



LESSONS FOR BOUGAINVILLE FROM 50 YEARS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA INDEPENDENCE

Five Decades of Lost Opportunities

Abstract

Papua New Guinea, the land of a thousand tribes, where the unexpected has become a norm, has struggled to realize the promise of freedom, growth and prosperity envisaged by its founding fathers under the preamble of the National Goals and Directive Principles which heralded integral human development for all. Bougainville's political journey, though somewhat different, is at a similar pre-independence dawn as PNG was around 1973-1975. The 50th Independence anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on the challenges PNG has encountered and draw lessons relevant to Bougainville as it charts its journey into nation hood.

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Lessons for Bougainville from PNG 50 Years of Independence

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Introduction.

Papua New Guinea is celebrating 50 years of independence on the 15th of September 2025. As we celebrate this milestone, it is also a time to reflect on how well the country (including Bougainville) has travelled in the five decades. In the good book, (Leviticus 25) 50 years is a special time of economic and social rest for the Israelites. It involves the release of slaves, the return of land to its original owners, and the cancellation of debts. It also signified a time of rest and restoration for the land. Beyond the Jubilee, the number 50 also appears in the measurements related to the Tabernacle and Temple and in the country of 50 days to Pentecost.

In keeping with the spirit of the Silver Jubilee, this paper offers a personal reflection (not an academic paper) of having grown up and observed the later stages of the colonial period in the 60s in Bougainville and experienced the self-governing period in the 70s in Port Moresby and then being part of the workforce, in varying capacities throughout PNG over the last four decades. Altogether, this analysis embodies 60 years of observations and readers are encouraged to compare these lessons with their own experiences and form their own conclusions so that you can meaningfully articulate your lessons and contribute to the crafting of a better future for Bougainville.

1. The Spirit of Nationalism

At the time of self government and independence (1972-1975), PNG was led by a cadre of political leaders driven by nationalistic ideals of Independence as the motivating factor and the spirit of emancipation creating a new nation. Political leadership included respected Statesmen like the father of the nation Sir Micheal Somare, Albert Maori Kiki, Sir Ebia Olewale, Julius Chan, John Momis, Vincent Eri, Tony Ila & Trade Unions, Mathias Toliman, Sir Paul Lapun, Sir Tei Abel, Percy Chatterton, Sir Pita Lus, Sinake Giregire, Sir John Guise, Paulus Arek, Somu Simogun, Thomas Kavali, Tom Dutton, Pita Lus, John Kaputin and many others. Their common denominator was freedom from the shackles of colonialism. As indicated by the country wide representation of the names above, the leadership was truly united geographically and politically, unlike today's leadership that is heavily influenced by regionalism and pork barrelling rather than political ideals.

In the intellectual arena, nationalistic expression was fostered amongst PNGuineans through such Journals as Niugini Writing and Kovave by authors like Vincent Eri, Authur Jowadimbari, Rusell Soaba, Kumalau Tawali, John Kasaipwalowa, Nora Vagi Brash and so on. The National Arts School, under Professor Ulli Bier, became the launching pad for many theatrical performances such as the "Sail the Midnight Sun" by John Kasaipwalowa. Famous Bougainvillean playwrights William Takaku and Albert Toro honed their skills at the National Arts School – hence the Tukana movie "Husat I Asua"?

About a decade later, the spirit of nationalism was not sustained as regionalism reared its ugly head and the integration of a thousand tribes into an integrated multicultural society was soon displaced by the tsunami that now sweeps across all aspects of the nation. Provincial Governors became major players supported by such devices as the sub national strategy by supported by donors. Arts and culture were not valued as intellectual streams of study because academic preference went towards more mainstream disciplines of sciences, economics, law, medicine and the social sciences. PNG consequently became just another black third world devoid of nationalistic spirit and problem prone nation.

The PNG Constitution states PNG's Core Values in the National goals and Directive Principles as *Integral Human Development, Equality and Participation, National Sovereignty and Self-reliance, Natural Resources and*

Environment, PNG ways. The **Matane Philosophy of Education** also promoted the idea of “integral human development”. These core values of Matane received little sustained attention as the education curriculum at that time was controlled by dimdins foreign to the ideals of Melanesian culture and society. Recent Govt’s focuss on economic development and the distributional policies are also counter productive to the Core Values.

What can Bougainville learn from this experience? The first lesson is that “*visionary leadership*” is essential but glued together by “a common purpose of a sovereign Bougainville and core values and principles of *Bougainville Ways*”. The vision of a future Bougainville should not only be about “independence” but should also be about the kind of society it wants to create and how to go about moulding the desired society. Fortunately, Bougainville has already articulated its future vision of being “*a wealthy, educated, healthy, peaceful, and Christian sovereign nation by 2052*”. The Vision will mean nothing unless it is operationalized through the Bougainville Nation Building Strategy that is currently being designed. The rent seeking behaviour of leaders commonly practiced across PNG must be eradicated from Bougainville. Secondly, *arts and culture (songs, music, dances, arts, crafts, colours etc)* are symbols through which our values and identity as a unique group of people are captured, cultivated and expressed daily. These must be promoted systematically through both formal and informal systems. The disbanding of the Viles Tokples Skuls in favour of academic preparation in the form of the Early Childhood schools may be a regressive move in this regard. A Bougainville literary journal should be encouraged so that Bougainvilleans can intellectually express their unique values as a people and sustain the spirit of nationalism (Kovave, New Guinea Writing). Possible names of a Bougainville literary Journal could be – *the New Dawn, Sunrise, Sun kamap, the Waves, Tukana, Voices* etc.

2. The Technocrats (The Gang of Four)

While Somare and his cohort of political leaders were pursuing the political aspirations, the real work of developing the blue print for the building of a new sovereign state of PNG was left in the hands of the Gang of Four (Sir Rabbie Namaliu, Sir Mekere Morauta, Sir Anthony Siaguru and Sir Charles Lepani) and ably supported by Sir Henry ToRobert from the then Central Bank of PNG and Bernard Narokobi on the legal front. Sir Rabbie and Sir Mekere later became Prime Ministers while the other two became Senior Diplomats over many years. Narokobi served as a cabinet Minister for many years. This was a truly PNG team that was hand picked by Somare based on merit and not on regionalism. The back-room engineers, were never self serving but loyal to Somare & country and did not chase personal glory. *Political Nationalism was backed up by Professional Technical Grunt!!*

Since then, there has been a quick turnover of Senior Planning Bureaucrats leading to lack of consistency in policy and planning (more so towards distributional practices rather than creating enablers for long term growth). High level planning office in PMs Dept, re-established by Wingti, was replaced by the Planning Office within Dept of Finance and Planning, thus eroding the high-level strategic focus. The new Planning Office became focussed on medium term planning and consequently lost sight of the long-term development goals until PNG Vision 2050 was formulated 33 years into Independence. Vision 2050 was doomed from the start because of infighting over planning jurisdiction between PMs Depts and National Planning Dept. The latter went on to write a competing strategy – the Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030.

What is the lesson for Bougainville? Political leadership must set the strategic direction through a high level Planning Office. The role of the Public Service is to implement the strategic directions. Experience in PNG and elsewhere proves that a New Planning Hierarchy is required if Bougainville is to progress from its current services delivery mode into a development transformation phase. A high-level Strategic Planning unit located in the highest levels of political and administrative levels is mandatory for Bougainville and be manned by skilled and competent expertise. The high-level strategic office must be sustained to provide oversight on the nation building strategy through long-term planning processes such as Vision 2052, the Bougainville Nation Building Strategy and Master Plans which will then be translated into MTDPS and Corporate Plans. Underpinning all of this transformation is political stability without the pork-barrelling behaviour prevalent in PNG. Bougainville must do away with anything resembling District Development Authorities because that is wasteful behaviour that results in no significant impact. The current Constituency Grants exhibit similar behaviours.

3. Regular Reflective Forums.

Following independence, PNG used to convene regular reflective forums/seminars such as the Waigani Seminar hosted every four years at the University of PNG. These were well attended by international speakers and provided an opportunity to contextualize nationalism in the international context and were not an opportunity for grandstanding by PNG leaders. So, when the President of Tanzania (Mwalimu Nyerere) told the Waigani Seminar in 1975 that *“sisal farmer wasn’t getting a fair deal”* – he was really talking about setting a new economic order where the producers were equal players in the global political-economic trade (globalization in today’s lingo). Today, one of the current common mechanisms for internal reflections is the Consultative Implementation Monitoring and Coordination (CIMC) Body which unfortunately is highly staged and managed with a guided agenda and participation not open to wider society, thus limiting its value. Another forum, the Annual PNG Business Council Forum has been corporatized and held mainly in Australia and not open to wider PNG society. The PNG Mining Conference is also not accessible to ordinary citizens’ participation. It’s no wonder law and order is escalating out of control as people feel marginalized by development in PNG which is being driven by corporate individuals living in high rise apartments at the Hilton, Crown Plaza, Stanley, Airways and Holiday Inn. It’s pleasing to note that the recent (19th August 2025) PNG Update was hosted at the University of PNG making it accessible to future leaders.

Lessons for Bougainville – Bougainville must continue to broaden participation to the wider society including govt, private sector and civil society. The current practice of limiting Leaders Summit/Symposium being an exchange between leaders while the general population looks on is a poor practice. Leaders must engage in open public discourse and be accountable to the people. An open dialogic forum every four years, (preferably at the beginning of its term of govt) would enable Govt to reflect on performance towards the Long-term Vision and chart key milestones for the next term of govt. The forum should be open to all sectors of society.

4. Vote of No Confidence (VoNC).

Fifty years after independence, PNG is now in its 11th Term of Parliament. Only two sitting Prime Ministers have served their full five-year terms (Somare from 2002 – 2007 and O’Niel from 2012 – 2017). Most PMs served about 2 years before being removed by VoNC using “stability of government” as the common argument. Legislations were introduced in the PNG Parliament to extend the grace period from 6 months to 18 months to delay any VoNC and also prohibit any VoNC in the last 12 months of Govt. The Morauta Govt (1999-2002) also made constitutional amendment on Integrity of Political Parties with the intention of strengthening party affiliations of leaders and thereby reducing instability through party hopping in Parliament. These constitutional amendments however have not had the intended impact as party affiliations remain fluid and politics remains unstable. The main motivations for staying in power or overthrowing governments seem to revolve around “access to the perks and privileges of government” as is clearly evidenced in the manner of distributing resources, favouring Govt MPs, using the various distributional schemes of District Development Authorities, District Services Improvement Program, and Provincial Services Improvement Program. It has reached a new low where MPs themselves are collecting cheques in Parliament by passing the normal administrative system for managing funds, thus further rendering the Public Service dysfunctional.

What can Bougainville Learn from this? – Bougainville has a Republican system of Govt where the President, who is the head of Govt, is directly elected by the voters. Any attempts to remove the President through a VoNC type process would be unconstitutional. The Bougainville House of Representatives currently has no formal opposition but ensures a lively debate in every Parliament sitting. Countervailing voices are an essential element of democracy and it is essential that ABG seek at every opportunity the views of citizens in every major law or policy making. Such a process has been fully exhausted in drafting the new Bougainville Constitution and the formulation of Bougainville Long-term Vision 2052. Public Opinion Surveys are useful tools of gauging views that are not commonly utilized in PNG and Bougainville. Whilst the Republican system offers stability for the Presidential system, accountability mechanisms must be exercised as instituted.

5. Politics of the belly – slush funds – DSIP, PSIP, PIP.

The channelling of public funds through politically managed processes such as the DSIP, PSIP and the DDAs is common knowledge. A number of factors are at play in this phenomenon- firstly is the failure by Leaders to understand *their role in law/policy making* and not to become managers of projects. Secondly is the Melanesian practice of *reciprocation* – in the villages people help each other in building houses, making gardens, marriage, births and funerals, warfare with enemy tribes and so on. This mutually reinforcing behaviour encourages patronage and pork barrelling in the political arena and renders the resource starved Public Service ineffective. Associated with this custom of “giving back” is the Moka ceremony where big men distribute pork to the tribesmen and women to consolidate their status. Third is the infiltration of the *highlands big men politics* into the corridors of Waigani (numbers game with highlands MPs congregating towards their own big men – Okuk, Wingti, ONiel, Marape).

The impact of this trend of leadership and governance can be observed in many ways across PNG – the monopolisation of the PM post by leaders from the highlands region, the monopolisation of senior Govt appointments by highlands, the monopolisation of fund distribution, the migration of highlanders into settlements all over coastal PNG where traditional social security systems reinforce tribalism, the domination of the informal sector trading by highlanders, the domination of the urban public transport system, and so on – one word describes this phenomenon - *the highlandernization of PNG* – this is not nationalism as other parts of PNG are not benefitting equally nor is it multiculturalism as there is little integration but the domination of PNG by one region. The other parts of the country have been so domiciled and domesticated through colonisation that they are still hibernating in their slumber – *if someone hits you on one ear, offer the other ear as well*.

The politically managed fund distribution mechanisms are also not conducive to long-term planning and development. Impact assessments clearly demonstrate the lack of development benefits beyond the first three years of project completion as such projects are often poorly designed and poorly implemented.

What can Bougainville learn? The change required is to educate the population so that they become oriented towards the Public Service as the services delivery agency through which political leaders can still gain popular value but without the leaders becoming ATMs themselves. Budget appropriations should also be tied to District Development and Regional Development Plans managed by the Public Service and within the ambit of the Bougainville Nation Building Strategy sequenced through MTDPs.

Bougainville leaders must not follow the behaviours of PNG counterparts and learn to use the Public Service for services delivery and development. Public service at the same time must refrain from “commission seeking” behaviour that is currently a common place especially in the Finance and Technical Services Depts. The example set by Singapore for zero tolerance for corruption at all levels is worth aspiring towards.

6. The Government System

PNGs’ four-tier system of Govt (National, Provincial, District, Local Level Government) is common knowledge to all citizens. The inefficiency at the National level is discussed throughout this paper. The Provincial Govt system, as we all know, was designed as a special package to appease Bougainville’s separatist intentions and keep it within the political boundaries of PNG. The system was subsequently introduced to the rest of PNG, under the decentralisation policy in the 80s and worked well for the first 10 yrs through adequate resourcing and the separation of provincial leadership (Premiers) from National Government and Parliamentarians. In the last two terms of PNG Parliament, there has been an increase in the concentration of power at Waigani through the enactment of Regional Members as Provincial Governors, the concentration of financial resources at Waigani and the distribution of DDA and PSIP funds on the basis of political patronage. Provincial governments, through the Governors, have become extensions of national level politics and consequently at their mercy. This has eroded the limited autonomy of provincial governments in determining their own development priorities. Even the appointments of Provincial Administrators have become so politicised that one province has been at the courts for over 2 years and the Governor of that province has refused to sign financial release documents funding for almost a year. This illustrates serious flaws in the appointment of provincial administrators as well as Governors as financial delegates instead of the provincial treasurer and finance secretary.

Lessons for Bougainville- Bougainville also has a four-tier system of government and administration (the ABG, Regional, District and Constituency Govts). Improved infrastructure (roads) and communications will make travel easy and conduct of government business less time consuming consequently rendering regional administrations redundant -apart from the Atolls where geographic distance is a major constraint. Secondly better systems and processes need to be framed around the management of the Constituency funds to avoid the patronage behaviour that has reached cancerous proportions in governance in PNG. Thirdly, the highlands politics of big men or the politics of “Akubra hats” should be discouraged in Bougainville. The “Akubra hat” has become a symbol of corruption. But the most important initiative Bougainville must take is to cultivate a Bougainvillean identity and nationalism through a Bougainville Nation Building Strategy. A nationalism identity representative of all ethnic groups and where all groups can feel equal participants in all aspects of the Bougainville nation.

7. Public Service Commission.

The Public Service system has its origins in medieval England and was introduced to PNG via Australian colonial administration to manage the country’s public affairs and is headed by a Public Service Commission. Its management systems are based on two fundamental laws which are the Public Service Management Act and the Public Finance Management Act - both Acts also supported by respective Training Manuals. These two Acts provide the regulations and procedures of how to run all aspects of the Public Service. The Administrative College (ADCOL – now renamed Somare Institute of Leadership and Governance) and its Regional branches were the institutions responsible for training public servants. Unfortunately, there are circumstances where the ready-make reckoner has been found wanting such as in post crisis Bougainville or the highlands culture of PNG or the Papuan coast. Over the last five decades various reforms (decentralization, downsizing, district treasuries etc), have been undertaken with a view to adapt the public service system to the prevailing political rationale. Its efficiency and effectiveness have declined over the years due to a number of factors but primarily due to the usurpation of functions and resources by politicians and the nativization of public service etiquette.

Lessons for Bougainville - The politicisation of the Public Service is an everyday complaint amongst citizens - cronyism in appointing of wantoks and in services delivery. Bougainville should legislate for an independent Public Service and criminalize any political appointments. At the same time, the Public Service should help its cause by becoming more effective in implementing its functions. A good start is the review of the Public Service Management Act as times and context have changed. The current structure of the Public Service with large structures and staffing at HQ (Buka) should be reviewed with a view to minimising at HQ and increasing presence in the districts. Heads of Departments are currently not answerable to the ABG Chief Secretary but report to the Bougainville Senior Appointments Committee which meets infrequently and comprises of politicians and private citizens. This seriously undermines day to day supervision and performance of the HODs and Public Service in general and needs to be fixed. Bougainville is now entering a systematic nation building process which should influence the restructuring of its’ public service.

8. Impact of the Forestry-Logging industry

The logging industry has been a regular topic for debate since the 1980 culminating in the two-year Barnett Commission of Inquiry in 1987, that found wide spread corruption and illegal practices, violation of environmental regulations, and exploiting customary land owners. transfer pricing, lack of policy and planning, weak enforcement by govt agencies. In response to policy changes as a result of the Barnett Inquiry recommendations, Govt initiated the Special Agriculture Business Land Lease (SABL). Customary land was leased by Govt which was then further leased to developers. Many SABLs, were illegal and the scheme simply became another means for loggers to clear fell huge areas of primary forests and harvest logs causing irreparable environmental damage and human rights abuses. Some cleared areas planted oil palm trees. Regulating the forestry-logging industry has become so difficult as the industry and its tentacles have now become entrenched into the political and business landscape of PNG, so much so that there is a growing apathy amongst citizens. Loggers recently tried to enter South Bougainville but vacated the area after armed rebellion by the locals.

What should Bougainville do? – the first action ABG Govt could do is to ban large scale logging because there are not too many primary forested areas remaining in Bougainville. Any remaining forests should be sustainably harvested by small scale local millers ensuring sustainable income over a longer period. Secondly, cash cropping

and subsistence farming is posing a real threat to the sustainability of forests and biodiversity. Growing urbanisation (such as in Buka, Arawa and Buin) and the need for firewood is resulting in the quick depletion of certain species of trees such as Mangroves in Buka. Apart from policy interventions, the relevant agencies should introduce small to medium forestry plantations particularly in areas not suitable to the standard cash cropping such as inland foot hills and mountainous areas or wetlands and open grasslands. The harvesting of mangroves in Buka is a very serious problem that govt is turning a blind eye on because it is occurring on customary land. As a responsible Govt, the relevant Dept must introduce fast growing good firewood trees species that can be grown as a cash crop. The JANT (Japan and New Guinea Timbers) paper mill that operated in Madang from 1972 to 2011 established a network of tree farmers in the Trans-Gogol valley that used to supply logs in a sustainable manner, each family owned about 3 hectares of an eucalyptus tree variety, with each hectare harvested every 6 years on a rotation basis ensuring sustainable income. This model can be replicated in Bougainville.

9 Accountability Systems.

Papua New Guinea has consistently scored low on the international corruption index (example scored 29 out of 100 in 2023 and 31 in 2024) on the Transparency International global corruption index. This is despite the country having already established accountability mechanisms in the form of the Ombudsmen Commission and the Leadership code, the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Public and Parliamentary Accounts Committees, the Public Auditors, the normal annual financial reports and audits, the State Solicitors, the Police and the normal Legal systems. The core of the problem seems to lie outside these institutions, systems and processes but in the general moral decay of society that is cultivating the kinds of leadership behaviours evident today. Research is needed to investigate the factors leading to the moral decay but observations tend to attribute this decay to the clash between traditional society and modern leadership practices (particularly the reciprocal behaviour of *mi halivim yu na yu halivim me*), the changing attitudes of voters, and the declining role of churches in social and economic development integrated with spiritual development, growing inequality and poverty, weak governance.

What lessons can Bougainville learn? The accountability systems are only as good as the people operating the institutions and systems - no amount of legal interventions can stop the rot in the system. However, only a personal change in values and behaviours (conviction) can improve the situation. The Bougainville Vision 2052 aspires to be a Christian sovereign nation and places integral human development and Bougainville ways in the hands of the churches and customary leaders. Government should support the Churches to strengthen their institutions so they can ably resurrect and continue their role in moulding society and future leaders of Bougainville.

10 District Development Authorities

The situation of the DDAs has already been discussed under point 5 above. National Parliament collectively does not possess enough moral tenet to be able to do away with DDAs. Sporadic voices from civil society are also inadequate to force change. Accountability enforcement institutions and agencies are so weak that there is no demand for change – in other words desire for change can only come from within the Parliament upon self-realisation and self-regulation. However, such personal change would demand strong moral values that is not inherent in most leaders. *The lesson for Bougainville is to either not embark on a similar journey or build proper systems and processes to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and accountability.*

11 Compliance with the National Constitution, National Goals and Directive Principles

PNG National Development Goals and Directive Principles were coined during the drafting of the PNG National Constitution and advocated for *Integral Human Development, Equality and Participation, National Sovereignty and Self-Reliance, Wise use of Natural Resources and the Environment, and following PNG Ways.*

Though nonjusticiable, they were intended to be the framework for national social economic and political development. PNG has swayed away from these goals and principles for several reasons – firstly these principles though initially included in the education curriculum have not received sustained effort through personnel and curriculum changes on the education front (education being the key instrument in shaping human values and thinking). Fifty years on, the intergenerational impact is that those in administrative and political leadership in

PNG have had diminishing inclination towards these national goals and directive principles and consequently demonstrate declining commitment to them. Secondly, is the increased focus on economic growth (mining, gas and oil, logging, oil palm) without it being underpinned by values, national goals and directive principles. Thirdly, the distributional policies through the DDAs and PSIPs have not resulted in equitable development and participation by all citizens – it has in fact distributed district development benefits along political lines. Electorates represented by leaders in the opposition do not seem to be treated favourably by the Government side resulting in unmet development priorities.

Lessons for Bougainville? Systems of compliance must be observed by the leaders including presentation of Acquittals to the Constituencies. Some leaders have falsely claimed that financial acquittals are confidential and not available for public scrutiny but only for the Finance Dept in Buka. Bougainville has enacted its Longterm Vision 2052 which advocates for a “high income, educated, healthy, peaceful and Christian sovereign nation” in a fifty-year timeframe. The Vision 2052 also espouses integral human development and Bougainville ways in gluing the new society. Integral human development requires the churches to play a major part in human development and require government support in reclaiming this mandate which the churches lost in the 1970s with the advent of the unified national education system. Bougainville ways further require traditional society to maintain its values, cultures and traditional knowledge systems.

12 Mekere Morauta Reforms

Over the 50 years of independence, many events have occurred but the country has experienced only three history changing events on a grand scale – (i) *the declaration of independence itself (15th September 1975; (ii) the ten-year Bougainville Crisis 1989 – 2000; (iii) the Mekere Morauta reforms.* A potential fourth debilitating event (the Black Wednesday of January 10 2024) cannot be classified in this category because it has not resulted in any significant history changing legislative reform by the leaders of this nation, though serious personal and business losses were incurred. The discovery and commercialization of the oil and gas fields in the Southern and Gulf provinces also cannot be included in this category as the revenues, though huge, have not yet impacted significantly on the country’s well-being. This section of the paper focuses on the Mekere Morauta reforms as the country is still enjoying the fruits of these reforms.

Sir Mekere Morauta was voted in the 7th Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea on July 1998 played a significant and important role in instituting revolutionary economic and political reforms that served to rescue Papua New Guinea from total political and economic collapse. Sir Mekere Morauta was voted into office after Bill Skate was voted out of Government through a vote of no confidence after only 2 and a half years in office due to gross political and economic mismanagement and abuse of power.

First, Morauta himself was an exceptional and politically-astute economist. Three decades of experience—as one of PNG’s first economists, as PNG’s first Finance Secretary, as the first PNGean Managing Director of PNGBC, as Governor of the Central Bank, as a private businessmen, as an opposition MP, and as a Minister—meant he was uniquely placed to understand the economic problems facing PNG, diagnose their underlying causes, and decide how to fix them.

From independence, the PNG economy grew at about 4% a year from 1980 to 1994. During that period, the economy experienced peaks and troughs in growth, caused by the closure of the Panguna mine in 1989 and the start of the Kutubu oil project in 1992. The PNG economy encountered deep structural problems in the mid-1990s as: weak law and order; poorly maintained and inadequate infrastructure; an uncompetitive exchange rate; underinvestment in basic services such as health and education; and behind all of this chronic and widespread corruption and mismanagement.

In the second half of the 1990s, the PNG economy was hit by successive shocks against a background of political instability and turmoil: the Sandline affair and a major drought in 1997; falling commodity prices; and a deepening crisis of waste, mismanagement and corruption. By 1999, the economy was spiralling out of control: government revenues had collapsed; reforms had stalled; an international bond issue had to be aborted; and international finance had dried up. Consequently, interest rates skyrocketed—peaking at 28% during 1999—as the Govt relied on credit from the domestic financial system, including through illegal borrowing from the central

bank and pressure on commercial banks to keep lending to government. The kina went into free fall. Looking back now, it is hard to imagine, but the kina lost roughly a third of its value during 1998 and the first half of 1999. Foreign exchange reserves evaporated, falling by half during 1998 (to US\$187 million) and by a further half again during the first half of 1999 (to US\$89 million, just one week of import cover). As the kina collapsed, CPI inflation surged out of control, reaching 21.8% in 1998 and 20.0% in 1999. Teetering on the brink of an abyss in 1999, PNG reached a historic juncture: a choice between continued corruption, mismanagement and waste (and ultimately ruin), or an opportunity for reform and repair.

Sir Mekere opted for reform and relied on five strategies in undertaking the economic reform namely to: (1) restore integrity to PNG's institutions of state by respecting the law, depoliticising the public service and seeking professional advice on public policy, (2) The second objective was to restore macroeconomic stability through effective monetary and fiscal policies, supported by a productive partnership with the IMF, World Bank and the Australian Government, (3) budget repair and fiscal discipline was aimed at restructuring expenditure to improve service delivery standards and infrastructure development; redrawing the boundaries between the public and private sector whilst encouraging the latter to play a greater role in service delivery, (4) was removing obstacles to investment and economic growth, ensuring the competitive provision of security, utilities, finance and foreign exchange, and transport; reviewing the tax system to remove barriers to growth; and prioritising major resource projects (notably gas), (5) and final objective was to continue the Bougainville peace process following the ten year conflict that resulted in the loss of 20,000 lives.

Sir Mekere undertook the most ambitious and intense reform program ever attempted in PNG in the short space of just three years achieving extraordinary results.

Less than a month after taking office, the Morauta Government passed a Supplementary Budget to rein in expenditure, increase revenue and contain the deficit. In two years, inflation was reduced from 21.8% to 7.9%; interest rates were reduced from 28% to 10.9%; and foreign reserves rose from US\$89 million to US\$371 million.

From 1999 to 2002, the Morauta Government passed around 150 pieces of legislation, including:

- Amendments to the Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections to introduce limited preferential voting (LPV) as a means to ensure that those elected represented a greater share of the electorate votes, and to provide a greater chance for election of women. Under the first past the post voting system, some candidates were being declared winners with only 12% to 20% of the electoral votes while 80% votes were missing out through losing candidates.
- An Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates to support political stability by strengthening and regulating the political party system.
- An Organic Law on Peace-Building in Bougainville to underpin the Bougainville Peace Agreement signed by the Morauta Government and Bougainville leaders in August 2001. The law established the Autonomous Bougainville Government and provided for a Bougainville Referendum.
- A new Central Bank Act to improve the framework for monetary policy, strengthen the powers of the Bank of PNG and make it more independent. And a new Banking and Financing Institutions Act to strengthen bank supervision.
- New superannuation legislation to bail out the National Provident Fund (NPF, now NASFUND), remove political interference in investments, and strengthen regulation by the central bank. (Morauta also established successful inquiries that laid bare the mismanagement and corruption that had robbed NPF and Defence Force Retirement Benefit Fund contributors of their savings.)
- Comprehensive amendments to taxation legislation (following a tax review in 2000), including to streamline and simplify taxes, to strengthen the independence of the Internal Revenue Commission and to encourage investment in the mining and petroleum sectors.
- A raft of legislations to strengthen the oversight of public enterprises, notably through a new and modern economic regulator (the Independent Consumer and Competition Commission or ICC) and an

Independent Public Business Corporation to insulate public enterprises from political interference and ensure efficient and commercial operations.

Other reforms included;

- The PNG Banking Corporation was saved from insolvency and put into Central Bank administration, paving the way for a merger with the Bank of South Pacific. By 1999, PNGBC had reached the point of collapse. With a 60% market share, this threatened not only the savings of hundreds of thousands of people, but to sink the financial sector. The merger in 2002 saved the bank and created a major success story: a PNG bank that has grown from strength to strength, expanding services (in PNG and later the Pacific), while delivering huge increases in share value as well as large tax revenues and dividends for the state.
- Orogen Minerals, a majority state-owned mining and petroleum company, was merged with the private-sector Oil Search in 2002 to create a strong, PNG-focused resource company that championed the PNG LNG project. The merged business went on to deliver big dividends and huge growth in share value for the state, from \$250 million at the time of the merger to \$1.7 billion when sold to the International Petroleum Investment Company (IPIC) in 2009. The sale proceeds financed the state's equity in PNG LNG.
- An orderly exit of BHP from the Ok Tedi mine was negotiated in 2001. BHP wanted to exit the mine on environmental grounds. It gifted its 51% share of the mine for the benefit for the people of PNG, through PNGSDP, which was created (in 2002) to invest some of its profits for the benefit of the community and to put aside the rest for future generations. The Ok Tedi mine went on to invest heavily in higher environmental standards, and to underpin economic growth for the PNG economy for the next decade. It generated a staggering K17 billion in tax revenues and dividends for PNG between 2003 and 2012, and PNGSDP now has US\$1.49 billion set aside in a long-term fund.

The key lessons that can be learnt from Mekeres' 4 years as Prime Minister is that (1) a PM/President with a clear vision does not need 1 or 2 full terms to make the necessary hard decisions for the good of the county, (2) such a leader must be self-less, fearless, honest and transparent and rise above politics of patronage, (3) reforms will cause short term pain for long term gain, (4) accessing appropriate knowledge bases is essential in crafting the reforms.

13 Political stability and consistency in Policy

"Political stability" is a highly malleable concept that has been commonly used in the Vote of No Confidence (VoNC) fiascos since the second PNG Parliament. The first Parliament was a 2-year Parliament (1975-1977) established by the Constitution to prepare the ground work for the 1977 elections and Parliament. The 11 terms of Parliament during the 50-year history of an independent PNG, has witnessed a VoNC in every term of Parliament citing the need for "political stability" which actually creates chaos and instability on the floor of Parliament and PNG. Most Prime Ministers on average served about 2.5 years before being voted out with only Sir Micheal Somare and Peter O'Neil serving full five-year terms of Parliament. Two Prime Ministers (Wingti and Chan) resigned to avoid VoNC.

Legislations have been introduced such as prolonging the grace period from 6 months to 18 months, then to 30 months as well as disallowing VoNC in the last 12 months of each Parliament. The Organic Law on Political Parties was brought in by the reformist Prime Minister Mekere Morauta with the intention of stopping party hopping but has failed to be a deterrent. Political stability is essential not only in the number of years in Parliament but also in the consistency of policy and implementation – policy should not change every 5 years.

Why is the history of VoNC of interest to Bougainville? The VoNC is a mechanism for restoring accountability of government, it has instead become a tool of instability, corruption concerns and politics of patronage. VoNCs have come to paralyse government functions in hindering legislative progress and policy implementation, weakened governance by shifting funds to political survival, slows economics progress by creating perceptions

of instability amongst foreign investors, encourages patronage and corruption as millions of kina is exchanged in securing votes, and becomes a bureaucratic burden as administration is subjected to immense pressure in organizing finance and logistics support to the factions.

Bougainville has so far avoided the VoNC behaviour in the House of Representatives as it does not encourage opposition parties. However, as democracy matures and allows wider expression of ideologies, there will come a time where such political behaviour will enter the Bougainville Parliament. VoNCs are already common practice in the Solomon Island, Vanuatu and Fiji. Bougainville can either follow the Singapore model where organized dissenting Voices were strongly discouraged until the 20s after Singapore achieved economic growth or Bougainville can allow for organized systems and processes outside of the Bougainville Parliament where citizens can express inputs on major governance matters as recently pursued in the crafting of the new Constitution and the post referendum consultations. The other option of freedom of political expression will lead to the chaotic PNG situation as Bougainville generally still does not use democracy and freedom responsibly (apart from elections) if one goes by the level of discourse exchanged on various digital platforms which pose the potential of creating momentum towards instability.

14 World Bank Reforms

The World Bank (WB) is owned by 187 member countries of the United Nations with the United States of America, Japan, Germany United Kingdom and France being the biggest shareholders – consequently the WB is perceived as an instrument for western domination of the global economy [*China operates the Exim Bank providing similar financial support*]. It (WB) provides concessional loans at rates (<2%) less than commercial bank rates. However, countries that lack prudent fiscal management often face difficulty repaying the size of loans. Following the closure of Panguna mine in 1989 and the reduced revenue inflows, the WB introduced a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) aimed at macroeconomic stabilization, public resource management, and promoting the non mining private sector but the program stalled due to increased revenue from other mines notably Lihir, Ok Tedi and Misima mines as well as lack of public support. One of the reforms it attempted in PNG was land reform with the intention of bring customary land into commercial production. While the initiative had good intentions, it met with very strong opposition (demonstrations and riots) from civil society mainly university students and non government organizations.

Lessons for Bougainville – Bougainville requires only about K800m annually to run its affairs adequately. The challenge for Bougainville is to install an economic development road map and an internal revenue raising strategy that will raise this amount in the quickest possible time (3-5yrs) and avoid seeking loans from international finance institutions. Immediate mine development of Panguna must happen asap and revenues divested into agriculture, fisheries and mine service industries such as hospitality and transport. This year (2025) cocoa farmers are expected to exported an estimated value of K1.2bn from Bougainville (a 10% GST would amount to K120m). Along with copra, fisheries, tourism and mining industry GST, Bougainville can easily generate the K800m it requires to run Government. The major constraint since formation of ABG is the narrow focus on mining, lack of cohesive and informed leadership and administrative inertia regarding the non-mining sector.

15 Outcome Based Education vs Standard Based Education

PNG and Bougainville have a long history of education system which set standards at every grade that needed to be achieved in order to progress to the next grade. Admittedly not many pupils used to progress to the upper grades but that was more because of not enough schools and spaces and out of school social-cultural factors for girls. The availability of places in the classroom mushroomed with the construction of more primary and high schools in the 1990s. Senior high schools (grades 11 and 12) proliferated in all the provinces and tertiary institutions were unable to cater for all high school graduates.

At around the same time (2000), Education Dept introduced Outcome Based Education (based on ill advise by Australian Advisors) that focussed more on the expected learning outcome and less about the methodology of how to achieve the outcome. OBE required a high level of teacher ability, creativity and eclectic teaching (no set curriculum (the what) but only provided a syllabus (the how - in 2003) in organizing learning experiences for the students. In other words, education was not oriented towards any overall goals but learning for its own sake.

Many teachers were at a loss as they were not trained curriculum writers. OBE consequently led to declining standards in academic performance of students and was abandoned.

In contrast, Standard Based Education was heavily dependent on a set of curriculum standard and uniform materials. All teachers were trained in how to teach the standard curriculum and was supported by the Curriculum Division of the Education dept. SBE was a competitive system of education ensuring literacy and education achievement in order to progress further.

The challenge for Bougainville is four-fold – (i) maintain standard based education and improve access to education without necessarily building new schools but expanding access using current establishments. (ii) Improve quality of education by upgrading education levels of teachers (iii) increased focus on technical vocational training especially with mining coming on stream in the next couple of years using a system of trade testing and accreditation. (iv) While there is political interest in building a Bougainville university, there is little educational output or economic rationale at the moment to justify such an investment. It is more prudent to improve primary and high school education so that Bougainville is able to produce appropriate (quality and quantity) intake levels (at least 2,000 grade 12 students annually meeting academic standards for university studies) for tertiary education,

16 Health Sector

Spending on health sector in PNG increased in recent years to 7.1% to 8.8% in the last four years (2020 – 2025) of total public expenditure. In real terms 2022 health budget is K2.2bn and K2.86bn in 2025. However, despite steady budget allocation, issues still remain of limited access due to geographic terrain, urban - rural divide in health services availability, transportation access, increase in communicable diseases, maternal child health, HivAids prevalence, limited specialist staffing, infrastructure deficiency, financial mismanagement, lack of accountability and access to safe drinking water.

All of these issues are also present in Bougainville and cannot be solved overnight. Health is actually one sector that is doing very well building new Health centers and hospitals to increase accessibility. With improved road network, accessibility to health services will improve on Buka and mainland Bougainville. Atolls need particular attention possibly with a mobile health service using seaplane through MAF. Also increased attention should be directed towards health education in the rural areas to combat increasing life style diseases.

[As an additional note – the lack of social and economic opportunities in the Atolls is leading to an increasing diaspora population in Buka – there is a perception that life style diseases are high with this diaspora population because of limited social and economic opportunities in Buka. The ABG Govt should resume efforts in resettling them back to the Kuberia land that was allocated to them by the North Solomons Provincial Govt].

17 Electoral system

PNGs' election system and process are laced with endemic problems that continually test innovations and improvements in various aspects of the electoral system. Issues range from under funding and untimely release of funding for the Electoral commission, voter eligibility and registration, candidate eligibility and nomination, election offences and election petitions, electoral boundaries, voter registration and electoral role, election administration, women's participation and representation.

The Organic Law on Political Parties was enacted with the intention of strengthening party policy platforms, affiliations and loyalty but none of these have been adhered to as party loyalty is becoming as common as marriage divorces fuelled by monetary incentives during VoNCs.

Leaders (Candidates) seem not to care if elections are not well run as long as they get into Parliament and may in fact violate election rules and guidelines to increase their chances of getting to the honey pot, which is indeed a core problem with the distribution of state resources through elected leaders (refer to point 5 above). *It is clear that the endemic problem associated with the Elections is rooted in the integrity and moral values of leaders themselves. No amount of leadership training/education will fix this problem – only the personal conviction of leaders!*

Bougainville, being a small island is theoretically easy to plan and conduct elections. Integrity of elections must begin with a system that maintains integrity, credible and efficient – all of which depend on adequate funding and the leaders should be made to pass integrity tests. Secondly, politics should not be seen as an entry point to the cash cow. Therefore, Constituency funds should not be channelled through the Constituency member but directly to the Constituencies and based on proper development plans.

18 Agriculture Sector

Agriculture sector was a very vibrant sector up to the time of independence and the next decade thereafter. The political awakening and shortage of land due to population increase resulted in the introduction of the plantation redistribution scheme around the time of independence. Plantation lands were bought by government and given to land owners who had no skills in managing large estate plantations. Consequently, hundreds of cocoa, copra, rubber, coffee, tea, pyrethrum plantations collapsed and remained idle all over the country. Any attempts to resurrect the plantation economy must deal with issues of *land ownership, poor infrastructure, fragmented supply chain, downstream processing infrastructure, limited access to credit, limited input costs and volatility of post-harvest environment, lack of skills and law and order problems.*

The list feels insurmountable and can only be addressed through consistent government policy, resources support and innovative management approaches over several decades given the ephemeral nature of these issues. Indenture labour schemes may no longer be viable as one of the main sources of labour (Southern highlands) are now landlords of the Gobe Oil fields and thriving in Port Moresby and Lae settlements. However, there is large idle youth population in all provinces that can be mobilised through innovative planning.

The agriculture in Bougainville - about 20, 680 hectares of land is under large plantations all of which are unproductive due to the disruptions of the Bougainville crisis. Key factors to be taken into consideration in resurrecting the plantation economy include:

- Absentee landlords living outside of Bougainville who do not feel the same economic hardships and the consequent need to bring the lands into production (holding Bougainville at ransom)
- Non-existent production and marketing infrastructure. All processing factories (fermentaries and driers), electricity, labour quarters, road transport, wharfs are all no longer exist.
- An estimated 90% of trees have fallen due to old age (about a 100 years old) and remaining trees about to be lost. The genetic quality of coconuts from the old tree is poor and not suitable for replanting.
- Given the number of plantation (18-20) a major replanting project should be undertaken starting with the importation of quality seeds from Buka or East New Britain. Hybrid coconuts take between 3 – 5 years before fruiting compared to the native Bougainville tall that take 7 – 10 years.
- Settlers and land owners will need to be factored into the redevelopment of any plantations
- Labour for the plantations should come from the youth population under a Bougainville National Service Program.

Bougainville Agriculture sector needs good political leadership and innovative active administrative orientation beyond policy and paper farming.

19 Subsistence Agriculture and the Environment

Despite economic poverty and the absence of official social safety systems, subsistence agriculture remains to be the saving grace of the majority of citizens throughout the nation. Many families are supplementing the staples with a bit of cash income from the road side market and cash cropping. As population grows, virgin tropical rainforests is increasingly being depleted for food gardens and cash cropping. Quality of water and rivers are being impacted as the headwaters of river systems are cleared and the increasing use of herbicides. The rich biodiversity of Bougainville is also declining as these forests are not being allowed to regenerate with some endemic species (both plants and animals) hard to find as a consequence.

Large plantations have declined partly because of the plantation redistribution scheme of the 70s and 80s but also because of declining infrastructure, law and order problems. Labour is also no longer readily available due to changing values as many potential labourers now prefer to work for themselves. The spirit of adventurism

under the “indentured labour scheme” is of limited currency now. Some innovative scheme for mobilising labour is needed if the large plantations are to be resurrected.

These lessons are also relevant for Bougainville. The ABG must consider repossessing the large plantations which are under foreign absentee landlords and put them to active production incorporating the squatter settlers who have helped themselves to these plantations.

A number of important lessons can be derived from this experience – first of all Bougainville must have a population policy. While the actual population figures are not known (due to poor Census and whoever is responsible for Census needs a kick on the backside), current population is estimated to be between 400,000 to 600,000. This may look small but given the practice of customary ownership of land (with only 3% state owned) and the mountainous terrain of the main island, it is prudent to start taking policy actions now. Average family size in parts of Bougainville is around 7 which is too high, with some families as high as 9 to 12 individuals.

Secondly, DPI needs to show a bit more interest in introducing new farming skills and new food crops with the intention of moving people away from shifting cultivation and protecting the environment. There is also unregulated use of pesticides and herbicides.

Thirdly, large plantations must be brought back into commercial production using surplus youth labour that is abundant throughout Bougainville. A national youth service integrating agricultural skills training with literacy, values education and sports training could be used to mobilize the youths. {where there is a will, there is a way}

20 Democracy and freedom

At the heart of the PNG’s failed state is the failure of the constitutionally guaranteed “*Democratic System of Government*” that is not aligned with the cultural psychology which accords primary loyalty to the tribe and secondly to the region. This mentality and practices have seeped into every corner of leadership and administrative systems up and down the hierarchy and across the breadth of the country. Parliamentary mechanisms such as the VoNC and the Ombudsman Commission were intended as balance mechanisms at the leadership level but have become tools of manipulation for the most populist region to maintain power and access to resources.

Cultural perspectives on the status and role of women have also not improved with modernization and may in fact be worsening as society struggles to cope with changing values and behaviours driven by a concoction of unemployment, home brew and marijuana, weak law and order systems.

The Public Service apparatus worked well in the first ten years of independence because it was adequately resourced and left alone to perform its functions but most importantly it was led by qualified administrators appointed on merit and with the right moral values and attitudes – names like Sir Alcan Tololo; Sir Paul Songo; MBE David Roakeina; Philip Bougaraga; Sir Paulius Matane, Ruben Taureka, John Banono, Pius Kerepia and others. The appointment of cronies and the syphoning of public funds through the DSIP and PSIP has totally undermined the capability of the Public Service.

At the ordinary grassroots level there is daily *abuse of democracy and freedom* with little impunity as law and order institutions and systems are under-resourced and malfunctioning. The introduction of mobile communication (face book forums) has exponentially increased misinformation and innuendos leading to increased violence. Human rights abuse particularly of women and girls are spiralling endlessly on allegations of sorcery. Peoples level of education and civility (including in Bougainville) is not yet at a level where they can exercise “democracy and freedom” responsibly. Bougainville has adopted a DDA and PSIP like system in the form of Constituency Grants which at one point was being deposited into Constituency Members personal bank accounts. Such practices need to stop if Bougainville is to learn from PNG and build a prosperous and honest nations.

21 Role of the Churches.

The five mainline Christian denominations (Catholic, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Anglican, the Seventh Day Adventist) were already well established by the time the sovereign nation of PNG was formed. They consequently played a fundamental role in the pre-independence growth of PNG through their multipronged spiritual, social and economic development agendas. They provided the early human resources that enabled PNG to venture into self-government and eventual independence. As Konedobu, and later Waigani consolidated its political power and administrative control, the influence of the churches has declined considerably. Almost all churches do not now have the financial means to effectively run their social, economic and spiritual nourishment of their flocks. Lutheran Shipping for example no longer plies its trade along the Momase and New Guinea islands. Fast forward into the 2020s, as the nation crumbles, it is however the work of the churches together with customary leadership that is holding the rural society intact while Govt plunders its loot. All major churches should be supported financially by Govt in strengthening their institutions and its population.

22 Panguna, Bougainville Crisis and Bougainville Peace Agreement

The factors around Panguna Mining that were the root causes (environmental destruction and pollution, distribution of royalties and compensation payments, failure to review and renew Panguna mining agreement) of the upheaval that is known as the Bougainville Crisis are well documented by scholars and journalists.

All of these factors were a result of *“poor leadership and governance by Australia and PNG”* which prioritised the interest of a multinational corporation and the state (but not the welfare and rights of customary land-owning citizens) at the onset of mining as well as during mining operations.

PNG state institutions were ill-equipped to handle the environmental and human rights issues and actually escalated the Crisis situation by its heavy-handed approach. The blanket social and economic embargo imposed on Bougainville (under Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu) remains as the most draconian exercise of leadership by PNG national leaders in the 50 years of independence.

The Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) is heralded globally as a unique peace instrument that has brought about stability and social, economic, cultural and political stability since 2001. It has also provided Bougainvilleans the opportunity for “political emancipation” through the referendum, which itself was only possible through Bougainville meeting all conditions (weapons disposal, good governance, referendum) stipulated in the BPA.

The post referendum consultations continue to display disparity in “trust” between National Govt and the ABG which has impacted on the implementation of the BPA in the two decades such as the outstanding accumulated Restoration and Development Grants and the delay in transferring shares in the Panguna mine.

Australia (as the colonizer and closest neighbour) plays a chameleon role towards maintaining the status quo in pursuing *“back yard relations”* rather than *“front yard”* diplomacy. It played a significant role (together with New Zealand) in brokering the peace agreement in the Burnham talks but has remained behind the scenes and unable to deliver on its “sweet talk” of international support for Bougainville independence. It is currently part of the PNG delegation and provides key policy advice to the PNG Govt during the Moderator managed consultations.

The lack of institutional memory on the side of PNG where the current generation of leaders don’t carry forward the same understandings and commitments of previous leaders is evident. This political amnesia has resulted in 5 years (2001 – 2005) of merry-go round since the declaration of the 97.7% Referendum results for an independent Bougainville separate from PNG.

Land Owners in other mining, oil & gas areas in PNG are receiving better benefits because of the lessons in Panguna and the Bougainville Crisis.

The key Lessons for Bougainville is that it must pursue full independence and be in control of its destiny because Waigani is becoming a political and bureaucratic nightmare to navigate. Bougainville should also expand foreign relations beyond Australia if it wishes to experience genuine development transformation.

However, independence and political stability alone are not enough for Bougainville to prosper. *Leadership and good governance* through strong institutions are also paramount coupled with consistency in the policy arena even in the face of Govt changes. Efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Service is a must through proper resourcing and systems and processes. If Public Service becomes too cumbersome, then Bougainville should look at alternative models of “services & development delivery” that is not too dependent on the Public Service. Another lesson is that any future mining must be on Bougainville’s terms because it owns the resources and must dictate the terms – enough of others benefiting from our resources.

[In post-crisis Bougainville and in response to the then PNG Mining law that gave primacy to the State, the Bougainville Mining law has given customary land owners the upper hand in making decisions regarding mining – so much so that Bougainville Government has now spent over US\$20m in attempting to resurrect Panguna mine and start other mines elsewhere in Bougainville. Some landowners are also being taken for a ride by outside investors. Bougainville needs to find a balance in mining legislation between protecting landowner interests and the interest of the Government on behalf of the rest of Bougainville]

23 Nation Building and Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism and nation building are intertwined towards the recognition and celebration of diverse cultures by fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging while respecting individual differences, balancing diversity and unity through political integration and the fair distribution of social economic benefits to achieve social cohesion. To what extent is this occurring in PNG?

PNG is a nation of a thousand land locked or sea dispersed tribes with little or no history of inter-tribe communication and trade apart from the sea traders along the Papuan coast and the Trobriand Islands Kula ring. German colonial government through the indentured labour scheme, around WW1, established a sense of identity amongst the New Guinea islanders on the coconut plantations on East New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville and Manus. The strong bond created in those days still exist today as New Irelanders and Manusians refer to each other as “*Wan Solwara or Sol*” or Bougainvilleans and Manusians refer to each other as “*Kawas*” – meaning friend. After WW2, the Australian planters brought indentured labour from the highlands to the coast but didn’t really establish any strong bonds with the coastal locals because of the wide cultural differences.

The self-government period used education as a tool for unifying the nation by sending high achieving students to Australian high schools (ex-scholars to NSW and Queensland) and by creating National High Schools in Sogeri, Keravat and later Aiyura and Passam National High schools. These experiences led to long lasting relationships and networks amongst the students that transpired into the employment careers. From the 1990s, this trend was overshadowed by the proliferation of grades 11 and 12 in Provincial High Schools across PNG leading to the growth in numbers of inward-looking matriculation graduates with little multicultural exposure and appreciation of life in other parts of PNG. Those entering universities and colleges sought refuge amongst their own kind thus resulting in the ethnic clashes regularly witnessed on several University campuses.

Since independence, there are no specific programs promoting “Multiculturalism” in PNG – the idea of many different ethnic tribes merging and coalescing into a group of people with strong united bonds amongst themselves as citizens of a nation. The idea of an ethnic salad bowl (of Tolais, the Motuans, the Orokaivas, the Morobeans, the Sepiks, the Gahukus, the Taris, the Keremas etc etc) who strongly identify themselves as PNGeans and live in harmony and tolerance is fast becoming far fetched. Instead, we observe provincial days as Morobe day, Manus day, Central day or Eastern highlands day and so on indicating limited multiculturalism.

The PNG NRL Franchise will produce sporting idols in a land scarce of “milk and honey” and bring false expectations because not all 12million citizens of PNG can benefit from the fruits that will fall from the PNG NRL franchise. Bougainville through the Nation Building Strategy must ensure strong multicultural and national integration using both formal and informal approaches, for example regional exchange from grades 10 to 12 in high schools, intercultural shows and so on.

25. Lessons from within Bougainville

The Bougainville Crisis itself has taught Bougainville many lessons. This section only points out a few of these lessons:

1. In hindsight, one of the lessons learnt is that it is easy to start a rebellion but hard to contain it without proper systems of governance, command and control over the population. When PNG withdrew its government and security forces in 1990, it left Bougainville vacant, providing a golden opportunity to the rebellion leaders and its government to take administrative control of the island (albeit the economic embargo). Instead, the islands disintegrated into a very violent decade long civil war from which it is still recovering. The impact of the crisis still lingers on 20 years after its official cessation.
2. Social Economy Development - Twenty years after the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement and the restoration of government and social economic services, Bougainville still has not reached where it used to be vis a vis some aspects of social economic development such as the economy, employment, rural road and transport systems. In contrast, countries like Rwanda and Bukina Faso have progressed within two decades. Notably one part of Bougainville have done very well with excellent road link, power supply and general access to social economic services. In general, gains have also been made in education with an increase in primary and high school education.
3. Peace, normalcy and a way of life – Peace has been restored but the way of life has not yet returned 100% to where it was prior to the crisis and may never return to that life style. Alcohol and drug abuse are now daily occurrences with the abuse of women and girls is a post-crisis behaviour in Bougainville. Churches remain weak institutions and distrust at a personal level is slowly dissipating. The Chieftain system, together with the Churches, held the communities together during the height of the Crisis. Population increase, overlayed on the cumbersome customary land ownership system, the lack of significant economic growth and the burgeoning unskilled and unemployed youth population are the new time bombs.
4. Trust – remains a rare commodity between PNG and Bougainville beginning with the nationalization across PNG of the provincial government system (intended to be a unique arrangement only for Bougainville), then followed by the Bougainville crisis experience, the nonfulfillment of the restoration and development grants and now the post referendum consultations.
5. Bougainville is still on the periphery of Waigani politics -due to geographic distance, Bougainville began its journey into colonialism as an outpost of England, then Germany and then Australia and was largely in the hands of the planters and Christian missions. 50 years after independence, even with modern communications, Bougainville remains unable to directly influence Waigani politics and bureaucracy with its four National MPs. PNG has in fact moved towards consolidating power in Waigani by way of centralised decision making, resources management and distribution. In contrast, Manus province has attracted increased attention through the Momote international airport and the Lombrum Naval base because of geopolitics. Bougainville must maintain its' resolve to take political control of its destiny.
6. The Panguna mine is the devil that Bougainville now owns with a mixture of old and new issues that require systematic and sustained treatment in order to convert the economic potential into prosperity.
7. The Bougainville Public Service has done well in resurrecting and delivery basic social and economic services but needs to now prepare itself for the development transformation agenda in the immediate future.
8. Finally, the experience of a sovereign PNG, in translating economic wealth into prosperity for all, clearly proves that political independence is only part of the picture and that strong people centred leadership and strong robust and transparent governance sustained over several decades is essential for an independent Bougainville to flourish.

24. Conclusion.

After 50 years of independence, the expected development and prosperity from all its mineral wealth has alluded PNG and is now at the juncture of either turning a new leaf or continue its journey to self-destruction. Recent events, such as the corruption allegations surrounding Kumul Holdings, the Jacob Yafai case, the deportation of three ICAC foreign experts, under questionable circumstances, who were providing legal expertise in

investigating corruption, and the continued lip service to good governance do not indicate any preparedness for change. The absence of organized peaceful countervailing voices and the increasing urban violence in coastal towns by migrants is a further indication of this trend continuing. Regionalism has traversed the length and breadth of the nation and is becoming an incurable disease. The Papuan Governors have recently initiated regional cooperation for the Southern region which may be an indication of positive change if sustained.

Bougainville is geographically and demographically too small to influence national political agendas if it remained with PNG. Bougainville must learn these hard lessons from PNG and use them to guide its' nationhood journey as an independent sovereign nation of the Republic of North Solomons.

Note – readers are encouraged to compare these reflections against their own experiences and form their own conclusions.