

Opportunist Sector in Urban Goroka - A real Development Challenge

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Abstract

Papua New Guinea recently is experiencing significant growth in its economy as pointed out in Asian Development Bank outlook in 2014. The update affirms that the GDP forecast for 2015 will soar to a record 21%, a marked increase from forecasted 6% GDP in 2014. At this juncture we anticipate prosperous future ahead as the profits from LNG starts pouring in. While the country heads into economic prosperity and poised to affirm itself in the region as economic power house, the stark reality at the backdrop of LNG era is the acute disparity that is so prevalent across the cross sections of the country. The age old question remains, how effective will the country's wealth translates into gains for all citizens.

The urban areas in the country continue to grapple with social problems. Lack of planning, political indifference and lack administrative foresight continue to exacerbate social problems in towns and cities. Most towns and cities are continually been stretched in dealing with urbanization issues as more people from rural areas move into town and cities competing for limited resources. Goroka well placed geographically, pride itself of having a spring like climate, host of institutions and important establishments; is a sprawling administrative, social and economic hub of the highlands is experiencing social dilemma in period of growth.

Goroka like any other urban centers in the country struggle daily to maintain order and to ensure general working and living environment is consistent with civic and citizenry standards and practices. Over the last few years influx of people from rural areas in the province as well as from other provinces had resulted in what I term "Opportunist Sector". More generally, it is an informal sector but

more precisely it's a sector that provides for residual demands and or services. Quite often, such opportunist services are provided by those with low self-esteem and lacking basic education in life. The makeup of the sector are one's that reside in settlements and blocks on the margins of the town.

Though there are different research methods, interviews and group discussions were used. Person to person interview in research focus areas, and mostly open ended question is employed to generate information, understand experiences and meaning, believes and values in the focus areas.

In total, seven interviews and two group discussion were carried out; in both notes were taken and recording done using the phone.

Key words: Opportunist, sector, economic, growth, social, urbanization, LNG, forecast

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Introduction

While economic prospect looks promising for Papua New Guinea, the contrast is unimaginable. Social indicators are dismal, poverty, disparity, deplorable state of infrastructure in rural areas, surge in law and order; high mortality, rapid urbanization and many other development challenges continue to paint a different picture of a country that is experiencing significant growth in its economy.

Goroka, like other urban centers continue to grapple with development challenges in an ironically exciting period of growth.¹ The “Opportunist Sector” in Goroka is one that categorically thrives on residual demands and is generally identified within the framework of informal sector. The term “Opportunist sector” is coined somewhat loosely to cluster services that are monetarily unfulfilling but is created by residual demand and cross cutting socio-economic issues, educational and development challenges.

Quite often perceived as derogatory and conveys negative connotation in highlands culture, it is generally an accepted reality.

The purpose and focus of this research is to offer theoretical insight into this development dilemma which policy makers and authorities are confronted with. Various reasons offered by respondents interviewed are discussed to shed light into multi facet issues surrounding the Opportunist Sector. The opinion and arguments provided are sure to generate further scholarly interest in the area.

Research Questions

Research questions are structured to draw from the experiences of individual in the sector. This include the questions that allows them to describe their engagement in the activity, how they see themselves in terms of what they are doing, the importance of what they do, describing their experiences in the undertaking, describe how they fit into the sector and also the benefits that is derived, possibility of change and how society and family perceived them. More

¹ The country’s GDP is forecasted at 21% driven by oil and gas sector, yet inequality and disparity is a glaring contrast

so, research questions also include those that would provide motives and reasons.

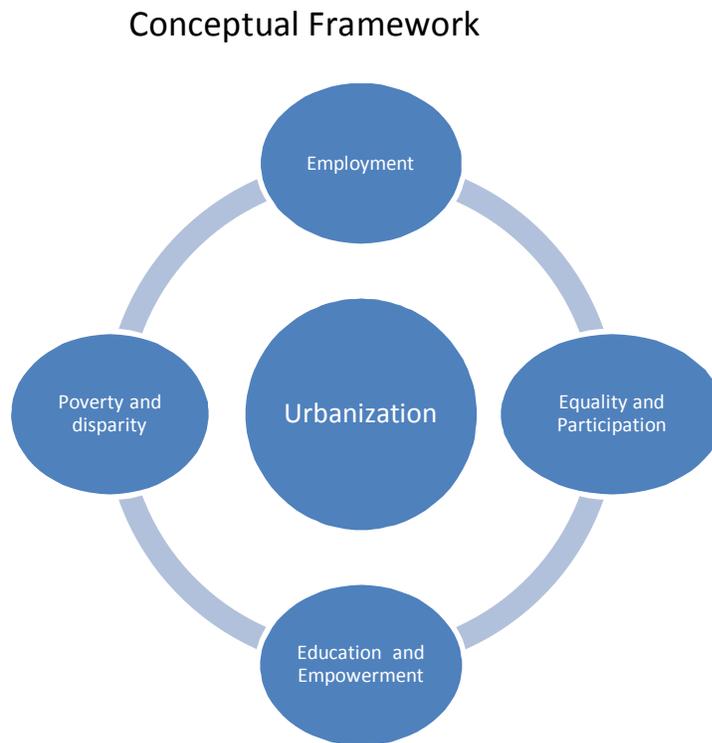


Figure 1: Urban development

The conceptual framework indicates the relationship or interconnectivity between urban development and issues that pertain to it. Goroka can draw from international best practices; South Africa is one area that has similar urban development challenges like PNG. Urban development framework (Department of Housing, 1997 SA) finds that the process of urbanization holds a great promise for economic and social progress, thus, the promotion of literacy and education, the improvement to access of better services to greater number of people and for cultivating democracy and equality.

Methodology

Research method used in this research is qualitative, mostly unstructured interview, group discussion and direct observation. Literature research also using the web source also carried out to anchor research to literature.

Sampling Method and Sample Size

The sampling method used in this research is convenience sampling. Samples selected based on convenience of time, social space, and cultural consideration, in particular with the female sample.

Security consideration also played part in deciding the sample size. Convenience sampling was more fitting because I have random afternoons week days and also random weekends that were used.

The sample size is 20, of which three quarter is male and 5 female respondents. Of the five female one is a child and four adults, while on the other hand 11 adult male samples and four male child samples.

Sample areas are randomly selected; most of the respondents are from block opposite Raun Raun Theater, main market town and Brick House.

Research Findings

Based on the preliminary research done, five services were identified, while there could be few others given the current socio-economic state of Goroka. The activities differ markedly, yet they tend to serve the same purpose, services are rendered for insignificant monetary reward. All these services in the sector are provided by settlers from the different settlements within the town margins.

Five Kina Crew

The need to persuade and influence passengers into Lae, Madang and Highlands buses in shortest possible time had created this demand. The crews are temporal, and compete for a change to call for passengers. If one gets on board first on the arriving empty bus he will call and persuade passenger's to get on the bus. He is offered K5.00 when all seats are filled and the bus is about to take off.

In this undertaking the smart crews can make good amount on the day; conversely some go empty handed at the end of the day.

Wheel Barrow Boys

This service operates to serve the mothers who bring in their produces to the market. In this service the lowest cash payment is K1.00; the amount due to service providers is determined by, the size and quantity of the goods and the distance it takes to transport the goods.

Most of the respondents in the interview alluded that one push can fetch between K15.00 to K20.00, if the quantity is big and the distance is long. However in most cases the push is short, from bus stop to the market which equates to K1.00 or K2.00 at most. With the introduction of taxi service in town, wheelbarrow is limited to the main market area.

Shopping Bag Assists

This service is provided mostly by children under age of 13, in particular boys. The activity is confined to big shops. Most obvious sight in Goroka is Bintagor and Papindo in town. Although it quite often done intermittently, afternoons of pay weeks are ideal time for bag assists. Many shoppers are reluctant or simply ignore their offers for help. This can be attributed to couple of reasons; all of the children are suspicious of being shoplifters, their presence within and around the shopping precincts irritates many shoppers.

The changes of benefiting is less, compared to other services in the opportunist sector. In cases where shoppers give in to the request for help, usually cash payments for the services provided are meager. Mostly they are paid 50t to K2.00, other times they are offered food, e.g. soft drinks, biscuits etc. In worse cases they are simply thanked for their help.

All shopping bag assists are not always lucky, however from the interview conducted, the amount is insignificant whether it is small or big. Hence, what matters and is important to them is at least they have money to get something at the end of the day.

Candle Children

This service is provided mostly by children under the age of ten are allowed or are coerced to sell candles to every PMV vehicle that stops to offload passengers. This is done a mile away from town; most of the children who engage in the activity are settler's offspring. A single candle stick is sold for 30t, a dozen or two can be sold each day.

These activities are often carried out in the afternoons, between four and six pm. Although this is an abuse of the rights of children, it's now becoming a norm because nothing is done about it because adults are benefiting from it. While on the other hand the children take pleasure doing it.

Flour ball Carriers

This service in the sector is provided mostly by woman, even though men are involved, it seems to be more fitting with the woman because load is carried on the head, which only women are adept. The service simply involves loading the flour balls down to the market from the kitchen several meters away from the main market.

The rate is K1.00 per load, on a good day one make up to K10.00. This service is subject to the owners discretion, they either get people to provide this service for a day or for sustain period of time.

Those who work for longer time periods are paid weekly or fortnightly, in contrast to one day service providers who is paid at the end of the day.

Discussions-what the Research Participants Say

According to the information provided by the research participants in the interview and group discussion and direct observations, it is interesting; the responses show a lot of similarity.

The only obvious difference is in the responses that adult and child research participants provide.

Limited or Non Existence of Income Earning Opportunity in Rural Areas

Base on the findings from the interview it's clear, those who engage in the Opportunist sector are all from rural districts of Lufa and Okapa in Eastern Highland as well as Chimbu. All the interviewees engage as Five Kina Crew and Wheel Barlow Boys contend that lack of income earning opportunity in their rural villages propel them to migrate to town to look for the opportunity that lacks in the village.² There is limited or nonexistence of income earning opportunities. It is revealed that most people in the villages hardly see money or have a feel of money as in many weeks or even months because of lack of income earning opportunity and the failure of the successive governments to create opportunities for people.

It is also revealed in the interview that the need to have money at any point in time is a driving factor. Money is needed to cover for basic needs and emergencies.

Wheelbarrow service are all from is from Ubaguvi in Lufa district. It is revealed that, the idea to have all young men from Ubaguvi into wheel barrow service is to protect it from other ethnic groups into gaining entry.³

Education

Lack of education is another important factor that is cause people to engage in the opportunist sectors. Almost half the number interviewed revealed they are illiterate, while others have basic education. Peter (not his real name) from Gimi in Okapa contends that when you lack formal education, opportunities are limited. You need to do anything to live, even if it do you harm. He said he has been doing it for over five years, he said it's a reality of life.

² The economic activity in the rural areas is very poor or is in shambles. Consequently cash flow is low and not much economic activity taking place. Not much improvement in general living standards of the people.

³ The research participants revealed that protecting the Wheel Barrow service is important for their survival in the town, without it life would be difficult.

Family security

Even though monetary reward is not fulfilling research findings revealed that family security is important. Family is important and cuts across various aspect of life including stigma and stereotype that is inherent in highlands culture. Thinking of family and providing for family needs is a worthwhile thing to do.

Some of the young men are married and have small children, without education and formal employment is difficult.

Cultural Obligation

Another revelation is the cultural obligation, as member of family, clan and tribe. Since income is meager or insufficient communal commitment is important part of fulfilling obligations or getting things done. Also it is often used as leverage to measure social worth within their own family, clan or tribe.

Children Participants Response

According to the three children that were interviewed, it is obvious they are either coerced by the older members of the families or in some cases by youths or older children for their own end. Even parents are aware of the rights of children and its implication, however monetary benefits by far supersede legal parameters.

Children contribute to aggregate income of the family, even though it contravenes the Convention on the Rights of Children which is ratified by many countries including PNG.

Others are forced by pressing circumstances beyond their control, acute poverty, living with foster parents because they have lost one or either of their parents. Such situations warrant children to act and engage in activities that contradict their fundamental rights.⁴ Small girls also involved in selling candles, older siblings

⁴ Acute Poverty is a serious shortage of income or of access to the range of resources that usually provide the basic necessities for life for humans, such as food, shelter, sanitation, clean water, medical care, and education.

[http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095349346\[27/04/2015 11:47:37 AM\]](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095349346[27/04/2015 11:47:37 AM])

and parents coerced them into selling candle other times they simply feel the urge to engage in, and at times they may appear lethargic and embarrassed.

Background to the Emergence of Opportunist Sector

At this juncture it would be crude neither shallow to develop philosophical insight into the emergence of the sector without making reference to cross cutting socio economic, geo political and cultural issues and challenges.

Based on the feedback provided by the interviewees, the following reasons clearly emerged that to some extent offers contextual awareness of the development of the sector

Rural Urban Drift

Urban drift is not new and is as old as the country itself, but it can be further traced back to the period of Industrial Revolution. Migrants from rural areas migrate to towns in search for better living⁵. Migrant to Goroka generally come from rural districts Eastern Highlands, including Chimbu and Western Highlands provinces.

Migration into Goroka is daily occurrence, from rural areas of the province as well as from other provinces.

Migration take place principally for economic reason, although social influences are always important, for real and perceived inequalities in socio economic opportunities.⁶ Perceived or unrealistic expectations of better living is always difficult to materialize hope of better living evaporates easily living many in disparity.

⁵ http://asopa.typepad.com/asopa_people/2011/02/examining-urban-drift-solutions-for-png.html[27/04/2015 4:44:53 PM]

⁶ Ibid

Poverty

Developing an awareness of poverty is important step towards understanding issues that pertain to it. Poverty is said to exist when people lack the means to meet their basic needs.⁷

The increase in law and order in Goroka town, mushrooming informal sector, competition for trivial demand and or services, increasing number of out of school, neglected settlement children indicates that majority of people are in economically desperate situation.

While state of poverty in the province is abject leading to the emergence opportunist sector, it is an inherent development dilemma in developing countries and PNG is no exception. Thirty seven percent of the people in PNG live below the national poverty line.⁸

Urbanization

Goroka's population continues to increase as more people are moving in. This has placed a lot of strain on the provision of municipal services as people compete for limited resource and services.

Fazed by unfulfilled expectation for better living squatters quite often resort to unconventional ploys for survival.

While Goroka is seen expansion of business and economic activities unemployment is a real challenge. Formal sector jobs require skilled people, while only a portion of the formal sector absorb unskilled labour. Example of this includes road construction companies, security companies, coffee factories and plantation.

High rate of unemployment, disillusionment of one's own status, lack of education, and family support, and their own inability to make amends to their life's had forced many into lower end of the social strata.

⁷ Poverty. (2010).Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Ultimate reference Suite

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http://www.pg.undp.org/content/papua_new_guinea/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/overview.html[27/04/2015 10:49:27 AM]

Increasing Uneducated Population

Most of the people in the opportunist sector are illiterate, others have rudimentary education, while others would have furthered their education but are forced out because of lack of school fees or simply cost of education before free education was expansive for ordinary citizens.

According to the research participants, they would love to educate their children but it is not something that is of urge or a matter of urgency. The need to have food on the table daily surpasses other aspects of life. There is high rate of Illiteracy for people moving into town (Goroka) from the rural areas and chief among the reasons for migrating is economic. According to Cate Rogers who has done research work in Obura-Wonenara, the literacy rate is 19% for women and 37% for men.⁹ The trend in Obura-Wonenara can equate to other districts in the province.

The Way Forward

While opportunist activity is a development dilemma that will remain, Goroka like other towns in the country has a mammoth challenge. Identifying practical approach to deal with the challenge's, harnessing development part ways envision in Medium term development strategy and vision 2050 will be a significant step forward for Goroka and the province at large.

Creating conducive economic environment in rural area (Rural Development) is important. It will contain people because income earning opportunity is there. Invest in road infrastructure, so they can have access to market and other financial service.

Low level of education and financial literacy is another important factor that exacerbates poverty¹⁰. Financial literacy and awareness would be significant step towards alleviating poverty as people will tailor their income and use it proportionately for basic needs and save the surplus for future.

⁹http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/papua_new_guinea[27/04/2015 10:47:41 AM]

¹⁰<http://devpolicy.org/confronting-the-economic-challenges-facing-pngs-new-government20120801/>[27/04/2015 11:02:21 AM]

Align service industries with government funding's, in particular training institution to provide training for settlers

Legislate viable policy to control and regulate informal sector and also to protect the service providers from abuse of those who benefit from it.

Conclusion

Opportunist sector thrives on residual demand. The emergence of the sector is attributed to cross-cutting socio-economic, cultural and geo-political underpinnings, which can only be adequately address by getting to the bottom of all this.

Opportunist activities will continue to challenge the urbanization process and will continue to stand in the way of urban development.

All of opportunist and informal activities at this stage demands holistic and concerted attention from the town authority and other stakeholders. These activities not only impede development but are constantly contributing to disorder, beauty and tranquility that were once the grandeur of Goroka.

Hence, there will still be solution to problems, Goroka town authority and partners must start to plan on how they wanted Goroka developing in the future. Whilst planning to be consistent with development aspirations of the country.

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