

A case study to establish insights into reasons and nature of conflicts in resource-based development projects in Papua New Guinea.

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Abstract: Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a nation of cultural diversity, having over 800 distinct tribes with their own languages, each tribe being separated by vast terrain, high mountains, vast river systems, swamp lands and rugged coastlines. As a result of isolation, tribal societies are structured on the basis of kinship, having varying degree of customs and values that is heavily entrenched into the decision making process, on how that particular tribe function collectively in how they use particular resources on their communal land. The unique context and challenges of conflicts in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are not adequately explained by the extant literature. This paper discusses the context of conflicts, barriers to conflict resolutions, key issues and the commonalities and differences in natural resource-based development effort, in PNG as the nation attempts to actively participate in a dynamic, rapidly changing global environment. This paper highlights that conflicts in PNG context are primarily everyday phenomena, which give individuals the recognition by customary rights and obligations within a family, clan and the society as a whole. It further shows that conflicts resolutions processes based on ‘Western’ culture are not directly transferable to PNG cultural context considering its unique contextual settings, barriers and issues that exist and inhibit effective conflict resolutions process in PNG.

Key words: Papua New Guinea, Conflicts Resolutions, natural resource-based development, Barriers, Issues

1. Introduction

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), 97% of the land is owned by the communities and the State has acknowledged this fact via the first, second and fourth goals of the National Constitution. This means the natural resources on the land or in the sea is communally owned by the people and not one individual leader can be expected to make any decisions to outside interests, like project developers without first securing, consensus through lengthy and long lasting discussions to secure final consensus. Whenever consensus is not secured properly with the primary resources users or owners as well those having use or

access rights, to land that has specific natural resources for development, conflicts of various forms are expected.

The recent study into investigating conflicts in a resource development setting in Papua New Guinea (PNG) highlights the problems and conflicts associated with the resource development projects. This paper begins with an overview, setting the stage of discussing conflicts – how, where and why conflict occur. It further describes the methods employed in this study, to show nature of conflicts, and barriers that hinder the smooth flow of these processes. Furthermore, it identifies some key issues to be considered in developing effective conflict resolutions. Finally, it compares and contrasts some of the commonalities and differences that exist across the varying regions in Papua New Guinea.

1.1 Defining conflicts in PNG context

By definition the word ‘conflict’ often carries negative connotations. It is often viewed as contrary to co-operation and peace, and most commonly associated with violence, threats of violence or disruptive (non-violent) disputes. Conflict is an integral part of life in most parts of PNG communities, and is not seen as intrinsically negative. Researchers such as Kehatsin (2004) and Banks (2008) note that conflicts are regularly used, encouraged and seen as legitimate way of dealing with disputes and seeking justice and restitution for perceived wrong-doings. Whilst the country has several hundred different ethno-linguistic groups, traditionally, in PNG, the issues that have been fought over are ‘land, women and pigs’- and forms that conflict takes, appear to be very similar across the country. Conflicts have traditionally taken place between neighbouring clans and tribes, but can also take place within clan units, and even with families. The high levels of connectivity between many neighbouring clans in PNG through inter-marriage, trade, and lineage could mean that rather than being static, groups engaging in conflicts are constantly shifting their boundaries. Tribal fights are owned by tribal heads and the disputants involved vary from conflicts to conflicts, depending on the issue as interests and allegiance are easily shifted based on the issue at hand and the way in which an individual, family or group chooses to identify itself during a given dispute.

1.2 Origins of conflicts

A starting point for conflict in any discussion of resource conflicts in PNG is the literature on traditional forms of conflicts. While there are obviously many differences in terms of nature and process of conflicts and their resolution across the varied societies in the region, there are some broad generalizations that are widely applicable (Banks, 2008). First conflicts in PNG are typically embedded in the everyday politics and history of the society. It would be a rare case, if a particular dispute or conflict had no ‘history’ or was unconnected to past events in some way. A second key characteristic derives from an adage that conflict in

PNG particularly in the Highlands of PNG are always concern with women, pigs and land. Important in the context of resource conflicts is the way in which non-human elements become incorporated into the social realm. For example, land is seen as an element of social milieu as it is a material external to the social setting. A final element of conflict in PNG that deserves noting is in the current context that concerns the 'resolution' of conflict. Two aspects of this are worth noting. One is that conflicts are never finally 'resolved'. Just as no current conflict is without 'history' that links the parties in the conflicts in some way, so these same current conflicts are likely to form the background to future conflicts, even when it appears that the parties have settled their differences. The second point is that traditional forms of compensation in PNG societies, the primary means by which conflicts are settled, are essentially focused on restoring balance to the relationship between the parties to the conflict.

Conflict in any sense requires considerable attention in resource development context, as it is an inevitable phenomenon in human life, and it arises when two parties have opposing views. It ranges from personal to inter-group to community-wide conflicts (Kehatsin, 2015). At the micro-level, such as the village setting in PNG, conflicts arise when one clan claims ownership over land rights and another clan believes they are the legitimate owners. It may also arise within two members of the same clan having opposing ideas over same piece of land, properties and resources (Banks, 2008; Martin, 2013). The micro-level conflicts have the potential to scale-up and feed into large-scale armed conflicts, such as those that occurred in PNG on Bougainville, and in the neighbouring Solomon Islands, which are protracted and serious, and may ultimately require costly external intervention (Allen and Monson, 2014).

1.3 Nature of conflicts in resource development context

In the natural resource development context in PNG, conflicts frequently originate from disputes and dissatisfactions over the distributions of benefits (i.e., royalties, compensation payments) from the resource development project (Kepore and Imbun, 2011; Essacu, 2016). There is a large and growing literature on natural resource development as a source of conflict (Banks 2008). For example, Kepore and Imbun (2011), Haley and May (2007) and Allen and Monson (2014) suggest that conflicts over land and extractive resource developments are on the rise across PNG. This rise in conflicts is likely to reflect the heavy resource dependency in PNG, and that the nation has suffered poor economic growth over several decades despite booming resource projects. Many conflicts in PNG are experienced in areas around resource developments, and range from family disputes over the distribution of compensation payments through to civil war (Kepore and Imbun, 2011; Banks, 2008; Allen and Monson, 2014). Explanations of the links between resources and conflict (e.g. Reilly, 2008) posit a range of reasons, such as the effect of natural resource developments on governments, governance and economies, and the political aspirations of resource-rich regions. In the PNG context, weak and often corrupt governance, inappropriate economic

policies and management practices, and separatist sentiments in resource-rich regions have all fermented conflicts around resource developments (Banks, 2003; 2008). Banks (2008) argues that resource development conflicts in PNG are better conceived as conflicts linked to social identity, relationships and ownership rights over the resources. But, if taken from a general Melanesian perspective that natural resources are for communal use, implying that everyone has the right to use and access, that could mean these resources become an agenda for social and political conflicts (Banks, 2008). In this case, as suggested by Banks, traditional conflicts in Melanesia provides only a guide to better managed processes for conflict resolution, particularly those associated with resource development in PNG.

2. Research approach and Methods

This study is based on research conducted between 2015 and 2016. Data was collected from 81 students attending the second year and third year Communication for Development Studies (Class of Conflict and Resolutions) degree programme conducted in PNG, at the PNG University of Technology in Morobe Province. Participants were drawn from a broad cross section of rural and urban dwellers, representing most regions (Provinces) of the country. Research consisted of (1) individual semi-structured interviews, (2) focus groups, and (3) a personal diary kept by the author throughout the study. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in English following an interview guide, taped, and transcribed for analysis. Respondents were asked to consider conflicts and negotiation practices in the community in which they were from or familiar with, as well as the region or province in which they are from, and to describe (1) the context of conflicts, (2) the barriers to conflicts resolutions, (3) key conflict resolutions constraints or issues, and (4) conflicts differences in other regions and provinces that they were familiar with. Data analysis employed a categorising strategy to identify data similarities and differences, to distinguish categories and themes emerging from the data, and explain the phenomenon under investigation (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). Following Rossman and Rallis's advice, transcripts were read and then put aside to 'incubate' in the mind of the researcher, and then reread at least two times to develop an 'intimate' familiarity with the data. A modified long table approach was employed to facilitate the data analysis. A descriptive summary was written of each response, and then compared and contrasted to each interview transcript. Specificity, emotion, extensiveness, and frequency of comments, guided the analysis within an overarching framework of constant comparing and contrasting (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

3. Results and Discussions

This section discusses the results obtained from this study alluding to the factors investigated. The

discussion is drawn from the analysis of the data collected during the research process and summarized in Table 1.1. As it can be seen from Table 1.1., there are four main factors investigated in the study. These included contexts of conflicts, barriers to conflicts, issues to be considered in conflicts and commonalities and differences observed in the study. Specific responses to each of these factors investigated are presented in the following sections.

Table 1.1: Summary of factors investigated and results obtained in the study

Context of conflicts	Barriers to conflict resolutions	Key issues to consider	Commonalities & differences
1. Heterogeneous and diversities: - Tribal customs, traditions, - leadership values & cultures	1. Values conflict barriers	1. Educational qualification	All (3) contexts of conflicts across the country are common. Barriers to conflicts varied across the country, so as the key issues all of varying level of commonalities and differences. For example, education and wantoksim were common across the country; whilst communication, values, leadership style and politics varied across the country
2. Complex resource governing systems: - Leadership system (chieftain, inheritance & hierarchical) - contemporary governance approach	2. Communication barriers	2. Landownership legitimacy	
3. Patriarchal & Matriarchal-based societies	3. Education barriers	3. Classes of value systems between traditional PNG and modern concepts	
	4. Wantoksim or wantok system		
	5. Payback or an eye for an eye or tooth for tooth		
	6. Leadership and Pride		
	7. Regional and tribal politics		

3.1 Context of resource development Conflicts in PNG

In this section, three key contexts of conflicts are discussed. These included heterogeneous and diversities, complex resource governance systems and patriarchal and matriarchal-based societies.

3.1.1 Heterogeneous and diversities

Historically, PNG is a nation of tribal societies organised on the basis of kinship (Tivinarlik and Wanat, 2006). Whiteman (1995, p.103) notes that 'kinship is a system that prescribes how people living together should interact with one another'. PNG has several thousand communities, most with only a few hundred people. Traditionally, tribes lived for one common purpose; to defend the tribe from foreign invasion. McLaughlin (1997, p.4) assesses that there are over 1000 tribes living in 'almost total isolation', often divided by language, customs, and tradition. Grimes (2000) estimates that there are in excess of 832 distinctive mutually unintelligible languages in a country with a population of 7.5 million people (GoPNG, 2011). As late as the 1990's at least three 'unknown' or 'lost' tribes were discovered (Connell, 1997). Each

tribe, language group, and culture acts to influence people to behave in quite distinct ways, peculiar to each individual tribe or group. Communities see themselves as 'central with other communities' peripheral and in turn central from their own perspective' (Busse, 2005, p.445). Divisions created by language, custom, and tradition have repeatedly resulted in on-going low scale tribal warfare with neighbouring communities, as Melanesian men, particularly leaders suffer an inability to trust neighbours (Herdt, 2003). Some of these unique complexities and diversities include *Customs and traditions* and *traditional leadership systems*.

Customs and traditions in PNG are complex, diverse, in many instances unique, and operate to significantly influence the conflicts resolution processes at all community, regional, organisational, and governmental levels. In this sense, customs and traditions practiced in one region may embrace similarities with other regions but may also be radically different. For example, an initiation ceremony is one event that exemplifies some of such customs and traditions. Initiation ceremonies, to pass leadership from big-man (Sahlins, 1963), or elders, to younger generations, are practiced in almost every PNG society. However, actual practices are not uniform across all societies. In the Sepik region, young men and women (20 years below) are not regarded as being ready to assume a leadership role until they have successfully passed through some form of initiation that signify their man and women-hoods status. Initiations are significant events that potential leaders undertake to be testified that young individuals are qualified to be matured leaders in the communities. The Yatmul people of the Sepik River for example, practice the 'skin cutting custom', requiring selected men to enter into Haus Tambaran (men's house) for between six and eight months. They fast, and are forbidden to undertake specific commandments, as determined by elders. To pass the test to be crowned with the man ship title, the elders' commandments must not be broken. Following successful completion of the Haus Tambaran period, the young men endure an initiation ceremony where crocodile tattoos are cut into their bare bodies. Tattoos identify that the young man has passed from boyhood to manhood, and is ready to assume leadership roles.

Depending on the customs of the community to which people belong, men and leaders are not permitted to do certain matters. Such taboos are determined by community elders, reflecting taboos passed from generation-to-generation. In Sepik societies, for example, during yam planting seasons, men, especially elders, must sacrifice eating fresh meat, salt, or sugar, the day before planting yam, as it is believed that if these foods are eaten, a poor harvest may result. Further, the men must not sleep with their wives the night prior to planting. They can be woken only by the early morning calls of the birds, and leave for the fields while others are still asleep. The men are not to be seen, or speak to anyone, until planting is completed. It is believed that if the taboos be broken, a failure of the harvest or the destruction of the garden by pigs, or strong winds will almost certainly result.

Leadership in PNG is largely culturally orientated, embracing traditional beliefs, norms and values, and a preoccupation with *kamap* (Tok Pisin: become developed) (McKeown, 2001). Thus, leadership style is

significantly influenced by the leader's immediate and extended family, clan, and tribe. However, there is no single or even widespread culture, embracing a common set of beliefs, values, and traditional practices. Values vary from province to province, while diversity is customary within provincial areas. Traditional leadership is mainly practiced in an informal setting, at the village or community level, particularly where the tribe or village structure is not formalised. To gain leader status, a person must display leadership qualities, such as being a good spokesperson, have status with wealth, the number of pigs or boars tusks owned, special hunting spears, fishing nets, kina shells, land held, big food gardens, house, or other 'essentials'. Also, the leader must be capable of leading people and congregating them to participate in all traditional ceremonial activities, such as initiation of young men, marriage, feasting, and dancing. Leadership can also be gained through inheritance, either from family, clan or tribe. Clan heredity also enables a person to become a leader, where the essence of leadership is the birth right of the family, and characterised by inherited wealth.

3.1.2 Complex resource governing systems

This section discusses the governance systems in PNG. It focuses on three key areas that are considered complex in nature. These are the leadership systems, contemporary governing approach, the patriarchal and matriarchal societies.

Leadership system

The structure of leadership varies greatly between communities (Tivinarlik and Wanat, 2006; Prideaux, 2007; Essacu, 2016). The Chieftain, inheritance, hierarchal and contemporary governing systems are widely practiced throughout PNG. Traditionally, in PNG a Chieftain structured leadership refers to societies that are well organized and governed by indigenous governing systems. Societies look upon certain people as their leaders, chiefs, and bigmen (Essacu, 2005). The chief makes all decisions for that society, and then communicates decisions to leaders of each clan within the society. The chief tends to be a leader who has high social status with wealth, in terms of owning many pigs, wives, money, and sometimes is a wise warrior as well (Essacu, 2005). The Chief controls the activities of the society, and its traditional legal system. Members of society are told to comply with all decisions made by the Chief for the common good of the society. Ethnic and cultural values restrict information and knowledge sharing within the society, with much information restricted to men only. This is to protect the identity of men and women from other cultural conflicts or influences, which are viewed as degrading to their identity. The Chiefly or Bigman system of leadership is widely practiced in patriarchal societies in the central provinces, and is common around the Papuan region particularly in the Mekeo, Gulf, and the Milne Bay districts (Essacu, 2005).

Inheritance is the most commonly practiced governing system in PNG. Inheritance allows leadership

responsibilities to be passed from father to son or from generation to generation. Elders also pass leadership skills and knowledge to younger generations. Most parts of PNG practice this leadership system. Whilst, the hierarchical governing system is an organized system of democratic leadership lead by a Chief of Council. Essacu (2005) distinctively described the Trobrian Island leadership structure that demonstrates the hierarchical reporting systems. This unique governing body in Melanesian society commands a lot of respect in the Trobrian societies and similar regions such as Manam Islands in Madang and Mekeo in Central Province.

Contemporary governance approach

The literature on PNG governance systems identifies both modern and traditional forms of governance systems (Narokobi, 1980: 1983; Kulwaum, 1985; Tivinarlik and Wanat 2006; Ambang, 2007). Kulwaum (1985) and Tivinarlik and Wanat (2006) suggest that the 'modern governance system' in PNG refers to governance structures, rules and formalities of appointing managers and leaders based on modern democratic values and principles. In contrast, the traditional governance system is that which operates at a community, typically village level, and is based on indigenous customary values and social structures (Ambang, 2007). Many authors -(e.g. Kulwaum, 1985; Tivinarlik and Wanat, 2006; Ambang, 2007; Prideaux and Beg, 2007) - note that the formal governance systems in contemporary PNG communities are based more on modern governance structures, which the country has adopted since it gained independence in 1975. Thus, what has progressively emerged in PNG is formal governance system that has both undermined and disregards community governance, particularly in relations to natural resource resource-development (Essacu, 2016). As many observers have noted of the natural resources sectors (e.g., Barnett, 1990; Filer and Sakrahn, 1998) for the case for forests, Maru and Koyama (2009) for the petroleum and Liu (2010) for the mining sector), manipulation and sabotage of lower-level decision processes by national politicians is commonplace.

In PNG, contemporary governance has been shaped by a number of key influences on the country: colonisation, the introduction of Christianity, and adoption of the Westminster system of government (Kulwaum, 1985; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997). Prideaux (2007) and Joseph (2015) note that colonisation introduced into the PNG government sector a paradigm of stability, control, competition, and uniformity. With colonization came the management approach being formal than the traditional management. Organisations, and the work performed, are formally arranged with managers, leaders and subordinates working in accordance with a specified duty statement or position description. As Prideaux (2007) pointed out, such governance mindset brought an extreme form of the bureaucratic system, which requires all government decisions to be centralized (Kulwaum, 1985) and made by few senior managers without

consultation with employees, restricts knowledge sharing, and fails to recognise the value of employees and general population. As a consequence, a conflict arises that usually lead to bankruptcy, political instability, poor service delivery, bribery, and mal-practice, such as misappropriation of public funds and appointment of political cronies to responsible positions, in both the public and private sectors (Pridaue, 2007). These elements are now firmly woven into the structure of PNG politics and governance processes (Koim, 2010; Essacu, 2016).

Patriarchal and Matriarchal-based societies

The region of Melanesia including Papua New Guinea commonly are characterized by either the patriarchal system where descent is through the father to son or the matriarchal system with descent passing through the mother to daughter societies. In PNG, almost three quarters of the country practices patriarchal society, while the matriarchal system is largely confined to coastal provinces.

In patriarchal society men are the legitimate head of the decision making process (Yala, 2005). Women and children may contribute to discussions; but men have the final say. Patriarchal society is common in the mainland regions, the Highlands, and some coastal provinces including West New Britain, Manus and New Ireland, Central, Gulf, Western and Northern provinces (Essacu, 2005).

Nevertheless in matriarchal society, women take the leading role in decision-making, assuming land and properties ownership (Lahui-Ako, 2001, Flaherty, 1998; Essacu, 2005; 2016). Referred to as 'string culture' by the Tolai peoples of East New Britain, men follow the women after marriage, as men have limited rights to land and properties. Daughters claim land ownership and sons follow the wives. Men must go with the women's tribe or clan to win the hearts of the wife's relatives. Otherwise they may not have land on which to settle. Where a woman marries into an outside culture, she is permitted to bring her husband to her land. Nevertheless, the man remains a stranger to the land, and their children have limited rights over the land. Here, the decision, or priorities, will go to the man's sister, and she decides whether to provide for him to settle his family. However, somehow the culture manages to handle such situations, with harmonious relationships amongst the resulting extended families. Three major provinces practice the matrilineal society; Bougainville, East New Britain, and Milne Bay.

3.2 Barriers to effective conflict resolutions in PNG

The preceding section outlined the complexity of conflicts in PNG. This section discusses barriers to conflict resolutions. For a number of reasons, there are considerable obstacles to effective conflicts resolutions in resource development context. The main barriers or obstacles identified in this study are listed in Table 1.2 in their order of preference as provided by the survey participants. They include value conflicts (46%), communication (18%), education qualification-low literacy (12%), wantokism or wantok

systems (9%), pay back or eye for an eye or tooth for tooth (6%), leadership and pride (5%) and tribal and regional politics (4%).

Table 1.2: Responses of barriers to effective conflict resolutions from the survey respondents

#	Barriers	Number of respondents (81 in total)	%
1	Value conflicts	37	46
2	Communication barriers	15	18
3	Education – Low literacy	10	12
4	Wantokism or Wantok system	7	9
5	Payback or an eye for an eye/tooth for tooth	5	6
6	Leadership and Pride	4	5
7	Regional and Tribal Politics	3	4
		81	100

3.2.1 Values conflicts barriers

As can be seen from Table 1.2 that, 46 percent of the participants stated that the main obstacle to effective conflicts resolutions is associated to value or value-based conflicts between the diverse cultures of PNG. Value or value based conflict refers to conflicts that occur between or within individuals or groups and focuses on values, beliefs, ideologies or ethics and morals. Scholars such as Tivinarlik and Wanat (2006), Ambang (2007) and Prideaux (2007) point out that PNG consists of many different races, cultures and regions; and that understanding and giving effect to leadership are complex, particularly in cross-cultural contexts where different views and values are expressed. This argument is consistent with those of Yukl (1994) and Koim (2013) that cultures and traditions are part of the base on which leadership decisions are made.

3.2.2 Communication Barriers

Another eighteen percent of the surveyed participants (as seen in Table 1.2) stated that lack of communication systems in PNG as barriers to effective conflict resolutions. In communication barriers, three primary communication barriers are evident: *linguistics*, *information technologies*, and *distance gap* (Prideaux, 2007). With more than 800 spoken languages, the communication process is laden with complexity and difficulty. While cultural uniqueness and diversity is recognised by the national government, English is promoted as a common language to bridge the divide. In this sense, the government officially promotes three common languages; Pidgin, Motu and English. Pidgin is spoken by widely spoken

by two thirds of the population, while Motu is spoken by the remaining population, mainly in the Papuan coastal provinces. However, English is spoken within the major centres, and under recent educational reforms, is taught in primary schools. Thus, the English language continues to be considered by many as a foreign language. Governments, at all levels, struggle to translate information into common languages with the message frequently being distorted or lost, fermenting an environment for corruption and misappropriation to flourish (Prideaux, 2007).

The telecommunications sector lacks cost effective and reliable technologies such as e-mail, voice mail, video conferencing, internet and intranet technologies, other types of collaborative software systems, and a broad national coverage. Whilst such technologies are frequently available in the larger cities and towns, connections between provinces are sparse, resulting in slow communications across the country. Radio is an important communication medium, particularly throughout provincial areas. However, not everyone has access to a radio or is able to afford to purchase batteries. The remote geographical conditions impose a third communication barrier, the 'distance gap'. Provinces are isolated from each other, separated by mountain ranges, and seas, in the case of the islands. Such geographical barriers have prevented the development of effective transportation and logistics systems, and telecommunication systems (Prideaux, 2007; Essacu, 2016).

3.2.3 Education - Low Literacy Barriers

About twelve percent of respondents see lack of formal educational qualification as their third common barrier to conflict resolutions (Table 1.2). As Prideaux (2007) pointed out, that recent educational reforms require that students undertake three years elementary, six years primary, and four years secondary education (3-6-4 education system). However, most Papua New Guineans remain illiterate, as schooling is unavailable in remote and isolated provinces. English is the language of instruction in some elementary schools, though Pidgin and Motu are also used, with a majority of Elementary schools teaching in their mother tongue. It is very difficult to integrate children into a common classroom setting where they speak in their mother tongue (tok ples) such as tok pidgin, tok Motu, or English. Of the literate population more than 50 percent cannot read or write English (Prideaux, 2007).

3.2.4 Wantokism or Wantok system

The fourth barrier to effective conflict resolution as demonstrated in Table 1.2 is the *wantok system* (Prideaux, 2007; Joseph, 2015; Essacu, 2016). As Joseph (2015) discusses, deeply entrenched in PNG culture is the wantok system. Swatridge (1985, p.4) further supports and describes the wantok system as 'friendly society, welfare system, and life-assurance all in one'. The tokpisin term Wantok, means friend, relative, 'who you know', or someone who speaks the same language (one talk). MacDonald (1984, p.4)

argues that wantok is a 'bond of people with a basic, kinship community, speaking the same tongue, living in the same place, and sharing values'. The Wantok system of inclusion of a person in a clan or community is often blamed for the abuse of patronage in organisations and government, misallocation of resources, or the allegiances formed during disputes.

Wantok in a Melanesian context means a friend or relative, but in more cultural context refers to group of people who speak same language group; the words 'wan' and 'tok' in PNG *TokPisin* means 'one' and 'talk' in English. Earlier definitions of *wantok* (e.g., Swatridge, 1985: 4) characterise wantok as "friendly society", welfare system, and life-assurance all in one'. MacDonald (1984: 4) describes *wantok* as a 'bond of people with basic, kinship community, speaking the same language, living in the same place, and sharing values'. These descriptions of *wantok* speak to the good relationships and social networking with the communities and Melanesia as whole. However, the *wantok system* is, as Prideaux (2006) and Lamour (2008) argue, often responsible for abuse of patronage in organisations and government, misallocations of resources, and for allegiances formed during disputes. Koim's (2013) work revealing the growth of *wantokism* system in the PNG bureaucratic systems supports this argument. He observed that the appointment of heads of the government agencies and related government arms were linked to *wantokism*; for example, a particular region is seen to have dominated the decision making structures of the government, and allowed the growth of corruption and misappropriation of public funds, including those from resource development projects. The *wantok* system is now deeply an entrenched culture in PNG communities, governments and bureaucratic governance systems.

3.2.5 Pay back or an eye for an eye or tooth for tooth

The fifth and sixth barriers to conflict resolutions were pay back system (Prideaux, 2007) and leadership & pride (Essacu, 2005; 2016). General, pay back system is commonly practiced at all levels of society in PNG. This system is particularly strong in the playing out of the political processes and conquering land ownership boundaries. Frequently, resulting from a land disputes at the local level and change of government, senior public sector officers are replaced by rival tribesman, who delay or abandon adversary's initiatives, thus creating a climate of constant fear and mistrust (Prideaux, 2007).

3.2.6 Leadership and Pride

Leadership in PNG is largely culturally orientated, embracing traditional beliefs, norms and values (McKeown 2001). Thus, leadership mode is significantly influenced by the leader's immediate and extended family, clan, tribe and *hauslain* (relatives/regional groups) (Essacu, 2005; Prideaux, 2007; Koim, 2013). However, there is no single or even widespread culture, embracing a common set of beliefs, values and traditional practices, across all of PNG. The practice of traditions varies from province to province or

region to region, and diversity is common within both provinces and regions Prideaux (2007).

In the rural PNG context, people view leaders as those who can provide for their household, work hard and be ready and willing to provide assistance to the needy. They see leaders as people who have material wealth (such as gardens and pigs) and are so better able to assist others. Thus, some authors including McKeown (2001) and Finney (1973) describe such leaders as being a 'Big Men'. The dependency of customary leadership on the social and cultural factors discussed above makes it difficult to define any single model of community-level leadership in a PNG context. There is however agreement amongst scholars, such as Warner (2000), Tivinarlik and Wanat (2006) and Ambang (2007) that community leadership is about –at least in part– enabling communities to realize their preferred development outcomes. Regan (1999) and Haley and May (2007) expressed similar views from their experiences with resource development projects in Southern Highlands and Bougainville communities, respectively, noting that community leadership is also at the intersection between the traditional and modern communities.

A number of studies of ongoing practices of leadership in rural PNG contexts indicates that it is based on a set of largely traditional factors: personal identity, integrity, values, respect, status, and wealth (not in terms of money but land, resources, gardens and pigs) (Essacu, 2005; Prideaux, 2007; Banks, 2008). Generally, one's origin is significant as it determines an individual's identity in their society. Their personality reflects their personal qualities, and contributes to the respect they command in the community. Wealth - not necessarily in terms of cash assets, but in terms of other resources such as land, gardens and pigs – may necessary to maintain the respect and standing generated by other means. However, leadership in contemporary PNG is shifting profoundly to adopt the changing world (Martin, 2013). Martin's (ibid) observations and descriptions of the 'death' of the 'Big Man' model of leadership, and the rise of the 'Big Shot' model (discussed further in subsequent sections of this Chapter) demonstrate the shifting modes of leadership in PNG. Martin suggests that the traditional obligations expected of Big Men to serve their people are overtaken, in the case of the Big Shot, by his pursuit to join the ranks of emerging socio-economic elite. This example illustrates the dynamic state of leadership in PNG.

In this sense, when individuals take a leadership role the tendency is to draw a great deal of pride from that leadership role. The custom of many of these societies is for the leader to adopt the belief that all power has been vested in them, and that it is their right to rule the society without considering the rights and privileges of others. The position of leadership leads to a gaining of personal pride, and the use of society power for personal gain. This then frequently translates into the business and government circles resulting in widespread abuse of power and misappropriation.

3.2.7 Regional and Tribal Politics

The final and least barrier to effective conflict resolution as indicated by the survey respondents is the regional and tribal politics (Prideaux, 2007; Essacu, 2005). As Prideaux (2007) notes that due to the complexities and diversities in PNG, and 42 years after independence, PNG continues to demonstrate strong regionalistic patriotism. Prior to independence, the public sector in the provinces was composed of people from across the country. With the adoption of the provincial governing system following independence, public sector employment reverted to a practice of employing people from the district or province in preference to those from other provinces or regions. The catch cry was ‘Enga for Enga’, ‘Sepik for Sepik’, Simbus for Simbus; for example. This practice is firmly entrenched in organisational and government politics, adversely impacting on the delivery of goods and services, and effective government. ‘Corruption and fraud is easily covered up, largely ignored, and often condoned by leaders and employees alike’ (Essacu, 2005; Koim, 2013).

3.3 Key issues to consider in conflicts resolutions in PNG

Building on the key lessons learnt from the context and barriers in this study, this section provides some analyses to issues and constraints that are considered critically important in conflict resolutions. The paper argues that conflicts resolutions with a focus on community capacity building should underpin more effective conflict negotiations processes, community participation and resource development projects. For this to transpire successfully, its focus should be on addressing key constraints and issues that preclude effective conflict negotiation process. Three principal constraints that this study research suggests are fundamentally important are those associated with *education, landowner legitimacy and clashes of values*.

3.3.1 Education

Education is a fundamental issue in terms of its role in addressing a lack of knowledge and skills for communication and information dissemination and conflicts resolutions. These can be realized by building community capacity through knowledge and skills development and integration. The importance of education and qualifications can be realized in terms of skills and the ability to make informed conflict resolutions decisions.

As observed throughout the study responses, human assets, particularly knowledge and skills, affected peoples’ decisions about development outcomes. For example, the level of educational qualification and technical knowledge of a particular individual or leader plays a critical role in the decisions he or she makes at both household and community levels. Other studies (e.g., Liu, 2010; Mulung, 2012; Essacu, 2016) noted that educational qualifications and skills relevant to formal employment opportunities affect

household decisions in many ways, to make informed decisions about livelihood options. Improving the level of education qualifications in communities would help them make decisions in a broader context, rather than just within the context of their traditional knowledge and perspectives. This argument is in line with Mulung (2012) and Essacu's (2016) arguments that, there is limited number of skill-based and educated members in the resource development impact communities. This simply means the non-skilled and poorly educated are those centrally engaged in development decision-making processes. This in turn constrains opportunities for community members to acquire further technical skills that would enable them to earn higher incomes associated with natural resource development opportunities.

The ability to make informed conflict resolutions decisions is a major constraint observed associated with decisions associated with sharing of development benefits throughout the study. This is an important obstacle that affects resource owners' development decisions. This, issue relates in particular to the communities' poor participation in decision making processes in solving conflicts; which linked to the existing low levels of training and awareness provided to the communities by the government and developers, as well as developers' and governments' inability to work with existing community structures.

3.3.2 Landowner's legitimacy and resource development institutional rules

The study results demonstrate that there are disconnects and misunderstandings between traditional and modern concepts. Other studies such as those of Ambang (2007), Prideaux (2007), Martin (2013) and Essacu, (2016) also suggest that it is very difficult to impose foreign concepts on traditional cultures in Papua New Guinea. More generally, it is difficult to integrate foreign concepts into indigenous traditional culture (Anderson, 2015). This section discusses the importance of land, and its consequences for development outcomes. To understand this, it is necessary to discuss the community's legitimate roles in the leadership structures of community institutions. The participants in this study are considered to be the legitimate landowners and community leaders (in their clans and families) in resource development impacted communities.

The study indicates that clashes between modern and PNG traditional values are common across the regions of PNG, and often related to the existence of various cultures and traditions. Often such conflicts arise between the primary and subsidiary landowners over who should claim ownership to the land. The PNG Constitution recognises the rights of traditional landowners over land and resource development. Thus, important decisions about the use and development of the natural resources rest with the legitimate landowners. However, community institutions - whilst appreciating the legitimacy of landowners in assuming leadership roles - are also challenged by these traditions. It is challenging to reconcile the application of modern rules, guidelines and procedures that are mandatory for the operation of institutions, with aspects of traditional practices.

3.3.3 Clashes of value systems between traditional PNG and modern concepts

In the rural PNG context, conflicts are an integral part of everyday life – and are viewed from both positive and negative perspectives. From these standpoints, people turn to look upon their traditional leaders to negotiate conflicts, depending on the type and levels of conflicts. Peoples' views of leaders are of someone who can provide for others, is a hard worker who is ready and willing to provide assistance to the needy, and a person who has material wealth (e.g., gardens, pigs) who can afford to assist others. In this context the leaders are able to find amicable solutions to conflicts. For example, in a traditional conflict resolution context, a clan elder took responsibility for ensuring that every member had equal access to land and other resources belonging to a clan for food production, and for other livelihood outcomes. Judgments of the quality of the clan elders' decisions are based on the livelihood outcomes of the clan's members.

In the event of major resource developments, it is usually the clan elder who is appointed as leader of the community to represent their views in the development process. In this case, the scope of responsibilities of the clan leader has suddenly increased. His/her judgments and decisions have to be based on a wide range of factors, including economics, markets, business, and benefit sharing. He/she is caught in the dilemma of making decisions for the organisations he represents as well as for day to day needs of his/her immediate relatives. In this regard, the leadership appointment processes in the communities made by villagers with such expectations in mind. The expectations of these villagers from their leader in these terms may also spread to extended '*haus-lain*' (families and relatives) and communities.

In the PNG context, the vote of an individual member of a family is representative of his/her members. Thus, a leader is expected to provide for all of his/her family members, including their extended relatives. In this sense, the role of a leader and the expectations from him/her may extend beyond the boundaries of their own villages and project sites to other regional and provincial centres. From this perspective, it is clear that leaders face multiple dilemmas in the context of PNG resource development projects. These include the dilemmas of extra responsibilities, of providing to the community and '*haus-lain*' goods and services as expected from a resource project opportunity, while at the same time facing the realities of modern economy, politics, and management decisions in managing the affairs of the new resource development institutions. It is also clear from this study that the success and failure of the resource development projects, and the stability and prosperity of these communities, hinges greatly on the decisions that the leaders make under such circumstances.

Another challenge confronting communities is that of clashes of values within and between PNG's many clans, tribes and regions, and between traditional and modernized or hybrid cultures. The study has

illustrated how internal conflicts between different tribes and clans, based on their own cultural norms and beliefs, can not only hamper development progress but also cause instability within and between the communities. The fact that PNG is culturally and linguistically diverse means such inter-and intra-community conflicts are inevitable, and emphasises the importance of effective community leadership in addressing these challenges.

3.4 Commonalities and Similarities across regions

With the backdrop of context of conflicts, barriers and key issues presented above, this section provides an assessment of commonalities and differences found across the regions studied. The study suggests that context of conflicts, barriers and issues shared varied commonalities and similarities across the regions. However, generally, some communities face similar challenges in conflicts resolutions in development context. In terms of conflicts contextual settings, almost all regions studied shared varied characteristics. These include customs and traditions due to heterogeneous societies, embedded with multifaceted values, cultures and traditions that are incompatible to each other. With regard to barriers, the study also observed variations in the regions. For example, *wantok* systems, education and communications barriers were common across the regions whilst regional politics & leadership styles varied to some degree depending on the locality, customs and traditions and interventions that each region has with outside influences. Similarly, variations were also observed in constraints and issues throughout the communities in the regions studied.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, conflicts in PNG context is primary an everyday phenomena and is common problem throughout the country. This is based on the fact that conflicts in PNG are strongly connected to customs and traditions and are built within the social fabric of clans, families, communities and regional structures (Ambang, 2007; Predaux, 2007; Essacu, 2016). The existence of conflicts gives an individual the recognition by customary rights and obligations within a family and the society as a whole. Thus, a conflict in PNG is from an intra and inter-personal conflicts that arise between the various land and resource owning groups and individuals.

As indicated by the results (Table 1.2) that value-based conflicts associated with various tribes and groups played significant role in dictating conflicts throughout the regions surveyed, whilst others including communication, education, *wantok* system, payback or eye for an eye or tooth for a tooth, leadership & pride and regional politics were considered less important in the barrier roles they play. It is

challenging at times that causes delays in progress of development processes. However, the main issue here rests upon proper understanding of the history and existence of relationships between various cultural, social, political and environmental factors that are associated with conflicts. Only then win-win situations and enduring relationships can be created to see desired development outcomes from natural resources in PNG.

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