This is the published version


Available from Deakin Research Online

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30059448

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that permission has been obtained for items included in Deakin Research Online. If you believe that your rights have been infringed by this repository, please contact drosupport@deakin.edu.au

Copyright: 2009, RMIT University, Globalism Research Centre
Urban and Peri-urban Communities

Houses raised on stilts in Vanagi Settlement, Port Moresby, with new developments visible on the hills behind.
Vanagi Settlement, Central Province

How can it be that the sources of insecurity and hope are bound up with each other?

Opening Story

Chris Clement Wagi Dogale died in the Port Moresby General Hospital in the early hours of Saturday, 20 October 2007. He was also known as Wadi, named after his uncle. He died in the same hospital where he had been born on a Saturday in June 1979. Twenty-eight years on, his father Clement Dogale was woken at 3.00 a.m. to come to Chris’s bedside. Chris had been shot a few hours earlier, allegedly by police officers. The story of what happened has been told and retold by various people, and our understanding of the events of that night is a patchwork of narratives and snippets of information pieced together. Chris had been in a stolen car with four other young men when they were stopped by police. What unfolded after that is murky. We know that the driver and one of the other passengers escaped. The remaining youths were apprehended, and all three of them shot. One was shot and died immediately; a second was shot through the leg and fell; Chris was shot through the side of his chest. He fell onto the second youth covering him with blood. They were left on the rugby field. Both Chris and the second youth were later taken to the hospital. After hours of waiting for treatment the second youth left the hospital and later went into hiding. He later told others that it was because he covered in Chris’ blood that he had been presumed dead. His story forms part of the background to this account.

When Clement arrived at hospital, his son tried to sit up in bed. Chris showed no sign of his pain, although his father could feel it. The young man didn’t complain. Instead, he asked, ‘Are you cross with me?’ Clement replied, ‘No, but I love you’. It was one of the last things he said to his son, and he said later that he could see that Chris knew he was dying.

Two weeks later, after waiting for an autopsy to be finalized, the people of Vanagi Settlement and other relatives and friends gathered to mourn Chris’ death. On the day of Chris’ funeral the settlement was quiet; people waited for his body to be brought back home. The coffin arrived on the back
of an open truck. Clement and other men from the community who had accompanied the coffin carried it along the narrow lane to the family home. Frangipani and bougainvillea flowers were woven into the chain-link wire and corrugated-iron fencing along the path. Inside the house, family and friends gathered around the coffin, crying and moaning, while others sat and stood in silence outside. Women loudly called his cultural name—‘Wadi, Wadi’. Clement Dogale was wearing a T-shirt with the words ‘Learn today for better tomorrow’ silked-screened on the back. A crying child came out of the house where Chris’s body lay, and Clement held the child saying ‘You’re a strong girl, strong girl’.

After an hour or so, the men once again lifted the coffin, this time to take it to the community church—also the community learning centre and the place where Clement, a retired teacher, runs the volunteer preschool for the young children in Vanagi. Chris’ mother let out a piercing cry as her son’s body left her home. People took her arms to help her stand and to comfort her and. Then they and the other people at the mourning house walked behind the coffin as it was carried back past the bougainvillea and frangipani flowers tucked in the fence. The church was full of people sitting on the ground and others stood looking in through the metal bars around the perimeter of the building. The coffin was placed in the middle of the room, and female relatives and children sat around it. Many of the women and men wore white tops, and the children’s white T-shirts were printed with the words:
Kakzo madi,
Born freely,
Lived simply,
Passed silently,
Rest in peace.

Chris’s mother wasn’t crying now, but sitting silently next to his coffin, and leaning forward slightly with her shoulders hunched. Her eyes stared forward, and the full force of her grief was written in them. After an introduction by the Deputy Chairman of the community, Clement stood up to speak. He talked to the people assembled about his son’s birth, and how he saw Chris head showing from his mother’s body. He talked of his wife’s pain in the birth and the strength of women. He talked about the short life of his eldest child, and how in 1985, leaving the Salvation Army accommodation at Koki, the family had come to Vanagi Settlement, not knowing how long they would stay. It was here that his son grew up.

Chris won a place at Don Bosco Technical School, and his parents were proud. However, as Clement described it, Chris walked around with the wrong boys and often missed classes. His father gave him three chances, but in the end took him out of school to be educated in the settlement. When he was in his mid-twenties Chris’s life began shift. He began spending time with the pastor, and he and his father grew closer. As Clement found out after his son’s death, Chris had begun taking food to prisoners inside the Port Moresby Detention Centre. He had been writing poetry about his experiences. One poem talked about death and the pain it causes, but also its ability to bring a community together. Reading it now, the poem had prescient meaning for his father.

In finishing his address, Clement spoke of his son’s strength, and of the things he had learnt from him. He told the mourners ‘I have been reborn today’. Our hearts are breaking, he said, but we are strong too. We go on because there are things we have to do.

Through its Law and Order Committee, its school programs and community security arrangements, and its Village Court, Vanagi is doing a lot to address violence and safety in a settlement that was once one of the most dangerous in Port Moresby. Some of Vanagi’s sons and their friends have been called raskols, but the term covers a multitude of sins, from organized crime to silly misdemeanours. The sadness is that there are too many communities in Papua New Guinea grieving the loss of their sons. Adversity has ironically strengthened this community, but it is not the case in general across the country.
Vanagi Settlement is a small, densely populated squatter community located in Port Moresby South in the National Capital District, nestled between the coast and the area of Koki. It was the first settlement ever established in Port Moresby, and in 2002 became the first squatter community to be recognized by the National Capital District Commission (NCDC). It has a small but rapidly growing population, which was estimated at 376 in the 2000 national census (probably an under-estimate) but has grown substantially since then due to the birth rate within the community and the arrival of new settlers. It is now home to over 1,000 persons.

There are people in Vanagi who trace their relatives back to the original founders of the settlement. They tell the stories of how the community was founded, about how the place where Vanagi is now built was originally a resting spot for fishermen from the Hood Lagoon, Hula and Aroma villages in the Central Province. The men and their families would stop to rest after selling their catch at Koki market, or while waiting for the tide to take them back out to sea or home to their villages. In the late 1950s, two brothers from Keapara village in Hood Lagoon, Kamu Ma’a and Wala Ma’a, built homes and became the first settlers in this community. They were later joined by their sister Dau Ma’a, followed by other settlers from Hula, Hood Lagoon

A broken fishing boat sits upturned and unused in the settlement.
and Aroma Coastal villages. Since then, settlers have come from provinces across Papua New Guinea. Because the original inhabitants were people who lived, sailed and fished on canoes, the settlement was named ‘canoe’. Recently, the community changed its name to ‘Vanagi’, which is a Motu word meaning the same thing.

There are now around eighty to one-hundred houses (some people say 200) within Vanagi, sharing a small area of land. They are mainly built with second-hand and reclaimed modern materials—wood, cement sheeting, unpainted weatherboards, louvre windows, rusting corrugated iron and sheet metal—although logs are often used for stilts. Many homes are make-shift huts; a few are more substantial dwellings with satellite dishes. Many are raised high above the water extending out from the coast, with dangerously thin wooden walkways connecting them to each other and the shore. There are open stoves on some of the walkways, and clothes lines stretched between houses for hanging out laundry. Small canoes are pulled up onto the shore or stored on wooden platforms beneath the houses. Looking out across the water, beyond the accumulating rubbish, Lade Kone Island is visible in the distance, and clusters of houses in other settlements can be seen dotted up and down the coast. In the other direction, Vanagi extends inland towards Koki market and the business area of Port Moresby South. There are more houses, not as closely packed but still with little room between them. Many are built on reclaimed land created by filling in shallow waters with gravel, rocks, soil and household rubbish.

A multi-purpose building, built with concrete blocks and metal, stands at the centre of the settlement. It serves as a learning centre, preschool, church, meeting hall and place for funerals. A number of trade stores are dotted around, along with small stalls, selling betel nut, lollies, drinks and food. There are no substantial vegetable gardens in the settlement, densely populated as it is, but banana palms and other plants and trees grow in places. Bougainvillea grows along fences and around some houses. Its bright pink and purple flowers stand out against the dusty ground and the piles of rubbish washed up on the shore and carried into Vanagi through open canals which run down to the sea from the business area and hills behind the settlement. Large buildings up on the hills—offices, apartment blocks and residential compounds filled with expatriates and members of Papua New Guinea’s emerging elite—stand visible in the distance.

**Organization and Governance**

The nature of Vanagi as an urban settlement means that its organizational structure needs to accommodate the considerable ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity within the community. The four main founding groups within the settlement are the Aroma, Hula, Keapara and Mailu ethnic groups, and belonging to one of these recognized founding groups carries with it a certain status within the community. In addition to these four groups, there
are families and individuals who have entered into the community through migration or inter-marriage. These include Kerema people from the Gulf, Mekeo people from Kairuku, Gorokas from the Eastern Highlands, Samarais from Milne Bay Province, people from the Sepik area; other Motuans from the Central Province; and New Guinea Islanders. Overwhelmingly and unusually, they live together with a shared sense of community and belonging.

Continuing but subordinate tribal forms of organization are evident in the choices of persons to head the various community committees and the extended family and kinship networks which provide a crucial social security system in the face of high levels of unemployment and a minimal capacity for subsistence agriculture within Port Moresby. Complex relationships of reciprocity—and connections through intermarriage—retain a central importance in the settlement despite the diversity of places of origin, and the strong influence of modern social, economic and cultural forms and systems. Strategic conversations with individuals and families in Vanagi indicated a strong sense of attachment to the place and the community, notable given that Vanagi is an urban squatter settlement with a relatively short history of establishment. Residents described a community which was relatively trouble-free, with a high level of respect for the property and wellbeing of others, reinforced by curfews and strict understandings of how to handle such issues as noise limits and alcohol use. When residents did speak of the still regular incidents of disturbance and
conflict, it was overwhelmingly in relation to perceived outsiders coming into the settlement from nearby suburbs.

The formal organizational structure in Vanagi is extensive. It was established in 1997, and includes an Executive Committee, a Community Improvement Committee, and a number of sub-committees which enjoy broad-based support and participation. The Executive—consisting of a chairman, deputy chairman, treasurer and secretary—meets monthly, and also holds special meetings whenever urgent matters and commitments arise. The nine sub-committees are responsible for organizing around education, housing, law and order, church, women, youth, health and sanitation, electricity and water; and sports. Sub-committee meetings follow the monthly Executive meetings, with the implementation of programs and activities involving the participation of committee members, community groups, elders and other residents. The sub-committees work co-operatively to organize community celebrations, particularly around Christmas and New Year. Church-run activities and spiritual development programs also contribute to the organization of the settlement and processes of community-building. There are six main denominations in the community, namely the United Church, Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Evangelical Alliance of Papua, Assemblies of God, and Pentecostal Church. All of them have strong standing, with none of them singularly dominant. This is perhaps reflective of the diverse ethnic, cultural and geographic origins of the population.

Being located within the boundaries of the National Capital District, people living in Vanagi Settlement have better access to some services than those living in hinterland or more remote communities. The community is able to utilize basic educational, health and postal services provided in Port Moresby. Approximately thirty-two households have electricity supplied to their residence, which they pay for. Similarly, thirty-four households pay for their use of a direct water supply. Community members express frustration, however, at the lack of response by the National Capital District Commission (NCDC) to their requests for increased and improved services.

Vanagi is recognized by government and non-governmental agencies as one of the relatively well-organized communities in the National Capital District, and is often held up as a model of successful community development in the city. Nevertheless, it faces a number of problems and challenges. On a practical level, there is the problem of rubbish and waste accumulation. A lack of adequate waste and sewerage collection services is common throughout Port Moresby, and Vanagi faces the additional problem of waste washing up on its shores from elsewhere, and being carried into the settlement from canals and sewers originating further inland. The water in the canals often turns a bright red colour, suggesting the presence of sewerage or chemical waste being released into the drains from the residential or commercial areas behind the settlement. Residents indicated that it is a cause for real concern given that fishing is a main source of
livelihood and sustenance for many local people. Another practical problem facing the community is that of overcrowding. Already, Vanagi is densely populated, and there is little room for the settlement to expand. The population is increasingly steadily, and the rate of growth can only be expected to intensify in keeping with current trends, and given the massive rate of rural-urban migration which is predicted across Papua New Guinea in the coming decades.

Primary among the social problems identified by residents are drunkenness, fighting and noise disturbances. As mentioned above, these are often perceived to be the result of infiltration of the community by outsiders, particularly male youth. As one fifty-two year-old man described it: ‘There are drinkers here, from outside, that come in. They start up trouble’. The comments of other people throughout the community were much the same. Some of the older generation spoke fondly of the early years after the foundation of Vanagi, and expressed the sense that the emergence of social unease in the community was linked to recent changes. Lily Ma’a, a volunteer teacher at the preschool, said:

Sometimes I go back and think about those ways, our olden times when our parents were living here. We used to play around, there was no trouble. We used to walk free and go to each other’s houses and play around and at midnight we used to come back. But nowadays, I don’t think guests would go to each others houses and stay any more. Our area is alright but the outsiders, they get drunk and come in and torment us. Now young boys, they’re going out and drinking home-brews and [smoking] marijuana.

Like Lily, a number of people pointed to a decreased feeling of safety in the community, linked to incidents of brawling, problems caused by outsiders, and the increased use of alcohol and marijuana. Overall, however, responses to the Community Sustainability Questionnaire indicate that the felt sense of personal safety in the community is higher than in many of the other research sites. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with how safe they felt, compared to an overall average of 71 per cent across all the sites including remote villages. And while participants in strategic conversations did identify particular social problems within the community, they also pointed to the presence of a number of co-ordinated community responses to these problems including the Law and Order Sub-committee, the presence of a magistrate, a Village Court at Koki, a peace officer, church-based programmes and activities, co-operation between elders and community leaders, and youth-focussed initiatives such as the organization of regular volleyball and rugby competitions.
Livelihood and Provision

Fishing is the main form livelihood activity in the community, and has been so since the settlement was first established, but it is not a strong industry. There are good fishermen within most families in the community, with fish providing a source of both sustenance and income, but not with the same consistency as in the past. In addition to fish, the main staple foods are rice, bananas and vegetables such as kaukau and yams. Some families have land on which to make small gardens, but most people rely on purchased food for their regular meals. There are a number of trade stores located in the settlement, and the busy Koki market is close. The supermarkets in Port Moresby are also easily accessible, although their prices tend to be expensive. Thirty-two per cent of respondents to the questionnaire listed local shops as the main place they got their food, with another 26 per cent listing food markets. Twenty-three per cent said that the supermarket was the main place they got their food. By contrast, the overall averages from all research sites were: 7 per cent, local shops; 4 per cent, food markets; and 5 per cent, supermarkets. In Vanagi, only 11 per cent of people said that their main source of food was work done on their own lands or fishing, compared to a figure of 78 per cent overall.

There is a high rate of unemployment amongst residents, reflective of the general employment shortage within Port Moresby. Of those people surveyed, 30 per cent said that they were receiving a wage from the state, a wage from private business, were a casual labourer or service worker, or were running a business. This roughly corresponds to the figures from the 2000 national census, which found approximately 35 per cent of people in Vanagi aged ten years and older to be in paid employment. The wages of these who work in paid employment tend to be used to support their extended families, and are supplemented by the informal sector work activities of other family members, including many children and youth. Conversations with residents revealed that the amongst those community members in formal employment, occupations included primary-school teaching, literacy teaching, medicine, plumbing, carpentry, welding, sign-writing, screen-printing, mechanics, cooking, building and manual labour. This amounts to a considerable range of skills present within the community. However with relatively few opportunities for formal employment, and no real capacity to practice subsistence agriculture, it is clear that small, informal income-generating activities are the main ways in which people in Vanagi sustain their livelihoods. Indeed, 37 per cent of respondents to the survey indicated that their main way of making a living was selling goods at market, and another 16 per cent said that they worked within the household. Another 12 per cent said that they worked in another way outside of the formal economy.

Informal income-generating activities practiced by individuals and families include selling fish, bettlenut, cigarettes and firewood; collecting and selling
empty cans, copper wire and scrap metal; collecting and selling firewood; growing and selling seasonal fruits such as mangoes; making coffins; sewing; operating trade stores; selling sea shells; and selling live chickens and eggs. Many people selling small goods do so at Koki market, and a number also set up small stalls within the settlement or in its immediate surrounds. The main demands for cash are for the purchase of food, payment of school fees and contributions to community funds and activities. Most families ‘own’ their houses (though without formal legal title), and so do not have make rental payments unlike many people within the city.

**Learning and Education**

There are a number of educational and learning initiatives within Vanagi. In addition to formal school education, there is a volunteer-run community preschool, a range of adult literacy and training programs, and the informal passing on of skills and knowledge through families. A key resource for many of these initiatives is the Community Hall, out of which the preschool is run, along with a range of workshops and skills-training sessions. The larger space also serves as a space for meetings, community gatherings and church services. The building includes a small room stocked with a few educational books, magazines and reports.

When asked about the highest level of formal education they had completed, responses to the Community Sustainability Questionnaire in Vanagi were relatively comparable to the overall results across all research sites, with people in Vanagi having just slightly higher levels of formal education than respondents in other sites. For instance, 3 per cent of respondents in Vanagi had completed either a university undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, compared to an average of 2 per cent for all the sites. Fifteen per cent had completed some sort of trade training, compared to a 13 per cent average for all the sites. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents in Vanagi had completed either some or all of their secondary education, a little higher than the overall average of 32 per cent. And 6 per cent had not completed any level of formal education, an apparently high figure but less than the overall average of 9 per cent.

Because of its central location in Moresby South, there are a number of elementary and secondary schools located close to settlement. However, community leaders and residents expressed concern at the dropout rate for school-aged children. Many leave during their time at secondary school, often because of difficulties in paying school fees. In addition, children and youth are often required to work in order to contribute to their family’s income, and many school-aged children can be seen around the settlement, selling small goods at stalls.

One of the most successful initiatives in Vanagi has been the establishment of a community pre-school. This development is the outcome of a program implemented in the late 1990s by the member for the Moresby South
electorate, the Hon. Dame Carol Kidu. Under the program, short training courses in early-childhood teaching were offered throughout the Moresby South area for interested volunteers. After the three-week course, these volunteers returned to their homes to establish community preschools. The Vanagi community pre-school opened in 1998, and is currently one of twenty-four located in the Moresby South area. They are co-ordinated through the Port Moresby South Community Preschool Association. Clement Dogale, a community leader in Vanagi and father of the late Chris Clement, is the President of the Association, and one of the teachers at the Vanagi pre-school. A retired teacher, he described his sense of disillusionment at the continuing problems affecting youth in Papua New Guinea, despite the large amounts of money being spent by the government on youth-focussed initiatives. When the training courses were offered he went along, motivated in part by curiosity, and by his feeling that things needed to happen in a different way:

I was one of those who trained to become pre-school teachers in our community. When I went in it was an eye-opener for me. I found that it was the thing I was looking for. I saw that it was the way to change Papua New Guinea … We went in and did the training for three weeks only, came back and started teaching children, with no pay, we just got interested and started teaching. Many of the children now are in the community schools, and they are ahead of other children. They are making a difference, which I am happy about.

Sixty-eight children enrolled in the Vanagi community pre-school in 2006, with around thirty attending each day. The program’s dependence on volunteers, however, makes it difficult to keep the pre-school going. Some of the individuals who initially trained as teachers have left leaving only Clement and one other core teacher. Some of the children bring twenty toea a day, which goes to support the teachers, and villagers support them with food. The pre-school also receives some funding from the local Latter Day Saints church, but it is not sufficient to pay an ongoing wage for the staff. Without this, is will be hard to ensure the continuity the program.

Another important dimension of the learning and education processes in the community is the informal exchange of skills and knowledge—both customary and modern. Older men pass down their skills in fishing, making nets and traditional canoes. Women pass down skills in sewing, cooking and baking to their younger female relatives. Outside of extended families, skills are shared through forums such as the women’s group, and through workshops co-ordinated through the Education Sub-Committee. Still, there is a sense that skills are slowly being lost, and both men and women express their frustration at not having access to adequate equipment with which to practice their skills, such as stoves, sewing machines and tools for making canoes or mending fishing nets.
Within Vanagi, there is a strong desire for further training and education. Eighty-eight per cent of people surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘More training is necessary for doing the work that I would ideally like to do’. The types of training identified by these people as being most important were income-generation and management. Respondents also expressed a desire for more training in family life, as well as in technology and literacy. To a large extent, though, Vanagi is already a very skills-rich community. The variety of occupations in which residents are working, and the experience and knowledge present within families, amounts to a significant resource for this small settlement to tap into. Clearly, there is a demand for more training and educational opportunities, and there is no doubt that many households struggle to meet their basic needs and desperately need means of increasing their income, but there is also a strong foundation on which to build. Within a place like Vanagi, one of the key tasks in enhancing and promoting community learning will be to identify and most effectively utilize the diverse skills and knowledge which already exist, and then plan for educational and training programs to complement this existing base and provide new skills where they are needed.
Divinai Village, Milne Bay Province

Why are local projects so difficult to sustain?

Opening Story

Several years ago Joseph Alex, a community leader in Divinai village, planted vanilla crops on his land on the advice of government officials from the Department of Primary Industries. A number of other villagers did the same and, now that their crops are finally producing fruit, all have found themselves unable to sell the vanilla beans they thought were ‘green gold’. Why did this initiative, like other cash-cropping projects in Divinai, fail to live up to expectations?

Markedly different from customary practices of subsistence agriculture, where surplus produce is sold within relatively localized systems of labour and exchange, the primary purpose of cash cropping is agricultural production for sale into an extended market. Most commonly cash crops are produced for the export market, drawing local communities like Divinai into global systems of trade and exchange. Cash cropping is expanding as an economic emphasis right across Papua New Guinea, promoted by the national government, and in turn by international financial institutions and donor countries such as Australia. The vanilla plots in Divinai are not the village’s first attempt at cash cropping. For many years, copra—the dried kernels of coconuts—was its principal cash crop, but declining world prices mean that it no longer provides a reliable source of income for people. Some people who used to produce copra moved to coffee or cocoa. Many returned to growing garden produce for their own consumption and small-scale selling in informal markets.

Then, in 2000, a cyclone wiped out much of the vanilla crop in the world’s biggest producer, Madagascar. It sent world prices sky-rocketing, and suddenly made vanilla production an enticing option for other ‘developing’ countries. As Joseph puts it, ‘when they started looking at other markets they thought that was an opportunity to get the idea of planting vanilla to the village people.’ Joseph planted it after learning that it was returning profits to farmers in the Sepik region—‘they were saying it was green gold’.
But vanilla is possibly the labour-intensive crop in the world, often requiring hand pollination and taking as long as five years after planting to produce aged extract. By the time his crops were ready for harvest, production in Madagascar was starting to increase again, supplemented by production in countries such as Uganda, India, Costa Rica and Colombia who, like Papua New Guinea, entered the market in the wake of the Malagasy crisis. The arrival of these new players, together with a concomitant increase in the use of synthetic vanilla by food manufacturers, meant that global prices for vanilla beans slumped by almost 90 per cent from their peak in 2003.

Thus, the reason for their disappointment lies in complex set of factors including, amongst other things, weather patterns in Madagascar, export-oriented development policies in PNG and its donor countries, poor timing, agricultural production in India, the increased use of synthetic vanilla extract in food manufacturing; and, perhaps most importantly, the fundamental volatility of global markets. In other words, local, national and global issues all make a difference to village life. All this means that Joseph cannot find a market for his vanilla. It’s not an uncommon story in Divinai, he says:

My uncle planted a hectare of cocoa, someone else has planted, maybe a reasonable amount of coffee, but they’re not even selling it because there’s not a market … I know these are good ideas that the government has told us to follow, to get into, but the big question is are they going to provide us the market?

The DPI station at nearby Bubuleta has now started distributing nutmeg seedlings, but there is anxiety amongst many of the villagers who worry that they will again fail to find a market for their crops. Joseph, while recognizing that the economy he is engaged in is complex and transnational, sees the lack of markets for his cash crops as a failure of the government to provide for its farmers. In truth, the vagaries of the international trade in agriculture are something the Papua New Guinean government is in no place to control, but it is encouraging local communities to grow cash crops with the assurance that it will provide a consistent, and considerable, source of income. Sometimes there are markets, and the crops become ‘green gold’ as they were for the Sepik farmers who were able to harvest their vanilla crops and sell them before world prices plummeted. Other times, as has been the case in Divinai, local people are left at ‘the losing end of the whole thing’, with crops they cannot sell, and which their families cannot eat.

**Place—Past and Present**

Divinai village is a small community of around 700 people, located in the Milne Bay province on the coastline overlooking the Bismarck Sea, towards the far eastern tip of the Papua New Guinean mainland. Narrow, black-sand beaches run along the Milne Bay coast, with mountains behind them and the Stirling Range to the north, rising to summits of 5000 feet. Thick jungle, scrub, mangrove and sago swamps are key features of the province’s
environment. The land immediately around Divinai, however, is largely flat and dry, with poor soil and occasional drought. Coconut, sago and betel-nut palms occupy much of the land, along with gardens and cash crop plantations. The Divinai population is organized into just over one-hundred households, with families living together in homes built mainly out of bush materials, located according to clan arrangements and matrilineal systems of land ownership.

Central to the story of the place, is the history of the missionaries and churches in the area. Samoan missionaries from the London Missionary Society first arrived in the region in the late nineteenth century. In 1891, the reverend Charles Abel arrived to establish a base for the Missionary Society on Kwato Island, approximately three kilometres west of Samarai Island in the China Strait of Milne Bay. The island was envisaged as a ‘total society’ for the Christian converts who lived there: isolated from the heathenism around them, they were trained to be evangelists, teachers and players of cricket and football. The island community was dispersed with the outbreak of World War II, but the Kwato church continued on as the Kwato Extension Association. Villagers in Divinai—which is a short boat ride away from Kwato Island—still refer to ‘Mr Abel’ as if he were a present figure in their lives, and the Kwato church is still the central religious body in community life. In recounting its own history, the Divinai community draws attention to these early interactions with strangers, with Charles Abel and the Samoan missionaries before him. Mrs William, an older villager woman whose grandmother was taught at the Kwato Island school, describes ‘something about this village that is very unique … a mixture of what we get from the outsider, from the foreigners who have been through the villages and the communities’.

The provincial capital of Milne Bay, Alotau, is located just twenty minutes drive north-west of Divinai. The proximity of the township—hence our designation of the community as peri-urban—and the quality of the road network in the area means that travel to and from the centre is relatively easy, and the community is able to access the services located there, including the market, bank, medical services, post office, shops, and government and private sector offices. Gurney airport has daily flights connecting Alotau to Port Moresby, weekly flights to Popondetta in the Northern Province, and flights three times a week to both Misima Island and Kiriwina Island in the province. Alotau itself was constructed in the late 1960s, shortly before Independence, its location selected because of the existence of the Gurney airstrip. The airstrip is a legacy of the Second World War, built when Milne Bay became a site of strategic importance in the struggle for control over the Pacific. Beginning in July 1942, large numbers of Australian troops were stationed in the area, and a major battle between Allied and Japanese forces was fought in September and October of that year. The Papuan communities in Milne Bay suddenly found themselves in the midst of a cruel conflict being fought on their lands, one which took
a heavy toll on them. Today, the wrecks of planes and ships which remain dotted around the area—both in the jungles and underwater in the bays off the coast—have become key attractions for a local tourist industry offering eco-lodge accommodation and scuba diving. Alotau itself is also a commercial centre, a result of its accessibility via the Gurney airstrip, and gold-mining operations on Misima Island.

Organization and Governance

The Divinai community includes a significant number of migrants who have moved to the area as a result of intermarriage, and amongst respondents to the questionnaire, 27 per cent indicated that they had lived in the area for five years or less. Many of those who have moved to Divinai are from nearby villages, and shared language and extensive networks of kinship and intermarriage connect communities in the surrounding area. Mrs William, a senior woman in the Divinai community, described it like this:

Here, in this area—we call it the Tawala area—the same language that we speak here extends as far as East Cape, and around there to Huhuna and right down here around the bay. We speak Tawala language, and we follow our mothers’ side, matrilineal society. So we all fall back to our mother. And my daughter will be taking after me, if I go. She will continue to live on my land. I am sitting on my grandmother’s land—I got it from my mother, and my daughter is going to get it from me.

The matrilineal system of community organization means that upon marriage, it is the husbands who move to their wives’ family lands. Upon death, however, their bodies return to their mothers’ land for burial. Mourning rituals around death and burial play an important role in affirming customary ties to land, and it is through the burial ceremony’s that elders pass on and confirm the land rights of clans and families. Relationships of responsibility and reciprocity are reinforced through the ritual practices at times of death, as they are through the practices around marriage, bride-price, birth and initiation. As a result, there are strong relationships of kinship which include those members of the community who have migrated from other places. Extended families and clans provide support networks and collective identity, and community members credit the strong kinship relationships for the social cohesion within Divinai.

Organization and leadership within the community is provided through the co-existing structures of the chiefdom system, the churches and the local level government. As with land rights in the community, clan leadership is passed down along matrilineal lines, from uncles to their eldest nephews. The leaders of individual clans are united under a paramount chief, who is the highest authority within the customary-tribal system. In addition to guarding and passing on customary knowledge of rituals, stories, land boundaries and history, the paramount chief and the clan chiefs are called upon to intervene in disputes within the community and matters relating
to cultural, land and marine resources. In cases where disputes cannot be resolved through the chiefdom system, however, they are now referred to the modern legal system to be adjudicated through the village courts.

Since the first arrival of missionaries in the area in the late-nineteenth century, the governance and decision-making structures of the chiefdom system have been existed concurrently with those of the Christian churches. Churches in Divinai and the Alotau area, particularly the Kwato Church, clearly play a fundamental role as a basis for communal life. When asked what they identified as their main source of community, 28 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire in Divinai identified the place that they lived, which is consistent with the overall results across all the research sites and attests to the widespread importance of land and place. Significantly though, another 24 per cent—much greater than the overall figure for all locations of 7 per cent—identified their main source of community as being a ‘club, community or religious centre’. This was confirmed and reiterated in more in-depth strategic conversations and interviews, in which individuals consistently referred back to the centrality of the church in the community.

There are four denominations in the area, although the Kwato church appears to be the dominant religious body, and certainly holds an important place in the history of the community. Under the church structure, the pastor is the leader of the congregation, with deacons acting under him. So while the paramount chief and the clan chiefs continue to be respected as the guardians of customary knowledge and practices, leadership within the community also comes from the pastor and deacons who guide the community in their spiritual life and congregation. Clans continue to serve as crucial mediums for the organization of families and individuals, providing a source of identification through which people exist in the relation to one another, and through which land and forms of knowledge and practice are passed from one generation to another. However, the community is also organized and mobilized through the structures of the churches—through the Women’s fellowships, youth groups, community activities and collective worship.

The continuing importance of customary rituals, practices and forms of organization and identity, exists concurrently with the importance accorded to the churches and Christian ideologies. In some ways, Christianity frames the way in which the contemporary relevance of customary practices is negotiated. So, when asked about the place of traditional values in community life, Mrs William spoke of the centrality of systems of matrilineal land ownership, and the practices associated with marriage and death, as ‘some of the customary things that we still retain’. At the same time, she pointed to a move away from customary initiation rituals, of which sorcery and charming are key elements. The distinction, for her, is in their compatibility, or otherwise, with Christianity. Initiation ‘goes on with witchcraft’, she says, ‘so we try to do away with that, according
to the biblical principal. Whatever is against God we don’t participate in very much.’ Clearly, though, there is some ambiguity in interpretation and practice. Initiation rituals and sorcery are still practiced, but in a way that is less publicly and collectively sanctioned than, say, clan-based funeral feasts which occur alongside Christian burial services.

Where Christianity and the customary dimensions of collective life seem to sit in a relatively harmonious, fluid relationship to each other, there are much sharper points of tension in the relationship between the churches and the local level government. Under the 1995 Organic law reforms, political power in Papua New Guinea was further decentralized from the provinces to local level governments (LLGs), and Divinai is now one of twenty-nine wards in the Alotau LLG. The ward councillor in Divinai is, under this system, the over-all head of the community, and considered to be the representative of the government at the local level. He is supported by a committee of five people appointed by the community, and under his leadership they constitute the core group which does most of the planning in the ward. A Ward Development Committee brings together representatives from families and clans, key programs such as health and education, and groups such as the Women’s Fellowship, youth, sporting clubs and church groups. These representatives are responsible for taking back information and decisions from the Committee and disseminating them throughout the community. The Ward Development Committee also has a number of sub-committees tasked with co-ordinating sports, law and order, youth and women’s activities in the community. In addition, it co-ordinates community work days, held every Tuesday, at which community members are intended to contribute labour and time to the general upkeep and maintenance of the village. Collective tasks include the beautification and cleaning of the village cemetery and individual homes, as well as of the church, local school and other shared spaces. The cleaning and de-vegetation of roads is done under contract from the Department of Works and Implementation, and earns the community some income. Attendance at community work-days is poor however, and the community leaders appointed under the LLG system frequently encounter difficulties in mobilizing the community through the Ward Development Committee.

The stated goal of the 1995 Organic Law reforms was to create stronger links between national government and the community life, while making law and government responsive to local needs and realities, but the sentiment expressed by a number of people within Divinai is that the new structure has failed to meet the needs and demands of the local people. Referring to the 1995 reform, Joseph Alex, a Divinai community leader within the Kwato church, described it as ‘something on paper alone—the practical part of it has never happened’. He spoke of his frustration at the difficulties in accessing government services, and the lack of responsiveness of government to the proposals put forward by community leaders. For him, the fact that he had put forward development proposals which had not been
taken up by the councillor and LLG, was evidence of the failure of the of
the government system. Doubtless there are a whole set of factors at play
here—including political will, funding, available resources and conflicting
demands—but Joseph’s comments illustrate the perception of government
by many community members both here in Divinai and across Papua New
Guinea. There is an abiding sense of disconnect between the experience
of daily life at the local level and formal structures of government.
Significantly, the argument which Joseph and other community members
made was that the church is much more central in organizing and bringing
people together than are the agencies of government. As he put it:

The government does not bring people together ... How the people
interact with each other is more or less through the churches. The
churches play an active role in people’s lives. When my councillor comes
and tells me, ‘OK, village people get together; we are going to talk about
this and this and this’, I am going to guarantee you this; you will find five
or ten people will attend ... but when you talk about my pastor, he’ll say
‘people come, we gather round and do this’, you’ll find that the whole
community’s going to come around.

The structures of religious authority and organization, then, seem to carry a
much greater importance within the Divinai community than do the formal
structures of political authority. Where the churches and chiefdom system
appear to co-exist in a relatively harmonious way, the churches and local
government seem to sit in uneasy tension with one another. A commonly
voiced sentiment was that there needed to be greater co-operation between
the two, and more respect for the churches in the development process.

Notwithstanding these tensions however, the results of the Community
Sustainability questionnaire suggested that structures of leadership and
decision-making in Divinai have comparatively high levels of support from
the community. When asked how much they agreed with the statement,
‘I feel that decisions made about life in my neighbourhood are made in
the interests of the whole community’, 77 per cent of respondents to the
questionnaire in Divinai either agreed or strongly agreed, and 15 per cent
disagreed or strongly disagreed. This is considerably more positive than the
overall results across all the research sites, where only 62 per cent agreed
or strongly disagreed, and 20 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed.
When researchers posed the statement, ‘I feel that governments make
decisions and laws that are good for the way I live locally’, 52 per cent of
Divinai respondents agreed or strongly agreed. This is hardly a resounding
expression of faith in government, but still considerably higher than the
overall result across all the research sites of 43 per cent. It suggests that while
the perception of government is poor within Divinai, as it arguably is across
the country, the relationship between state and citizenry here is less strained
than it is within many of the other research sites.
Overall, the results from the questionnaire, and material gathered from community conversations, interviews and ethnographic observation, point to high levels of community wellbeing in Divinai. Eighty per cent of survey respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their community neighbourhood, and 84 per cent said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with feeling part of their community. Seventy-nine per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with their life as a whole, with 10 per cent indicating they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This compares favourably to the overall figures across of the research sites of 72 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. Respondents in Divinai also reported a much higher feeling of safety within their community, with 81 per cent saying they were satisfied or very satisfied with their feeling of safety, compared to an overall figure of 72 per cent. Only 4 per cent of people Divinai respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their feeling of safety, much lower than the overall result of 12 per cent. A feeling of social cohesion, connectedness to the provincial capital in Alotau, the strength of the church and kinships relationships, ranked highly amongst those things which community members and leaders identified as positive features of community life.

Livelihood and Provision

Daily livelihood in Divinai is sustained through a variety of activities, the predominant ones being agriculture for subsistence and for sale at markets. The ocean too is an important source of food, and, as in coastal villages across the country, there is wealth of knowledge about fishing which has been passed down family-lines for many generations. Within families, livelihood activities are frequently divided on the basis of age and gender. Women are the main income earners, and it is they who sit at market stalls in the local village market or at Alotau selling their families produce and catch for a small income. In practice, it is the best fish and vegetables which are sold at market, with the rest retained for the family’s own consumption. Many of the village women also engage in periodic small-scale income generating activities such as selling handicrafts or baked goods like scones. As Mrs William described it, ‘any grass-roots woman can pick up something like a bundle of pumpkin tips, or a coconut, and sell it at the market—she gets one kina or two kina, something to buy kerosene—basic needs.’ In total, 52 per cent of Divinai respondents to the questionnaire said that their main way of making a living was through work within the household. Another 21 per cent identified selling goods at market or on the street. Eighty-nine per cent of people surveyed said that their main source of food was work done on their own land or fishing, a figure significantly higher than the overall result of 78 per cent across all the research sites. Five per cent identified a supermarket, and 4 per cent identified local shops as their main source of food.
The income which the women earn is distributed to cover the costs of immediate family needs such as school fees, health expenses, clothing and household goods, and community obligations like church contributions, funerals, feasts and bride prices. A small microfinance initiative has been set up to enable women in the community to accrue some savings from the money they earn. However, unlike in the Tokain group of villages in Madang Province, being the primary income-earner does not always ensure that women are able to control how the family’s money is spent. Through interviews and conversations, women in the village expressed concern about men spending family money on alcohol. The Councillor and Law and Order Committee have been asked to take up the issue, but it remains a matter of concern for community women.

In addition to gardening, fishing and small-scale income-generating work such as marketing, a significant number of people in Divinai are engaged in livelihood activities within the formal sector. In the responses to the Questionnaire, a much higher than average percentage of respondents from Divinai—26 per cent as opposed to 14 per cent across all the research sites—indicated that they were receiving a wage, either from the state, private business, or ran their own business or were paid a cash income as a casual service-worker or labourer. A key reason for this is the proximity

Isolated as it is by distance and steep mountain ranges, Alotau Harbour is an important port for Divinai, with boats carrying cargo and passengers in and out.
and accessibility of Alotau, and accordingly with the commercial, political and tourist activities based there. Additionally, the development of cash-cropping agriculture means that increasing numbers of villagers within Divinai are being drawn into formal-sector employment—and the much broader systems of production and exchange within which such work is situated—through the growth of cash cropping as a livelihood activity. Often, though, this work is precarious and inconsistent, and families may revert to subsistence agriculture and the selling of small surpluses in the local informal markets when they are unable to find a market for vanilla, cocoa, coffee or copra they produce.

Formal-sector employment, then, encompasses a broad range of activities, and accordingly there are significant variations in the lifestyles, status and subjective self-understandings which these activities afford. Many of the people in formal employment work for relatively small incomes, with little to distinguish their lives from those of the majority of villagers who make their living from gardening, fishing and selling goods in the informal markets. There are some, though, whose levels of income position them in sharp contrast to those they live around, providing them with conspicuously different lifestyles and according them particular status. The relationship between these people and the other Divinai villagers seems ambiguous. One the one hand their incomes and housing are a marker of difference; on the other hand, they are connected through kinship and wantok relationships, and in some senses their presence is claimed as a way of elevating the status of the community at large. The provincial administrator for Milne Bay lives in the area, married to a village woman. So too does the assistant secretary for the Department for Primary Industries, and other officials and business people: ‘All the tall people’, as Mrs William describes them. ‘They are in the bush here; they have big high-covenant houses. They’re hiding in the bush, you won’t see them! But in the morning if you are [outside] washing dishes, you’ll see all these flashy cars driving out. So you will note that this village too has some tall people here’.

Learning and Education

Levels of education in Divinai are comparatively high in relation to Papua New Guinea as a whole. The presence of the community primary school in the village means that all people have completed at least a basic primary education. In fact, only 2 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire in Divinai said that they had received no formal education, significantly lower than the overall figure of 9 per cent across all the research sites. 54 per cent said they had completed primary school, compared to 42 per cent across all eleven sites; however, the percentage of those who said they had completed some or all of their secondary education was lower than the overall figure, at 28 per cent as opposed to 33 per cent. Beyond primary school level, access to formal education becomes much more difficult, and the expense is often too great for families to continue. However, the immediate proximity of the
village to Alotau means that many people with skills training or higher-level education still reside in the community while employed in the urban centre.

Outside of the formal education system, learning takes place within families—as skills and customary knowledge are passed down from one generation to the next—and through forums provided by faith-based and governmental agencies. Familial forms of learning are being emphasized by both tribal and modern-political community leaders as a remedy to the challenges facing youth in the community, including those posed by alcohol consumption, the lure of urban centres, and the struggle to retain customary ways in the face of the modern. The obligation falls upon older family members to pass on local knowledge to the young men and women, in preparation for them to take on adult family and community responsibilities. Training for both young and older women comes as well from the churches, particularly through the Women’s Fellowship. An Agriculture Station in the village has run some training sessions, especially on cash cropping. It could be utilized to assist the community in agricultural methods such as soil improvement and improved gardening skills. When researchers visited the community in 2006, a community resource centre was in the process of being constructed, and the hope was that it would also be a place for training and learning activities.

There is a strong desire for greater access to learning and education within the community. When surveyed about what sort of training they desired, 52 per cent of respondents agreed that agricultural training would be useful. Twenty-five per cent selected training in income-generation as desirable, and 23 per cent wanted that training in management skills. As was common in all of the communities where the questionnaire was conducted, training in family-life and traditional ways of doing things were also important to people, with 34 per cent and 30 per cent of respondents respectively expressing a desire for such education in these areas. The forms of education and training which are desired by people in the village correspond strongly to the nature of the community itself. The strong cultural basis of Divinai, rooted in its kinship and clan networks, means that customary forms of learning are highly valued. At the same time, though, people and families are clearly negotiating the effects of social, cultural and economic change. The desire for training workshops on traditional family-life activities, sits alongside the desire for skills training which will enable them to tap into the growing tourism industry in the region. People want more information on cash-cropping and the functioning of the export market, but they also want to learn how to improve their subsistence gardening as population growth creates pressures on available land. They want to be able to access the knowledge held by outside experts, at the same time that they are holding strongly to the knowledge of their tribal elders.
Kananam Community, Madang Province

What does it mean that outsiders with grand plans and global connections have done so much damage?

Opening Story
The path from the church-building set within the grounds of the Alexishafen is uneven, but well-trodden. The Gamarmatu clan, the main clan in these areas, has settled here for years, with families moving inland from the outlying islands after the heavy bombing during World War II. Many of the islands have also become inhabitable, and lack of access to fresh water supplies or fresh food, particularly the loss of fish from their once-abundant waters, has exacerbated the process. A small community hall is set a little way from the edge of the lagoon, and Papa Paul Buy’s house is on the shore-line. He is a village elder and a Gamarmatu Elder in his seventies and lives with his wife. His children are spread around him—an extended family dotted across different lanes and corners in the areas edging the lagoon. Directly across from Alexishafen is Sek, the largest island in the lagoon, comprised of one large family of approximately 1,000 people across twelve hamlets. Other islands such as Dumuseg and Ambusin dot the lagoon; however several have been abandoned because of rising water-levels over the last ten years, presumably due to global climate change. Two islands have disappeared completely, and others are in the process of being subsumed by the warm, blue waters of the lagoon.

It is early afternoon and Papa Paul Buy asks us how we possibly thought we could help his people to come out of this apathy and depression into which they have fallen. His voice rose in consternation as he talked of the dragging of the seas by foreign fishing trawlers, and the arrogance of people who simply took so much from his people’s lands and put nothing back. Suddenly he stopped and smiled, and asked us if we were friends. Not quite sure how to respond to such a sudden question, we looked at him. We had earlier asked him to tell us his story, and Papa Paul Buy was keen to understand why we wanted it. He said to us, ’My story is also the story of my people. If I tell you, will you say it like I say it— should I trust you
like a friend?’ He looked at us and then away, almost like he was going into another time and place.

In the heavy denseness of the afternoon sun, squatting under a straggly tree for shade, we were unsure how to proceed. Then Papa Paul Buy started to speak. His sentences were short and in the local dialect. It seemed a long story as many times Papa Paul Buy stopped and pointed out into the sea, or stopped to reflect, sometimes with great sadness it seemed, and sometimes with pride. A small group of local community members gathered and sat around us with us, including children.

We are Mortononoa people, of the Gamarmatu Clan. We came by canoe built by us, from the knowledge of our ancestors, the word of the ancestors. We came in canoes and boats that could move through the waves of the sea, and the rumbles of the rains. We set upon Sec Island, grew our gardens and fished in the waters and traded with our many people of this noble land, nation. The sea was our garden, it gave us much, it gave us our people, and we gave the sea our respect. Our law, the word of the elders ruled to keep peace, law, justness.

When the bombs fell, and the embankments we had built from corals from the sea broke around us, we took to our canoes and rowed to the mainlands. The church became a place, a home of sorts and we served
in many ways. Independence dawned, with it a new hope that our story of the Mortononoau, the word, the elders, be told—the spiritual fabric, the heart of our people here in this place near the sea. We had hoped that this, our story would have been heard, lived again through this independence. But we are overcome—we are swallowed by that which is large, foreign to our sea, to our fish, our lives, and our word. We are faced with destruction, and our old ways cannot hold together in these times as some of our elders themselves sell their soul and people. But we cannot lose hope. We live with hope, that one day our story will arise—and we will know ourselves, rule ourselves as we proclaimed in 1975 by the PNG colours.

**Place—Past and Present**

The Kananam community is situated on a lagoon, approximately fifteen minutes by road from the provincial capital of Madang town, with approximately 3000 people inhabiting the many villages scattered across the short stretch of coast and handful of islands. There are three main clans—the Sec Clan, Gamarmatu Clan and Matanan Clan—and two sub clans—the Geonen Clan and the Danu Fon Clan. Like Divinia near Alotau, Kananam is so close to Madang that it can be described a peri-urban in a rural setting. From a survey conducted in this region, we found that 64 per cent of Kananam respondents had lived in the area their whole life, significantly higher than the overall figure of 38 per cent across the eleven other communities sites across different provinces of Papua New Guinea. In the recent years, new settlers representing the Susubanis, Begis and Dapu Clans have also moved in and settled around the water edges, many also seeking jobs with the fishing companies in the area. Masses of mangroves and clusters of coconut trees are perched over the edge of the lagoon, framed by the misty Bismarck Ranges. Traditional wooden canoes—made from a long, slender log with a smaller log that juts from the side as a counterbalance—bob across the turquoise blue waters during the day. Mornings are a slightly busier time as children slowly make their way to school or villagers head out to catch some fish. The canoes which sit along the edge of coastal villages are an important mode of transport but also mark the uniqueness of every village. The shape and design of a canoe can only be borrowed from another village with the appropriate permissions, and compensation must be paid, often in the way of pigs, by those who fail to ask before copying a canoe design.

The manicured lawn and landscaped gardens of the Catholic mission at the Alexishafen stand out conspicuously against the dense vegetation along the coastline. Still a significant physical presence over a century after missionaries’ arrival, the Catholic mission remains a source of ire because it represents for most of the community the critical point in their recent history when they were first alienated from their customary land. This land called Vidar was heavily forested and the land was used for making
gardens. However, the church took over Vidar and used the forests for building houses and boats. In the mid-1990s, the Church handed the land back to the government rather than the Kananam people. The people feel a great betrayal as they understood that they had passed the land over to the missionaries in reciprocal exchange for learning and ministry. The Kananam people were not made aware, until it was too late, that the land was not to be handed back to them, but instead was to be sold privately.

In the late 1990s, Vidar was bought by a private company for three million kina and is now the site of the RD Tuna Cannery, owned by a Philippines company. According to the villagers, the first payment was handed over to the Catholic Church. Villagers described relations with the church as poor. The sisters at the Alexishafen mission later told us that, despite their attempts at building relations, they did not understand why they were despised by the villagers who sometimes stole food from their gardens. For the Kananam people, however, the problem was obvious. Augusta Nalun, the now unemployed local primary-school teacher says angrily, ‘while my people here starve, the foreign companies scrape our seas bare and the government pockets get filled’. A large protest organized by the local community in late 2006 drew more than 3,000 community members out against the trawling companies, particularly the indiscriminate acts
of exploitation and human rights abuses they commit. One community member described it, saying:

I got into the tiny boat and we came right up to one of RD Tuna’s large trawling boats. I used a large microphone and asked them to leave our young women alone. I screamed at them and asked them who are there to take of the many illegitimate children, who because of our ways, were also now our children. We ourselves were struggling to put one decent meal on the mat.

Nothing seems to have changed much for these people since that protest, though conversations with locally-based NGO Bismarck Ramu revealed that this community protest brought the activities of RD Tuna to the attention of the European Union, one of the company’s main markets. Following a visit a few months later by inspectors from Germany, their market sales in Europe have been dramatically reduced.

**Organization and Governance**

The Kananam communities maintain strong traditional systems of leadership and ways of doing things that have sustained their livelihoods throughout generations. However, family relationships are weakening, due to the scarcity of resources such as land and fish, and the declining daily practices of reciprocity through the exchange of fish and garden food. There is clearly a weak sense of participation in community activities, especially by the young people. The older generation and parents expressed unhappiness because their children are showing less interest in family activities like gardening and fishing, and spend too much time lazing around the houses or in the communities.

There are also indicators of problems emerging as a result of the operation of RD Tuna. Some people in the village explained how, in the early years of the cannery, the village women exchanged fruit and coconut for by-catch fish with the Filipino men on the fishing boats. However, after some years, the fishermen began to reject the fruit and coconut, demanding sex. There is now a ‘fish for sex’ trade in Kananam whereby the women sell themselves. Seven Filipino-Papua New Guinean babies have been born into the area recently, and the mothers of these babies struggle alternately for survival and acceptance within the community, which is itself struggling to stay on its feet. In the last two years, there seems to be a growing number of HIV cases in the place, prompting concerned community leaders like Alexia and Alphonse to initiate and invite awareness and training programs such as the National level *Tingim Laip* HIV Awareness Program. This program, funded primarily by AusAID, works in partnership with local groups and sites across the area. The *Tingim Laip* Madang Province document circulating in Kananam showed the RD Tuna Cannery workers—80 per cent female—to be in the highest risk category for contracting the virus.
The hope of employment opportunities at RD Tuna is also attracting new settlers to the Kananam region from further inland. This migration seems to be stretching the fragile fabric of the already-struggling community. Clan divisions are growing, especially as new settlers, equipped with money, buy into lands and set up new groups of settlements. The pressures on the customary models of organization and leadership are great. As the community feels increasingly marginalized from the benefits of development activities around what was once their land and way of life, there is an increasing frustration and growing anger.

For many, the anger is the result of the practical question of the lack of royalty payments and benefits given by the church and the RD Fishing Company for the use their land and the sea. The people also blame the government for not informing or involving them when they engaged the development projects in the communities. The result has been the inability of the community to negotiate a better outcome for their people and place. The simmering anger at the Catholic mission at Alexishafen compounds a rising tension, and community leaders speak of a growing disregard for new approaches by government bodies to respond with new but short-term and under-resourced projects. Alphonse, a community leader in Kananam, argues that the biggest handicap for people is their lack of general information about their basic rights, the National Constitution, and the bureaucratic system, meaning that they are often unable to adequately respond or act. But even for the community leaders, it is difficult to access good or valid information, unless they are able to connect regularly with the Bismarck Ramu NGO, which has been campaigning against the tuna cannery for many years.

Many people also expressed a sense of disconnect from the systems of national and provincial government. Prior to 1975, and in the early years after independence, Government Extension Officers regularly visited communities and worked with the people, however Kananam community members say that this has now stopped. People express a desire for the Government extension programmes to be revived again, on the basis that they made the government presence felt in the communities.

Results from the Community Sustainability Questionnaire indicated low levels of community wellbeing within the Kananam area. Whereas 78 per cent of respondents across all the research sites said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their community neighbourhoods, only 50 per cent of respondents in Kananam said as such. Similarly, only 56 per cent of Kananam people surveyed said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their life as a whole, much lower than the overall figure of 72 per cent across all the sites. And again, when asked to what extent they agreed with the statement ‘I feel most people can be trusted’, only 19 per cent of Kananam respondents agreed or strongly agreed, compared to 34 per cent across all eleven sites in PNG. Forty-seven per cent disagreed or strongly
disagreed with the statement, much higher than the overall figure of 34 per cent. Data such as this correlates strongly with the sentiments conveyed by community leaders and other villages, namely that this is a community struggling to hold together its social and cultural fabric in the face of massive challenges.

**Livelihood and Provision**

People’s livelihoods depend heavily on resources from both the sea and the land. Both are fast becoming scarce due to population increases, and the acquisition of a good portion of these resources by the state and the church. People in Kananam speak of dwindling fish stocks, and marine resources contaminated by the heavy oil spills from the fishing vessels operated by the RD Tuna company. They speak of the difficulties in making a living and sustaining the livelihoods and wellbeing of their families. The community also tell of health problems, such as stomach aches after swimming in the water, chronic skin-infections, coughing and diarrhoea, which emerged with the arrival of the cannery. At Mataman, one of the leaders of the Bismarck Ramu Group—which RD Tuna has already unsuccessfully tried to bring defamation charges against—explained how the fishery was affecting his village. Less than half of people in Kananam were employed by the fishery, he said, and the numbers of fish in the lagoon dropped in the late 1990s with the arrival of the fishery.

The declining marine resources, and the generally deteriorating quality of the marine environment impacts, not just on the capacity of families to find sufficient food to feed themselves, but also on the possibilities for small-scale income generation. Fishing, and the collection of other marine resources like shellfish, shrimps, lobsters and crabs, is the main income-generating activity for the people in Kananam. Various reef fish are caught using fishing lines and hooks or spears, especially at night, and the fishermen know well the breeding sessions and grounds for the different species. Fishing skills and knowledge are passed through the family lines, especially from fathers to sons, but the waters are yielding much less for the younger generations than they did for their parents.

Another source of income for families is the farming of cash crops. Because of current low market-prices copra processing is not occurring in Kananam at the moment, and most villagers expressed disappointment at this. There is, however, some cocoa farming, and growing betel nut and mustard also provides good sources of income. Families from the Islands make their gardens on Ambusin Island, while those on the mainland villages like Kananam and Tawei villages make their gardens on the mainland. Garden crops are mainly grown for the families’ own consumption, but surplus produce will be sold at the food markets. Villagers note, however, that the garden surplus is diminishing with the loss of land. Reducing fish and garden yields are affecting social relations within and between communities, particularly in regards to exchange systems. Fish was once abundant
and easily shared with others, and was often exchanged for garden food. Exchanging surplus produce for fish provided villagers who lived from their gardens with an important protein supplement for their diet and also, because garden produce is seasonal while fish stocks are available year-round, provided important food sources when their own food supplies were low. With fish and garden food becoming scarcer, however, increasing numbers of people are turning to ‘development’ to support their livelihoods, either working in paid employment at RD Tuna or in spin-off businesses. The community as a whole is becoming more and more dependent on income from the cannery, and the cash economy is supplanting former reciprocity-based systems of exchange and barter. Simultaneously, the decline in fish and garden resources means that supermarket food has become increasingly important. This in turn reinforces the need for a cash income.

Food is expensive, however, and when these costs are combined with the costs of school fees, medicines and other staples, the result is community experiencing intensely the squeeze of modern life. Wages at the fishery are very low and conditions poor. The company is increasingly taking over ‘spin-off’ businesses or creating its own ‘spin-off’ businesses in breach
of the commitment it made to the community when it first began its
operations. The combined effect of an increased vulnerability in their food
supply, indeed their livelihood, and the betrayal of the company’s prior
commitments go some way to explaining why the entire community is so
focused on the activities of the company for their survival. In 2003 a report
by Nancy Sullivan concluded the following:

Despite the social impact components inserted into the Environmental
Plans of RD Tuna Canners Pty Ltd, and RD Fishing PNG, Pty Ltd,
which generally dismiss the possibility of substantive social effects,
these companies have had a significant impact on the quality of life for
their host communities. A number of environmental impacts have also
had cultural effects, and despite complaints, the company has not made
adjustments. Wastes disposal at both the Wharf and Cannery is making
people sick, as are the noise and odor of these premises. Over-fishing
has left little if any fish for these people to live on and conduct trade.
Promises of material and developmental assistance from the company
to the landowners have not been fulfilled. None of the schools, Aid
Posts or churches has seen any real assistance since their arrival. The
social breakdown of traditional authority and family values is most
alarming, and while some of this might be inevitable for any large
development project, they have certainly been exacerbated by negligent
company policies and the behavior of foreign company personnel. We
find problems of workplace hygiene, social and sexual abuse of women,
improper waste dumping, illicit sales of alcohol and cigarettes, disregard
for landowner hiring preference practices, and the payment sub-
minimum wages.¹

While we found nothing to suggest that company policies or behaviour had
substantially changed, the community is beginning to work how it might
respond and adapt in sustainable ways.

Learning and Education

Within the Kananam communities, traditional forms of learning and the
passing on of knowledge are weakening. Older members of the communities
say that the younger generations lack the interest to learn traditional
knowledge about things such as dancing, feasting and festivals. While some
skills continue to be passed down within families, the danger is that many
important forms of knowledge will be lost in part or in whole. At the same
time, levels of formal education are not high. In comparison to the average
results across all the research sites, there are few people in Kananam and
surrounds who have had no schooling. Only 3 per cent of respondents to
the questionnaire indicated that they had not completed any level of formal
education. However, of those who have been educated within the formal
system, the large majority — 62 per cent — have not progressed beyond
primary school level.

Some learning and training opportunities are available through government agencies, Church-provided programmes and non-governmental organizations. Such learning opportunities, however, appear to occur sporadically in response to particular issues arising the region. Respondents to the questionnaire indicated a strong desire for more learning opportunities within their community. When asked which sorts of training would be useful for them, 65 per cent of respondents said they would like training in family life, and 41 per cent agreed that training in traditional ways of doing things would be useful. In both instances, these figures were higher than the overall figures across all the research sites. Comparatively, respondents in Kananam were less likely to want training in agriculture and income-generation, with 14 per cent and 27 per cent selecting these options. And smaller numbers again indicated a desire for training in technology, management or literacy.

Partly in response to these existing community needs, and as part of the ongoing response to the social tensions and the presence of the cannery, community leaders have already initiated a Community Learning and Development Centre within Kananam. In a letter handed to the RMIT research team by Alexis Tokau in October 2007, it was apparent that the weight of responsibility was heavy and many community leaders were feeling something had to be done. Alexis wrote:

I have taken this bold step to begin a CLDC (Community Learning and Development Centre) in the community ... Our current leaders and the Councillor and SSD Cooperation have not come up with an alternative solution or action to address the issue. Further problem experience in the community is the divisions among clans (5 clans) and in families there is a strong influence on handful of elders who own spin-off business at RD Fishing and ignorant of the rest of the population. Confirm statement from our elders that the sex trade at RD Fishing Vidar is still continuing. Note that the company’s operation is still continuing ... females and school age children are being indirectly force to engage themselves in illegal activities. Lack of cooperation is a result of poor leadership ... at the moment we are using the parish hall for our monthly meetings—katholic mama group. We can conduct training here ... women are the backbone of families, communities and even the nation ...

The sentiments expressed in the letter, and the move to establish a CLDC in Kananam, correlate with the findings of the questionnaire, particularly in the articulated need to build training around core issues affecting this community — the erosion of family and community life. The letter also conveys the importance of women in organizing their community and responding to the forces threatening to pull it apart. Despite the many and varied challenges facing the villages in Kananam and its surrounds, the fact that the community is taking active responsibility to address them is
exciting, and points once again to the strengths which existing in so many of PNGs customary communities. If the determination and commitment of the community can be reinforced and supported through the findings of this research report, the Community Learning and Development Centre may well flourish.

Endnotes

Local–Global

Yalu Village and Surrounds, Morobe Province

Is it possible to negotiate the future by going back to the past?

Opening Story

It is early afternoon at Yalu. The village is thick with discussion about recovering from the government what the people of Yalu see as nearly 359 acres of their customary land. One of the community leaders, Bing Sawanga was at the helm of these negotiations as a representative of both the Aliwang Land Trust Committee and the Land Mobilization Committee. Buno Storm, an elder, comes out of one of the larger bush-houses to greet us. Women busy themselves getting ready a meal. A hen scuttles past with one of the women in pursuit. ‘Your dinner’, Buno Storm said, laughing loudly. As questions deepen around community responses to sustainability issues, Kolam Storm and Nawasi Bonnie, brother and youngest son of Buno Storm respectively, pick up the draft Community Sustainability report and turn to the draft write-up of Yalu. They both pore over it—and every so often they talk between themselves.

Almost an hour passes—and meanwhile, more people have started turning up at this end of the village. Many are women, and they sit around, talking to each other, and sometimes with us. As we exchange stories of where we are from and of the different worlds we inhabit, Deckie Maino, leader of the local women’s group and the village expert in making bread in local-made ovens, becomes reflective and asks us how we possibly thought we could understand what is happening in Yalu through such a short stay. It is hard to see how sharing food and talking might contribute to government policy supporting village sustainability. We explain why we had come back with the draft report and, in so doing, were also learning more about the village. The other women nodded, and Deckie Maino laughed: ‘At least you come back, and ask us. We have to give you that. We must give you our famous chicken stew’. There were loud responses that the stew was already on the fire.

As the food was eaten and then dishes cleared, the people gathered around. There were now about thirty people, and many settled back, chewing betel
nut and looking towards Kolam Storm to begin. Earlier, we had asked if there was a particular story of their village and area that they wanted us to write as an entry into the profile of the place. There had been much discussion and it seemed as if they had reached a consensus.

Long, long time ago in the time of our ancestors, one tribe-line lived in the mountains on top of the Yalu River. They called themselves the Ngalunuf. One day they went to see another family. The village was called Ngalugosol. They had a sing-sing; a sing-sing without drums; all sing-sing with chuwen.

Buno Storm explained that when his ancestors heard the singing they were surprised as the people from Ngalugosol did not use a kundu (traditional drum). Instead they were using something very different—a chuwen—a kind of a split drum made from black palm.

One day, the young men of Ngalunuf decided that they wanted to try the singing that they had heard the time when they went to Ngalugosol. Yet this time the people of Ngalunuf wanted to try these songs using the kundu drums. The young men waited until all the adults left the village to go and attend to their gardens. Whilst everyone had gone the young men started singing-dancing what they had heard and seen from the Ngalugosol. A beautiful sound was created which echoed throughout the surrounding area. Suddenly, realizing their singing and drumming could be heard, the young men stopped singing. The older men and women, returning from the gardens, asked these young men who was singing the beautiful songs in the village. The young men replied that they did not know who was singing.

These episodes continued many times, until one day the older men of Ngalunuf got tired and, wanting to find out who was singing, told an old lady to stay behind and hide in the house when all the men and women went to the garden. All the young men, thinking that every one had gone to the garden like many times before, gathered together and began to sing. Little did they know that the old lady was watching them. In the late afternoon when all the men and women returned from their gardens, the old lady told the villagers of what she had seen. She said that she saw all the young men singing and that they have all this time been hiding the truth. Once the men and women of Ngalunuf discovered that the young men of Ngalunuf were responsible for the singing, they became very angry.

Nawasi Bonnie, the young man, then continued the story.

The young men of Ngalunuf discussed what to do about the situation. They decided that next when all the men went to the garden, the young men would get the married women and have their way with them. When the men came back from the garden that afternoon the women told them of what had happened that day whilst they were at the garden and how
the young men assaulted them. The male elders of the village all met that night to discus what punishment the young men deserved for the crime they had committed against the married women of the village. They decided that the young men should be banished from the village to go and live some place far away. The elders of the village called out for the young men to come and see them, telling them that because of the trouble they had committed the young men were to leave the village forever and be banished far away from the village and find their own settling place. They heard their fate and left as requested and made a new home away from the village.

The young men stayed at their new home, yet the problem was that they had no women so that they could create a new population for their new village. Then one day one of the young men went looking in the surrounding bush lands when he came across a bushman [magic man] called Mumulafa who held the ability to create black magic. Mumulafa was sitting up a tree with his powerful poison bag [a special bilum or string bag containing certain powers] hanging on a branch below. The young man quickly took the poison bag and ran as fast as he could all the way back to his village. When he arrived a the village he informed the other young men of what had happened and told them to be ready to fight in case Mumulafa came back to retrieve his poison bag.

The young men waited on guard till it was night-time and the bushman arrived to be captured on arrival by the young men. Mumulafa pleaded not to be killed and in return for his poison bag would grant the young men what they needed in their survival. The bush man gave the young men many powers that they needed including the ability to create a productive garden, the ability to find animals easily whilst hunting and also most importantly the ability to find women so as the tribe could grow and prosper. Mumulafa took back his poison bag as agreed and was about to leave when one of the young men shot Mumulafa with a bow and arrow and killed him. The other young men in anger got up and killed the young man that killed Mumulafa. After the remaining young men used the magic that Mumulafa gave to them to get women, using this magic the young men were able to marry the girls and thus creating the population for the new tribe. This village/clan till this day is called Ngaluwasuw [Mulamula].

Buno continued:

Our story tells of old ways and new beginnings—and also of old rules and new rules. But we are all linked, and we have to decide what rules to use and what stories to keep. This story was chosen by us to tell of our ways and of the ways we have to live with ourselves and with our new beginnings and endings. Even young people need rules. They have to make good rules themselves too.
The next day Nablu Sngat and Ezikiel Wallys, also of Yalu village surrounds, gave us two written pieces of paper. ‘We have written out the story for you again in pidgin, and this will help you to remember.’ The story recounted above is a combination of what we heard at the gathering at Yalu and what was retold with consistency in those two pieces of paper. The story is an indirect telling of an ongoing process of social negotiation—including negotiation as basic as that involved in the setting up of clans. As in many of the stories we heard, there is an acute recognition of change and the need to do something in the face of old and new complexities.

**Place—Past and Present**

Yalu is located about seventeen kilometres out of the centre of Lae along the Lae-Madang and Highlands highway between the airport and the town. It is in the Wampar Local Level Government, Huon District in Morobe Province. Yalu is made up of eight small community settlements ranging in population from nineteen to 957 people. These settlements, much like the story that Buno Storm and others unfolded to us, arose out of different circumstances and reasons. Yalu village remains the central point, primarily because of its size and also that it comprises of members of the two most prominent clans—the Timkim clan and the Konzorong clan. The settlements, drawing from NSO 2,000 National Population Census report
include Yalu (957 people, 160 households); Ambuasutz (218 people, 33 households); Langalanga (311 people, 62 households), Anund (19 people, 3 households), Yalu Bridge (184 people, 29 households); Parapi (326 people, 54 households); Yalu Plantation (191 people, 42 households) and Junglik Plantation (403 people, 76 households). In total, Yalu and its surrounds consist of approximately 2,609 people and 460 households. These settlements encompass the area where the Aliwang language has become the main mode of communication. (According to one community member said that ‘Aliwang’ is a word from the past—it means the shield ‘Ali’ made of wood and which was sometimes used as a base to sleep upon. ‘Wang’ means to be on top, and this means to be ready to defend your people.) The customary boundaries, now being negotiated, extend from the ninth mile to the Nawai Mountain boundary, back of West Taraka down to the Markham River.

Yalu now has an estimated total population of 1,500. It is occupied by both the local Aliwang people and settlers from other parts of Morobe such as the Waingg and Kabwum people, as well as people from other parts of the country. Yalu has a large land area beginning at Nine Mile to Markham Bridge, over the mountains to West Taraka, Bumayong and Igam Army Barracks and ending at Muya Primary School along the Highlands highway. Because of this large unused land area, most of it is occupied by settlers especially from Nine Mile all the way to Yalu along both sides of the highway. Land-owners have until the recent past ‘sold’ their land to new settlers. The Aliwang people belong to thirteen main clan groups. To list them is to give an impression of deep history, but they are also part of what we saw in the opening story is continuously in process—the Ngalugosol (Timkim, the main clan), Konzolong, Ngalukumbun, Chupeng, Alivis, Ngalumbas, Ngalunuf, Ngalutumb, Ngaluwasuw, Mimin, Siwon, Zam and Waril. Apart from the Aliwang language, Yalu people also speak the Yabem language which is one of the two common languages spoken throughout the province along with Kote.

Organization and Governance

People live in family groups and clans. One household, for example, comprises the elderly parents, their children, in-laws and grandchildren. Some grown-up children have their own houses built next to their parents’ homes. Young boys and unmarried men live in haus bois which are usually in a central location close to the families. Girls and young women live with their parents in the family homes. Results from the Community Sustainability Questionnaire indicated that 59 per cent of Yalu respondents identified ‘neighbourhood or place that you live’ as their main source of community, as opposed to 28 per cent overall across Papua New Guinea. Overall, respondents were much more likely to select ‘more than one of these’ when given a list of possible sources of community (42 per cent), suggesting that in Yalu and surrounds, there is perhaps a stronger
identification with place as the locus of community than a particular group of persons. Almost all Yalu respondents (96 per cent) were either satisfied or very satisfied with feeling part of the community, much higher than the overall PNG figure 80 per cent.

In our second visit to Yalu, it was apparent that there was a great deal of community development activity. Ezkiel Wallys, co-ordinator of the women’s group affiliated with Soroptimist Lae, an international NGO, provided a sheet of paper listing the number of activities and groups that are currently active in Yalu and the surrounds. These include six youth groups, Giamsao Women’s Group, Aring Women’s Group (affiliated with Soroptimist Lae), Aliwang Land Trust (affiliated with Ahi Land Mobilisation), Law and Order Committees (twenty young men helping law and order committees as task officers), small enterprises (Aliwang Holdings and Mopong Binis Group), Aliwang Cocoa Growers Association, twenty-one cocoa fermentaries, with more in the pipeline, and a locally managed water control group, that collects K1.00 per month for basic maintenance costs. The national Department of Health has also introduced and launched the ‘Healthy Island’ concept to improve healthy living by building ‘VIP’ ventilated pit toilets in the community.

The community members who came around to meet with us were ready to talk and discuss local issues and also about how they were responding to these issues. As was common with other communities, the rise in local crimes and youth-related issues and violence was their main concern. Some of the women felt that there were now many more efforts to build more training programs and activities—and currently the community was building a big training centre on land that had been donated by the Timkam clan leader. There appeared to be a strong relationship with the local authorities and also that was evident in the number of programs and training activities that members of the community were able to attend or participate in as trainers.

Livelihood and Provision

The majority of the people in Yalu are subsistence gardeners. They grow their own food, some look after chicken and pigs and some grow cocoa and betel nut as cash crops. Some of the food they consume themselves and the surplus ones they sell at the main market in Lae. Some of the people rear chicken and pigs for local consumption and a few have trade stores in the village. Some of local people raise chickens and are contracted by the Niugini Table Birds, which has a huge factory a few kilometres down the highway. A contract with Niugini means building a chicken house, and rearing the chicken provided by the company. It is an attractive contract, as the feed is also supplied as is everything else that is required in the rearing of these chickens. The income helps the family to buy other food and also pay for expenses such as school fees and medicine.

Many of the Yalu people earn their income through the sale of garden food
at the market in Lae. In the survey conducted, when asked about the main way of making a living, 74 per cent said that they work within the household (compared to 57 per cent overall), 12 per cent sell goods at market or on the street (compared to 23 per cent overall); 9 per cent receive a wage from the state (compared to 7 per cent overall) and 3 per cent receive a wage from private business (on par with the overall average). Seventy per cent said the main place they got their food was from work done on their own lands or by fishing (compared to 78 per cent overall), 21 per cent selected ‘local shops’ and 3 per cent selected ‘food markets’.

Food is expensive, however, and when these costs are combined with the costs of school fees, medicines and other staples, the result is the community is experiencing the squeeze of modern consumer life. At the same time the survey indicated that only 25 per cent of respondents considered their household to be struggling financially, compared with 57 per cent average across all locales. Seventy per cent of respondents said they were comfortable, much higher than the overall 35 per cent, and 5 per cent said they were well off, compared to 8 per cent across other locales.

The proximity of Yalu to Lae, and also their location immediately off the highway, meant that there were better opportunities for travel to other places for jobs or seeking supporting sources of income. But it remained that the community as a whole is becoming more and more dependent on a cash-income, and the cash-economy was supplanting former reciprocity-based systems of exchange and barter. Young people were keen to experience life in the city, and there has been a slow increase of numbers of young men and women seeking employment in Lae and also other places further away from Lae.

**Learning and Education**

Local knowledge and special skills are passed down from fathers to sons and from mothers to daughters. For example, local knowledge in making a garden and planting certain local vegetables is passed down within the family. Special skills like black magic and sorcery are also passed down through specific and selected individuals who are within the family group. Some of the persons interviewed indicated that respect for elders and traditional knowledge of doing certain things and activities seems to be waning and many of the elderly people said that the young people in the community are not interested to learn or know about traditional things. They say young people have lost the respect and value of traditional customs. Western values have influenced the way they behave and traditional values are slowly diminishing. They said traditional values should be preserved within the community. Nevertheless it is obvious that rituals and stories have not lost their place in community life. The retelling of an ancient legend (as the storytellers called it) recorded above, and the way it was related in its relevance to contemporary times is a good indication of the use of stories to negotiate change. It was also significant that the story was finished by a
younger member of the community.

When asked what kinds of training or learning would be considered particularly helpful the following responses came up: agriculture 73 per cent (compared to 53 per cent overall); technology 16 per cent (compared to 18 per cent overall); family-life 16 per cent (compared to 37 per cent overall), management 22 per cent (compared to 27 per cent overall); literacy 16 per cent (compared to 19 per cent overall); income-generation 18 per cent (compared to 35 per cent overall) and traditional ways of doing things 16 per cent (compared to 33 per cent overall). Tertiary education as highest level of education completed (at 9 per cent) was on par with the overall figure across the country, whilst primary school was 46 per cent, just slightly higher than the overall figure of 42 per cent. Secondary-level education was much lower at 28 per cent, compared to the overall at 33 per cent, while trade training was higher at 17 per cent than the overall average of 13 per cent. There were no tertiary level qualified compared to the 3 per cent overall.

There appears to be some NGO groups that are funding a couple of small training activities. One such activity is the building of a learning building, focusing primarily on training skills for women. This activity is coordinated by the Timkam clan, one of the two largest clans in the Yalu community area. The site for this centre is on Timkan land. In October 2007, during a site visit by the research team, it was apparent that the basic structural foundations were in place. A couple of capable and strong community leaders are playing a critical part in organizing funding opportunities and addressing community needs. Yalu has two trained teachers ready to teach adult-literacy classes as soon as the building is ready. There also a male member who has attended a week-long course in leadership management in Lae. The course was run by a representative from the Department for Community Development. The women in Yalu seem particularly active in building networks and partnerships with local government and organisations. It was evident that there were also a lot of negotiations and activities in dealing with the issue of land ownership and reclaiming customary land.

**Endnotes**

1 Interestingly, though, 39 per cent of respondents from Yalu were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their feeling of safety, compared to 12 per cent overall. It is possible that these task forces are new activities to respond to the feelings of insecurity in the area and amongst the communities. The first visit and survey was conducted in early 2006 and the second visit was in mid-2007.

2 In 1950, approximately 150 fermentaries that had existed were closed down by colonial authorities. In 1978, the village decided to rebuild, and currently there are 21 small ones functioning.