



ISSUES PAPER

THE SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN PORT MORESBY'S MORATA INFORMAL SETTLEMENT AND WHAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD DO TO KEEP THEM FROM SOCIAL EVILS

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Issue Paper 40

Abstract

- Due to lack of job opportunities and having no other source of income, some of the youths in Morata informal settlement in Port Moresby are believed to engage in criminal activities to sustain themselves and their families in the city.
- We canvassed and asked some of the youths in selected streets across Morata settlement to understand who they are, what they do, and the kind of help they need to keep them off the streets and criminal activities.
- Job opportunities, engagement in community service projects, financial support through youth loan schemes, and entrepreneurial training opportunities are some of the key policy initiatives that young people believe would help kickstart their careers.

There are large number of unemployed youths in urban settlements in Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea. Without land or jobs, some of these unemployed urban youths are often part of gangs that contribute to law and order problems through break and enter, hold ups, shop lifting or any criminal activity to earn a living. Thirty-five young people aged 20 to 35 living in Port Moresby's Morata informal settlement were interviewed (using questionnaire and face-to-face discussion) to understand why they are unemployed and what they believe should be done to keep them out of social evils. The young people believe that poverty, inadequate training and corruption are the main reasons for their extended periods of unemployment situation. They also believe that enhanced government funding for youth training and engagement in community youth activities for pay would help keep them out of social evils. The Government should consider creating employment opportunities, particularly in downstream processing where graduating youths can begin their employment careers; but establishing government-backed microfinance schemes that they can access loans or grants from to kick-start their self-employment ventures is also an option that some of the youths are yearning for.

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THE SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN PORT MORESBY'S MORATA INFORMAL SETTLEMENT AND WHAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD DO TO KEEP THEM FROM SOCIAL EVILS

By Julian Melpa and Francis Odhuno

Introduction

Morata is the largest and often considered the longest established squatter settlement in Port Moresby (Goddard, 2005). It is located within Moresby North West electorate of National Capital District (NCD) of Papua New Guinea (PNG). With rapidly increasing population due to more people moving in to settle there, Morata is considered by many to be in a central location where people have easy access to schools, workplace, market and other public services to meet their daily needs and wants (Hausples, 2017). Consequently, Morata is now a sprawling multi-ethnic settlement inhabited by a mix of Port Moresby's middle-class, the unemployed and those engaged in informal jobs and roadside economic activities.

Usually the environment in Morata settlement is not safe for visitors, women and girls because it has a record of high criminal activities (Borrey, 2003).¹ In most instances, it is the unemployed youths who are believed to be involved in illegal activities such as robbery, stealing, bag-snatching, murder, prostitution and other anti-social activities. From the situation on the ground, the fate of youths can be predicted through casual observation and assume that all young people in Morata areas are faced with the same social issues. However, as noted by Kanaparo et al. (2013), it is the unemployed youths who lack adequate family support that often turn to criminal activities in order to earn a living. These criminal activities occur mostly during nights and early morning hours. It can be casually concluded, therefore, that only some of the unemployed youths cause a lot of law and order issues within the community of Morata.

Indeed, in a preliminary discussion with Morata settlement resident, a mother who has lived there all her life recalled that in the past, there were only a few youths living in Morata

who were involved in criminal activities. She believes that these youths never caused trouble within the settlement where they resided. Instead, they often went to commit crime in other places such as Gordon, Erima, 4-Mile and other settlements around the city. These days, however, the number of criminal-minded youths residing in Morata has grown to the extent that they do not care about their identity or neighbourhood (Anonymous, personal communication). Residents believe that youths in Morata settlement are creating a lot of social issues by acting violently towards the people in their own neighbourhood. People cannot identify who is involved in crime because there are many unemployed youths compared to the situation in the past.

Such typical situation of the country's youths in the labour market and their socio-economic well-being have been of concern for policy makers in the last few decades. The Government's Medium Term Development Plan 2011-2015 (Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2010a), for example, envisaged a vibrant and productive youth population that has career opportunities, skills, good education, moral values and respect. Yet, perhaps with the exception of only Blank (2008) and Woo & Naidoo (2018), no other study appear to have ascertained the situation of the youths who are believed to continue to negatively affect the daily activities and movements of people within the country's settlement communities. No study also appear to have discussed with the young people in Morata settlement to better understand what kind of help they need to keep them off the streets and criminal activities.² In short, very little has been learnt about the situation and expectations of the youths from the youths themselves.

In view of this, this research was carried out using Morata settlement as case study site to: (i) understand the demographic characteristics of the unemployed youths who are often blamed for the high rate of crime in Port Moresby; and, (ii) document what the youths themselves believe should be done to keep them out of social evils. The factors

¹ See also <https://emtv.com.pg/pm-visits-once-notorious-settlement-of-morata/> (15/08/2021)

² Noble, et. al. (2011) study youth crime and violence in Port Moresby generally.

noted above – being the largest and longest established settlement; the most densely populated settlement; and the prime location for much of the criminal activities – largely motivated the choice of Morata over other settlements in the suburbs of Port Moresby as the study site.³

Method

There was no readily available record of the population in Morata settlement from which the research sample could be drawn. A survey was therefore conducted in two stages. First an exploratory face-to-face discussion with a few community elders to inform the probable numbers and identity of young people in Morata settlement who would be approached to take part in the study. According to a community leader who moved to Morata in 1988 when he was young, the number of people flooding into Morata settlement has been steadily increasing and cannot be easily estimated compared to the population of the past. Previously, it was easy to identify people by name and know how many people lived in each block. But now, it is very hard to identify how many are living in any one area. They cannot also identify people by face as a result of more people migrating from one place to another, even between Morata settlement blocks, for various reasons.

The dialogue held with the community leaders were also used to revise a pre-tested structured questionnaire and decide the sampling method. The dialogues suggested that many of the youth roaming the streets of Morata were considered to be heavily involved in criminal activities. While not every youth in the streets is criminal, it is also very difficult to identify the culprit(s) among the increasing number of unemployed youths who go around in groups within the community.

In such circumstances, it was not possible to use random sampling techniques to target individual respondents. Instead, it was convenient to take them random in situ. Some male youths who were spotted either lone or in groups were approached in Morata 1 and Morata 2 settlement areas. The female youths, on the other hand, mostly spend their day selling petty consumer items by roadsides, so they were also easily spotted sitting by their market tables. No street quotas were imposed but we canvassed as many youths across selected Morata settlement streets (deemed safe enough for a female interviewer) as could be convinced to take part in the study. The interviews and discussions were conducted by the first author of this paper in June 2020.

After explaining the purpose of the research, 35 youths agreed to take part in the study. Apart from completing the questionnaire, other methods such as voice record, observations

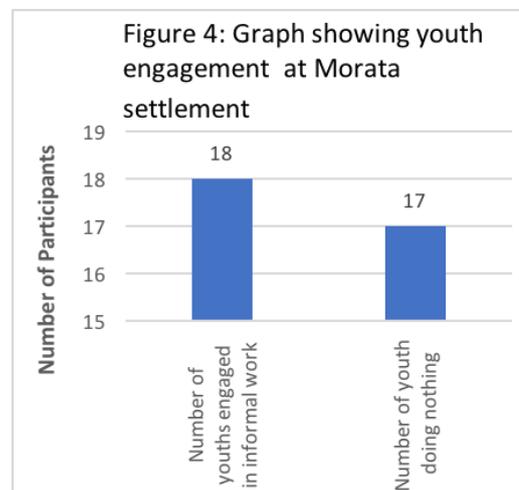
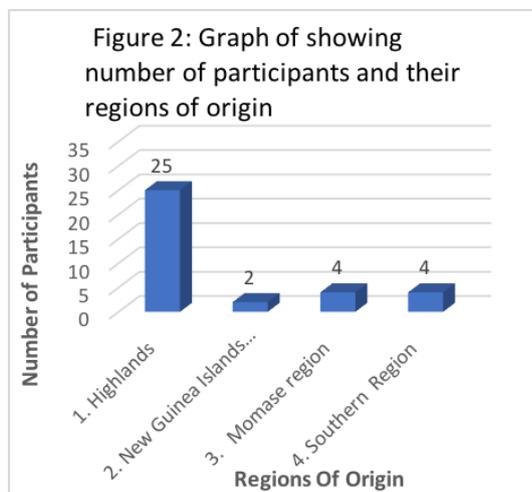
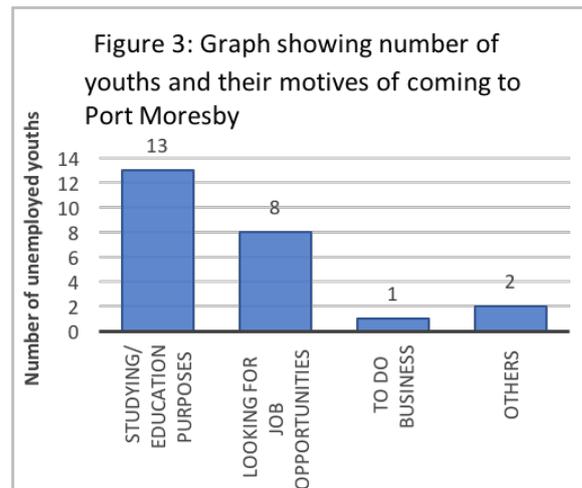
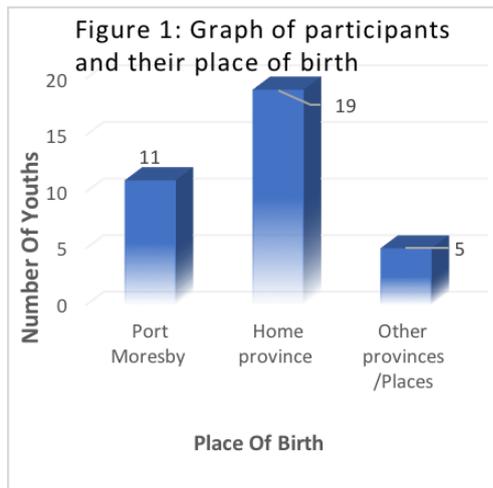
and photographs were also used to elicit additional insights about youth engagement and unemployment in Morata settlement. The questionnaire was designed to understand the different categories of youth – where they were born, region of origin, level of education reached and their own suggestions on what they want the Government to do to reduce the increasing rate of unemployed youths in Morata and around the country.

Results

Twenty-five of the participants were between the ages of 20 to 30 while the remaining 10 were between the ages of 31 to 35. Girls do not feel safe out on the streets of Morata. That is probably why only few females (9) were interviewed. All the nine females were migrants who have travelled from their villages to Port Moresby and by the time of the interview, all but two were married. Most of the males were not married and they believe they are still young. Indeed, the National Youth Policy recognises that there are people over 25 but still identified as “young” because they maintain active involvement in community youth activities (National Capital District Commission, 2015). So, only youths aged 20 to 35 who were expected to have completed secondary schooling by age 19 and transition to higher education or into labour market were interviewed for this study.

As Figure 1 below shows, majority of the sampled youths living in Morata settlement are migrants; that is, they were born in their home provinces outside the NCD. Figure 2 shows that most of the youths identified were from the Highlands region – either they were born in the Highlands or their parents migrated from Highlands. Those who were born in Port Moresby are the second largest group of youths in Morata settlement. Youths from Momase and Southern regions are equally represented in Morata while New Guinea Islands region contributes the lowest number of youths in the settlement.

³ There are 20 planned settlements, 79 informal settlements and seven urban villages in Port Moresby (Kiele, et al. 2013).



The next pair of graphs (Figures 3 and 4) show the responses of the youths regarding their motives for coming to Port Moresby and what they are currently doing in the city. Majority of the youths came to the city to study but a good number of them also came to look for employment opportunities. Only a few (approximately 3%) said they came to do business, while the rest did not disclose the reason for their coming to or staying in Port Moresby.

On the question of what they are currently doing, the number of youths engaged in informal work is nearly equal to the number of those doing nothing (Figures 3 and 4). Those doing informal work believed that school fee problems, lack of skills, poverty, nepotism, corruption, lack of financial support and the large number of people with the same qualification prevented them from achieving what they dreamed of doing in Port Moresby. So, due to lack of formal job opportunities, they resorted to informal businesses in order to make ends meet. Note that both youths engaged in informal economic activities and those identified as doing nothing are considered “unemployed.”

It would seem that the other half of the youths in Morata settlement who spend day and night doing nothing are unemployed and totally depend on other people for their everyday living. The co-authors of this study who collected data observed that more boys than girls were roaming the streets of Morata settlement on the day the field work was carried out. It is possible that these youths doing nothing are the ones involved a lot in criminal activities such as pickpocketing, stealing vehicles, rape, violence, murder, illicit drugs and alcohol within the community because they spend their time on the street looking for opportunity to make fast money to sustain themselves in the city.

In terms of educational attainment, Figure 5 suggests that more than half of the youths in Morata settlement who were interviewed for this study have university or college education qualification, while about one third of them graduated from technical and vocational education training institutions. It appears that a good number of the youths vending or doing nothing in Morata settlement attained university or college qualifications some years ago, but finding a job was their

major challenge.

A young man from Western Highlands Province who graduated from the University of Papua New Guinea with a degree in Business Management in 2014 stated that he tried his best looking for a job but nepotism and bribery in public offices became his obstacles. He eventually lost interest in searching for employment because almost all recruiters asked for money (more than K1,000) in exchange for a position. He categorically concluded that “the only choice is to involve in criminal activities to sustain ourselves because we have low level of income which cannot meet all basic needs; we need more than a plate of food for a day”.

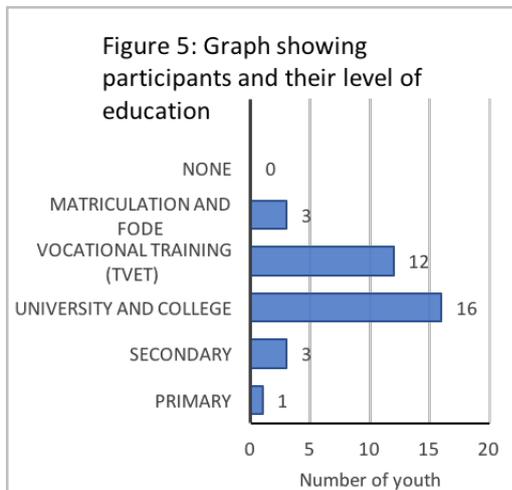
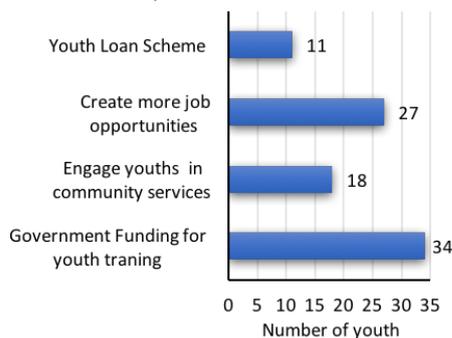


Figure 6: Graph showing participants suggestions of what the government should do to help them



The remaining one-fifth of the youths who attained either secondary or primary education also had their predicaments to share with the researchers. Nearly all of them come from the village to further their education by living with other families in the city, but finding money to move from one point to another everyday became expensive. So, they left school or college and got involved in activities that make fast money. “Having to live with other families in such a

big city is not that easy because sometimes they will serve no food for you or even soaps to wash your clothes”, one participant lamented during group discussion. “All these were contributing factors leading to us getting involved in prostitution, pickpocketing and other activities to sustain ourselves in the city”, another participant added. Staying up all night walking around from street to street looking for opportunities to do illegal activities has become their way of life.

Given the dire situation of the youths in Port Moresby’s Morata informal settlement, the survey participants were asked to suggest ways they think they could or should get help. Nearly all the participants believed that they “have equal rights to what others are benefiting from the country’s development and to participate in any decision making but we were and are being neglected by the government”. They, moreover, argued that “we have struggled to pay for our school fees to this far and now the Government should look into it by minimising the increasing number of youths who are unemployed because we are the future of Papua New Guinea”.

Figure 6 shows the participants’ responses when they were asked to specify the exact type of help they need from the Government. Respondents were allowed to suggest as many types of help that they thought were relevant. Nearly all of them (34 out of 35) stated that the Government should provide funds for youth training. Twenty-seven of them mentioned that more job opportunities should be created; slightly more than half (18) suggested that the youths should be engaged in community services and get paid by the Government; and, slightly less than a third (11) of the youths want the Government to make available a youth loan scheme from where they can borrow to support themselves and pay the loan without interest within a given period of time.

Discussion

This section discusses what Morata youths who participated in this study said were the best that the Government can do to help reduce youth unemployment and keep them out of trouble. These suggestions, depicted in Figure 6 above, are policy options that could help guide and direct the jobless young people in urban settlements so they can contribute meaningfully to nation building and be successful in achieving the country’s common future. Some of these suggestions were proposed or in operation four decades ago. O’Collins (1984) gave an example of a Port Moresby Community Development Group which linked youths and community activities as part of its work with urban settlements. Current planning documents such as the PNG Vision 2050 and Development

Strategic Plan (DSP) 2010-2030 also consider reviving and developing youth programs as well as recapitalising existing youth centres across the country as critical. It would seem, therefore, that to the young people in Morata settlement of today, the following policies and programs they are asking to be created or reintroduced should not have been abandoned or considered outdated.

Government funding for more youth trainings: Developing a high-skilled workforce and equipping young PNG entrepreneurs with the skills they need to grow their business is a key element of the PNGDSP 2010-2030 (Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2010b). For economic growth of PNG, the Government needs to focus on investing more in building the capacity of unemployed youths who have great potential to accelerate the development process to achieve vision 2050 (National Strategic Plan Taskforce, 2011). Indeed, there are more students with very good marks terminating their studies after secondary schools throughout the country each year due to limited space at the tertiary level. The “leftovers” usually feel that there is no (bright) future for them. So, the Government needs to increase investment in building and equipping more technical training centers and colleges to cater for the growing number of school leavers who do not get university placement. Biavaschi et al. (2012) suggest that vocational education and on-the-job-training with young workers and companies also need to involve governments, social partners or other societal actors to be stable and effective. This will create the alternative path way for their employability and eventually get engaged in some form of activity to earn income instead of doing nothing in the streets.

Creating more job opportunities: Given the continued mismatch and imbalance between job opportunities and the number of school leavers (Voigt-Graf and Odhuno, 2019), building more factories for downstream processing of cash crops and other natural resources to add value to our home-grown products has the potential to absorb a good number of the country’s youths. But the youths should also be encouraged to take up opportunities in agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors in order to maintain constant supply of raw materials needed for the downstream processing. Agriculture, fisheries and forestry that do not necessarily require huge investment funds have the potential to engage majority of the unfortunate youths who are walking around aimlessly in the city streets with the feeling that they have no hope. It would seem that the unemployed youths in Morata settlement are not aware that the informal sector of the economy offers the greatest employment opportunities for young people to find work (DfCDR, no date). Indeed,

creating jobs across sectors as the engine of development is in line with the country’s principle of responsible sustainable development number 5, which emphasises on the potential of the youths to change the nation to achieve its vision (Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2014).

Engage unemployed youths in community services: Another way forward to reduce youth unemployment is to engage unemployed youths within each settlements in Port Moresby to promote safer community by coming up with innovative ideas with strong policies and penalties to minimise law and order issues within every community. It is better to start promoting sustainable development at the community level rather than looking at the national level because a strong nation with a bright future builds its foundation on a sustainable community which has the potential to contribute effectively to provinces and nation as a whole. As the saying goes, how can you become a successful businessman in the future if you cannot manage a 10 toea or a 2 Kina now. Everything starts from small and small things contribute to bigger things; therefore, Papua New Guinea Government should engage unemployed youths at community level to create a safer community for everyone to feel safe and secure within the society today and into the future.

Loan scheme for unemployed youths: Through questionnaire interview, there were a good number of unemployed youths who suggested that government should come up with an idea of loan scheme, specifically, for unemployed youths. Establishing sustainable financing mechanism to support short-term employment oriented training and start up capital can help them financially to kickstart income generation from informal and agricultural activities instead of roaming the streets. The loan advances should be given without interest and should be repaid within certain period of time. But if they do not pay back within the required time frame, then the (unemployed) youths should be required to pay back the loan with minimal interest rate. In such way, the unemployed youths can contribute effectively towards improving their living standards while protecting the community and development of this country.

Conclusion

Morata is now developing, and changes are slowly picking up compared to past few years. Yet youth unemployment and youth involvement in criminal activities in the settlement still remain constant. The rate of youth unemployment is increasing in the rural and urban areas of PNG. As a consequence, poverty and law-and-order issues are also rising. This is really a threat to the growth of the nation and peace and harmony in the societies, prompting a re-think of

strategies to meaningfully engage the youth in the country's development process. The Government should promote the practice of good governance in all sectors and create a platform for every youth to at least take part, not only to earn a living, but also to contribute towards the development of the nation.

In particular, the Government should expand the opportunities for quality education and training, rehabilitation centers, and also endeavor to expand the base of agriculture and downstream processing of the country's raw materials. The expanded agriculture and manufacturing opportunities should absorb the ever increasing large number of youths graduating with various skills from schools, colleges and vocational institutions across the country. This will simultaneously alleviate the issues of youth unemployment and crime in the country. A safer community promotes and protect the well-being of the people. The only way to protect the community is to minimise or even eradicate criminal activities in the country. This can be done by equipping unemployed youths with useful skills, knowledge and job opportunities to at least generate income for themselves in order to survive.

Criminal activities perpetrated by young people in Morata settlement should be expected to decrease if the suggested interventions are implemented. Even then, more resources should still be allocated to the police and to other crime prevention measures, because some of the young people might still find that the expected benefit from engaging in criminal activities outweigh the benefits from the social and economic interventions.

Acknowledgements

This paper is derived from the final year undergraduate term paper on "Youth unemployment in Morata Settlement" written by the first author while she was an intern at the PNG National Research Institute. The help given to the authors by study participants and community leaders is greatly appreciated. The paper has benefited from anonymous review comments on earlier drafts. Views expressed herein as any errors and omissions that remain are the authors' own.

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