



THE NATIONAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SPOTLIGHT

STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING INSECURITY ISSUES IN PORT MORESBY

Philip Kavan

www.pngnri.org

Volume 15, Issue 11

Key Points

- Issues of insecurity are common in Papua New Guinea (PNG) especially in cities such as Port Moresby.
- Insecurity covers a wide range of areas such as secure livelihoods, employment, law and order.
- Addressing issues of insecurity and making communities safer has been a major challenge for PNG.
- In order to mitigate insecurity issues, innovative strategies for promoting safer communities need to be used.

inquire
inform
influence

September 2022



STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING INSECURITY ISSUES IN PORT MORESBY

By Philip Kavan

Introduction

Historically, the colonial administration tends not to be much concerned about security and safety for Port Moresby. Instead, the perception of administrators was that rural migrants to towns were potential source of socio-economic problems, but they were temporary visitors who would return to their villages (Ward, 1998). Indigenous people were not trusted and controlled through imposition of tough restrictions of their movement. Urbanisation appears not to be in the plans of the colonial administration (May, 2004). The growth in urbanisation began as soon as the restrictions were lifted with the country preparing for self-government. The urban population in Papua New Guinea (PNG) by 1980 was increasing in three main centres including Port Moresby (Koczberski et al., 2017). Poverty, crime, and social disorder increased with population growth in urban centres, especially Port Moresby.

This article focuses on the insecurity aspect of the findings by Laki (2022) concerning an innovative strategy for promoting safer communities in PNG, particularly in Port Moresby. Laki's study was based on desk review supplemented by some stakeholder consultations. The article highlights the key factors that contribute to issues of insecurity and ends with suggestions of potential ways to address the challenges and improve a safe living environment. In this paper, emphasis is placed on factors that contribute to insecurity and the potential strategies that could be used to address the insecurity issues in PNG.

Key factors that contribute to insecurity issues in Port Moresby

Some factors that contribute to insecurity issues in Port Moresby are the following:

The pull and push: Living conditions in rural environments are tough when subsistence living is not supported by access to food market, schools, and health services. Towns act as a magnet for the rural population who migrate, in search of better opportunities for jobs

and services and live in under-serviced low-income settlements on the periphery of urban centres. Thus, this contribute to insecurity issue for not been able to secure livelihoods, employment and resolve to criminal activities.

Drug smuggling: Drug smuggling and trafficking is a big concern as these offer a potential source of huge sums of money for those involved. These include stimulants, cannabis, and those that could be injected. Others could possibly include heroin, cocaine, opium, and illicit synthetic drugs. The abuse of these drugs cause insecurity in terms of law and order issues.

The youths as perpetrators: The population of youths has increased exponentially. In 2018, 54 percent of the PNG population was under 24 years old (Mclachlan, 2019). Youths are marginalised and continue to be disadvantaged when the education system pushes them out. Many young people are not able to contribute meaningfully to the future development of PNG through gainful employment and engage in illegal activities that contribute to social and economic instability. This results to insecurity or law and order issues in the city.

Policing deficiency: The internal security responsibilities, a service function of the State is bestowed on the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC). Its main functions are to preserve peace and order to maintain and enforce the law in an unbiased and objective manner in the country. However, some city residents seem not to trust the Police Force to enforce the law correctly and provide security to the citizens. Instead, the Police Force personnel are seen as people to be afraid of when they deal with law and order issues. As a result, this creates insecurity or fear to most of the people.

Land scarcity: The increased population in urban centres requires new areas for housing and essential infrastructure such as educational, health, social, and recreational facilities (UNICEF, 2010). Given land scarcity, there is increasing pressure on customary landowners within the urban periphery of Port Moresby to allocate land for development without due process. This lacks proper planning for urbanisation. The landowners have not

been organised to prevent unwanted settlements. As a result, it increases social problem and create fear and insecurity to the city residence.

Cultural implosion: Ethnic tensions and violence are common occurrences in Port Moresby. Thus, such conflicts involve 'wantok' groups creating different forms of cultural affinities or connections with a common goal to fight off other ethnic groups. This group violence has also strengthened cultural affiliations within areas, districts, or provinces of origin, but also create interest groups by residential locations. Therefore, this creates fear or insecurity among ethnic groups.

Gun culture: The threat of using automatic firearms and homemade versions continues to drive fear or insecurity in many settlements. Settlement dwellers comprise of a wide range of people and not only the poor and marginalised. Many people have regular jobs in the formal sector and could rent out a reasonable room. Providing a secure community for those who live in it. However, firearms are still available through illegal procurement, smuggled, or imported by unobserved or non-monitored schemes or vessels. Some of these vessels could be unlicensed fishing vessels or logging vessels that have direct access to settlements and rural communities.

Gender aspects: The analysis of human development indicators by gender reveals widespread inequality between men and women in PNG (UNDP, 2018). This is obvious in many areas such as home, employment, government, access to education and health services, human rights, politics, and economic development. The causes of gender inequalities are diverse and various, and these are intensified by socio-economic and cultural pressures as society adapts to change, population growth, and urban migration. In rural PNG, women's status is linked to the political structure of clans, systems of land inheritance, and cultural attitudes and perceptions of women based on the men's culture. This creates insecurity in gender.

Sex workers: Out of insecurity without economic support, some women engage in sex work as a form of employment. These illegal activities occur in the city out of necessity. However, participants of this industry often face high levels of stigma and discrimination.

Approaches for making Port Moresby a safer city

Some approaches that can be used to make Port Moresby a safer city include the following:

- Provide an appropriate legal framework for security and welfare services. The community is the centre for all issues to effectively deal with insecurity or law and order issues.
- Provide more police stations in communities for people to access. These will include Family and Sexual Violence Unit (FSVU), specialised child welfare and protection services and experience counsellors as well as healthcare personnel stationed at police stations. Moreover, within the same structure, there could be community police mediation and conflict resolution teams.
- Other important measure to reduce marriage problems and domestic violence is to get the community involved in preparing young people for marriage.
- Creation of a legal framework consistent with other laws which would allow for specialised training for all concerned parties to ensure law, order, and harmonious community living.
- Police to change policing strategies in their operation as to how they can work effectively with the community to deal with law and order issues. By working closely with the community, the police force will restore justice and peace.
- Set up a food bank that would enable the purchase of local fresh food at affordable prices by those living on the margins. This would alleviate poverty issues in Port Moresby.

Conclusion

A number of key factors contribute to insecurity issues in Port Moresby. Some of these issues include pull and push factors, drug smuggling, youths as perpetrators, policing deficiency, land scarcity, cultural implosion, gun culture, gender aspects, and sex workers. State intervention to provide an appropriate legal framework for security and welfare services to effectively deal with insecurity or law and order issues would contribute to alleviating many of these issues.

References

- Koczberski, G., Curry, N.G. and Connell, J. (2017). 'Full circle or spiralling out of control? State violence and the control of urbanisation in Papua New Guinea.' *Urban Studies*, Vol. 38, No.11, 2017-2036
- Laki, J. (2022). *Innovative strategy for promoting safer communities in Papua New Guinea: A case study of Port Moresby*. (PNG NRI Discussion Paper 193). Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea National Research Institute.
- May, R.J. (2004). *State and society in Papua New Guinea: The first twenty-five years*, ANU Digital Print, Adelaide
- McLachlan, A. (2019). *Youth in PNG: challenges to building a positive future*. Retrieved from <http://www.devpolicy.org>
- United Nations Development Program (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators: Statistical Update for Small Island Developing States*. Retrieved 17/06/2022, from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27972UNDP_2018_Statistical_update_Briefing_note_SIDS.pdf
- Ward, R.G. (1998). Urban research in the Pacific Islands: A Brief Review. *Development Bulletin*, 45, pp. 22-26.

About the Author

Dr Philip Kavan is a Senior Research Fellow with the Economic Policy Research Program at the PNG National Research Institute. He has a Doctor of Business Administration Degree from the University of Canberra, and a Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development from the Australian National University (ANU). Bachelor of Arts Honours, and a Bachelor of Arts Degree (Major in Anthropology and Sociology) from the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). His research interests include informal economic activities, social and economic issues in development.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Dr Francis Odhuno, Associate Professorial Research Fellow and Program Leader of the Economic Policy Research Program, PNG National Research Institute (PNG NRI), and Dr Elizabeth Kopel, Senior Research Fellow and Program Leader for Informal Economic Program, PNG NRI, for their valuable comments in the earlier version of the manuscript.