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# SPOTLIGHT

## CAN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IMPROVE URBAN PLANNING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA?

LESSONS FROM THE FAIRFAX  
HARBOUR IDEAS COMPETITION

Eugene Ezebilo

Charles Yala

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### Key Points

- Incorporation of public perspectives into urban development plans (UDPs) is important, but this is rarely done in Papua New Guinea.
- The Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour in Port Moresby generated useful lessons for incorporating public perspectives into UDPs.
- A new UDP for Lae-Nadzab is being developed by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency and the Morobe provincial government.
- The National Research Institute and Chief Physical Planner's Office will implement a project that promotes public participation in the Lae-Nadzab UDP, using lessons from Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour.
- To empower future planners to incorporate public perspectives in their work, the National Research Institute will organize a design idea competition for students of the Papua New Guinea University of Technology.

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## CAN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IMPROVE URBAN PLANNING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA? LESSONS FROM THE FAIRFAX HARBOUR IDEA COMPETITION

By **E. Ezebilo and C. Yala**

**T**his paper uses lessons drawn from the first public design idea competition in Papua New Guinea (PNG), conducted by the National Research Institute (NRI) in 2015 for Fairfax Harbour, Port Moresby, to show that public participation in urban planning is critical but challenging in PNG. Highlights of two projects that are off-springs of the Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour are also presented.

Sections 59 and 60 of PNG's Physical Planning Act of 1989 stipulate that the public should be involved in the development of urban development plans (UDPs). The importance of public participation in UDPs in PNG was revealed by findings from the Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour, which has generated increasing public interest in participating in physical planning. To this end NRI, in collaboration with the Chief Physical Planner's Office, will engage in a project that promotes public participation in the Lae-Nadzab UDP. NRI has also initiated a design idea competition to create awareness among students at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology (UNITECH) of the importance of including public perspectives in UDPs. The projects are expected to be carried out this year (2016) and to be followed by similar projects in other major cities in PNG in the years to come.

Section 59 of the Physical Planning Act of 1989 requires that a proposed UDP be exhibited in a public area for at least twenty-eight days in order to inform members of the public and invite comments to be used in finalising the UDP. Public participation in UDPs leads to collaborative and well-informed outcomes. It promotes cognitive, behavioural, and institutional changes that are necessary for the successful implementation of a UDP, as well as its sustenance over time (Opondo et al. 2006). However, public participation processes require substantial efforts to develop common objectives, social skills, and improved learning. Public perspectives have rarely been incorporated in UDPs in PNG.

To stimulate public participation, NRI sponsored PNG's

first public design idea competition in 2015, targeting the development of the iconic Fairfax Harbour in Port Moresby. Twenty-eight participants from different parts of the world registered, and twenty designs were submitted. A team of technical experts chose five of these designs, which were displayed at different locations in Port Moresby for a week and widely promoted in the media; members of the public were invited to vote for their preferred design. The winning design was announced at a public event witnessed by people from all walks of life, including the media, and handed over to a representative of the Port Moresby City Manager's Office. The top five designs are on display in the foyer of the New City Hall of the National Capital District. Visitors to City Hall will be reminded by these drawings in years to come of the need for public participation in designing UDPs.

### Lessons learnt from the competition

The Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour is an example of successful public participation in urban development in PNG. It provided planners and policy-makers with the opportunity to understand public preferences for various designs for Fairfax Harbour. The number and diversity of participants indicate that Port Moresby residents are interested in UDP processes. The competition helped inform Port Moresby residents about the proposed plans for Fairfax Harbour, engender their support, and legitimise the plans. The fact that the winning designs are displayed at City Hall shows that the National Capital District authorities and Port Moresby residents attach importance to the design competition. It also shows that public involvement in urban design and development, as required in the Physical Planning Act of 1989, can be encouraged in PNG with proper planning and the appropriate skills.

Other lessons from the Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour include the following:

- Members of the public, especially those living in Port Moresby, are interested in participating in the development of UDPs. Data gathered from participants showed that people from different provinces, age categories, and genders, both citizens and noncitizens, participated in

the competition. Irrespective of origin, these are people who reside, carry out business, and raise families in Port Moresby. Others who participated in the selection of the winning design were visitors to the city at the time of the public display of the UDP.

- Public design preferences for Fairfax Harbour vary. It is important to consider variations in the design of a UDP to promote its acceptability. The competition had twenty submissions, and technical experts chose five, from which the public chose one as the most preferred. The final choice of design could be dictated by cost, environmental, cultural, historical, and economic considerations. Managing varied stakeholder expectations is an art, and requires specific skill sets to remain objective and within the law while meeting social and business expectations.
- UDP design idea competitions can help resolve conflicting interests among stakeholders on issues such as land use. This requires special skills, but must occur within a legal framework. Hence, a sound legal framework for the process is critical.
- Most members of the public find it difficult to interpret UDP designs. There is a need for an expert in physical planning to educate the public about the designs before asking them to choose one. Town planning is a scientific process and requires special skills to balance business, social, geographical, environmental, and legal requirements. Hence, the designs are technical and require interpretation for the general public.
- Public participation in the design of a UDP could help reduce challenges associated with its implementation. When many stakeholders are involved in developing a UDP, most of their concerns are addressed before the implementation phase. This is critical because township development needs to be people centred as well as technically correct. Implementation, which sometimes takes longer time than the design phase, requires ongoing communication and attention to changing social dynamics. Furthermore, new and emerging issues such as global warming will have implications for township development. A reliable administrative system is critical to ensure effective stakeholder input into the design and implementation of UDPs.

### Two new projects fostering public participation

NRI is promoting public participation in UDPs through two new projects informed by the success of the Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour: the Lae-Nadzab UDP and an

idea competition for UNITECH students.

#### Lae-Nadzab UDP

The importance of public participation in UDP development, as revealed by the Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour, has attracted the attention of authorities from other major cities, including Lae, PNG's second largest city. A new UDP for Lae-Nadzab is currently being developed by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency in collaboration with the Morobe provincial government. Like in PNG as a whole, the majority (about 98%) of the land within Lae-Nadzab is customarily owned. Hence, the implementation of the Lae-Nadzab UDP will involve trade-offs between different types of land use and has the potential to generate conflict over land use, especially during the implementation phase. To resolve such conflicts and promote the plan's acceptance by stakeholders, it is important to involve the public in the design of the plan.

Drawing lessons from the Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour, NRI, the Chief Physical Planner's Office, and the Lae-Nadzab UDP Project Office will carry out a project aimed at promoting public participation in the design of the Lae-Nadzab UDP. This has the potential to increase the support of stakeholders such as landowners and communities in the area affected by the UDP. It is expected to reduce land-use conflict and help make implementation of the UDP successful. Experts in urban development planning will explain the principles of the UDP to members of the public using sketches of the development options. The experts will explore the public's preferences and report their findings, as stipulated by Section 60 of the Physical Planning Act of 1989, to the Office of the Chief Physical Planner.

#### Design idea for UNITECH students

To stimulate appreciation of the importance of public participation among future PNG urban planners, the NRI has initiated a design idea competition for the development of the land that UNITECH owns in the city of Lae. A master plan is currently being developed for UNITECH's total landholding. The Lae-Nadzab UDP is expected to emphasise the development of this landholding, and the students have an opportunity to participate through the design idea competition. NRI hopes to promote students' interest in urban design concepts. The competition will be conducted in UNITECH this year (2016) and is expected to empower students with knowledge of ways to include public perspectives in a UDP. This will contribute to the process of sustainable physical planning in PNG.

### Concluding Remarks

Public perspectives are rarely included in the design of UDPs in PNG, and this has made their implementation challenging. Participation by the public in the design of a UDP promotes support by stakeholders, reduces conflict over land use, and makes implementation more effective. To promote public participation, NRI successfully conducted the first public design idea competition in PNG, which focused on development of Fairfax Harbour in Port Moresby. This has stimulated public interest in UDPs and provided guidelines for incorporating public perspectives in urban planning in PNG.

Drawing from lessons learnt from the Design Idea Competition Fairfax Harbour, NRI and the Office of the Chief Physical Planner will implement a project promoting public participation in the design of the Lae-Nadzab UDP. In order to encourage future planners to incorporate public perspectives in UDP design, NRI has initiated a design idea competition among architectural, land administration, geographic information systems (GIS), and environmental planning students at UNITECH. It is expected that the competition will influence their perceptions on effective physical planning and

help them translate theory into practice.

We hope that this paper will provide policy-makers, urban planners, and other stakeholders with more understanding of the importance of incorporating public perspectives into the design of UDPs by considering social preferences and addressing conflicts over land use.

### References

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### About The Authors

Associate Professor Eugene Ezebilo is a Senior Research Fellow in the Property Development Program at National Research Institute. Dr. Charles Yala is the Director of National Research Institute.

*Corresponding author:*

Eugene Ezebilo (eezebilo@nri.org.pg)