

Paperwork in PNG

by Joseph Tuan Viet Cao

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Photo Credit: *Nasfund*

I am Joseph Tuan Viet Cao, a Catholic priest in Papua New Guinea. I am working in the Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Bomana, National Capital District (NCD). My parish includes 13 chapels that belong to NCD and Central Province.

After saying morning Mass one day, when I was preparing my breakfast, a couple from Laloki Village in Central Province dropped by. The man, in his forties, told me his problem. He is a member of **Nasfund**, the national superannuation fund. He is eligible to withdraw some money from Nasfund. So, he needs to fill in a form and it is required that I, as his parish priest, confirm the information with my signature and parish seal.

He left the parish house but returned at noon. He told me that the people in the Nasfund office wanted him to obtain a reference letter from me. I was surprised and asked to see what other papers he had in relation to this application for funds. I found a letter from his employer, a police clearance, bank statements, and a paper from the courts, among others. I provided him with a letter and he went on his way.

Around 5 pm, he came back to me and asked me for a copy of my national identity card (NID). I have written many reference letters but no one has asked me for my NID. In the letter, I had already provided my phone number and email for confirmation. I was so sorry for that man. I made a copy of my NID and gave it to him.

At noon on the following day, the man returned yet again. He told me he was still unable to withdraw his money. The people in the office had asked him to fill out a new form. They said that the old one was dirty. He filled out a new form and I signed it again.

My parishioner hasn't returned so I assume that at last he was able to get his funds. But it did make me think.

From his house in his village, getting to the Nasfund office took two buses. From the office to where I live was another two buses. I do not know how much money my

friend spent for bus fares, and how many hours it all took, but the process is unimaginable.

Many other processes in PNG are similarly complex, whether getting a bank account, or applying for an NID, passport, visa or driving licence. It is more complicated than anyone can imagine. And it is very time consuming. Some people have to wait for two or three years before they get their NID and passport. During that period, they have to go to the office often to follow up and check. They often have to apply more than once. Students miss out on study opportunities, and workers on work opportunities.

PNG people are patient and are used to the unexpected. But in this digital age, the government surely needs to do something to speed up everyday systems.

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