of lies to the UN Human Rights Council and reduce local and federal corruption. If evidence suggests that the government is hoarding the resources meant for the people, independent distributors can directly supply their resources to the people which would make corruption difficult to continue since the malignant organizations will not be self-sustaining anymore. Political reform and foreign intervention can bring public disapproval at first, but the possible positive results of attempting to strengthen safety and legitimacy of Papua New Guinea governance is worth the risk when their current way of life is already not working. Trust in the leaders of the nation needs to be rebuilt if there is to be any hope of restoring systematic dignity.

When the federal and local government is established as a federal democracy and leaders who want the best for their people and the system are elected, the best thing to tackle next is the corruption in the lower levels. When people with high accredited positions like captains have ties to nefarious dealings, then the rest of the rank like sergeants and lieutenants will also be corrupt as to give the right impressions to the

people who give them their paycheck. When one person at the top does something, the rest are likely to follow by example. The UN could create a multinational law enforcement panel to investigate widespread and systematic corruption in the police force to minimize embezzlement and extortion. This can potentially be people from the supranational organization, ASEAN, a group of nations trained in law enforcement and policy who can investigate and hopefully weed out the corrupt leaders and help develop a plan to effectively replace them. The specialists can also train new officers and equip them with more tools to protect the defenseless people. This includes providing them with communication and surveillance systems and vehicles for transportation. "The difficulties in communication and transport make it equally hard for government services (health, education, policing, environmental monitoring, and enforcement) to reach these more remote communities. This results in these communities' suffering disadvantages and hardships through lack of basic government services, most notably education, health, law, and order (Nicholls, 2004)." Eradicating inhumane practices can increase the livelihoods of the people in all areas.

Of course, the risk of imperialism is a huge factor that must be taken into account. The fragility of the government during a switch such as the one that is being suggested needs to be protected by institutions. While the help of countries like the USA would be a great help in warding off intruders, history has shown through the Monroe Doctrine that even though the US tries to prevent imperialism, there isn't stopping them if they decide to dominate and insert control into the country themselves. Leaving the protection of the country, in regards to their government, to the UN will give people and leaders more peace of mind.

The reduction in corruption, a modified system and more trust in law enforcement would hopefully lead to more legislature that gives back rights to the people. As previously mentioned, human rights are a huge issue in PNG and with the government's lack of order, not much was being done to fix this. With the new established connection between the local government and people, the residents will be more inclined to protest and speak about issues that they want changed. There is no incentive for the population to dig themselves out of poverty and support their government and economy when the system is oppressive. Passing bills to protect human rights, with the help of the UN and the Human Rights Council, will significantly reduce discrimination throughout the nation. Giving more opportunities to women, the disabled and other marginalized communities in PNG will lead to the population supporting a more trustworthy governmental system which, in turn, would boost the economy. With increases in gender equity and ownership of land, these liberated people will want to start small businesses and work hand and hand with the government to improve their lifestyle. Improved trade policies with semi-periphery and core countries will drive economic growth, providing more money in the country which translates to more money for the people. Teaching the people how to use the resources of the surrounding ocean to its full potential will improve agricultural techniques as well. Techniques like feeding cows kelp can improve climate change conditions and lessen the economic burden on low-income families. With these advancements in society, the GDP, or Gross Domestic Product, will improve, resulting in growing wealth. Improved GDP prospects will rapidly improve the issue of food insecurity.

With the improved relations between the people and leadership, there will be more of an inclination to progress in regions related to the people's living style. The booming economy and relations with the UN and ASEAN will provide PNG resources to increase widespread health care and education to the country. This slowly developing country will not survive without educated and healthy people supporting it. Vaccines for spreading diseases like Polio and Covid-19 can be provided to children and elderly age groups. Hospitals can be built, and international health care providers can teach locals how to take care of themselves. Increases in education will allow for rural farmers to become less reliant on agrarian commerce and diversify the traditional sole providership that they are accustomed to. "Around 75 percent of natives practice subsistence farming. Coffee production is one of the country's main sources of revenue, and thus, when this cash crop fails to produce, the regional economy suffers. Productivity has been low because farmers lack sufficient training in techniques, and yields are averaging 30 to 50 percent

of their potential. The same thing is happening with the country's cocoa production. (Voegeli, 2)" The answer to strengthening subsistence agriculture is not commercial farming like other countries have evolved into. In an effort to minimize deforestation, capitalizing on commerce in local markets will support the local economy in the microstates. A factor that could substantially strengthen the government is ecotourism. By including local residents in the demonstrations of their local culture, there would be more environmental understanding and local economic benefits. Showing local residents that this new form of government would give them more prosperity, would help them to accept and acclimate to the changes. Getting the people involved by telling families and keeping an open mind would force those who benefit now from the system to take into account those who don't. With the combination of inoculations and health care centers with access to healthy foods, food insecurity will decrease, and this is all dependent on a stable government and effective policies in place.

Saving PNG is highly achievable when policy and people are dedicated and determined to change the government for the right reasons. More effective and efficient agricultural techniques through education and legislature to protect human rights is possible with the reforms in the systematic government. A utopian country is not achievable even if they weren't a low developed country, but more attention to policy and governance in PNG will rapidly decrease food insecurity throughout the nation and ease tensions between the people and leadership.

- Anton, Lawrence, et al. "Behaviour of Outrigger Beams in High Rise Buildings under ... - Aees." *Aees.org.au*, Nov. 2013, <https://aees.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Herath-et-al.pdf>.
- Cobon, David H., et al. "Food shortages are associated with droughts, floods, frosts and ENSO in Papua New Guinea." *Agricultural Systems* 145 (2016): 150-164.
- Gibson, John, and Scott Rozelle. "Poverty and Access to Roads in Papua New Guinea." *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2003, pp. 159–85. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/380424>. Accessed 20 May 2022.
- Human Rights Watch. "World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Papua New Guinea." *Papua New Guinea Events of 2020*, 13 Jan. 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/papua-new-guinea#:~:text=PNG%20remains%20one%20of%20the,viole%20nce%20reported%20in%20Port%20Moresby>.
- Nicholls, Stephen. "The priority environmental concerns of Papua New Guinea." *IWP-Pacific Technical report* 1 (2004).
- Pandey, Manoj K, et al. "PNG: The Hungry Country." *Devpolicy Blog from the Development Policy Centre*, 6 July 2021, <https://devpolicy.org/png-the-hungry-country-20210520/#:~:text=The%20answers%20to%20these%20questions,one%20whole%20day%20with%20eating>.
- Saunders, J.C. 1993 Agricultural Land Use of Papua New Guinea: [map with explanatory notes]. Scale 1:1 000 000. PNGRIS Publication No. 1. (AIDAB: Canberra.) 4 sheets & 12p.
- The ASEAN Secretariat. "RCEP Agreement Enters into Force." *Asean.org*, 1 Jan. 2022, <https://asean.org/rcep-agreement-enters-into-force/>.
- Voegeli, Lucy. "Papua New Guinea's Poverty Rate." *Borgenproject.org*, Borgen Project, 19 June 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/tag/papua-new-guineas-poverty-rate/>.
- World Bank. "Rural Population (% of Total Population) - Papua New Guinea." *Data*, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=PG>.