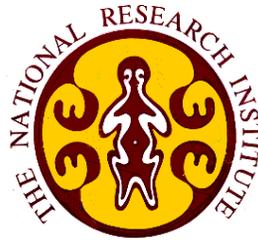


**THE NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
PAPUA NEW GUINEA  
DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 120**



**COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT POLICY  
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**



**NRI  
The National Research Institute**

**The National Research Institute**

**Discussion Paper No. 120**



**COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT POLICY  
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

**by**

**Michael Unage**

**NRI  
The National Research Institute**

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Discussion Paper No. 120

The NRI is an independent statutory authority established by an Act of Parliament in 1988 and confirmed by the *IASER (Amendment) Act* 1993. NRI's main aims are to undertake research into the social, political, economic, educational, legal, environmental, and cultural issues and problems of Papua New Guinea and to formulate practical solutions to these problems. Research results are published in the following NRI publication series:

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## CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
Basic Premises	1
Situational Analysis	4
Challenges and Responses	6
<b>THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<b>9</b>
Theory of Empowerment	9
Structuration Theory	9
Feminist Thought	10
Theory of Communicative Action	11
Theory of Social Economy	12
<b>APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES</b>	<b>14</b>
Various Approaches	14
Research Methods	18
<b>POLICY RESEARCH PROJECTIONS</b>	<b>22</b>
Community Governance Research	23
Community Learning Research	24
Social Economy Research	26
<b>POLICY RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS</b>	<b>29</b>
Assumptions of Community Governance	29
Assumptions of Community Learning	31
Assumptions of Social Economy	32
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>36</b>

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CLDC	Community Learning and Development Centre
DPLG	Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs
EHP	Eastern Highlands Province
FBO	Faith-Based Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
ICDP	Integrated Community Development Policy
MBN	Minimum Basic Needs
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MTDP	Medium Term Development Plan
NCD	National Capital District
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRI	National Research Institute
OLPGLLG	Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PLLSMA	Provincial and Local-level Service Monitoring Authority
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHP	Western Highlands Province
WSP	West Sepik Province

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The National Research Institute (NRI)'s research program on community empowerment looks at communities in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and explores the processes that lead to community vulnerability, social disintegration and low social indicators, and offers ideas and strategies to mitigate them and lead toward community empowerment and resilience. The targets of the program are to:

- generate ideas on community research and policy development;
- develop strategies for community capacity, planning and transformation;
- explore possibilities for community empowerment for self-sufficiency and poverty reduction;
- assist in developing strategies for community learning and people's self-critical reflection on their situations; and
- facilitate linkages, networks and partnership among community development groups.

In PNG, the experiences of dependency, socio-economic vulnerability, political patronizing and social exclusions are on the rise, making people in communities powerless. Compounded by the problems of illiteracy, ignorance, disease, indolence, poverty and lack of government services, this situation can only be transformed through concerted effort. Problem analysis is indeed crucial, and a critical reflection on the situation by the people themselves is absolutely necessary for taking the initial step in changing their circumstances.

The community empowerment research program has identified three major challenges that it will give research attention and put forward for policy consideration. The first challenge facing communities is the experience of powerlessness; the second challenge is ignorance that portrays an array of problems in people's attitude, and the third is the challenge of poverty. The three challenges serve as broad categories under which other related issues become aligned. The community empowerment research program is determined to investigate the three concerns raised above by proposing policy strategies in the areas of:

- community governance to deal with people's powerlessness;
- community learning to deal with ignorance; and
- social economy to deal with poverty.

Theories in the social science are sought to give a theoretical foundation to the problems and necessary interventions. The theory of structuration and feminist thought are drawn upon to guide the thinking on empowerment, the theory of communicative action is sought to direct the discussion on community learning and dialogue, and the theory of social economy is drawn upon to deal with community economics.

Also, approaches and methodologies are necessary for doing policy research. The community empowerment program offers six approaches that scholars, academics, states, donors and organizations have taken in community studies and development. The six approaches, though not mutually exclusive, are:

- knowledge-centered approach;
- project-based approach;

- minimum basic needs approach;
- people-centered approach;
- model-based approach; and
- integrated approach.

The approaches suggested above are not prescribed; rather, it is left to the researcher to propose a suitable method and tool. This framework, however, usefully suggests some of the potential options available. Also useful is the fact that a few of those approaches can be combined to address a particular research query.

Research looks at challenges faced by people regarding their needs and wants in specific situations. It studies the causes, learns from those challenges and systematically documents the issues, using appropriate methodologies. Generally, two methods of research are often employed in doing community research. They are the qualitative and the quantitative methods. However, both encompass their own specific varieties of methods and useful research tools. Quantitative research methods involve the collection and analysis of data that can be represented in numbers, and often involves statistical analysis. Other methods used by social scientists are qualitative methods. These methods collect and analyze empirical evidence that is not numerical.

However, there is another method that has become useful for community research which is called the Participatory Action Research (PAR). Participatory Action Research is a practical research tool involving a cycle of reflection, planning, implementation and reflection. It is also an evaluation and monitoring tool that the people in communities can use to monitor progress. The preliminary objectives of PAR are to increase:

- the researcher's understanding of the local situation; and
- the insight of the local people into what factors and relations are the root cause of, and contributing factors, to their problem.

Community governance is a crucial area for research because it involves community mobilization, organization, planning, involvement and development. Research areas include power dynamics, network and partnership, social capital stocks, social protection mechanisms, service delivery demands, and others. The broad and major outcome is that people in communities achieving a certain degree of independence and self-determination.

Community learning is the major thrust in the Integrated Community Development Policy (ICDP). Research would explore aspects of community conversation and dialogue, people's critical reflection, community data management systems, universal basic education, technical skills, life-skills development and others. The ultimate outcome would be that people in communities would increase knowledge, be technically and practically skillful, become wise and be enlightened.

One reason for poverty in many developing countries is the lack of social economy development among citizens. Economic empowerment among the rural community is a necessary step to reducing poverty. Research conducted would include household income and expenditure surveys including self-reliant activities, informal sector economy, cooperative societies, entrepreneurship, micro finances and others.

The need to empower communities is an intricate assignment. Some may claim that the cost is far beyond its benefits. The current wave of individualism, consumerism and liberalism may hamper community empowerment. People may be content with their individual attainment and their work toward achieving personal goals. However, community empowerment can also bring collective benefits. There are many unresolved issues that require resolving through collective efforts.

## BACKGROUND

The National Research Institute (NRI) initiated the community empowerment program in the last quarter of 2008. Under the program, a community case study was undertaken in Domil Community in the Western Highlands Province and a Community Transformation Conference was held in June 2009. Two articles were published (Searchlight and Spotlight) on the case-study and the publication of the conference proceedings was launched on 17 June 2010 titled, *Community Transformation: Unlocking the Development Potential of the People*. Vital information was drawn from the case study, the conference presentations and literature search, upon which this policy research framework is developed. Also, other relevant government documents did inform the design of the framework.

The purpose of designing a policy research framework on community empowerment is to:

- define the parameters in which research activities would be identified and the parameters for policy recommendation and decision;
- serve as a guide to be used by subsequent researchers within the community empowerment program;
- assist other community development partners, especially in the business of research and policy development, who may wish to consult this framework for their own purpose;
- inform the wider public regarding issues on community empowerment; and
- make the framework available for use in academia.

### Basic Premises

From the National Research Institute's perspective, two basic premises are drawn for this program on community empowerment. The first comes from the NRI Director's letter of offer to the author to lead the program on community empowerment and the other derives from the National Research Institute's Corporate Plan. To begin with, a paragraph from the Director's letter serves as a directional statement that needs quoting. It reads:

Some government agencies have expressed interest to develop thinking on poverty issues and on the development of communities as vibrant learning communities that can work to improve themselves. NRI may be able to work in this area and generate some ideas on policy development as well as for research.

From the directional statement quoted above, the following points could be extracted as the means towards achieving certain targets for community empowerment policy research. These could be achieved by:

- exploring possibilities for community empowerment that would lead to self-sufficiency and poverty reduction;
- assisting in developing strategies for community learning and people's self-critical reflections on situations;

## 2 *Community Empowerment Policy Research Framework*

- developing strategies for community capacity, planning and transformation; and
- generating ideas on community research and policy development.

From the targets, the following objectives were built into NRI's Corporate Plan, which will explore areas that would assist and bolster community empowerment. The objectives of the National Research Institute's Corporate Plan on community empowerment (2009:23–24) are to:

- develop a conceptual framework for community empowerment and devise processes toward strengthening the sources of social capital;
- build a strong research, learning and action culture among communities;
- create knowledge about appropriate institutions and ways of involving people in policy making and decision making that affect them and their communities;
- identify and analyze livelihood issues that affect contemporary Papua New Guinean communities; and
- facilitate linkages, networks and partnership among community development groups, and explore processes and institutions for managing conflicting cultural values.

This framework tries to blend both the targets extracted from the directional statement and the objectives found in the NRI Corporate Plan, which sets the parameters for this policy research framework.

Apart from the National Research Institute's intention, other broad but relevant policy documents and declarations do influence the development of this framework. The documents are:

- Integrated Community Development Policy;
- The National Goals and Directive Principles;
- The Eight Point Plan;
- The Millennium Development Goals;
- The Papua New Guinea Vision 2050; and
- The Determination Assigning Service Delivery Functions and Responsibilities.

A brief introduction to these policies and declarations is given below:

*Integrated Community Development Policy:* The Integrated Community Development Policy (ICDP) was developed in 2007 by the Department for Community Development as a systematic approach to dealing with the needs of communities, with a special emphasis on Community Learning and Development Centres (CLDC). The policy is focused on four areas; community governance, community learning, community economics and community environment. So far, some communities have been piloted by the Department for Community Development and have established Community Learning and Development Centres. The content of the policy has greatly influenced the thinking behind the formulation of this framework.

*The National Goals and Directive Principles:* The five National Goals and Directive Principles are found in the introduction to the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea. The import behind the directive principles is to direct development and that all development must be informed by these goals and principles. The five national goals and directive principles include: integral human development, equality and participation, national sovereignty and self-reliance, natural resources and environment, and Papua New Guinean ways. Most of the ideas have special relevance for this policy research framework regarding community empowerment, especially Goal No. 2, Equality and Participation and Goal No. 3, National Sovereignty and Self-Reliance.

*The Eight Point Development Plan:* Papua New Guinea attained independence in 1975. In order to develop a path for nation building, the founding leaders produced a farsighted development blueprint called the “Eight Point Plan” as the guiding principles upon which the development plan of Papua New Guinea could be mapped and implemented, through the different levels of society. However, after independence, people witnessed efforts by the national government to formulate different plans and policies to address its development agenda. While these plans carried various strands of development thinking, almost all had synergy with the spirit of the Eight Point Plan.

*The Millennium Development Goals:* The United Nations Millennium Declaration set the agenda for development during the first 15 years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with its commitment to human rights, health, democracy, peace, security and good governance. The 189 members of the UN General Assembly, including Papua New Guinea, adopted this declaration on 8 September 2000. In doing this, they committed themselves to a world in which sustaining development and eliminating poverty would have the highest priority. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are relevant to the development of this framework, especially in addressing lack of development and poverty issues in the country.

*The PNG Vision 2050:* In 2008, the Somare-Temu Government initiated the development of a national long-term strategic plan. A think tank was formed to brainstorm and develop concept papers on seven pillars, to be translated into the PNG Vision 2050. That plan seeks to address Papua New Guinea’s apparent paradox of ‘rich and poor’. The fundamental problem of poverty in wealth, so to speak, seems to lie in the failure by successive governments to focus on critical aspects and strategies regarding the development of the nation’s human, natural and social capital. Though all the pillars are relevant to this framework, the third pillar on institutional development and seventh pillar on spiritual, cultural and community development are proximate to the thinking of this framework and have shaped its development.

*The Determination Assigning Service Delivery Functions and Responsibilities:* This document was prepared by the Provincial and Local-level Service Monitoring Authority (PLLSMA) within the Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs (DPLG). The determinations assign functions and responsibilities to lower levels of government with the view to improve service delivery to the local communities. The determination of the national governments is to encourage each level of government to invest in its own capacity, both in terms of people and systems, for worthy outputs. Such determinations are needed for greater coordination

and for the delineation of specific functions to each tier of government in order to avoid either confusion or duplication.

### **Situational Analysis**

Policy research is problem-driven and is a very sensitive receptive to the context in which issues and challenges arise. The basic assumption is that many of the problems faced today are the result of the rapid social change that is taking place in the country. The process of colonization, decolonization and nationhood has resulted in a major shift in the social processes in Papua New Guinean communities. The shift away from the close-knit traditional group to a mixed and open society does contribute to community fragmentation and people's displacement. Experiences of dependency, socio-economic vulnerability, political patronizing and social exclusion are on the increase and they demonstrate that people are gradually becoming disempowered, meaning that they now cannot take control of their lives. Compounded by the problems of illiteracy, ignorance, disease, indolence, poverty and lack of government services, these situations confronting communities can only be transformed through a concerted effort.

Furthermore, lack of development and missed opportunities do increasingly instill in people a sense of haplessness. For instance, this sense of haplessness was depicted in a writing which was found on the wall of a rundown government building, which reads: "born by mistake, live by chance". The innuendo expresses some deep psychological pain resulting from the experience of misery by this individual. The writer sees that he or she was brought into this world without a destiny to live for, and the life he or she lives is determined by fleeting chances. The wide ranging law and order problems caused by many young, frustrated people are, to a great extent, countermeasures to the feeling of haplessness and desperation. These and other problematic issues need to be further explored through research and policy analysis so that they could be better understood.

The *PNG Vision 2050* document (2009:1) states that the country has not progressed well, particularly in delivering services to rural and remote communities. The document expressly states that the nation's history indicates that there was lack of clear strategic actions in development plans, the experience of corruption and poor governance, poor economic performance despite periods of growth, and poor social development. The development performance or the lack of it can be found in NRI's publication titled, *Papua New Guinea's Development Performance* (Webster and Duncan, 2010). A sentence in this publication states that progress on development could be quantified in terms of the number of people lifted out of poverty, gains in literacy rates, falls in infant and maternal mortality rates, and increase in life expectancy (*ibid*:5).

Baseline data are necessary to understand the basic indicators in order to improve on them. On the international comparative list, Papua New Guinea does not score well in its demographic, social and economic indicators according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report (2009:83, 89). It can be argued that this demonstrates the widespread lack of human and community development. Table 1 shows Papua New Guinea's development indicators as provided by the UNFPA.

**Table 1: Demographic, Social and Economic Indicators.**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Source</b>
Infant mortality total per 1000 live births	49	UNFPA
Life expectancy, M/F	59.3/63.6	UNFPA
Maternal mortality ratio	470	UNFPA
Primary Enrolment (%) (gross) M/F	60/50	UNFPA
Illiteracy (%) (>15 years) M/F	37.9/46.6	UNFPA
Births per 1000 women, ages 15-19	55	UNFPA
HIV prevalence rate (%), ages 15-49	1.5	UNFPA
Total population (millions) (2009)	6.7	UNFPA
Projected population (millions) (2050)	12.9	UNFPA
Average population growth rate (%) 2005-2010	2.4	UNFPA
Urban (%) (2009)	13	UNFPA
Urban growth rate (2005-2010)	2.3	UNFPA
Population ha arable & perm. crop land	5.4	UNFPA
Total fertility rate (2009)	4.01	UNFPA
Birth with skilled attendants (%)	39	UNFPA
GNI Capita PPP\$ (2007)	1 870	UNFPA
Health expenditure, public (% of GDP)	2.6	UNFPA
Under-5 mortality M/F estimates (2005-2010)	70/68	UNFPA
Access to improved drinking water sources	40	UNFPA
Human Development Index (out of 182 countries)	148	PNG Vision 2050

The demographic, social and economic indicators, as shown above, demonstrate the lack of development in Papua New Guinean communities as well as lack of policy attention given to the challenges confronting rural communities.

Indeed, the challenge of ignorance can still be a concern as half of the total population still needs to be enrolled in primary education. The country has an illiteracy rate that shows 40 percent of people are not able to read and write. As shown in the indicators above, poverty is an issue to be addressed, as the average person in PNG earns about US\$5 per day and 60 percent of the population does not have access to improved drinking water sources. Although there is some indication of the level of ignorance and poverty from the source above, there is nothing that will directly quantify the level of powerlessness. Perhaps one can infer that lack of empowerment of people and

community does contribute to the low human development indicators, and the author will try to demonstrate this contention as well in the framework.

It is plausible to say that the rapid pace of socio-economic change in communities has not been matched by the pace of policy analysis and development to support community development. Sanida and Yala (2010) stated that although there were about nine development plans for PNG, the realization of those plans were hardly tangible. On the other hand, development in rural communities is often excluded from policy decisions on key issues affecting communities and people's well-being. While the physical development in cities and towns is more advanced, the same is not true for rural communities that are struggling to catch up with the development pace.

Despite the general climate of neglect, some rural communities, such as the community in Domil and similar communities in PNG, have shown significant resilience and creativity in addressing issues relating to community growth and sustainability. Langille *et al* (2008) contended that although forces such as globalization are sometimes presented as inescapable forces acting on people and places, it is evident that human agency, both individual and collective, can play a key role in determining economic and social responses and outcomes. This contention becomes the major impetus regarding the research program on community empowerment.

This framework tries to explicate this concern in order to help in improving the human development index and to assist the government in formulating a sound policy for community empowerment. As projected in the PNG Vision 2050 goal, Papua New Guinea will be among the top 50 countries in its human development index in the year 2050. In order to achieve that, and recognizing that PNG's population is based in the rural communities, a state-community synergy in development planning and implementation is necessary to collectively work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal targets, which in actual fact is the realization of an improvement in the quality of life among people.

### **Challenges and Responses**

Problem analysis is indeed crucial for the research program on community empowerment. A critical self-reflection on the situations by the people themselves is absolutely necessary for taking the initial step towards transforming their current experiences and circumstances. The community empowerment program, therefore, has identified three major challenges that it will give research attention to and put forward for policy consideration. The first challenge facing communities is the experience of powerlessness; the second challenge is illiteracy that portrays an array of problems in people's attitude and aptitude, and the third is the challenge of poverty.

However, these three challenges serve as broad categories under which other related issues become aligned, since they are all in one way or another intimately interrelated. The three categories and their associated problems are not meant as an exhaustive list of community challenges. Table 2 shows the three broad categories and the associated problems.

**Table 2: The Three Broad Challenges and Associated Problems**

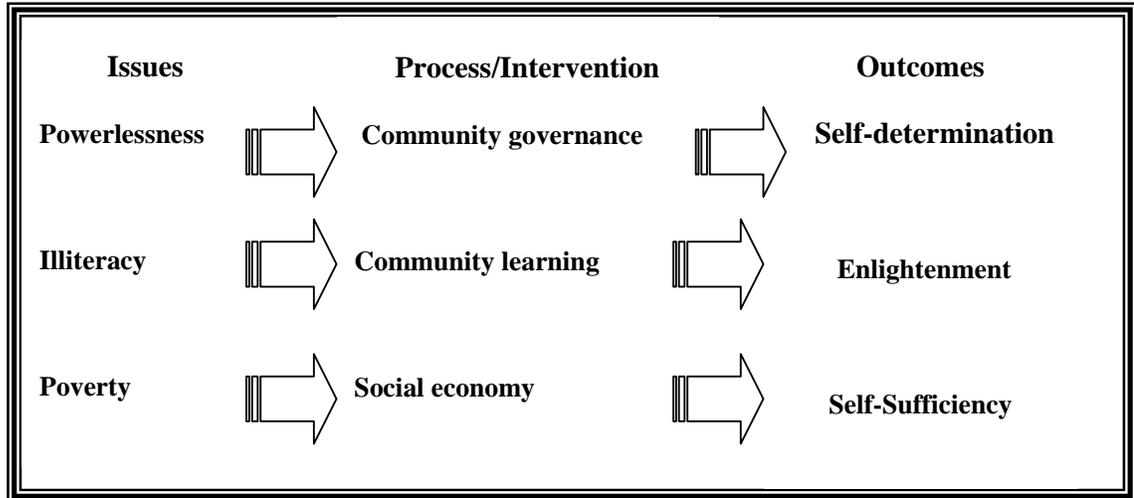
<b>Powerlessness</b>	<b>Ignorance</b>	<b>Poverty</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the feeling of vulnerability;</li> <li>• insecurity and anxiety;</li> <li>• uncertainty;</li> <li>• indecisiveness;</li> <li>• loss of control and direction;</li> <li>• leadership crisis/tussles;</li> <li>• -the experience of power vacuum;</li> <li>• the feeling of haplessness;</li> <li>• -personal/communal displacement;</li> <li>• lawlessness and disorder;</li> <li>• inter-group conflicts;</li> <li>• anonymity;</li> <li>• substance abuse;</li> <li>• isolation;</li> <li>• mistrust;</li> <li>• lack of cooperation;</li> <li>• political instability;</li> <li>• loss of communal values;</li> <li>• -corruption/elite &amp; local capture;</li> <li>• disorganization;</li> <li>• disintegration of community; and</li> <li>• others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• illiteracy;</li> <li>• lack of access to basic education;</li> <li>• lack of access to information;</li> <li>• lack of knowledge and skills acquisition;</li> <li>• array of attitude problems;</li> <li>• lack of critical awareness;</li> <li>• lack of dialogue;</li> <li>• disease and malnutrition;</li> <li>• gender discrimination;</li> <li>• -witchcraft/sorcery accusation and execution;</li> <li>• aesthetic insensitivity;</li> <li>• inferiority complex;</li> <li>• negative complacency; and</li> <li>• others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -lack of choice among alternatives;</li> <li>• lack of capital;</li> <li>• poor living conditions;</li> <li>• homelessness;</li> <li>• lack of land;</li> <li>• general hardships;</li> <li>• indolence;</li> <li>• lack of ownership;</li> <li>• inequality in the distribution of goods and services;</li> <li>• lack of basic government services;</li> <li>• high cost of living;</li> <li>• cash poverty;</li> <li>• over-population;</li> <li>• external debt;</li> <li>• lack of food;</li> <li>• lack of market;</li> <li>• dependency;</li> <li>• dependency burden; and</li> <li>• -other effects of poverty (prostitution, HIV/AIDS, theft, child labor, etc.)</li> </ul>

Problem analysis also involves cause and effect analysis, and when doing a cause and effect analysis, one can arrive at a very complex and even confused schema. Only through a well designed research activity can one assist in this inquiry. For instance, in the broad analysis of the three challenges, poverty can be a cause of powerlessness. One can easily become a slave to the one who is well-off and wealthy. Likewise, illiteracy can become the cause of poverty. For instance, one might own a large piece of land, but lack of knowledge and relevant skills to develop it would make one idle and poor. Conversely, poverty may be the cause of lack of knowledge, in that one does not have the money to pursue formal education, and poverty thus results in one's lack of participation in the formal economy.

Simply, the community empowerment program wishes to, at the outset, work out a simple strategy in order to assist in mitigating problems arising in the community, through research and policy pathways. It discusses the three major challenges, the

interventions necessary to facilitating change, and the envisaged outcomes. Table 3 shows this simple strategy, which is a snapshot of the discussion that will follow in this policy research framework.

**Table 3: Simple Strategy**



## **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The search for a theory concerning community empowerment can be vexing, given the multiple theories in the domain of the social science. One needs to be selective and see what theory or group of theories suits the purpose of one's research framework, or provides the kind of theoretical direction one desires to rely on in trying to understand empowerment processes in communities. Thus, appropriate theories should be examined, in order to systematically analyze community vulnerability, ignorance and poverty, and offer strategies for community empowerment and resilience.

Specific considerations for a theoretical underpinning are the theory of empowerment, the theory of communicative action and the theory of social economy. These theories, discussed below, only highlight the direction of the thought process. The concern here is to link the three broad issues (powerlessness, ignorance and poverty) and the necessary interventions suggested (community governance, community learning and social economy) and ground them on a solid theoretical framework.

### **Theory of Empowerment**

The theory of empowerment is an offshoot of the critical theory originated in the social science. However, the theory of empowerment referred to here is specifically informed by two trends of thought: they are the structuration theory and feminist ideology.

#### ***Structuration Theory***

Structuration theory (sometimes referred to as duality of structure) is suitable in that it explains the various levels of empowerment, as well as analysis of any social process. Sadan (1997:140), who employs the theory of structuration made popular by the work of Anthony Giddens (1984), asserts that community empowerment is a human activity that has structural and organizational aspects, which are aimed at changing social systems and creating structural alternatives. Indeed, the structuration theory is the basis for analyzing the empowerment process because it is critical, self-critical and holistic, and relates directly to the concept of power.

Giddens sees the social structure and the human agency as two factors which build and activate the social relationships, and power as a central and important component of both. Giddens integrates two separate approaches: the idea of power as a voluntary human activity and the idea that power is structural, and asserts that it is more a quality of the society than of particular people. Hence, one can explain power simultaneously in terms of human action and in terms of structure; it is the ability of individuals to act in a directed and voluntary manner and to bring about changes; it is also systems of domination and rules, and of the rules and resources connected with these. Here, Giddens creates the basis for the discussion of empowerment and provides a theoretical link that integrates micro and macro phenomena; of action by individuals and the change that this action can bring to the environment.

Influenced by Foucault, Giddens sees every individual as possessing knowledge and even consciousness, and in this he is seen to be the most optimistic among the theorists of power. Power, according to Giddens (1984:14), is to be able to 'act otherwise' and be able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the resolute goal to influence a specific process or state of affairs. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. Giddens contended that a disempowered person loses the capacity to 'make a difference'; that is, to exercise some sort of power. On the other hand, some people see power as above all, a property of society or of a social community. The point is not to eliminate one of these types of conception at the expense of the other, but to express their relation as a feature of the duality of structure.

Sadan (1997:68-69), following Giddens, was able to summarize the basic principles of power. He says:

- Power is a basic component of human agency. Absolute lack of power means ceasing to be a human agent. Power is the human ability to intervene in events and to make a difference.
- Power is an inseparable part of the social interaction. Power is an integral feature of social life. It is always part of the relations, and its signs may be discerned even at micro level of interaction.
- An inequality exists in different people's ability and access to resources, which also creates an inequality among them in the sphere of power. Hence, the development of ability and access to resources are key concepts for an understanding of the power that people can exercise.
- Power can also be described on a continuum of autonomy and dependence. Unequal access to resources for realizing goals and unequal opportunities to influence the course of the interaction ensure mutual relations, because each side is to a certain extent dependent on the other, and also autonomous to a certain extent in its action. The investigation of power involves exposing this dialectic of dependence and autonomy in specific situation.
- Power is a process. Power is a factor that intervenes between human agency (in the form of every person's inherent ability to influence the world around him) and social structure (in the form of the structures of domination that determine the degree of a person's ability to influence the world. These relations, between human agency and social structure, are dynamic and processual.

### ***Feminist Thought***

According to McDowell and Pringle (1992:9-17), feminist thought is a political move by women from the invisible to the visible, from the periphery to the centre, from the private/domestic domain to the public/professional domain — *from exclusion and segregation to inclusion and integration in society, from vulnerability to empowerment*.<sup>1</sup> At the very heart of feminine ideology is the issue of power disparity and the lack of exercising of that power. Thus, feminist thought, in this instance, has a greater role in assisting in the theory of community empowerment. Why is this linking of feminist thought to the theory of empowerment possible?

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<sup>1</sup> My italics.

It is possible because, increasingly, the mainstream of people in communities is pushed to the periphery of political and economic activities and benefits in this developing nation of Papua New Guinea. The innuendo expressed by the writing mentioned earlier, “born by mistake, live by chance”, is in fact an expression of disempowerment, marginalization and exclusion experienced by a growing number of disadvantaged citizens. The degradation, suppression and oppression said to be experienced by women in strong patriarchal communities has now entered the mainstream of socio-political life of the average Papua New Guinean, where the greater population is experiencing vulnerability, dependency, voicelessness and exclusion from all forms of participation in decision making and resource distribution. With the growing impoverishment of people in communities, policies and strategies are necessary to engender people empowerment so that they become self-reliant, independent, have a voice and are included in all development plans and implementation. The feminist ideology would greatly assist and offer valuable insight into the process of community empowerment.

### **Theory of Communicative Action**

The theory of communicative action suggests that people learn who they are as autonomous agents from their basic relationship with others. Communicating and learning are basic to human living and interaction and to the development of peoples’ culture and society. In order to empower individuals and to transform communities, the theory of communicative action provides the necessary insight. Habermas (1984) argues that the key to liberation is rather to be found in language and communication between people. From these bases, he builds up his theory of communicative action. Communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge, in a process of achieving mutual understandings. It then coordinates action towards social integration and solidarity. Finally, communicative action is the process through which people form their identities.

Here, Habermas underscores the importance of communicative action for community empowerment and transformation and provides the very basis for the importance of community learning and development. Knowledge and skills are transmitted, new ideas and innovation emerge in this creatively dialogical process, transformations happen to our ways of knowing and understanding issues, consensus are reached, cooperation among people is found and, importantly, in this process, people’s identities are formed. Indeed, the theory of communicative action is very crucial to the concept of community learning and dialogue.

The theory of communicative action has now gained many nuances, especially in its application to practical situations. One such is community learning and interaction. According to Mackeracher (1996), it is inborn nature for people to discuss, interact, share information or ‘meaning’ and learn from each other. It is not unusual that learning is a normal and natural phenomenon that has been used as a medium for both survival and for improving conditions in communities. Again, Moore & Brooks (1997) claim that individuals and community organizations need networks and normative systems for capturing, processing and understanding data information and knowledge that can then be used for creating application, implementation and evaluation systems for their community related experiences. Communities use a variety of methods to capture this information and share experiences. Communities

have numerous formal and informal information sharing processes and provide numerous opportunities for group participation and networking.

A learning process which ignores critical analysis of human behaviour protects the status quo in society and blocks the learner's creative ability to think and learn. Critical thinking and analysis are among the cornerstones in community education and if allowed can lay the foundation for dialogue, communication, transformation and sustainability. Finally Nielsen (2002) offers a summary that community learning is a methodology founded on environment and community sustainability, and guided by four components:

- open participation;
- sharing information;
- networking; and
- building dialogue.

### **Theory of Social Economy**

To deal effectively with the issues of poverty, both at the theoretical and practical level, social economy is proposed as a response to be embraced by people and groups in communities. To begin to understand the social economy as a theoretical concept, one needs to start with the fact that in its broadest sense its practice is everywhere and, in important ways, has always been with us. For example, Fontan and Shragge (2000:3) argue that the social economy "has been with us as long as humans have worked communally and shared in the results of their labour". However, the concept of social economy goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when various new types of organisations and enterprises were formed collectively by groups of people in response to problems they were facing due to deep transformations of the economic system. People formed co-operative societies, friendly (mutual benefit) societies and other forms of undertakings which aimed at organizing production, consumption, access to credit and access to health and other services on a more equitable and democratic basis.

In today's terms, the social economy refers to enterprises of the co-operative movements, mutual benefit and insurance societies, foundations and all other types of non-profit organizations which all share some principles, making them correspond to the 'third sector' of modern economies. Indeed, social economy organisations differ from the private for-profit sector as their primary goal is to serve members' needs or a broader public interest, instead of maximizing and distributing profits to shareholders or members. Broadly, social economy is defined as an economic activity neither controlled directly by the state nor controlled by the profit logic of the market; activity that prioritizes the social well-being of communities and marginalized individuals over partisan political directives or individual gain.

Karl Polanyi is considered a pioneer in identifying social foundations of economics throughout history. Polanyi's arguments found in his monumental work, *The Great Transformation* (1957) is similar to Fontan and Shragge's position in that for most of history, human economy, as a rule, is submerged in social relationships. This means that rather than portraying a for-profit orientation, the 'economic problem' was solved within the context of, and for the benefit of, social relationship. Polanyi argues for a transformation of the economy to one that is socially focussed and for social goals.

Polanyi tries to point out that the economic activity is markedly different from the economic activity undertaken in the market system. Social agenda drives the economy, rather than economic concerns driving the society.

Polanyi's economic position is in strict contrast with that developed by Adam Smith, the proponent of the neo-liberal economy. In an edited version of Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1976) claimed that he has done more than any other thinker to create the problem to obscure the functioning and the concept of the social economy as economic activity. Smith says that humanity has a 'propensity to truck, barter and exchange,' not for social good but for individual gain (*ibid.*: 17). For Smith, economic activity is understood as individual, rational and of self-interest. His views comprise the basis of neoclassical economics, the dominant economic theory today. The social economy challenges neoclassical economics implicitly by searching for a social sensitive economy.

The other classical figure to be examined and his relevance to the social economy is Karl Marx. Marx is relevant because he is the first historical figure to construct a systematic economic critique of the capitalist market economics while at the same time developing a conception of the social nature of economic production. For Marx, economic activity, even capitalism, can only be understood as a social activity based on social decisions. Crucially for him, therefore, human history is reflective of the economic structures of production. For the social economy, Marx is important because he sees the economic structures of any society as changeable and fundamentally social.

In summary, social economy consists of association or group-based economic initiatives founded on values of:

- service to members of community rather than generating profits;
- autonomous management (not government or market controlled);
- democratic decision making;
- primacy of persons and work over capital; and
- principles of participation and empowerment.

To conclude, the assertion is that the theory of empowerment, the theory of communicative action and the theory of social economy provide the theoretical basis for the program on community empowerment and for this policy research framework. Nonetheless, any research and policy consideration for community empowerment had to be mindful of other pertinent conceptual tools available in community studies.

## **APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES**

This section deals with two aspects: the first on approaches and the second on methodologies. The former discusses the varying approaches taken in community studies, while the latter deals with the appropriate research methodologies in doing community research. Both aspects are envisaged to contribute to the discourse on community empowerment.

### **Various Approaches**

Community empowerment and development was approached in many different ways over the years with different motivations and interests, be they from the perspective of the government, the private sector, the international donor agencies, civil society organizations or other interest groups. Thus, a brief explanation of the various approaches taken for policy research purposes is discussed below, since the issue of approach has been critical to community empowerment processes. In this work, six approaches have been identified. These are: knowledge-centered approach, project-based approach, minimum basic needs approach, people-centered approach, best model approach, and the integrated approach. These six approaches are options. However, there are other approaches which the researcher can seek, depending on the nature of the research enquiry.

#### ***Knowledge-centered Approach***

The knowledge-centered approach is the conventional approach found in the social sciences. Most of the work done in this area falls within the realm of ethnography and social anthropology. The focus is on observing, understanding and documenting what is found among those social groups. The researcher approaches the community as an explorer, an investigator or as an information seeker, while the community is treated as an object of study. Strict rules of science are employed, such as the positivist position taken in the social sciences, of which functionalism and structuralism have become the strongholds in this discipline.

The knowledge-centered approach has its value in that research explores and understands the background information, which has become useful in community development work. Understanding the social setting, the cultural way of doing things, such as work, festivities, how social groups are structured and how people interact, has contributed a lot to the repertoire of knowledge in the field of social science. The multi-culturalism work, respect for minority groups, avoidance of stereotypes, and the dissolving of ethnic enclave consciousness are to a great extent derived from those studies that show a world made up of a diversity of cultures and belief systems.

Despite the valuable contribution of this approach, there are setbacks in regards to policy discussion. The first major criticism of this approach is that communities are only objects of knowledge, and most often do not share in the information generated. Strictly abiding by the positivist tradition, informed by a natural science method, knowledge becomes the focus, and the information becomes the property of academia. Such knowledge is not generated to the public arena of discourse. It only serves the interest of academia.

### ***Project-based Approach***

Most organizations, both within government and non-state actors, feel strongly about certain issues and disburse funds to programs and project activities that it is hoped will provide solutions to the problems. For instance, poverty is perceived as an issue and they engage strategies by which to reduce poverty. Such approaches can derive from political or global interest, as well as agenda of special interest groups. For instance, an international wildlife protection group may fund a community organization to help people conserve large forest areas, or a government policy may introduce universal, free and compulsory education.

The project-based approach is more centralized, bureaucratic and top-down. It involves planning and funding arrangements done in centralized locations, usually away from the needs and aspirations of the people in communities. Usually, project planning is done by an elite population, often aloof from people, but keen on spending money. Important elements in this project-based approach are project identification, project formulation and design, budget approval, implementation and monitoring, completion and evaluation. The intention is to produce anticipated outcomes. The project-based approach still has a stronghold today, especially by state bureaucrats and donor agencies.

The strength of the project-based approach lies in the rigorous and systematic processes of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in trying to achieve the anticipated outcomes. And this approach is indeed a status quo among donor agencies who are keen on pouring money and achieving results, and reporting on progress. The criticism is that this approach is centralized, bureaucratic and top down, while people are treated as recipients, and has a rapport that is simply patron-client in character. The probability of sustaining the specific project activities has been questionable. Experience reveals that a project-based approach often leads to failure because of conflict of interest of the donor/sponsor and the demands and specific interests of the recipients.

### ***Minimum Basic Needs Approach***

The Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) approach is a strategy of prioritizing primary requirements to ensure that the basic needs for survival, security from physical harm, and enabling needs of the individual, family and community are attended to. The focus here is to measure the quality of life in the family. If the family is unable to meet its minimum basic needs on a sustained basis, then the family is considered to be deprived of these basic needs and is therefore in a state of poverty. Those who are classified to be at the highest level of deprivation are targeted for priority assistance. The MBN approach develops tools that will establish a basis for targeting families needing priority action and attention.

The positive feature about this approach is that the rudimentary social unit becomes the focus of attention in policy research. Moreover, the MBN approach can be adopted by local governments as a tool for planning and budgeting and therefore significantly improves resource allocation at the local level. Also important is the fact that such targeted areas are basic requirements demanded by the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations intervention called the Millennium Village

shares the same concern of reducing poverty by targeting hunger hotspots in the world.

The criticism is that MBN is only based on finding poverty needs within families and excludes other common issues confronted by communities. Especially, it forgets the community strengths, its energy, social capital and community dynamic. It neglects the community capacity for self-regulation, self-sufficiency and resilience. Thus, the issues of poverty are more far-ranging than that of hunger, but also include issues such as conflicts, poor governance, lack of education, and so on.

### ***People-centered Approach***

People are regarded in this approach, both as the focus and agents for development. People's participation and involvement in their own development is the quintessence of this approach. People will want to know more about who they are, what they are able to do and what changes they wish to bring to their life and to their environment. Community engagement and participation are part and parcel of this approach. Here, the focus is not only gaining understanding of a situation in the community, the projects and programs perceived as plausible intervention, or the needs of the family and community. The focus is also on the potential and capability of the individual and the community to understand their own life situations, the self-realization of their inadequacies and limitations, their own perceived needs, and the identification of their own strengths towards remedies and resilience.

In this approach communicative action, as discussed in the theoretical consideration, becomes a very important tool and process in the people-centered approach. People communicate and moot the idea, they collectively draw up a plan of activities, they implement the plan and are totally responsible for the outcomes, whether good or bad.

The value in the people-centered approach is that developments will be sustained and it resolves the issue of responsibility and ownership. It is a process in which knowledge is generated, responsibility among people is evoked, people are united in collective efforts, participation and inclusiveness are realized, and people own the process and its outcomes.

The setback is that the people-centered approach can be a prolonged process that requires patience. It is not a quick-fix or band aid solution to an issue, and often the aim is to do with finding a lasting solution to a problem and even to sustain any initiative. In the people-centered approach, the process is valued over the intended outcomes. Often in such situations the outcomes can be deviating and at times unintended. Program planners often find this a vexing engagement, as there are uneven and diverse positions, statuses, views, needs and wants, and to seek a common consensus and rationality is often an intricate process.

### ***Model-based Approach***

The model-based approach can be undertaken by doing case studies of successful individuals, families and communities and determining how that can be emulated and multiplied in other individuals, families and communities. The approach employs the best known people, the best known community and the best known program for the

purpose of bringing change to individuals, groups and organizations. Furthermore, the approach is change oriented and hopes to alter the mindset and the situation in which people are entrenched.

Local effective models for change include good friends (dyad), families and communities, while institutional effective models for change include best managers and best performing organizations from both public and private sectors. The model-based approach requires coaching, mentoring and learning from best models and their practices, and a supervisory role of effective models. It also includes outreach programs, intergroup exchange programs and community to community based learning and exchange. Indeed networking is vital to the model-based approach, as weak groups or communities can be enriched and be motivated by strong communities. Interest-based groups find this approach more appealing for their purposes as communal values, goals and missions become propagated in this interaction.

The strength of this approach is that it gives a definite assurance with which community development will be successfully implemented and outcomes realized, because the guarantee is that it worked elsewhere and is not a trial of a new idea. It is not idealistic but a practical sharing, interaction, and modeling based on known successes. Most often, proximate community groups can be ideal for such modeling and must have the same social and environmental circumstances to be successful.

However, the criticism is that too high a standard would easily tend to bring some struggling communities to a feeling of self-defeat and inadequacy. Negative complacency would make some communities resist progress. Often some communities are happy as they are and wish to maintain the status quo. Often changes come with cost, and people are unwilling to sacrifice. Often genuine commitment to change in the community involves a lot of personal cost. Also there are various forces at play to make one successful model. For instance, features like leadership, trust, environment social circumstance and others contribute to the success. If one of these aspects is missing, modeling and imitation will have setbacks. All the features, the characteristics, the necessary components and aspects have to be considered. This is also true for an isolated and poverty-stricken community to have a high society as a model for emulation.

### ***Integrated Approach***

The integrated approach to community development would be the desired approach. It builds on the strengths and avoids the weaknesses of the five approaches. The integrated approach tries to make a synergy of the other five approaches in their program directions, control the excesses and work on the deficiencies. An integrated model can be a balanced approach, in which specific circumstances may demand a specific approach to an issue needing attention.

On the other hand, not one size fits all. That's why the integrated approach will have to decide which approach is best suited to one particular community situation and which approaches are not. Discernment is required for the different approaches to decipher which of them empower, as opposed to those that are disabling community prospects. The government of Papua New Guinea has adopted an integrated approach

to community development in its 2007 policy, and that would be the approach envisaged for a policy research framework.

### **Research Methods**

Flyvbjerg (2006:219-245) claimed that good social science is problem-driven and not method-driven, and will employ the methods that best answer the research inquiries at hand. Research looks at challenges faced by people regarding their needs and wants in specific situations. It studies the causes, learns from those challenges and systematically documents the issues using appropriate methodologies. The research reports can then assist stakeholders, especially government agencies, to bring about policies and consequently pass laws to contain the problems. Two research considerations are given here: the common academic inquiry using quantitative and qualitative methods, and the community-based practical and reflective investigation called the participatory action research (PAR).

### ***Academic Research Consideration***

Quantitative research methods involve the collection and analyses of data that can be represented in numbers, and often involve statistical analysis. In these methods, the respondent particulars are considered important: the sex, the age group, the level of education, the religious affiliation, the type of occupation and other personal profile. For example, in a quantitative survey, sampling methods are used to identify and select which sections and numbers of the population information should be gathered from. Sampling methods range from simple random selection or systematic selection such as purposive and cluster sampling. In sampling, specific consideration is given to the diverse category of people in order to make sure that the sample will be able to provide the reliable data posed by the research inquiry. After giving special attention to the sampling method, questionnaire instruments are designed for the required variables that the quantitative research method wants to measure, analyze and report on.

Soon after the preparation, questionnaires are distributed to respondents identified in the sampling. This means taking field trips and collecting the data. Postal or other mailing methods are often used without the researcher having to take a field trip. The information collected is checked and verified to ensure the reliability of the data. The data are then analyzed and interpreted using valuable computer software programs such as the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), Stata, Devinfo and others.

Other methods used by social scientists are qualitative methods. These methods collect and analyze empirical evidence that is not numerical. They generally rely on interviews, participant observation, small numbers of questionnaires, focus group discussions, subjective reports and case studies. Similarly, qualitative research does not use one method. There are many different qualitative methods and they do not all consider emotions, attitudes, beliefs and systems. Quite a bit of qualitative research does use pre-determined questions. Qualitative interviews can be structured or semi structured, as well as unstructured. Furthermore, quantitative research can easily study emotions, attitudes, beliefs and systems as well.

For example, in some qualitative studies, field notes are taken, whether taped or written, and they are then transcribed and numbered to make them convenient for data analysis. Generally speaking, there are at least five processes involved in the qualitative data analysis. First, field notes or transcripts are studied to determine the main themes emerging from the transcripts. Second, those themes are identified and put into a thematic framework. Each thematic framework is given a code. After the coding, begins the process of categorizing or mapping. The final stage is the interpretation of the data that is being analyzed. An example of useful software is Nvivo, which, among others, is helpful in analyzing qualitative data.

Like the quantitative method, the qualitative method has its own merits and weaknesses. To improve and challenge the weakness of both methods, mixed methods are sometimes employed, combining aspects of qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, a quantitative survey instrument may include both structured and open ended questions, or a survey may be combined with focus group discussions. Mixed methods recognize that both numerical and non numerical data shed light on different dimensions of an issue or problem under study.

A few comments are necessary before we turn to practical research considerations. In the academic approaches, research participants, their ethos and their cosmos are often given scant attention, and they are kept out of the research design and involvement. Therefore, it is the assumption that community development policies were designed that neglected the total stance taken by people in communities. Funding and implementation of community projects were eventually based on such objectively limiting research investigation. This has been the predominant trend of the knowledge-based and the project-based approaches alluded to above. Thus, important shift are necessary in doing research in communities.

To resolve whether a community is developing, Freire (cited in Burkey 1993:30) states that one must go beyond criteria based on indices of per capita income as well as those which concentrate on the study of gross income. He contended that the basic, elementary criterion is whether or not the community is an entity for itself; that is, its political, economic and cultural decision making power is located within. For community empowerment research undertakings, the stand taken by Freire is of paramount importance. Information is power, and self-knowledge and critical reflection by the people is what research must also aim to accommodate. Communities must have ownership of information generated by researchers. The process of power dynamic and power relations within, far outweighs the study perspective of information seeking. What Freire is alluding to is that power and knowledge should be the property of those people from whom the study is generated, and whom this information in turn will enable to determine their own progress.

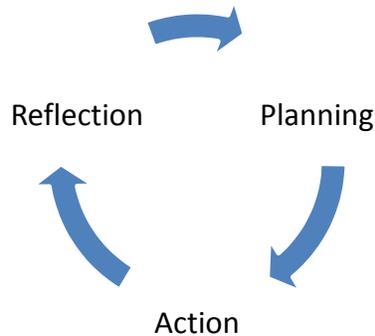
### ***Practical Research Considerations***

This brings us to the point at which the participatory action research (PAR) attempts to resolve the gap left by the academic research considerations, and to remedy that deficiency. In participatory action research, the researcher is not considered as somebody in dire need of information, or a data collector who goes around pilfering information from people. Moreover, the researcher is a facilitator who together with the community generates specific information belonging to the people. They jointly

determine how best that information can be arranged into knowledge, and how best that knowledge should be arranged into action plans, and how those plans can be implemented by the people themselves, with the assistance of key stakeholders.

The participatory action research is a practical research tool involving a circular and spiral cycle of reflection, planning, implementation and reflection. Also, participatory action research is an evaluation and monitoring tool that the research subjects can use to monitor their own progress and that of their community. There have been development partners in the country who have used PAR as a community research tool with their partners.<sup>2</sup> Lessons learned from these groups can assist other communities become researching communities rather than being objects of academic mixed methods. Diagram 1 shows the circular and spiral cycle of participatory action research.

**Diagram 1: The Circular and Spiral Cycle of PAR**



Burkey (1993:64) asserts that a true development process is based on a continuous series of analysis — action — reflection — action. Beginning with awareness and analysis, people must mobilize their own resources and link into sources of external credit and technical assistance in order to initiate an action. When the action has been taken, the results are reflected upon; these reflections lead to a new analysis and to new action; and the development process hopefully continues. A more systematic approach to dealing with this is discussed in the next section on community capacity analysis.

Participatory Action Research, however, starts from the principle that it is not possible to separate facts from values and social relations. In traditional social research, values do not form part of the sciences, but of the ideology of the researcher. For the participatory action research, science is a social activity in which the researcher becomes part of the phenomenon being investigated. Involving people in participating in their own research is through the participatory action research, which is a process of conscientisation. The preliminary objective of PAR should be: (1) to increase the researcher's understanding of the local situation; and (2) to increase the insight of the local people into what factors and relations are the root causes of, and contributing factors, to their problems.

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<sup>2</sup> One such development partner I know of is Oxfam Highlands.

To conclude, it is crucial to note that the approaches and methods of research given in this framework are options available in a more general manner. In certain circumstances, a combination of approaches and methods can be employed using specific research and analytical tools. However, the contention here is that the choice of which approach and method to employ, some of which have been identified in this policy research framework, ultimately depends on, and is determined by, the specific research question at hand. Table 4 provides a summary of the preceding discussions.

**Table 4: Summary of the Approaches**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Research Focus</b>	<b>Policy Relevance</b>	<b>Sphere</b>
Knowledge-centered Approach	Pure research, ethnographic/descriptive.	Database, profiling, observation (baseline information, history, demographics).	Community profile and information management systems	Academia
Project-based Approach	Applied research, quantitative surveys, rapid rural appraisal (RRA), triangulation.	Issue analysis, feasibility studies, survey designs, monitoring and evaluation, social impact studies.	Community need identification, effective planning and implementation, top-down planning.	Government, donor agencies, bureaucracy.
Basic Minimum Need Approach	Applied research, quantitative/surveys, triangulation.	Survey design and questionnaire, HIES.	Family need identification and planning, family planning, baseline information.	Government, welfare state or department, philanthropic organization.
People-centered Approach	Action research, participatory action research (PAR), participatory rural appraisal (PRA), qualitative, triangulation.	Community conversation, focus groups discussion, meetings, key informant interviews, observation.	Community effective participation and engagement strategies, bottom-up planning strategies, social capital.	Community development practitioners, people, stakeholders, society.
Model-based Approach	Comparative, competitive Qualitative.	Case studies, model emulation, mentoring.	Community effective networking and partnership strategies, social capital.	Change agents, effective models, interest groups.
Integrated Approach	Mixed method Triangulation.	Inclusive and synergizes all research methods.	Synergistic and holistic strategies for community development.	Stakeholders partnership.

## **POLICY RESEARCH PROJECTIONS**

Policy research is an activity to inform and plan research activity for policy consideration. It involves such processes as preliminary investigation, research project design, implementation of this research project design, the process of analysis, the production of evidence and the dissemination of the results.<sup>3</sup> In the preliminary investigation, two things are necessary. They are stakeholder consultation and literature review. In designing a research project, three processes are involved. First, one must be clear about the aims and objectives of the research project, second, the necessary design and the relevant methods, and third, the collection and interpretation of data.

A reflection on the manner in which the research activity is carried out is a significant process and would involve: first, how the design and data collection was implemented; and, second, the strengths and limitations of the implementation. It would also involve the process of analysis in which the types of data (survey responses, focus groups, interviews, etc) are analyzed, the method (such as quantitative and qualitative) and the plan for analysis.

Indeed, policy research is concerned with the production of evidence. It is concerned with providing knowledge, as evidence and shedding light on questions that involve an intervention or policy response. Policy research is to be implemented in a particular context (national, local), and to achieve an anticipated outcome. The outcome is evidence of what will work well for whom and in what context.

Dissemination of research products to the wider community is another vital part of policy research. The findings of the research have been disseminated in the following manner:

- a formal reporting process;
- an informal briefing;
- in the public media; and
- in the academic literature.

Research into communities looks at challenges faced by people regarding their needs and aspirations. It studies the causes, learns from those challenges and systematically documents those issues for policy planning and implementation. The policy research documents can then assist stakeholders, especially government agencies, to come up with policies and consequently pass laws to address those problems.

As mentioned now and again in this framework, the community empowerment research program has identified three major challenges that it will give research attention and put forward for policy consideration. However, the three are not mutually exclusive. The first challenge facing communities is the experience of disempowerment that leads to insecurity; the second challenge is ignorance that portrays an array of problems in people's attitudes and their lack of involvement in development issues; and the third is the challenge of poverty and dependency. The

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Murray Couch for providing valuable ideas on this topic in a seminar at the National Research Institute.

empowerment program is determined to investigate the three major concerns raised above by proposing research activities in the areas of:

- community governance to deal with people's powerlessness;
- community learning to deal with ignorance; and
- social economy to deal with poverty.

### **Community Governance Research**

Powerlessness means lack of autonomy and ownership of decisions affecting one's life. In order to deal constructively with community governance, the dynamics of power and power relation at play at the basic social unit need to be explored. Sadan (1997:33) claims that power is a key concept for understanding the processes of empowerment and a deeper study of it will also make possible a better understanding of states of powerlessness, practices of disempowerment and processes by which people and communities struggle for control over their lives and environment. Community governance is about giving communities the opportunities to make decisions and have control over issues affecting their lives.

Community governance is envisaged in the community empowerment research program as the basic pillar for community mobilization, organization, planning, involvement and development. Structurally, linking community governance with the current push for sub-national government strategies should include how effective governance is realized at the local level utilizing and implementing the provisions in the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments (OLPGLLG) that recognize the Ward Development Committee. During an extended period of district consultations sponsored by the National Strategic Plan, it was shown that programs for sub-national government stop at the provincial government headquarters, and do not reach the local level governments and the communities.<sup>4</sup> One recommendation was that the formal government system should recognize the ward or community government as the basic formal government institution which requires funding.

A few community initiatives, in places such as Pamusa in the Eastern Highlands Province) Domil in the Western Highlands Province, Waramo in the West Sepik Province, and Vanage in the National Capital District, have shown that community governance can be achieved by amalgamating the ward development plan provision found in the OLPGLLG. It is at that level that representative democracy and participative democracy, if working in tandem, can strengthen the democratic process and enhance decision making. The Ward Development Committee must find out what the local people want and champion those issues. By getting the people involved, the Ward Development Committee increases its accountability to, and credibility with, local communities. Community involvement in decision making leads to increased trust in public institutions and improved satisfaction with basic delivery of services.

Better governance organization at the local level is conducive to, and an incentive for, better service delivery and greater responsiveness to local conditions and needs. It

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<sup>4</sup> The author was involved in a three-week district consultation held in the Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands and Simbu Provinces in July, 2009, sponsored by the National Strategic Plan Taskforce.

will also dismantle the ‘local/elite capture’ in which people with self-interests capture resources that are meant for communities. Local governments with authority need to put in resources to empower communities so as to increase citizen inclusion, participation and access to information, to invest in local organizational ability, and to increase accountability of all forms of government to its citizens.

Some research questions that need investigation with regard to community governance are:

- a) What are the dynamics of power and power relations (exclusion) in communities?
- b) What are the levels of people’s participation in community decision making?
- c) Do LLG wards have a ward development committee? If so, how are they effectively performing?
- d) What are the capacities and planning processes of local governments?
- e) Do communities have effective network and partnerships?
- f) What can communities do to hold the government responsible?
- g) What roles do civil society organizations such as NGO, CBO, and FBO play in communities?
- h) How far have women been included in political decisions at the local level?

Other related research questions involving community governance are:

- a) Is there a feeling of insecurity and anxiety at the community level that need to be explored?
- b) Are individuals in control and do they have direction in their lives?
- c) What leadership issues are there in communities that need investigating?
- d) What factors contribute to the widespread lawlessness and disorder in communities?
- e) Do influential people in communities use their positions for self-gain in any community development projects?
- f) Are traditional and communal values considered important in community decisions?

### **Community Learning Research**

Powerlessness can be caused by illiteracy and that illiteracy, in turn, can be caused by lack of formal education. The community empowerment research program takes lack of knowledge and skills seriously as a major issue to be addressed by the nation, if it needs to make any progress in community development. The cliché “knowledge is power” is appropriate in this context. Foucault is acknowledged as the authority in the study of power. According to Sadan (1997:55) Foucault adopts Nietzsche’s ideas about the connection between knowledge and power and assumes that the power/knowledge connection is hardly separable, even semantically.

Since the link between power and knowledge is too deep for separation, in the community empowerment research program, the basic research assumption is that the association between powerlessness and lack of knowledge are intimately linked. If community governance can be seen as a power base for development, the community learning can be regarded as the knowledge base for community development. Any

information that broadens the perspective of citizens is much required to alleviate the widespread illiteracy and enhance self-knowledge and self-empowerment.

Perhaps one of the basic properties of empowerment is knowledge creation among people in communities, by whatever means. A well-informed person is an enlightened person. People are empowered when they are well informed about situations, acquire new knowledge and skills, can better discern and decide what best options are available, and can act in a given situation. Fostering conversation in communities is the best way of reaching a collective consensus or rationality. Through communication, people can resolve conflicts and build relationships and trust. Agreements are reached and a common goal can be mapped out.

Indeed, community learning is the major thrust in the Integrated Community Development Policy, and with that is the establishment of Community Learning and Development Centres (CLDC) in the twelve piloted districts in PNG. The ICDP document (p.30) states that community learning is about people in the community having access to information, skills and ideas — new and traditional — that help them improve their lives. The community learning approach sees learning as a major tool for empowering people to participate in their community's social and economic development, emphasizing life-long learning and the connection between this and sustainable development.

According to the policy, examples of activities to be undertaken in learning and developing communities would include: literacy and skills training; improved agricultural techniques; income generating activities; governance work such as establishing law and order committees, community policing and leadership training; water and sanitation and preventive health projects. Community learning and development are intimately linked. There is always a learning aspect to community development. In the course of community development processes, people develop their skills, knowledge and ideas and relate these to addressing issues and undertaking development activities for the good of their communities. Accordingly, all the above activities such as early childhood programs, adult illiteracy, *tok ples* programs and passing on traditional skills and knowledge do enrich people's capacity.

Developing a research and learning culture in communities presents the best option for government policy. As such, research attempts will pursue the following questions that need to be explored:

- a) Are there possibilities given for people in the community to engage in conversation regarding aspects of their development? If possibilities exist, what forms do they take?
- b) Is there constant monitoring of community learning and development centres? What kinds of learning experiences are derived from those centres?
- c) Are there communities in PNG that are ready to engage in participatory action research?
- d) How can communities be able to manage their own information better?
- e) Is it possible for people to be able to access informal education, and what kind of activities and outcomes can be found there?

Other research questions that need to be explored are:

- a) What are the causes and effects of high level illiteracy in the country?
- b) Why are there prevailing attitude problems and insensitivities among people?
- c) Are there issues of gender inequity that need to be addressed?
- d) What impact do inferiority complex and negative complacency have on community development?
- e) What impact does the belief in sorcery have on community progress?
- f) What can universal basic education, skills development and other education programs do to address illiteracy?

### **Social Economy Research**

The reason for poverty and destitution in many developing countries is a lack of social economy development among citizens. Thus, liberal and capital economy takes advantage of this lack. Economic empowerment among the rural community is a necessary step toward achieving the first Millennium Development Goal — the eradication of extreme poverty. Thus, a push for social economy can inform policy makers regarding its importance.

Social economy was traditionally practised by people in this country, and to some extent many of the so-called informal economic activities belong to this realm. More salient is that social economy has been the foundation of the kind of economy that the PNG Government envisaged for its citizen when Papua New Guinea became an independent state. The economic blueprint was contained in the ‘Eight Point Plan’ as a guiding principle for the economic development agenda of Papua New Guinea. The Eight Point Plan provides for:

- economic improvement of individuals and groups;
- equal distribution of economic benefits among people, and the equalisation of services among different areas of the country;
- decentralisation of economic activity, planning and government spending;
- development of small businesses;
- a self-reliant economy, with less dependency on imports and more based on local production;
- locally raised revenue to meet government spending;
- equal and active participation of women in all forms of economic and social activities; and
- government control and involvement in those sectors of the economy where control is necessary to achieve the desired kind of development.

The current thrust toward profit driven economic development in PNG will not achieve much for citizens, as is increasingly experienced today. A very special segment in the Constitutional Planning Committee Report already envisaged the exploitation by profit-driven multi-national corporations, and underscores the importance of social economy for the people of Papua New Guinea. That report states:

We see the darkness of neon lights. We see the despair and loneliness in the urban cities. We see the alienation of *people* that is the result of the present machine oriented economy. We see the true social security and the *people’s* happiness being diminished in the name of economic progress. We caution therefore that large scale industries should be pursued only

after very careful and thorough consideration of the likely consequences upon the social and spiritual fabric of our people...There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that a significant number of people who live by the fruits of multi-million dollar, multi-national corporations live in misery, loneliness and spiritual poverty. We believe that since we are a rural people, our strength should be essentially in the land and the use of our innate artistic talents (Constitutional Planning Committee, 1974:2/14).

Other salient documents of government do point in the direction of setting up a strong social economy for the people of Papua New Guinea. Some principles contained in the National Goals and Directive Principles underscore the importance of social economy. Goal 2 (equality and participation) demands the meaningful participation of citizens, especially in economic development, and that they also become the beneficiaries of such activity. Goal 5 demands the employment of PNG ways and underscores the importance of small-scale artistic skills and business activities.

Economic dependency and poverty can be mitigated when efforts are put into the social economy and developing a viable micro economics rather than following the dictates of liberal economic strategies. As stated in the Eight Point Plan and further elaborated in the National Goals and Directive Principles, small scale economic activity is preferred over big investment opportunities. In the ICDP, this concern is expressed in the third pillar on community economic. “

Community economics is about how people make their livelihoods and access income generating opportunities to improve their quality of life. Work in this area is concerned with developing the informal sector in various ways including: skills training; developing domestic and international markets for handicrafts, food production and other informal sector products and services, and improved access to microfinance (Department of Community Development, 2007:30).

Social economy empowerment is crucial for people in cash poverty whose wellbeing is threatened by hunger, natural disasters, inadequate income and vulnerability to shocks. According to ICPD, a policy priority is economic activity for optimal engagement of the poor in production activities, productive livelihoods, and the creation of a conducive environment for their participation in entrepreneurial activities. Vulnerable people are easily excluded because of lack of access to information, skills, connections, credits and perhaps discrimination. Research questions to be explored are:

- a) How can research be conducted in household surveys and livelihood activities in rural areas? Have there been sufficient data collections?
- b) What capacities are required for entrepreneurial development in the communities?
- c) Are communities able to be self-reliant? What processes are required?
- d) Is the forming of co-operative societies a good economic option for groups in communities? What lessons can be learnt from past and current experiences?
- e) How can research tell us about the informal sector economy in the country?
- f) What device or mechanisms are available for people in communities to have access to markets?

- g) Are microfinance or community banks able to create a saving culture in the communities?
- h) Are community rotational credit arrangements an option for wealth and resource distribution for improving livelihood conditions?

Other research queries involving social economy that need to be explored are:

- a) Why does PNG, with plentiful resources, have its people living under poor conditions? Is there any legislative or policy option to transform this situation?
- b) What causes lack of basic government services to communities?
- c) Does over-population have any bearing on poverty in the country?
- d) What is causing the high cost of living?
- e) How can people remove dependency and dependency burden?
- f) What factors affect food production? Why are people in urban areas begging for food?
- g) What causes child labor to increase in PNG towns and villages?

## **POLICY RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS**

Community empowerment is both a process and an outcome. The process can be community engagement, involvement, mobilization, participation, ownership and so on. However, what are the potential outcomes (benefits) of the community empowerment process? Below are some assumptions envisaged, when people in communities become empowered.

### **Assumptions of Community Governance**

Reorganizing communities and establishing community government will be the major thrust of this research policy framework. The government should encourage communities to organize themselves and use the important asset, the social capital, for social mobilization and growth. The case study of the Domil Community (Unage, 2011) reveals that the community has become empowered through the rekindling of basic units of society, such as the family and the sub-clan. As suggested several times in this discussion, the provision contained in the OLPGLLG on Ward Development Committee should be transformed into something equivalent to a community government. The unyielding contention is that only through effective mobilization and organization toward a rudimentary government at the local level would some of the following results be anticipated:

- *Strong, democratic, cohesive, accountable communities:* Intra social bonding can be an important starting point for strong, democratic, cohesive and accountable community government. The basic unit to start with is the family, then the community, and on to the bigger clan. Those natural bonds serve as the basis for building strong communities. However, the bonding aspect alone is not enough. People must strive to open up to include other families and communities in forming a community government to discuss and plan for activities that would be of benefit to them. Everyone should be involved in the decision making process to claim collective responsibility for outcome, even though some may have unintended consequences.

To link community to higher state institutions and mechanisms is to create a formal government entity at the basic level of community. Community government, depending on the variations of each region, should have a mechanism in place where the government services and presence are realized and felt at the community level, and that can be easily achieved if community government is given priority by state authorities. The linkage with the state and community should be formally recognized at the ward level and become a formal institution of government. Only then could strong, democratic, cohesive and accountable communities become achievable.

Community involvement creates stronger interactions between people, changing individuals' perceptions and improving their sense of belonging. When people work together to solve problems, it avoids disagreements and upholds transparency in decision making about resource allocation. Community involvement encourages communities to take ownership and action over local issues. The assumption of community governance is that people at the very basic level of community are involved in decision making, organize themselves into groups, have a structure that demarcates roles and responsibilities, and ensures

that everyone is included, especially women and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

- *Greater participation of people in decision making:* Community government, when established, will bolster greater participation by people in decision making. People feel empowered when they are given opportunities to express what they feel about certain issues involving their wellbeing and for the common good of the community. Their participation and input create the most conducive environment for taking ownership of events, and even if the outcomes turn negative, they take responsibility for that. Community governance is all about involving people in the process of decision making. People, through a participatory democratic manner, express their views and those views could be taken to higher levels of government such as the local level governments, and to the Joint District Planning and Budget Priority Committee (JDPBPC) through community mandated representatives, thus creating a synergy in which participatory and representative democracy complement each other.
- *Delivering better and more efficient service:* Effective linkages between the government and the community can be the basis for efficient delivery of goods and services. Services can be more effective and efficient if they are based on what the people and communities want. Where resources are targeted in a focused way, responding to the greatest areas of need, they can be used more effectively. Conversely, not involving communities can lead to poor services and be very costly. Services designed without community input risk wasting public resource through what is called the ‘elite capture’. Elite capture happens when people placed in positions to advocate for community needs usurp resources for themselves.  
Involving local people in designing and developing services brings greater creativity and innovation. Successful community involvement works across the board for all community groups and so improves access to services for marginalized and vulnerable people. People can also hold service providers accountable if there is a clear and transparent mode of service provisions.
- *Sustained developments:* Only through the empowerment of communities and involving people with their bottom-up planning based on community needs can development be sustained and government and donor development funds properly expended. Evidence suggests that top-down, bureaucratic approaches to socio-economic issues often fail to meet the expectations of local people. Conversely, community involvement means that community members feel a sense of satisfaction and ownership in something they have helped create. They shape the environment conducive for development initiatives to take place and for their sustainability.
- *Improved partnership:* It was very much contested that improved partnership does mean a lot to community governance. Having linkages with people in positions of authority at the district or province, where resources are placed and disbursed, provides the motivation for people to become organized and mobilized for action. A common community stance can drive collaborative working, and provide the condition for linking up services more effectively. Many of the local priorities will only be achieved if communities get engaged and contribute their knowledge and resources. By working together to engage communities and sharing their knowledge, the local strategic partnership can reduce duplication and waste. Engaging with communities connects local government with service providers and users. Providing the opportunity to jointly design and deliver services gives local

government a better understanding of the importance of the service to communities.

- *A safe, harmonious and happy community:* Only through an effective community government can people collectively work towards building a safe, harmonious and happy community. One of the central targets of the PNG Vision 2050 is about communities being healthy and happy. It says that PNG will be a “smart, fair, healthy and happy society” by the year 2050. Studies in communities reveal that communities that have in place a functioning and effective governance system are able to thrive and progress, to create the environment for people to be safe and happy, and to build peaceful relations.
- *Achieving self-determination:* The final outcome of what the strategy on community governance wishes to achieve is the necessary assistance in empowering individuals and communities for self-determinism. From within individuals and community, people can determine the course to take in life and be able to influence the manner in which things are done.

### **Assumptions of Community Learning**

Most people perceive that learning is an activity that belongs to the formal school system. However, learning is seen as a life-long process involving everyone, whether they participate in the formal education system or otherwise. Community learning underscores the idea that learning should be an activity that belongs to everyone and is not restricted to any specific or privileged group. The idea of setting up community learning and development centres as formulated under the Integrated Community Development Policy should be given close attention to foster this idea.

In some places in Papua New Guinea, resource centres have been created through which information, knowledge and new skills can be disseminated. Other organizations have their own way of disseminating information to people. Churches use their buildings and premises to conduct meetings and share information. Whatever the form or medium of information sharing, some of the following features are considered to be potential benefits of community learning:

- *Interactive community:* It is only through dialogue and communication that ideas and information are spread across the broad spectrum of the community. The sharing naturally brings people together and often leads to reaching consensus regarding issues. Dialogue is the only natural way of resolving conflicts and other negative consequences in community development. Dialogue and communication in family would resolve a lot of conflicts and grudges, rather than resorting to the many forms of domestic violence found in families. The same would apply to inter-group conflicts, if dialogue is seen as the best means of resolving conflicts.
- *Formation of a positive mindset:* Possessing a negative mindset, according to public opinion, is the cause of the many problems associated with lawlessness and disorder in the country. Lack of understanding is the major cause that contributes to people having a negative mindset. People cannot escape from the vicious cycle they have created for themselves. In order for development to take place, learning should become an important activity for people. People should be enlightened to move forward in development. In dialogue and communication, people can move away from a negative and selfish attitude to sharing a positive mindset. In learning from each other and communicating, there is a greater sense of respect for one

another and a greater willingness to share ideas and goods, and work for the greater good of all.

- *More people become literate:* Community learning and development centres or any other centres that provide literacy training and information services, if properly run, have the potential of making people become more literate and informed. It is possible to conduct literary lessons for people to learn to read and write and feel confident and empowered. They can learn a lot from printed materials, such as newspapers and even the Bible, which many literary lessons and programs have been designed around. Community learning centres and resource centres would constitute a community library, in which vital information could be stored and information could be easily retrieved. Appropriate newsletters would be sent to this centre for people to know what is happening in the country and to broaden their perspective regarding issues of common interest.
- *More knowledge and skills acquisition:* There is a great potential for knowledge dissemination and skill development among people in the village. Life-skill courses would be conducted in those community learning centres. Such skills would be in the area of hygiene, nutrition, farming, budgeting, carpentry, sewing and others, which would assist in improving the quality of life for the people. As more people become skilled and educated to a certain level, their outlook on life does change.
- *People become enlightened:* The final outcome that the strategy on community learning wishes to achieve is the necessary assistance in empowering individuals and communities for enlightenment. From within individuals and community, people can be motivated to mitigate ignorance and come to the true knowledge of themselves, of other people and cultures, and of their environment. Only then can people be able to contribute to positive development.

### **Assumptions of Social Economy**

Eradication of extreme poverty, apparently an impossible task, is the first target of the Millennium Development Goals. As stated by the Constitutional Planning Committee, the liberal economy has left many in poverty and destitution. The few rich people are becoming richer while the majority of the poor are becoming poorer. The idea of creating a social economy is to assist people to overcome the trap of poverty. Once caught in this trap, people will never get out of it again. There needs to be a concerted effort to assist people in the community to move away from dependency on outside assistance, imports and economic vulnerability as a result of the liberal economic system currently dominant in the market sphere, and substitute it with the establishment of a strong social economy at the community level. Social economy is not profit-oriented but directed toward wellbeing and improvement in the quality of life. A well developed social economy is envisaged to produce some of the following results:

- *More self-reliant activities:* People in the community are actively involved in trying to produce things that will cater for their own basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. People are working very hard toward fulfilling many of their needs, rather than expecting things from others or from outside sources. The idea is that people will take full responsibility for their lives and have a strong work ethic and be prolific producers.

- *Formation of co-operative societies:* Co-operative societies have been working successfully in the past and some have continued to prosper today. However, despite that, a few have ceased because of management problems.<sup>5</sup> The same success is envisaged in today's communities, where people can work collectively, have collective savings and share in the gains generated. Thus, gains are shared equitably among groups and people have collective ownership over economy activities, and there is a greater possibility of their sustainability.
- *Community access to credit facilities:* Communities, if organized, either into an association or a co-operative society, have a greater potential for having access to credit facilities. In the country, the Rural Development Bank and the Nation-Wide Micro Bank are two credit facilities, among others, that can assist community co-operatives. Local Members of Parliament and bureaucrats play a significant role in facilitating access to such credit for specific groups in communities.
- *Entrepreneurship:* Currently, most big businesses and investments are controlled by foreigners, and this has hampered local people taking up small-scale business opportunities. A positive wealth creation mindset is required to mitigate poverty and its associated problems. The intention of the PNG Vision 2050 (p51) is to turn struggling rural communities into economic growth centres through the mobilization of the masses. To achieve this, it is imperative to develop a rigorous program in entrepreneurial skills, co-operative society arrangements and nucleus estates for collective economic growth.
- *Eradication of poverty:* Eradication of poverty would be an impossible task. However, strategies are required in order to reduce the factors that lead to poverty. This research framework recommends social economy as a strategy to combat poverty. The final outcome of what the strategy on social economy wishes to achieve is the necessary assistance in empowering individuals and communities for self-sufficiency. People can be motivated to be productive through developing greater personal responsibility, possessing a strong work ethic and being industrious to help reduce poverty.

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<sup>5</sup> One of such is the Simbu Co-operative Society.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The policy research framework for each of the research programs at the National Research Institute is an important feature document that demarcates the parameters, the aims and objectives and the research activities envisaged in the program. This discussion paper offers a framework in which research activities within the community empowerment program will be based. The broad areas identified and often referred to in this discussion paper were powerlessness, illiteracy and poverty, and the necessary response strategies such as community governance, community learning and social economy were put forward as a solution to these human problems.

As mentioned earlier, the idea of designing a policy research framework on community empowerment was to define the areas in which research activities could be identified and conducted in order to make informed policy recommendations and decisions. Also, this discussion paper would serve as a guide for subsequent researchers within the community empowerment program, who may wish to consult this framework and to offer suggestions for improvement. It may also assist other community development partners who may want to use this framework for their own purpose and the ultimate purpose was to make this framework available for public use.

Unfortunately, while this framework was being written, a restructure was proposed for the research programs at the National Research Institute. Thus, the community empowerment research program will again undergo some minor shifts of focus. Previously, the community empowerment research program was placed under the social and environmental studies division, in which social dimensions were the stepping stones for the development of this framework. With the current restructure, the program has been absorbed into the program on delivery of basic services, in which political characteristics would dominate social concerns. The perspective of the restructure is on how communities organize themselves to benefit from government services and how they organize themselves to maximize these benefits. However, what will be missing here is the community's own initiative for development without having to wait for government handouts. Where do we situate the communities' own initiatives for development and the empowerment process within this shift?

One consolation, and this is supported by the restructure for the community empowerment research program, is the multi-disciplinary approach taken in the current restructure. The rationale for it is that problems and issues that affect development in PNG are often multi-disciplinary in nature and require the input of multiple disciplines to better understand the complexities and offer practical solutions. Identifying a policy issue for research within a specialist research division often precluded other disciplines from being engaged. This flexibility and openness is necessary for the people and community research project under the basic service delivery program to take a new direction.

Indeed, the current restructure at the National Research Institute seeks to align their programs with the Government's PNG Vision 2050. Out of the seven pillars of the PNG Vision 2050, three pillars are identified by the National Research Institute to be given research attention. They are the human capital development, wealth creation

and institutional development pillars. However, that does not exclude the issues of the remaining four pillars. Pillar 5 of the PNG Vision 2050 on environmental sustainability and climate change is well adopted under Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) issues, which is attached to NRI's Wealth Creation Pillar. The Community and People Empowerment Project will incorporate the concerns of the PNG Vision 2050 Pillar 6 on Spirituality, Cultural and Community Development. Also, the program on law and justice sector is envisaged to deal with issues of security of Pillar 4 of the PNG Vision 2050.

In synchronizing the research pillars at NRI to the empowerment program, community governance will collaborate with the pillar on institution, community learning with the pillar on human capital development, and social economy with the pillar on wealth creation. The community empowerment program wants to see itself as an integrated program engaging and collaborating with the three pillars for research collaboration and policy recommendations.

Finally, the need to empower communities is a difficult assignment. Some may claim that the cost is far beyond its benefits. The current wave of individualism, consumerism and liberalism may hamper community empowerment. People may be content with their individual attainment and their work toward achieving personal goals. It is like sacrificing social capital at the expense of human capital. However, community empowerment can also bring collective benefits and there are many unresolved issues that need collective efforts to resolve. Thus, research in the areas identified in the framework should be undertaken in order to throw some light on the issues discussed.

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