The Bougainville Referendum Research Project

AN UPDATE

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Introduction

• The Papua New Guinea National Research Institute (PNGNRI) is a statutory body mandated to carry out independent research into socio-economic issues affecting the country.

• BRRP was created by the PNGNRI Council in 2017 to undertake research on the forthcoming referendum.

• This research aims to generate information that will assist in the conduct of a 'free and fair' referendum, the results of which will be credible both domestically and abroad.
Background to the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA)

• Decade-long (1988 to 1997) brutal civil war that saw 5000 – 20 000 lives lost and one third of the population displaced.

• The crisis affected people’s livelihoods, damaged infrastructure and the economy. It plunged the people of Bougainville into considerable sufferings for close to ten years.

• Peace restored following several failed attempts through the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) that was signed on the 30th of August 2001.
Background to the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA)

Several reasons for the conflict including:

i. Bougainvilleans’ underlying demands dating back to the period before independence for national identity separate from the rest of PNG

ii. Issues that arose with the establishment of the Panguna mine by Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) and the slow progress of the revisions of the arrangements related to:

- inequality of distribution of mining royalties and compensations
- damages to the livelihood of landowners and to the environment
- influx of people from other provinces who were seen as taking opportunities from locals
Attempts at Peace Throughout the Crisis

November 1988 – Power pylons blown up by dissatisfied young land owners and mineworkers
December 1988 – Riot Squad deployed to Bougainville
May 1989 – PNG Defense Force deployed to Bougainville
April 1990 – PNGDF leave Bougainville and put up a blockade around the island.
December 1988 – MOU signed. GoPNG committed to improving services to Panguna landowners
September 1989 – John Bika assassinated following work on Bika Report
May 1990 – Bougainville Ceasefire Initiative
October 1994 – Arawa Peace Conference
July 1997 – Bill Skate elected as PM, Burnham I held
October 1997 – Burnham II held and Burnham Truce signed.
January 1998 – Lincoln Agreement signed
August 30, 2001 – The Bougainville Peace Agreement signed at Arawa
The Bougainville Peace Agreement – The Three Pillars:

The Bougainville Peace Agreement had three main pillars:

1. Weapons Disposal

2. Autonomy

3. Referendum
Established in 2017, the Bougainville Referendum Research Project (BRRP) was created to generate information on the referendum and where, possible disseminate this to the stakeholders both within Bougainville and wider PNG.

Three main reasons were considered by the PNG NRI Council who then established the BRRP:

i. the approaching referendum in Bougainville was deemed an issue of national significance as it would affect the future of Bougainville and also PNG as a whole

ii. there was a void in information on the referendum

iii. the conversations on the referendum in Bougainville were difficult to hold as the subject was considered to be politically sensitive.
Bougainville Referendum Research Project

Three questions were put as central questions to be considered through this Project:

i. What is a Referendum and why is it being held?

ii. How can the Referendum be effectively administered?

iii. What are possible outcomes and how can the outcomes of the Referendum be effectively managed and implemented?

These questions were considered in the form of six main research reports.
Bougainville Referendum Research Project: Research Reports

1. Independence Referendums: History, Practice and Outcomes
2. Administration of Referendums: A Comparative Study of Independence Referendums
3. Options for Bougainville’s Autonomy Arrangements: A Study from a Global Comparative Perspective
5. Bougainville Referendum Outcome Issues
6. Status and Implementation of the Bougainville Peace Agreement and Implementations for Referendum
The other main focus of the BRRP has been on communicating the research findings of the studies, fostering greater awareness on the issues and creating spaces for conversations to take place around these issues. This has been accomplished via:

- Commissioning the “Challenges of Communicating Sensitive Issues in Fragile Settings: Literature Review for the Bougainville Referendum Research Project” Issues paper
- Seminar presentations on research reports and launches held both in Port Moresby and Buka for all reports
- Hosting the first ever National Conference on the Bougainville Referendum in June 2018
- Fortnightly Radio Talkback shows on NBC Radio paired with commentaries released on the two Dailies
- Seminar Presentations to University Students
- Distribution of research reports to all Primary and Secondary schools and community governments in Bougainville
- Joint roadshows with the Parliamentary Bipartisan Committee on Bougainville Matters
Conclusions

• The PNG NRI has been proactive in the preparations for the referendum on Bougainville’s Political Future. The decision on Bougainville’s political future has implications both for Bougainville and for PNG.

• PNG NRI through BRRP is fulfilling its mandate of providing independent research into socio-economic issues affecting the country. The six studies plus other work undertaken by the BRRP have been aimed at filling the information gap about the Bougainville referendum in Papua New Guinea.

• Through the studies, much information has been generated which have been used as the basis for starting the conversation and desensitizing the issue of the Bougainville Referendum at the national level.

• The BPA allowed for the pursuance of 'Peace through Peaceful means'. It provided for Disposal of Weapons, Autonomy, and a Referendum that was to take place between 10 and 15 years after the election of the first President of Bougainville. The time for the referendum, which must be 'free and fair' as required by legislation, has come.

• PNG NRI through the BRRP is making a concerted effort to generating information to assist the conduct of a 'free and fair' referendum, the results of which will be credible both locally and internationally.
Thank you All!

More information on BRRP are available via:

Email: Referendum.Research@pngnri.org
Website: pngnri.org
Facebook: PNG NRI’s Bougainville Referendum Research Project