

Taking research back to the community

by Nayahamui Michelle Rooney

11 July 2018



Michelle discussing her research (Credit: Nicole Yariyari)

My research has an urban focus and I undertook my PhD fieldwork in the ATS settlement in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. My thesis is [available online](#) at the ANU open access theses collection.

During my PhD research, I discovered that academic writing is a difficult, long, and rigorous process because of the need to engage with scholarship, the review process, and because knowledge and expertise are contested concepts. I sought to share my research and ideas through various platforms available to me at the time. These included policy briefs and blogs (my favourite!), conference presentations, seminars, and panel discussions. When opportunities arose to write peer reviewed articles or book chapters I would grab them. These bite size portions of sharing allowed me to test some of my ideas and enabled me to boost my confidence. I also received important feedback that improved the thesis. These modes of sharing are an important part of the process of research itself.

The most challenging, and most fun, part of sharing my research was at the end. As my PhD drew to its end, I started to think about how to share this research with the people and community who had generously shared their knowledge with me. I was nervous. I had occupied a privileged position to write for so many years. I had pulled together and synthesised data – words, observations, maps, photographs, literature, newspaper articles, emotions, experiences, numbers and other data – into a body of work that actually drew on many people. Ultimately, however, I felt accountable for it.


Had I consulted all the necessary and relevant sources and literature? Did I act ethically? Will my research lead to conflict? Did I understand what people were saying to me? Had I interpreted them accurately? Did I portray people's lives honestly? Had I reflected my own positionality, which may have shaped my values and my interpretations? Importantly, given time limitations, how would I work through the rather large document that the thesis had become whilst ensuring that it would be accessible.

In addition, my field site of urban Papua New Guinea is also an increasingly contested space. Increasing land values, evictions, legal battles, inequality and other social, cultural, political economic forces means that the research touches on important issues in Port Moresby. We also research during a time when social media like Facebook, Twitter and blogs have helped to break down the barriers between researchers, the general population, and research participants.

Mainstream print media is readily available in Port Moresby and the population has a higher education level. All these mean that debates can be intense. In addition, I am not an outsider to the fieldwork site. I lived in Port Moresby for a long time and have family and friends there who might be interested in what I had to say about home.

To assist in the process I prepared two posters (see posters 1 and 2 below) to summarise the research, and printed several hard copies of the thesis. Over two days in two different parts of the settlement, I made copies of the posters and the thesis available for Tuli people to browse. I explained the PhD process and apologised for the very long time it took to complete it and return to share it. I left three copies of the thesis and sets of posters with three leaders in different parts of the settlement for people to read in their own time.

Poster 1



Social Safety Nets for People Living in ATS Settlement, Port Moresby A Case Study

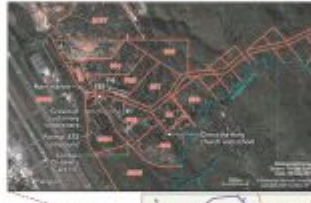
Summary of PhD Thesis: Michelle Neaumeau Rooney (PhD), Research Fellow, Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University. Many people have contributed to this research. Here I acknowledge the important contributions of the Tuli community and others at the ATS settlement and beyond who shared their stories and knowledge with me. The research is supported by funding from the Australian Government. All mistakes are mine. Email: michelle.neaumeau@anu.edu.au © by Michelle Neaumeau Rooney, 2017. All rights reserved.

Summary

This thesis is based on research conducted among the Tuli community in the ATS settlement, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG). ATS stands for Air Transport Squadron of the PNG Defence Force which has a compound located in one of the portions of land near the settlement. This research studied the livelihood and social safety strategies for participants over the period from the mid-1990s to 2013. It studied the challenges and responses that the Tuli, Oro and ATS community face as migrants and as citizens of PNG living in an urban informal settlement. In this context, there is very little money income, or *Nigari Money* in Tok Pisin. The study examines how families work either individually or as a community to address the livelihood and social safety challenges they face. The data presented in the thesis is based on in-depth interviews with 33 families who identified as being from Tuli. I also had interviews and conversations with many other people in the settlement and Port Moresby.

Urban land

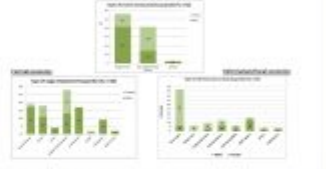
- Land is a major challenge. There are many stakeholders of land in the city. Leaders of the settlement negotiate with different stakeholders of land in the city.
- Customary Land owners are important stakeholders in the land. This means residents of the settlement sometimes need to contribute towards customary events.



- The ATS settlement covers several large portions of state land. In Port Moresby property developers also want land to make money. They threaten to evict residents. When this happens residents need to fight legal battles in the courts. For example, portion 655 has been in the courts for many years.

Income generation

- Most families combine waged employment and small informal activities like selling, busi and other items at their *haus market*.
- Men are more likely to have waged employment.
- Women are more likely to have a small *haus market*.



Household Type	Waged Income	Informal Income	Total
Households with only waged income	10	0	10
Households with only informal income	0	10	10
Households combining informal and waged income	5	5	10
Households with no income	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	15	30

Background

To understand people's livelihoods and social safety nets (network) was carried out in the settlement in 2013. The following kinds of questions were asked to people who agreed to participate in the research:

- How do you and your family make a living?
- How did you come to live in the settlement?
- What are the key challenges that you and your family face?
- What are the key challenges that the community faces?
- What are your important social safety nets? Who do you go to when you need help?
- What is your relationship with your family at home in your village?

Urban ethnicity: Living with Oro and other Papua New Guineans

Their Oro and Tuli identity is an important part of the stories of people I interviewed. The settlement is also a safety net for family and friends who live and work in the city. Many people came to the settlement because they had family living there.

Being part of Oro and Tuli helps keep people safe in the community. Family, friends, and neighbours share with each other but this is also becoming harder to do because no jobs and low incomes means that everyone is struggling to make a living.

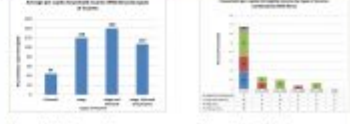
Many people also recognize that it is important to live in harmony with people from other parts of PNG. The settlement is very much a mixed community where people from all over PNG have come to live.

Safety and Security

- People from all over PNG live in the ATS settlement. Ethnic conflicts are another challenge that the community faces.
- Crime is also a problem.
- When a conflict occurs everyone gets involved to help solve the conflict. This can mean paying compensation to other groups of people.
- Maintaining peace and harmony involves everyone. A lot of time is spent on solving conflicts.
- More needs to be done to address family violence and violence against women.




Income distribution



Households that combine wage income with informal incomes have higher incomes per person per fortnight in the household.

When household incomes are divided by all members living in the house, most families have less than K100 per person per fortnight.



The ATS Settlement community engaging as citizens in Port Moresby Accessing Water and Education Services


Summary of PhD Thesis: Michelle Macpherson/Honorary PhD, Research Fellow, Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University. Many people have contributed to this research. I want to acknowledge the important contributions of the ATS community and citizens, the ATS settlement and people who shared their stories and knowledge with me. The research is supported by funding from the Australian Government. All mistakes are mine. Email: michelle.macpherson@anu.edu.au © by Michelle Macpherson, 2016. All rights reserved.

Summary

People living in the ATS settlement face challenges in accessing services like water and education. These challenges are partly to do with having no resources, but are also to do with the way the government authorities and the laws deal with land, education policies, and the delivery of services in urban areas. In order to overcome these challenges the community and their leaders have made important efforts to work together in partnership with many people and organisations in order to provide services like water and education to the community. This means that people balance their identities, as coming from a province in PNG, with being citizens who are interested in development and improving their community's well-being. Their efforts as citizens trying to secure development for their community means residents of the settlement are making an important contribution to the country and the government's policies like the Universal Basic Education Plan. They also contribute to international agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals. The poster is based on fieldwork conducted in 2015 and research undertaken since then.

Water in Port Moresby

Water is a natural resource. Port Moresby's water comes from the **Sikimaia Dam** in the Central Province. From there it is piped to Port Moresby. **Eda Plains** is the State Owned Enterprise that is responsible for releasing water to Port Moresby. Like the issues of land, Port Moresby's water supply management and system divides the city into two groups. One group access water through pipes that lead directly to taps in their houses. This group pays individual water bills. The other group of residents of Port Moresby are those that live in urban settlements like ATS settlement or in urban villages. This group either connect water illegally or work together to pay their water bill as a community.



- In ATS Settlement the Water Committee and other leaders in the community play an important role in negotiating for water.
- The water committee negotiates with Eda Plains, the Members of Parliament, and contractors.
- The water committee also works with the community to make sure that the water taps are collected and the water bill is paid.
- Sometimes this is difficult when people don't pay their fees. Many people cannot afford to pay the fees.

Citizenship: Make your own poster

CANDY stands for:

- **C**itizenship at the **C**ommunity Level in urban PNG is **C**reative. Citizenship is a desirable quality that PNG leaders have long included in national policies, participating in development transparent processes, for equal and equitable access to services for everyone. The land issue at all PNG other urban settlements makes it hard for people living there to benefit from these democratic principles.
- **A**ction from people living in the community is important. This means that the ATS community manages water when how local systems and partnerships with other institutions in the city enable the community to access water.
- **M**aintaining a spirit of hope, innovative thinking, resilience, and resourcefulness to great challenges is important.
- **D**evelopment takes **D**etermination and working towards our **D**reams.
- **Y**outh - **Y**oung Passes New Outcomes are our future. They hold the answers.

The **C**ome, The **K**ing Primary School and the **T**embari Children's Centre are good examples of the way that PNG universities and its leaders have developed their citizenship through action nurturing creative thinking to achieve development for young people in the community.

For your poster think about the following questions:


- What are some possible solutions to overcome the issue of land so that the government can provide funding or recognise locally established governance institutions? For example, one idea is to ask the Government Department of Education to allow the students to register for the Flexible Learn and Distance Education (FLDE) program. Students can remain in the community and be supported by the teachers while they complete their education in the formal system through FLDE. Another idea is to ask the government to reorganise and recruit the students education by allowing them to sit the national grade 8 test.
- Can you think of other possible solutions?
- What other challenges are there in your community and what ideas do you have for solving them?
- Can you think of other initiatives in your community that are led by people in the community?
- What kinds of partnerships are important?
- What other important sources of water are there in the community?
- How can we overcome challenges to citizenship and democratic principles?

CANDY
WORK IN TEAMS AND BE CREATIVE!

Urban land challenges


Many people move to the settlement because they cannot afford housing in Port Moresby. ATS stands for Air Transport Squadron of the PNG Defence Force which has a compound located in one of the portions of land near the settlement. In order to secure the land to live the community negotiates with various stakeholders in different ways. These stakeholders include:

- Customary Landowners
- The State of PNG
- State leaseholders
- Property developers
- People looking for land for housing
- Current Residents of ATS settlement




Education: Christ The King Primary School

- Christ The King Primary School was established in 2008 by the Anglican church community.
- Government of PNG education policies require communities to make land and other resources like water available before the government can fund schools.
- Because the community at ATS settlement do not legally own the land they are not able to register the school and therefore cannot qualify for government funds.
- Despite these challenges the community have demonstrated citizenship by working in partnership with the church and non government organisations. These organisations also receive funding from donors.
- The community raises funds locally to support the school.
- In 2017 the school is graduating its pioneering grade 6 students.



Education: Tembari Children's Centre Inc.

- The Tembari Children's Centre was started because the community leaders saw that many children needed support.
- Tembari Children's Centre is an example of the community partnering with the private sector in the City.
- Companies supply food for the feeding program and other important support like containers to be used as classrooms.
- This is another important example of how urban communities exercise citizenship.



Urban services

Land is a key challenge facing the community when they try to secure government services. The authorities and the laws regard the land as being 'owned' by the state. Even though the community makes important efforts to establish services, it is difficult to secure government support because they do not legally own the land. This situation shows that even though the government is supposed to provide services to citizens based on the PNG Constitutional and human rights principles of equality and fairness, the reality is that these laws divide citizens of Port Moresby into two groups. One group in the city reside in informal or 'illegal' settlement situations. The other part of the city live in formal legal arrangements. These two parts of the city access services in different ways.

Two days was not enough time for people to fully absorb the thesis and engage in its findings. It is likely that this process will unfold over the next few years. However, I was glad to note that some people asked me if they could use the posters and the thesis to engage with authorities as they strived to bring development into their community. Research and the knowledge it generates is a process that occurs between researchers and participants as well as with the broader panel of supervisors and advisors and the many people who engage with the researcher. One of the leaders reminded me about this point when I tried to apologise for any errors in the thesis. He had helped to guide and support my fieldwork. In response to my apology, he pointed out that the community had supported me by sharing their time, stories, and knowledge and therefore the outcome was our mutual responsibility.

One woman who was also an important collaborator who guided and supported the research asked an important question: "What's next?" This question lingers with me and I am sure with her. It brings home the obligation we as researchers have to thinking through the implications and outcomes of our research. Without responding to this question, the research remains just a document. I like to think that it will generate conversations, add to the debates, and help people, including policy makers, think through the issues in the thesis. However, I do still think about how I

might more concretely respond to my collaborator's question.

Not everyone gets the same opportunity to return to host communities to share research. I am very lucky that I have a job that enables me to return to PNG and hence to the community. But, even without such a job, I feel that we live during a time when the internet, social media, platforms like blogging make it much easier to make research available to the wider public. I also shared the research with the National Research Institute, colleagues at the University of Papua New Guinea, and the funders of the research.

I decided to make my thesis available online. It is by no means perfect, and I remain circumspect about how the findings may shape debates and impact on the community, as Port Moresby continues to change rapidly. At times I feel overwhelmed by the thought that my research is now available publicly, but I am more confident after returning to the community.

I encourage others to reflect on how they want to share their research. Being open with communities and participants about the nature of research, the power you hold, and your own limitations in representing research is important. Communities and individuals are very generous when it comes to supporting research, and we need to be accountable to them. We also live in a time when the divide between researchers and researched is increasingly blurred.

Post-PhD, my researcher and personal identity are in many ways entangled and constantly changing with life and relationship changes. For me the sharing process is an important part of being accountable and acknowledging that our research outcomes are grounded in collective efforts. The process is not over. Completed research also takes on a life of its own as researchers, communities, other stakeholders, and the wider public begin to engage with the ideas, findings, and debates. This is the organic and mutually constructed nature of research.

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/taking-research-back-to-community-20180711/>