

PNG's role in facilitating climate change dialogue

December 19, 2017 • 1 Comment • by Kylie McKenna, Kenneth Pomoh, Louise Boronyak, Brent Jacobs • 6 min read

(Citt/Flickr/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Written by [Kylie McKenna](#), [Kenneth Pomoh](#), [Louise Boronyak](#), [Brent Jacobs](#)

The Government of Papua New Guinea (PNG) has [vowed to use its hosting status of the 2018 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation \(APEC\) summit](#) to put climate change at the forefront of the regional agenda. The move supports broader attempts by Pacific Island leaders to take a lead role on climate change. This includes calls to halt Australia's [Adani coal mine](#) and Fiji's co-hosting of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP23) in Germany, dubbed "[the Islands COP](#)".

PNG has good reason to take a leadership role in facilitating dialogue on climate change. A recent [Caritas report](#) found that in 2017 alone, 2000 households across 30-35 coastal communities in PNG were displaced by rising sea levels, flooding, and erosion.

Projections made by the [Pacific Climate Change Science Program \(PCCSP\)](#) suggest further effects of climate change, including increasing intensity of cyclones, rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, sea level rise, increasing ocean acidification, and pressures on food security. As part of the [Engaging Communities and Government in Biodiveristy Conservation and Climate Change Adapation project](#), the authors conducted 15 interviews with provincial government representatives in Madang and Goroka in October 2017, which revealed a number of other impacts.

Provincial government authorities across Papua New Guinea are concerned that climate change will exacerbate existing threats to vulnerable communities.

The majority of Papua New Guinea's 7.9 million population live in rural areas and approximately [75% of households depend on subsistence agriculture](#). Impacts such as [severe drought, frosts](#), heat and changing rainfall patterns have already reduced yields of staple foods (including sweet potato), and other garden produce and cash crops.

Women and children, who predominantly undertake tasks such as gardening, collecting water and firewood,

are most affected. Representatives of Eastern Highlands Province say that changing weather patterns are now posing a threat to maternal health as “[gardens] are not producing as much and women have to work twice as hard to grow their sweet potato. They work extra hard and they’re pregnant – it’s one reason why they result in premature births” (anonymous interview, 5/10/17).

For coastal communities, rising sea levels are a major concern. In a low lying area of Madang Province, for example, provincial government representatives say that between 2010 and 2017 they have observed changes in sea level, based on proximity of the sea to the main road. “In 2010, the sea was 15 km from the road. Now it is 5 km or 6 km” (anonymous interview, 4/10/17). Although the provincial government financed the development of a sea wall, resourcing issues reportedly stopped completion. Systems of customary land tenure also restrict communities from moving inland and risk initiating land disputes.

A major challenge facing Papua New Guinea is how to generate economic development while preventing further environmental damage. With almost 40% of the population living below the national poverty line, opportunities to pursue economic development and supporting infrastructure are highly sought-after. The PNG Government’s support for large scale development projects (e.g. mining and gas), could be perceived as being at odds with its recent commitments to facilitating regional dialogue on climate change. Many communities across Papua New Guinea have already experienced the negative social and environmental costs of large development projects. The impact of the minerals and energy sector in particular is well documented, including high profile cases of environmental disaster (Ok Tedi), armed conflict (Panguna) and human rights violations (Porgera).

Furthermore, climate change is an amplifier of existing social and environmental vulnerabilities. In Madang Province, there are concerns that waste disposal from the Ramu Nickel mine has polluted the main drinking water supply for communities in Bundi. This comes at a time when declining rainfall and rising temperatures have affected food and cash crops.

Communities threatened by rising sea levels in Madang province will also be among those directly affected by the new Pacific Marine Industrial Zone Project (PMIZ). Funded by Exim China Bank, PMIZ will establish up to ten tuna canneries and enhanced port facilities. Construction of the project was initially delayed due to a lengthy legal battle with Madang environmental groups concerned about depletion of fish stocks, oil spills, polluted drinking water, and increased migration of settlers. Furthermore, destructive fishing practices conducted by international fishing vessels (such as drag netting) is destroying the coral reefs that provide habitat for marine life, and eco-tourism opportunities from diving and snorkelling.

Aside from the direct flow of revenues from major development projects (such as royalty payments and compensation), communities often use these projects to create business “spin-offs”. These activities however, are not without their own environmental consequences. Representatives of Eastern Highlands Province are concerned that communities located near the Crater Mountain gold mine will be tempted to log their forests to capitalise on the mining company’s need for timber supplies. In addition to the social and environmental impacts of mining, this will place further pressures on biodiversity in the area and increase the risk of floods and landslides.

Alternative livelihoods such as agriculture, community conservation projects, education and eco-tourism can

present viable and sustainable substitutes for some communities. Yet provincial government representatives say that this is not always possible for some communities, especially if they lack access to basic resources and services: “remote areas that have difficulty accessing cash will be in favour of the [immediate] money” (interview, 5/10/17).

PNG will spend **800 million kina (\$330 million)** on hosting the APEC summit, which along with **Australia’s commitment of \$48 million is money that could be better spent on basic health and education services for the population**. Given that PNG will host the summit regardless, the Government should be commended for its commitment to using the opportunity to shine a spotlight on climate change in the region. The country is already experiencing severe environmental threats and human development challenges. While it is arguable that Pacific Island countries do not hold the political power to match Australia, **many Pacific Island leaders** are showing that they can make climate change an essential precondition for successful foreign policy in the region. As the largest of the Pacific Islands countries, Papua New Guinea has a vital role to play in furthering this agenda.

The Engaging Communities and Government in Biodiversity Conservation and Climate Change Adaptation project is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



[Download pdf](#)

Related posts:

- [Working together to understand climate change risks in Fiji](#)
- [Hungry for justice, thirsty for change](#)
- [Women in Vanuatu are taking ownership](#)
- [The ongoing impact of the El Niño drought and frosts in Papua New Guinea](#)
- [PNG drought response: reporting from Goroka](#)

[#APEC](#) [#Climate change](#) [#PNG](#)



Kylie McKenna

Kylie McKenna’s expertise in sustainability and business has been recognised internationally. She is the author of *Corporate Social Responsibility and Natural Resource Conflict* (2016, Routledge), which explores the dynamic nexus of business, conflict and peace building in Bougainville and West Papua. Kylie has published widely on topics as diverse as post-

colonialism, law, aid, revenue distribution, security and the environment. She was awarded a PhD in Sociology from the Australian National University in 2012.

[View all posts](#)

Kenneth Pomoh

Kenneth Pomoh was a paraceologist at the New Guinea Binatang Research Center.

[View all posts](#)

Louise Boronyak

Louise Boronyak is Senior Research Consultant for the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology, Sydney.

[View all posts](#)

Brent Jacobs

Brent Jacobs is Research Director in the NR&E cluster at the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology, Sydney.

[View all posts](#)

1 Comment



Albert Schram

December 19, 2017 at 12:28 pm

Reality is that Fiji plays a leading role. PNG's policy framework is not encouraging emission reduction. Installing solar power is still illegal for some industries, for example. Therefore a lot of work left to do but hardly any interest to do it, except for a few academics and other converts.

Reply

Leave a Comment

Comment

Name *

Email *


Website


Sign me up for the fortnightly newsletter!


Post Comment


Recent comments


 ROKSANA KHAN on What's missing in the facilities debate

 John Cowan on Solid waste management in Papua New Guinea

 Terence Wood on Three questions about Australia's infrastructure promise to Solomon Islands

 Redley Raramo on Three questions about Australia's infrastructure promise to Solomon Islands

 Alwyn Chilver on Market systems and social protection approaches to sustained exits from poverty: can we combine the best of both?

 Gabriel on Through the lens of a seasonal worker

Upcoming events

Navigation by judgment: why and when top down management of foreign aid doesn't work on June 18, 2019 12:30 pm

2019 Pacific Update on July 3, 2019 8:30 am

Other Devpolicy sites

PNG ELECTIONS
DATABASE





[Cookie policy](#)

Creative Commons



Posts on the Devpolicy Blog are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#) unless otherwise noted.

Most commented

Most commented this year

Most commented this month



An ex-volunteer's perspective on improving the...

Should aid workers lead comfortable lives?

PNG LNG landowner royalties – why so long?

Compulsory SIM card registration in Papua New Guinea



Felled before forty: the once and future AusAID

How politics keeps Solomon Islands and Papua New...

The shocking truth about randomised control trials...



Catastrophic failures in PNG health service delivery

Three Nobel Prizes in economics ≠ the truth about aid

The political economy of the Solomon Islands oil...

Through the lens of a seasonal worker

Market systems and social protection approaches to...

Aid and the Pacific in the Coalition's third term

Chinese aid to the Pacific and the Caribbean

A tax on mobile phones in PNG?