

## POLICY BRIEF



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### PHILANTHROPY AND GIFT GIVING FROM A PAPUA NEW GUINEA (MELANESIAN) DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

#### KEY FINDINGS

- The difference between western capitalist views of gifting and PNG gifting is that PNG societies' gifting economies are deeply rooted and entrenched in the structures of the PNG societies.
- As shown in this research, corporate philanthropic gifting is still viewed by Papua New Guineans as beneficial to corporations for their purposes.
- The gifting done in the PNG Melanesian way is not the same as corporate gifting.
- PNG has many development challenges; however, local communities, in many cases, live off their land and acknowledge the importance of traditional land ownership and the social networks and relationships that support each person and community in times of need through gifting and social exchanges.
- Philanthropic organisations and other NGOs' development contributions should be coordinated by a specific government department, like Community Development Department, with a specific commission, like the charities commission, that can oversee the work of foundations and charities operating in PNG.

#### CONTEXT AND ISSUE

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In Papua New Guinea (PNG), charitable work and doing good has always been part of society. People in communities have cultural and social relationships which enable them to look out for one another in times of need. In his book *The Melanesia Way*, PNG's philosopher Bernard Narokobi (1983) explained that giving and taking, cooperation, and mutual support, especially in times of need and crisis, are integral to PNG societies (Narokobi, 1983, p13). Melanesian scholars have written about Melanesia from their world views, and in doing so, they have discussed their perceptions of Melanesian ways. They have recognised the importance of gifting and social support (Kabutaulaka, 2015, p193-4). One of the key features associated with Melanesian ways is gift exchanges and reciprocity; gift-giving is part of the Melanesian Way. My research aimed to understand how Melanesian gifting affects how people see development gifting by alternative development actors, especially corporate philanthropic organizations in PNG. I focused, in particular, on the case of the Digicel Foundation.

There have been acknowledgments of alternative development actors' contributions, especially faith-based and non-government organisations (NGOs), contributing to development in PNG (Luker, 2003). However, there are limited discussions of philanthropic and corporate foundations' contributions to development from a PNG Melanesian perspective. Against this backdrop, this research took a critical development perspective to analyse the perspectives of Papua New Guineans who have grounding from their respective gifting societies and how this plays out in their views of contemporary development actors. I examined whether PNG communities see corporate philanthropic giving as beneficial or as the resurfacing of top-down neoliberal development approaches with private (market-based) organizations with resources to work in communities for the benefit of their businesses (Edwards, 2009, p237). In other words, I look at foundations' contributions to development from a PNG Melanesian perspective.

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## THE FINDINGS

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The research showed that gifting and reciprocity in PNG Melanesian societies were and are done to maintain relationships and linked to the individual's personhood in the communities to which they belong. Therefore, comparing corporate gifting to PNG gifting shows that gifting in PNG is about long-term relationships as opposed to corporate gifting, which is time-bound. Personal gifts are exchanged through existing relationships rather than for commercial purposes; past and present gifting exchanges are embedded and woven into the social relations of societies, and these have been in pre-colonial times and carry on to current times (Polanyi, 2018, Carrier, 2016, Gregory, 2005, Denoon, 1985, p120).

Local people saw the gifting done by corporates as reciprocity as many said corporations take from PNG; thus, what they give back is seen as reciprocity or the morally right thing to do. Corporate philanthropic giving is tied to corporate marketing and corporate social responsibilities (CRS) for corporation benefits. These findings link to the expressions that philanthropic giving still has a primary profit objective

and tends to do good along the way as it endeavours to achieve its goal (Edwards, 2009; McGoey, 2012). The state recognises the roles of the corporate foundation or NGOs through taxation and registration. However, the development contribution through infrastructures and service deliveries needs better coordination; thus, these vital services may not be recognized/recorded by the state. Therefore is a need for a statutory body like a Charities or Development commission that can monitor and record development services provided by NGOs or non-state actors.

Development situations in PNG have been challenging, especially the lack of development services reaching most rural communities. However, despite these challenges, people still talked about the positive things, especially people's ownership of land and tribal/family affiliation, which serve people and communities in times of need and when times are tough. Despite the concern of urbanisation and the movement of people internally to the cities, most people still live in rural areas where they own the land and live off it (Rooney, 2017).

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

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My research focused on people's perspectives on development contributions by philanthropic organisations in PNG, looking at the Digicel Foundation, which is one of the well-established foundations in PNG. The recommendations outlined in this brief can be for government policy-making institutions, philanthropic foundations, and other NGOs operating in PNG.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Have policy mechanisms or statutory body to capture the development contribution of non-state actors (including foundations)**

From the perspective of financial development contribution, the state, through its Department of Treasury, records the development contribution from its Official Development Assistance (ODA) partners through the formal statutory bilateral or multilateral arrangement (PNG Government Budget, 2021). For the other non-ODA development actors, especially NGOs and philanthropic organizations, there must be policy mechanisms or statutory body to capture the development contributions of those non-ODA development actors, including philanthropic foundations and other international NGOs operating in PNG.

### **Establish a charity or development commission under Community Development or National Planning department to oversee the NGO development contributions (including foundations).**

Establish statutory organizations like Charities or Development commissions to sit under an existing department like Community Development or National Planning and Development to coordinate and document development contributions by NGOs and others like philanthropic foundations. Having coordination and records of NGOs' contributions to development in PNG ultimately will provide an overview of non-state actors' contributions in PNG, which is essential for tracing and tracking the development progress of PNG.

### **Inclusion of PNG National Development Goals, Vision 2050 by all development actors.**

The Government should have appropriate policies and regulations to ensure that alternative development actors in their endeavor to contribute to development in PNG are, including the PNG National Development goals (Vision 2050). That way, there is a coordinated effort toward achieving PNG's development goals by all development partners

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

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- The research was conducted with PNG students, diaspora communities in New Zealand, key state agency representatives, and the Digicel Foundation representative. Therefore, it lacks perspectives from communities in PNG that directly benefit from the development projects that philanthropic organisations have set up. Therefore, there is needed for further research to be conducted within those beneficiaries' communities to get better views on the development contributions of philanthropic and corporate foundations, especially Digicel Foundation.
- This research was limited to looking at Digicel Foundation, which has ties to the telecommunication industry, so comparative research should be done to compare extractive industries and other industries' philanthropic organisations to validate people's views on corporate philanthropic organizations gifting in PNG.
- To better understand if state agencies are recording development contributions, research should be conducted with important state entities' monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, especially within the Department of National planning and monitoring, Community Development, and the Department of Treasury. Targeted research can then determine policy gaps and provide appropriate targeted policy recommendations to the PNG government.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

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- ✓ There is limited information on the specificity of philanthropic operations in PNG. Therefore, this research is significant in providing details about the development contributions of philanthropic organisations in PNG.
- ✓ Contributes to and enhances knowledge about the Melanesian Way, particularly on how gifting is perceived in a contemporary setting and how it impacts alternative development actors delivering development services.
- ✓ The research documents and analyses the types of relationships between the development actors (the Government, philanthropic organisations, citizens/others) and how these relationships influence the development and service deliveries in PNG.

## METHOD

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The research data collection involved both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data collection approach used the Melanesian "Tok Stori" approach. Tok Stori refers to an informal meeting with conversation or story-telling sessions, and it can also be used in formal meetings depending on context (Sanga et al. 2020). I used the PNG Tok Pisin term "Yumi Tok Stori." "Yumi Tok Stori" is an inclusive and inviting term I have used for my data collection. The Stori sessions involved both in-person and online using Zoom as the use of online facilities became very crucial during covid 19 period, and generally, nowadays use of technology for qualitative data collection is prevalent (Linabary and Corple 2019).

Most of my secondary data was from the reviews of relevant articles of organisational documents, and general literature relating to the study context was sourced through journal articles and key documents. Also, online sources were used, especially for accessing updated information from websites and social media platforms.

One secondary data source that proved helpful was desk-based baseline research, which provided the context of philanthropic organisations' environment in PNG. The baseline research involved analysing the secondary data of 10 philanthropic organisations in PNG. The analysis of these organisations provided the background information needed to understand the context of philanthropic organisations operating in PNG. Secondary data sources were another means by which information relating to my study was gathered. Nachmias (1996) and others, such as Mason (2002), point out that it is helpful for social researchers to use data already available in their study's focus area, although the objective may differ.

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