MAN BILONG BUK

THE FRANCIS NII COLLECTION

edited by

KEITH JACKSON AND PHIL FITZPATRICK

The writings, the exploits and the ideas of Papua New Guinea’s Man of Books
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In Memory of Francis Nii, 1 March 1964 – 2 August 2020
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IN MEMORIAM

We honour these friends and supporters who predeceased Francis Nii, who worked with him in humanity’s betterment, and without whom his life would have been much more difficult and painful.

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Entrepreneur and Philanthropist

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Writer and Humanitarian
“Chants of good governance
Prosperity and advancement
Resonate throughout the fatherland.”

– From ‘The Battle of Power Begins’ by Francis Nii
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As you read in this book the contributions and assessments of Francis Nii and his work by his peers, you cannot help but notice the constant references to his resolve and indomitable spirit.

These remarks by fellow writers generally relate to the way Francis overcame his physical disabilities and carved out a new career as a writer, critic and advocate.

There is no doubt that among his many attributes was an incredible toughness of mind and body that helped him survive after the terrible accident that left him a paraplegic.

In those early days at the Kundiawa General Hospital he was one of a number of paraplegic patients being treated there but he alone survived for more than a short time.

That physical toughness was evident in his appearance at the first Crocodile Prize writers’ workshop held at the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby in 2011.

That a man in a battered old wheelchair could make his way from the highlands to the Papua New Guinean capital was remarkable in itself but the harrowing story of his return home, where he was left stranded at the Mount Hagen airport and suffered broken bones in his legs during the jarring drive back to Kundiawa in a crowded PMV is heart rending.

And yet several years later he undertook a much more ambitious journey by air and road to Australia to present at the Brisbane Writer’s Festival, albeit this time assisted by good friends including Daniel Kumbon, Martyn Namorong and Murray Bladwell.

There is no doubt that Francis was a tough and determined individual. I would aver that this toughness and determination were present well before his accident and enabled him to survive while others in a similar condition fell by the wayside.

If might be useful to speculate what he might have achieved had not that terrible accident befallen him. A good way to measure that potential is to read what he wrote over the years.

This collection of Francis’s written work has been arranged into a number of categories which reflect his wide-ranging interests.

Paramount among these are his essays related to writers and writing. This passion to write was cultivated by Francis in his university days
and, as he relates, grew from his love of books and reading when he was a child.

Several of his earliest poems that appeared in journals and magazines in the 1980s are included in this collection. During this time, he was also a founding member and office bearer of the Papua New Guinea Writers Union.

Skip ahead another 35 years and we find Francis, just a few days before he died, editing and publishing a biography by a highland writer. This demonstrated how literature was a constant theme throughout his life; a passion that would not be relinquished in any circumstances.

That in itself is unusual and marked him out as an uncommon individual in the Papua New Guinean context.

Another category in the collection is devoted to his essays about society and people. From these it is possible to deduce his abiding interest and concern for his fellow Papua New Guineans, including their problems, their relationships and their achievements.

Francis obviously cared deeply about people, who wanted to succeed as individuals and as a nation. In his essays he felt compelled to explore many of the elements – social and personal - dictating their condition in a country making the difficult transition from tribalism to westernisation.

Closely allied to this regard and concern for his fellow Papua New Guineans was his interest in the corollaries of government and politics and their social, economic and personal impacts.

In describing and analysing this he was a fearless commentator, not afraid to criticise and chastise individual politicians and to rebuke them when he considered what they were doing was wrong. He particularly abhorred corruption and wrote at length on its evils.

In the confusing and often brutal world of Papua New Guinean politics this took a great degree of courage. He was not averse to demanding the resignations of recalcitrant politicians, including the prime minister, nor of pointing out hypocrisy and bad faith.

As people who have experienced the backlash from such disparagement can attest, such public disdain runs a very real risk of physical intimidation in Papua New Guinea.

Francis was also unafraid to speak his mind in his views about law and order. This boldness comes through in his essays and also in his novel, Paradise in Peril.

In this book he outlined a blueprint of what he thought Papua New Guinea needed to do to bring crime and the social problems it induced
under control. To many people his views verged on the extreme but in typical Francis Nii style he was prepared to disregard political correctness for what he saw as the necessary pragmatic solutions.

His political commentary was not just confined to Papua New Guinea. He was an astute observer of the Australian media and the goings-on of the Australian government and in particular its representative in Papua New Guinea, the Australian High Commission.

In this respect he was critical of Australia’s lack of understanding of Papua New Guinea and its people and the unconstructive and misdirected way it allowed aid money to be spent.

He was also alarmed at the way Australia seemed to be missing in action when it came to climate change and the rise of China and dismayed at its persecution of asylum seekers by marooning them on Manus Island in a dodgy deal with the Papua New Guinean government.

From time to time, Francis allowed himself to ponder whether Australia was the ‘big brother’ and friend of Papua New Guinea that it purported to be. Many times, in his essays he expressed his sadness and dismay at what he considered the errant decisions of the Australian government and the waste of the many billions of aid money it lavished on Papua New Guinea.

That said, however, he was a strong admirer of the Australian people, especially those who had worked in Papua New Guinea as young men and women and refused to turn their backs on the country even though they had been compelled to leave its shores at independence.

He had many friends in Australia who he ensured he would maintain relationships with. Having known Francis Nii is a badge of honour among many of these people. His sudden passing was as much a shock to them as it was to his wantoks in Papua New Guinea.

One of his most commented upon essays was his support of the removal of the carved lintels in parliament house by then Speaker Theo Zurenuoc. Not only did he write that this was a good thing to do but he also questioned the popular reference to Parliament House as the haus tambaran.

This essay surprised a lot of his readers and his supporters. This was particularly so given his otherwise strong support for heritage and tradition. In essence his message was that the carvings represented unsavoury aspects of traditional custom that were contradictory to Papua New Guinea’s declared status as a modern Christian country.
He was not criticising the carvings as works of art but what they represented. He did not think Parliament House was the appropriate place for them to be on display.

This essay was probably one of the strongest expressions of his Christian faith, which was dear to him because it had carried him through all the pain and other trials following his accident. He strongly believed that his God had not permitted him to die even when oblivion seemed to Francis to be the best option.

We also know through his work with schools that he was a strong advocate of education. His visits to schools – his broken body being thrown around on unforgiving bush tracks - and his organisation the publication of student anthologies and related activities shows this without doubt.

Unsurprisingly he was a very stout advocate for people with disabilities. He was not one to simply complain and involved himself in establishing an advocacy group for the disabled and in issues related to proposing better planning and policy at the national and provincial levels.

And all the time he wrote, and encouraged others to write, and designed means by which their writing could reach others.

What all of these elements of his character, personality and achievements point to is something well beyond what can be simply attributed to the consequences of his disability.

His disability did not cause him to champion all the things he did and wrote about. He never complained about his disability. He accepted it as his lot and got on with making a success of his life.

In this sense it is possible to see him as a remarkable man even without his disability. Had he not had that terrible accident he might have taken his life into untold realms and greatness, quite possibly into politics where he could affect not just proselytise the betterment of the Papua New Guinean people.

He was a great man in true Papua New Guinean style and that is the way he must be remembered. This is not a book about a disabled writer. It is a book about a towering figure in the history of Simbu and Papua New Guinea itself.

It is about a man who has left a proud legacy, a legacy that must be acknowledged and then used to inspire others, particularly the young, as Papua New Guinea travels further and further into the 21st century.
The one matter Francis regretted not being able to progress was acceptance by the nation’s leaders of the importance of developing a home-grown literature in Papua New Guinea.

This book provides a metaphorical marker inscribed “so far but not far enough”, a challenge to others to take up and carry forward the work where, but for being denied valuable years of life, Francis Nii would have propelled to even greater heights.
Daniel Kumbon, Phil Fitzpatrick, Martyn Namorong and Keith Jackson with Francis Nii in Noosa preparing for the Brisbane Writers Festival, 2016 (Photo: Peter Gardiner, Noosa News)
Can I thank you for your human compassion?

Francis Nii
21 October 2013

I cannot find the right words to express my heart’s gratitude for all my friends in Australia and Papua New Guinea who have poured out their heart so compassionately to support and ease my physical condition … only silent tears say it all.

In my life as a paraplegic I have been confronted with all kinds of challenges, both physical and spiritual, and some of them are very painful but I don’t whine and cry.

I have always asked myself: would whining and crying help me? And I find that they don’t. They only weaken my spirit and my strength and make my condition worse. So, I have developed an iron-hearted approach to the challenges that come my way.

But I now realise that in every iron heart there is a softer part and, when you touch that, it can melt and the brooks of heaven burst forth.

For the past few days, I have been in mourning. The compassion that has been shown by my family of writers and readers in Papua New Guinea and Australia, and even as far as Nairobi in Kenya, to ensure that my life not only continues but is changed for the better has been so overwhelming that I have been moved to tears.

These very humane friends have touched my heart so much that every time I tried to write this thank you note, tears blurred my vision and I had to lay it off several times.

Being a paraplegic and unemployed, life has been very challenging.

Many times, especially in the first two years of my disability, I prayed to the Lord God, the Author of my life, to simply take my life away.

I refused to face the world in the completely different perspective of a man in a wheelchair. The thoughts about the numerous impediments I would confront daily were a nightmare. I just wanted to go away and be at peace in Heaven.

But God did not take away my life. He has His own plan for my life and I have seen His hands many times in many ways.

The accident happened in February 1999 in Goroka. I was hospitalised in Goroka for about two months before obtaining a voluntary discharge because of the very poor service. I spent the rest of the year in Goroka setting up a home for my children with my final entitlement from the public service, which wasn’t much.
In February 2000, I came to Kundiawa hospital for further treatment. In early 2001, spinal fixation surgery was attempted but failed because of a secondary complication.

While the operation was in progress, my right lung collapsed. My right diaphragm was cut open from close to the navel right around to the spine. When my right lung was exposed, it could not cope and collapsed.

Although my whole body was numb as a result of the anaesthetic, my mind was still functioning at a certain degree of consciousness and I felt that my breath was going to stop at any moment.

The doctors confirmed later that I told them my breath was going to stop - and I passed out. The doctors saw the lung had completely stopped working, did what they could to resuscitate it and immediately stitched it up. They did not do the spinal fixation.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in the surgical ward with infusion tubes, cannulas and drainage pipes all over my body. It was tormenting.

While I was recuperating from the failed surgery, I developed severe pressure sores. These were caused mainly because I had to lie still in one position for some days. The hardness of the ordinary mattress also contributed. My water mattress was too big for the hospital bed so I had left it back home in Goroka where it was stolen.

Several times I went under the blade of the surgeon’s knife for the removal of the necrotic tissue. There was also skin grafting. There are many scars around my buttocks and hips – the residual marks of pressure sores and surgeons’ blades.

Sometime later my surgeon and priest, Dr Jan Jaworski from Poland, got me a second hand water bed which was very helpful. All the sores healed. I was able to move around in my wheelchair, be independent and do the things I wanted to, including writing stories and poems. But to get the writing published was hard.

Then in 2011, Jimmy Drekore introduced me to PNG Attitude and The Crocodile Prize. Since then I have been writing and sharing my thoughts with my family of writers and readers from PNG and Australia in PNG Attitude and through the annual Crocodile Prize Anthology.

My current condition developed from a mishap that occurred on my return from attending the 2012 writers’ workshop and Crocodile Prize award ceremony at the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby in September last year.
When I arrived in Goroka, my daughter Cheryl, who was supposed to be waiting for me at the airport, was stranded in Kundia. She was unable to catch a bus. Worse than that, my mobile phone battery went dead … total communication blackout. I had not charged it the night before.

I waited at Goroka airport for two hours and still there was no sign of Cheryl. I couldn’t wait any longer because it was getting late. I offered some tips to a group of boys and they assisted me to the bus stop and into a bus that was almost crammed.

There were only three seats remaining and I sat in the one close to the doorway. There was plenty of cargo and it was very awkward for me but I refused to complain. In a way I had no choice.

On the way to Kundia, my right tibia fractured below the knee. The road condition was very poor, riddled with crater size potholes. As the bus manoeuvred its way around them, I was tossed about and in one of those movements I must have had hit something that broke my leg.

I didn’t know, and I didn’t feel anything, until two days later when my leg became severely swollen. Of course, I suspected something was wrong. I went for an x-ray and the picture revealed the fracture.

A back slab was wedged around my ankle for 12 weeks and it terribly impeded my mobility in bed.

More woe, my second hand water bed developed holes and was rendered useless. Pressure sores started to develop. Although my leg was healed, the pressure sore under my left buttock got worse.

I went under the doctor’s blade and the necrotic tissues were removed but the sores have not improved because of my hard mattress, and other reasons as well. I have been confined to bed for more than a year now.

I go out once in a while to get natural Vitamin D from the sun because I am becoming a carrot. Otherwise I stay in bed all the time and do all my writing lying on my back.

I have never before discussed publicly like this the previous accident or the latest mishap, nor the consequent experiences and problems that I endured – except with other people like my family members and Jimmy Drekore, who is like a son to me.

When some of my friends asked me to write about it, I bluntly refused. I have been keeping everything to myself and battling on silently.
This is the first time I am sharing it all openly and I really feel obliged to do so in appreciation of the overwhelming support rendered to me by some beautiful and kind-hearted people.

“Whether my views on the issue are representative of my silent fellow Papua New Guineans or not, I am happy that I have the liberty to express my views freely and frankly, a privilege that most of my fellow Papua New Guinean readers are denied.”
“For an unemployed, mischievous, hot head like me, I have nothing to lose for speaking out and such naming emboldens me. Only if I had committed a cardinal crime would I have cowered into the hellish shithole.”
IN THE ASSESSMENT OF HIS PEERS

Francis and Phil discuss a new publication
If no one supports me
I alone will carry you
Until you smile and say
Papa, thank you I am healed
Then my heart will be at peace
My soul will rest

- Francis Nii (2016)

The twisted metal of a motor vehicle accident in Papua New Guinea’s Highlands nearly brought Francis Nii’s life story to a sudden end.

The crash, at the start of 1999, left him forever paralysed from the waist down and brought a promising career as an economist and financial adviser to a sudden halt.

Francis, now 56, speaks softly and chooses his words carefully, but behind this gentle nature is an immense inner-strength that has served him well in the most trying of circumstances.

“There were moments I saw death coming,” he says.

“But every time I looked at the faces of my three daughters, there was this immeasurable power and energy unleashed in me to fight to stay alive and see them grow to womanhood and live lives of their own.

“They have always been at my side and, to this day, although all the girls have children, they are so close to me. I am a proud grandfather.”

The unexpected and tragic accident would have caused most people to despair, but Francis transformed it into an opportunity to surround himself with family and to channel his energy into pursuits to make the country better.

His formal education began at Diani Community School in Simbu Province in 1973 and continued at Chuave Provincial High School, where he developed a love for books.

After completing high school, he studied for an Economics degree at the University of Papua New Guinea, graduating in 1987.

It was at UPNG that Francis began experimenting with poetry, participating in recitals and publishing a number of poems in the PNG
Writers Union magazine, PNG Writer, Ondobondo, and a book, Through the Eye of Melanesia.

Though in many ways he is a product of modern educational institutions, Francis maintains a strong link to his own cultural identity and has never lost touch with the traditions of his people.

“I am of a mixture of traditional and modern eras,” he says.

“I grew up in the hausman, survived by subsistence farming and wore tanket, kondai and malo, traditional items of clothing.”

This close connection to his roots fostered an egalitarian, community-oriented spirit which led him to a graduate position in the then Rural Development Bank.

Over the next decade Francis travelled Papua New Guinea and began to better understand the complexity of its people as he worked to boost small projects in Rabaul, Bialla, Namatanai, Manus, Kainantu and Goroka.

It was in Goroka in February 1999 that a terrible motor vehicle accident nearly took his life. Francis is hesitant to talk about this calamity, but says he was a victim of bad company. It changed his perspective on human nature.

After surviving the initial stages of his severe injury, he moved to Kundiawa where he has since lived at Sir Joseph Nombri Hospital, one of the few places suitable for him to stay in his rugged home province.

With the generosity and care of hospital staff, particularly Dr Jan Jaworski and Dr Urakoko Boku, Francis regained his health and rekindled his love of literature. He resumed his own writing and later supported other writers.

He also involved himself in voluntary and charity work – most notably with the Simbu Children Foundation – where his resilience, energy and enthusiasm boosted the morale of other hospital patients, especially those living with a disability.

In 2005, having written for several years without access to a computer, Francis managed to scrape together the resources to publish his first novel, Paradise in Peril.

“I wrote the novel by using scrap paper from the hospital’s trash bins,” Francis says.

“Reverend Daryl Boyd of the Lutheran Church typed the entire 200-plus pages and author, educator and former governor-general Sir Paulias Matane assessed it and sent it to India for publication.”

Though Francis is a fine storyteller, he doesn’t limit himself to a single form. His finely-crafted essays, stories and poems demonstrate a
strong sense of justice, a loathing of corruption and a love for country and place.

He brings a unique understanding of fading traditions and an intellect sharpened through academic and professional excellence.

He says of his first novel, “I captured real issues affecting society hued in a fictitious plot with different model characters.

“The underlying idea was to keep readers captivated and engrossed in the story and, as the issues unfolded, to embrace readers and hopefully make a difference.”

In 2011, Francis heard about the establishment of the Crocodile Prize – PNG’s national literary awards – and recognised its potential to provide a platform for writers who were creating an authentic Papua New Guinean literature.

“There were talented writers, but the lack of publication opportunities was the obstacle,” he says.

“The Crocodile Prize and its annual anthology were the keys to unlocking this stumbling block and certainly there will continue to be a flood of new writers and new writing in the ensuing years.”

Francis was no longer writing on recycled paper, but punching out prose and verse on a mobile phone – enabling him to reach further and wider than ever before.

He entered the Crocodile Prize and also established himself as a regular contributor to the eminent PNG Attitude blog - published by Keith Jackson, co-founder of the Crocodile Prize, who had been a teacher in Simbu 50 years earlier.

In 2013, Francis had a defining moment when he won the Crocodile Prize award for essays and journalism for If Dekla Says Papua New Guinea is Eden, Then It Is!

The Crocodile Prize’s other co-founder Philip Fitzpatrick later wrote that this essay gently, but pointedly, made light of Papua New Guineans who follow Westernisation only to miss what their traditions have to offer.

“The end result is an anecdote and fable of considerable power, both in its social and political contexts,” Fitzpatrick said of the essay.

“Part of this power is in its purposeful but cleverly disguised objective of making its readers think about the issues.”

It was quintessential Francis Nii.

Rather than sit back and feel content with his achievement, Francis saw his Crocodile Prize success as an opportunity to encourage others
and expand the base of writers and readers across the country and he wasted no time in getting to work in his native Simbu.

“Keith Jackson, Philip Fitzpatrick and the Crocodile Prize elevated me to a different height where I am now a writer, editor and publisher,” he says.

“We established the Simbu Writers Association in 2014 to encourage the present generation to write and be published.

“We travelled to remote areas of the province to bring the message of literature to schools and to the people.”

Francis and the Simbu Writers Association never intended to make money, which was fortunate because the exercise of publication and distribution cost far more than they ever got back.

“We had an idea and were prepared to work hard and without compensation to realise it,” he continues.

“We began to visit schools, talking to students and teachers about the Crocodile Prize literary contest. We covered lots of ground and talked to many hundreds of people.

“Schools don’t have the money to bulk buy books so I handed out copies of my novel – sometimes a principal would even ask me to autograph it!”

The mission to encourage reading, writing and critical thought took the group through some of PNG’s most rugged terrain and marginalised communities.

“Sometimes the roads were so bad we couldn’t get through,” Francis says, “but that didn’t happen often... we were very determined.”

“As more books became available, we grabbed whatever transport we could to deliver them, including ambulances and police vehicles.

“Once, disgruntled youths held us up thinking we were the Governor and local politicians – we gave them a book to let us pass.”

The Simbu Writers Association continued to spread the word and also facilitated more local authors to be published, including a collection by students at Ku High School that was launched by Kerenga Kua MP, now PNG’s Minister for Petroleum.

The Association again teamed up with Kua to host the 2015 Crocodile Prize Awards in Kundiawa – the first and only time the ceremony has been held outside Port Moresby.

While it was no surprise that a national literature was well-received within PNG, Francis could not have foreseen the international acclaim and support he would receive.
In 2016, he was conferred perhaps his greatest recognition as a writer when invited, along with authors Rashmii Bell, Daniel Kumbon and Martyn Namorong, to present at the Brisbane Writers Festival in Australia – a trip sponsored by Paga Hill Estate, the Crocodile Prize and Professor Ken McKinnon.

The PNG authors took the stage for the one-hour session, reflecting on the state of their nation from a political and social perspective, it’s halting developments in literature and daring to imagine their people’s future.

Francis told stories of the journey of the Simbu writers and mused on the disappearance of the hausman, the institution of the men’s house that provided the educational and ethical foundation for Highlands’ societies.

He also revealed a subtext to his years of hard work – a fear that without a stream of writing and writers the nation that had been born of a thousand tribes might become disconnected from itself.

“PNG has a wealth of diverse and esoteric cultures and traditions, unique flora and fauna, historical heritage and relics, legends and folklores, proverbs and idioms, contemporary developments and issues and others to be written about,” Francis says.

“Different cultures and traditions are passed on orally from generation to generation – but we need to harness this talent and convert it into written form.

“A nation without literature is a people with a lost identity.”
The suffering and death of Francis Nii
Philip Kai Morre
01 September 2020

A giant has fallen, his sufferings and distress he has lived. He is gone to his Father’s House where there are many mansions.

It was Sunday 2 August that I visited Francis Nii for the last time at around 11.30 am.

I saw him in so much pain and with complications such that his survival looked grim. Francis did not yet know whether he might get well, but he was preparing for his long journey.

Here lay a brilliant writer whose inner strength and willpower made him live longer than most other people bound to a wheelchair.

As I watched him, his inner strength seemed to diminish as his body faded away in agony.

I felt sad that I still had some unfinished business with him. The Provincial Disability Policy which he helped draft was yet to be launched. He would not be present physically but he would be with us spiritually guiding us.

After some hours his wife Cathy rang to tell me that Francis had passed away. My mind returns to one of the saddest days of my life. My heart broke and hot tears ran from my eyes. But I was not present enough to comprehend the death of Francis Nii.

So, his life had ended. He had shown us what was meant to be an authentic human being with unique qualities which enable him to conquer physical disability.

Within hours condolences flooded in from all corners; from those who knew Francis personally and many others, especially students who had read his books but never met him face to face.

Social media and Facebook offered headlines grieving his death. It showed his great impact on the life of others not only in Simbu and Papua New Guinea, but in Australia and other countries as well.

Francis’s intellectual ability and his facility as a mentor, philosopher, author, editor and publisher can not be questioned. Here was a genius who could solve complex issues.

He was also a king of charity, a giver who received an abundance of love and respect. Even though he was in a wheelchair and looked helpless, he never had to beg from others.

Amidst all his difficulties he sustained a living, and was the bread winner of his family.
Francis would never want us to think that he was special, that he needed to be awarded with a Queen’s honour or looked upon as a hero to be praised for all his deeds.

He did not need to be a big name or even to become popular. He used his gifts to help others in need either in charity work or through writing and editing books and provide consultancy services.

When it came to social justice and fighting corruption or addressing human rights issues, Francis was always there to take the lead.

He was a critical political analyst; a man of courage who feared no politician, including the prime minister. In fact, he played a crucial role in the downfall of Peter O’Neill.

In mid-2015 I gave the manuscript of my book to Francis Nii, it was a technical book and the most difficult book he had ever edited.

Francis had a hard time refining the information on drugs and their effects, content which was complicated for a non-pharmacologist or chemist to understand.

Peter Kepa, an editor for the English Teachers Association, also corrected my English grammar. Francis in his wheelchair; Peter with a walking stick.

I also gave Philip Fitzpatrick a hard time and so his brother in law, a chemist with a PhD, helped us to check the scientific and technical aspects of my book.

Finally, the book was published and is now in demand amongst schools in PNG. In its more recent second edition, I have added five new chapters. Francis is owed a lot.

Francis Nii did so much for me, not only editing books but providing other support that I needed. My appreciation is not measured in monetary terms but priceless. I will always remember him as the most generous person I ever met.

There is no other person I ever experience the same relationship with as Francis. We never came to conflict in opinions or discussions of social issues.

His intellectual ability was beyond my scope and I listened to him attentively and took his prudent advice seriously.

Francis was my mentor and a shining star. May the angels in heaven welcome him as he is an example of God’s grace and a gift upon us.
A letter to my dear friend Francis

Daniel Kumbon

04 August 2020

Francis, I met you through your writing in 1985 in Ondobondo and later PNG Writer at the University of Papua New Guinea. But we never physically met.

Later I met you through your writing and comments in PNG Attitude.

I never imagined you sat in a wheelchair until I met you in Simbu in 2015 during the Crocodile Prize presentations.

Then I pushed you in both your two wheelchairs - the old one from PNG and the other given by generous friends in Brisbane during our attendance at the memorable 2016 Brisbane Writers Festival.

Francis, do you remember what you said to me at Noosa Blue Resort when I came to help you early next morning after we had arrived there from Port Moresby?

“Daniel, don’t worry. I’ll manage. You go back and have your breakfast,” you assured me.

You were able to climb onto the bed yourself, prepared tea yourself, made bread yourself, washed yourself, and changed yourself. You did everything yourself.

All I did was to give you my coat to keep you warm on our trip down the Bruce Highway to Brisbane to attend the festival. And pushed your wheelchair in the city.

Francis, I discovered you, the real Francis Nii, in Australia when I pushed you around in your wheelchair, across the bridge over the Brisbane River, on the footpath along the Brisbane River, in the bustling markets and shops, along the streets - everywhere in the city.

When I pushed you, I saw the back of your head most of the time. You spoke to me as you took in the sights of Brisbane.

My impression of you was that I was pushing around a ‘brain box’ comparable with Stephen Hawking also a wheelchair-bound British author.

Both of you could think big from your wheelchairs.

Stephen was a theoretical physicist, cosmologist and author.

Could I have been pushing this UPNG Economics degree holder, this towering PNG writer in a wheelchair if he had been involved in an accident that destroyed his banking career?
No, definitely not. People could have been making appointments to see him in a bank.

But it was decreed that he should be a writer and thinker. And that is what he had become – a towering figure in PNG literature.

Much of what he has written shall remain with us and an inspiration to future writers.

Here is a part of the poem The Last Cedar Standing from your book, Walk My Song. You dedicated the poem to your father Nii Kaupa Nugrus ‘Tura’ Duma.

The sixth verse talks about how your father was heartbroken when you were involved in that nasty traffic accident that paralysed you for life:

Although lacked modern education
He has seen civilisation
Has travelled the jets
Has dined in the luxurious hotels
The heart wrecked moment of his life
Came when his only seed suffered a tragedy
It afflicted him so much
And goes into seclusion atop the rocks
Although a broken-hearted cedar
He has embraced his great grandchildren
A soul-filled satisfaction he cherishes
He shall pass on a happy man….

Francis, indeed your father passed on as a happy man surrounded by grandchildren.

And now you have passed on a happy man. Your life has not been in vain. The volumes you have published shall remain with us into the future.

And the copy of your signed book you gave me at the Noosa Blue Resort on 4 September 2016 shall remain in my family. And of course, the pictures we took in Brisbane.

Travel well my brother.
The novel Francis Nii had to write
Phil Fitzpatrick
18 April 2017

Back in the 1960s, during a census patrol in the highlands, I called out a man’s name and watched him pull himself across the muddy ground to the table where I sat.

He looked up at me and grinned before affirming the details I had about him, including the cryptic observation in the notes column that he was, indeed, a ‘cripple’.

It wasn’t so much the fact of the man’s obvious and severely misshapen spine and useless legs that stayed with me but the look of fierce determination I saw in his eyes.

I encountered something similar just recently when three of Papua New Guinea’s writers travelled to Australia for the Brisbane Writer’s Festival. Among them was Francis Nii, a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair after a vehicle accident.

I was talking to Francis and drew his attention to something or someone across the room. Then, quite unconsciously, I grasped the handles of his wheelchair to push him over there.

To my surprise there was firm but gentle resistance. Francis was interested in the conversation where we were and he had grasped the wheels of the chair to stop it moving. We exchanged a friendly glance and I was reminded about something I’d forgotten from that long-ago census patrol.

In a way, the need for strength and independence is the theme of Francis’ new short novel Tears.

Being disabled is a huge struggle and it takes an extraordinary amount of inner strength and character to cope and, importantly, to prove that a person with a disability cannot automatically be assumed to be helpless.

In Papua New Guinea this can be hard for such people. As Francis has attested previously in his writing, many disabled people eventually just give up and succumb.

Those born with a disability are especially stigmatised. In some cases, they are killed or abandoned. To have a crippled child is for many people shameful, and a reflection upon themselves and their family.
This is what happens to the main character in the novel. As a new born child, Tears, as his adoptive mother names him, is left by his parents in a rubbish bin outside Kagamuga Airport.

A security guard, Joseph, finds him and takes him home to Maria, his apparently barren wife, before noticing the boy’s disability.

Maria represents another sort of strength that is crucial to many disabled people. While Joseph wants to take the baby back to the rubbish bin after seeing his misshapen legs Maria strenuously resists.

Without much assistance from her husband, Maria risks the destruction of her marriage to look after Tears and raise the child. Along the way they both encounter much resistance and prejudice.

Francis makes some telling points about growing up disabled in Papua New Guinea as well as observations about public attitudes and perceptions. He also makes clear that disabled people in Papua New Guinea have many friends, not least among officialdom.

The novel is quite short, only 122 pages. It is a bit rushed towards the end and there are a couple of apparent inconsistencies in the narrative that could have had wider exposition. Apart from that it is well-worth reading.


Tears is also something of a mile stone for Francis and the Simbu Writer’s Association, of which he is a founding member since it is his first wholly independently produced book. He follows writers like Baka Bina, Jordan Dean and Michael Dom in this regard. Expect more books under the SWA banner in the near future.

Papua New Guineans can feel proud of all this: an independent national literary competition and an increasingly broad-based independent publishing effort. May it long continue.
A writer who understood the writing business

Keith Jackson
6 August 2020

In Germany a Festschrift is a book honouring a respected person. It is generally presented during their lifetime, although it can also be a memorial. This book is such a memorial.

Soon after his death, it was decided that our writers’ memorial for the late author Francis Nii would take the form of an edited volume of his most significant essays, articles, poetry and commentary, his ideas and achievements and includes fellow writers’ observations of his work, his methods and his life.

To create a national literature is not just gathering a few people in a backroom to write and talk, although it may start from such conversations - of which Papua New Guinea has had many.

Such a grand enterprise of course requires writers, and prominent ones, because by definition a literature is built from the creative urge of essayists and poets and novelists and the commentariat and the rest.

But it also requires publishers, mentors, advocates, marketers, teachers, petitioners and, arguably most important of all, administrators – those planners and organisers and networkers and negotiators – who can bring everything together, make an industry of it and give it a future.

I only ever met one man in Papua New Guinea who had the capability to put all of those demands together.

He was Francis Sina Nii, the man in the wheelchair and hospital bed in the Four Corner Town, Kundiawa.

Francis was a writer who also understood the writing business - its administrative and technical complexity.

With virtually no resources (and those he acquired being often stolen from him), he put together a micro industry.

His was a tour de force without resources. Nothing represented this more than his tapping out a novel on a mobile phone while lying on a rough hospital bed surrounded by the noise and emotion of sickness and death.

A Francis Nii who had the support and recognition he deserved could have provided for Papua New Guinea the cultural and educational agency literature could offer.
He could have created the legacy required to achieve those PNG national goals that after 45 years have proved as elusive as they are grand.

Too often it is that only when a man dies do we fully realise the qualities that have been lost to us and do we come to appreciate the full extent of his talents and understand the depth of his influence.

On that Sunday in August when Francis Nii died, along with the great grief many of us felt, we also realised we had lost a good and courageous man and someone who knew what to do and - with the simple pragmatism required by the complex challenges he faced - had managed to take it so far.

The intelligence, wisdom and creative energy Francis Nii possessed and which drove his ragged body to great heights of achievement now need to be harnessed by others.

What Francis knew and understood, as well as what he did, must not be lost but be built on.

This book will help by ensuring that the multiplicity of Francis’s talents and understandings will not be lost even though the man himself is not with us.

It will help ensure that the words and deeds of Francis Nii endure and that he has left behind a legacy not just a reputation.
In 2004 I was visiting sick kids in the isolation ward at Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial General Hospital when I met Francis Nii. What intrigued me was that he had written a book, Paradise in Peril, while on his sick bed. I had never before come across anyone publishing anything in such circumstances.

Francis told me about the struggles he went through, such as collecting scrap papers from the hospital so he could write his manuscript. His words challenged me and from that moment we stood side by side in our pursuit of literature and I introduced Francis to PNG Attitude.

Our literary passion took off in 2011 thanks to Keith Jackson and Phil Fitzpatrick who initiated the Crocodile Prize. The awards took place at the Australian High Commission and Francis and I flew to Port Moresby from Simbu, the only two writers to fly in. The other writers were from the National Capital District. These efforts were not in vain, as I was awarded the inaugural poetry prize. When my name was announced by Russel Soaba, Francis pinched me and congratulated me.

The award lifted our spirits and spread interest in the Crocodile Prize across Simbu.

When Francis won the Crocodile Prize for essay writing in 2013, the urge to start a writers’ club gained momentum and a number of good writers started popping up in Simbu. Among them were Arnold Mundua, Mathias Kin, Jimmy Awagl and Philip Kai.

We started visiting schools and spread the flame of the Crocodile Prize, encouraging students and teachers to participate in the nationwide literary competition.

Simbu is mostly rugged and we didn’t have a car so we would hire police vans, ambulances, government vehicles or whatever was available to make awareness visits to schools, especially those in remote areas.

The roads were rough, we would slip and slide and Francis would ride with us. We forgot he was a paraplegic because he showed no sign of hurt or of being a hospital patient.
This passion resulted in us forming the Simbu Writers Association (SWA) the following year.

In 2014 the newly formed SWA team flew to Port Moresby to attend the Crocodile Prize awards, as usual hosted by the Australian High Commission.

I was appointed master of ceremonies and, after awarding the prizes to the winners, I announced to the dignitaries that SWA would host the 2015 awards in Kundiawa.

This drew puzzled looks from the rest of the SWA team but not Francis, who was smiling. We had never held a meeting prior to the announcement.

So, in 2015 SWA successfully hosted the Crocodile Prize awards at the Mt Wilhelm Hotel in Kundiawa. All the winners from across PNG were flown to Mt. Hagen, ferried by road to Simbu, toured Mt Wilhelm and held the awards ceremony in Kundiawa.

SWA was to publish many books with Francis himself leading the number of publications. SWA also won the Highlands Regional Think Tank Quiz in Mt Hagen and hosted it the following year at Lutheran Day High School in Kundiawa.

While all this activity occurred, Francis was the heartbeat and he went onto many more accomplishments that he managed from his hospital bed. This was a feat without equal.

Francis was not only smart but had a very strong will. He knew what he wanted to do and wouldn’t let pain of any kind overtake him.

Even we, his very close friends, never saw signs of any of his struggles as he successfully tucked them away from us, always wearing his trademark smile - a contagious smile that you could never walk away from.

His kind heart, smartness and humour comprised a true gentleman in every sense.

The manifestation of his willpower gave hope to humanity that nothing is ever impossible.

Thank you, Francis Nii, for your indomitable spirit.
In 2010 Keith Jackson and I established the Crocodile Prize to help rejuvenate the flagging literary scene in Papua New Guinea.

At the first writers’ workshop at the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby in 2011, we and the writers endeavoured to plot a road ahead for the competition.

In the second row there was a gentleman sitting in an old wheelchair listening intently to what everyone had to say. Now and again he joined in the conversation.

At first, I didn’t make the connection. In his submissions to the Crocodile Prize competition and his contributions to PNG Attitude, which is the central support agent for our endeavours, Francis Nii had not once mentioned that he was a paraplegic.

I was later to learn that this was typical of Francis. His focus was on writing, not on himself, and he certainly wasn’t looking for sympathy or special treatment.

When we read those entries in the initial competition in 2011, we had noted Francis as a talent to keep an eye on and, as the years went by, he didn’t disappoint.

I was to learn that he had already published a book and a few years later I had the great pleasure of helping with editing and publishing a new edition.

Fitman, Raitman and Cooks: Paradise in Peril is a ground-breaking novel in its portrayal of modern life in the Papua New Guinea highlands.

It pulls no punches and is ruthless in describing the ills that beset this region, particularly for its socially disconnected young men.

At the same time, it is inspirational, setting out what is good in highlands society and how this can be harnessed to forge a way forward - all packaged in a highly readable and enjoyable narrative.

As the Crocodile Prize matured, Francis seemed to hit his stride as an essayist. This has become his forte and his work has appeared in all of the Crocodile Prize Anthologies to date.

He is not a populist and doesn’t engage in hyperbole; nor does he preach. His essays uphold those classic traditions of humour and subtlety, a more lethal combination. In 2013 he won the essay prize, much to the delight of his many fans.
But this indefatigable man hadn’t finished yet. In late 2014, at the Crocodile Prize Awards ceremony in Port Moresby, along with his good friend, prize winning poet Jimmy Drekoare, he announced that they had set up the Simbu Writer’s Association.

And if that wasn’t enough, they also declared that the association intended to host the Crocodile Prize awards ceremony and writers’ workshop in Kundiawa in 2015.

The Simbu Province has been a fertile breeding ground for Papua New Guinean writers. They have consistently produced the most entries and the most winners in the Crocodile Prize and have probably produced more published works than any other province in recent times. Only Bougainville snaps closely on their heels.

Francis has since been trekking around the schools in Simbu, which is no mean feat for a man in a wheelchair, encouraging young people to put pen to paper.

The Simbu Writers Association program in the schools has produced the first in a planned series of anthologies. The Ku High School Anthology 2014, edited by Francis, has been distributed throughout schools in the province and has inspired the provincial governor to commit to a substantial contribution for the future.

It seems that nothing will keep this man down and nothing is too hard for him.

In a country renowned for its public ennui he stands out as a shining beacon of hope.

If it was possible to package his indomitability and humanity and sell it in the stores, Papua New Guinea would forge ahead in leaps and bounds.

Not bad for a humble writer in a wheelchair.
Francis Sina Nii, author, publisher and poet, passed away in Kundiawa town, Simbu Province, on 2 August 2020, just one month shy of a decade since I first met him.

While Francis fellow writers may wish to pay him good tributes, we should more so uphold his highest ideals and brightest dreams.

On 15 September 2011, the eve of Papua Niugini’s 36th independence anniversary, I attended incognito the inaugural Crocodile Prize ceremony, after having flown into the capital city Port Moresby from Lae for work duties the day before. I was excited and eager to meet my fellow writers, essayists and poets at this unexpected event.

The Crocodile Prize national literary awards were established in 2010 by Australians Keith Jackson AM and Philip Fitzpatrick “to encourage creative and critical writing in Papua New Guinea and to provide Papua New Guineans with access to home-grown literature”.

In June this year the Crocodile Prize, our beloved Pukpuk, was pronounced dead in the water. But now we can make some leather goods (and hopefully we can sell a few items) which are intrinsically valuable and certainly more useful than the decaying carcass of a sukundumi.

When I look back on that starting event it strikes me as being a sad indictment on our nation that we ourselves had not dared to dream of this possibility as our writer-leader forbearers had done in decades past. “It was not so long ago / less even than a lifetime or so / when our nation was so young / and our history had just begun…/ Did then we dare to dream / and transcend as one?” (O Arise!).

Our literary pioneers, Albert Maori Kiki (Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime), Vincent Eri (The Crocodile), John Kasaipwalova (The Reluctant Flame), Kumalau Tawali (The Bush Kanaka Speaks), Nora Vagi Brash (Which Way Big Man), Russell Soaba (Wanpis), Rabbie Namaliu (The Good Woman of Konedobu), Bernard Narokobi (The Melanesian Way), Michael Somare (Sana) and Ignatius Kilagi (My Mother Calls Me Yaltep), had all written about their lives and aspirations and dreams, before becoming politicians, administrators, dramatists and philosophers. But only one novelist.

They may have tried to make their dreams of the future nation become our reality but a recent PNG prime minister’s autobiography
was titled His Dream is Our Dream. But it seems more often than not we live in the nightmare which he created.

More than three decades after the flourishing of literature in PNG there was a deathly silence. It was difficult to fathom that it was “all quiet on the Western front” in “the land of a thousand tongues” or, as our Tourism Promotion Authority proudly boasts, “the land of a million different journeys”.

So, where were all the stories?

It was a dead literary garden that Keith and Phil found and, in trutru pasin bilong ol kiap, decided to do something with what they had available to them right then and there, laka.

They started off with tentative steps, Keith and Phil playing midwives to the pikinini pukpuks emerging from their kiau. Some writers stepped out bravely whilst others and I in particular were more reluctantly drawn out into the light of day.

At the time it was my proclivity to use the pen name Icarus, by which I had become well known for writing political poems such as Yesterday We Dreamed, Oh My Penge and The Aspiring Politicians 36 Winning Ways for Making Monkeys. Keith was willing to let me gradually wean myself off the pseudonym use.

Nevertheless, it was Icarus, a foreign idiom, which provided some interest when I met Francis Nii, of The PNG Writer era, after the awards ceremony at the Australian High Commission on Wards Strip Road.

It seemed fitting to me that a wartime airstrip should be the launching site for the soon to be national literary awards.

“While PNG’s situation may not justify 'bloody' warfare, we are at war. We are at war against corruption in government and throughout the public service system, the very architects and mechanisms that should make our state function. But it is the State versus the People every day. And clearly the other side has no rules of engagement” (At War Against a Dysfunctional State, Crocodile Prize Anthology 2011).

It also seemed auspicious that the Australian High Commission building bordered upon the sprawling grounds of the Department of Education Teachers In-service College, responsible for managing appropriate teaching skills and knowledge, and designing the school curriculum.

I had assumed that writing was still one of those skills included in the school curriculum, although there seemed little evidence of this in
the 1990s when I was a sumatin reader looking for PNG authored books at the National Library just down the road.

I recall the late Francis Nii listening intently to talks by Russell Soaba and Philip Fitzpatrick during the writers’ workshop prior to the Crocodile Prize awards ceremony. I could feel Francis paying them attention with a kind of contained energy. Like the pressure of Wara Singar breaking at Sigewagi, bursting the rocks on its banks, his eyes were hurling boulders across the room.

Francis and I were competing writers, and there were no holds barred in the ensuing days of the Crocodile Prize fights, which were very well refereed by Keith and Phil. We had sparring sessions of which I am proud because we each stuck to our guns: honest and forthright disagreement, in mutual respect. (God knows the world needs more of that.)

The more I read of Francis it dawned on me that his writing was much like our Wara Simbu; broad and powerful, current fresh with cold and rudely awakening thoughts, always dirty-brown with the earthiness of the land from which it springs and seeps.

In some places Wara Simbu undercurrents will move even football-sized rocks as you wade into the water, and this is the potentially hazardous but life giving, grinding and gritty nature with which my fellow writers Francis Nii, Jimmy Drekoré (A Bush Poet’s Poetical Blossom) and Mathias Kin (My Chimbu) approach our art, for our people.

We are Simbu warrior-poets. And Simbu will always speak up for the ‘unheard voices’.

Simbu are also great advocates of the ‘fair fight’ – rulim lain na bai yumi stretim long namel [rule a line and we will sort it out in the middle].

These are worthy pasin that we Simbu share and which I believe are well recognised by our fellow Papua Niuginians. Michael Somare recognised this when he chose a Simbu, Iambakey Okuk, as his campaign leader in 1974. Their story is now PNG history and mystery, knighthoods, empty coffins, sukundumi and all.

In 2015 Simbu spoke up for hosting the Crocodile Prize in Kundiawa, the first and only time the awards was fully run nationally and held outside Port Moresby. The hosting team had already established the Simbu Writers Association to promote reading and writing to schools around the province.

However, the Crocodile Prize eventually floundered and died despite the valiant efforts by other writers, particularly Emmanuel Peni.
(Sibona), Betty Wakia and Caroline Evari (Nanu Sina), as well as Ben Jackson, husait i givim bel gut na karim pasin bilong papa b’long em Keith Jackson.

Various business houses had supported the prize awards and initially there was a mean acknowledgement from the PNG government. There were also recognition and facilities provided by the High Commission.

But a failure to communicate, cooperate, coordinate and provide cohesive leadership amongst nationals on the literary scene meant that while the soil and seeds were fertile there was no one willing to till the land and water the garden. Government support, like elsewhere, was non-existent.

Last year PNG writers initiated a petition to Prime Minister James Marape “to commit his government and future governments to providing the support our writers, our literature and our nation deserve”. I chose to lampoon him in poem.

Supporting the petition, Francis Nii expressed that: “Writing and publishing our own Papua New Guinean stories in the absence of government or donor agency support is a daunting and painful experience. But we write because stories are part of our culture and books are repositories of our culture. What is it the authorities don’t understand?”

Keith Jackson wrote that: “It is a home-grown literature that will amplify the creativity, culture and spirit of Papua New Guineans. But, lacking the required support, literature has not emerged in PNG as an influence capable of playing its vital role in education, in nation building or in people's lives.”

Francis had seen very clearly the real effect of the lack of support. “No one even knows or cares to how many national authors there are in the country. Nor what kind of books they produce. Nor what their books look like. Nor how good their stories are. They don’t know and they don’t care to know the importance and value of the books that have been written”.

On his hospital bed earlier in 2020, Francis Nii’s last project was to raise K425,000 to help Australia’s bushfire victims. “When we Papua New Guineans face natural disasters, Australians are the first with support,” he said, “this is the time to show our solidarity.”

Francis later published my poetry collection, Dried Grass Over Rough Cut Logs, for which he praised, “Mike is truly a gifted poet and I had the pleasure of publishing his latest anthology”. I imagine him stoically texting this comment with his weak and trembling hands by
sheer willpower.

A warrior has fallen in the battlefield. I weep for our loss. And I will not give up his good fight.

In modern day Papua Niugini, writers are not offered a ‘fair fight’ and the ‘unheard voices’ of our people have far too often and for far too long remained as muffled whispers behind the security enforced doors of our political leaders’ offices at Waigani.

When invited to present the petition at the Manasupe Haus our team leaders were instead told that the prime minister was unavailable – at the Waigani golf course across the road.

It was towards such leadership that I had penned the following poetic epistle in 2010, before ever imagining a literary future for myself or for my country.

DEAR HONOURABLE SIRS

We are your loyal supporters, remember us
Your fellow Papua New Guineans
The honoured rabble that raised you up to lofty heights
We drink your poisoned brew
While we suffer your misspent fortunes
Watch our heritage squandered
And our independence scorned.

In our national parliament
Where once walked wise men, proud and true
Where once were just laws, written and defended
Foolishness now rules that house
Where the Honourable vie for their-own (rabble)
With their educated rhetoric, regurgitated oratory
Sanctimonious as wallowing sows and as smelly
In our nation’s capital
Beggars loiter while wealthy loaded landowners’ loaf
Pickpockets, thieves and informal street sellers roam
As mountains crumble and trees topple
Littering our rivers and seas
Our ancestral lands and siblings are divided over riches
Money for dishonourable dignity in Port Moresby.
There Honourable Sirs you dwell
And celebrate our nation’s prosperity
Which we apparently are yet to receive
There Honourable Sirs you play pernicious politics
You and your rabble, squabble, dribble, grapple
For position, power and prestige, PNG big man policies
Your slightest glance is our grace, dear Honourable Sirs.

In our towns and villagers
Far, far from freeways, Fairfax and Finance Ministry
We hear tales of civilization, rumours of development
Our aging fathers idly reminisce
While their beloved sons seek other forms of bliss
Mothers and matriarchs do what their daughters should do
Excuse what their children have done, and for you.

We are the commoners from rural towns and villages
Those hamlets not seen on Falcons flight
Distant, and remote, you’ve forgotten our vote
Our sweat feeds this nation
Our land; fills your coffers
Our blood bathes your altars
Our tears are granted no remittance.

Our fates are in your hands
We are the unheard voices
Disenchanted, disowned and denied
How long lived is your deception
Schemes and dreams and fantasies
Where are the promised fruits?
Your majestic visions.

Leave us in dearth and doom
We are your people
We gave, glorified and grovelled for you
Now disrespected, deceived and destitute
We are the infants you suckle on a flimsy future
The unborn cheated, betrayed and bartered
As your virulent greed robs our womb
God save Papua New Guinea!
THE EARLY YEARS

Grade 10, Chuave High School, 1982. Francis second row on the right
Triumph and tragedy

Francis Sina Nii Anguay was the first child and only born to a traditional warlord, Nicholas Tura Duma, and his beautiful wife, Erikina Tinegirin, before dawn on Sunday 1 March, 1964, into the Moigirin Tribe of Yui at Diani village near Yobai rest house at the foot of Yobai Mountain.

The government identifies Diani village as part of Salt Local Level Government in the Karamui Nomane District of Simbu Province in the central highlands of Papua New Guinea.

On the eve of Francis’s birth Nicholas took Erickina to a small health post run by the Catholic mission at Drima number 2 village. A Catholic priest by the name of Francis helped deliver Francis so the parents decided to name him after the priest. They called him Sina Frans or Francis Sina Nii.

Due to birth complications faced by Erickina, his parents decided not to have any more children. Being the only child, his father was very strict. Francis was known to everyone in his village as Kumul Tane, meaning only child. He was the apple of his father’s eyes. As was typical of the region, his staple diet was roasted yam and kaukau.

Francis first started school aged eight in 1972 at Diani Community School, a government run school built on his father’s traditional land. In return his parents were never charged school fees.

Francis successfully completed Standard 6 as a top student and was selected to attend Chuave High School, a boarding school now known as the Yauwe Moses Secondary School much to the delight of his parents who wanted their only child to be educated to live a life beyond the village. Fortunately, the family owned many pigs so were able to pay his school fees for the next four years.

It was a long journey for Francis to get to the school. He had to cross a dilapidated rope bridge across the Waghri River then climb Elimbari Mountain to Chuave High School. Then back again at end of term. A vehicle ride to Elimbari and then a seven hour walk home. Most times his father would escort him to the river and watch him cross the bridge until he was safely on the other side then shout farewell to his son.

Yauwe Moses Secondary was built in the late 1960s and was one of the pioneer high schools in Simbu Province. It educated students from all over Simbu who went on to achieve prominent positions as leaders.
of Simbu and Papua New Guinea, like Hon Kerenga Kua OL MP and Hon Wera Mori MP, both government ministers.

On Monday 2 February 1979 the new students stood in a long queue in front of the headmaster's office to produce their acceptance letters and get enrolled. The headmaster was Mark Rosen, a decent Englishman in his fifties who was well liked by students. Francis Nii was placed in Grade 7B. Most of the staff members of 20 teachers were expatriate volunteers.

With a friend, Andrew Ya McCarthey, and their fathers, Francis explored the school. Each class had a maximum of 35 students and the boys were excited to see the classroom so neat and clean and with electric lights, Francis quickly claimed a seat in the front row and found a friend to sit with him.

Then came the time to part from their fathers. Francis told Andrew,” I’m so sorry for our fathers who came with us. They will return back home now. I am worried for them”. I could feel hot tears roll down my face and Francis was also in tears.

Francis quickly adapted into the high school environment and, although a rather shy boy, was a high achiever. As he progressed through school, he proved to excel in all subjects - Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Commerce, Agriculture and the rest – but he was especially outstanding in English.

“The good thing between Francis and me,” says his friend Andrew Ya McCarthey, “was that we would compete to read books provided by our English teacher. Francis had an appetite for reading books. He would always have a book in his hand every time and wherever he went.”

At the start of the 1982 academic year all of the boys who had enrolled in 1979 and succeeded in reaching Grade 10 were young men who knew that if they successfully competed that year, they could explore the world.

Ms Diane Smart Keathler was friendly but very strict in her teaching of English. Francis was a brilliant student who scored high marks in his test and assignments and he also became friends with Ms Keathler and her husband, also a teacher.

Francis had applied to the University of Papua New Guinea to study economics. He had once thought he might study law but there were good career opportunities in economics.
The graduation date was set for 5 December 1982 and all the successful Grade 10 students turned up in their best attire. Families, friends and loved ones were there too. People came from far and wide.

Francis collected most of the academic awards and also claimed dux of the year, the most prestigious award. In fact, the champ from the rural outback of Salt Nomane Karamui stole the graduation show. His father was delighted that his son had done well. The outside world had opened up for Francis Nii.

Instead of going on to a National High School, as a top student Francis was selected directly into the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby to study Economics. Unlike in his school years, everything was provided by the national government, tuition, meals, travelling expenses, and the lot.

At the end of his third year at university, his father arranged a marriage for him back home. Cathy, a beautiful, hardworking lady from the Southern Highland had followed her big sister who married to of Francis tribesmen and stayed in Yobai. Cathy was good at everything - gardening, cooking and taking care of old people.

Nicholas Tura Duma had not sought Francis’s permission before he paid the bride price and when Francis arrived home for the semester break, he was surprised at his father’s decision, but didn’t argue.

Then came 1986, his final year at UPNG. Francis’s parents insisted he take Cathy with him to Port Moresby so she could be with until he graduated. Without hesitation he agreed and in 1987 he graduated with a degree in economics, becoming the first university degree holder and economist from his area and also one of the few highly educated men in Salt Nomane Karamui.

After graduating from UPNG in 1988 Francis got a job with the PNG Development Bank which offered managerial positions to top economics graduates. He was first posted to Kimbe in West New Britain where his territory also included Rabaul, Bialla and Manus.

In these roles he was responsible for advising farmers and business people in the financial aspects of starting and growing their businesses.

Francis and Cathy’s first daughter, Cheryl Tine, was born in Rabaul on 16 July 1989. His second daughter, Maggie Nigidongo, was born on 6 July 1993 after he was transferred to West New Britain.

Then he was promoted to be the manager of the Manus Rural Development bank and his last-born daughter, Charlene Dinipami, was born on 24 September 1995. From Manus he was transferred to
Goroka in 1996 then to Kainantu in 1997 and back to Goroka as branch manager.

His leadership qualities had been recognised as was his astuteness as a banker and his career was soaring until, when in his official vehicle going about his bank duties, he was badly injured in an accident on 9 February 1999. It left him a paraplegic, paralysed from the hip down.

He was admitted to Goroka General Hospital but, two months later, dissatisfied with the lack of treatment, he discharged himself and spent the rest of 1999 using his small public service endowment to establish a home for his children in Goroka.

In February 2000, he arranged his transfer to Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital in Kundiawa for further treatment. Here he found a permanent home and for the rest of his life was treated by the Polish missionary surgeon and priest, Dr Jan Jaworski, who became a close friend. Unfortunately, further surgery to repair his spine failed.

The Papua New Guinea government has never been known to treat its disabled citizens well nor perceiving an obligation to assist them further in life and career. Francis Nii was stranded.

After a period of deep depression, Francis realised he must adjust to his predicament. He drew on his personal strength to survive and drew on his experience as a literary leader at university to find a new role.

And so, he began to write a novel.
University years: Ondobondo

The Athabasca website is a wonderful storehouse of Pacific writing, the outcome of collaboration between the University of Papua New Guinea, Athabasca University in Canada and the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau.

In its archives rests precious material from the first two great eras of PNG written literature – around the years of independence, which amongst a profusion of writing produced the literary magazine Kovave (1969-75, nine issues), and then the 1980s literary resurgence, which produced the magazines Ondobondo (1982-87, nine issues) and The PNG Writer (1985-86, three issues).

It is worth noting that in Athabasca’s magnificent historical archive are also facsimile copies of The Papuan Villager (1929-1941) and its successor The Papua and New Guinea Villager (1950-60) as well as other colonial era publications.

Francis Nii was at UPNG during the period of the eighties revival and contributed to both Ondobondo and The PNG Writer. In fact, he was one of the leaders of the PNG Writers Union which established The PNG Writer.

Amongst his contemporaries at UPNG was the Engan journalist Daniel Kumbon, later to become a noted author himself, who met Francis through the Crocodile Prize and became his great friend.

Ondobondo’s emergence in 1982 coincided with the formation of the Ondobondo Club, a writers’ group that gathered monthly for readings. The magazine averaged about 30 pages long and carried a range of stories, poems, book reviews, plays and excerpts from novels.

Ondobondo remains the largest single source in PNG’s literary history of excerpts from unpublished novels. The reviews of these provide the first instance of Papua New Guinean criticism of indigenous writing.

Here are three poems that Francis Nii had published in Ondobondo, all from its fourth issue of mid-1984.

There is a problem

A-a yes, that afternoon
People waiting for the only transport, the Urban PMV Bus.
Small, big, fat, thin, tall, short.
Mostly teenage boys and girls.  
All in uniforms of one kind or another.  
Blue, green, red, yellow  
And the combination of orange and white,  
Pen, pencils, rubber, rulers, bags, books held in hands. 

Not very long and there it came.  
A beautiful 25-seat Coaster.  
Clean comfortable cushion seats.  
Stylish, dusty bearded man at the wheel.  
And next to him a man named Tarangu.  
Of the driver’s identity and nature,  
Maybe from one mama or papa.  
Who knows?

Tarangu counted everyone so as not to miss a toea.  
The card-board said Gerehu.  
And all the uniformed boys and girls rushed in.  
Ge-e-ed-n-n Ge-e-ed-n-n roared the engine proudly. 

The driver drove literally 60  
Whistling the typical driver’s tune:  
The Highlands Highway tune  
Of the Coffee Buyers.  

Driver – driver givim 60 way nambiriwa  
Biriwona – Biriwa Biriwona – Biriwa  
Driver – driver givim 60 way nambiriwa  
Ha-ha driver – driver givim 60 way nambiriwa  
Hey! Stop driver, two red uniformed girls called.  

Off they got at Waigaini, the Roots bingo marketing centre  
Twenty toea each to Tarangu  
“Ten toea more pilis,” said Tarangu  
“Mipela students,” said the girls.  
“You students? You tupelo meri!  
You no look to me belong students.  
You look to me marit 20 years before.”  
“My meri no school.  
Stayin in the house. No like olsem you.
My meri no putim uniform.
Holim book in hand.
My meri pay 30 toea for bus repair and fuel.
You wastim time for marit
And karim pikinini
You mas pay me 10 toea more.

Oi, wire lose or lasi?
Mipela i no work for money. Mipela students.
Sorry Tarangu, you keep insisting for 10 toea.
Mipela sing out long police.
Poor Tarangu, poor uniformed people
The food price is shooting high
Great sympathy for you.

Empty Pocket

Two yellow tops, please
Cheers baby
Two red tops, tambu
Ta – a – hurrah
Four yellow tops, man.

Bottle up
Beer down
Beer in
Head sway out
Laughter echoes the discotheque inn
Hands in
Pocket out
Empty pocket
Break pocket
No pocket, crazy.

Kina Money

Laden with the burden of the West
Crucified slyly and forever
On the forsaken tree.
Deteriorating and smouldering in soul
Yet unabated.

Kina.
Residual name.

“A free man does not fear and run and hide from the law. Only the one who breaks the law fears, runs and hides from it.”
University years: The PNG Writer

According to their first president, Micheal Yaki Mel, in late November 1984 “a group of eager young writers based at the University Papua New Guinea got together to express their dissatisfaction over the lack of publishing outlets for their work.

That this occurred at the same time Ondobondo was being published hints at some division in the ranks of writers at the time, of which we know nothing.

“Many had poems, stories and other tattered manuscripts tucked away which they couldn't get published because they were unknown. From that meeting was both the Papua New Guinea Writers Union,” Mel wrote.

Again, no reference to the Ondobondo Club.

Anyone in PNG was eligible to join the Writers Union – adults K5; students K2.

And thus, the second wave of work to establish a sustained creative writing culture in PNG occurred, the first having flourished under the guardianship of university lecturer Ulli Beier around the time of independence before wilting and almost disappearing.

The archives of the online Athabasca University in Alberta, Canada, tell the story of the second wave – the Ondobondo Club and the Writers Union and their short-lived publications as well as other university-based literary efforts.

The story of The PNG Writer is important as an attempt to drive a writing culture in PNG but it is especially significant in our context because the vice-president of the PNG Writers Union was Francis Nii.

President Mel had urged his colleagues to “nurture [The Writer] along so PNG literature becomes a living reality: not just something academics talk about.” But, sadly, it was unable to fulfil that noble sentiment.

However, in a Kundiawa hospital bed 20 years later, the now paraplegic Francis Nii – his spine severed and legs made useless in a vehicle smash - remembered those ideals and, with his career as a banker also wrecked and his gradual acceptance of his dreadful handicap, he began to write.

In 1985, on the tenth anniversary of Independence, the Papua New Guinea Writers Union had been able to obtain financing from the
National Literature Board – now long defunct - to fund a periodical, The PNG Writer.

The PNG Writer was a lively journal of about 70 pages, most of its content in English published. It was meant to be published twice each year but in fact came to an end after just three issues.

It featured essays, poetry, short stories, plays, interviews and reviews with only one or two pieces in Pidgin out of an average 15 items.

The genres were labelled and collected in sections, except for verse, which was interspersed. Reviews and interviews were located at the end of the magazine. It had an academic bias with a greater proportion of essays and reviews -- about half of each issue – mostly written by writers themselves and about PNG literature.

An interesting aspect of the magazine was its black consciousness, evident in reviews of some African and Caribbean writing. This 'spiritual' connection between African and PNG literatures had survived Ulli Beier's tenure.

In 1986, Ben Nakin and Steve Winduo returned from the inaugural Black Writers Conference in the USA impressed by the power of black organisations, committed to the new Writers Union and to black control of editing and publishing.

This black consciousness was a political identification directed in two ways: to professional achievement and acceptance for black writers and as a kind of cultural affirmation.

If there was a backlash in The PNG Writer, it was not anti-colonial, but directed toward the first generation of PNG writers as too elitist, too political and not committed enough to literature.

Among the writers who contributed to The PNG Writer were Vincent Eri (an essay about writing), Allan Natachee (poetry), Kumalau Tawali (poetry) and Russell Soaba (poetry). Eri and Natachee were always apolitical. Tawali and Soaba were two of the most committed of PNG writers and two of the least systemically aligned.

The Writers Union was at pains to dissociate itself from what was generally understood as university writing; that is, the Beier-Kovave school, which could explain the separation from the Ondobondo Club and its activities. Although the journal was based on the UPNG campus, it was to be understood as a national magazine.

The PNG Writer conveyed its non-elitist message in part through forewords and editorials that were populist and written in clear, simple English:
“There is a wealth of creative talent in this country. Let's nurture it along so that PNG literature becomes a living reality; not just something which academics talk about,” Mel wrote in 1985. “The best way to do this is to join the PNG Writers Union or to set up a branch in your school, college or home district.”

Mel’s appeal for broad participation was echoed in the magazine’s editorials where the pitch was reminiscent of Roger Boschman's editorials for Papua New Guinea Writing in the early 1970s. The Writers Union was receiving manuscripts from all over the country, indeed so many that they could not all be published as quickly as the magazine would like.

The magazine welcomed manuscripts from provincial writers and from women although drama, that very political genre used by the first generation of PNG writers was not at first forthcoming.

And so, The PNG Writer was conceived as another entry-level populist literary magazine intended to bear the full weight of forming whatever character the national literature might come to have. But its ideals were far greater than the practicalities of publication could bear.

So far as can be determined, Francis Nii, as vice president of the Writers Union, wrote three poems that were published in the first issue of The PNG Writer in 1985.

Peaceful Village

Kunai hut, remember – me – ever
Wooden bed, forget – me – not
Roasted kaukau is always sweet
Flowers keep smiling.
Birds sing unchanged jungle melodies
While country kids dance free for joy.

Water falls like silver crystals.
Early rainbows kiss the dewy treetops.
Kids hide and seek,
And mum and dad have endless honeymoon
No gangs of boars intrude
Stay gentle village
Peaceful promised land.
Aging

Yesterday was a babe,
Boobed and cradled,
Bottle-fed and baby-sat.

Today is a machine,
Magic mirrors admire your gleam.
Girls sigh for steel thighs,
Surrounded by merry friends.

Tomorrow the mirror will curse you
Wrinkled, grey, old withered stick.
You cannot hold your spear erect.
Broken, old rusty spring. Go!
Baruni is waiting you.

Education

Like the bee
I buzz away
Ignorance rules my warm hive,
Yet I buzz on,
Not sure of my destiny
In fact, there is no destination.
Only dreams of
Eurocentric luxuries.

Like the bee I buzz
From flowers primary
To flowers secondary
To flowers tertiary.
Collecting nectars that I ought.
Only of West origin
Because my dreams
Are Eurocentric luxuries.

From dawn to dusk
From days to weeks
From months to years
Like the bee I buzz
But the realities of my dreams
Will never be my destiny.

“Now is the time for true patriots to rise up. It is the time for loyalists and true people’s servants to triumph. It is time for rectitude, transparency, justice, truthfulness and prudent stewardship to reign.”
WRITERS AND WRITING

Francis at the 2012 Crocodile Prize awards. Sil Bolkin, Sir Rabbie Namaliu and Drusilla Modjeska immediately behind him
Bushman likes reading and writing. Whenever he finds time, he collects half used scrap paper, writes on it and stacks it away.

One day, Bushman retrieves one of his stories from the stacks of scrap. He starts reading it. There is not much sense there. It’s not a complete story; only a brainstorming.

“I must complete the story,” says Bushman to himself. He finds some scrap paper and starts writing.

As he progresses, the story becomes interesting. He suspends his other activities for the time being. He gets stuck into writing.

By the time he finishes, he’s covered a good amount of scrap paper.

He is amazed. He smiles to himself. He has a complete story.

Bushman stacks the scrap paper in the middle of an Air Niugini Paradise magazine and puts it away. He goes about his usual business.

Some days later, Bushman returns home from the buai market. He finds scrap paper lying all over the floor. His youngest daughter sits with her friends outside, all their eyes on Paradise.

They are arguing which one of them is that pretty air hostess. Bushman shakes his head. He picks up the paper and goes to his bed.

Lying down, Bushman reads his story.

It is full of mistakes. He makes corrections as he reads.

When he finishes, the scrap paper is full of crossings, asterisks and arrows pointing here and there. The whole is a mess. Only Bushman can make sense out of it. He feels sick.

He looks around and finds a plastic shopping bag. He puts his scrap paper in the bag and hides it in that place Bushman calls bedroom.

One morning, a friend of Bushman comes along. He tells him about PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize. Bushman goes to town and buys a writing pad and some biros. He goes back to his bed and painstakingly starts rewriting the whole story on the pad.

After two hours, Bushman completes the rewrite. He is happy. He burns the scrap paper. The pad takes their place in the plastic bag.

Typing is Bushman’s next dilemma. On the following day, Bushman goes to town looking for a place to have his story typed. One typing shop charges K2.50 per page. The rest charge K3. He chooses the cheaper one.
After two hours of waiting, his typing is ready - three pages in all. Bushman checks the typed story. As far as Bushman is concerned, he is the Microsoft Word 2007 proof checker. He is the grammar, the vocabulary, the tense and the punctuation.

He finds mistakes. He gives the story back to the typist to make corrections. The typist demands an extra K1 a page for the corrections and reprints. Bushman pays.

Scanning and sending the story to PNG Attitude is Bushman’s next double headache. He doesn’t give up. He searches and asks around.

His good friend who introduced him to PNG Attitude helps. He sends Bushman’s first story to PNG Attitude from his work place. Thanks Mero.

Bushman’s story gets published; his greatest delight and satisfaction.

He is happy that he shares a piece of mind his with others. He wishes to write more stories. But how is Bushman is going to overcome the obstacles, or at least alleviate them?

“Wickedness has a cost. At the ripe time, the perpetrator will pay each his price.”
The dilemma of Bush Writer is not an isolated issue of publication difficulty but a holistic problem of accessibility and affordability of modern communication technology.

I’m talking about a town like Kundiawa in the middle of the Papua New Guinea highlands – still struggling in this time of communication revolution.

Communication in general - like accessing, transmitting and receiving information and messages or conducting commercial transactions with using the internet - is a nightmare in Kundiawa, the main town. Forget the rest of Simbu.

Accessibility to internet communication is a privilege enjoyed by the wealthy minority, particularly private companies and key state entities that have v-sats.

For the common grassroots, the hardship in using internet to access information or conduct business is a never-ending hurdle.

To get connected to internet via a modem stick, the only accessible technology, is infested with seemingly insurmountable limitations.

Adding to the woe of cost, it is very slow and has limited capacity. To log on can take one hour if one is lucky. Otherwise, one can scramble a whole day in vain.

Even if one gets connected, the capacity is so low that only a limited amount of information can be transmitted or retrieved.

There are only three internet cafes in town that provide paid internet service and they also use modem sticks.

Whether one uses a PC and modem at workplace, home or cafe, the problems are the same. For those who do not have PCs, the paid internet cafe is the only option.

The denouement is that internet use is frustrating, time wasting and expensive; so much so that many people are not interested in anything that involves its frequent use. Sadly, among these people are writers and potential writers.

Simbu writers residing in big centres like Port Moresby, Lae or Mt Hagen where internet services are more reliable are able to get their works published while their comrades in Simbu are trammeled by the compounded woes of communication.
But regardless of the stumbling blocks in everything that one does, if the person has passion and persistence they will prevail and find ways of getting around the problems. Bush Writer, for example, sent this article from his mobile phone.

This comes with its perils. Three months ago, Bush Writer burned out the keyboard of his Nokia XpressMusic 5310 mobile phone, which he calls internet smuk balus.

Bush Writer is now thumb-pushing the keys of the replaced board at windmill speed. He maintains the internet smuk balus because of speed and cost effectiveness. What will go idle next, only Nokia 5310 knows.

“Australia is only pretending to be a friend of PNG. Be wary of the talking dollar. After it talks it boomerangs.”
I have just been honoured, by persons who will go unmentioned, with the Hot Head Medal - a scintillating award for my views on the Kevin Rudd-sponsored Manus Island asylum deal. Such are the perils of commentary.

I already had the hunch that I had stepped on too many giant toes in the debate and I was expecting direct fire much earlier but it came indirectly and a bit late in a different scene. Nevertheless, it came.

Whether my views on the issue are representative of my silent fellow Papua New Guineans or not, I am happy that I have the liberty to express my views freely and frankly, a privilege that most of my fellow Papua New Guinean PNG Attitude readers are denied.

Being carefully observant, one would realise that my fellow PNG readers are very selective in what they write and how they comment because they don’t have the liberty like me to speak their mind freely.

Apart from a handful of full-time students of the Divine Word University, most are professionals employed either by the state or private companies.

They are subject to the rules and codes of ethics imposed on them by their employers.

They don’t have the freedom to speak their hearts’ feelings on highly sensitive political issues concerning PNG and Australia because of repercussions if they are not careful in what they say. This is a limitation of free speech for them.

For an unemployed, mischievous, hot head like me, I have nothing to lose for speaking out rightly and such naming emboldens me. Only if I had committed a cardinal crime would I have cowered into a hellish shithole.

However, the despicable crime that I detest to commit, especially in public media, is to harm anyone by making personal allusions and backlash. Keith Jackson has reminded us on several occasions that we all have a moral obligation to observe this does not happen.

Anyone can become red-hot head-on issues and that’s the end of the story.

Leonard Fong Roka and I locked the horns of ideological difference on certain Bougainville issues and that’s that. There were no personal
allusions and backlash between us. That’s the beauty of debate and commentary on issues in the public media.

Hot heads, tepid heads, cool heads and whatever heads us all produce in literature, commentary and debate in PNG Attitude are lively, colourful, meaningful, beneficial and enjoyable. How would it be if we all had cool heads or spongy malomalo heads?

“A country without educated people is not a nation but a barren land.”
Not easy, but SWA devoted to volunteerism

Francis Nii
07 June 2015

Volunteerism means sacrificing precious time, energy, knowledge, experience and resources for the benefit of others in the community and, more broadly, the nation.

It is no easy feat, particularly when the volunteers are people with no formal employment and with no stable financial base.

It’s a mammoth task, particularly in the society that is ridden with greed and selfishness, and yet members of the Simbu Writers Association (SWA) are devoted to it.

There are times things don’t turn out the way they expect but they don’t look back. With the heart of a lion they keep progressing one step at a time.

This is because their heart is in what they believe in and their motive is honourable.

Combining like-minded people to pursue a common aim is like fusing lodestars together. As the saying goes, two minds are better than one, and I suppose many minds are better still.

SWA members Jimmy Drekore, Mathias Kin, Jimmy Awagl and Arnold Mundua are an invincible force.

Helping children to excel in education is building a pathway for a better nation. A country without educated people is not a nation but a barren land.

A nation of highly educated people is a nation full of gold and silver. It will prosper.

This is what the people in SWA believe and they have sacrificed much in order to pursue the Simbu for Literary Excellence Program to help Simbu children excel in education so they can excel in life.

SWA members climb rugged mountains and cross ferocious rivers amidst scorching heat and in bone-shattering cold to inform and spread the idea of Papua New Guinean literature and reading to students and teachers.

Taking a PMV (public motor vehicle) to one school, jumping on a police vehicle or into an ambulance to reach another and taking a truck back home may seem a hassle, but not for this group of indomitable hearts.

For the SWA leaders, getting students and teachers fully versed with their intentions is critical if they are to value Simbu for Literary
Excellence and get involved in it. Communication is very important and a task that has to be accomplished by every possible means.

At the same time, they present small gifts and share fun and even shed tears with their audiences.

In the two years of this project, the publication of the Ku High School Anthology last year was a pinnacle and a benchmark among high schools in Papua New Guinea.

And SWA will produce another anthology this year as the highpoint of its 2015 literary efforts which will feature the writing of high and secondary school students delivered to schools as a perfect 40th independence gift - a productive and achievable project!

“While wounds heal and memories fade, scars remain.”
The first day of the two-day 2015 Crocodile Prize award ceremony in Kundiawa, Simbu Province, kicked off at 9 o’clock on Friday under the organisation of the Simbu Writers Association (SWA).

The scene was the Riverside Resort at Wara Simbu; celebrations continued to the foot of PNG’s highest peak, Mt Wilhelm; and they concluded with the literary awards presentation at Mt Wilhelm Tourist Hotel last night.

A decent number of people turned up at Friday’s writers’ workshop chaired by Mathias Kin, mostly young writers and students.

Established writers Bob Cleland, Baka Bina, Arnold Mundua, Daniel Kombon and Joyceelyn Leahy gave motivational talks which were very well received.

Among the high school teachers at the workshop were Ware Mukale of Kariweri High School, a strong supporter of SWA.

Another participant was academic Bernard Yegiora of Divine Word University.

After lunch at 2 o’clock, the visitors were taken on a panoramic tour of the mountainous and rugged country around the township of Gembogl.

There was also a session which focused on the management of the Crocodile Prize for 2016 and beyond as arrangements are made to take over the administration from Keith Jackson and Philip Fitzpatrick.

The weekend activities were capped off last night with the presentation of awards and gifts and a number of book launches – a true sign of how far Papua New Guinean writers have come in the last five years.

One of the books launched was the Simbu high and secondary schools’ 2015 anthology, a culmination of SWA’s Simbu for Literary Excellence program for schools.

Minister for Education and MP for Gumine, Hon Nick Kuman, was the guest speaker and other prominent people present included Governor Noah Kool, Provincial Administrator Joe Kundar Naur MBE, Principal Advisor Education Essy Walkaima MBE, Manager of Bank South Pacific.

The organisation of the annual Crocodile Prize awards event was a considerable feat for the Simbu Writers’ Association as it had never
seriously anticipated that hosting the award would actually happen in Kundiawa. It seemed like peppy talk and a wild dream and but it became a reality.

On 6 May 2014 a group of like-minded people with a common interest in literature got together at Mt Wilhelm Tourist Hotel and formed the Simbu Writers Association.

As it was the first gathering, the group had no finance, no constitution and none of the many other requirements that attach themselves to an organised body.

Nevertheless, the idea of Simbus hosting the 2015 Crocodile Prize awards was broached at that very first meeting. Those present liked the idea although no one was sure how it might happen given that the association was merely an infant. Most people treated the idea as a wild dream.

But at subsequent formal and informal gatherings, people kept discussing it and, the more they talked, the more the determination and fire burned in them to turn the dream into reality.

Interest kept growing until it culminated in the official announcement at the September 2014 awards ceremony hosted by the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby. And now the event has happened right here in Kundiawa.

In retrospect, we can now examine what was SWA’s strength for success and what enabled it to create the event from nothing.

Prior to the first Crocodile Prize award ceremony hosted by the High Commission in September 2011 when our good friend Ian Kemish was the High Commissioner, Keith Jackson and Phil Fitzpatrick invited Jimmy Drekore and me to make a presentation on ways to promote Crocodile Prize in PNG’s highlands provinces.

When Jimmy’s turn came to talk, he offered a PowerPoint presentation on the Simbu Children Foundation (SCF). He did not mention a single word about writing.

Sitting right at the back in my battered wheelchair I could see reflections of indigestion on the faces of participants.

So, when Jimmy had finished talking, the obvious question came from Phil. He asked: “What has Simbu Children Foundation got to do with writing?”

“Francis will answer your question in his presentation,” Jimmy answered. I have never forgotten that question – or the answer.

After question time, I also made a PowerPoint presentation. I graphically plotted the advocacy and promotion of the Crocodile Prize
in Simbu linking with the network and platform established by SCF, thereby answering Phil’s question.

Today SWA is leaping and jumping in its aspirations as it rides on SCF’s vast experience and solid platform.

Very importantly the key people in SWA are the same human beings who run SCF and, with the strong support of likeminded people, SWA has been made a success story.

So, a big tribute and thank you to Simbu Children Foundation

“Let probity be implanted in our blood.”
Crocodile Prize needs permanent home

Francis Nii
23 September 2015

Looking back at the recent Simbu Writers’ Association’s successful hosting of the 2015 Crocodile Prize awards in Kundiawa and the previous unsuccessful Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers (SWEP) experience of 2012, I strongly feel that the Crocodile Prize should have a permanent home where it can generate its own revenue to sustain itself in the long run.

Author and publisher Phil Fitzpatrick, in a comment on my earlier article, remarked that the SWA made history by not only hosting the awards but for the first time paying the return air fares and hotel accommodation of the winners.

Well done Arnold Mundua, Jimmy Awagl, Mathias Kin, Jimmy Drekore, Roslyn Tony, family members and stakeholders.

You made writers, sponsors, friends, the Simbu Administration, teachers, students and the people of Simbu proud. I know that Keith Jackson and Phil Fitzpatrick, the founders of the Crocodile Prize, are proud too.

Your sweat and personal sacrifice has paid off. I salute you all.

Praise also goes to the MP for Gumine and Minister for Education, Hon Nick Kuman, and his Secretary, Dr Uke Kombra, as well as the MP for Sinasina-Yongomugl, Hon Kerenga Kua, and MP for Alotau and Minister for Planning, Hon Charles Abel, for their financial support without which the event would not have happened.

On the same note, a big thumbs up to Baka Bina and his committee of volunteers who will take charge of the administration and hosting of the Crocodile Prize awards ceremony in 2016.

The committee members are Jocelyn Leahy (Australia), Bernard Yegiora (Divine Word University, Madang), Bomai Witne (University of Goroka), Daniel Kumbon (Wabag, Enga Province) and Rev James Mai (Chuave District, Simbu Province).

We congratulate Baka and his committee members for the courage and boldness they have shown in putting their hands up. We wish you and your team all the best.

Unlike the SWA team, which is based in one location, the new team members are scattered and will be relying heavily on cyber technology for conducting meetings and organising Crocodile Prize activities.
The world is heading in that direction and Keith and Phil have successfully administered the Crocodile Prize using the internet. Baka’s team will make it.

However, looking back at the SWEP experience, which was discussed at length by the meeting in Kundiawa, and comparing it with the SWA story, one significant difference is worth noting.

It is that the SWA team, based in one location, met face to face on an average of four days a week to conduct SWA and Crocodile Prize business while the SWEP executives were scattered.

SWEP could have killed the Beast had it not been for a quick emergency rescue intervention by Keith and Phil. A lot of personal sacrifices, which we did know about at the time, were made behind the scenes to save the Crocodile Prize.

We also had an incident in 2013 where Steamships Trading Company withdrew its sponsorship for the short story award at the last moment and without giving any reason after providing assurances the sponsorship was still alive.

That experience taught us a valuable lesson that sponsors are at liberty to pull out at any time they like with or without good reason.

In the light of these experiences, I feel the Crocodile Prize should have a permanent home where it can generate its own revenue to sustain itself come sun or rain. It has to establish its base somewhere. I don’t know how that can happen but the idea is now up for discussion.

Your experience, ideas and thoughts can help Baka Bina and his team to plot a long-term course for the wonderful Beast.
At its first meeting for 2016 at the Mt Wilhelm Tourist Hotel last Friday, Simbu Writers Association executives developed strategies for the organisation’s 2016 activities.

Re-elected President Jimmy Drekore, Vice President Jimmy Awagl, Treasurer Francis Nii and newly elected secretary Angela Kaupa spent three hours reviewing the achievements and hiccups of 2015 and planning for 2016.

Among the important matters discussed was the 2016 Simbu for Literary Excellence Program – an annual debate, quiz and literature competition for provincial high and secondary schools – which was started in 2014.

The final program will be presented to the SWA members for endorsement at a general meeting scheduled for Monday 1 February.

This year’s award event will be held in June atop Papua New Guinea at Mt Wilhelm Secondary School in the shadows of PNG’s highest mountain. If things work out okay, we might be honoured to have someone from one of the foreign missions in PNG as guest of honour.

The other important matter discussed was purchasing land at a cost of K20,000. The executive resolved that SWA must make money to sustain its programs in the long term and to do that it must have land of its own on which income generating activities can happen.

The objective is to erect a multi purchase auditorium, an idea that was floated in SWA and Crocodile Prize circles last year.

A temporary place has to be arranged before the arrival of the container of books that Murray Bladwell and his team of Brisbane Rotarians will send us.

Given the land shortage in Kundiawa, the executive discussed the possibility of securing mobile storage by placing the container on a wheeled frame.

The executive has resolved that only schools with a library will receive the donated books. No library, no books.
Simbu schools and rural health centres have celebrated an early Christmas with boxes of books and linen gifted by the Toowong Rotary Club in Brisbane.

Rotary’s Murray Bladwell and Terry Shelley of Goroka’s Nowek Ltd worked together to deliver the Books for Simbu Schools project, a shipping container of 11,000 books, linen and other health items.

The huge consignment reached Kundiawa on Sunday after its long journey from Brisbane Donation-In-Kind yard by ship to Lae and along the Highlands Highway to be distributed from Kondom Agaundo Building in Kundiawa.

The gift comprised reading books, text books, teacher resource books, dictionaries, a set of Encyclopedia donated by Bob Cleland, library shelving and trolleys, school desks and chairs, as well as hospital supplies.

The project was initiated by one of the true men of Simbu and Papua New Guinea, Murray Bladwell, and backed by Toowong Rotary supported by the Donation-In-Kind Brisbane Chapter.

Murray, together with his wife Joan, spent their young adult years in Papua New Guinea as teachers at various schools including Gon in Kundiawa, Chuave and Port Moresby.

Nowek Ltd, a company founded and owned by Terry Shelley and his family, funded the container’s shipment from Brisbane to Goroka at a cost of K21,200.

Winestar, a local brewing company owned by Terry’s daughter Sarah, then met the cost of the freight from Goroka to Kundiawa at a cost of K4,800. In total, this was a magnificent gift of K26,000 by the Shelley family.

Although now based in Goroka and making his business there, Terry is another of those white skinned true men of Simbu.

He spent his young days in Simbu working as a cooperatives officer. It was here he fell in love with one of Simbu’s beautiful mountain orchids, Lynne, from the Kamaneku tribe, and married her. Lynne became Terry’s lifetime partner and they have beautiful children.

Charity work is not new to the Shelley family. Nowek Ltd is well known for sponsoring rugby league in the Eastern Highlands. In his
youth, Terry was a respected, tough and talented, and sometimes feared, league combatant.

On a number of occasions, Nowek and Winestar have supported the Simbu Children Foundation in its charity work. Terry also supported me in cash and kind, including freighting the donations by PNG Attitude readers of a wheelchair, special mattress and vitamin supplements when my health problems took a serious turn.

When the books and materials arrived in their huge container, although hampered by bad weather and lack of funds, the Simbu Writers Association (SWA) team worked tirelessly and successfully to ensure everything could be distributed last Thursday in the heart of Kundiawa.

The SWA team - comprising Jimmy Awagl, Arnold Mundua, Jimmy Drekkore, Mathias Kin, Angela Kaupa and Philip Kai supported by a brigade of young boys - worked through Wednesday night in the heavy rain and transferred boxes from the Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital to the Simbu Provincial Government’s events podium.

Here they were labelled with the names of the 62 primary schools, 20 high schools and 18 rural health centres which would receive them.

On Friday, they were distributed in a low-key ceremony as limited funding meant we were unable to hire a singsing group, usually big crowd attracters.

We had invited Governor Noah Kool and Provincial Administrator Joe Naur, but they did not make themselves available.

They gave no reason but we believe they were ashamed to take the stage because they had not honoured a K50,000 donation the Simbu Provincial Government had promised SWA a year ago.

SWA was delighted to welcome the presence of education head Essy Walkaima and health head Jerry Kubu who joined us in distributing the boxes, preceded by expressions of appreciation by SWA president Jimmy Drekkore and Essy Walkaima. Sarah Shelley was also able to join us.

The schools in attendance were overjoyed with the gifts and thanked Towoong Rotary, Nowek, Winestar, SWA and the Simbu Division of Education.

Wara Sua and Kaliwai primary schools from the Nomane Karimui District showed their appreciation by donating K200 and K100 respectively to SWA which we used to offset some of the additional costs we had incurred.
The SWA and Simbu Division of Education will officially thank the Toowong Rotary Club, Nowek Ltd and Winestar with a certificate of appreciation.

SWA expresses its heartfelt gratitude and thanks to Murray Bladwell and the Rotary Club of Toowong, Nowek Ltd, Winestar, Essy Walkaima and the Division of Education, Eddie Wem of Haumex Architecture & Building Construction, Arnold Mundua, Mathias Kin’s sons, and the guardians from the hospital. We are very grateful to all of them.

“The laws of a nation not only protect its citizens but they are the compass that directs its course. The laws must be strong, respected, upheld and they must work fairly in the interests of every citizen.”
Writers tour Australia for literary exchange
Francis Nii
20 January 2017

During last year’s McKinnon-Paga Hill sponsored study tour of Australia, which included our presentation at the Brisbane Writers Festival, Daniel Kumbon, Martyn Namorong and I failed to discuss bringing Papua New Guinean arts and crafts for our Aussie friends.

However, of my own accord, I brought gifts of highlands bilums of different styles and, without me knowing it, Daniel and Julie did the same. They brought bilums, caps and two large sand paintings that vividly depicted the Engan culture.

Keith and Councillor Ingrid Jackson’s home in Noosa was filled with excitement and hilarity when Daniel, Julie and I presented our gifts at the second of two receptions hosted by Keith and Ingrid.

We also presented copies of our books to our Aussie friends.

A hilarious moment came when Daniel handed over Enga caps and a couple of the Australian gentlemen had to strain their head muscles to get them to fit. Everyone burst into laughter to see two small caps perched on the heads of local MP Glen Elmes and Keith.

Glen, Mayor Tony Wellington and everyone who attended the receptions were lovely and cheerful people.

Amongst them was Deborah Carlyon, a Simbu-Aussie descendant and author of Mama Kuma: One Woman, Two Cultures. I was very happy meeting my wantok and chatted with her about her Sinasina origins.

The receptions were the most enjoyable moment of my trip, even though I was down with terrible flu on the first evening.

My heartfelt thank you goes to Glen Elmes and Tony Wellington for receiving us and giving us special recognition at the political level, which made our visit more meaningful and significant.

Thanks to Keith, Ingrid, Ben and his partner Becky for everything they did for us. Their hospitality was awesome.

Ben Jackson’s management of the whole week was exceptional, especially for a young man. I could see Keith’s pedigree in him.

Thank you to the many friends in Brisbane - Rob Parer, Bob Cleland, Bernard Corden, Murray and Joan Bladwell, Lindsay Bond, Patrick Hynes and others including the Brisbane Writers Festival organisers and big Ted and his brawny boys at Donation-in-Kind for treating us with generosity and kindness.
Thank you also to the friendly Air Niugini ground staff both in Moresby and Brisbane and the flight crews. They all made our tour of Australia smooth and enjoyable.

One thing that made my heart cry while I was in Brisbane, and even to this day, is that apart from Ben Jackson most of our friends and patriots to our cause are in their older years.

What will happen to our relationship after these people have gone? Every time I think about this, my heart cries.

I would be happy if more young Australians came on board and strengthened the relationship.

Although I didn’t bring a boomerang home for my children to keep as memorabilia of my visit to Kangarooland, we left our footprints behind.

I would like this tradition of art and culture exchange to continue to build strong relations between writers and politicians of our two countries.

“Papua New Guinea is Eden. We don’t lack anything, so why should outsiders describe us as poor people?”
Thank you for empowering me to write

Francis Nii
16 April 2018

A personal computer can be an important tool for any writer but, for a disabled writer like me, composing my words and sentences from the confines of a hospital bed, a laptop and a reliable mobile phone are essential tools of trade.

Without them, I am truly handicapped. With them, I am liberated to access information and to write, write, write.

When the screen of my Asus computer, given to me by my good friend Murray Bladwell in 2016, experienced a major breakdown while I was trying to upload the second edition of my novel, Tears, I knew I had hit a desperate moment. Hopelessness overwhelmed me. Tears indeed!

Luckily, I had saved the entire manuscript in a Samsung phone given to me by Patrick Haynes so I emailed the valuable document to Philip Fitzpatrick to upload to my CreateSpace publishing page.

I told Phil that I couldn’t upload it myself because my laptop had encountered a serious problem. I had no idea that piece of information relayed to Phil would prompt a fundraising effort that would result in me getting a brand-new HP laptop and a Canon printer.

The next day I received an email from Keith Jackson enquiring about the condition of my laptop and I was surprised because I hadn’t mentioned this to him. I guessed immediately that Phil had passed on the news.

I emailed Keith telling him what had happened to my laptop and he said a new one was ‘a goer’. Knowing Keith, I understood straight away that a new computer would somehow make its way to me. I provided Keith with the prices of the laptops sold in the shops of Kundiawa.

Next morning when I routinely logged in to PNG Attitude to read the daily stories, I saw the appeal was underway and was both surprised and glad.

I was glad because I knew my PNG Attitude family of writers and readers would help me get a new laptop. Indeed, they did me proud. Their support was awesome and exceeded the cost of the laptop.

So, I am now the proud owner of a brand-new HP laptop and a Canon printer with scanner and copier all in the one device.
My heartfelt thanks go to all the kind-hearted individuals. I am so humbled by this gesture of goodwill. My heart cried with tears of gratitude and joy when I held the new laptop in my arms.

Thank you, Phil and Keith, for recognising the value of the literature I contribute to PNG Attitude.

What you did for me empowers me to keep writing. Now you will see me more frequently on PNG Attitude.

“When probity is in control, the nation shall know no greed, either for power or for wealth.”
An inspirational Simbu success story
Francis Nii
30 November 2018

All primary and secondary schools in Papua New Guinea should have a copy of Quest for Education, an inspirational autobiography. It’s an incredible story of success in education that can inspire the next generation of Papua New Guineans.

It is my pleasure to officially announce the publication of Pole John Kale’s autobiography.

It tells of progress from a typically harsh and poverty-stricken rural Papua New Guinean life to the prestigious Yale University in the United States.

It is a story of the many successes of Pole John Kale of the Mian Tribe of the Gumine District in Simbu Province.

Pole was the last and dream child of aging couple Thomas Kale and Monita Nirua in a family of two girls and one boy.

Despite his lowly status and his great age, Thomas Kale’s dream was to see his youngest son educated and live a modern and affluent life.

With the support of all his family, Thomas Kale sold firewood at the Gumine government station to finance Pole’s education.

For this, Thomas and his son were branded as ‘woodsellers’ by their tribesmen and the name became the invincible impetus behind Pole's successes in education and professional life.

Quest for Education is a poignant, motivational and educational story for everyone to read and embrace, especially young Papua New Guineans.

I congratulate Pole for the publication of his book and I look forward to helping more Simbus publishing their books.

Editing and publishing a book is not easy. It can be a long and sometimes tedious job that only talented individuals can handle.

I thank Pole for recognising my effort and I’m sure our professional relationship will go a long way

FOOTNOTE
Quest for Education was the first commissioned work Francis Nii Publications published from start to finish.
I feel it is important for me to share my experience of book publishing with authors and would-be authors to give them insights into book publication so they can make informed decisions to find the best and cheapest online or other publisher of their choice.

My first publication was my 2005 maiden novel Paradise in Peril with CBS Publishers and Distributors of New Delhi, the same publisher that produced books by Governor General Sir Paulias Matane and other Papua New Guinean writers.

I wrote the story on scrap paper and later Lutheran Pastor Daryl Boyd assisted me type it on a rugged old typewriter. When I felt the story was complete, I sent a hard copy by airmail to Sir Paulias Matane at Government House for his assessment and comment. There was no internet service in Kundiawa at the time.

Some weeks later, I received a letter from CBS in India through the post office. The letter said CBS had received my manuscript and was happy with the narrative and was ready to publish it. Thanks to Sir Paulias.

For a literary work of a first-timer to be accepted for publication by a renowned foreign publisher was quite a feat. I was very happy.

To make a long story short, after a number of letters going to and fro, I got the first lot of hard copies printed and ocean freighted to Lae where some boxes had to be traded for customs and storage fees. That was the first and last shipment of Paradise in Peril I commissioned from India.

I never went back to CBS and I never received a soft copy of my published manuscript, even though I asked the publisher for it.

I later learnt that 30 copies of Paradise in Peril had gone to the humanity studies department of Divine Word University in Madang and that a stationery store in Port Moresby was selling the book.

In both cases I had no knowledge of how they had got there. Someone benefited from my hard work thanks to the PNG government’s indifference to copyright law.

After that I kept an eye out for a cheaper way of republishing Paradise in Peril. I started making enquiries with domestic and overseas publishers and all of them wanted upfront deposits I couldn’t afford.
Then in 2011 the national literature competition, the Crocodile Prize, started. It was initiated by Australians Keith Jackson and Philip Fitzpatrick as a means of reviving and promoting PNG literature.

I didn’t know about it until poet and founding president of Simbu Children Foundation, Jimmy Drekore, introduced me to the competition. Thank you, Jimmy.

Through my association with the two Australians and the competition, an opportunity opened up for republishing Paradise in Peril. I hired a typist to retype the book on a computer. It took her almost 10 nights to complete the job.

With the help of Philip Fitzpatrick, I got the revised version published by Amazon under the Pukpuk Publications imprint in 2013. It was a trial and error effort as we were new to the CreateSpace publishing tool but the book was republished with improved layout and cover design.

I next edited and published the Ku High School Anthology 2014 and the Simbu High and Secondary Anthology 2015 under the Simbu Writers Association banner and using the Pukpuk Publications’ account. I also published other books of my own through Pukpuk.

On several occasions, Philip had told me he was planning on retiring Pukpuk Publications and letting Papua New Guineans take charge of their own publications.

The bomb was dropped in November 2016 when he announced his decision in a PNG Attitude article titled, Pukpuk Publications Winds Down: PNG Writers Must Take Charge.

I didn’t know how other Papua New Guineans felt at that time but for me it was the end of a very cheap and workable publishing platform for PNG writers. I took the news with mixed feelings but Phil said something in his concluding remarks that brought me both tears and inspiration.

He said, “Francis is an excellent editor and cover designer and has been providing me with print-ready books for some time. If anyone can do it, Francis can. And then I can truly say my work here is done and I can ride into the sunset in the best Hollywood tradition.”

After some tears, I promised myself I would do it and decided to take up the challenge head on and let Phil enjoy a well-deserved rest.

His publishing work was all voluntary and a hell lot of work for Phil. My heart went out to him. He really needed the rest and I felt strongly that the work had to go on to help other aspiring authors.
I knew Phil would assist me, so I gave it my best shot and after numerous emails to and fro, I got the first book published. I followed it with several other books under the Simbu Writers Association imprint, all the time gaining confidence.

But finding a publisher and getting books published is not the end of the exercise. Printing copies and selling printed copies are other hurdles.

There have been misconceptions, false theories and accusations about my publications with Amazon. These need to be clarified.

Headquartered in the United States, Amazon is the world leader in online publishing and marketing with branches in all major countries. Around 2007 it started an online self-publishing program called CreateSpace where writers could publish their own books.

However, at the beginning of 2019, Amazon made CreateSpace obsolete and replaced it with Kindle Direct Publishing, an improved version of CreateSpace.

Kindle Direct Publishing like CreateSpace is also free. All that it costs you is internet data. You can publish your work and, when you have money or secured a market, you can order your book in any quantity from one up and sell them with a mark up to make some money for yourself. It’s known as print on demand.

When a writer sends a manuscript to me, the first thing I check is the genre. Is it fiction, non-fiction, poetry or an anthology or collection?

The second thing I check is size. For example, when a writer comes up with a 50-page story and calls it novel, I tell the writer that it’s a short story and to develop the plot further to 150 or more pages to reach novel length.

When I am satisfied a work has met the required size I browse through it examining the content and layout. It is at this stage that I have a rough idea of the amount of work involved to get the manuscript to a publishable standard. I then advise the writer that I will work on the book.

My work involves checking for typing errors, grammar, sentences and paragraph structure, sequence and flow of storyline, the title of the work and chapter titles, content numbering, header and footer captions and then formatting the whole manuscript to Amazon’s prescribed format.
Once satisfied with the content, I work on the cover design. This includes making it conform to the book size, using conspicuous and attractive fonts, appropriate pictures, colours and a blurb.

The blurb is the brief summary of the book that you see on the back cover and it is important because before readers buys a book, they read the blurb first to see if they will like it. I normally design three different covers for the writer to choose from.

The final thing I do before publishing is give the edited version of the book with the final cover design back to the author for final proofreading.

I emphasise that it is important for the author to check the edited version word by word. It is only then that any oversights can be picked up and alterations or amendments done.

At that point we’re good to go and I publish the book with Amazon under the Simbu Writers Association imprint.

Simbu Writers Association does not have a board of editors. As I have mentioned earlier, I voluntarily took up the challenge and have kept it going because I see there is a need.

The only benefit I get is a small fee that I call an editing and publishing fee and the amount depends very much on the amount of work involved.

I do not charge the market rate as no ordinary Papua New Guinean is able to afford that much. What I charge ranges from K1,000 to K2,000. The difficult and time-consuming part is when you have many images and tables included with the text. If this is the case you can expect a higher fee - but not over K2,000. Very cheap isn’t it?

Once the book is published, it goes online for sale immediately. Amazon’s publishing policy is that they get 60% of every book sold online and the author gets 40%. The 40% royalty is accumulated until it reaches US$100 (K260).

Then Amazon raises a cheque in the author’s name for US$100 and forwards it to my post office address by registered mail. I pick up the cheque and give it to the author.

There is no room for stealing the royalty because the cheque is written in the author’s name. No reputable human being would put his or her credibility on the line for a lousy K260 anyway.

If someone’s book is of extraordinary quality and becomes a bestseller, he or she will become an instant millionaire. For us Papua New Guineans, that’s only a dream – at least until now.
With the Amazon system the author retains the copyright to their work. If a conventional publisher sees the book, they can approach the author and do a deal.

What authors who have published their books with me do to make money for themselves is find a market, order copies through me and sell them with a mark-up.

The advantage to authors ordering their books through me is that they benefit from my online purchase account, which is highly efficient and secure and takes less than five minutes for the transaction instead of hours queuing at the bank.

Second, authors benefits from the author/publisher discount facility offered by Amazon meaning that they pay less than the threshold retail price automatically determined by Amazon.

This is the service I provide free of charge. What the author is charged is the bank’s international transaction fee and I allow K100 in the author’s expense for that. Some understanding authors pay me some money for this service as a gesture of goodwill.

Third, they benefit from Nowek Kofi Limited’s import duty support scheme. The benevolent Nowek has been paying import duty ever since SWA started publishing with Amazon.

Gratitude for this must go to the late Terry Shelley and his children, particularly Sarah and Ben Shelley. They’ve made it very easy for us and we shouldn’t take that for granted.

The cargo is airfreighted from Columbia to Hawaii to Sydney to Port Moresby and up to Goroka through the DHL courier service and is kept at the Nowek Kofi premises at Kamaliki. The author picks it up from Nowek.

If your order for some reason gets lost, Amazon will replace the order at their cost, which you rarely get another publisher doing.

Since I started publishing, I have not once ordered a book authored by another author and sold it to make money for myself. This is stealing and it would be morally wrong for me to do that. The trust I have built up with writers over the years is an asset and I am not going to mess it up.

If a problem arises with a book, I am able to contact Amazon through my account to seek a resolution. This can range from a missing consignment of books to books that arrive with some sort of fault.

This is an efficient and secure contact avenue for communications. To me, Amazon’s client service is five-star.
Lately I have decided to go private. I have opened up a Facebook page under Lodestar Publications. This is mainly because of the false accusations and conspiracy theories that have circulated about what I do.

When I reflect on where and how it all started, my heart cries for Keith Jackson and Philip Fitzpatrick, my helpers and mentors.

Their intention was never about making money. It was all volunteerism and that was how I acquired the knowledge about writing and publishing I now have.

I feel I must stand strong and carry on with what I am doing for the struggling authors and potential authors in Simbu and outside under the SWA banner I co-fathered.

“People don’t go to the politician’s office to be seen by ignorant and arrogant fools. They go with one thing in mind: to get an answer from the mouth of their mandated leader, be that answer negative or positive.”
Writing and publishing our own Papua New Guinean stories in the absence of government or donor agency support is a daunting and painful experience.

We write because stories are part of our culture and books are repositories of our culture. What is it the authorities don’t understand?

I would like to relay the many struggles and hardships I went through to get my first book published only to find there was a trifling level of readership in Papua New Guinea. My story, unfortunately, is similar to that of many PNG authors.

I started writing, mainly poetry, in the 1980s while doing my economics degree at the University of Papua New Guinea. They were published in Ondobondo and The PNG Writer magazines.

Some of the poems were later gathered in a collection, Through Melanesian Eyes, edited by lecturer Ganga Powell and published through with Macmillan Press Australia in a book now available on Amazon.

My first serious writing, a novel, came in in 2003-04 while I was recuperating at Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital in Kundiawa from a near fatal motor vehicle accident.

I wrote the story on scrap paper and Rev Daryl Boyd, a Lutheran pastor who was the hospital chaplain, assisted me type it on a beaten-up old typewriter.

When I felt the story was complete, I sent a hard copy to author Sir Paulias Matane, who was then Governor-General of PNG, at his Government House address. I asked him to assess and critique the work.

Some weeks later, I received a letter from CBS Publishers and Distributors of New Delhi, the same publisher that published Matane’s and other Papua New Guinean writers’ books. The letter said CBS had received my manuscript, was happy with the narrative and was ready to publish.

For a novel written by a first-time writer to be accepted for publication by a renowned foreign publisher was unusual and quite a feat, I thought. I was very happy.

After a number of expensive letters going to and fro, and with the benevolent assistance of Caritas PNG courtesy of Dr Jan Jaworski, I
got the first batch of hard copies printed and ocean-freighted to Lae in 2005.

Unfortunately, I traded two boxes to meet customs and storage costs because I didn’t have the money to pay the fees.

This was the first and last shipment of my baby, Paradise in Peril, from India. I never went back to CBS and I was never sent the soft copy of the book even though I asked the publisher for it.

The sad thing I found out later was that, while I struggled to write and get my story published, 30 copies of Paradise in Peril were in the possession of the humanities department of Divine Word University in Madang. And the Theodist Stationery store in Port Moresby was selling copies.

I hadn’t supplied the books and had no idea how those entities got hold of them. Some people had obviously benefited from my struggles and toil by getting the books delivered on a golden platter thanks to the PNG government’s indifference to copyright law.

After that experience, I kept an eye out for a cheaper way of republishing Paradise in Peril. I made enquiries of publishers including the PNG government printing office and all of them wanted hefty upfront deposits I couldn’t afford.

That was until 2011, when the door opened. A new national literature competition, the Crocodile Prize, came along, initiated by Australians Keith Jackson AM and Philip Fitzpatrick to promote and encourage Papua New Guineans to write their own stories using the PNG Attitude blog as the platform.

Keith and Phil each had long standing connections with Papua New Guinea in various capacities dating back to the pre-independence Australian administration of the then Territory. They understood the development of PNG writing from the time of Ulli Beier, writer, scholar and pioneer mentor of modern PNG literature.

They had seen the burgeoning of interest in writing around the time of independence and observed its decline into dormancy afterwards. They were the right people to initiate this important project of rejuvenating a home-grown PNG literature.

I was introduced to the Crocodile Prize in 2011 by award winning poet and founding president of Simbu Children Foundation, Jimmy Drekore. I have written for the competition and PNG Attitude ever since.

My association with the two Australians and the Crocodile Prize, opened up the opportunity for the republication of Paradise in Peril. I
hired a typist to retype the book and after three hours a night for 10 nights, I had the badly needed soft copy in my hands.

With the help of Phil Fitzpatrick, I got the revised version published by Amazon in 2013 under the Pukpuk Publications imprint. It was a trial and error effort because we were both new to Amazon’s CreateSpace self-publishing platform.

Pukpuk Publications had been established to accommodate the influx of writing as a result of the Crocodile Prize and to publish its annual anthologies.

Many Papua New Guinean authors including me benefited greatly from the selfless voluntary editing and publishing support provided by Phil. In many aspects, it was a sacrifice for Phil as he did everything without charge.

I then published my English textbook with kind support from Amos Dagma and Mika Kekemo.

At the same, I was also studying how Keith Jackson was editing my writing for PNG Attitude.

My own first attempt at editing was of the Ku High School Anthology 2014. Phil Fitzpatrick published the print-ready version I sent him. This was followed by the Simbu High and Secondary Schools Anthology 2015 under the Simbu Writers Association banner.

The Crocodile Prize has been very successful thanks to corporate and agency sponsorships. It is an annual anthology of the best writing by Papua New Guineans from all walks of life and it has been published and distributed free of charge throughout PNG by a network of volunteers.

The competition has inspired and helped to develop some of PNG’s finest writers like Leonard Fong Roka, Wardley Barry, Corney K Alone, Rashmii Bell, Baka Bina, Jordan Dean, Daniel Kumbon, Emmanuel Peni, Marlene Potoura, Caroline Evari and ‘poet laureate’ Michael Dom to name a few.

When Philip Fitzpatrick decided to retire Pukpuk Publications, I felt the work was so important that it must continue, and took up the challenge of editing, designing and publishing.

These are great skills and I could have operated as a business entity but, when I reflected on how it all started, my heart ached.

The intention of the two mentors, Keith and Phil, was not to make money but to foster a spirit of volunteerism.

They wanted Papua New Guinea to have an abundant supply of PNG books in libraries and homes written by PNG authors about their
own unique history, culture, development and progress in politics, science and technology instead of books by foreigners writing about our country.

I have kept to that spirit and so far, I have published five books and assisted with the editing and publishing of eleven others.

My story is the story of many authors in this country. They went through the same hardships to get their writing published, knowing well that there is no market for their work.

They knew there is no government and donor support for their work. They know that our education system does not have systems in place to encourage students to read books authored by Papua New Guineans.

Nonetheless, we struggle to produce our own literature hoping that one day a good leader will rise up and see the importance of our literature; a leader who will embrace our effort with both hands and put smiles on our faces; a leader who will promote our stories.

We believe that day is now here. We believe the leader we have been hoping, praying and waiting for all these years is here today and he is James Marape.

A group of writers is gearing up to bring to the attention of the prime minister the voice of writers, mentors and readers of PNG literature so the government will recognise PNG authors and our books.

There would be no better time for Prime Minister James Marape to make a grand statement than at this time as the 44th independence anniversary nears. This would be a great gift to the indomitable flag bearers of Papua New Guinean literature.
“Our people’s cry for justice has been met with brutality as this government has deceived its people and become arrogant and painful.”
HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Francis Nii at Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital, Kundiawa, 2014
Conquering the curse of osteomyelitis

Francis Nii
27 February 2013

Every patient’s dream is a new lease of healthy and vibrant life after many years of living in pain and confinement.

Osteomyelitis, a painful bone-decaying condition that afflicts many young children, sometimes causing permanent disability, will soon be a scourge of the past.

The surgical doctors at Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital in Kundiawa were baffled when, after many years of treating osteomyelitis with common antibiotics, there was little or no improvement in the condition of patients, especially children under the age of 14.

This lack of success prompted the doctors to undertake research into bacteriology and the sensitivity of the antibiotics administered to find out why they were having no effect.

The research carried out by doctors led by senior surgeon Dr Damien Hasola in collaboration with the PNG Institute of Medical Research is sponsored by the Simbu Children Foundation. It started at the beginning of July 2012 and continues.

The bacteria or organisms present in the disease have now been identified and their levels of sensitivity to common antibiotics established. The full results will be documented at the conclusion of the research.

Basing on the preliminary findings, the doctors have developed a new drug regime. As a result, significant improvements have been showing in the patients’ conditions. Many have been discharged.

The first patient to benefit was 16-year-old Pauline Kuma of the Tekpa clan who lives in Kitip village in the Dei Council area of the Western Highlands. Pauline is the eighth and last born in a family of four boys and four girls.

In August 2009, with the support of her mother Sarah and father Kuma, Pauline left her siblings and the comfort of home behind and headed east in search of medication for a painful swelling on her left leg.

Pauline first sought medication at Mt Hagen General Hospital. After being treated with antibiotics, the swelling did not subside. Instead it got worse and became very painful.

So, her parents decided to bring Pauline to Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital to seek further medical assistance.
Senior surgeon and bone specialist Dr Jan Jaworski diagnosed her condition as osteomyelitis. He admitted Pauline to the surgical ward for further medication. She was hospitalised with many other children suffering from the disease.

After receiving treatment under the new drug regime, Pauline’s sore healed. However, she would have to rely on the tibia leg bone for the rest of her life as the fibula had been completely destroyed by the osteomyelitis.

After three long and painful years of hospitalisation, she was discharged with a Plaster of Paris cast to support her until the tibia became strong enough to bear her body weight.

Before Pauline and her mother Sarah left, they asked me to convey their gratitude to all the doctors, SCF president Jimmy Drekore and everyone involved in research and clinical care.

“Mipela i hamamas tru sua i drai olgeta” [We are very happy the sore completely healed] were Sarah’s departing words accompanied by tears of joy as they headed for home.

The youngest victim of osteomyelitis is 18 months old Bata Guba from Opul village in the Sinasina-Yongmuq District. He was only six months old when diagnosed with osteomyelitis in March 2011 and was admitted for medication.

The sores have healed after treatment under the new regime. But the bone was severely affected hence the doctors are currently working on helping its regrowth.

The surgical team of Dr Jan Jaworski, Dr Damien Hasola, Dr Chris Mungkas and Dr Herrythrengi want to expand their research into a second phase which is to find out the origin or source of the bacteria with the aim to develop a control and preventive mechanism.

Jimmy Drekore has assured the doctors that SCF will continue to fund the research.

Congratulations to Simbu Children Foundation for being the first home-bred NGO to fund scientific research. To everyone, well done!
Disabled people find nothing to live for

Francis Nii
20 May 2015

In Papua New Guinea, people with a disability - people like me - are marginalised and neglected. They experience misery on daily basis.

Chauvinism and poverty are two killers of disabled people in our society, particularly paraplegics and polio victims.

Public ridicule and stigmatisation are the worst forms of chauvinism, creating social barriers that deter disabled people from exercising their freedom of movement and participating equally in programs and activities.

People mock them and call them names when they see them in public. In fear of being ridiculed and stigmatised, disabled people isolate themselves in the seclusion of home.

Their relatives also live in fear of public ridicule and stigma and lock up disabled people at home while they go about their business. They don’t allow them to take part in community activities or to be seen in public.

Worse still is the practice of keeping children at home and not allowing them to attend school.

The United Nations convention on the rights of people with a disability states that “children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education or secondary education on the basis of disability”.

It adds that “persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities they live in”.

These children should be given the necessary support to go to school but it rarely happens.

Disabled people, particularly in rural areas, suffer extreme poverty. Because of their physical impediments and poor infrastructure and economic opportunities, they are not able to earn a living.

As a result, they depend heavily on relatives for financial support and welfare. Many relatives regard them as liabilities and loathe, neglect and ill treat them.

Thus, disabled people also become psychologically defeated people. Rejected by family and community, they feel depressed and useless.

They feel that there is nothing to live for. There is no meaning in life. All is hopelessness and bleak despondency.
Many of these people call it quits and lose their lives. I have experienced this for myself. There were eleven of us paraplegics living in Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital. Seven have now died.

The main contributing factor to their deaths was misery and self-defeatism. They did not fight for survival as they faced health problems like pressure sores, bladder and kidney stones and the other ailments that particularly effect immobile people. They simply gave up.

One of those who died was a young man aged about 30. He had a kidney stone and the doctor told him to take care of his diet while on medication. He deliberately defied the doctor’s advice and accelerated his demise by drinking home brew and heavily smoking marijuana … you could call it suicide.

Another man, around the age of 35, had typhoid, which is curable, but he refused medication. He told the doctors he wanted to die. The doctors and nurses did everything they could to save his life but he refused and finally died. He called it quits.

The National Disability Policy spearheaded by Dame Carol Kidu during her tenure as Minister for Community Development was rendered a boneless piece of paper because there was no funding from the national government for its implementation.

The policy is now obsolete. I understand it was under review last year. How far that progressed is anyone’s guess.

The much-publicised disabled people’s welfare scheme announced by Peter O’Neill in 2013 was populist bunkum. Nothing has eventuated, while the minister responsible, Louzaya Kouza, battles family affairs and local Morobe politics and does virtually nothing for the nation.

The best way forward to address the plight of disabled people is for each province to have its own disability policy. To my knowledge, Manus and Gulf have been moving in that direction under the guidance of disabled policy experts. Other provinces should follow suit to address the plight of their disabled populations.

Only through implementing such policies will there be consistency in funding for disability-related programs and activities to improve the misery, and often short lives, of disabled people.

Otherwise the culture of ad hoc, handouts and donations will continue and disabled people will continue to suffer chauvinism and poverty.
Kundiawa Hospital celebrates achievements
Francis Nii
25 September 2016

The mostly quiet corner of Kundiawa town that is home to the Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital last week came alive with the beating of kundus, singing and dancing as more than 3,000 people celebrated the hospital’s second open day.

The event marked the hospital’s proud track record of community service and development in both its clinical and non-clinical areas under the management of CEO Mathew Kaluvia.

The activities took place in the outpatient area where each unit of the hospital had its own stall and staff conducted displays and exhibitions.

The eager crowd was amazed at some of the displays, especially weird looking surgical tools they had never imagined before. “This is just amazing,” said Jane, a guardian from Jiwaka Province.

Some hospital units provided free medical examinations - taking temperatures, measuring blood pressure, checking weight and so forth.

Radio Simbu, which previously had been off air for four months due to technical problems, broadcast the whole event live.

Mathew Kaluvia said the objective of the event was for staff to show the public the services the hospital provides and the changes that had taken place since the first open day four years ago.

There had been many changes and new developments, he said, and it was important for the public to know about these.

“We are accountable to the national government and the people of Simbu to give the hospital’s status report,” he said with a smile on his face. “And we are providing that to the people today.”

In what appeared to be a farewell speech, Kaluvia thanked all the unit managers and staff, starting with Dr Jan Jaworski and the surgical team for their undivided support and cooperation in delivering clinical and curative health services during his tenure as CEO.

Simbu principal provincial health advisor Margret Kaile said the current management of Mr Kaluvia and the board headed by Fr Luke Kewani had proven to be a great team with a strong vision. Many beneficial changes had taken place at the hospital during their term of office, she said.

Apart from management and board, other units also contributed to the success of the hospital. Sixty-five-year-old Joe Daugl of Kond
outside Kundiawa had this to say: “Kundiawa hausik em nambawan tru. Ol ners na dokta i wok hat tru na wok bilong ol i gutpla stret. Mi man Simbu na mi hamamas long hausik bilong mi” [Kundiawa hospital is the best. The nurses and doctors work really hard and their services are excellent. I am a Simbu man and I am proud of my hospital].

Parkop Chandrol, 53, from Rambutso Island in Manus Province, who travelled all the way from Lorengau to Kundiawa six weeks ago seeking treatment for Pots Disease, had this to say: “Mi harim yet long Manus olsem Kundiawa hausik i save oraitim ol man na meri bun baksait blong ol TB binatang i kaikaim na paralaisim ol. Olsem na wantaim balivim bilong ol pikinini bilong mi, mpipla i kisim balus igo long Madang na haiarim wanpla kar na kam kamap long Kundiawa” [I heard way off in Manus that Kundiawa hospital heals men and women whose backbone TB bacteria had destroyed and paralysed them. That’s why with the assistance of my children, we flew to Madang and hired a motor vehicle to bring me to Kundiawa]

“Olo man, nambawan taim mi kam kamap mi ting em wanpela hotel tasol mi kirap nogut taim ol i tokim mi em hausik. Nogat smel blong marasin na ples i klin na nais stret” [Man, when I first arrived, I thought it was a hotel and I was surprised to be told it is the hospital. There is no smell of medicine and the place looks clean and nice]

“Waitman dokta i tok em bai operetim bun baksait bilong mi na mi amamas stap. Manus i nogat kain operesien olsem” [The European doctor (Dr Jan Jaworski) said he is going to operate on my backbone and I am happily waiting. Manus does not operate on such sickness]

This story is not an isolated case. The hospital receives patients from all over the highlands and places as far away as New Ireland, Western and East Sepik provinces and even Port Moresby.

The major developments that took place under the current management and board included security, a warehouse, a doctors’ office block, a hospital records building, the administration building, a multi-drug resistant tuberculosis unit and TB clinic.

The MDR [multi drug resistant] TB unit and CEO’s administration block were officially opened at the event. An additional operating theatre is under construction and will be commissioned soon.
“The test of true leadership is at times of crisis and hardship and not when everything is good and rosy.”
Francis and Jimmy Drekore take the reading and writing message to schools
Living everyday life on borrowed money is a big problem for thousands of workers in Papua New Guinea.

Three-quarters of the working population are so enslaved by dinau [debt] that they find it extremely difficult to break free from its grip. *Dinau kilim mi ya* [debts are killing me] is a national sentiment among the workforce.

People who earn less than K1,000 a fortnight and are single breadwinners with large families are the most affected. Gamblers, alcohol users and cigarette and betel nut consumers are doomed without borrowed money.

The vicious circle of debt evolves from the squandering of take-home fortnightly income on unbudgeted non-essentials like alcohol, cigarettes, betel nut, customary and extended family [wantok] obligations and gambling on the pokies, horse races, cards and the lottery.

Papua New Guineans know how to budget their income on paper or mentally. However, they rarely adhere to their budgets. Indiscriminate spending means they run out of money for necessities like food, fuel and bus fares well before the next pay packet arrives.

To provide for their basic needs, somehow, they have to find money. The easiest and fastest way is to borrow cash from the fast-growing money lending business known as maket moni at exorbitant fortnightly interest rates of 30, 40 and even 50 or 100%.

The usurers readily lend so long as loan seekers agree to the interest charged while at the same time surrendering their EFTPOS cards (along with pin codes) enabling the money lenders to collect their repayments directly from ATMs.

The prevailing trend is that when the previous loan is repaid, new financial pressures bite into the family budget forcing the breadwinner to borrow again.

The amount of the loan increases until the total debt, comprising the principal and interest, reaches an unmanageable size. Often the debt equals or exceeds the total take-home income of the debtor.

Then the vicious circle of debt comes into effect. The money lender has the upper hand, having the opportunity to acquire the entire take-home income of the borrower. The poor person then borrows again
from the usurer to sustain his or her family’s life and they go round and round like that payday after payday.

There are many consequences on the social and economic welfare of workers and their families: children’s school fees unpaid; electricity and water supply disconnected; household goods like TV sets having to be sold; and female family members driven into prostitution.

At the extreme are court proceedings and unemployment as borrowers try to evade loans by getting new EFTPOS cards with new pin codes or running away to new locations and new jobs.

How can people enslaved by debt for many years break free from its grip? Before embracing any plan, it is of paramount importance that you must have the willpower to break free.

Having your heart and mind fully committed to breaking free is the foundation for any plan to be fruitful because the plan will necessarily involve self-discipline and personal sacrifice.

Once your mind and heart are fixed, you should list all the possible ways of saving money and assess them one by one. Eventually you should come up with the best saving option to follow.

My recommendation is lifestyle adjustment – that is, making changes to your current style of living. There are two components to a lifestyle adjustment plan.

First is cost saving through budget cuts. You must cut down your fortnightly spending on non-essentials as well as other expenses. What can be slashed on each item is up to you to decide.

I recommend 50% cuts on alcohol, cigarettes, betel nut and customary and extended family obligations. I strongly recommend a 100% cut on gambling, meaning a complete stop. Cut communication expenses by 40%. Reduce electricity and water rates and fuel like kerosene and petrol or diesel for private motor vehicles by at least 25%.

If you are renting accommodation it is worth searching around for a cheaper home.

This list is not exhaustive. You can add more.

The second component that complements cost saving measures is a change of habits.

As much as possible, you must avoid the people you drink, chew, smoke and gamble with. Avoid long conversations with them. Say hi, see you later and move on. If you don’t do that the temptation of the old habits and peer pressure will drag you back to square one. Then you’ll get nowhere.
Do not go near your favourite drinking and gambling dens especially on paydays and weekends. Take your family to the park, beach, river, sports field or church fellowship.

You must be bold in setting limits to customary and extended family obligations and pressures - and stand by your decision. You must have the guts to say no to unnecessary demands.

You must stop calling or receiving calls from phone friends who flirtatiously entice you into sending them credit or cash. Twenty kina can save your family one decent meal.

You must openly talk about your problems and your intentions with relatives and friends, including your old drinking, chewing and gambling mates. They must understand why you have changed your spending and social habits. Their understanding, respect and cooperation are important for the success of your plan.

Speed up your loan reduction by making additional repayments with 50% of the money you have saved fortnightly from your cost saving measures.

If you strictly observe your break free plan, you will find that your financial position and social habits significantly improve. Your debts will have gone in six to 12 months.

You will then have surplus money in your account to meet family needs before the next pay packet arrives. You will be able to easily manage your children's school fee loans without jeopardising your family’s welfare. Once you have broken free from the grip of the vicious circle of debt, it is important you maintain it.

Be very careful of the temptations of the old habits returning because, to many people, these habits are as sweet as honey. It feels impossible to live without them. If you get back into the vicious circle, you might be stuck there for the rest of your life.

Look for books and articles on money management and budget tips in the libraries, bookshops, magazines and newspapers, and read them.

They will help you properly manage your finance because the debt problem stems from poor management of your hard-earned cash. Live within your means and you will never get into debt.
If there was anything Australian that makes Papua New Guinea go mad then it is the State of Origin rugby league game.

While State of Origin is entertainment, fame and money for Australians, here in PNG it is obsession and fanaticism.

No other sporting event has such a fanatical following. The whole nation goes bananas about the tri-series annual contest that pits the Queensland Maroon boys against the Blue boys from the New South Wales.

The Blues and Maroons culture is growing and spreading even into the remotest communities of PNG.

Children as young as one or two years old are indoctrinated into the Blues and Maroons tribes by their parents. Birthday presents are Blues and Maroons souvenirs.

The kids grow up in Blues and Maroons uniforms. They know the players by name. Show a five or six-year-old urban kid a picture of Hayne or Thurston and he will call the name and the player’s jersey number. No mistake.

The days of the series are unofficial national holidays in PNG. Public servants work only half a day. The other half they celebrate.

Families go shopping in the name of Blues and Maroons. They go over their budgets to buy TV sets just for the sake of watching the State of Origin games.

Favourite Blues and Maroons team flags fly on hats, motor vehicles and homes days before the game.

Men, women, boys and girls adorned in Blues and Maroons jerseys or tee-shirts fill the streets, their faces painted in team colours. School children leave classes to get their faces painted.

Young men and women in the rural areas risk their lives and travel hundreds of kilometres to urban areas simply to watch the 80-minute football fixture.

In all of its madness, this is the time that family members divide, Christians don’t go to night fellowship, workmates become foes, and best friends become enemies - all in the name of the Blues and Maroons.

The fever heats up as the countdown ticks to the last minute.
Anxiety and unease dig deep within the hearts and minds of die-hard supporters as their eyes are glued to the TV in front of them. Fox Media brings the Telstra Cup to PNG live courtesy of EMTV.

The crazy shouts of the opposing fans ring high as their teams run onto the field for the battle of the stature, power, tact and agility.

‘Go Blues…go! Go…Mighty Blues…go’, urges the Blues tribe.

What makes you think the NSW Mighty Blues cannot defeat the Queensland Maroons again in the second fixture of this series tomorrow night?

“I really appreciate the faith you have in my literature and empowering me to carry on writing for Papua New Guinea.”
The street people for whom there is no tomorrow
Francis Nii
27 September 2013

The problem of orphans is getting so serious that the government must not ignore it any more. The number of waifs and strays on the streets is constantly on the rise.

As you travel around the cities and towns of Papua New Guinea, you will notice the faces of young children between the ages of six and 12 going from street to street collecting empty cans and bottles and doing small errands for a few toea to buy flour balls for the evening.

If they are lucky, a cup of coffee complements the flour balls. Otherwise cold water suffices.

Amongst the young people, you will see some elderly males and females also collecting empty cans and bottles in determination for survival. Many of them grew up as waifs and strays in the slums.

For these people there is no tomorrow. All they care about is today.

Talk to them about the 2015 Pacific Games or the multibillion kina liquefied natural gas project coming on line in 2014. To them these are meaningless stories. All they see is bleak despondency. All they care about is their immediate need for the day.

They have no place to call home. The way they dress and the filth and the stench of unwashed bodies clearly tells they have no proper home.

They lodge with wantoks in overcrowded squalid cardboard shelters or hang around night clubs or gambling dens in the slums until dawn. In the morning they are back on the street and the routine continues.

When the going gets tough, the difference between good and bad is obliterated. Pocket picking, shoplifting, bag snatching and mob attacks become necessary. Crime and violence reign. Girls turn to prostitution in their teens.

HIV/AIDS is the biggest contributor to the orphan problem. As parents die of AIDS and other calamities, the number of orphans increases.

Chairman of the National AIDS Council, Dr Banare Bun, revealed in Kokopo last week that the total number of people infected with HIV stands at 35,000. This official figure excludes those who have not been tested and recorded.

Most are young people between the ages of 15 and 25 and most are married.
When parents die of AIDS, they leave their young children to grandparents and wantoks who generally do not take good care of them. The children are abused and maltreated.

As a result, they are forced to the streets to fend for themselves.

Prime Minister Peter O’Neill says he is “compassionate” about the welfare of so-called asylum seekers - foreigners of unknown background most of who are wilfully leaving their country for greener pastures in Australia.

But O’Neill ignores his own people who are in dire need of government attention.

The problem is getting worse by the year and the government cannot continue to ignore it. These people are Papua New Guineans and their welfare should take precedence over that of foreigners with aid money from Australia and elsewhere.

If ordinary people can see the problem and go out of their way to address it, then the problem is serious.

The Mother of Life Centre in Simbu Province, founded by Martin Van der Palen of the Netherlands, the Faith Based Orphanage in Western Highlands Province run by Aunty Ruth and the Nangbe Nazarene Care Centre in Jiwaka Province operated by husband and wife Steven and Ruth are good examples of local initiatives.

There are also several other care centres established and operated by ordinary people to look after orphans and their needs.

The three centres mentioned each look after an average of 50 to100 children a year. The figure may be insignificant compared with the total problem, but the important thing is they have seen the issue and gone out of their way to address it.

The availability of resources - land, shelter, food and of course money - is the biggest challenge.

Out of compassion and benevolence, these people have voluntarily taken the burden upon themselves to provide shelter, food, clothing and education for the children.

These organisations provide a noble service which is rightfully the responsibility of government. It is a mammoth task that these charities are tackling and the government cannot continue to turn a blind eye.

The government must provide support through the District Services Improvement Program with yearly grant assistance for sustenance and expansion until such time as the government has an orphanage policy in place.

The sooner the better.
The price for parental neglect will be paid

Francis Nii
25 February 2014

The level of love and care we give our children are the same we will receive from them when we are sick or get old. If we give them the best according to what we have, we will get the same measure and even more from them.

Yesterday the news of the demise of Tabie reached me, and memories of human tragedy rekindled. He had been referred to Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital in Kundiawa from Goroka Base Hospital.

Tabie was in his early sixties and some months ago was admitted to my ward for treatment of acute arthritis in his legs.

Although he was able to walk with the support of crutches, he didn’t have the strength to help himself with other chores.

My daughter Charlene (now doing Grade 11 at Gumine Secondary) helped him to fetch drinking water and get his morning tea and dinner from the mess. She even did the laundry for him.

As days passed into weeks, we realised that none of his relatives was coming to look after him. He lacked toiletry, so we helped him. We provided him with fruit and extra meals. Whatever we had we shared with him.

At times Charlene would ask about his relatives and if they might come and look after him. Tabie said he didn’t know.

“Do you have children?” she asked.

“Yes, Bubu, I have many children. They are all grown-up and married. Two of them are in Port Moresby. One is teaching at Kilakila Secondary School and the other is operating a taxi service,” Tabie replied proudly.

“Then why will none of them come to visit you? You need a guardian to look after you, bathe you, wash your clothes and get your meals from the mess. You are not strong enough to help yourself.”

“Bubu, you are right. I don’t know why they are not coming,” he said with a tone of regret.

“Do they know you are here? Do you have their phone numbers?”

“They know I am here, Bubu. But I don’t know why they are not coming. I don’t have their phone numbers.”

“It’s alright,” Charlene assured him. “I will look after both you and my dad.”
Tabie stayed in this hospital for almost three months until being transferred back to Goroka. He was living with his latest wife, a widow, when he passed away a week ago.

Throughout his three months at Sir Joseph Nombri Hospital, only three visitors came and visited him and they were not family members. They were wantoks from the hauslain [village] who brought with them some food.

The first who came were a couple. Charlene asked them why Tabie’s children were not coming to look after him.

The man hesitantly said he didn’t know. The wife facing Charlene and, with the back of her head to Tabie, twisted her nose.

I couldn’t work out what the facial gesture meant.

Charlene, being an intuitive girl, grabbed the woman’s hand and said, “Let’s go and chew betel nut,” and out they went.

About half an hour later they came back, their lips red with buai spittle.

When the couple left, Charlene bombarded Tabie with questions about the number of wives and children he had with each wife and how he parented the children. She had already learnt a lot about Tabie’s life from the woman.

The truth finally surfaced.

Tabie had been a handsome man in his young days and married one woman after the other. After the birth of his second child, he deserted the mother and the children and married a new wife.

As soon as the new wife had a child, he left them and married another one and went on like that … a hit and run type.

He had nine children from his many wives.

He didn’t look after any of his children. He didn’t promote and support their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development including formal education. He neglected the usual parenting process of all his children from infancy to adulthood.

The children were raised by their maternal grandparents or other people who put them through school and paid their school fees.

Biological fatherly love was something that Tabie’s children missed in their lives.

Tabie didn’t realise he wouldn’t be forever young, handsome and energetic. There would come a time when he would get old and or sick and depend on his children for care and support.

When he got old and became ill, the children totally despised and neglected him.
When Charlene learned of his promiscuous past and the neglect of his children, she stopped helping him. Tabie found life hard and was transferred back to Goroka.

Currently at Sir Joseph Nombri we have a patient paralysed by TB of the spine. He is in his fifties and was living a promiscuous life with no or little concern for his children.

His children would come and go. They didn’t give a damn about his excrement and urine.

Many times, he would yell and cry for help and the children would tell him to die. They told him straight that he never cared for them. They grew up in their mother’s hands. Other guardians had pity on him and were helping him.

There are instances where children inflict severe bodily harm on their biological mother or father because of parenting negligence.

There are many Papua New Guineans like Tabie who follow the flesh without worrying about the consequences of their actions and end up paying the ultimate price.

Our children are precious gifts from God and assets and heirs. They are the ones we would fall on in old age and in the time of sickness and other calamities.

It is inhumane and insane for people to not take care of their own children unless for medical, economic or other legitimate reasons.
Betel nut is here to stay – so let's solve the problem

Francis Nii
31 January 2015

It is most regrettable that people’s lives, including very young lives, have to be destroyed because of one very divisive policy – the banning of betel nut.

No amount of money will appease the pain suffered by the relatives of those three people who recently died or compensate for their loss. No way.

When the National Capital District Governor, Powes Parkop, first announced the policy in October 2013, I was one of those who opposed the idea in the Post-Courier and PNG Attitude.

The essence of my argument more than a year ago was that the betel nut trade sustains life, creates employment, creates wealth and has the potential to swing political power, and that banning it would create many problems.

I argued that there are families in Port Moresby (whether Southern Highlanders, Engans, Simbus or Hanuabadans) who survive on income from selling buai and that to sever this lifeline without providing them an alternative means of survival was akin to direct or indirect homicide.

So far three people have died (one accidentally and two murdered), all related to the betel nut ban. Apart from the dead, there are many others who have been physically assaulted by authorities engaged to enforce the ban. There has also been destruction of property.

If Governor Parkop wants to pay compensation, he should also pay it for the mother who died at Gordons Market. But even if he does that, as I said, no amount of money will appease the pain suffered by the relatives.

The employment power of betel nut cannot be underrated. It creates a chain of employment. Farmers employ people who harvest and bag the nut. Wholesalers employ truck or boat owners to transport it to market.

Retailers employ truck or taxi owners to carry the nut to their employees, the sellers who are many and scattered across various locations.

If research was done on the number of people involved full time or casually in the betel nut trade, we’d be amazed to find that it is the single highest employer in PNG. This is one crop that knows no
regional, ethnic or cultural boundaries. Highlanders and coastals alike chew the nut and involve themselves in its business.

Banning betel nut is cutting off employment and alternative employment must be created to put money in people’s pocket so there is food on the table. One cannot just separate people from their employment and let them go hungry. This will not work. People will still sell betel nut.

The economic importance of betel nut cannot be understated. It has the potential to make people rich. People have bought motor vehicles and dinghies and built permanent houses with buai money. They have paid bills and invested in their children’s education.

Those who know the money-making potential of betel nut put their lives on the line in search of it. Imagine Engans, Southern and Western Highlanders travelling as far as Oro and Sepik looking for it.

Think of the length and lawlessness along the Highlands Highway.

Many highlanders do not know how to swim. Several of them have drowned in rough seas while searching for betel nut. But this does not deter others. People take risks because there is money in it.

So banning betel nut has not and will not bring forth the intended outcome.

Although betel nut is a health hazard and a source of filth, it can exercise potent political influence.

Politically, Governor Parkop has dug his own political grave by his total buai ban policy. He seemed to forget that the bulk of the population that gave him the mandate to govern are ordinary people: the unemployed, taxi or PMV owners, low income earners and street vendors.

In one way or another, these people rely on buai money to take care of their daily needs or business activities. Banning betel nut is jeopardising the lives of the very people who gave him his mandate and Parkop can expect repercussions come 2017.

I feel the governor has realised his mistake and is going to back down on the policy before the 2017 general elections. If not soon, it will be sometime later.

Instead of banning buai, the National Capital District Commission (NCDC) must explore other means that are beneficial to all parties. If the NCDC has run out of ideas, then it should ask the public to contribute, select the most agreeable proposal and pay for it.

In order for the governor not to totally lose face, he might like to consider the following option.
The NCDC should issue betel nut trading licenses and identification cards to traders, whether individuals or companies. The license should have terms and conditions spelt out clearly in Pidgin and Hiri Motu.

It should state the trading site, which may be at the main market or in front of one’s residence or any other place mutually agreed to by the buai seller and the NCDC.

The NCDC must supply trash bins with the license number and location printed on them and small plastic bags to the license holder free or for a small fee.

When people buy buai, they must also be given a plastic bag for the rinds and spittle and, after they finish chewing, they must dump it in a trash bin. City trash collectors will empty the bins and leave them behind for re-use.

When the plastic bags run out, the trader can get the NCDC to replenish them or buy them from the supermarket and pass the cost to the betel nut user by increasing the buai price.

Before closing for the day, the trader must clean the designated spot.

City rangers for each electorate within the capital should regularly check every licensed area to make sure the place is clean. Heavy penalties should be imposed on traders who do not comply with the terms and conditions of the license.

Buai users who misbehave should be fined heavily to deter others from misbehaving.

Of course, this has to be legitimised by NCDC to protect itself from law suits.

In this way, no one is a loser and, very importantly, the responsibility of taking care of the rubbish is given back to the perpetrators in a regulated way.

This will cut down clean-up costs and other related problems like violence and killings we have experienced.

The ball is now in Parkop’s court. He must not forget that betel nut is here to stay no matter how hard he tries to get rid of it.
Is it just us - or is the whole world stupid?

Francis Nii

04 March 2015

There are some things human beings – in this case Papua New Guineans - do that I find to be so absurd as to wonder whether we have brains.

There was a mother selling taro which was nicely creamed in coconut oil with spring onion and garlic puree. You could smell it from afar.

Her grown-up girl came back from school and she was hungry. The mother gave her one kina from the money earned from selling the taro and told her to buy a bun, known as dry scone.

The girl grinned and walked to the nearest bun seller, got herself a dry scone and sated her hunger while other people bought taro from her mother for one kina and ate it with coconut milk and garlic and onion soup served on plate.

A delicious and healthy snack; much more so than a dry scone.

Another time I saw a woman selling oranges for K1.50 at our small market at the hospital’s front gate. Her little kid came crying to her for something. Instead of giving the child an orange, the mother gave her a kina and told the kid to buy a bottle of Tang.

The kid ran to the Tang seller and, wearing a broad smile, came back carrying a bottle of the sugary beverage.

There is a fisherman from Wara Simbu who catches trout in the river. Each time he catches a big one, he sells it. With the money, he buys lamb flaps, an animal product classified as health hazard and unfit for human consumption in Australia and New Zealand.

In those countries it is processed into animal feed but it also exported and floods PNG supermarkets because dogs and Simbu fishermen like it.

I see many coastal people doing the same thing. They toil in the rough seas, fighting the wind, rain and sun, to catch fish to sell them at the market.

After they sell everything, they buy lamb flaps and tinned fish full of additives and little quantity and take them home to eat.

A mother and daughter sold English potatoes at the main market. In the evening they bought a packet of rice to take home.

Before catching a PMV [public motor vehicle], they were in one of the Chinese fast food places eating potato chips.
Whenever I think about these things, it makes me wonder which part of their body these people use for thinking. It can’t be their brains.

And I wonder whether there are people like them in Australia, New Zealand and other countries or do we only have them in Papua New Guinea.

“In Papua New Guinea, people with a disability - people like me - are marginalised and neglected.”
In need of Vitamin D from heaven’s abundant supply, I was wheeled in my battered wheelchair down to the helipad at the southern end of Kundiawa’s Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial hospital, which is my home.

As I was sun bathing, Kaupa, an old friend and aspiring politician, walked up to me. He had seen me through the window of the ward where his sick daughter had been admitted the day before.

We chatted for a while and Kaupa suggested we go to the hospital front-gate market for a cup of Kongo coffee. He helped push my wheelchair and we went to the favourite coffee spot.

After a kapa each at Dorothy’s coffee shop, I was tempted to take a chew of betel nut. We moved to the first seller on the Wara Simbu side of the road and I paid for two nuts.

As we were chewing, a young woman in her early thirties came towards us wearing six-pocket trousers, collared tee-shirt and a pair of strappers.

“Dekla, my sister, what are you doing here?” the buai seller asked the woman in Tok Pisin.

“My sister Paula, it’s been a long time,” Dekla responded and they shook hands.

“I’ve been in the hospital for some days now looking after my son. He twisted his ankle while playing with other children and got admitted,” Dekla explained.

After chatting with Paula for a while, Dekla asked her for some betel nut. “Sista sampela piksa buai o.” [Sister any display nuts?]

“Sista laip em had tru. Buai em ino planti. Yu baim na kaikai,” the buai seller responded. [Sister life is so difficult. Betel nuts are not plentiful. You buy and chew]

“Sista, mi askim long wanpela piksa buai tasol. Blong wanem yu tok laip i had. Olsem wanem laip i had tru?” [Sister, I am asking for a display nut only why are you saying life is so difficult? How come life is so difficult].

“Sori sista, laip long town i had tru. Olgeta samting i moni tasol.” [Sorry sister, life in town is so hard. Everything is money]

“Oh sista, yu nogat wok na yu hangamap nating long town osem na yu painim laip em had. Yu mas kam bek long ples.” [Oh sister, you have no job and
you are just squatting in town, that’s why you find life so difficult. You must come back to the village]

“Ples em heven. Olgeta samting i stap. Yu ino bai wari long wanpela samting.”
[Village is heaven. Everything is in the village. You will never be worried about anything]

The conversation turned into an argument and became quite bitter so I decided to distract them. I gave K2 to Paula and instructed her to give Dekla four nuts worth 50 toea each.

Dekla looked at me and shook her head. “Give his money back,” she said, pulling the K2 from Paula’s hand and giving it back to me.

“I feel sorry for you. I have money. I will buy myself some nuts but not from this rubbish,” and in full view of Paula, Dekla pulled a K10 note from a stack of 10 and 20 kina bills in her purse and walked to the next seller.

“Would you like a drink of Coke?” she asked me and I nodded.

From the corner of my eyes I saw Paula swallow a lump that refused to go down her throat. I couldn’t figure out what was going on in her mind but clearly, she was flustered.

Dekla came back with a bottle of Coke and a handful of betel nut and mustard beans. She gave me the Coke and suggested we stay under the shade of a mango tree on the other side of the road and chew. We went to the shade of the mango tree.

“Paula is my cousin,” Dekla explained as she and Kaupa were chewing the nuts and I was drinking the Coke.

“We are from Toromambuno in Gembogl. We both left school after completing grade six and got married.

“Me and my husband, we live in the village. Our three children were born at Gembogl rural health centre.

“Once in a while I travel to Madang or Lae to sell my carrots, broccoli and cauliflowers. After selling them, I buy clothes and household items - mattresses, blankets, cooking pots that we need - and I go back.

“Paula and her husband left the village soon after they got married and they have been living in a settlement around here ever since.

“I don’t understand this talk of hard life or poverty. Maybe this is the language of vagrants squatting in settlements in towns and cities.

“In the village, we have everything we need. We have food, fresh clean water, firewood and, house to live in.
“When we are hungry, we just take a walk to the back of our house and pick ripe bananas, avocado or sugar cane and consume them and we are full.

“When we need salt, soap, kerosene, cooking oil or a Flex Card to make a phone call, we pick coffee or vegetables from the garden and sell them on the roadside, get the money and we buy these things.

“We are not worried about money. We don’t struggle in the scorching heat to make a few kinas for just one evening’s meal.

“We do gardening whenever we feel like. Otherwise we go washing in the creek or lazing around with friends and play 7 Bomb [cards]. We are happy.

“I feel sorry for my sister and her family. They must come back to the village,” Dekla said.

I was very interested in what Dekla said especially after all the negative publicity about PNG in the Australian media.

I mulled over her words for a while and then asked, “Dekla, contrary to what you have said, some Australians are saying that PNG is a poverty-stricken shithole. What do you think about that?”

I stressed every word for effect.

“What?” Kaupa and Dekla fumed simultaneously.

“Lucky their jobless are living off the dole otherwise they would have starved to death”. So, said Kaupa, the senior public servant and aspiring politician.

“People like Paula who squat in settlements and lack basic needs like food, good shelter and decent clothes may come under the definition of poverty Australians are talking about.

“But they are only a fraction of the whole population. Most Papua New Guineans, including me and my people in Salt Noman, are not poor.

“We don’t survive on dole handouts. We don’t live in makeshift tents. We don’t survive on a spoonful of donated rice and soup day by day. We don’t stand in queues for hours just to get a bucket of water for a week.”

Dekla cut in. “You are right my brother. Papua New Guinea is Eden. We don’t lack anything, so why outsiders should describe us as poor people?”

I intervened and changed the subject. After all, the nuts were depleted. We dispersed. And I forgot about the incident.
Get to know your country: become a local tourist

Francis Nii
01 May 2015

In Papua New Guinea when people talk about tourists or tourism, the general picture they have in their minds is people of different skin colours, particularly white and yellow, armed with backpacks and cameras, hiking up mountains, boating along rivers, diving in the sea, walking through jungle and spending their money on local food, art, craft and accommodation.

This is the general perception of what tourism is about … foreigners coming to PNG and taking pleasure in the cultures, rituals, nature and scenery of our country.

Hence the promotion and focus are mostly geared in that direction, which is fine as far as luring foreign exchange is concerned.

PNG - a veritable nation of nations - offers variety in diversity and some of the best tourist attractions in the world: this land with such spectacular geography; brilliant local peoples; lustrous flora; breathtaking cultural rituals; and so much more.

How much do Papua New Guineans know about their own country; how many have immersed themselves in its delights? This may seem an unfair question to ask people who have been born and bred here. Yet it is testing and searching.

How many Papua New Guineans have stood atop PNG looking out from the summit of our highest peak Mt Wilhelm and uttered in awe, “Wow, this is my country”?

How many have swum in the brilliant blue seas of New Britain, Manus, New Ireland or Bougainville and took delight in the underwater forests of the sea with corals and multitudinous marine life?

How many have boated or canoed the mighty Sepik or Purari river systems?

How many have walked through some of the thick coastal jungles and highlands rain forests breathing the fresh air and bathing in the sounds and sights?

How many have met, sat and shared betel nut or a snack in their homelands with Bainings, Telefolmins, Kukukus, Gogodalas or Marawakas to name a few of our wonderful array of traditional people?

How many Papua New Guineans have seen a bird of paradise in a tree singing and dancing in prodigious splendour?
How many have witnessed a Sepik skin cutting ritual, or seen the Kontu shark callers, the Huli wig students or the burial rituals of the Gulf?

Most Papua New Guineans, whether of the elite or the ordinary people, have not witnessed such things. Maybe some looked at pictures in books or watched a video or heard from friends but most will not have seen these wonders.

PNG has some of the world’s best tourist spots and attractions that we locals have not experienced, and that is sad. There’s no excuse. Most people in rural areas are kind, hospitable and well behaved. They like to make friends with strangers.

The prospect for local tourism is beginning to look up with Air Niugini’s low cost travel service through its subsidiary, Link PNG. The platform has been built.

The Tourism Promotion Authority and tourism providers should take advantage of this to encourage local tourism by offering affordable rates especially for group travel around PNG by ordinary Papua New Guineans.

In this way, we will not only get to better know our country but also foster friendship, harmony and unity that will evoke a positive change in attitudes and a pride in who we are.
PNG Power needs to learn some lessons

Francis Nii
20 June 2016

Endless power blackouts in Simbu and elsewhere in Papua New Guinea indicate that PNG Power is inefficient in the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity.

It reminds me of the worst-case corporate coup ever in the history of PNG in 2007 and 2008 when Caribbean-based communications giant Digicel almost crippled the mobile phone business of home-grown rival B-Mobile.

B-Mobile, carrying the flag of Telikom PNG, had a golden opportunity to invest in rural areas during its monopoly period but failed miserably.

No member of parliament, particularly the Minister for Communications, and no State-Owned Enterprise had perceived that mobile phone services could become an infinite gold mine after an initial aggressive investment.

So, B-Mobile limited its focus to urban centres and charged exorbitant prices for its Nokia and Motorola phones. Simcard prices went as high as K50 in some shops. The lowest was K20.

Then, when Digicel came, it targeted rural areas where 80% of the population lives. It imported the cheapest mobile phones, selling them for as little as K20 and flooded the market. Simcards cost only K10.

There was mobile phone rush and anything Digicel marketed sold like hot cakes.

The company embarked on huge capital investment, erecting communications towers across the country wherever people lived and including many areas which B-Mobile had neglected or considered uneconomical.

In remote Karimui, for example, where there is no road link, Digicel choppered in towers in sections, something that B-Mobile hadn’t thought to do.

The investment paid off in no time. There was a mass exodus of mobile phone users from B-Mobile to Digicel.

Most workers in the urban areas originate from rural areas and Digicel readily facilitated their communication with relatives.

B-Mobile would have gone out of business if the government hadn’t bailed it out.
Today, in almost all rural areas, you will hardly hear of B-Mobile. Digicel is everywhere including the most remote places. By the time B-Mobile awoke from its investment slumber, it was too late. Digicel was way ahead.

I don’t know how B-Mobile is faring these days. Someone tell me. The Digicel-B-Mobile experience should be a case study for state-owned electricity company PNG Power.

PNG Power, like its predecessor Elcom, currently enjoys a monopoly in the electricity sector. It is solely responsible for power generation, transmission, distribution and retailing.

While it enjoys the great advantage of monopoly, PNG Power needs to take a more emphatic approach to investment by harnessing the country’s abundant water resources to build super dams that will power the entire nation, and North Queensland as well while it’s in the mood. I have read that Cairns is growing rapidly and its future demand for electricity looks like surpassing its current supply capacity.

With appropriate investment now, PNG Power might be in a better position to supply power not just to PNG but also to the north of Australia.

PNG Power needs to get moving and strategically position itself to take advantage of such developments.

The government and companies which have a vested interest in the energy sector are mooting the privatisation of PNG Power or allowing in competition like in mobile phone communications.

If that eventuates and a multinational giant is allowed to invest in the electricity sector, PNG Power, with its current appalling service, will not stand the chance of competing against it.

The company must get its act together and take advantage of the monopoly it currently enjoys or else find itself crawling on its knees when competition is allowed.

From down there, it may find it extremely hard to stand up again.
A blessed year for Simbu Children Foundation
Francis Nii
23 December 2016

Patience and perseverance are truly the keys to success in whatever we want to achieve.

This proved true for the Simbu Children Foundation (SCF) this year when we were smothered with an unprecedented level of support in our charity work serving the sick and disadvantaged children of Simbu.

During our ninth annual fundraising ball last Saturday at the Mt Wilhelm Tourist Hotel, we were presented with no less than two motor vehicles.

The first from Digicel Foundation was a brand-new Toyota Land Cruiser station wagon fully kitted out with mobile medical facilities worth K190,000.

The second was a Land Rover donated by Kennedy Wemin, CEO of Melanesian Trustee Services and long-serving SCF patron.

These donations were the icing on the cake following the World of Children Award for Child Advocacy received in New York in October by founding President Jimmy Drekore.

This award is valued at K240,000 a year for three years starting in 2017.

Jimmy broke down in tears each time he was asked to go forward and receive the keys to the vehicles. He was lost for words. The hug and tears said it all for him.

The only words that came out of his mouth amidst tears of joy were ‘thank you’.

It was a moving moment for SCF members and benefactors as, in its 12 years of operation, SCF had mostly been hiring vehicles to carry out its work. (Occasionally compassionate individuals like Edwin Wem loaned vehicles free of charge.)

But many times, when the need arose to see very sick children, Jimmy and the team toiled on foot with patience and perseverance.

After he regained his composure, Jimmy assured everyone that SCF was now empowered to go out and find sick children instead of just those who could afford the cost of finding their own way to Kundiawa Hospital.

Jimmy then presented the Toyota vehicle to the paediatric ward of Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital. Hospital board chairman Fr Kewani, specialist paediatrician Dr Guapo Kiage and other staff went
wild with applause as, since the establishment of the hospital in 1994, the children’s ward never had a vehicle of its own.

“This is a proud moment for the hospital and especially us, the paediatric ward and staff,” a proud Dr Kiage said. “Thank you to Jimmy Drekor and SCF.”

The Land Rover was kept by Jimmy to be used by the SCF team to carry out its charity work.

Other benevolent hearts that night poured in funds: a K15,000 donation by Trans Wonderland Transport as the major sponsor of the ball and K5,000 from the president of the PNG Law Society and principal of Kuman Lawyers, Peter Kuman, who was also the guest speaker.

There were other notable donations by individuals and business houses and, in addition, K100,000 from the 25 ten-person tables, each sold for K4,000.

The master of ceremony was John Kama of Think Tank Quiz. Music was provided by former PNG Kumul captain and regular SCF DJ master Bal Numapo and the resurrected Simbu Rocks, the famous band from the 1970s.

The trouble-free celebration continued until daybreak when everybody dispersed.
We need research into domestic violence

Francis Nii
09 November 2017

Domestic violence is again in the headlines following the death of journalist Rosalyn Evara last month.

At the time of her death, Rosalyn was business editor of the national Post-Courier newspaper.

Her death was alleged to be a result of domestic violence, but Port Moresby General Hospital’s chief pathologist, Dr Seth Fose, who carried out the autopsy, stated that embalming and decomposition had undermined any reliable findings as to cause.

Earlier, at Rosalyn’s funeral, a family member had made public graphic photos of the harm done to her body.

The matter is now before the coroner for further investigation and final determination on the cause of Rosalyn’s death.

The first case of gender-based violence that came to recent prominence was the brutal murder of 20-year old Kepari Leniata in Mt Hagen in 2013.

Leniata had been accused of sorcery and was burned to death on a pile of tyres before a crowd of onlookers.

Her case, and horrific images, went viral in social and mainstream media and drew national and international condemnation.

Human rights advocates, women’s groups, NGOs and individuals vehemently called for justice against the perpetrators of the atrocity and demanded that the PNG government take tougher measures to address the problem.

Subsequently Andrew Watea and Janet Ware, the main culprits, were arrested and charged with murder.

The PNG government then passed the Family Protection Bill criminalising domestic and gender-based violence and enabling perpetrators to be arrested and prosecuted.

The outcome, however, has been disturbing. Reports reveal a very low number of arrests and prosecutions related to gender-based violence.

Most cases are not reported by victims or their relatives. Why?

This critical question needs answers if we are to get to the root of the problem and find a solution.

But there is little or no effort being made to identify the causes of gender-based violence.
In March this year, the government launched a national strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. This was the result of three years of work by various government agencies and the United Nations Development Program.

I haven’t had the benefit of reading the document, but at least there seems to be a road map for addressing this social illness.

With this strategy, it is imperative that the focus be redirected from cure to prevention and that means more research on finding root causes.

The fundamental question to start with is why female victims and their relatives are reluctant to report violent acts to the authorities for arrest and prosecution? Why the silence on the part of victims and their families?

I strongly believe that seeking answers to this question will unveil the underlying causes of violence and from there fact-based remedial measures can be developed.

It is time for redirection of focus to find the causes and to address them rather than just treating the effects.
Ilimo farm mystery: 746 cows & grass missing
Francis Nii
28 January 2018

The announcement by Innovation Agro Industries (IAI) at Ilimo Farm outside Port Moresby that its locally produced milk will find the shelves of PNG supermarkets next month has been received with mixed reactions.

IAI managing director Ian Weiss told PNG News that 746 cows were producing six tonnes of milk a day with production aimed to be ramped up to 12,000 tonnes a day by March.

“The quality is in the taste,” said Mr Weiss. “I’ve got years of dairy experience and this is the best you can get globally.”

To many Papua New Guineans, the announcement is welcome news for the local economy especially at a time when imported milk product prices are high due to government tariffs and the falling value of the kina.

Once the IAI product hits the supermarkets, it will create competition against imports, giving consumers an economical choice.

Furthermore, the K100 million investment in the enterprise has created employment for locals.

But Papua New Guineans who have been to Ilimo Farm are querying the existence of the 746 cows Mr Weiss says are producing the milk.

“They have to show us where the dairy farm and cows are,” Joe Larry Chinau told PNG Today. “Ilimo farm has no land for cows. Where is the milk coming from?

“The last thing we need is to be putting more chemicals into our kids’ bodies so can someone confirm that this large herd of cows exists?” he asked.

Eragairma Yal confirmed this view. “Where could the cattle farm be and how could they manage to raise 746 cows? Is its indoor grazing like the hydroponic farm at Nine Mile?”

Other people have raised similar concerns.

“Unless it’s hidden in the hinterland, there is no notable green grass for cow grazing,” said AH Robin.

For the good of the company, its products and its customers, Mr Weiss should answer a straightforward question: Where is the dairy farm and its 746 cows?
The Karimui road saga. Can Kama change the game?
Francis Nii
20 May 2019

While Papua New Guinea is focusing on the imminent Vote of No Confidence in Prime Minister Peter O’Neill, in the Simbu Province’s remote Salt Nomane region, the struggle to connect the Karimui area to the outside world is a never ending saga.

The striving to connect Karimui by road has spanned more than three decades and cost many millions of kina with no success.

But wok mas go het yet [work will proceed] courtesy of a local MP. The big question now is whether Geoffrey Kama and his idea of a changed route from Gumine-Karimui to Kilau-Karimui can be a game changer.

Karimui is one of three local level government areas in Salt Nomane Karimui District and is situated at the extreme southern tip of Simbu Province bordering Gulf, Eastern Highlands and Southern Highlands.

Karimui has a population of about 17,000 who are represented by 27 ward councillors.

Unlike most parts of mountainous Simbu, Karimui is mostly flat with altitudes ranging from 800 – 1,500 meters above sea level.

Because of the unusual geography and climate, crops like cocoa, betel nut and coconuts normally found in coastal areas grow in Karimui as well as coffee, peanuts and rice. For this reason, Sir Michael Somare during one of his visits to Simbu described Karimui as the coast in the highlands.

Although coconut and betel nut haven’t performed well, cocoa has promise as a major cash crop to supplement coffee in Karimui and agronomic research began in the early 1990s to introduce it.

The agriculturalist who pioneered cocoa’s development was the late Kale Kua. With the more recent involvement of agricultural scientist and cocoa expert Dr John Konam, research outcomes have been highly successful.

Many farmers in Karimui can now grow cocoa but are not producing beans due to lack of a dryer and the high cost of freighting produce to Goroka by air. Coffee and peanuts face the same challenges.

Farmers are discouraged by the low return for their sweat but the potential for large scale production remains. The big problem is building a road to connect Karimui with the outside world.
Successive political leaders under different governments have spent millions of kina to build the road but it has never reached Karimui.

Initially, with K3 million allocated by the Simbu provincial government, the national Department of Works undertook construction of 22 km of road from Yoya to Yobadibol.

A further allocation of K20 million from the Somare government was divided equally between a company owned by former Kerowagi MP, Camillus Dangama, and Sky Development, a company owned by current Salt Nomane Karimui MP, Geoffrey Kama.

Camillus was to fly his machines to Karimui and work north while Sky was to work south and they were to meet at the Waghi River.

Sky covered 15 km from Yobadibol to One Creek with part of the money needed for settling land claims and outstanding payments for previous construction work.

The third tranche of funding, another K10 million by the O’Neill government in 2016-17 took the road from Yobadibol to Talpakul, still some kilometers away from the Waghi River.

And recently, there was another K10 million allocation from the national government from which Kama secured K5 million and used to construct a new route from Wara Mogerema near Kilau through the eastern side of the Golemole mountain to the head of Gai Nugu range and on to the Mahau prairie to reach the mighty Waghi River.

The work halted at Mahau when the funds ran out.

I asked Kama’s office why it had been decided to discontinue building the road from Gumine to Karimui in favour of a new route from Kilau to Karimui. Unfortunately, I received no response but a source told me the main reason was that the distance from Kilau to the Waghi River and on to Karimui was much shorter.

The source said the distance from Kilau to the Waghi is less than 40 km and so far, 75% has been covered. It requires an additional K2-3 million to get to the Waghi River.

When the source was asked how confident Kama felt about getting the road to Karimui through the new route, he said the MP was determined to get the road connected during this term of parliament.

There are critics who describe the Karimui road as a milking cow for people with self-interest who use the money for themselves. They say progress has been at snail pace and is of poor quality.

While this may be true, no one has asked why, despite so much money pumped into the Gumine-Karimui route, the road has not even reached the Waghi River, let alone Karimui.
The answer may lie in the unforgiving and treacherous high mountains, deep gullies, leech-infested forest and many lowland swamps. Added to this are three big rivers to bridge and the lengthy distance itself.

Edwin Wem, a senior employee of the national Works Department at Kundiawa, says the Gumine-Karimui route is a near impossible task that will cost a lot of money. The bridge alone across the Waghi River will require super trusses which the current road size and condition cannot accommodate. On top of that, there is no rock bed nearby on which to construct the bridge.

Wem says Kama has made the right decision by changing the route to Kilau-Karimui as the distance to the Waghi River is much shorter – only 36 km. The proposed bridge site is shorter and the rock bed is good to host the bridge.

So, Kama, with his vast experience in road construction and thorough knowledge of the challenging South Simbu terrain, has decided to embark on the new Kilau-Karimui route instead of sinking money into the same hole.

Does he know more than his predecessors? Can his idea of changing the route be the game changer in connecting Karimui with the outside world?

Kama has ample time ahead of him to accomplish his dream before the next election in 2022 but finance might be a major setback. He needs major funding from the national government or donor agencies to get the road through.

Currently, Kama is camping with the opposition team for the coming vote of no confidence in the prime minister.

If alternate Prime Minister James Marape and the opposition team are successful in changing the government, the best reward Marape can give to the people of Salt Nomane and Karimui is a sealed Kilau-Karimui road and expansion of the Karimui cocoa project.

And even if Peter O’Neill retains power, he could put politics aside, think of his people in Salt Nomane Karimui and put substantial funding to finish this road, a link that will address economic, health and education issues.
Murray Bladwell was a man of Simbu
Francis Nii
18 November 2019

Death is part of the life cycle mankind must go through, but the passing of a friend and a good person is an especially painful loss.

When I read Keith Jackson’s obituary about the passing of Murray Bladwell, also shared by Robert Parer on his Facebook page, my heart stopped beating for some seconds.

I was shocked. My mind blacked out. I sat still and silent staring at my mobile screen.

After some moments, consciousness returned and the news sank in.

I immediately turned to PNG Attitude and read the story with tears constantly falling from my eyes. I was in deep grief and didn’t have the strength to write. I was lost for words.

I let it go. Now, after some days have passed and the pain and sadness have lessened, I have found the strength to reflect on my life’s encounter with my friend and good mate, the late Murray Bladwell.

“Hello Francis,” was followed by an awkward but warm hug that September afternoon in 2016 at the Harbourside Hotel alongside the Brisbane River.

The memory of our first meeting rekindled tears as the news of Murray’s passing sank in.

The moment had been awkward because I was sitting in a wheelchair and Murray was bending down uncomfortably seeking a suitable position for a hug.

But the embrace, when it came, was executed with tenderness like two souls who had known each other for cons.

Although it was our first face to face encounter, the hug was profound. It was a hallmark of a bond between two peoples and two nations: a strong bond that had sustained down the years.

Murray and his wife Joan were among the outstanding Australians who served my people and my country Papua New Guinea with distinction between 1963 and 1974, preparing our nation for independence.

They both spent many years in the education service as teachers before Murray moved up through the ranks to the policy level at education headquarters in Port Moresby, becoming the executive officer of the National Education Board.
Joan became a lecturer at Port Moresby Teachers College and later developed the health curriculum and health teaching guides also lecturing at Port Moresby Medical College.

You can read about this, and more, in my PNG Attitude article of November 2016 entitled, True Australians Maintaining Bonds with a Flawed Nation [later in this collection].

Author Daniel Kumbon and his wife Julie, writer Martyn Namarong and Ben Jackson and I had arrived at the Harbourside Hotel from Noosa, where we spent two days of our study tour of Australia with Keith Jackson and his family.

At the Harbourside, our accommodation in Brisbane for the writers’ festival, we met with friends of Papua New Guinea, most of who were prominent contributors to pre-independence development in our country.

On that afternoon, we met Robert Lenton (Rob) Parer, Bob Cleland and Murray Bladwell along with others in the hotel bar, where we had a great time taking some beers and chatting together like old acquaintances.

That was the first time I met those great Australians who had made, and continued to contribute immensely, to the development of PNG. We learnt many things from them and vice versa.

“Francis, I'll pick you up at 9 o’clock for sightseeing,” Murray said softly when the gathering was winding up.

“I'll be waiting,” I replied excitedly before pushing my wheelchair back to my room close by.

In the morning, I was eagerly waiting when Murray picked me up in his car and we headed south-west to Ipswich.

It was on this trip, and in that short time, that I learned about Murray and his beautiful wife Joan’s time in pre-independence PNG and their contribution to the education and health sectors.

In Ipswich, Murray showed me a container packed with 11,000 books, school desks, tables, chairs, encyclopaedia and cartons of high-quality hospital bed linen and other things for schools and health centres in my Simbu Province.

It was Murray who initiated this benevolent project which was overwhelmingly supported by fellow members of the Rotary Club of Toowong.

Then Murray showed me piles of wheelchairs in the warehouse and instructed me to choose one that I liked. I selected one that I reckoned
was suitable for the rough Kundiawa roads and a giant of a man lifted it into the boot of Murray’s car.

After a brief chat with members of the club, we drove back along Brisbane River and then through the Queensland University campus, across a bridge and on to Murray’s residence on the Brisbane River.

Joan was ready to take a ferry ride down the river, leaving with the Simbu bilum that I had brought for her hanging on her side. Murray and I drove back to the hotel.

Many things Murray and I talked about that day. I learned that, after so many years, Murray still cherished the memories of the time he spent in Simbu and Papua New Guinea.

He talked about the warm-heartedness of the village people and the inquisitiveness of the children he and Joan liked so much. He talked with deep affection and it dawned on me that he had a special attachment to the Simbu people and this drew my heart even closer to him.

When I returned to Kundiawa from Australia in December 2016, I brought with me the wheelchair Murray had given to me and donated it to the Accident and Emergency Unit of Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital because the unit had no wheelchair and was in dire need of one.

It is the only wheelchair in the unit since then until now. It has served thousands of patients and is still in good condition. It has helped so many people, thanks to Murray.

Apart from the wheelchair, Murray also arranged a Dell computer for me which was delivered by Ben Jackson, by this time a resident of PNG, sometime after I returned to Simbu.

Murray and I kept in touch through email. That was until recently when he didn’t respond.

My email was about metal bookshelf frames for the Simbu Writers Association library that had been sitting idle in the container for all this time.

I wanted to use the shelves to set up a library in one of the high schools and stock them with PNG-authored books.

I wanted to call this the Murray Bladwell Library in honour of his contribution to the education of the Simbu people and sought his approval.

When he didn’t reply, I thought he didn’t like the idea.

Then I received the news of his passing. It saddens me so much. It breaks my heart. It is painful.
Murray was not just a friend but a good man who had a heart for those he met along the way. I have been very privileged to have known him. Many other Papua New Guineans as well as I will surely miss him.

For me there will be no more emails with kind words from a mate and good man. Only fond memories of Murray’s smiling face and kindness will live on in my heart.

Now that Murray has gone, the idea of setting up a library named after him in one of the Simbu high schools is stronger in me. I and members of the Simbu Writers Association will pursue it until it is done.

And to my brother and good mate, Murray Bladwell, may you rest in eternal peace.

“Every author in this country has their own story of hardship and struggle to get their work published knowing very well there is no return at the end of the hard work.”
Disastrous partners: wantokism and business

Francis Nii
22 April 2013

There are many factors that contribute to the failure or lack of development of small to medium sized businesses by Papua New Guineans and wantokism is one of them.

Wantokism or the wantok system is a phenomenon that impacts upon every sphere of life in Papua New Guinean society, including business.

In traditional PNG society, wantokism operated as a welfare buffer and underpinned social security. It ensured no one went hungry or was naked or homeless.

Everyone made sure that all other people, including those who were vulnerable and disadvantaged, had food to eat, clothes to wear and shelter or a place to live.

Wantokism tied and held together the tenet and communal principles of a clan or tribe. It instilled clanship and the tribal bond. It was a good custom.

But the practice of wantokism in the modern socio-economic sphere tends to entail more disastrous upshots.

When it comes to meeting traditional obligations like compensation and bride price payments, the community expects wantok business people to make significant contributions.

They are expected to donate competitively over and above other contributions to maintain respect and status in the community. Fear of sorcery may also be involved in this decision.

Under this kind of pressure, business owners may be compelled to misappropriate money that is vital to the enterprise. As a result, small businesses go into bankruptcy or fail to expand because the money or profits have been diverted to maintain customary obligations in the name of wantokism.

For those entrepreneurs who have moved their businesses away from traditional community ties, the prospects of success are high.

There are many instances of successful businesses that would have reached one-million-kina turnover being destroyed in tribal fights and ethnic clashes because of wantokism.

Workshops, trade stores, liquor clubs, coffee plantations, factories and PMV buses owned by innocent people have been torched just because the owners were wantoks of one idiot drunkard or marijuana
addict who murdered or harmed someone from another clan, tribe or ethnic group.

Lae City is a hub for such ethnic clashes. The main characters are Morobeans and Western Highlanders who have fought each other several times. Many businesses worth many thousands of kina had been destroyed.

You may not have heard this before but there is such a thing as a ‘wantok prais’ in Papua New Guinea. If your wantok is a salesperson or sales manager, you are likely to get what you want to purchase at a very high discount, or even free.

In a fast food shop, you can get free of charge a plate of chicken and chips and a cola worth K20 if your wantok is in charge.

This is ‘wantok prais’ and this is how bad wantokism operates in business in PNG. No wonder Asians are more successful. They keep their eyes on the till from 6 am to 6 pm seven days a week.

Then there is wantokism in job recruitment and placement. Unqualified wantoks are given jobs resulting in poor performance and low productivity, a phenomenon we know is common in government departments.

The PNG government knows of the high rate of failure or lack of growth of small to medium enterprises owned by Papua New Guineans.

In its bid to address the problems and promote a business culture in PNG, the government has injected millions of kina into state economic development agencies like the Small Business Development Corporation, Department of Agriculture, National Fisheries Authority and National Development Bank to facilitate training, technical assistance, grants and low interest micro credit facilities.

The Small Business Development Corporation in liaison with provincial commerce officers is vigorously carrying out a training program called Start Your Own Business for small provincial entrepreneurs, non-government organisations, women’s groups and the like.

One course was conducted in Kundiawa early this year exclusively for women. A total of 120 Simbu women from all walks of life (subsistence farmers, public servants, small business entrepreneurs) attended the course and graduated with certificate.

The Minister for Trade and Commerce Richard Maru was guest of honour at the graduation ceremony.
The government also realises that cooperative business societies have improved a lot in their operations lately. The government is promoting them through technical support, training and finance.

At least the government has realised the problems and has adopted some appropriate measures.

However, it will take time before the results of such initiatives are realised.

We can only hope and pray that the best times may come to our people when they can compete shoulder to shoulder with foreigners in their business endeavours.

“The object of starting a war was to end a conflict. Warfare was the ultimate means of dissolving a contentious conflict that normal peace mediation and compensation had failed. When the conflicting parties refused to make peace, they went to war and fought it out and got it over with.”
In my walk of life, I come across people whose personality sometimes confuses me, particularly those who have crossed over from the dark side.

Many times, I have met up with a guy who wilfully murdered a man, was imprisoned, served his time, got his freedom back, married a beautiful wife, joined the police force as a reservist and is currently one of the top officers.

Every time I meet him, I am confounded as to what kind of personality tag I should confer on him.

And there is a public servant who was accused of stealing state funds while he was a district manager. He appeared in court, was found guilty and sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour.

He served his time, came out, somehow got back into the public service and is now occupying one of the senior positions in his department. I hear he is considered one of the most hard working and honest officers.

Each time I see him on the road in his government white Toyota Land Cruiser, I feel muddled as to what kind of personality he might have.

Then there is this another guy who was accused of raping a teenager. He was arrested, appeared in court and pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to two-and-a-half-year imprisonment with hard labour.

While in prison, he joined a Christian denomination and was converted. Immediately he was released from prison he attended Bible College and became a pastor of the church, preaching the word of God.

Whenever I see him, I am confused as to what kind of personality he really has.

Here’s another case. A politician was accused of misappropriation. He appeared in court and was found guilty. He paid the penalty imposed on him and sometime later was awarded an ambassadorial post in a prestigious foreign mission.

Every time I read about him; I find myself confused about his personality.

There are many others, not only men but women, in this society who have gone through similar experiences in life.
Maybe I am suffering from some sort of vacillation complex which bewilders me when trying to confer a personality tag on such people. I guess I’ll leave it up to others.

“The laws of a nation not only protect its citizens but they are the compass that directs its course. The laws must be strong, respected, upheld and they must work fairly in the interests of every citizen.”
HERITAGE AND CULTURE

Francis with family and friends in 2014
Peace ceremonies - our equitable code of justice

Francis Nii
23 May 2012

The traditional code of conflict resolution known as the peace ceremony is Papua New Guinea’s most equitable and timeless alternative justice system.

In peace ceremonies, the aggrieved parties come together in a public gathering at a neutral location with money, animals, food and other material goods.

The money and goods are exchanged between the aggrieved parties preluded by heart-moving words of remorse, forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration and friendship from the chiefs and leaders of both sides.

These commitments are witnessed by church and community leaders including law and justice officials.

The amounts they exchange are dependent on the degree of damage or suffering incurred or endured as a result of the conflict. Naturally the party that suffered most or incurred the worst damage is given more.

The peace agreement is profoundly binding and lasting because the amount of money and goods exchanged have being negotiated and mutually agreed on by both parties in peace mediation.

If there is disagreement, negotiations continue until a final settlement is reached. Then the peace ceremony is equitably and amicably executed.

The money and goods add substance and value to peace making. Without either of these offerings, a peace agreement would be deemed unbinding and vulnerable to collapse at some point.

Tears and hugs are instant signs of remorse, forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration, friendship, peace and harmony. They are the first indicators of a true and lasting peace.

There is no loser in a peace ceremony. Both parties are winners.

In contrast, in a modern court of law there is usually only one winner and it is either the complainant or the defendant depending on how the court is convinced by the evidence, the proof and the veracity of the affidavits.

It is possible for the worst villain to bluff their way through making an innocent party unjustifiably bear the brunt of a judgement.
In PNG, on many occasions the victims of such legal blunders take the law into their own hands because they have lost faith in the modern justice system. They seek justice themselves on their own terms.

For this and other cultural reasons, many Papua New Guineans prefer peace ceremonies rather than a court of law to solve conflicts even in this advanced modern society.

A classic example is a recent peace ceremony that was held between Highlands Police Mobile Squads 05, 06 and 07 and their colleagues in the National Capital District (NCD) at McGregor Police Barracks in Port Moresby.

The background was that the three highlands-based police mobile squads flew to the NCD at the direction of the O'Neill-Namah regime at the height of the political impasse between Somare and O'Neill.

In an unrelated incident, the mobile squads assaulted members of an NCD highway patrol unit and their OIC Sergeant Paul Simon alleging they were carrying out private business.

The violence escalated existing enmity in the national capital among an already divided Royal PNG Constabulary.

After the incident and given the history of bad blood, reconciliation and peace between the two factions were not anticipated in the foreseeable future.

In fact, there was great fear the conflict would escalate into anarchy.

However, tradition triumphed and the undreamed harmony came sooner than expected thanks to the peace ceremony system and the peace initiators.

As reported in The National newspaper of 14 May 2012, at the peace ceremony the highlands mobile squads gave eight pigs and K10,000 cash to their NCD colleagues.

In return, the NCD police gave four pigs, one cow and 80 cartons of soft drinks to the highland’s mobile squads.

Giving credence to the peace making were the emotional words of remorse, apology, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace and unity from both sides.

NCD metropolitan commander Peter Guinness observed of the peace-making, “In my experience I have never seen anything like this. It's a dead issue and we must unite and operate as one police. We are sorry for what had happened.”

Group Sergeant Major Kelly Sombe of the highland’s mobile squads remorsefully apologised, “If you come to the highlands, we promise to give you the best treatment.”
Sombe was referring to the 300 NCD police that would be deployed in the highlands for the 2012 national election security operations.

“We are all brothers. We will be brothers and friends forever,” NCD Sergeant Paul Simon said in response. “From the bottom of our hearts we forgive you.”

And so, the conflict was resolved and peace prevailed there and then.

The PNG traditional code of conflict solution may have not been designed to handle serious and complex conflicts involving police, army, corporations or politicians.

However, time and again when the concept is tested it proves to be superior, equitable and timeless.

The case of the feuding police is yet another example and a milestone. The peace ceremony can be an equitable alternative mode of conflict resolution in PNG.
Remove carvings as a stepping stone to change

Francis Nii
15 December 2013

Those opponents of the removal of carvings and art work at the national parliament – an action directed by the Speaker Theo Zurenuoc - ignored two important facts in their opposition.

First, the national parliament is not a museum. The right place for the preservation of historical relics, carvings and all kinds of cultural heritage is in a museum and not the national parliament.

All the carvings being taken down can find their rightful place at the National Museum and Art Gallery which is nearby. No problem.

Parliament House is a modern structure based on modern political ideology and as such the structure and the face of it should be altered at any time to suit development and change.

In fact, the idea of removing all those ugly, scary, evil looking idols is not new.

It has been mooted by parliamentarians, civil society and Christians for some years and it so happens that the execution eventuated during the tenure of Speaker Zurenuoc. At least he had the guts to sanction the project.

Secondly, I wonder if anyone has seriously thought about the meaning of tambaran and its attachment to the national parliament. Tambaran is the Tok Pisin word for evil spirit or demon and all the bad connotations associated with it.

Why is the national parliament called Haus Tambaran – House of Evil Spirit? The national parliament is a noble and honourable institution that operates on Christian principles, or is supposed to be, and it should never be called Haus Tambaran.

The answer lies in those fierce carvings perceived to guard the entrance of Parliament House and parliament itself. It is those evil depictions that give us the description Haus Tambaran.

It is proper for the name Haus Tambaran and its associations to be uprooted and erased from the face of the parliament and in the minds of the people. The Speaker has done the right thing.

Papua New Guinea as an independent nation has declared its allegiance to the Jehovah God, the God of Israel, and the significance of this is manifested in the preamble to the Constitution and in the Constitution itself which is based on Christian principles.
The national parliament, the country’s most important institution, should depict Christianity from the entrance into the interior.

The entrance should have murals of archangels with swords in their hands guarding it and not all those fierce and scary idols.

They should be guarding the entrance of the National Museum and Art Gallery and not Parliament House.

Furthermore, the greatest teacher of all time, Jesus Christ, said of the power of spoken words: ‘You speak words and they will come to pass’.

We call the national parliament a house of evil and truly it is full of evil – extreme corruption. The evil will continue to reign if we do not do something about it. What the Speaker is doing is right.

Of course, we all want our leaders to change their attitude and mindset to God-fearing and accountable in managing the affairs of the country.

However, changing the attitude and mindset of our leaders directly is not so easy and even a small project such as this can be a stepping stone towards evoking changes and making difference.

DISCUSSION

Francis’s articles frequently drew a sizeable response from readers and they would often trigger passionate and even heated debate. These discussions were frequently dynamic and insightful in what they revealed about the Papua New Guinean character and educated opinion on contemporary issues. In the light of events, Francis’s judgement was not always shown to be perfect – but more often than not it was. Perhaps not in this case, though…. - KJ

Edward Moki

I am shocked that in developed countries around the world, there would be such respect for our products of the past and in our country, people look at these same artifacts with such disrespect. From an outsider’s perspective we appear to be coconuts, white on the inside, black on the outside, ashamed of our past, and hoping to become the perfect coconuts.

People who are not proud of their culture look like copycats. No one respects copycats like they respect those who are proud of their
past and use their culture as a source of strength, like the roots of a mango tree. I cringe when I see our leaders today trying to dress like white businessmen and failing miserably at it. They wear the wrong colour shoes, they don't use the right colour coordination, and their copycatting results in a painfully inferior look.

That's what ends up happening. You can't copy another culture and if you try to create a new national culture, you end up copycatting other cultures and fall in the trap again. We will never be like westerners no matter how hard we try. We will only be laughed at by the world for our efforts. But those parliamentary carvings, no outsider ever laughed at them. They showed us to (once) be a proud people in a proud, newly independent nation. How pathetically we have changed.

*From David Wall*

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. There are many people who find the carvings in the national parliament beautiful, and their opinion should be respected.

*From Michael Dom*

I am disappointed that you think this way, Francis. No matter their long words, lengthy essays or pulpit preaching, The Desecrators and their supporters have committed a crime against this nation; past, present and future. What a sad a misguided Christianity. Is it any wonder they fight a losing battle and need to import prayer warriors?

By the way, why are angels always Caucasian? How brainwashed we are. Hah! Whenever the real Satan comes to us, he will be beautiful, have no doubt. Give me back my ugly carvings! Oh, I forget, none of our current leaders have the skill, knowledge or talent to do that. Theo's action is like someone taking your unduplicated original manuscripts and burning them to ashes in front of your sick bed. Think again friend.

*From Trevor Freestone*

It is one thing to remove the carvings but another thing to destroy them as the Speaker has. Not everyone in PNG is truly Christian. Many say they are but do so because it avoids conflict with the church. Deep down within their hearts they still treasure their customary beliefs.
Then there are those Christians who outwardly declare themselves to be Christians then inwardly behave in a manner which is anything but Christian. The carvings are a historical reminder of the wonderful culture and skills of past Papua New Guineans and need to be preserved in a museum at least.

Christians need to be Christian. Stop being corrupt and selfish and be like Jesus and help the poor. Put the villagers’ needs first that is why you have a parliament with the power to improve everyone's living conditions. It's not the images that are the problem, it’s the behaviour of those inside the parliament that could be PNG's downfall.

*From Robert Puyu*

Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare has seemingly been upset and calling for the sacking of Speaker Theo Zurenuoc for the ‘crime’ of vandalising carvings. Here is another great political leader not walking the talk. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare had all opportunity to fight against corruption but allowed his cabinet members to get away right under his watch as a Prime Minister.

Fellow Papua New Guineans having no basic health care in the parts of Western and Gulf provinces or remote villages of Highlands were not a great concern. Millions of kina was mismanaged and stolen by corrupt individuals must not have been an issue. With all due respect, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare did not take any form of stand while the prime minister of this country. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), PNG has the worst health status in the Pacific region and ranks 153rd of 187 countries on the UN’s Human Development Index, worse than Bangladesh and Myanmar.

But again, we see another political leader willing to make a strong call for the removal and partial destruction of carved heads and parts of totem poles. I wish when Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare was Prime Minister that he would have been so upset and passionate against corruption that he could have set the example. Did our Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare go into a deep sleep and then just awaken only to see the ‘crime’ of the vandalism of the carvings that requires the sacking of the Speaker.
From Winifred Kamit

I love our national parliament because it is unique. It is like no other. The PNG cultural legacy captured in the artwork makes it so very special. These objects define our culture, our traditions and our people in a country of different tribes and languages. It makes me so proud!

I am a Christian (not a perfect one), but I have never felt my faith was at risk with the parliament so beautifully adorned as it is (was) in what represents our past heritage. It is truly sad that we are about denying ourselves, our PNG spirit and things PNG to be ‘modern’, and supposedly in the name of Christianity.

From Mathias Kin

So, since the destruction of the carvings, have we eliminated corruption from parliament? Are we doing better? In reality we are worse off now than we were before the destruction. It’s like jumping from the frying pan into the fire. Look at it. Our Simbu singsing bilas may be evil too. They look very messy and inconvenient, and of course they are 1,000 years old? Our facial paintings are scary to some.

If someone like Zurenuoc is worried about these carvings, their faith in Jesus Christ the Lord is not strong. As believers, you should be able to digest Christian ideologies and discard non-Christian issues. Not destroy them. Christian country? I am not too sure about that now. And our Parliament House is not called a haus tambaran.

From Zuleika Winfrey

Francis Nii, if the Speaker was a man of faith, he would not be intimidated by those carvings. Our leaders must NOT force their religious views upon people. God was in PNG before Loujaya Kouza MP went looking for Him in Israel. Theo Zurenuoc was NOT mandated by the people to stab wooden carvings.

From Michael Dom

I don't think tambaran means ‘evil’ spirits. Someone from Sepik may know better, but my understanding was that haus tambaran is a term provided by early missionaries to describe the house where ancestral
spirits in the form of carved representations were kept. A man had to be initiated to be able to contend with these spirits. Akin to baptism and confirmation methinks. The notion that these spirits are necessarily evil may be entirely concocted by ignorant fools.

In the traditional mind there was belief in beings that were not of this world, could not be understood and were felt to be responsible for unexplainable phenomenon. Westernised Papua New Guineans call these beings ‘spirits’ and prescribe carvings as being non-human and terrifying. Ofcourse, the carvings would look non-human when we represent beings that are not of this world. Ofcourse, they would look terrifying when people could not understand the natural phenomenon that surrounded them, and literally lived in the dark with only fire light.

I grow weary of reading articles defending Theo's actions, which were simply inexcusable. We have lost something great about us.

*From Francis Nii*

There is nowhere else in PNG you find a haus tambaran except in the Sepik, mainly in the east. It is where the good and evil spirits of the Sepiks, represented in the form of carvings, are worshipped and sacrifices and initiations are performed strictly in adherence to rules or else the curses of the evil spirit befall the people. To the rest of common Papua New Guineans, tambaran is an evil spirit and it should not be lurking in the Parliament House that belongs to the 21 provinces of PNG.

*From Fr Giorgio Licini*

My personal suggestion. Take what happened in parliament as a blessing in disguise and try to push ahead with a healthy and open sharing to make sure that all the good of the past is kept and all the evil is relinquished. As time goes on and the debate widens, one has to admit that the barbarian-style destruction of the carvings was unfortunate and unilateral.

A lot of soul searching, however, seems to be needed as far as social, psychological, religious beliefs are concerned. Ancestral feelings are still quite alive. Distinguishing between them and pure work of art doesn't appear to be easy exercise. In Europe as well a lot of old cultural and religious symbols were destroyed over the centuries
because of true or supposed incompatibility with the new times, beliefs and sensitivities.

From Paul Yabob

Francis, you are against religious fundamentalism, the ferment of perpetual discord all over the world today and throughout history, are you not? Come, come, Francis you are an intelligent Simbu, are you not? Did you see Satan or Baal creeping under the shadow of the tall carved statue foaming and frothing at its mouth, or lying beneath the lintel uttering all manner of gibberish till its horns were shiny red? Did you or the Speaker hush walk upon the congregation of demons worshipping the traditional carvings by the buildings divide?

Have you looked into the eyes of the Speaker lately and seen the demon of a grotesque figure looking back at you, a mere reflection of the figure looming large behind you? And the singing of the congregation you heard. The repetitive chanting. The shouting of strange Arabic or Aramaic words in between the slaying of the spirit, and the laughter, strange laughter, and the clapping. Are you sure they were demons at worship of their master Satan at one of their annual feasts, right there in our Parliament House?

Are you sure the Master Wizard and the Mistress Witch are not MPs simply waylaid? And the singing congregation not a student fellowship group also waylaying themselves? Hallelujah Brother! Praise the Lord! Burn the parliament down! For the spirit world has also come to inhabit the inanimate. Be careful o wise man of Simbu. Don't let your mind play tricks on you and deny your own existence. Next time you pray, ask God why he didn't create you a Jew.

While we at it, ask God who is the real demon making money behind the desecration. Is it not L&A Brick Layers? Ask how much was the contract? K20 million? Try K40 million. Check if it was tendered. Also check why are so many MPs suddenly supporting the desecration? Perhaps the PM has something to do with it? Next time ask God who the real demon is in parliament. God knows the truth. He will tell you. After all your name is Francis!
From Corney Koroka Alone

How about the specific characterisation “as living spirits”? And are they good spirits or ancestral unholy spirits relied upon to achieve one's interest? In what context were those labels applied?

From Michael Dom

Corney, they are our spirits.

From Francis Nii

Paul, do you know where most or all of the carvings originated from and how the patron identifies them? They are from Murik and the patron calls them “living spirits with fixed abodes” as Corney has pointed out. You may have been too westernised to think otherwise but what is that supposed to mean according to the patron? The spirits had lived their time and served their purpose and it's time for them to return to their original habitat or else imprisoned them at the National Museum.

From James Kalapi

You cowardly mashed potatoes of humanity! How dare you call yourselves Papua New Guinean! You of no past and of no particular future! You of no fixed destination! How dare you waste this space and time! Even the water in the coconut can boast new life!

I fear for you lot. Ready to give away what God has given you for that which you cannot readily touch feel or define. What is wrong about what God has given you? What is wrong with God’s creation? Is God a Jew? What if he was Melanesian! Then what?

From Frank K. Daosak

Paul, no need to be personal in your comments against Francis. In one breath you are against the removal of the carvings and in another you mention the lucrative contract for their removal. So, which is of more importance to you, the removal of the wooden carvings (that frankly do not bother the majority of the country who are non-Sepik)
or the wanton stealing of public monies through shady corrupt contracts?

From David Gonol

Francis, I totally agree with you. You have set out everything in detail. You have addressed both spiritual and physical aspects of the issue. Your conclusion is absolutely splendid. You will be criticised by those who walk by sight on the grounds of culture, but those who walk by faith will surely appreciate your article. God bless you Francis.

From Cara Borcherds

Yes, parliament is not a museum, it is the House of the People and it should well reflect something of the people who are represented by their members. It needs an identity. I don't believe these carvings are overdone, they represent the people of PNG and if they are to be removed, they should be preserved and not destroyed. Keeping them intact should now be a priority.

With all this media attention they can certainly be used as a drawcard. I would like to view them up close and will take the opportunity next time I visit Port Moresby to do this if I can. Maybe the National Museum and other authorities can step in and assist remove these carvings in a manner which can preserve them.

From Francis Nii

Thank you, David. I am glad you have an exact understanding of the entire content of my article. If only all the opponents understood the article in the same way as you, our arguments would have been healthy and without unnecessary and irrelevant personal attacks and inferences. Anyway, such are the perils of public debate and commentary that we have to cope with.

From Jack Klomes

It saddens me to realise Francis Nii’s shallow understanding and appreciation of the origins of the name haus tambaran. Tambaran is a Kuanua word referring to evil and haus is a German word referring to a building or a house. Now ask yourself why should a Kuanua and a
German word be used to describe a phenomenon found only in the Sepik? Go back and study your history na bai yu save.

Dear Mr Dom, Kuanua may be part of the state of PNG but not the nation of Abelam or Arapesh where the shape of our Parliament House was adapted from. Sepiks or, in this case, the Abelam and Arapesh do not speak Kuanua. The usage of a word belonging to a very different culture to describe something that is unique in a different culture, does it fully grasp the true meaning of the Kwarambu/Kalabu?

Yeah, I know, the colonialists were responsible for coming up with that name due to their own shallow understanding. My point is that for fellow Papua New Guineans to use the literal meaning of the name haus tambaran as a reason or pretext to label the house as evil is somewhat incongruous. It is an insult to the Abelam and the Arapesh people.

From Dale Digori

Mr Nii, could you please be more specific. Where specifically in the preamble of the PNG Constitution does it state that we're a “Christian country”? I’d really like to read that. And also, section three of the fifth National Goal and Directive Principle in the Constitution - Papua New Guinea Ways, clearly states that we are to recognise, respect and appreciate our traditions and culture. Destroying these artifacts then, to a certain extent is in direct defiance of our mama law.

Personally, I don't think destroying or removing the design and the artifacts will make much difference. Let's not go on blaming wooden objects for all the corruption and what-not this country grapples with when we all know who the real tambarans are!

From Michael Dom

There are no useful arguments for this crime against the nation and the culprit is glorified. It’s sad that the Abelam and Arapesh feel insulted by the use of Kuanua to describe their building design. My friends in the UK and elsewhere are saying how unique and fascinating is the haus nickname and decor. Like I said, losing the carvings is only an indication that we've already lost something special about PNG. So much for unity in diversity.
The rituals and rules of tribal warfare and rugby
Francis Nii
02 January 2015

Before the influence of western culture, life in Papua New Guinea revolved around traditional customs developed to protect, govern and foster the survival of the clan.

Many practices that had economic value and social benefit survived the onset of Westernisation and remain to this day. One of these concerns the rites and rules of tribal warfare.

Tribal war has been common in my village of Yobai in the Salt Nomane area of Simbu Province.

I was told by my father that it was part of the way of life since our ancestors first settled the area, and archaeologists tell us this was many thousands of years ago.

The most recent fight in Yobai in 2012 was related to national elections. Two men were killed and property worth thousands of kina destroyed. However, this was not as bad as a 2007 election-related fight that cost five lives and also destroyed much property.

The rituals and regulations of tribal war have been part of the sages’ knowledge passed on through the generations. All males, including me, have grown up with them. They are one of the strongest skul tok in the hausman [ancestral learnings of the men’s house].

Tribal war is a way of solving contentious conflict or crime that people reckon is worth nothing less than taking a life as payback. Rape and murder are examples.

Before fighting starts, however, war must be decreed.

The clan chiefs investigate and determine the person or people involved and the nature of the conflict or crime. If the incident warrants a fight, the chief will ask the person affected or one of his relatives, a man of substance, to declare war in front of clan members before the fighting begins.

This declaration involves two rituals. First the affected person brings a pig before the chiefs, smashing its head with a piece of wood and spilling the blood on the ground.

Then, with cassowary feathers on his head and face painted black with charcoal, the man swings his axe in the air as he dances around declaring war.

He will chant something like, “Men of the clan, today I bring war into your hands and I urge you to go and fight. Go and fight!”
The clansmen respond by shouting the war cry (accompanied these days by gunfire) and the war begins.

There are three fundamental parts of these rituals. First, after the war is over, the costs of the fight, such as loss of life and property, must be compensated by the initiator assisted by his relatives and friends. By declaring war, the initiator and his family agree to that responsibility.

Secondly, the initiator and his male relatives must take the lead in all fighting engagements. So, they also must agree to that.

Thirdly, there is a belief that spilling blood will improve the fighting, meaning there will be less damage to their side and more to the enemy, including killings.

So, the decision to go to war rests with the person involved in the conflict. If he says no to a fight, then the clan has to find other ways to solve the conflict, for example by taking it to the District Court.

If the clan defies the affected person and decides to go to war anyway, the man will not be responsible for compensation. Moreover, it is believed there will be more casualties.

It can also be the case that the troublemaker’s side attacks first. He would also have met with his male relatives and decided whether to go to war. And he would have promptly let the chiefs know.

There are core rules that govern tribal war and there are many more don’ts than dos taught by the sages, themselves veterans of many wars.

I remember grandfather and others lecturing us in the hausman:

“You young men of today never follow our ancestral rules of war. You think they are obsolete and you do it the way you like. That’s why you will die unnecessarily at the hands of the enemy.

“Even if you are observing some distance away from the battlefield, the arrows will still smell you and track you down,” the chiefs would say.

“If you strictly follow the rules, you will become champions. You will be at the forefront and miss the enemy’s arrows. The enemy will get scared of you and run away.

“If you are wounded, you will not die. The wound will be less painful and you will get well.

“That’s why we say you must listen to us and learn. We have been through it and we know what we are talking about.

“If you have physical contact with your wife, like kissing, you must stay back within the boundaries of the village. Do not go out and fight.
Do not even go close to the fighting zone to observe. The enemy’s arrow will track you down.

“If you sleep with your wife, it is a death warrant. Never ever go out of the men’s house. Sleep here all day.

“If you have contact with your wife and get wounded, you must let us know immediately.

“We will order your wife to cut her pubic hair. We will burn the hair, collect the ashes, mix them with some herbs and give them to you and you will eat it and get well.

“There is no other medicine that will make you well. Your wife’s pubic hair is the only medicine,” the elders would stress.

The belief is that the body odour of a woman is so powerful that it will attract the enemy’s weapons to the man who has had physical contact with her.

If a man touches a woman, he is not allowed at the battle field until the next day.

If a man kisses a woman, he must stay in the village for two or three days and then he can fight.

If a man sleeps with his wife, it’s a death warrant according to custom. He must not go out of the hausman. He must stay in the village for a week before he goes to fight.

If he breaks the rule and goes anywhere near the fighting zone, it is believed the bullet or arrow will kill him, tracking him down as if it is controlled by radar.

Other rules are that men are not allowed to receive food directly from their wife’s hand. The wives must leave the food in front of the men’s house and go away and the husband will pick it up later.

Men are not allowed to hug or even touch babies and children before going to war. If he does, he must remain at home until the next day.

Touching and feeding pigs are not allowed. Not even touching a pig’s rope. If a man does, he must not go to war. If he is defiant, the custom has it that the bullets will find him.

If a man gets wounded because he touched or fed his pig, that pig must be slaughtered immediately, cooked and eaten or else the wound will eventually kill him.

If a man eats animal meat he must not fight. If he disobeys, an arrow or bullet will enter his mouth.
Even the words one utters during tribal fights are scrutinised. Statements like “go and fight and get killed” are strictly not allowed because people believe that event will happen exactly as stated.

The whole customary array may sound absurd to foreigners but they work for my people.

I once watched a tribal fight and somehow an arrow landed in the neck of a man named Yoriwa who was also observing some distance away. He died on the way back to the village.

The wife cried and confessed in her dirges that he slept with her the night before and she warned him not to go near the fighting zone but he disobeyed.

On another occasion, a young man named Sipa received pellet wounds to his stomach. The local surgeons operated on him and removed the pellets but he bled profusely and was in great pain.

After meeting with the surgeons, the sages reckoned the wound was superficial and the man should not have been bleeding so much.

They questioned him and he admitted he had hugged and kissed his girlfriend the night before the fight. The chiefs ordered the man to be given the pubic herb potion. He ate it and got well.

The same principles are applied to sports like rugby league that involve heavy body contact.

I don’t know about Australia, New Zealand and other rugby playing nations, but in Papua New Guinea rugby players are not allowed to sleep with their wife or girlfriend before the game.

If one does, he will become the rotten apple in the team. He may even sustain serious injuries to his body and guess what therapy he gets? It’s not the herbal potion.
How my faith in an old custom worked

Francis Nii
15 November 2017

Some old customs can be just as effective today if we strongly believe them and put them into practice.

I had just arrived at the office from one of my regular cocoa development field work visits in the northern Gazelle area of East New Britain Province.

John Tebin had already cleaned the office and was waiting for me when I arrived. John, from East Sepik, was the office cleaner and teaboy.

I rushed into the office to drop off my brief case full of farmers’ files and head for home.

As soon as I reached my desk, a bombshell that had been waiting for me the whole day blew up, tearing my mind to shreds. The briefcase dropped from my grip and I sank into a chair like a drunkard.

John was immediately at my side. “I am so sorry about the news, Wara,” he said in an attempt to comfort me. It was then I realised all the staff knew the story.

The bombshell came from the might of a pen stroke on the sheet of A4 lying on my desk. It was a message from my cousin Bony Kaupa back home in Kundiawa which had been transcribed by Winnie, the branch manager’s secretary.

“A call came from Kundiawa this morning,” it read, “that your mother Erkina had died. You are wanted back home immediately. Message came from your brother Bony Kaupa.” Winnie had signed her name.

Winnie was the only authorised person to receive incoming calls on the subscriber trunk line. There were no mobile phones back then.

I had not seen my mother and father in the four years since I had started working in the Rural Development Bank’s Rabaul branch. I was deeply aggrieved. My being was paralysed and tears fell freely from my eyes.

In the midst of my grief, I picked up the paper and looked at it again, closely digesting every single word. Surprisingly, I felt a kind of hidden peace spring up in me. The grief vanished and the tears stopped.
My mind was preoccupied with the message as I reached home, a rented flat near Rabaul Market where I lived with my wife Cathy and daughter Cheryl. They were watching television.

I had a shower, ate my dinner and went to sleep.

In the morning, I went to the office early and waited for the manager.

As soon as he arrived, I showed him the note from Winnie and requested plane tickets Rabaul-Port Moresby-Kundiawa and return and some advance money.

He approved and in an hour the plane tickets and the money were ready.

Two hours later I was airborne courtesy of Air Niugini heading for Port Moresby via Nadzab.

The worst thing I did was not tell my wife about the death of her mother in-law and not taking her with me for the haus krai [wake], breaking one of the very important customary tenets for which she would never forgive me. Nor did I take her and my little girl with me.

Around three o’clock the plane arrived at Jacksons Airport. I hadn’t brought luggage so I didn’t waste time. I walked straight out of the terminal, got a taxi and went to Two Mile Hill Settlement near Hugo’s Building where my relatives live.

My uncles and aunties were there. I expected them to cry for me because my mother had died. It is our custom to grieve and show sorrow for the loss of a relative.

But no one cried. They greeted me normally. Maybe they don’t know, I thought. I decided not to tell them.

Early next day, I boarded Air Niugini’s Dash 7 aircraft bound for Kundiawa.

Just before midday I arrived.

I met some relatives in town but no one showed sorrow. They greeted me normally.

Some of them had just arrived from my village but I decided not to ask them about my mother. I got on a PMV [public motor vehicle] bound for Salt Nomane.

Late in the afternoon I arrived in my village, Diani. The first person I met was aunty Mariana, my father’s brother’s wife.

Mariana shouted my name and cried loudly. I hugged her but tears refused to come.
Mariana amidst her crying said, “Kina was right here but she left for Yobai (our other home on the mountain)”, and she started calling my mother, Erkina.

It wasn’t a surprise. I already knew the dead would be alive before I left Rabaul.

My mother was not so far away so she heard Mariana’s call and called back.

Mariana yelled repeatedly, “Prans is here, come back”.

My mother rushed back crying and we hugged each other. At that very instant, I felt tears streaming down my cheeks. Tears of joy.

“Where is Daddy?” I asked.

“Your Daddy went to Koge yesterday with other people to receive bride price payment for one of our daughters who got married there,” Mum replied.

Koge is in Sinesine and far away, a day’s walk from Yobai.

I really wanted to see my father but it was impossible.

I felt bad that I was going to go back to Rabaul without seeing him but there was nothing I could do.

I gave some money to my aunty and instructed Mum, “You pack your clothes in the night. Early in the morning wait for me at the PMV stop.”

Then I went and slept on my father’s bed in the men’s house.

Early in the morning I met Mum waiting for me at the rendezvous spot. We got on the first PMV leaving for Kundiawa.

As soon as we reached town, we went to the Air Niugini office and registered our tickets for next day’s Port Moresby’s flight.

Around three the next afternoon, Erkina and I disembarked the Dash 7 at Jackson’s Airport.

We walked into the Gateway Hotel, booked two adjoining rooms towards the western side, one for Mum and the other for me.

I led Erkina to her room and orientated her to all the facilities. I told her I would get her for dinner and switched on the TV and went to my room.

I stretched out on the bed, not realising how tired I was until that moment. I was fast asleep when the alarm on my wristwatch triggered and I woke up. It was dinner time.

After a quick shower, I went to collect Mum for dinner. I knocked on the door and there was no answer.
I turned the door knob and the door opened. I went inside and Mum was not there. I checked the toilet and the shower and there was no sign anyone had used them.

I looked for her outside the car park and there was no sign of her.

I went back to her room. It was cold and unnerving.

I thought, was my mother really dead and the person I came with was her spirit? Goose bumps rose and I felt afraid. I locked the door and rushed to the bus stop.

I saw a taxi and I waved it down. We fought through the afternoon rush hour traffic and eventually made it to Two Mile Hill.

To my surprise, my mother was sitting on the side of the road surrounded by our relatives. They were chewing betel nut and chatting.

“How dare you not tell me and just disappear like you were in the village?” I scolded Mum.

“You expected me to be lonely and miserable in that big room like I had no relatives to talk to,” Mum retorted.

“Suit yourself but I want you to be at the airport by 11 am. We are taking the 12 o’clock flight.”

“Don’t worry, John will bring me there,” Mum replied proudly.

John is my uncle and he was driving a PMV bus at that time.

Mum had left the hotel and gone to the road looking for betel nut when John spotted her from his bus and took her to Two Mile without informing me.

I rushed back to the hotel for dinner with one of my cousins. We arrived just before the restaurant closed.

I told my cousin to sleep in the other room which I had already paid for.

Around noon next day, Mum and I left Port Moresby aboard Air Niugini’s Fokker 100 bound for Rabaul.

After a short stopover at Nadzab, we arrived at Matupit Airport just before sunset.

We caught a PMV which dropped us off at Rabaul Market.

“You see that brick house with the blue paint,” I pointed at the rented duplex. Yes, said my mother.

“There are two doors. You go first and knock at the one on your left. You will see a familiar face there. I will follow you later,” and I watched.

Mum went and knocked on the door, which opened and immediately shut. After a short time, it opened again and there was
much hugging and crying. While this happened, I sneaked into the house.

After they stopped crying, Cathy and Cheryl burst into laughter.
“What’s funny?” I asked.

They couldn’t control themselves. They laughed their hearts out.
“Our neighbour told us that Mamma died and you went to bury her. So, we didn’t expect her to be alive and come here.

“When she stood at the door alone, we got so scared. We thought it was her spirit so we locked the door and ran into the bedroom. But she cried out loud so we realised it was her,” Cathy explained.

“You see this stick. This was meant for breaking your head but lucky Mamma is alive and you brought her,” Cathy said.

Wow, it was a branch of a rain tree. “I believed Mum was alive,” I said, “so I went to bring her. Had I believed she was dead; I would have brought you and Cheryl with me.”

“How did you know Mamma was alive?”

“In my custom, if someone dies and an immediate family member is in a faraway place, we are not allowed to tell him or her directly that his or her father, mother, sister or brother is dead.

“The custom commands that we tell him or her that the relative is sick and is in a critical condition so you must come home immediately and see him or her before anything happens.

“The reason for not telling directly is to avoid them committing suicide or harming themselves.

“After I read the message carefully, I understood what it meant. So, I went to bring Mum and she is here.”

Cathy concurred that my belief in the old custom was justified.

It also saved money. Otherwise we would have all gone home unnecessarily.
“Given my physical condition, I rely heavily on two things to do my writing and they are a reliable mobile phone and a PC. When I have these two, I am complete. The world is in my hand. When one is missing, I am disabled.”
POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Francis Nii in 2015
Once the political impasse and the related cases that are currently before the Supreme Court are disposed of, the next step towards reunification and restoration is a grand reconciliation and peace ceremony.

It’s only three months before Papua New Guineans will go to the polls in June to elect new members of parliament. By August PNG will have a new government and a new prime minister.

Pathetically, the people of PNG will be going to the polls in confusion and uncertainty about what the future holds for the country given that the animosity born out of the impasse of two self-proclaiming prime ministers (and governments) still hangs in the air.

Even if the entire stalemate is settled by the court, it will not necessarily mean the divisions and enmities that arose between the Michael Somare and the Peter O’Neill camps will have evaporated.

This is unlikely to occur as not everyone affected by the impasse will become a winner in the court’s reckoning.

Moreover, prominent personalities who have reached the top echelons of the judiciary, security forces and public service through sheer hard work have all been dragged through the political mud.

They and their families have suffered a great deal of pain. Although the court settlement will bring relief, the trauma and acrimony will not be easily undone. It will linger and could become the impetus for repercussions.

Thus, a physical reconciliation marking restoration will be the next best step after the court’s determination.

Whether Somare and O’Neill will be returned as leader in the election, for the benefit of the nation reconciliation and reunification should proceed as part of the restoration process.

There must be genuine and lasting reconciliation, reunification and renewal of the main parties to the impasse, namely the judiciary, the armed forces and the public service.

Somare, Abal, Agiru, Amet, O’Neill, Nama, Nape, Marat and others must take the lead even if none of them retains his seat in the election.

I believe PNG’s traditional way of making peace is one of the best customs in the world.
The aggrieved parties come together covered in mud and exchange animals domesticated and wild, foods of all kinds, crafts and artefacts like *bilums* [string bags] along with an amount of cash.

This is preceded by heart-moving words of forgiveness, reconciliation, reunification and friendship from the chiefs and the leaders of both sides that move the crowd to tears. It is the best.

It gives material meaning to reconciliation, reunification and restoration ahead of mere abstraction. The process has been tested and proven to be effective in solving conflicts around PNG and it is the way to put PNG back on track in this case.

It is also the best way for our leaders especially Grand Chief Somare to restore the loss of their credibility and prestige and move on in life with their heads up.

“Ordinary Papua New Guineans are never happy when high profile corruption involving millions of kina does not see justice being meted out.”
It was fear that destroyed O’Neill and Namah
Francis Nii
16 April 2012

Peter O’Neill and Belden Namah, prime minister and deputy respectively, in fear of losing their grip on power have not only destroyed the regime they moulded but muddied their personal credibility and popularity.

When the O’Neill-Namah led camp wrested power from the Somare regime on 2 August last year, the whole nation rejoiced.

The change of government came at a time when the masses were feeling the pain of rampant corruption, mismanagement, deteriorating public infrastructure, declining services and escalating lawlessness.

Christians throughout the nation were up in arms, fervently praying for a change of government. When the change came about, the masses triumphantly proclaimed that God had answered their cries and prayers.

The popularity of O’Neill and Namah soared sky high as they swiftly tackled corruption head on by setting up Task Force Sweep. And introduced free education and free health care. Their political future looked rosy.

As far as the people observed, believed and professed, these two leaders were poised to lift their fame and power to a new height come the June elections.

However, they failed to embrace this golden opportunity. They destroyed their popularity and credibility as fast as they had gained it.

Had they wisdom and foresight and allowed Somare to assume the office of prime minister as the Supreme Court ruled in November last year, the whole nation would have revolted against Somare and brought down his regime.

The stage was set for that to eventuate. Somare would not have had the numbers to run the government and O’Neill and Namah would have prevailed, if not in the current parliamentary term, most certainly in the coming one.

Instead O’Neill and Namah were so hell-bent on gripping power – even for a very brief period before an election they would surely have won - that their worst enemy was not the judiciary nor Somare and his camp.

It was their own fear of losing their grip on power.
Their controversial Judicial Conduct Act was a fear-driven legal weapon of convenience devised to indirectly intimidate and influence the outcome of the political impasse case in the courts.

In introducing the legislation, they triggered suspicion and animosity, not so much between the legislature and the judiciary as institutions but personally between O'Neill, Namah, Marat and Injia-Kiriwom and other leaders.

Moreover, O'Neill and Namah not only destroyed the government they had built but poisoned their chances of becoming prime minister at the June poll.

Their actions, or rather those of the regime they commanded, the enactment of the controversial Judicial Conduct Act and the controversy surrounding election dates have not gone down well with the masses. They raised fear and suspicion in the minds of ordinary citizens.

Time is not in O'Neill and Namah’s favour to enable them to correct these mistakes, particularly repealing the Judicial Conduct Act. Even if they try, they may not be able to muster the numbers as other parties within the coalition are also eyeing the prime ministership.

These parties would want O'Neill and Namah to be tainted in the minds of the people before the election.

Any course of action they take to regain their popularity in the few remaining weeks before polling is most likely to set the coalition parties on a collision course.

The clash between Speaker Nape and O'Neill over the date of issue of writs for the election and the departure of ministers Bob Danaya and Ken Fairweather have confirmed the speculation of a rift in the O’Neill-Namah regime.

We hope to see more renegades as MPs attempt to distance themselves from the current political mud in the hope of winning voters’ trust and approval.

This leaves the top job in the open and the most likely contenders after the poll are the Melanesian Alliance's Powes Parkop and THE Party’s Don Polye.

O’Neill and Namah will have to work extra harder to secure enough numbers if they want to be in the race for the top jobs after June.
It takes courage and boldness for a politician to meet people face to face and answer their questions about the hottest issues.

In district development matters, such political gatherings may well address the spending of district services improvement funds. Tough stuff.

Last month, philanthropist-cum politician Kelly Naru made history by decreeing Wednesday as people’s day.

He set aside Wednesday for the people of Morobe Province to have face to face dialogue with him on development issues affecting community and province.

This is the very thing almost every politician in Papua New Guinea is so fearful of – regular meetings with the people to account for performance.

So, on the designated Wednesday in November, Naru met with his voters at the provincial government headquarters in Lae.

They attended at his invitation and he listened and discussed their problems and issues for more than two hours.

Now whether Naru will continue to honour this commitment is a different matter. But that he took this initiative at all is history and transparency in the making.

Since self-government in 1973, no politician has included a public forum with the people as a task in their weekly, monthly or even yearly program.

This was the first time a politician had encouraged public dialogue. Naru should be applauded for the courageous undertaking because he not only faces supporters but also the deprecating rhetoric of rivals.

Public dissemination and consumption of information and decisions based on collective views are vital development tools in any democracy.

Information can empower the masses to become proactive and make meaningful contributions to the development of their community and province. It can also induce a transparent, free and fearless environment in which the leaders can operate.

What the governor of Morobe has done is what all politicians are supposed to do.

However, the sad reality is that, when candidates are given a mandate by the people, instantly their world changes.
They don’t walk the tracks they used to walk before. They run behind dark glasses.

They don’t eat from the fires they ate from before. They eat from fires with no flames and no smell of smoke.

They don’t live in the homes they used to live in before. Nobody knows where they live except their briefcase-carriers, sidekicks and venal mercenaries.

With the exception of very few MPs, they operate in seclusion away from public participation and scrutiny.

They are scared of facing their people and giving reports of their conduct of corrupt deals and misappropriations.

The only time a politician meets the people and eats with them from the same mumu pit is at a campaign party as an election loom. This is where the crafty rhetoric is preached and the credulous are misled.

The Morobe governor has challenged this culture and set a precedent. Only time will speak for its success and sustainability. Meanwhile, good luck, Kelly Naru.
Rationality required on Bougainville issue
Francis Nii
17 June 2013

Apparently, there is a lot of misunderstanding, confusion and misconception, especially among Bougainvilleans, on the factors that were the impetus for the Panguna copper mine conflict that caused the Bougainville crisis of the 1990s.

It is imperative that there must be more education on the fundamental factors that triggered resentment and the subsequent crisis if there is to be better understanding, unity and progress.

Let me clarify my stance from the outset. I am not condoning the Bougainville crisis or its aftermath. I do not wish to interfere with the dreams and aspirations of Bougainvilleans.

But I am mindful that while wounds heal and memories fade, scars remain.

However, for a harmonious, balanced and non-aggravating history on the crisis for Bougainvilleans or other Papua New Guineans who know nothing about it or were born afterwards, the onus is on us to set the record straight without the biased influence of egoistically indoctrinated ideologies.

This remark may be too harsh but I have got to be frank and realistic, for retrospective librettos have the power to make or break a nation. I recall the famous adage by Edward Bulwer-Lytton that “the pen is mightier than the sword”.

The Panguna deal was botched by everybody - the Papua New Guinea government including Bougainville members of the House of Assembly, the Australian government, so-called advisers and the Rio Tinto mining company.

This was mainly attributable to a number of unfavourable factors which became part of the nucleus of the crisis on the island.

First, the Panguna copper and gold mine was PNG’s first big mining project that came about at a time when we were just beginning to transit from stone age to modernisation.

Our leaders, including Bougainvillean members of the House of Assembly, literally had no experience and skills in mining ventures. They were shoved a raw deal by the mining giant Rio Tinto and its subsidiary Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL).

Secondly, the public service machinery in general did not have the experience or expertise to render sound advice to the government.
We did not have the qualified mining engineers and environmentalists and other experts we have today to make an independent assessment of BCL’s mining and environmental plans and advise the government effectively.

Thirdly, PNG needed money badly to develop a newly emerging country. As poor as we were at the time, Panguna was the golden opportunity that Konedobu could not allow to slip by.

Fourthly, the landowners, like our leaders and the rest of PNG, had little or no knowledge of the complexities. They were totally ignorant.

Fifthly, Rio Tinto, being one of the giants in the mining business with all its experience, clout and dominance, had the upper hand. The people of PNG including the landowners were given a raw deal by BCL.

Over the course of time, as PNG progressed and interacted with the outside world, and new knowledge and information became available to us, we came to realise the mistakes of our leaders. That’s when resentment began to brew.

Whether the calls for hefty compensation and political independence were rational, whether all avenues of negotiation had been exhausted before sabotage and murder began, I will not comment on to avoid digging old graves.

However, the pressure that built up over some years had to vent. It triumphed over sagacity - beginning with sabotage and the murder of innocent fellow Papua New Guineans.

This led to the eventual all-out war that saw brothers fighting against brothers and sisters against sisters.

No matter whether they were PNG Defence Force soldiers, members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, members of the police force, correctional service officers or resistance fighters, they were all Papua New Guineans fighting each other.

The conditions on the ground back then were not in favour of equitable bargaining or resolution and the consequences were tragic. In light of this, it is futile vanity to point fingers at people of any one region or ethnic group.

The Panguna experience places the PNG government and landowners of all other mines and fossil fuel projects in the country in a better position to strike equitable arrangements and will inform us in the future. This includes reopening the deal with BCL in Panguna.

Given these insights and the resultant resolution through the granting by the PNG government of autonomous status for PNG’s
island of Bougainville, what raison d’etre is there for emasculating the peace accord and propagating a sensationalised separation ideology?

“I recall the feeling the very first time I saw, felt and embraced the hard copy of my maiden work. It was heavenly awesome and I want others to experience that feeling.”
Betel nut is a health hazard and a source of filth, but it is also a potent force of political influence.

Economically, buai has become a commercial crop like coffee, cocoa or copra and is of significant market benefit.

In the domestic economy, buai creates a chain of employment for many people. Farmers employ people who harvest and bag the nut. Wholesalers employ truck and boat owners to transport the product to market.

Retailers employ other truck and taxi owners to transport the nut from wholesalers to sellers who are many and scattered in various locations. The nuts are then sold to consumers.

In the buai trade, one can hardly go wrong. Everybody knows the mark-up. At the end of the day, everybody profits.

This cash flow along the trading chain benefits many people: whether business houses or street vendors.

In the highlands, people buy buses and built houses with buai money.

The trade can also trigger violence. A number of highlanders have lost their lives in search of buai.

This small nut is a social, political and economic power house.

That’s why Governor Powes Parkop of the National Capital District has dug his own political grave as the result of his placing a total ban on buai.

The governor seemed to forget that bulk of the population that gave him the mandate to govern are ordinary grassroots people: farmers, taxi or PMV (public motor vehicle) owners, low income earners and street vendors, who in one way or the other rely on buai money to take care of their daily needs.

The good governor and his advisors have come to their senses lately and are already talking about relaxing the ban, but it is too late. The damage has been done. Many people have already been driven into hardship and suffering.

Even if he relaxes the ban in future, perhaps a few months before the 2017 national election, how can people trust him that he will not revisit the policy?
I won’t be surprise if the buai issue becomes a political platform for candidates challenging Parkop in the 2017 national elections.

And I will bet my last toea in favour of the candidate that promise to liberate the buai – one of them will succeed Parkop.

Mark my words, buai has the potential to swing political power come 2017.

FOOTNOTE
Governor Parkop saw the warning signs and relaxed the ban in time for him to retain his seat.

“"I prayed to the Lord God, the Author of my life, to simply take my life away. I refused to face the world in the completely different perspective of a man in a wheelchair. I just wanted to go away and be at peace in Heaven.”"
Advertisement supporting O’Neill was a decoy
Francis Nii
24 July 2014

It was a lustrous and paid-for advertisement about Peter O’Neill that appeared in The National newspaper of Monday 21 June.

It was political propaganda.

And it had been crafted to divert, mollify and defuse the focus of the nation on the possible impending arrest of the prime minister in relation to his alleged corrupt involvement in siphoning off K71.8 million public funds in the direction of Paul Paraka Lawyers.

The advertisement’s core argument, that political and administrative stability is “absolutely necessary” to achieve socio-economic prosperity, was a cunning decoy to distract the attention of the people away from the prime minister and what is now called Parakagate.

The blatant nature of the advertisement has led to the serious questions about the credibility of its author and the research that underpinned it.

Apparently, it was sponsored by O’Neill, or maybe the government, and it certainly seemed to have the intent of diverting people’s attention from the process of administering justice.

There were, it was claimed, 10,000 people interviewed by Michael Mell and his company Mell Research and Marketing Consultants to glean the opinions on which the research was based.

If true, this is a large number for any research project, itself a matter for interrogation.

Another important question concerns how representative of the population the research sample was, irrespective of its size.

And yet another concerns the impartiality of the questions.

Michael Mell confidently asserted in the advertisement that “Peter O’Neill [was the] best choice for Prime Minister 2012 - 2022”. Such claims from a supposedly independent opinion pollster leave a lot to be desired.

I would not like to think that Michael Mell was just another puppet dancing to the music of O’Neill in disrespect of his own integrity, intelligence and conscience.

It would also be interesting to know how much O’Neill pulled out of the public purse to solicit Michael Mell into producing this one-sided O’Neill extravaganza.
Using public funds on an ill-conceived and embellished advertisement could set a dangerous precedent.

But here’s my main point.

If Mell, O’Neill and their cohorts are in any doubt, I’d like to inform them that stability in government, public service and armed forces and high standards of social and economic well-being for the people is a trademark of – wait for it - zero tolerance of corruption.

This is the pillar of a country’s governmental and bureaucratic stability and advancement. Stability is the end result of zero corruption governance.

If we have a government full of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, definitely the country is doomed.

I have total confidence in our justice system regardless of how some of our leaders seem to scheme to evade justice.

No one is above the law. O’Neill himself has always preached this and it is true. The writing is on the wall and true justice will prevail.

No amount of research and newspaper advertising will change that.
Imagine you have genuine business to conduct with your provincial governor, the man that people like you have given a mandate to serve.

Say you want to follow up on the K100,000 he committed to your group’s community-based vegetable project under the special agriculture grant roll out.

The money has been budgeted but not released and the year is about to end.

Your group members are frustrated and pressure you as chairperson to personally meet the governor and collect the cheque.

You get up early one morning and walk up the mountain, along the valley and cross swamps for three hours fighting the chill and mosquito bites. Then you reach the nearest main road. You wait an hour for a PMV to arrive.

By the time you get to the provincial government headquarters, half the day has gone. You spend another two hours standing in a long queue, each person wanting to see the governor.

As you stand there, the atmosphere starts to get tense and eventually the people in front of you become rowdy.

The security guard and one of governor’s sidekicks at the entrance to the great man’s office are purporting to answer the people’s queries and then compelling them to go away.

The people are not satisfied with this. They are angry and want to force their way into the governor’s office.

The guards threaten to call the police if the people don’t leave immediately. Knowing what the police are like – brutality first; talk later - the people slowly and reluctantly leave, thoroughly dismayed.

Only a few, people who appear to be the governor’s acquaintances, are allowed in to see him.

By now you are thinking hard about how you will convince the guard and get in to see the governor. You feel more uneasy as you move closer to the top of the queue.

After what seems to be a million hours, your turn comes. The first question shoots at you like a missile: “What is it you want to see the governor about?”

The missile is delivered with a tone of power and authority that you did not expect. Your heart beats faster.
After a moment of silence, you give your reason.
“There is no money. Come back next year.”
“I want to see the governor,” you insist.
“I told you, there is no money. Are you deaf? Now get out and come back next year. Stop wasting our time.” It’s the sidekick.
“When exactly next year will I....?”
You haven’t finished your question and the guard shouts out to the next person who shoves his way to the front.
Feeling lost and disgusted, you take the slow steps like those who went before you.
“If only you knew where I come from....”
The thought sweeps back to swamp, mountain and mosquitoes. You are engulfed with feelings of sadness then anger and hatred.
You look to the sky and the grand old sun is about to perch on the western mountain top. You check your mobile phone and it is four o’clock. The thought of the long and gruelling journey home enervates your soul. Nevertheless, the journey has to be done, as you have no friend or wantok in this town.
You force your legs to stride to the PMV stop and get on the back of an old and battered Land Cruiser. You know the vehicle is a road menace but you risk the journey anyway because at this time of the day you have no choice.
Finally, you reach home around midnight, feeling sore, tired, hungry and disheartened.
Next morning happy group members gather at your house to welcome the K100,000 cheque from their honorable governor. Instead, to their dismay and detestation, you tell them the story. They feel sorry for you and hate the governor to their bones. Ol i kaikai tit the tok bai ol i lukim (mekim save) long taim bilong nnpla ileksen. [They grind their teeth and vow to get even at the next election.]
Have you ever come across stories like this? People who have genuine business matters to discuss with the governor or some other elected leader are handled by secretaries, security guards, drivers, tea boys, briefcase carriers and sidekicks.
People don’t go to the politician’s office to be seen by these ignorant and arrogant fools. They go with one thing in mind: to get an answer from the mouth of their mandated leader, be that answer negative or positive.
Only then will they be satisfied.
Instead the nincompoops guarding the door are the mouthpieces. They demand to know the reason to see the grand personage and, when they are told, they provide an answer as if they were the MP himself.

When people tell them that they are not satisfied and want to hear it from the MP’s own mouth, these lunatics say that they are telling them what the MP is going to tell them.

When the people insist, they are ordered out or simply ignored. In extreme cases, they are ushered to the gate which is shut in front of them.

This is real and happening all the time at Kondom Agaundo Building, the Simbu Provincial Government headquarters in Kundiawa. It is also happening elsewhere in our country.

The briefcase carriers or sidekicks think they are doing a great job. What they don’t realise is that they are destroying the MP who employ them.

Those same people who have given the politician the mandate return home with anger and hatred. This will not be forgotten at the time of the next election.

Papua New Guinea has a high turnover of politicians at each election. And this is one of the reasons that contribute to their downfall.

It’s up to the politicians to ensure their electoral staff facilitate the process of accountability and answerability to the voters, not trash it.

FOOTNOTE
The then Simbu governor, Noah Kool, lost his seat at the 2017 election.
At a recent public forum held in Kundiawa and attended by over 6,000 people, the people of Simbu called upon Prime Minister Peter O’Neill to resign.

The forum, jointly organised by university students and Voice of Simbu led by Mathias Kin, was to inform the people of Simbu and make them aware of how Peter O’Neill has run down Papua New Guinea as well as to explain the Parakagate affair and other allegations involving O’Neill and his government.

The forum also canvassed actions the people of Simbu could take.

After receiving official permission from the Simbu provincial police commander, Superintendent Albert Beli, Voice of Simbu conducted a province-wide awareness program to inform people of the forum.

People started arriving in Kundiawa as early as eight o’clock last Thursday. At the beginning there was a small misunderstanding with the Kundiawa Police Task Force and the Mobile Squad 8 of Kerowagi when they questioned the legality of the assembly.

However, the provincial police commander came out and addressed crowd. He agreed the forum had official approval and could go ahead.

The forum was joined by students from the University of Technology who had travelled from Lae on the tulait tulait [overnight] bus. The students gave good insights into the current political, social and economic situation in PNG.

They spoke strongly on the many current issues surrounding the prime minister including the National Provident Fund saga, the Paraka fraud, the $3 billion UBS loan, the PNG power generator fraud, government mismanagement, the disbanding and suppression of government institutions, the sacking of ministers and senior police, public servants pay, university student strikes and the current cash problems.

The crowd loudly applauded as the speakers touched upon each issue.

After the students spoke, other people contributed including the member for Sinasina Yongomugl, Kerenga Kua MP, who spoke powerfully on the need for the prime minister and other elected and unelected officials to respect the laws of this country and not to
continuously use expensive lawyers to run to the courts and use the media to convince the public.

Kua called on his Simbu colleagues to put the interest of the people and their country first by withdrawing their support for O’Neill. He said politicians who continued support for O’Neill showed that they were selfish and greedy and only serving their own interests.

The forum concluded with a resolution from the crowd that the prime minister must resign to save PNG from disaster.

To show the Simbu people’s position on this national crisis, it was resolved that 200,000 Simbu people will sign a petition to give to the prime minister. The six Simbu members of parliament will receive the petition on behalf of the prime minister.

The organisers of the forum thanked all the Simbu people for attending the forum, which ended peacefully at one o’clock.

They also highly praised the Simbu peace and good order committee and provincial police commander Beli for their endorsement of the staging of the forum. They commended Beli for his neutrality, observing that police in Port Moresby had become O’Neill’s puppets.
The counting and declaration of winning candidates in the 2017 elections is nearing completion and lobbying leading to the formation of a new government has begun.

This will intensify in coming days and, while the horse trading continues, elected members need to bear in mind that the people’s mandate is not for them to sell or for others to buy.

Indications are that the battle will be between a Pangu-National Alliance led grand coalition, assembling in Goroka, and a group led by the governing People’s National Congress (PNC) who are camping in Alotau.

Peter O’Neill will definitely be the prime ministerial nominee for the PNC-led Alotau team.

O’Neill will not relinquish the prime ministership to another PNC member or anyone else because some actions and decisions made during his tenure as prime minister are subject to investigation by a new prime minister.

Hence, he wants – perhaps needs - to be at the centre of power so he can keep the lid on all this.

Deputy Prime Minister Leo Dion has been defeated leaving that senior post for O’Neill to use as bait to lure leaders of other parties to join PNC. The target might also be offered a senior ministry and a golden handshake as well.

Given the integrity displayed by Pangu Party leader Sam Basil, and his strong stance against corruption, I’d be betting that he will definitely not take O’Neill’s bait.

National Alliance leader Patrick Pruaitch, although quiet since his victory as the re-elected member for Aitape-Lumi, is likely to take the same stance as Basil.

Pruaitch attacked O’Neill’s economic management on the eve of the election and was duly sacked. It is possible, but seems unlikely, that this difference will be bridged – especially if Pruaitch can secure a prime job in a new non-O’Neill government.

That said, there is plenty of a precedent for u-turns and backflips in PNG politics.
After the 2012 election, the National Alliance under Grand Chief Michael Somare surprisingly backed O’Neill and made him prime minister.

This came after Somare’s power and credibility was muddied, tarnished and torn apart in the 2011 political impasse led by O’Neill and Belden Namah while the Grand Chief lay critically ill in a Singapore hospital.

But I don’t think history will repeat. Pruaitch is a learned leader and is fully aware of the mess created under the O’Neill regime.

My assessment is he will not be part of it again even if he is offered the deputy prime minister’s post.

If Pruaitch does take the bait, he can expect a split within the National Alliance as its president and member-elect for Namatanai, Walter Schnaubelt, has categorically stated he is a corruption fighter and suggested that he will join the Goroka team.

The position of Sir Julius Chan and his People’s Progress Party isn’t clear. His statement at the declaration of his Kavieng seat highlighted fence-sitting. PPP is likely to follow the tide.

The Pangu-NA team has been boosted by firebrand politicians Kerenga Kua, Gary Juffa, Belden Namah, Alan Marat, Bire Kimisopa, Mekere Morauta, Walter Schnaubelt and retired Air Niugini pilot Lekwa Gure.

The prospect of more members joining the team is high and there is also the prospect of a split in the PNC group as they see O’Neill, with a poor track record, losing his grip on power.

The decision that each elected member makes at this time will determine the destiny of PNG in the years to come.

They must have the interests of the people and country at heart; the people who elected them and the country they are pledged to serve.

Before accepting bribes and other inducements from others, they must first think of the people who gave them the mandate to serve. That mandate is not for them to sell or other people to buy.

The moment they accept a bribe or other enticement, they have sold the rights and mandate of the people and trashed their own integrity and moral principles.

They have become valueless and powerless. The party or leader who bought them will use them and manipulate them. And he will unceremoniously dump them when they are no longer needed.
These newly-minted politicians now have the clearest of choices – to exercise the moral imperative of standing for country and people, or to go down the grubby road of self-aggrandisement and dishonesty.

“People look up to the judiciary as their last bastion of hope in the fight against corruption and if this is infected and infested, people may take the law into their own hands.”
When government brutalises, patriots arise

Francis Nii
22 July 2017

As a citizen of this beautiful, rich, poverty-stricken country of Papua New Guinea, I congratulate Kerenga Kua for his re-election as the member for the Simbu seat of Sinesine-Yongomugl in the tenth national parliament.

It is the heartfelt desire of the Simbu people and most other Papua New Guineans across the country that Kerenga Kua along with other patriots Sam Basil, Gary Juffa, Bire Kimisopa, Allan Marat, Bryan Kramer, Mekere Morauta, Don Polye, Belden Nama and others be elected so they can lead a team who can rescue our country from its current predicament.

In Simbu, this desire was manifested in the huge support for Kerenga in social media, at meetings and through other modes of communication during the campaign period.

Thanks to the people of Sinesine-Yongomugl for being kind in returning their paramount chief and Simbu’s favourite son for a second term as a national member of parliament at a time when the government is hell-bent on colluding and engaging in high level corruption.

In this election and prior to it we have observed the government intent on dismantling and subjugating the structure, command and modus operandi of law enforcement agencies, evasive and disrespectful of the rule of law, and so greedy that the riches of our land have been denied to the people.

Our people’s cry for justice has been met with brutality as this government has deceived its people and become arrogant and painful.

Who is going to hear our cry? Who is going to lead us in the right way? Who is going to bring sunshine into our lives? Who is going to put a smile on our face?

Now is the time for true patriots to rise up. It is the time for loyalists and true people’s servants to triumph.

It is time for rectitude, transparency, justice, truthfulness and prudent stewardship to reign.
How to stop the PNC forming government
Francis Nii
19 July 2017

There is a possibility to stop Peter O’Neill and the People’s National Congress Party from forming the next government after writs are returned, however it is up to all other parties and independent candidates to take a united stand to ensure this can happen.

In Papua New Guinea, no single party has ever mustered an absolute majority of winning candidates in an election to allow it to automatically assume power.

From results so far of the current election, history will repeat itself when all the seats are declared.

PNC might muster more seats than other parties but it will not reach an absolute majority of 56 elected members to assume office in its own right.

This means PNC will need the numerical support of other parties and independents to regain power with Peter O’Neill as prime minister.

The governor-general, in adherence to election protocol, will invite the party with the largest number of members - in this case PNC - to form government.

However, this is only an invitation. It does not give PNC the right to be in government nor is it an order for other parties to join PNC.

Other parties are at liberty to accept inducements from PNC (in whatever form of horse trading) or not.

This will be a major test of moral principles for other parties and independent members, a process that the people of Papua New Guinea and the international community will be closely watching.

In the event that no other parties and independent members join PNC to give it the required numbers to form government, the governor-general will invite the party with the next highest number of members to form government. Most likely this would be the Pangu Party.

This would be the turning point in the political direction of this country. What happens at this stage would make or break PNG in the years to come.

The majority of Papua New Guineans are fed up with the PNC-led government and this was demonstrated in many ways prior to and during the election.
Yet somehow (I think we know how) the election results were contrary to those popular views. Observation, discovery and consequent analysis clearly indicated that many election results were spurious and contrived.

They did not reflect the true desire of the people because the process was rigged. Common rolls were manipulated, ballot boxes tampered with and voting papers distributed fraudulently.

It seems the election was engineered to favour PNC but there is nothing ordinary citizens can do about that in the short term. Aggrieved parties and candidates have the court of disputed returns before them.

Our prayers and hopes lie with people like Sam Basil, Bryan Kramer, Gary Juffa, Mekere Morauta, Patrick Pruaitch, Kerenga Kua and Allan Marat to do the right thing and rescue PNG from the current turmoil.

The right thing now is for these leaders to join forces with other parties and independents to form the next government.

If this possibility slips by and PNC gets back into power, PNG can expect to be in much deeper shit.
The defection of Sam Basil

Francis Nii
25 September 2017

It is now two weeks since nine members of the Pangu Party, including its leader Sam Basil, and four independents left the opposition in search of greener pastures in Peter O’Neill’s paddock.

It was a move that shocked Papua New Guinea.

Supporters of Pangu and ordinary Papua New Guineans had held Sam Basil in high esteem for his personal stand against corruption and his often-repeated condemnation of the corrupt government of O’Neill.

They found it hard to swallow the new reality of Basil’s u-turn to get into bed with O’Neill.

Social media commentators had a field day, calling Basil a Judas, liar, opportunist, pretender, hypocrite and more.

In his self-justification through a media statement, Basil said O’Neill had invited him and Pangu to join the government and he had thankfully accepted.

“I want to thank the Prime Minister Peter O’Neill for seeing value in the calibre of Pangu Party MPs and inviting us to join the PNC-led coalition government,” he said.

It was clear that it was Prime Minister O’Neill who had lured Basil and his party to join the government. If Basil had any other reason – for example, his failure to become leader of the opposition – he did not make it clear.

All he stated was that Pangu was invited by O’Neill to join the government.

O’Neill, for his part, in welcoming Basil and other opposition MPs into the government said there were no strings attached.

“I don’t think it’s about goodies,” he said.

So, was O’Neill telling the people of PNG - including the people of Basil’s Wau-Bulolo electorate and Pangu Party supporters - the truth?

Was it true he didn’t throw any bait at Basil and his followers? Can the people of PNG trust that O’Neill was truthful?

I did not then and I do not now believe O’Neill’s words. It would not be the first time he has been economical with the truth.

My grounds for not believing O’Neill are that, prior to the move by Basil and 12 members of the opposition to the government, O’Neill did not have the absolute majority of 74 MPs he required to legislate
laws in parliament, including the important Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) bill.

Also, at stake, and possibly facing an impasse, were the 2017 supplementary and 2018 budgets which meant that O’Neill’s government could get itself into deep trouble on the floor of parliament.

In other words, O’Neill understood how insecure and shaky his government was and could see trouble looming.

Furthermore, he knew that losing grip of government and the position of prime minister would cost him dearly. The impact would be disastrous for his political career and himself personally.

Undeniably O’Neill was confronted with a serious dilemma and the invitation to Sam Basil and his Pangu Party was a calculated strategy of buying badly needed numbers.

And, of course, the price had to be attractive. Without that, no one was going to jump ship.

So, what was the price or reward Basil and his disciples will receive? The nation is watching.

If they are hoping that over time, we will forget the deal, we will not.

For someone like Basil, who had publicly declared O’Neill as his number one enemy (“friend to all, enemy to one, Peter O’Neill”) to twist his tongue the other way and marry O’Neill was a monumental back flip.

One would expect no lesser bait from O’Neill than to offer Basil the position of deputy prime minister (presently occupied by Charles Abel) as well as a host of other rewards for him and the other MPs who accompanied him across the chamber. This would include ministerial portfolios.

In the two weeks since this happened, Basil and his disciples have patiently waited for O’Neill to give them their rewards.

There is no better time than now, in the few remaining days before the next sitting of parliament during which the 2017 supplementary budget and ICAC bill will be tabled.

Upon his return from the United Nation’s general assembly in New York, will the prime minister reward Basil and the other MPs for giving him the desperately needed numerical power?

Or will O’Neill continue to frustrate them, use them for his convenience and dump them when he doesn’t need them; a tendency he has demonstrated previously in his prime ministerial tenure?
But the stakes are higher this time. It seems he must play the right game. Surely, he cannot continue to play footsie with highly educated politicians at a critical time when his sins are beginning to bear some ugly fruit.

A particularly ugly lemon saw the government just bail out of its Oil Search shares at a loss estimated to be greater than K1 billion.

This story should be a wake-up call for those politicians who decided to jump the fence to O’Neill’s paddock.

The greener pasture they thought was there is already proving to be a messy mud heap full of unmanageable shit.

“PNG politicians will always fall into the trap of ‘free money’ but Australia has a moral obligation to not set the pernicious bait in the first place. Mutual understanding and respect for each other’s sovereignty and adherence to the wishes of the citizens of our respective countries must take precedence over money and other duress.”
In crisis a leader’s true worth is measured

Francis Nii

19 April 2018

Madang, a town once dubbed ‘Beautiful Madang’ and, in even earlier days, ‘The Pearl of the Pacific’ because of its scenic beauty, in recent times has been experiencing serious civil unrest including murder and the destruction of businesses and state property.

This crime and disorder have disturbed the tranquil blue waters, large furry flying foxes, arrays of colourful crotons and hibiscus, pleasant hotel facilities and, perhaps most regrettably, the renowned friendliness of the Madang people.

The latest incident involved the death of three local youths believed to have been murdered by settlers, a tragedy that led to public panic, civil unrest and disruption of the town’s water supply.

But unlike major unrest in other years that continued for weeks, last weeks was quelled in reasonable time and services and businesses quickly restored thanks to the presence and leadership of Bryan Kramer, the member for Madang in the national parliament, along with police and other community leaders.

Kramer played a decisive role in re-establishing peace and reinstating the sabotaged water supply, a vital utility in an urban area.

Kramer went to the site of the water supply with police, PNG Water and PNG Power and assessed the damage.

PNG Power went to collect parts to replace those damaged, but didn’t return.

Kramer didn’t leave. He stayed at the reservoir cajoling PNG Power personnel to return with the parts and get the pump fixed, only departing after the water started flowing again.

I can’t think of another member of parliament in PNG who has ever done that or who would do it.

But Kramer’s role did not stop there. He then conducted meetings with stakeholders to find a lasting solution to the frequent civil unrest in the province and restore the town to its former glory as a tourist destination.

By contrast, similar civil strife that occurred in the resource rich Southern Highlands capital of Mendi some months ago escalated into full-blown warfare resulting in many people, including policemen, shot dead and millions of kina worth of property (including prime minister Peter O’Neill’s Wildcat company assets) destroyed.
In this case, there was absolutely no political leader, including O’Neill who is from the province, who dared to be on the ground to attend to the problem.

When the police failed to contain the fighting and arson, the provincial politicians were scared and confused not knowing what to do to quell the situation. This was evident by the total absence of political leadership in the province.

Had there been decisive political intervention after the unrest started, the problem could have been contained and lives and property saved.

Instead the Southern Highlands’ politicians and their families cowered in Port Moresby enjoying the comfort of city life while their people were killing each other like animals.

Even when the unrest had subdued, none of these politicians bothered to travel to Mendi to address the problem.

Instead O’Neill, through the National Executive Council, made former police fraud squad commander Thomas Eluh a scapegoat by sending him to Mendi as acting provincial administrator to meet the people and solve the problem for them.

Although this move seemed to bring life in Mendi to normalcy, the situation on the ground remained volatile until the devastating earthquake struck the province, effectively defusing remnants of civil unrest.

As they turned to rebuilding their lives from the rubble and ashes, people had no time for warfare.

The test of true leadership is at times of crisis and hardship, not when everything is good and rosy.

Soon after, for the first time in the life of parliament, Bryan Kramer revealed the amount of his first sitting allowance - and donated it to his people as the member for Madang
Let’s deploy money for Karimui cocoa

Francis Nii
30 May 2018

Karimui, in the deep south of the Simbu Province, is poised to become one of the major cocoa producing districts in Papua New Guinea but it requires greater attention from the national government.

The European Union committed K340 million for rehabilitation in the cocoa pod borer-devastated province of East Sepik which many of us were not aware of it until it was mentioned recently in parliament by Bryan Kramer MP.

Kramer’s question related to a decision by planning minister Richard Maru to cancel the grant to the East Sepik Province and direct it to projects in Karimui, Momase, Papua and Kerevat.

This would involve establishing a cocoa nursery in Karamui and building a connecting road from Gumine to the southern region, where there is no cocoa pod borer problem.

A Facebook post by Kramer questioned the prudence and practicality of Maru’s decision in directing part of the grant to Karimui, which he assumed was not a cocoa producing area.

Kramer normally backs up his arguments with evidence but in this case he erred.

The redirection of this money to Karamui is something that needs to happen.

Karimui is an emerging cocoa producer ready to explode but awaiting large scale supply of seedlings and a road connection to transport cocoa and also coffee, peanuts and rice to market.

Geographically, Karimui is at the extreme southern tip of the Simbu Province bordering with Gulf, Eastern Highlands and Southern Highlands provinces.

Unlike most of Simbu, Karimui is generally flat at an altitude of 800-1,500 meters with a climate of moderate to high humidity.

Crops like cocoa, betel nut and even coconuts normally associated with coastal areas grow prolifically in Karimui.

Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare during a visit to Simbu once described Karimui as ‘the coast in the highlands’.

In the early 1990s, the agriculture officers in the Simbu provincial government with the support of the National Agriculture Research Institute and the Cocoa Board started cocoa agronomical research in Karimui with the aim of introducing it as an additional cash crop.
A name synonymous with the project is the late Kale Kua, a veteran agriculturalist and a pioneer developer of Karimui cocoa.

More recently, with the involvement of agricultural scientist and cocoa cloning and hybrid expert Dr John Konam, research and development into cocoa production has been very promising.

In July 2013, MAF airlifted the first trial cocoa production of nine bags of high-quality cocoa beans which were produced using the old drying method.

Many farmers grow cocoa and coffee but are not producing due to the high cost of freighting produce to Goroka by air.

Farmers are discouraged by the low return for their sweat but the potential for large scale production is unquestionable. However, it needs a road.

Thus, the decision by Minister Maru to allocate part of the K340 million European Union grant to develop a road to connect Karimui with the outside world and to establish cocoa nursery in Karimui is good and economically feasible.

The people of Karimui and Simbu have been praying and pleading with successive national governments for such an initiative.

Simbu is the poorest province in PNG in terms of natural resources and large-scale agricultural production.

Its best hope for a more prosperous future lies in the backward, remote and naturally rich land of Karimui.

As a man from that area, and on behalf of the illiterate and ignorant majority who are mostly farmers, I plead with prime minister Peter O’Neill, treasurer Charles Abel, planning minister Richard Maru and officials of the European Union to reconsider and direct at least K40 million of that EU grant to Karimui road and cocoa.

You will never regret making that decision.
Time to pay landowners their money

Francis Nii
16 May 2018

There is no better time than this to pay Papua New Guinea’s liquefied natural gas [LNG] landowners their entitlements since many lives have been disrupted and even ruined by the devastating earthquake in the region.

Jubilee Australia seems to have blown open a closely-kept secret on how much LNG revenue has been received by the PNG government and not been paid to landowners.

The Jubilee report generated a strong reaction from project developer Oil Search, whose Chairman Rick Lee said community violence around the project was not the fault of his company but a result of the PNG government's failure to distribute royalties.

These comments came regardless of Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s relentless attempts to water down his government’s responsibilities.

According to the Jubilee and other recent reports, the situation on the LNG project sites is tense and menacing mainly due to the non-payment of landowner benefits. I should note that the project developers, Oil Search and Exxon Mobil, have been well aware of this.

Now they may feel their investment has become even higher risk because of the growing frustration and anger of landowners.

They have tried to protect their position by clarifying their position to landowners and the people of PNG who need to be aware of who is responsible for entitlements not reaching the right people.

Last Friday Oil Search managing director Peter Botten revealed that PNG had received K14 billion from PNG LNG since production began.

“The country has received K14 billion in revenue, with K3.9 billion paid to the state and landowner entities in royalties, development levies and equity payments,” Botten said.

He further stated that of the 15 licenses covering PNG LNG project areas, 12 were either receiving or close to receiving payments. The other three have been held up by the court.

However, the K14 billion revenue figure revealed by Botten is ambiguous and needs clarification.

The two main concerns are the O’Neill government’s silence over the revenues it has received and the protracted delay in paying landowners their dues.
Without Jubilee Australia’s report, this matter would have continued to remain secret among project developers and the national government.

The people of PNG, including the landowners of the LNG project, should be grateful to Jubilee for its report.

O’Neill and his finance minister James Marape have repeatedly claimed that identifying the rightful landowners was the reason for the delay in the payment of entitlements.

When the project benefit sharing agreement was signed at Kokopo (a thousand kilometres away from the project area), the Somare government, so-called local chiefs and project developers had erred in not properly executing social mapping.

The government started the identification of rightful landowners in 2015 under what was then known as ‘clan vetting’ but never produced a result.

The government resurrected the project in November last year under the new title, ‘landowner beneficiary identification’.

Then petroleum minister Fabian Pok assured the people of PNG including the landowners that the identification would be complete by December 2017.

The government allocated K3 million for this but it became an endless process. Why?

Is it a deliberate delay on the part of the government because of the cash flow problem it is facing?

There is no better time than this moment when lives of landowners have been disrupted by a devastating earthquake.

Surely the vetting process can be expedited and landowners immediately paid the K708 million that is said to be sitting in trust at a time when it is needed most.
As cash dwindles, schools face closure

Francis Nii
9 May 2018

High and secondary schools in Simbu Province are on the verge of closure due to the delay in the release of the tuition fees by the national government. At least two secondary schools in Simbu suspended classes last week.

Rosary College Kondiu and Gumine Secondary School put classes on indefinite hold on Friday and students were sent home to await further notice.

Joe Kalasim, a policeman based in Kundiawa whose child is a student at Rosary, confirmed that classes there were suspended.

“We parents are having emergency meeting today to discuss how parents can assist ease the delay under the tuition fee free policy of school subsidies,” he said.

Later in the day, Kalasim reported that the main resolution of the meeting was that parents would provide food to keep the school functioning until outstanding fees were released.

He said that notable dignitaries attended at the meeting including the secretary for Kundiawa Catholic Diocese, Bishop Anton Bal, as well as the board of directors, parents and teachers.

Kalasim said the school principal reported that the first term subsidy instalment of K140,000 was used to partially settle debts of K167,000. The balance of K27,000 remained outstanding and creditors had closed their doors making it difficult for the school to continue functioning.

My attempt to get a comment from Gumine Secondary School principal Bepwick Kutna was unsuccessful but a student from the school who did not want to be named confirmed classes had been suspended indefinitely from Friday.

The student said the school administration told students that if their parents were willing to provide food for them the school would resume. Otherwise it would remain closed until the subsidy from the national government arrived.

Kerowagi, one of the largest secondary schools in the province with over 1,000 students, is sending boarding students home at weekends as a cost saving measure. It is uncertain how long this will keep the school operating.
These experiences are not isolated cases. Many schools in Simbu are operating on credit facilities to keep them functioning.

When the subsidy comes, it goes to paying off debt. Then schools again resort to credit facilities to operate in a never-ending vicious circle.

If the government has financial difficulty in paying the fee subsidy on time, Prime Minister Peter O’Neill and minister for education Nick Kuman must tell the truth to the nation so parents and school governing boards can find alternative ways to continue classes.

They should not play games with the future welfare of the children of this nation by continually delaying or applying piecemeal disbursements of the subsidy.

If the truth is made known, parents may be able to pay appropriate fees to keep their children’s learning to the end of the year. O’Neill and Kuman must immediately disburse the ‘tuition fee free’ subsidy or tell the nation the truth about their inability to pay.
Politicians need courage and wisdom to settle grievances
Francis Nii
29 June 2018

The call by Angore landowners in troubled Hela Province for a forum
to discuss the problems surrounding the liquefied natural gas project
could be the beginning of meaningful dialogue among landowners and
other stakeholders leading to a peaceful solution to the royalties’ crisis.

The issue has been exacerbated by lack of landowner and political
leadership on the ground.

All members of parliament from Southern Highlands and Hela
mostly operate out of Port Moresby. They have avoided face to face
dialogue to address the grievances of the people.

Frustrated landowners resorted to violence to draw the attention of
political leaders, resource developers and the PNG government to their
marginalisation.

The two-faced statement by finance minister James Marape from
the comfort of his base in Port Moresby was a clear indication of a
leader who has lost touch with his people.

Marape said his constituents should invite him to pursue their
grievances with the government. This was a foolish call by a confused
government leader.

The people had already given him a mandate through the ballot box
to shoulder their interests. What else does he want? Was he really
awaiting an invitation or did he just not want to front his own people?

Then, after first appearing conciliatory, the threat by Marape to use
army and police to fight his own people was also an indication of a
leader without ideas and lacking a clear strategy.

The people are fighting for what is rightfully theirs. Their land. They
must be given what belongs to them, the royalties and other benefits
legitimately and contractually agreed.

People ignored Marape’s words and the vandalism of Exxon
Mobil’s LNG assets continued last weekend.

Decisions to use the army and police against landowners without
addressing the core issue will only add fuel to the fire. This is what
happened in Bougainville triggering a 10-year civil war.

Leaders like Marape should be mindful that missteps on their part
could be responsible for a similar tragic outcome.

A possible breakthrough opportunity has been provided by Angore
landowners who stated that stakeholders – including politicians and
resource companies – need to come together in a public forum to address grievances.

Instead of local politicians like Marape making ridiculous statements from his comfortable enclave in Port Moresby and Michael Nali trying to flex his muscles on the floor of parliament, they must get into those mountains and negotiate with their people.

This is the answer: wise dialogue to develop an amicable pathway to end the violence and pay landowners their promised benefits without further delay.

“As we know, there is only one life on this earth and, while we are alive, we do what we can to contribute to the common good through our actions and words as well as minding our personal affairs.”

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Could Indonesia possibly invade PNG?

Francis Nii
31 August 2018

Will Indonesia ever invade Papua New Guinea? It’s an eyebrow raising question. To some people it may sound irresponsible, irrational or insensitive.

Of course, there is always speculation and theorising about the why, when and how an invasion could occur and possibly the best people to render a credible verdict are those in diplomatic missions, foreign affairs departments and intelligence networks.

But individuals around the region - like Australia, New Zealand, PNG and Indonesia of course - are entitled to their own conjecture. I have my opinion too.

Before moving to the substantive question, let me start from the periphery by asking could Indonesia invade PNG if it chose to do so?

It would be a walk in the park.

With its military superiority and huge numbers of personnel, it would take only a few hours for Indonesia to effectively take over. Port Moresby would be a pushover.

Indonesia has a population of over 260 million and nearly one million military personnel of whom some 440,000 are active, the rest reserves.

Its air force has 478 aircraft including 120 in an attack capacity and 200 helicopters.

Land assets include 418 combat tanks, 1,131 armoured fighting vehicles, 105 self-propelled artillery pieces, 356 static artillery and 153 rocket Launchers.

Its 221 naval assets with 12 surface warships and three submarines are overwhelming from a PNG perspective.

PNG with 7,500,000 people and less than 500 military personnel has zero fighting aircraft, zero land armour and an insignificant number of small naval vessels.

It would not stand a chance of defending itself. It would be a clean sweep of the chessboard not long after those first paratroopers floated to the ground.

Now let me go back to the substantive question: will Indonesia ever invade PNG? Thankfully, given the foregoing statistics, my answer is no. Indonesia will never invade PNG. Here’s why.
Apart from external factors like Australia’s great interest in preventing any aggression, Indonesia has a nagging internal revolt to keep her busy. The long-running West Papuan insurgency will continue to provide a buffer for PNG.

Then there’s the topography of PNG itself. Indonesia might find Moresby easy pickings but controlling PNG would be an entirely different matter. If Indonesia cannot fully contain West Papua after four decades of trying, PNG would be at least as much of a challenge.

Indonesia also learned a lesson from her December 1974 invasion of tiny East Timor with a population of just over 1.2 million people. Dili might have been straightforward but the mountains were an entirely different proposition. Also, it had the rest of the world telling it to lay off.

After more than two decades of annexation, serious human rights abuses and the deaths of between 100,000 and 180,000 soldiers and civilians, through United Nations arbitration East Timor eventually gained independence in 2012.

But the big issue for an Indonesian invasion of PNG would be Australia. It would be hard for our southern cousins not to be drawn into the conflict, Australia’s big fear being that Indonesia might have even more expansionist plans.

PNG strategically serves as a buffer for Australia from any serious aggression from South East Asia. Australia will want to keep it that way.

Moreover, Indonesia would not want to draw condemnation, sanctions and even intervention from the international community.

So, in my opinion, Indonesia will not invade PNG – the scenario does not compute.

The problem I see likely to create tension and disharmony in the PNG-Indonesia relationship is intrusion and occupancy of PNG territory along the border by Indonesian military.

There have been many instances of border incursions by Indonesian soldiers claiming to be hunting West Papuan rebels. They could just as easily be testing PNG’s sensitivity to such matters – and our ability to do something to thwart them.

Indonesia is now reported to be stationing an additional 450 military personnel along its 800 km border with PNG.

The ostensible reason is to crackdown on drug smuggling.
But just a couple of months earlier Indonesia was said to be more interested in using military ‘explorers’ to assess what resources there are in some border areas.

To me, resources could prove the flashpoint if there is to be one. The task for PNG is to beef up our own military presence and fortify the physical border.

But that takes troop power and money. Two things we don’t seem to have a lot of at present.

So, invasion, no. Resource-based incursion, yes.

Outcome? It has to be a deal, doesn’t it?

“And of course, in anything we do there is always a price and that’s the way it is but we have to move on in doing what we think is good for ourselves and others whatever the circumstances, and that’s how I see myself.”
Bad decision by politicians’ costs millions
Francis Nii
16 February 2019

A hasty and imprudent decision by political leaders to pay members of the security task force deployed to the APEC congress an additional unbudgeted allowance of K300 each will cost Papua New Guinean taxpayers nearly K31.5 million.

The security force members, comprising army, police and others, are now claiming the government has not paid them these additional K300 allowances.

This was a commitment made by ‘political leaders’ to members of the security forces following their 30 November storming of national parliament in relation to non-payment of a K200 allowance.

APEC minister Justin Tkatchenko distanced himself from the issue saying it was up to police commissioner Gary Baki to make sure security forces were paid their allowances.

Following the Tkatchenko’s statement, Baki stated that, as far as he was concerned, “all allowances for members of the security forces engaged for APEC 2018 security operations have been paid”.

Baki explained he had requested K21 million for members of the security forces at a K200 daily allowance for each member for 18 days.

He claimed K10.8 million of this was paid on 21 November, which was one day after the storming of parliament. He said a second and final payment was made a week later.

Baki further stated that what the members of the disciplinary forces were now claiming was an additional K300 which ‘political leaders’ had promised them after they stormed the national parliament.

The attack on parliament house was in relation to the non-payment of the K200 allowance. Those officers who had flown from outside Port Moresby had to travel back to their duty stations and wanted their payments before departing.

So, out of frustration, they invaded parliament house to force the government to pay them their K200 allowances immediately. This escalated by another K300 after the invasion.

But to agree to pay rogue elements of the security forces K300 extra after they had caused extensive damage worth millions of kina to the people’s house is totally absurdity. It is costing taxpayers an unbudgeted APEC expense of K31.5 million.
Was the ‘political leaders’ additional K300 commitment done in the best interests of PNG? Or was it more in the interests of the ‘political leaders’?

In my mind, the additional K300 allowance was a hasty, reckless and politically motivated appeasement by Prime Minister Peter O’Neill to win favour from the security forces.

In doing so he foolishly surrendered the nation to ransom setting a very bad precedent for the future.

Now he has to find the money and fulfil his promise immediately or another attack against parliament house or another government office might be in the offing.

“We write because stories are part of our culture and books are repositories of our culture.”
Brutal politics at play in resignations

Francis Nii
20 April 2019

Papua New Guinea’s opposition and many members of the public applauded the resignation of James Marape from the finance portfolio last week as a heroic move against corrupt Prime Minister Peter O’Neill.

Now, the resignation of the member for Esa’ala, Steven Davis, as attorney-general has added more weight to Marape’s exit.

I didn’t buy Marape's resignation as a genuine move so much as a plot to save O’Neill and his People’s National Congress-led government from an imminent vote of no confidence in parliament.

I expressed this suspicion in a PNG Attitude article in which I wrote:

“Marape’s resignation could also be part of a political strategy ahead of the coming vote of no confidence in the prime minister, but in light of O’Neill’s well-known trickiness, it could be a stratagem. Thus politically, it is really an unpredictable move. There is no doubt that this issue has many twists and turns still to be revealed.”

O’Neill’s elevation of his once fiercest political rival, Pangu Party parliamentary leader Sam Basil, to the coveted finance portfolio left vacant by Marape in Wednesday’s small ministerial reshuffle made me confident of my earlier suspicion.

The appointment of Basil and another Pangu member, Markham MP Tony Iguan, to take Basil’s former communications ministry, gives Pangu a total of three ministries. Pangu has 15 members in the government.

The intended vote of no confidence is only three weeks away and any move now is critical. At the same time, politics in PNG is volatile and unpredictable. Often things happen at the eleventh hour on the floor of parliament.

Having stated this, I believe Marape’s resignation was a calculated political plot to lure Basil and members of the Pangu Party to consolidate O’Neill’s position in power.

In any institution when anyone resigns, it is a requirement that the resignation be authenticated bearing the signature of the concerned person. To date, I don’t think Marape has done that, leaving his purported resignation in limbo.
Furthermore, usually when ministers resign in these circumstances they also resign from their party. In a normal political manoeuvre, O’Neill would have expelled Marape from People’s National Congress.

Since Marape’s resignation announcement, I have watched for either of these acts to eventuate but so far it has been business as usual. This is strange in PNG politics.

O’Neill and Marape have strong cultural and personal ties and the same unbreakable bond has existed politically.

They have been brothers in arms in just about everything. If anyone will go to the extreme to make sacrifices to save O’Neill, Marape has been the man.

So, my initial expectation was that Marape would stick to O’Neill and be his backstage puppet. I believed any expectation of Marape rebelling against his brother in arms would be in vain.

After all, O’Neill has always used the enticement of others for his convenience and dumped them when he didn’t need them or if it threatened his survival as prime minister.

Accordingly, he successfully lured Basil and used him for the additional numerical strength he brought with him from opposition.

And it looked like he would stick like glue to Marape.

However, the resignation of Attorney General Davis and my further consideration of Marape’s strong Seventh Day Adventist background, has changed my mind.

Instead I believe Marape had simply had enough of O’Neill’s denigration of mandated leaders and their roles.

Davis’s resignation has widened the crack in the government and soon O’Neill will unleash his anger on Marape by kicking him out of People’s National Congress. This will add to the damage O’Neill and PNC are experiencing.

Basil and his Pangu Party now have to make a most critical decision. The opportunity for Basil to live up to his 2017 election slogan, “Friends to all, enemy to one”, being O’Neill, may have arrived.

Instead of being used by O’Neill, it is time for Basil to be smart and use his numerical strength to turn the tables and secure a better place in a new government.
O’Neill’s citizenship saga: who’s telling lies?

Francis Nii
25 May 2019

The political games continue in Australia’s closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea, as a parliamentary vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Peter O’Neill gets closer.

There have been many tactical twists and turns, with one of the hottest issues at the moment being an allegation that O’Neill is an Australian citizen, which would have barred his election to parliament.

A week ago, the member for Madang, Bryan Kramer, raised the eyebrows of many Facebook users when he posted an article alleging that O’Neill was an Australian citizen. Including in his article relevant sections of the Dual Citizenship Act, Kramer stated:

“Prime Minister Peter O’Neill is an Australian citizen holding a current Australian passport giving effect to the fact he is illegally a member of parliament and therefore illegally occupying the office of prime minister of Papua New Guinea.”

The next day, journalist Freddy Mou reported in Loop PNG that O’Neill was born and raised in Pangia in the Southern Highlands and was not an Australian citizen. Pro-O’Neill posts and comments also began to appear on social media dismissing Kramer’s accusation as fake news.

Kramer in response said the issue was whether O’Neill was also an Australia citizen, writing that:

“While the law now provides for dual citizenship, it does not allow for them to vote or be elected as members of parliament, let alone a prime minister.

“There are thousands of mixed-race Papua New Guineans born in PNG to an Australian parent holding both PNG and Australian passports. However, once they reach the age of 19, they are required to either renounce their PNG or Australian citizenship.

“O’Neill is foolish enough to invoke his Australian citizenship by descent and renewed his Australian passport therefore effectively disqualifying him to be a Member of Parliament and Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.”

In levelling his accusation, Kramer stated if it was not true, he expected the Australian Foreign Minister to immediately issue a statement that O’Neill wasn’t an Australian citizen.
To date the Australian foreign minister or some other relevant authority has not issued any such statement. There has been complete silence.

Kramer also asserted O’Neill could issue a public response saying he was not an Australian citizen, however he expected O’Neill to remain silent.

So far O’Neill has used journalist Freddy Mou and attorney-general Alfred Manase to try to dispel the accusation, but has not himself spoken on the issue.

On Thursday, the Post Courier newspaper reported that O’Neill, through his lawyers, had obtained a court order to restrain Kramer from “further defaming O’Neill either in person or in writing.”

The report stated O’Neill had declared in court that he was not an Australian citizen and had never been an Australian citizen.

He also declared he did not hold an Australian passport.

He said the posts and comments were malicious in the extreme and designed to denigrate him in the eyes of the public.

It is believed no restraining order has yet been served on Kramer, who has been in Rabaul.

The question now is why, if he is not an Australian citizen, did O’Neill wait six days to obtain a restriction order from the court to shut down Kramer? Why didn’t he call a press conference and dispel the accusation immediately?

Is the restriction a calculated ploy to prevent Kramer from raising the issue on the floor of parliament when it sits on Tuesday?

And I’m wondering if a reputable and independent investigative reporter from Australia can establish the truth as we can’t trust PNG’s mainstream media and their reporters these days?
In the last eight years, when other Papua New Guineans celebrated their country’s independence anniversary on 16 September, to me it was just like any other day.

I didn’t feel anything special about the occasion. Independence had become meaningless and unimportant to me.

Although 2016 had been a special year, in that I spent one week in Australia and attended the Brisbane Writers Festival, and in 2018, PNG hosted the historic APEC meeting in Port Moresby, when it came to 16 September there wasn’t any special feeling in me.

I didn’t know why and there was no urge in me to bother about it.

But yesterday on the eve of the 44th independence anniversary, as I sat in my favourite spot under the mango tree in front of the gate at Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital in Kundiawa and watched young and old passers-by attired in the national colours of red, black, white and gold, I felt an urge to have a cold SP export lager that has the rare and beautiful bird of paradise on its label.

I don’t like drinking this beer. Whenever I feel like drinking, the SP brown stubby is my favourite. But yesterday, I felt very much compelled to drink the beer that has the national bird, the Raggiana, on its label.

So, I sent a young man to TNA Coffee Shop and he brought me back two SP export lagers.

I opened the beer with a loud popping noise, punched the air, gave myself a happy independence greeting and gulped the beer.

It was around midday and the cold beer tasted refreshing in the sweltering heat.

After I drained the first bottle, I nursed the second one, my mind wandering back in time like watching a movie.

All the significant events of the past seven years streamed vividly through my mind.

Surprisingly, my thoughts swarmed with more bad things than good.

Of prominence were Peter O’Neill’s unconstitutional thieving of power from Michael Somare, O’Neill’s disbandment and elimination of the champion corruption fighter Investigative Task Force Sweep and O’Neill’s arrest warrant saga involving the infamous Paul Paraka case that never saw the light of justice.
Scrolling through my mind was O’Neill’s scandalous signing of the UBS loan after villainously sacking Don Polye and replacing him as finance minister, the indiscriminate shooting of protesting university students by police, O’Neill’s people in the Southern Highlands maliciously burning an Air Niugini Dash 8, the daily agony and hardship of earning money to pay for basic necessities and so many more thoughts.

But as the reminiscences wound towards their end, I felt a kind of joy I had never felt in those previous eight long years. The joy flooded my mind.

Then it dawned on me I had good reason to celebrate this independence anniversary.

It seemed that the long and difficult war had finally come to an end. A war against greed, selfishness, power-hunger, serial lies, tyranny, extreme corruption, venally-motivated policies, education and health degeneration, an economy immersed in foreign debt and a country so rich in resources, yet so poor because of gross mismanagement.

Victory was at hand for our motherland, so often described as a poverty-stricken shithole.

I felt this description can now change for the better.

The welfare and future of my children and their children are in safer hands.

Not only my children but every other child.

The futures of the impoverished, orphans, the disabled, the can collectors on the streets and so many others are in the hands of the visionary, passionate and patriotic James Marape, a leader who we can look upon as saviour and a beacon of hope for a prosperous PNG.

I started celebrating yesterday and I will finish it off today, 16 September 2019. God bless Papua New Guinea.
“Banks are very good at serving their own interests. But when it comes to serving customers’ interests, they are down in the pit.”
LAW AND ORDER

Philip Tabai, veteran village court magistrate, with Francis in Kundiawa
The threat of modernised tribal war

Francis Nii
17 March 2012

Tribal warfare has always been an integral part of Papua New Guinean and Simbu traditions. However, modernisation of it poses a serious threat to civilisation.

In Simbu society there used to be two kinds of tribal warfare. In the Yui dialect of Karimui Nomane, they were described as *kura magi* and *kura bamil* meaning internal war and external war.

The internal wars were conducted to injure only and not to kill. Long poles, sticks and stones were used as weapons. Combatants mainly aimed at the heads of the enemies to cause minor lacerations. It was close contact fighting, like sword battles around Europe in the medieval period.

Since the fight was to injure only, dangerous weapons like spears, bows and arrows, axes and bush knives were not allowed.

Although the battle normally lasted for just one or two hours, it was fast and intensive. A lot of blood would be spilt but there would be no killing.

Women, children and property were left untouched.

The victor was the side that had the lesser number of warriors injured.

An interview with a number of old people revealed that internal fighting occurred between neighbouring clans and tribal allies.

That is why it was called an internal war, connotatively meaning ‘friendly fight’. Peace and normalcy always prevailed the next day.

In an external war, the fight usually occurred between tribal enemies.

Killing, destruction, looting and plundering were the order of battle. Dangerous weapons such as bows and arrows, spears, axes, bush knives and shields were used.

The war was normally fought openly on common ground. The opposing sides, after raising their dander by hurling provocative words at each other, would converge on the battlefield where all hell broke loose.

Traditional allies of the warring tribes would also take sides and the fight could escalate into a civil war.

Sometimes it involved many tribes against just one or two tribes.
The fighting could go on for a week, a month, a year or even longer until eventually the stronger side prevailed, chased away the weakened enemy and possessed the land.

The main causes of tribal wars were disputes over land, stealing, sorcery, rape and adultery.

The object of starting a war was to end a conflict in contention at the time. It was the ultimate means of dissolving an antagonistic situation where the usual mediation and compensation processes had failed.

When the conflicting parties refused to make peace, they went to war, fought it out and got it over with.

With modern developments, the entire anatomy of tribal war in Simbu and other parts of Papua New Guinea changed greatly in causes, weaponry and tactics.

These days, guns of all kinds and even hand grenades have replaced sticks, stones, spears and bows and arrows.

The enemies now attack each other in stealth and use ambush in guerrilla style warfare. They open fire at each other from far distances. When an enemy is caught, he will be chopped to pieces and his body scattered into the bushes.

All property in the fighting zones, including schools and aid posts, are subject to looting and destruction.

The first time guns were used in a tribal fight in Simbu was in 1982. The fight erupted between the Endugla and Nauro tribes of the Kundiawa-Gembogl District in a conflict related to that year’s national election.

The fight developed into a civil war affecting many tribes and cost numerous lives and much destruction of property. It set a precedent for the modern style of tribal war.

It also presaged the end, the phasing out, of the traditional types of warfare.

Since that time political disputes have been the dominant reason for tribal wars in all six districts of Simbu and in other parts of the highlands. There are few cases of tribal wars related to land matters, stealing, rape, adultery or sorcery.

The modernisation of tribal war and politics paved the way for an aggressive build-up of illegal high-powered firearms in Simbu and other highland provinces posing a serious threat to development, progress and freedom.
The education and future of the children in the Salt Nomane local government area of the Karimui Nomane electorate of Simbu Province are being trivialized and overlooked.

Last week the provincial education authorities suspended classes for each school in the area due to continuing election-related tribal fighting.

The warfare is between the supporters of Mogerema Sigo Wei MP and runner-up in the 2012 general elections, businessman Michael Korry.

The continuing conflict has caused much hardship and anguish for the people of Salt Nomane. The fight started last August and is now into its seventh month.

Three people have been killed and others have sustained serious gunshot injuries inflicted by high powered weapons. Property worth thousands of kina has been destroyed.

The Kundiawa police have made several attempts to bring the warring groups together but have failed because the two warlords Korry and Wei have not consented.

The fighting has brought government services to a standstill. The provincial education authorities suspended classes for schools in the fighting zone because teachers refused to take up postings in fear of their lives.

Ten primary, 15 elementary and one secondary school in Salt Nomane were closed for an indefinite period.

Parents are very concerned about the education and future of their children and are calling on the two leaders to end the fight immediately.

The fighting is a deprivation of the children’s right to gain an education, especially at a time when the parents have just been relieved of the burden of tuition fees. It is totally wrong.

Parents, police, provincial authorities and the people of Salt Nomane are calling on the two leaders to return to Simbu and end the war as soon as practical so schools can start classes and other government services restored.

The lives of the innocent majority and the future of children cannot continue to be jeopardised by the political greed and ambition of two individuals and their barbaric supporters.
As leaders they must consider the welfare of the majority which includes pregnant mothers and sick people who have difficulty accessing medical services.

It is hoped that the fight ends soon

“Our people’s cry for justice has been met with brutality as this government has deceived its people and become arrogant and painful.”
Banning guns, a major step towards peace

Francis Nii
20 February 2014

Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s announcement in parliament of proposed legislation to ban guns in Papua New Guinea except for security forces is a step in the right direction towards peace and order in this country.

O’Neill told parliament the proposed law would include banning police from carrying high powered guns in public. He said it would restrict guns to senior officers.

The legislation was recommended in a report by former police minister and current Goroka MP Bire Kimisopa tabled in parliament three years ago.

A ban on guns would be a momentous step towards the elimination of tribal warfare and armed-holdups and towards enhancing peace and order in PNG.

The presence of high-powered guns poses a constant and serious threat to human life, development efforts and foreign investment.

Hundreds of people have died from the use of guns, particularly in tribal fights.

They have been the contributing force in the destruction of numerous businesses, churches and public infrastructure like schools, health centres and bridges, setting back community and economic development.

Just about every high-profile robbery in PNG involves the use of guns.

This banning legislation is the right thing to do and we hope and trust it will be fast tracked and all MPs will support the bill when it is introduced.
Simbu on edge as vote recount triggers violence
Francis Nii
15 January 2019

The Papua New Guinea electoral commission should consider the deteriorating law and order situation in Kundiawa before there is a recount of votes from the 2017 general election.

The long-delayed election of a new Simbu governor is occurring in a volatile climate of violence and arson as supporters of one of the candidates demand the recount be moved from Lae to a neighbouring province, preferably Goroka in the Eastern Highlands.

The national court ordered the recount completed by 7 February after a petition filed by former governor Noah Kool against the election result and the winning candidate Michael Dua.

After an affidavit submitted by the electoral commission, the court decided Lae should be the recount venue.

The decision was badly received by governor elect Dua and his supporters.

Dua cited as his reasons the distance, risks and costs to candidates and scrutineers in making their way to Lae. But the court dismissed his application for a change of venue.

An unhappy Michael Dua said the electoral commission had not consulted the provincial administrator, police commander and election manager before making a decision.

Dua also said the electoral commission did not give a reason for choosing Lae as the venue for the recount.

However earlier this month electoral commissioner Patilias Gamata told media Lae was “neutral ground”.

Since then, Dua’s supporters have taken control of Kundiawa town. At the police station the container containing the ballot boxes is heavily guarded around the clock by his supporters.

Police have made two attempts to move the container to Lae but were prevented by Dua followers.

The latest attempt to move the container last Thursday turned ugly when Dua and Kool factions engaged in a physical confrontation that continued through Friday.

At present Kundiawa has a serious breakdown of law and order and is in total chaos.

With constant harassment of the public, the town is unsafe for people, especially women and children.
Houses had been burned down when the national court handed down its decision for a recount.

Kundiawa police are overpowered and have no control of the situation. The problem is exacerbated by the absence of the feared Kerowagi Mobile Squad, which is currently under suspension.

It seems the only way to defuse more serious trouble is for the electoral commissioner to move the venue to Goroka, which is more readily accessible from Kundiawa.

With less than three weeks remaining for the completion of the recount, time is of the essence if the worsening law and order situation in Kundiawa is to be alleviated.

If the electoral commission does not reconsider the venue, the impasse is likely to continue.

And if the court-ordered date for the recount expires, Kool is likely going to file a motion for the court to award the win to him.

This would be disastrous for law and order, government, business and infrastructure throughout the Simbu Province.

There was an earlier instance of such mayhem in the Southern Highlands and the electoral commission should have learned from this mistake.

To prevent further trouble the commission should organise a round table discussion with Dua, Kool and Simbu provincial authorities to agree on neutral ground for the recount.

Goroka offers both parties the best opportunity for this.
New government must restore confidence

Francis Nii
28 May 2019

Public confidence in the police force and judiciary as independent and impartial state agencies has declined drastically under the leadership of Peter O’Neill.

Meddling in appointments and in the operations of the police and hard-to-understand decisions of the courts has raised serious doubts and mistrust in the minds of the people.

Increasingly the independence and integrity of the two institutions are being questioned.

As the political numbers game in the lead-up to a possible vote of no confidence intensifies and as a mass exodus occurs of government MPs to the opposition, O’Neill had no choice but to relinquish his position.

Whether he actually does this in favour of Sir Julius Chan or thinks of some other escape route, it will be a last-minute do-or-die manoeuvre for his own survival.

That O’Neill has not resigned but stepped down “for a few days” means he could resume his position anytime.

As of yesterday, the opposition had 63 members and the government 47. There were more defections expected from those who remained in the ‘government’ but the opposition said it had shut its doors to them.

As D-Day gets nearer, perhaps today, the formation of a new government looks certain.

Should this occur, one of its first tasks needs to be the restoration of the integrity and independence of the nation’s law enforcement institutions.

Under O’Neill, these vital state institutions have been severely impaired

There has been the dismantling of the corruption-busting Investigative Task Force Sweep and the termination of its members, O’Neill parachuting Gary Baki into the job of police commissioner and the Supreme Court quashing of the UBS loan case against O’Neill.

There was the continuous suppression and eventual closure of the Parakagate affair by O’Neill and Baki without proper trial, the storming of parliament by the ‘disciplined’ forces never properly investigated and a much-promised anti-corruption commission never delivered.
These are just a few examples of malpractice that have contributed to the decline in public confidence of vital state institutions.

When a new government takes office, one of the first items of business must be to restore the independence, credibility and integrity of the judiciary, the police and the public service.

This means that all agency heads who took political sides and practiced nepotism during O’Neill’s tenure should be replaced with neutral personnel through proper and transparent appointment processes.

All allegations of corruption that have not gone to trial must be resurrected and justice meted out.

Those found guilty must be punished by law to restore confidence in the judiciary and to rid PNG of corruption.

To give credence to this effort must be the passing of an ICAC – Independent Commission Against Corruption - bill into law. The bill must be looked at again to ensure it is totally free of political interference and manipulation both in the appointment of its personnel and in its operations.

The unpopular and unnecessary dual citizenship law must also be repealed to prevent law breakers escaping from PNG.

If the economy is to grow and civil society is to enjoy prosperity, peace and harmony, the country needs a vibrant, independent and impartial justice system and law enforcement agencies.

The laws of a nation must not only protect its citizens but must be the compass that directs its course.

The laws must be strong, respected, upheld and they must work fairly in the interests of every citizen.
CRIME AND CORRUPTION

Fellow Simbu author Sil Bolkin and Francis Nii
In the last couple of months, there have been deep sentiments expressed by lobbyists, critics and social media for a change of government in Papua New Guinea.

The raison d’etre is discontent about a number of the decisions made by the O’Neill government.

Some of these have involved corruption of some sort including amendments to the Vote of No Confidence Act, the government takeover of the PNG Sustainable Development Program and Ok Tedi mine, the asylum seekers deal with Australia and the awarding of a medical kit supply contract to Borneo Pacific Pharmaceuticals.

Bloggers and users of social media are prominent advocates in this discourse. Some even joined hands with the PNG opposition in strategising to topple the government. A case in point was the call for a nationwide strike on the eve of the budget session last November: a plan that went amiss.

Advocating for change in leadership is a typically Papua New Guinean way of reacting to unpopular policies and allegations of corruption. There is nothing wrong with that.

Citizens have the moral obligation to raise concerns about government decisions they feel are not in the best interest of their country.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr once said, “The moment you become silent about the things that matter, you are dead”.

However, the critical question is whether changing the government is a solution to corruption. In other words, can tossing out a government have a tangible impact on reducing corruption?

In the past, allegations of corruption have been a major platform for seeking changes of government on the floor of parliament through votes of no confidence.

The ousting of Somare by Wingti in 1980, Wingti by Namaliu in 1988, Wingti by Chan in 1994 and the dismantling of Somare’s National Alliance by O’Neill and Namah in 2011 were all motivated directly or indirectly by anti-corruption notions.

But was corruption alleviated? No.

Corruption still existed and went on to become even more systemic and complicated. It became a national plague. Why?
The answers lie in our political culture in the way elections are conducted, the way governments are formed and how governments govern.

These peak political activities are mostly flawed.

The electoral system is a breeding ground of corruption. Trading cash and cargo for votes has become deeply rooted.

A candidate who is serious about winning an election has to spend a lot of money and provide a lot of cargo to bribe as many voters as possible and so muster the winning numbers.

Nere-tere – eat and give - is a well-known election catchphrase in Simbu. I'll feed you and you give me your vote.

Consequently, when a new member is elected to parliament, the first thing on his mind is to recoup what he has spent on getting elected. That’s when all kinds of vices creep in.

Often these new members lack leadership qualities. They are prone to vice, negligence, mismanagement and dishonesty because they enter parliament in an illicit or dubious way.

And when they are elected, the golden handshake from a senior politician is a rite of welcoming MPs to one’s side during the formation of government. Venality is a well-grounded tradition during this initial horse trading.

Leadership ethics in PNG must be amongst the poorest in the world. There is no moral conscience in most of our leaders.

Politicians can be accused of the most serious corruption and they will still cling to office. They will appear in public if nothing is wrong with them. They don’t feel ashamed. They don’t have a guilty conscience.

They will even go to court seeking vindication for their wrong doing. It is unethical and it is shameful and it is PNG.

In most societies we don’t see this kind of brazenly corrupt leadership. The moment politicians face serious allegations in the public media, the ritual is that they step down and pave the way for independent investigation.

And if reputation or character is badly tarnished, demotion or resignation will follow.

In Papua New Guinea not one politician has resigned from ministerial portfolio or public office on the basis of moral principle.

Moreover, the culture of nepotism in the allocation of project funds and disbursement of provincial and district development monies make
bad leaders out of good. They compromise their ethics to align with and benefit from the government of the day.

Tobias Kulang, the member for Kundiawa-Gembogl, is a professed Christian and strong advocate against corruption. He was vocal against the O’Neill government on many fronts yet he crossed the floor and joined government ranks citing the interests of his electorate.

And sadly, he was right. If he had remained in opposition his electorate would have missed out on project and development funds.

Although Kulang was a good leader, but flawed and crafty government dictated his crossing sides at the cost of his reputation.

Ofcourse, there are some good leaders who resist these temptations but the system of governance is so flawed that it is like a cobweb that will continue to snare and smear no matter who leads the country.

Reformation of the entire political culture from electioneering to the formation of government and practice of governance will need changes if corruption is to be sidelined.

The introduction of a biometric electioneering system, tightening loopholes in political party integrity law and establishment of Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) would be positive reforms.

Such mechanisms and similar reforms will bring about tangible changes to corruption. Merely changing government will not.
Is Peter O’Neill behaving like a truthful man?
Francis Nii
23 June 2014

Does Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s unrelenting claim that he is free of any wrongdoing in the Parakagate saga hold water?

He has resolutely defended himself against allegations since the matter surfaced as a result of last year’s massive investigation into the Finance Department by Task Force Sweep (TFS) and in the face of forensic test results that affirmed his signature on an authorisation letter was not a forgery.

O’Neill is adamant that the signature on a letter of 24 June 2012 that authorised the payment of K81.7 million of state money to Paul Paraka is not his. He claims someone else signed the letter.

Yesterday, in the face of potential arrest, he accused TFS, police and judiciary of collusion and politicisation and alluded to a plot to overthrow him.

The critical question is whether O’Neill is telling the truth to the people of PNG.

In the minds of the people, and even Australians who have been closely following events, O’Neill is not telling the truth. This is evident in the avalanche of negative views expressed in print, social media and public places.

There seem valid reasons for people taking this stance.

First, O’Neill has never denied the signature on the authorisation letter is his. All he has been asserting is that the signature was forged. In other words, he admits the signature is a representation of his own signature.

Secondly, there is credence to the authenticity of the forensic test result. There is a credible clue that the signature on the authorisation letter belongs to O’Neill, indicating that he himself signed the letter and not another person as he claims.

If O’Neill believed the result of the forensic test was biased or flawed because of collusion and collaboration between Task Force Sweep, police investigators, politicians and TFS’s appointed forensic tester, then the rational thing to do was to seek independent forensic tests.

Without evidence that disputes or disproves the current forensic test result, how can O’Neill prove to the people of PNG that the result was flawed and that he didn’t sign the letter?
Thirdly, if O’Neill has done no wrong, the simplest and most honourable thing to do was to present himself to police investigators, answering their questions and clearing himself.

By doing this, he would have lived by the maxim he has always preached: that no one is above the law.

Moreover, he would have not only cleared himself and maintained his integrity but upheld the dignity of the office he occupies.

Instead, hiding from police investigators and running to the court to block and prevent normal police operations to uphold the law and ensure the administration of justice has cast huge doubt over his claim of innocence and incorruptibility.

Fourthly, if O’Neill has done no wrong, there is no reason for him to fear Deputy Police Commissioner Simon Kaupa, former Attorney General Kerenga Kua, Task Force Sweep head Sam Koim and others who stand against corruption and seek justice.

Instead he has incapacitated them by termination and disbandment. His actions are indications of fear and desperation to conceal something.

Even if the proposed commission of inquiry or court clears O’Neill of any wrongdoing, never will the populace be convinced that he has not played a collusive and corrupted role in siphoning millions of kina belonging to the people of PNG.

A free and innocent man should not fear the law. Only one who breaks the law fears, runs and hides from it.
The 85-21 vote of confidence in the prime minister exercised by the PNG parliament yesterday is a victory for corruption in Papua New Guinea.

The vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Peter O’Neill was a test of leadership ethics and good governance for parliamentarians.

The victory has not vindicated O’Neill of alleged corruption relating to a K81.7 million paid to Paul Paraka Lawyers.

This was the core issue that prompted civil society, university students, national pilots, port workers, doctors, health workers and opposition members of parliament to call for O’Neill to step down. The demand still remains.

Members of parliament who voted confidence in him have indirectly condoned the alleged crime.

They did not want this alleged corrupt payment to be a consideration in parliament’s decision of whether it should have confidence in O’Neill.

There is evidence of decadence in the leadership principles that govern this country, which is very unhealthy for our democracy.

In the face of the new National Joint Security Task Force, schemed by O’Neill and his mob, the majority of politicians, in principle, endorsed the application of this tyrannical scheme.

When applied, it will aggravate the weakening of our democracy and fast lead us towards tyranny by suppressing freedom of expression and denying the rights of citizens to strike.

It was disgusting and morally decadent the way O’Neill played his game. He made his followers puppets as he pulled strings with K3 million borrowed money disguised as district funding disbursements.

The corrupt MPs followed him like little kids begging for lollies.

In ethical terms, it seems to me that O’Neill practiced venality in buying votes for money.

He should not brag that he is clean and victorious. He has only added more filth to the mountain of filth he has created for himself and this country.

Until and unless O’Neill is vindicated by a competent police investigation or court of law, as long as he plays his defiant, evasive and
self-protective game against justice, he is capable of being suspected of an alleged crime.

All those selfish MPs bribed by O’Neill should be ditched in 2017. They should be totally rejected.

O’Neill can lie and bribe and get away with a vote of no confidence but he cannot get away with the truth and, ultimately, the courts.

“There is a higher court than court of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts,” said Mahatma Gandhi.

And, I would add, all wickedness has a cost. At the right time, the perpetrator will each pay his price.

Papua New Guinea, hold your breath, time will reveal all.

“My story is the story of many authors in this country. They went through the same hardships to get their writing published, knowing well that there is no market for their work.”
Corruption originated in electoral commission

Francis Nii

17 July 2017

The title of this article may raise eyebrows but I believe I have evidence to show it is factual and I suspect electoral commissioner Patilius Gamato is likely to be knowingly involved.

The first indication of manipulation came with the printing and circulation of an extra five million ballot papers above and beyond the number of eligible voters. It will be interesting to learn how Gamato accounts for this.

As reported by Jimmy Awagl in a recent article in PNG Attitude, after pressure from candidates, scrutineers and general public the Simbu election steering committee demanded from electoral commissioner Gamato that all boxes of ballot papers sent from Port Moresby be opened and verified against the eligible voting population in each ward.

The steering committee also insisted that the back of each rechecked ballot paper be identified with a stamp approved by the committee and signed by its chairman, provincial administrator Joe Kunda Naur MBE.

The committee’s third ultimatum was that the 2017 preliminary common roll update be used for polling.

After some hesitation, electoral commissioner Gamato eventually conceded to all three demands.

When the steering committee went through the ballot boxes, it was amazed to find that there had been systematic manipulation in the allocation of ballot papers.

In the stronghold areas of People’s National Congress (PNC) Party candidates, the number of ballot papers had been inflated by 100% or more.

The extra papers had been deducted from rival candidates’ areas, thus effectively reducing the number of ballot papers available in those wards.

For example, Ward 1 in Yongomučl local level government, which is the stronghold of Kerenga Kua, has 2,400 eligible voters but only 880 ballot papers allocated by the electoral commission.
The balance of 1,520 ballot papers were found in boxes designated for the stronghold of PNC Party candidate Peter Dege, who is challenging Kerenga Kua.

After fixing the anomalies in the boxes, a total of 10,070 extra ballot papers were extracted: 3,000 for Gumine MP Nick Kuman (PNC); 2,000 for Kundiawa-Gembogl MP Tobias Kulang (PNC); 2,400 for Kerowagi; 2,300 for Chuave; and 370 for Sinesine-Yongomugl.

Despite a plea from Gamato for the return of the extra ballot papers citing they were state property belonging to the electoral commission, the Simbu election steering committee ordered their burning.

They were duly destroyed in front of security forces and stakeholders at Kundiawa Police Station.

The rigging of this election was foiled by all election stakeholders - the provincial election steering committee, electoral officials, candidates, scrutineers and security personnel – being vigilant, smart and honest.

The action in Simbu is ensuring that a true reflection of the people’s wishes will be articulated in this election.

But elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, unfortunately, this is unlikely to be the case.

If the current level of security and public vigilance in Kundiawa continues, Simbu will most likely be the only highlands province that produces an election outcome with a high degree of credibility.
The principal of Jaminan Lawyers, Christopher Jaminan, has announced on Facebook that his firm will provide free legal aid to the Police Fraud Squad and the Criminal Investigation Division if they want to resurrect the fraud case allegedly involving Prime Minister Peter O’Neill.

Jaminam’s offer follows the Supreme Court’s quashing of an arrest warrant against O’Neill in the case known throughout Papua New Guinea as Parakagate.

The announcement drew immediate and overwhelming support across PNG although some Facebook readers, while welcoming the suggestion, were sceptical about its prospects of success.

Some people claimed the judiciary has already been compromised and the effort would be futile as the case would drag on for years or be thrown out on petty technical grounds.

However, most Facebook followers applauded Jaminan and said he should assist fraud squad head Matthew Damaru and his team to obtain a fresh warrant of arrest against O’Neill.

Papua New Guineans have felt the pain of the financial and moral crisis created by the O’Neill government and many people say they are willing to contribute financially to support the law firm and the Police Fraud Squad.

Jaminan was urged to open a trust account and publicise its number in the media.

I had an email chat with Christopher Jaminan last night and commended him for his good heart in wanting to fight this case as many people are seeking justice to prevail.

Jaminam said he had already spoken with Damaru and dialogue would continue until the Fraud Squad’s position was clear.

“I have been in touch on the phone with Mr Damaru,” Jaminam said. “We will be having a few more meetings in the coming days to discuss options and a way forward with the matter.

“Hopefully at some point in the near future, the Fraud Squad’s position will be made clear and known to the public.”

Although we all want proper justice to prevail in the Parakagate matter and fully support Jaminan, it is not the end result that concerns me at this stage.
What worries me is that the wheels of justice get into motion so Jaminan can start to work with Damaru. What happens after that is something for the future. Past experience tells me that O’Neill, his henchman police commissioner Gary Baki and his ‘vetting committee’ will do everything under the sun to prevent Jaminan from providing legal aid to the Fraud Squad. 

If the Jaminan-Damaru team gets over this initial hurdle, the rest should be history creating.

“Living everyday life on borrowed money is a big problem for thousands of workers in Papua New Guinea.”
Impartiality of judiciary is in question

Francis Nii
26 December 2017

The Supreme Court’s decision to quash the arrest warrant for Prime Minister Peter O’Neill relating to an alleged fraudulent payment of K78 million to Paul Paraka Lawyers, a case that spanned three years, has not gone down well with many Papua New Guineans.

Many people are expressing dissatisfaction with the decision on social media and in private.

What is in question is the very impartiality of the justice system.

Prior to the decision, Chief Justice Sir Salamo Injia was photographed happily chatting with O’Neill in the grandstand of Sir John Guise Stadium during a November world rugby league cup match.

The photo went viral on social media as people talked about it and expected the court’s decision to be in O’Neill’s favour, which happened.

Irrespective of whether O’Neill and Sir Salamo discussed the pending case or not, it was a case of whether justice was seen to be done.

The fact that the Chief Justice, sitting as a one-man bench on a stay order application by O’Neill, ordered the arrest warrant be reviewed by the Supreme Court raised a serious question of judicial ethics and integrity.

On Facebook, many people expressed the impropriety of Sir Salamo being seen with O’Neill in such circumstances. After all, this was a fraud case involving tens of millions of kina of public funds.

The quashing of the arrest warrant was based on a number of technical errors which did not go to the substance of the alleged crime.

A court document posted in part on Facebook by Madang MP Bryan Kramer showed the fraud case was alive and able to be resurrected by the Fraud Squad if it wanted to do so.

Given the allegiance between Police Commissioner Gary Baki and O’Neill, and an unusual vetting process engineered by Baki, the chances of the case seeing the light of day again seem very slim.

What baffles most people is that the case took three years to reach a technical dead end, costing the State millions of kina in legal fees. Surely these petty technical errors which could have been rectified a long time ago had the Police Fraud Squad been informed.
Or was there some other hidden force that influenced the court to make its decision? This is the question many people are asking.

In the eyes of Papua New Guineans, the judiciary has been corrupted and compromised like other law enforcement agencies before it.

People look up to the judiciary as their last bastion of hope in the fight against corruption and if this is infected, some people may take the law into their own hands.

What has been occurring in the Southern Highlands Province, where there is a continuing revolt against the State, could easily spread to other provinces.

“Patience and perseverance are truly the keys to success in whatever we want to achieve.”
Governor under scrutiny over yoga contract

Francis Nii
23 April 2018

A controversy surrounding a contract awarded to Yu Yet PNG Ltd, a company associated with Malaysian national and fitness instructor Fazilah Bazari, has been referred to the Ombudsman Commission and police fraud investigators.

The National Capital District contract, in which governor Power Parkop is alleged to be involved, is understood to be worth K250,000 a month for the provision of yoga instruction in the national capital.

Madang MP Bryan Kramer, who has conducted his own inquiries into the contract, said he will file a formal complaint against Parkop with anti-corruption watchdogs.

Kramer said that, among stringent regulatory requirements of the PNG Investment Promotion Authority, to conduct business in Papua New Guinea a foreign enterprise must deposit startup capital of no less than K100,000 into a PNG bank account.

According to IPA records obtained by Kramer and widely circulated in social media, Yu Yet was registered with IPA on 6 June 2015 but did not meet the deposit requirement.

Yu Yet opened a bank account on 21 August 2015 with just K5,000, Ms Bazari obtained a work permit and Yu Yet was able to conduct business.

By 14 October, the Yu Yet bank account balance was K113,613.50 which was proceeds of three National Capital District cheques totalling K143,700 deposited between 24 August and 14 October.

If the cheques were for business (yoga classes) then the payments should have been deemed illegal because there was no IPA certification for the company to conduct business in PNG at that time.

The certification for Yu Yet PNG was eventually issued on 21 October 2015.

This chronology of events seems to indicate that NCD may have illegally facilitated a foreign enterprise with NCD taxpayers’ money to obtain IPA certification, and this is the crunch issue raised by Kramer.

Prior to the revelation of this information, Parkop had strongly denied any irregularities in the IPA certification.

“I want to assure everyone that if you go to IPA you will find that we didn’t pay for that certification,” Parkop said.
“How can we pay for that certification? We would be stupid to raise public funds to pay for a private certification.”

Despite these facts being brought to his attention by Kramer, Parkop offered a defence against the allegations in parliament saying there were no irregularities involved in the IPA certification. He was supported in this by the Member for Chuave and Commerce Minister Wera Mori.

“I’d like to dismiss the claims that Yu Yet PNG was operating illegally,” Mori stated.

“Yes, it is a foreign company owned by one shareholder but it has been fully registered and it has met all requirements by IPA to operate.”

Mori reiterated the statement in The National newspaper last week and drew a backlash from social media users across the country.

Refuting Mori’s claim, Kramer said, “A foreign national who stated her job as a fitness instructor, set up a startup company with just K5,000 and relying on NCD ratepayers’ money (K140,000) generously funded by the governor of NCD was able to obtain its IPA certificate.

“Yet our confused Minister of Commerce and Industry Wera Mori sees nothing wrong with this,” Kramer argued.

This hot issue that has now spanned over many months has attracted a huge amount of comment across PNG.

Ordinary Papua New Guineans are never happy when high profile corruption involving millions of kina does not see justice being meted out, and they seem to think this may be another example.

People get fed up when justice is constantly deferred only, in the end, to be dismissed or quashed in what people believe are dubious circumstances.

The whole nation will be keenly watching how this case is handled if, as expected, it is referred to the Ombudsman Commission and police fraud investigators.
Delays in the disbursement of the so-called ‘tuition fee free’ (TFF) subsidy gets worse each year and the underlying indication is that the national government simply is short of money.

In Monday’s Post-Courier newspaper, chief secretary Issac Lupari stated this was not the case and that it was all the fault of the Education Department in not releasing the funds.

But his statement was confusing and full of contradictions.

“Currently K50 million is sitting in trust accounts and will be released but it is up to the Education Department to make the move,” he said. “When money hits central bank accounts, the Education Department will be given authority for the release of the money to respective school accounts.”

But another statement said: “There is K50 million sitting in a trust account in central bank now that needs to get to schools.”

This is confusing. If the K50 million is the aggregate of various amounts sitting in various trust accounts, then it should be the responsibility of the Treasury Department to release the money to a central account controlled by the Education Department where it can easily be disbursed to the respective school accounts.

Lupari should not expect the Education Department to play a dual role of being collector of TFF funds from various government trust accounts and releaser of funds to schools.

He should be clear on this otherwise people will think he deliberately cooked up the story to confuse the public and make the Education Department the scapegoat.

If there is K50 million currently sitting in a trust account (or accounts) as claimed by Lupari, the Education Department under the leadership of Dr Uke Kombra is not so stupid as to claim it.

The responsibility rests with the prime minister and the treasurer to direct the money to the Education Department as TFF funds for the department to disburse to schools.

In blaming the Education Department for the closure of schools around the country, Lupari said, “The department was at fault because it was not paying fees whenever fees were made available but waited for bulk remittance.”
But he also said, “Money (TFF fees) is sent out on a weekly basis depending on cash flow.”

Lupari can’t have it both ways. This is a total contradiction.

In any event, the K50 million Lupari talks about is inadequate – it will not cover all schools. Many will still miss out.

This also raises the question of what criteria the Education Department will adopt to allocate funds to certain schools when all schools are in dire need of funds.

The truth is plain and it is that the government cannot adequately and effectively sustain the TFF policy because it doesn’t have the money. It has a well-known cash flow problem.

Lupari should not hide the truth by making confusing, contradictory and blame-shifting statement to the media.

And instead of the government making the situation worse by not admitting the reality of its financial difficulties, Prime Minister O’Neill must tell the truth.

Then schools can begin to make their own arrangements to collect fees from parents or support themselves in other ways.

For example, parents can supply food to schools like the Simbu Province started doing this week to try to see classes through to the end of the academic year.

In this way, the government can also be relieved of some financial pressure.

The ball is in your court, Mr Prime Minister and chief secretary Isaac Lupari.

Tell us the truth about your finances and, if you’re out of money, we’ll try to make up the difference.

FOOTNOTE
“Education Minister Nick Kuman refuted Chief Secretary Lupari’s claim of the K50 million in trust stating that the K49 million in the trust account was already paid out. There was no money left. Issac Lupari should be ashamed of telling lies to the people of PNG” – Comment by Francis Nii, 12 May 2018
Papua New Guinea’s police commissioner Gary Baki has claimed in a media statement that Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s official corruption case is officially closed.

The long-running saga involves alleged fraudulent payments of K78.4 million of public funds to Paul Paraka Lawyers.

However, according to Bryan Kramer MP, Baki may have both rekindled the fire of justice and set a trap for himself and the prime minister.

Baki stated his reason for closing the case was lack of evidence.

Whatever reason Baki may employ, though, many Papua New Guineans view the act as a conspiratorial servant-master scheme with no bearing at all on O’Neill’s innocence.

If Baki thinks his recent action has put a complete end to the case, then he is far from reality in the eyes of PNG’s firebrand politician and no-nonsense corruption fighter Kramer.

“If Baki and O’Neill think for a second that this issue will somehow disappear, they are gravely mistaken,” Kramer warned.

Kramer stated there is sufficient evidence to commit O’Neill to stand trial and, now that Baki had gone on record to close the case, he, Kramer, will file fresh complaints and proceedings against Baki for conspiring to defeat justice and against O’Neill for official corruption.

Kramer said that Baki needs to be summoned to explain in court the circumstances that led to his appointment as commissioner, his role in dismantling the National Fraud Squad, his role in establishing the unconstitutional committee to ‘vet’ allegations of major leadership crimes, his siding with O’Neill in national and supreme court proceedings seeking to stay the warrant of arrest against O’Neill and his most recent statement that the case against O’Neill is closed.

This high-profile case has spanned more than three years and cost PNG millions of kina in legal fees without ever seeing a proper trial.

Instead, justice has been gagged, evaded and denied through numerous stay orders until the case hit a technical dead end through a Supreme Court ruling that quashed an arrest warrant against O’Neill on a minor technical glitch.

This effectively put an end to a proper trial on the substantive matter. This failure of the justice system has been harshly criticised and
is regarded with great suspicion by the vast majority of educated Papua New Guineans.

Many people want the case be accorded a proper trial in a duly constituted court of justice. Only through an appropriate trial of the substantive matter will Papua New Guineans see a true and just outcome of this case. This is the lingering wish and desire of our people.

If anyone is capable of ensuring this matter finds a just resolution, it is Kramer who must be commended for intending to resurrect the case.

We pray and hope that justice will eventually prevail.

“In traditional PNG society, wantokism operated as a welfare buffer and underpinned social security. It ensured no one went hungry or was naked or homeless.”
A stunning report by Papua New Guinea’s no-nonsense corruption fighter Bryan Kramer MP yesterday suggested that an K8.5 million bill for damage to parliament was a scam to defraud the state by people related to prime minister Peter O’Neill.

The damage was caused by security personnel who laid siege to parliament when they were not paid allowances following last year’s APEC conference in Port Moresby.

The government decided to pay the assailants K300 ‘sorry money’ in addition to the delayed allowance but last week finance minister James Marape said the government was looking at deducting the K300 allowance as security force members’ contribution to offset the damage to parliament caused in the rampage.

An investigation by Kramer into the K8.5 million damage bill, which was tabled by acting speaker Jeffrey Komal and approved by MPs, showed the bill was fraught with irregularities and inflated costs.

Of the K8.5 million approved, K3.3 million was for the repair of elevators and K2.2 million was for access control systems and water coolers.

Kramer reported: “I carried out an inspection of the lifts and confirmed [there] was no damage caused during the attack on parliament.

“A company connected to O’Neill put in a false claim to profit from it by blaming the security forces.

“These costs are nothing but a con job,” Kramer said.

While confirming there was damage to the access control system, Kramer said the K1.537 million cost was highly inflated. He said the cost estimate should have been K275,000.

The video phones cost K82,000 in 2017 but the claim was for K607,000 - a 640% increase in less than two years.

The replacement cost of the four water coolers was K88,000 which Kramer said was absurd.

The company engaged by parliament to carry out inspection and damage assessment, Port Moresby Lift Services, is said to be owned by Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s cousin Peter (Oscar) Yamuna from Ialibu-Pangia.
It has operated from a small office on the second floor of parliament house rent free since 2011 and planned to defraud the state of K3.3 million for elevators that were not damaged by members of the armed forces.

Simac Ltd, a company registered in Kundiawa with a 50-50 shareholding by Mack Banai and Simeon Wai, engaged to carry out an independent inspection and damage assessment of the elevators also came under fire by Kramer.

“So, a company based in Kundiawa is now carrying out inspections and damage assessment of lift systems in the nation’s capital.

“Correct me if I am wrong, I wasn’t aware elevators even existed in Kundiawa,” Kramer said.

This is another serious corruption allegation involving O’Neill and Kramer’s report, which went viral on Facebook, had many readers asking the prime minister for an immediate explanation.

The nation’s corruption watchdogs, the Ombudsman Commission, the Police Fraud and Criminal Investigation Unit, now need to carry out an immediate investigation and make sure the people involved are promptly prosecuted.
AUSTRALIA AND AID

Francis at the Brisbane CBD in 2016
AusAID should really focus on PNG’s infrastructure

Francis Nii

07 December 2012

All the annual Australian aid to Papua New Guinea to date would have made a lot of difference in the lives of Papua New Guineans in rural areas had the funds been injected directly into where the needs were. You know, like building schools, health centres, roads, bridges and railways, sealed airstrips and communication facilities.

Instead millions of dollars every year have been dumped into the bottomless den of crooks and venal mercenaries in Waigani, where they were sucked dry.

The commitment of K66 million for child and maternal health care and K25 million to support PNG's fee-free education policy announced this week by Australian foreign minister Bob Carr is applauded.

This is welcome news and a bonus for many parents in PNG who have difficulties in finding school fees for their children.

The aid announcement was not a surprise. Australia has always presented PNG with millions of dollars in aid as Christmas gifts. These are welcome presents from our Aussie friends. Thanks to the government and the people of Australia.

But the ever-mind-boggling questions remain. Will the bulk of these funds actually benefit the intended beneficiaries? What percentage will be going into the pockets of Aussie suppliers, consultants and specialists and their counterparts in Waigani? And what percentage will trickle down?

Such are the problems with service-oriented aid.

I detest myself for calling this kind of aid a boomerang franchise but, at the end of the program, there is often nothing to show on the ground.

Australia should re-focus the bulk of its aid on infrastructure development in the rural areas of Papua New Guinea.

I would love to see the Julia Gillard Simbu-Madang Highway or the Bob Carr Highlands Histopathology lab in Mt Hagen or Kundiawa and many more like developments.

It’s just a loud thought.
What have you done Australia? There are no footprints

Francis Nii

03 December 2012

I always had this ugly paranoia that any Australian government sponsored business for its small brother Papua New Guinea was crafted for PNG to fail as a state.

Recent writing in PNG Attitude has confirmed my paranoia.

Education reform, the so-called OBE (outcome-based education), is one example. HIV and AIDS policy is another worse one. It has failed miserably.

People are dying every day from AIDS and yet Australia is still pushing the failed policy with its aid program to the detriment of Papua New Guineans.

Australia has been pumping much aid into PNG over the years but there is nothing on the ground for the Aussie taxpayers to be proud of.

Japan and China are newcomers in the business and wherever they lay their feet footprints remain permanently.

The best examples are the state of the art five-star Kundiawa General Hospital and Jacksons Airport Terminal. Reconstruction courtesy of the Japanese government.

Now I know why there are still slight traces of the Aussie kiaps in PNG and no absolutely no footprints of modern-day Canberra.

It’s all been crafted to fail and boomerang.

When I think about the future of PNG-Aussie relationship, it makes my paranoia worse.
Reject this malign, disrespectful asylum deal

Francis Nii
26 July 2013

Kevin Rudd’s politically-motivated agenda of dumping the asylum-seeking boat people on Papua New Guinea’s soil should be reversed.

The pernicious deal between Rudd and his PNG counterpart Peter O’Neill was done in a dubious manner and driven by the might of the Aussie dollar.

O’Neill was suborned by Rudd into blindly shouldering politically motivated absurdity under the influence of Aussie taxpayers’ money without proper assessment of the long-term implications on PNG.

Whether this is a temporary political ploy or otherwise, as far as the communities of the two countries are concerned the deal is not appropriate and not transparent.

Even after much public outcry, the deal still remains secret. This is unbecoming of democracy, should be condemned in the strongest terms and the deal reversed.

In our global community, every nation depends on each another for commerce, trade, security and other matters. There is no exception for PNG and Australia.

The PNG-Australia relationship is unique and goes beyond the boundaries of a usual bilateral relationship.

It has been more of a brotherly bond and has extended as far back as World War II when Papua New Guineans became wartime supporters of Australian soldiers and even took up arms to fight alongside Australians against the Japanese.

The relationship was further strengthened under the flagship of the Australian colonial administration when thousands of young Australians toiled under horrendous conditions to bring civilisation to an undeveloped PNG in an effort that led to the subsequent granting of independence without bloodshed on 16 September 1975.

Until now Australia has continued to enhance the relationship by way of aid. Until the 1980s, Australia pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into impoverished PNG coffers as direct budgetary support with no strings attached. PNG used the money as it pleased.

Later Canberra changed the aid policy to tied aid-projects under which PNG enjoys an annual subvention of around half a billion dollars.
In view of these facts, I have always believed in my heart that Australia is PNG’s best friend and will always remain our best friend. I am sure many Papua New Guineans and Australians agree with me on this.

However, there are times that I get angry with Australia for certain Canberra-sponsored policies that are deemed detrimental yet are imposed on PNG.

One prime example was outcome-based education and now we have the asylum-seeking boat people deal between our two prime ministers, Rudd and O’Neill.

Australia has long been an asylum seekers’ preferred country of destination. They have always headed for the shores of Australia; never PNG. Rudd and O’Neill know that.

Now Rudd has shoved his politically-motivated egoistic agenda down the throat of O’Neill under the might of the Aussie dollar without regard for the views of the ordinary Papua New Guineans who will day by day bear the implications of the deal.

This to me is Australia as a bully; emasculating the sovereignty of PNG and denying the intelligence of its people.

PNG politicians will always fall into the trap of ‘free money’ but Australia has a moral obligation to not set this pernicious bait in the first place.

This trend of Aussie dollars doing the talking without respect for the sovereignty of PNG as an independent nation will breed contempt and sour the relationship.

This malign approach by Australian politicians must be condemned in the strongest terms.

Mutual understanding and respect for each other’s sovereignty and adherence to the wishes of the citizens of our respective countries must take precedence over money and other duress.

Then we will continue to enjoy a harmonious relationship between our two great nations.
Australia must retract plan for Bougainville

Francis Nii

19 May 2015

Australian foreign affairs minister Julie Bishop should apologise to the people and the government of Papua New Guinea and retract her government’s intention to clandestinely interfere in PNG’s internal affairs by establishing a diplomatic mission on Bougainville.

Of all nations, Australia should be the last to even contemplate such a grave political injury against its closest neighbour and friend when she knows very well that Bougainville is a sovereign province of the independent state of PNG.

On what grounds has Julie Bishop been scheming to give covert diplomatic recognition to Bougainville? What is the Australian government’s motive?

If Australia has a valid reason then it should have the courtesy to discuss it with PNG; not go around the back of the government. Bougainville is an integral part of PNG.

I have always thought that Australia is a good friend of PNG, but after Australian immigration officials stripped Grand Chief Somare’s sandals, the revelation of a planned Australian military takeover of PNG, the transfer of Australia’s internal refugee problem to Manus, Australia spying on PNG communications and now the proposed diplomatic mission on Bougainville, I’m beginning to rethink the Australia-PNG relationship.

Australia is only pretending to be a friend of PNG.

No wonder Australia, through the might of the Aussie dollar, reduced the number of personnel in the PNG Defence Force citing that PNG doesn’t need a big army. After incapacitating the army, the motive has now unfolded. Oh, PNG the gullible one.

Of course, there are Australian citizens who are diehard patriots of PNG and I have great respect for them.

But the acts of politicians like Bishop are destructive of PNG’s sovereignty and she should publicly apologise to the people and government of this country and retract the whole plan. Otherwise the relationship of the two countries is going to erode.

This is a serious matter and all Papua New Guineans should be concerned about it instead of making loud noises over trivial matters like spending a few hundred thousand kina to bring in an old King James Version bible.
When the media revealed the story of the diplomatic mission, I expected the so-called Papua New Guinean crusaders and saviours to be the first ones to condemn Bishop and demand a public apology to the government and people of PNG.

Instead, they have been silent like they have threads over their mouths.

When it comes to criticising PNG’s leaders and government, they are the first to want to be seen as crusaders and saviours.

But they cower when it comes to defending our country against foreign governments like Australia for policies and actions destructive to PNG.

What a bunch of hypocrites and pretenders, always grumbling and rubbing their own leaders and government but they can’t do the same against the likes of Julie Bishop and the Australian government.

Are we serious in our literature and voices or do we just want to make noises for glory and fame?

Such faux radicalism and pretence can become our own enemy and hindrance to good ideas and intentions.

Of all the Papua New Guinean readers and commentators on PNG Attitude, only five true Papua New Guineans spoke up against Australia’s diplomatic scandal: Jack Klomes, Busa Jeremiah Wenogo, Corney Korokan Alone, Fidelis Sukina and Dr Clement Waine. I salute you. You are true Papua New Guineans. Keep it up!

I have also realised that Australians are divided on this issue. Thank you to those who have raised their voices against the plan. I salute you too.

Lest we allow for division, for divided we shall fall.
Resist the division schemers and our unity shall be stronger.
Be wary of the talking dollar
After it talks it boomerangs
No footmarks for it flies out the way it flies in
Leaving us begging
Dependency!
Manipulation!
For a moment say no to the talking dollar
And see how we go from here.

FOOTNOTE
Francis received 30 comments, some of them offended and agitated, in response to this article. But his judgement was sound. On 5 June PNG Attitude reported that the
Australian government had replaced its High Commissioner and a diplomatic mission was never established in Bougainville:

“The boss of Australia’s foreign affairs department, Peter Varghese, has admitted that Papua New Guinea was not told of Australia’s plans for a new diplomatic post in Buka. This stunning revelation discloses a serious breakdown of process and communication within Australia’s elite government agency and affirms that the PNG government was justified in its strenuous response to Australia on this matter. The secret plan to locate a diplomatic post on Buka came to public view only when it was published in the detailed background papers that accompanied last month’s Australian federal budget.”

“Death is part of the life cycle mankind must go through, but the passing of a friend and a good person is an especially painful loss.”
Roads and bridges are key to effective aid

Francis Nii
27 July 2016

Last week Lindsay Bond wrote of the opening of three bridges worth K139 million at Eroro, Girua and Ambogo in Oro Province, built with the support of Australian aid.

Yesterday we read of the death of a mother of eight children in Dr Kevin Pondikou’s searingly personal piece on administering a health service in remote Papua New Guinea.

These articles brought a million thoughts to my mind of what wonders Australian aid could have brought to PNG had more attention been focused on building roads and bridges to link rural areas and urban centres.

Australia spent millions of dollars on her colony prior to independence and continues to spend $500 million annually today, but why has this aid money not transformed the lives of the rural masses scattered across remote and mountainous terrain and on islands separated by often treacherous seas?

The efficacy of Australian aid money on the lives of Papua New Guineans, especially in rural areas, has often been raised in PNG Attitude and remains a matter of contentious debate.

It brings forward related issues like how much of this aid money goes back to Australia in the form of contracts, company profits, consultants and procurement of Australian goods and services, so-called boomerang aid.

It is understandable that, for political, economic and security reasons, Australia has her own foreign aid priorities. However, as a political and economic powerhouse in the Pacific, her aid money should be making a colossal and sustainable impact in PNG.

In our country, infrastructure such as roads and bridges are key to overcoming obstacles and disparities and lopsided social services and opening up economic development opportunities.

For services like health and education to cheaply, equitably and effectively reach the bulk of PNG’s population in isolated rural areas, roads and bridges are vital links.

The people of PNG know how to survive in this harsh environment, either with or without the presence of government.
We know how to get to the nearest health centre or market. We will carry a sick person long distances to get to the nearest aid post; we will paddle a canoe for many hours to get produce to market.

We are born and bred to walk and sail long distances no matter how severe the sun, wind or rain. It's in our blood.

We have a natural ability to survive which serves us well, but even this does not allow us to overcome the many disadvantages of being remote from the benefits of modern life.

Efficient road and sea links will solve many problems as well as opening up new business opportunities.

Of course, health and education, the two sectors that Australian aid concentrates on, are important. But how can these services reach people and transform their lives if there is no efficient, low cost and reliable transport?

For example, a place like Karimui in Simbu Province, often described as ‘coast in the highlands’ because of its capability to grow crops like coffee, cocoa, coconuts and betel nut, has no road link with the rest of Simbu and PNG.

After 41 years of independence, this area of high economic potential and its 12,000 population are only readily accessible by air, which makes delivering health and education services to the people very expensive.

It costs an average of K6,000 to airlift a sick person or pregnant mother from Karimui to Kundiawa.

If there was a road link, K6,000 could provide access to health centres for 600 people.

Moreover, the prosperity of Simbu as a province could change greatly because of the huge economic potential of Karimui.

In Karimui, Yehebi and other similar places, there is no evidence of aid money trickling down to those it is meant to benefit.

I’m not advocating that all Australian aid be concentrated on roads and bridges but aid should create a rippling, continuing and lasting impact in PNG so effective health and education services are available to all communities regardless of whether they are rural or urban.

The $500 million of aid money Australia spends in PNG each year could have transformed the lives of the rural majority by now had it been concentrated on opening isolated areas to the outside world.

As far as PNG is concerned, no matter how much aid money Australia spends on health and education, its impact in rural areas will
continue to be insignificant compared to towns and cities because of the cost of service delivery.

If Australia is serious about its aid making a sustainable transformation in the lives of most Papua New Guineans, it should be thinking seriously about infrastructure.

Without solving this problem, the equitable delivery of services will remain a formidable challenge.

“The lives of the innocent majority and the education and future of children cannot continue to be jeopardised by the political greed.”
True Australians bond with a flawed nation

Francis Nii
29 November 2016

Back then I could never have known that the creator of the splendid building standing conspicuously on a hill in Chuave would one day be my friend and escort me on my first visit to Australia.

In 1979, when I enrolled in Grade 7 at Chuave Provincial High School, I observed on a prominent hill a monumental structure with a very different architecture from anything I had ever seen.

By the time I arrived, this building – once a library – was derelict, the walls riddled with holes. It was human vandalism that had done this but the structure remained solid as if it was defying human vileness.

I came to know that this elegant A-frame library had been constructed in 1968-69 and I was still at school in Chuave when eventually it was demolished in 1980.

Just two months ago, in September, I was able to make my first visit to Australia on a study tour funded by a McKinnon-Paga Hill fellowship.

While in Brisbane for the annual writers’ festival, I met Murray Bladwell, a retired educationist and long-serving member of Toowong Rotary Club.

Under the auspices of the club, Murray had arranged for me to get a new wheelchair and a replacement for my stolen notebook computer. The wheelchair was being assembled in Ipswich, near Brisbane, and he wanted me to test it. Together we drove to Ipswich.

On the way, Murray shared fond memories of his life in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s and 1970s. Somehow the conversation got around to that unusual building I had admired nearly 40 years ago.

It dawned on me that I was in the company of the brain and sinew behind that unforgettable structure.

Murray told me the building was a library and that he, as headmaster of Chuave Primary School, had been instrumental in its concept, design and construction.

My heart cried as the image of the building was rekindled in my mind. It had been a solid structure which, had it been looked after, could have stood to this day and continued as a reservoir of knowledge.

That library was yet another hallmark of the work of Australian civil servants, missionaries and entrepreneurs who came to our shores in
those pre-independence years. It was through the careless attitude of too many of our own people that such gifts vanished over time.

But let me tell you the story of Murray Bladwell.

After working as a health inspector in Queanbeyan, New South Wales, Murray accepted an offer to train as a school teacher in PNG, travelling to Rabaul to undertake a six-month course at Malaguna Teachers’ College.

After he graduated in October 1963, Murray was posted to Goroka where – with the school year nearly over - he did temporary work at the District Education Office.

Here he met Keith Jackson who, after two years teacher training at the Australian School of Pacific Administration in Sydney, had just arrived in PNG and was also awaiting posting to a school.

Murray told me that this was the start of a lifelong friendship with the PNG Attitude editor and another patriot and true man of Papua New Guinea.

In 1964 Murray was first assigned to Siokiei Primary T School, out of Goroka along the Bena road. He had no sooner arrived than he found himself in the middle of PNG’s first national election for the House of Assembly.

Murray told me he was privileged to act as an assistant returning officer under the watchful eye of esteemed kiap Colin Campbell who, with a team of polling officials, trekked through villages in the Henganofi open electorate on a five-week patrol.

Later in 1964, Murray was posted to Gon Primary T School, now known as Gon Kambua Primary School, in Kundiawa in Simbu Province. There he served under Ray Andersen, a dynamic educator and prominent contributor to PNG’s education development.

Through 1964 and 1965, Murray and Keith taught in Kundiawa and collaborated in publishing the Kundiawa News, a small newspaper with a circulation of about 200.

During leave in Australia at the beginning of 1966, Murray married Joan, also a teacher. Joan is such a beautiful woman and I had the pleasure of meeting her during my trip to Brisbane.

She treasured the bilum I gave her. The next day I saw Joan carrying it on a boat ride on the Brisbane River, which made me feel so happy.

On return from leave in early 1966, Murray and Joan were posted to Chuave Primary T School, as it was known back then: Murray as headmaster and Joan as kindergarten teacher.
Murray told me that he and Joan had a wonderful three years working with a highly supportive local community in developing the school facilities, including the famous library.

In 1970 they were transferred to Port Moresby where Murray worked in the Publications Branch of the Education Department and Joan was posted to Hohola Demonstration School and later seconded to the Department of Health to develop a health curriculum and jointly author health teaching guides for PNG schools.

In 1971 Murray joined Wal Capper and Fay Goodman on the much-loved radio program, Teachers’ Teatime, a joint initiative between the ABC (now NBC) and the Education Department.

This program was aimed at teachers throughout PNG and was broadcast at morning tea time so all teachers could gather in their staff rooms to listen to it and discuss the issues raised.

Teachers’ Teatime enabled Murray to travel widely throughout PNG interviewing teachers and educationists.

At about the same time Joan was appointed a lecturer at Port Moresby Teachers College, later lecturing in early childhood learning at Port Moresby Medical College.

In 1972, Murray was seconded to Education headquarters in Konedobu where, prior to independence, he was executive officer of the National Education Board.

Upon his return to Australia in late 1974, Murray joined the Queensland Department of Education.

He later earned a master’s degree from the University of Alberta in Canada and had an impressive career in Queensland education, retiring as Assistant Director of Planning and Policy in 1999.

Murray then spent nine years working as a consultant in his best friend Keith Jackson’s public relations company, Jackson Wells Morris.

Murray and Joan told me they have very fond memories of their years in PNG and in particular the warm-hearted village people, parents and inquisitive children who made teaching such an enjoyable and inspiring experience.

Murray and Joan still feel a strong attachment to PNG and the recent Simbu schools book project for that Murray initiated was another clear manifestation of this bond.

There are many Australians like Murray and Joan who are true friends of PNG and who spent much of their life serving PNG and its people, sometimes in the most difficult conditions.
Although most left PNG around 40 years ago, they still have special attachment to our country. As the late David Wall said, “You can take the man out of PNG but you can’t take PNG out of the man”.

Today, when these men and women see PNG driven into poverty and riddled with extreme corruption and malpractice by the current brand of leaders and public servants, they feel the same pain and anger as we PNG’s common citizens.

This is evident in the writings of Keith Jackson, Phil Fitzpatrick, Chris Overland, Paul Oates, Peter Kranz, Barbara Short, Bernard Corden, Lindsay Bond, Robin Lillicrap to name just a few.

Sometimes they say openly, bugger it, I am done with that shithole. But you will find that they do not give up.

The bond between them and the shithole continues, and even strengthens, and this makes them true men and women of Papua New Guinea.

Murray Bladwell is one such person.
Australia, you’re being outgunned by China

Francis Nii
20 July 2018

The recent surge of Chinese influence in the western Pacific and especially in Australia’s former colony Papua New Guinea should not be a surprise.

China has been in the region long enough to capitalise on weaknesses in the PNG-Australia relationship.

Instead of Australia getting anxious and wringing its hands, Canberra should be asking where it has gone wrong as PNG’s big brother and start working on fixing the relationship.

The official Chinese presence in PNG goes back to 1976 when the People’s Republic of China established diplomatic ties soon after PNG gained independence in 1975.

So, China has been here for over 40 years providing investment and development aid. But it was only after 2000 that bilateral ties with PNG in investment, health, education and infrastructure intensified. And this included military training for the PNG Defence Force in 2013, which was a signal.

Although Australia has provided many billions of dollars’ worth of aid to PNG since independence – half a billion a year currently - debate about its impact has been contentious.

How has this huge amount of money transformed the general development of PNG and the livelihood of its people, especially the rural majority who reside in traditional communities?

There have been many impediments to aid effectiveness. One good example is the road system.

Difficulty in service delivery posed by the lack of efficient transport has been a significant obstacle to success.

About 85% of PNG’s population dwells in rural communities scattered across remote and rugged terrain where road access is a major problem.

Most of these communities have no road access even in this 21st century. Villages and hamlets only accessible by plane or chopper make services delivery expensive and often impossible.

Australia knows this and has documented it in numerous aid reviews. But its’ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has largely failed to address this huge problem.
As PNG’s traditional ally and closest neighbour, Australia could have done much more in this sphere – a decent road system is imperative to equitable economic development in this country.

Instead DFAT has over the years tailored programs predominantly toward human development, specifically health and education, and most recently governance, law and justice.

All important, of course, but somehow ending up benefiting mostly the urban-based elite class who are out of touch with the rural population.

Australia doesn’t seem to have a comprehensive, workable plan to enable the rural majority to advance in terms of physical and economic development.

Instead it regards PNG as economically impoverished and politically weak - only good for Australian companies to rip out vast resources and walk away.

When PNG is faced with an economic crisis, which we are at present, Australia hasn’t come up with any special rescue package. Instead Canberra seems to have folded its hands and watched to see at which point PNG might sink. Hopefully after APEC.

Sure, the sentiment is that Australia doesn’t want PNG to fail; but its passivity and lack of concern seems to belie the truth of that.

So, it is good that China seems to be waking Australia from its slumber, perhaps aided by a bit of a shake from the Americans.

It is now time for Canberra to ask itself where it has gone wrong, why and what it can do to find ways to improve its approach.

Australian aid to PNG apparently was being reviewed in Port Moresby last week. Hopefully something different, bigger and better will come out of that.

However, as long as the current focus of Australian aid to PNG continues to avoid the basic challenges, and the problem of transportation is really fundamental, the meaningful delivery of services to the rural majority means that the bulk of Papua New Guineans will flounder.

If China through its ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ can make a difference in important but neglected infrastructure development, so be it.

It will make service delivery easier and cheaper. It will improve health and education services in rural areas.

It will stimulate business activity, especially small to medium enterprises in rural PNG.
It will stimulate agriculture and improve logistics to increase inter-provincial and regional trade.
It could be a new dawn for PNG, especially the rural majority.

“I see many coastal people toiling in rough seas, fighting wind, rain and sun to catch fish to sell them at market. After they sell everything, they buy lamb flaps and tinned fish. Whenever I think about these things, it makes me wonder which part of their body these people use for thinking. It can’t be their brains.”
Pacific Beat’s end signifies corrosion of bonds  
Francis Nii  
18 July 2018

There have been certain things that signify the bond between Australia and Papua New Guinea despite what appears to be a quickly eroding relationship.

Amongst them has been the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s shortwave service and its program Pacific Beat, which has played a vital role in the Australian-PNG relationship and development process.

But these connectors between the people of PNG and the people of Australia are disappearing.

Pacific Beat reaches all corners of PNG and the Pacific with news and other information.

It connects people in the region and collects and disseminates news and other stories to listeners.

At Kundiawa in the central highlands of PNG, the most effective way I get Pacific regional news is through Pacific Beat.

When I read about the axing of the program it brought tears to my eyes because I twice participated in it and one of them was directly from Kundiawa.

My friends and relatives who heard the interview asked me when I had gone to Australia. I laughed and told them that I did not go to Australia; I was interviewed by phone. They were amazed.

Pacific Beat and its dedicated staff should be given special recognition for their excellent service in bringing together the region through this program.

My family and I in Kundiawa are appealing to the Australian government and ABC to rescind its decision to axe Pacific Beat and its shocking earlier decision to get rid of shortwave radio

Instead they must revitalise and enhance radio transmissions and recognise the programs they produce and the staff who make them.

Please bring back to life our Pacific Beat.
Generosity is what counts
Francis Nii
30 January 2020

In a critical economic situation as we have now in Papua New Guinea, when even a single kina matters much for many families, the generosity shown by Simbu people toward the Simbu For Australia bushfire appeal was amazing.

Simbus from all walks of life poured their hearts out for the fundraising effort to help the people of Australia affected by devastating fires.

Incredibly, elderly mothers clambered up rocky Simbu mountains to give money, so did young children, as did market hawkers in Kundiawa, public servants, educated elites in faraway places and small business entrepreneurs.

And it wasn’t only the people of Simbu making donations but the neighbouring Jiwaka people, including political icon and Jiwaka chief Sir Philip Kapal and his daughter Debbie.

The generosity of people has been so amazing and the fundraising committee wondered why that was so?

One phrase frequently uttered, particularly by elderly donors, was ‘Australia em mama’. [Australia is our parent] So why do the Simbu people describe Australia like this?

“I wouldn’t be here like I am now if it wasn’t for Australia,” said the managing director of Greenland Motel, Andy Siure, giving his donation of K5,000. “It was Australia who gave me the education.

“Australia is like a mother to PNG. In good times and bad times, Australia is always there for PNG and there is no better time to show them our appreciation when they are faced with devastating bushfire.”

Another Simbu businessman and philanthropist, Peter Iggy, presenting his company 350 Limited’s K5,000 donation expressed the same sentiment.

“Australia is like a mother to Simbu and PNG. They give us a lot of aid for infrastructure, health and education development and we have the social and environmental obligations to help them when they are affected by the bushfire,” he said.

An old woman placing a handful of coins in the donation box said in perfect Tok Pisin:

“Astralia i lukautim yumi taim yumi no save long rit na rait. Ol i bringim lotu, school na hausik. Ol i wokim ples balus, rot na bris. Na bihain ol i givim
Australia looked after us when we did not know how to read and write. They brought churches, education and health services. They built airstrips, roads and bridges. Later they gave us independence but they didn’t leave us. They continue to give us money. Now that they face problem, this is our time to help them.

Mechanical engineer Robert Bal Muka from Genabona in Gumine, currently working for Qatargas in Qatar in the Middle East, donated K1,000 to the appeal.

In 2009 while working for Santos in Adelaide, South Australia, Robert had witnessed a similar bushfire in Victoria. In Robert’s own description, “The bushfire killed many people, animals and destroyed many homes. Due to the vast devastation, it earned itself the name Black Saturday.”

The prime minister at the time, Grand Chief Michael Somare, on behalf of the PNG government and the people of PNG donated $1 million to relief efforts.

The thing that was most memorable to Robert was that his Australian colleagues at Santos House came up to him and acknowledged publicly PNG’s donation.

Those were people not directly affected by the bushfire but their words of gratitude and facial expressions clearly indicated to Robert that they really appreciated PNG’s support. As a Papua New Guinean, Robert was proud of Grand Chief Somare.

An old woman places a few coins in a donation box. Half of the money raised in Simbu and Jiwaka has come from ordinary people with little money of their own.

That experience taught Robert that if ordinary Australians could acknowledge the humanitarian efforts, then those directly affected must have been touched profoundly.

“After all we are all humans so any humanitarian efforts are felt by others too,” he said. “Over the years, I’ve come to appreciate more and more that all humans are connected at some level, perhaps spiritually.

“That’s why I try to contribute to such causes whenever I can and encourage my children to do the same.”

Dr Ga’allah Peter Kora is from Dawaré in Dom, Sinasina-Yongomugl, and he donated K1,000 to the appeal.

When making his donation at the appeal launch, Dr Ga’allah said two things that remain vividly in my mind.
He challenged the audience that if they were true Christians, they should show love by donating something. It wasn’t known at that time that Dr Ga’allah had started a love ministry.

Later he said, “This year we are in God’s ministry under the ‘Love Your Neighbour’ banner. We believe that only by love we can enter the kingdom of God. Without love we cannot.”

Dr Ga’allah also mentioned was that he owed the Australian people his education and he wanted to show them his appreciation at this time of bushfire.

After graduating from UPNG with a bachelor’s degree in economics in 1996, he was sponsored by the Australian government for further studies in Australia where he attained his PhD in 2005.

At this time, when Australia is grieving the effects of its worst bushfires, Dr Ga’allah felt very indebted to the people of Australia. He wanted to impart the Godly love and care to them through his donation.

Dr Tine F Ningal from Imiltop village in the Dom Sipagul area of Gumine District was another philanthropist who donated K500 to the appeal all the way from University College Dublin in Ireland where he works in the School of Geography as a senior technician.

Prior to that, Dr Ningal got his master’s degree in cartography and geo-visualisation at Twente University College in the Netherlands. He also received another Masters in Geographical Information Systems from Wageningen University, also in the Netherlands.

Dr Ningal’s current role involves performing a range of tasks involving GIS, remote sensing and cartography, computer maintenance as well as teaching, running courses on drone flying and research.

He was brought up with a strong Catholic faith, his father was a pioneer catechist, and he learned to share.

“I would hear him preaching about giving to others who are in need of help without expecting anything in return. Only God knows your heart and will reward you accordingly. That kind of talk registered strongly in me.

“We had very little and were poor compared to others, yet he would take whatever meagre resources we had, like food, money and material, and give them to others who badly need them. This would make me angry as a child but, in retrospect, he demonstrated what he preached and that humbled me.

“We don’t get to live on this planet for eternity. We also do not need a lot of material wealth and money to make us happy.
“Sharing is caring and I believe that whatever little help we can spread around to those who are in need of help is the humblest act of love we can show our fellow human beings.

“This would then instil in them the act of giving to help others around them – it is contagious act and the more we help each other, the better our society can become and set a benchmark for future generations to adhere to,” Dr Ningal said.

The fundraising ends on Friday 7 February and if any Simbu member of parliament wants to stand alongside the little people of Simbu who have overwhelmingly supported the fundraising because they feel that Australia is their friend and helper in good and bad times, you have until then to give your donation.

This message also goes to business houses in Simbu who feel that they have social and environmental obligations to help Australians affected by the bushfire in rebuilding their communities.

The fundraising committee highly acknowledges Kundiawa based local companies Greenland Motel and 350 Limited for being the only two business houses who donated K5,000 each toward the appeal.

The committee also acknowledges the Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital for being the only government agency so far to donate K1,000.

The committee highly praised the ordinary Simbus and Jiwakas who gallantly poured their hearts into giving half of the money raised.

Whether big or small amount, the generosity you have shown is what counts and hopefully the government and people of Australia will appreciate that they have true friends in the central highlands of Papua New Guinea

FOOTNOTE
The appeal eventually raised K174,000 which was presented to the PNG government through Prime Minister James Marape to direct to the Australian government. There was no recognition from Marape or the Australian government of this act of great generosity by the Simbu people.
“Newly-minted politicians have the clearest of choices – to exercise the moral imperative of standing for country and people, or to go down the grubby road of self-aggrandisement and dishonesty.”
THE LATER POET

First meeting of the Simbu Writers Association
The PNG Attitude Poetry
Francis Nii

A Call to Seed with Probity
27 January 2012

Written at the height of the 2011 political impasse between Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare and Peter O’Neill over the prime minister's post and Task Force Sweep’s stunning unveiling of misappropriation of millions of public funds by politicians and public servants

Probity...probity!
Fountain of love
Pillar of peace
Crown of justice
Rock of salvation
Tower of liberty
Sea of prosperity

Probity...probity!
Heaven’s legacy
Messiah’s advocacy
Yoke of supremacy
Dream of the meek and afflicted
National cry of the masses
Manna for a nation in crisis

Seed Papua New Guinea seed
Big men seed
Small men seed
Mothers’ seed
Children seed
Clergymen seed
Everybody seed
With probity

Seed in all walks of life
Probity in the homes
Probity in the learning places
Probity in the work places
Probity in the churches
Probity in the bureaucracy
Probity in the political arena

Let probity be implanted in our blood

Let probity be rooted in our systems of governance Let probity takes reign in our dealings A probity-cherished Papua New Guinea shall her citizens triumph over a new sunrise A dawn of opulent paradise where the euphoria of triumph never dies

Just Another Mortal
11 February 2012

Written during the crowning of Miss Simbu

Oh Simbu Ambai
Pearl of Paradise
No cosmetic disguise
No vexatious vice
Discreetly modest and wise
Your roseate nose
Shines like the petals of rose
Your romantic pose
Enthrals my conscience into comatose

Oh Simbu Ambai
Your ebony lips
Make my heart leap
The spell of your velvety slips
Drives my virility into eclipse

Oh Simbu Ambai
On the wing of pride
In nirvana you glide
With prudence you
Preside
Songs of virtue you confide
Oh Simbu Ambai
I wish your bones were made of steel
So that you’d know no aging
I wish your heart was made of diamond
So that you’d know no debility
I wish you were an angel
So that you’d know no mortality
But pity - you're just another mortal

Life’s Journey
26 December 2012

I am still bed ridden. Fortunately, my work station is custom-made with wheels so it is now beside my bed where I can do whatever I have to do. I sent my last article from my bed and so this poem. It looks very odd here in the ward but the nurses and doctors are very understanding, which gives me the flexibility and a bit of freedom do my writing and my Simbu Children Foundation work.

With dreams abound
Man embarks on life’s flight
He stumbles and scrambles
In this blind journey

Driven by ego or circumstances
For survival or fame
Man toils and fights
In this blind journey

As sun sets and rises
One dream fades, another rises
Keeping man chasing the wind
In this blind journey

As time’s wheel keeps spinning
Just dreams and more dreams
Despair and disillusions abound
Yet the blind journey continues

Till man’s strength grows grey
And his breath ceases,
Only then peace avail
Only then destiny at last.

What I Was Told
17 October 2015

What I was told by Grandpa …
Show compassion to others
And you sow amity
Multitude friends you shall win
Myriad peace and harmony you’ll enjoy

What I was told by Grandpa …
Care for the old, vulnerable and meek
And you sow prosperity
Copiousness you shall reap
Peace and happiness shall fill your home

What I was told by Grandpa …
Do not steal
Like stepping in a flaming fire
You’ll get burnt until you repay in full
Or else bad blood and blood bath will ensue

What I was told by Grandpa …
Do not covet
For your conscience will get tainted
Morality and astuteness will depart your mind
Violence and cacophony will prevail

What I was told by Grandpa …
Uphold the laws of the land
And you build a fort
Refuge you’ll find when attacked
Peace and security, you’ll enjoy

What I was told by Grandpa …
Like good soil is education
Good harvest comes from hard work
Wealth and prosperity, you’ll reap
Peace and happiness, you’ll enjoy

What I was told by Grandpa …
Take to heart the sages’ advice
Like torches in the dark
They’ll show you the right path
Success, peace and long life you’ll reap

Guileless Wahgi River
16 October 2015

Guileless Wahgi River
Rumbling and rolling on
Who can be au fait with your liberty?

Guileless Wahgi River
Rumbling and rolling on
Who can fathom your versatility?

Guileless Wahgi River
Rumbling and rolling on
Who can perceive your dexterity?

Guileless Wahgi River
Rumbling and rolling on
Who can reverse your course?

Guileless Wahgi River
Rumbling and rolling on
Who can tame you?

Guileless Wahgi River
Rumbling and rolling on
To the ogle of the mighty ocean
The Dodgy Warrior Is Falling
13 October 2015

Dodgy Warrior …
Your days are numbered
Defeat’s storm is brewing
A sweep into oblivion awaits

Your fame has receded
Your triumph has waned
The accolades have faded
The music’s tempo diminishes

You can’t fight anymore
Your potency is enervated
Your shields are battered
Your spears depleted

You can’t hide anymore
The night has departed
The dawn has come
There is no more refuge

You are falling, dodgy Warrior
Not by the sword of the enemy
But by the venom of your wicked deeds
Into a grave you yourself dug

Dodgy Warrior …
Pay the price of your duplicity
Suffer the wrath of justice
Await the dungeon you deserve
Forever We Will Love You, Dollorose
10 October 2015

Dedicated to Leonard Roka and his wife Delphine on the passing of their daughter, Dollorose

Only yesterday you bloomed
Like a rose in the morning sun
Full of life, promises and purpose

Only to fade and wither
So early and so young
Leaving us with broken hearts, grief and sorrow

Only fond memories
Of your smile and innocent voices
Shall we cherish on in our hearts

Wherever you may be, Darling
Forever we will love you
Until the end of time

Rest in peace

Exploitation
18 March 2016

Development, they croon
The typical claptrap
Behemoth’s sweet gimmick

What development?
My lifestyle the same
My status a shame
Change, they chant
The typical mumbo jumbo
Tyrant’s propaganda

What change?
My lifestyle the same
My status a shame

Progress, they brag
The typical gibberish
Swindler’s bitter pill

What progress?
My lifestyle the same
My status a shame

What happens to my gold and copper?
What happens to my oil and gas?
What happens to my forest and fish?

Bamboozled, ripped and robbed at will
While I spectate in bewilderment
Beggar on my own rich soil

My cry fades into vanity
My supplication falls on deaf ears
While swindlers keep plundering

When I rise up for my rights
Armed brutality the answer
Cruelty and dungeon my prize

Why, I ponder
In whose interest, I wonder
Am I not the rightful owner, I cry

Will there be an answer to my cry?
Will there be an end to the exploitation?
Or will I perish on my own soil?

Manus Island
15 March 2016

Cruising over Los Negros Island
Momote Airport sleeping in serenity
Surrounded by surging blue seas
Pilot’s bliss

The Bird of Paradise
Gracious national flag carrier
Swiftly taxis to a halt
Joyfully I disembark

To the welcome of equatorial heat
Brackish sea gale
World War II relics
Swaying palms and mangroves

My mind races to Kundiawa Airport
Surrounded by rugged and menacing mountains
Pilot’s nightmare
My spirit groans

Settling into a single cab Hilux
I cruise along Loniu road
The pulsating songs of Chauka set the pace
My soul thrills at the ambiance

At the sight of Lombrum turnoff
Hatred overwhelms me
Why, I question myself
But the answer hasn’t dawned

Wow, Loniu Bridge!
A state-of-the-art ingenuity
A solid and durable structure
Connecting Los Negros with Manus

Thinking back to South Simbu highway
Rugged terrain and potholes
Scary Pilme Bridge and snaky Deboma Pass
My mind battles to comprehend the contrast

Arriving at Lorengau Market
To the enchanting smiles of pretty angels
Adorned with stylish tattoos, long tresses
Selling all kinds of sea products

I think of Wara Market
Where varieties are arrayed in galore
Kaukau, potato, broccoli and more
And the familiar smile of Simbu ambais

Harbourside Hotel
Manus deluxe holiday bungalows
Perched on the sea edge rocks
A lip-smacking banquet of seafood

Out in the dark tranquil sea
Seagulls dexterously glide down and up
Catching the speedy skipjack
Fleeing from the predatory boats

Lying quietly to the east of Harbourside
Is the beautiful no man’s Rara Isle
Surrounded by white sandy beach
A perfect hideout for freedom seekers
Beyond is Lombrum Naval Base
The asylum seekers’ detention centre
I smell the rot from where I stand
It makes me sick

Then it dawns on me
Why hatred overwhelmed me at Lombrum turnoff
It is the asylum seekers processing centre
Alias Australia’s problem solution centre

An institutionalised human rights abuse
Where Australians are at liberty to rape
To satisfy their power and lust
And get protected by Australian government

Filling sick I retreat to my room
Jet lag makes it worse
In the comfy of the twin bed
Soon I forget the ugliness of Lombrum
**Mantra of Solace**

*18 July 2017*

This verse is offered as a consolation for the many candidates in the 2017 Papua New Guinean national election who have been physically affected and psychologically hurt by its challenges and traumas

Soon
The tireless drudgery will end
There shall be leisure

Soon
The agonising scramble will end
There shall be no more insomnia

Soon
The sore throats will heal
There shall be tranquillity

Soon
The fiery rivalry will end
There shall be amity

Soon
The storm clouds will subdue
There shall be calm

Soon
Only reminiscence and depression
Shall linger till the next power game

**The Battle of Power Begins**

*26 June 2017*

Voting has begun after a long and taxing campaign for national elections in Papua New Guinea. This poem is dedicated to all aspiring politicians

Driven by intimate dreams
Of fame, wealth or servanthood
The battle begins
Scaling the hostility of the terrain
Taming the inimical leeches
Inveigling souls of all sorts

Embracing the chilly surliness
And the sizzling emotion
The inevitable milieus

Busted by hunger and thirst
Torment and deprivation
Endurance tested to the core

Lumbered by cash expectations
Repressive aloofness
Wisdom and tact play pivotal role

Chants of good governance
Prosperity and advancement
Resonate throughout the fatherland

As the deadline nears
Uncertainty emanates
Insomnia has taken grip

For in this game
After all that drudgery
There is only one victor

My heart pleas
For ingenious warriors to triumph
For they will invigorate the Paradise
“The lives of the innocent majority and the education and future of children cannot continue to be jeopardised by political greed.”
WHEN THE END CAME

Mathias Kin and Francis with disabled athletes at Kundiawa Hospital
My father’s last moments on this earth
Charlene Nii
14 September 2020

It was on Wednesday 1 April that bad news came to Francis in his hospital bed in Kundiawa.

It was early in the morning when the phone rang. The caller was his cousin Duma Paulus from Diani village.

In broken tones, Duma told Francis that his father, Nicholas Tura Duma, had passed away.

Francis was in deep pain. He had not seen his father for 18 years and now he was dead.

They had talked on the phone over the years and I would take shots from my phone to show to Duma and Francis but that was the only way they got to see each other.

The roads were appalling, the distance was great, their health was suspect and financial problems were always present, so they had never got to meet over all that time.

But Francis could not bear to be absent from his father’s burial. So, though he was ill, he decided to go the village to see the gravesite and witness the burial.

When his son-in-law, Cheryl’s husband, heard the news he gave his ten-seater Land Cruiser to Francis to go to the village.

Without thinking about his worsening pressure sores or body condition, Francis took off to his village early in the morning with Cheryl and a driver.

They reached the village at around 5 pm. All the villagers were surprised and hugged their long lost son, brother and uncle and cried.

Some were crying because of the old man but most were crying because of not seeing Francis for the last 20 years.

It was the saddest day for the Moiwo Bumba tribe. They had lost their Chief Nicholas Tura Duma and now they saw his only son and heir to the chieftainship, Francis, paralysed.

Francis slept in the car. The next day Mala helped her father buy a pig and her cousins slaughtered it. Mala gave the pig to the women in the village as a token of appreciation for taking care of her father together with some money.

Then Francis travelled back to Kundiawa, to the only place he called home, Sir Joseph Nombri General Hospital.
Upon his arrival from the village he started feeling sick. He was tired and the pressure sores had become worse.

This condition continued to worsen and by July he was in a shocking state. All the fluid in his body seemed to have gone, everything he took - solid food and liquid - couldn’t settle in his body. He vomited them out.

The doctors and nurses tried to help him stop vomiting and gave him drugs but this did not help.

He got so weak so they put a cannula in his wrist to run drugs straight into his veins, but he kept on vomiting.

One morning a nurse by the name of Kiak came to his bedside and told Francis that he had been living in the ward for almost 20 years and the smell and the environment of the hospital could be making him sick.

Kiak suggested he try live with his daughters and the hospital would send medical supplies.

Francis thanked Kiak for her concern and said: “I was so concerned for my daughters because they were so small when I got into the accident and I wanted to see them grow up and now all of them are mothers and I am a grandfather now so I will dedicate my life back to my creator.”

Kiak was speechless after hearing his reply and went away. The nurses never give up and they continued giving drugs through the cannula but he still vomited.

When the nurses were away Francis would take the cannula out. When the nurses returned they would put it on again and this went on for two weeks.

On one occasion Francis complained to his nephew, Mondo, saying that the cannula and drugs didn’t help and wanted it taken off. Mondo took it out.

After several minutes one of the senior nurses, Shirley Wena, heard that Francis was very sick and came to check on him. When she arrived she saw his body was fading and that he needed sugar.

She was so mad that there was no cannula found and went to the nursing station and scolded every nurses on duty that evening.

She told them all to write five good reasons why Francis was not getting all the attentions he deserved.

When Shirley was about to leave, Francis told all the nurses to come with Shirley to his bedside.
In a very weak voice he said to them: "Yupela tingim mi na yupela koros ya yupela noken makim olsem sapos em plan blo Bikpela God untap olsem me bai dai yumi nonap senisim, yupela rausim ol gumi nambaut ya na larim me go".

“You are all concerned about me but you cannot treat me like this because it is the Heavenly Father’s plan that this is the time for me to die and you cannot change this. So take the cannula away and let me be.”

When he completed these words all the nurses, even Shirley, cried and they said, “Don’t ever say that. You are still under our care and we will not give up on you”.

Shirley cleared her throat and apologised to the nurses and told them Francis was unhappy seeing them like that and to forget about the five reasons and work together for Francis’s sake. It all happened in his presence and he was very happy seeing them make peace again.

On Friday 31 July Francis called everyone who ever had grudges against him and he against them and asked for forgiveness and he also forgave them. Everyone who came to visit him shed tears.

Meanwhile Francis’s condition went from bad to worse and he was transferred from the TB Ward to the Medical Ward for constant observation. On Saturday 1 August he summoned all his daughters to his bedside and gave his blessings to them.

He also said that he didn’t say good bye to his friends namely the two Jimmies [Drekore and Awagl], Mathias Kin, Andrew Ya, Philip Kai, Eddie Wemin, Arnold Mundua, Keith Jackson and Phil Fitzpatrick.

He called those names with tears.

On Sunday 2 August 2020 at around 1.20 pm he told his daughter Mala and wife Cathy to pull both his hands up because he wanted to sit. When they held both of his hands he passed away quietly.

He was a very strong man. All the other patients at the hospital who were paralysed like him died in less than ten years. He stayed for 20 years.

Everyone thinks that we the family took care of him long enough but that was wrong; he took care of us constantly. Even though he was paraplegic and unemployed he was very much the father every child deserved.

He was a concerned father, a provider, he loved us without measure, he watched over his grandchildren. He was a loving man with a very soft heart.
He never cursed us. He blessed us even though we failed him a lot of the time. He would say, “never give up, life is tough, but if you are educated nobody can put you down. Never forget to put your children in school, they are your future assets.”

“There is no moral conscience in most of our leaders.”
My friend Francis Nii rang me on a Friday afternoon in early January to say he wanted to meet me about something that had been bothering him.

He briefly told me over the phone that it was about the terrible Australian bushfires and that he was surprised the Papua New Guinea government and other organisations were not doing anything about it.

We met the next day as usual in the Mt Wilhelm Hotel foyer to further the discussion. The outcome was that we decided the Simbu people needed to do some fundraising to assist the affected people of Australia.

As a first step, we called a meeting of friends to gauge opinion before asking other interested people to join us.

That afternoon Francis put up a notice on Facebook and I pinned notices around town. On the following Sunday, I went to the hotel to find 15 interested people, mostly our own gang, already waiting with Francis.

During the course of the meeting another five like-minded people joined us.

I was elected unopposed as Chairman of the appeal; Francis Treasurer and various other positions were filled. Simbu Administrator Michael Temai Bal was appointed patron.

We called ourselves the ‘Simbu for Australia Bushfire Appeal’ and, at this stage in early January 2020, ours was the first group to commit to assisting our friends in Australia.

Among other goals, our target was to raise K400,000. That was one kina for every person who lives in Simbu Province.

Francis was adamant about the huge amount of money and also that we raise it in just one month. Many wise people in the group, including our great author Arnold Mundua, questioned the possibility to raise this much money in just one month.

As usual, Francis stood his ground.

Our plan was to do a launch on Friday 10 January. So, we carried out an awareness campaign on Facebook and Radio Simbu, and distributed signs to business houses, government agencies and notice boards around town.
On the day after the launch, various groups of people pushed wheelbarrows around town and shouted through loudhailers starting at each of the *foa kona* of Kundiawa and converging on the town centre. Francis and I were together and I enjoyed pushing the bugger’s wheelchair while he did most of the shouting.

Money started flowing in toea and kina. Table mamas and street vendors, PMV commuters, policemen, students, teacher, nurses, doctors and other public servants all contributed. We had a permanent station at the front of the former NBC and the BSP Bank and played old Slim Dusty records and other Australian music at peak volume on PA systems.

Big crowds assembled at these two stations every day, many of the not so young along to enjoy their favourite Australian country music. On the first day we raised K390, most of it in coins and K2 notes. Only a few 10s, 20s and 50s. Simbu is not a rich place.

We continued doing this daily. At about 4 pm each day in the hotel foyer, the takings were poured onto a table and counted and banked the next morning.

By the end of Thursday, we had collected over K1,000 kina. K400,000 was still far away. During the week we planned a bigger launch on Friday 10 January.

As the big launch approached, Francis told me he was developing pressure sores around his backside due to the continuous sitting in his wheelchair and being pushed and bumped around, the heat of each day also contributing to his condition.

I knew what Francis was going through but cracked a joke like I always did: “Put some bloody bandage on your ass and be up here early tomorrow.” I didn’t want to mention it, didn’t want to impose on his psychology, great man that he was.

On the Friday, we prepared the NBC area early with big banners, Australian and PNG flags flying high and loud and Australian blaring from the big PA system.

As usual Francis was at the venue early, being pushed up by his uncle Maima. The crowd got bigger and people gave speeches. By midday a lot of important people including government officials and business houses representatives had said something. Many ordinary villagers and church elders volunteered to take the messages to the villages and parish. A lot more people contributed to this day.

At the usual 4 pm meeting at the hotel, all the members high fived each other and expressed overwhelming gratitude at our success.
Throughout that day, however, I could see that Francis was not well.

Every time I asked, he kept on telling me, “It’s OK, this is important, I need to see it through”.

Straight after the event, I got him into the front seat of the car and threw his chair in the back and drove him straight to his hospital bed.

When he was finally lying down, I took the nurse aside and told her that Francis was not well and would need attention.

By the next Saturday he seemed to be recovering but did not attend our wheelbarrow pushes. I noticed that he was absent at several times during the appeal. Only our close friends knew of his condition.

It was Francis’s way to always tell us not to worry too much and not to tell others about it.

Meanwhile, we would go to the parish churches to share the message of the bushfire appeal. At Goglme we were welcomed by parish priest Fr John who invited us to attend mass with the 1,000 people in the big old church.

The priest put a small box in front and the Simbu people contributed 10, 20 and 50 toea. It really touched me to see this outpouring of sincerity from simple people who themselves hardly had enough to live off among these mountains and gullies.

On 18 January we had a breakthrough moment when Greenland Motel presented K5,000 kina to the appeal. As chairman I was to speak but instead, I asked Francis to talk. Before he could say a word, Francis broke down. It was the first time I had ever seen my sturdy friend in this situation. On seeing this, a number of us present freely shed tears.

After our struggle, this was the biggest amount we had ever collected. Over successive days we were to receive large amounts from other companies, including K5,000 from 360 Limited.

Each evening Francis’s other duty was to update Simbu and other friends on Facebook about our efforts each day.

I still find it hard to imagine my good friend Francis sitting up each night after a hard day’s activities to write the inspiring lines in his posts.

These daily updates had a great effect. Now thousands of kina were coming in to our appeal from our Simbu friends overseas. As Francis would often say, the heart of a Simbu man is as big as our mountains.

Each day in town, Francis in his wheelchair was always the attraction and the leader.
Jimmy Drekor, a few others and I took turns pushing his ‘car’. We had an Australian flag and Simbu flag flying side by side as we walked through the streets, always attracting attention.

We never organised meals or drinks and at times a Good Samaritan would appear to give us K100 kina for lunch or water bottles. Only the Good Lord knows your hearts.

One afternoon I saw that Francis was not his usual self.

Despite looking ill, he volunteered to chair the usual 4 pm meeting but afterwards, as we were driving back to the hospital, he told me he had not eaten the whole day and that he had diarrhoea for two days or more.

He was also worried about where he would get money to get Digicel flex cards so he could post his regular report on the day’s efforts.

With the only K10 kina I had I bought him some flour balls, a couple of cans of Coke and a K3 flex card.

Our major breakthrough came in early February when our patron broke the news that all seven Simbu MPs led by the member for Chuave Wera Mori had pledged K50,000 each to the appeal. We organised Friday 7 February to be the day for the MPs to give their contributions.

Francis made a speech that included these words: “We know Australia is a big wealthy country with a strong economy and capable of taking care of itself during disasters like this. “Our Simbu people’s contribution, however small, comes from our hearts and will only be token of appreciation of the mother-child relation between our two countries.”

Francis as always was resolute in his actions and speaking and writing on Facebook and PNG Attitude. The social media attracted more attention to the cause and contributions and applause from in PNG and Australia and other places around the world.

By mid-February the gallant efforts of Francis Nii and our volunteers gradually phased out. From K390 on day one, we had raised K174,000. A mighty effort.

Francis Nii was somebody I came to know really well and like very much.

Everybody who stumbled upon him liked him. Apart from his writing talents, he was a leader of men and such an indomitable character.

He always stood for what was right, never taking a back step as he fought what was ill in society, especially official corruption among
elected officials and the bureaucrats.

His urge at the end of his life to help Australia because Australia had helped us was huge.

We are going to miss him.

“Australia doesn’t seem to have a comprehensive, workable plan to enable the rural majority to advance in terms of physical and economic development.”
The death of Francis Nii

Keith Jackson

“As we know, there is only one life on this earth and, while we are alive, we do what we can to contribute to the common good through our actions and words as well as minding our personal affairs. And of course, in anything we do there is always a price and that’s the way it is but we have to move on in doing what we think is good for ourselves and others whatever the circumstances, and that’s how I see myself.”

- Francis Nii, May 2015

It is said that cowards die a thousand times before their deaths. Francis Nii was not in that class. He was no coward and his brushes with death were not imaginary.

The shocking vehicle accident in 1999 had come close to killing him and the nature of his spinal injuries and the many surgeries that had to be performed on them brought him within the touch of death many times in the ensuing years.

It took more than 20 years for those terrible injuries to wreak their final toll and in those months before Francis finally succumbed in August 2020, without self-pity or any semblance of despair, he acknowledged in conversations and emails that he felt the end was near.

In fact, the last book he published, Wake Goi’s autobiography, Flight of Jungle Eagle, was completed just before he died.

“No one will ever publish a book in his dying moment with almost half of his body faded away,” his good friend Philip Kai Morre said later. “It was a miracle that I had witnessed.”

And author Philip Fitzpatrick, who collaborated with Francis in editing a number of books, including Flight of the Jungle Eagle, has written:

“I don’t know what drove him but between becoming very ill and eventually passing he managed to publish the book. He died, as it were, still at the helm of his literary boat.”

Francis had been surrounded by death and disability. In one of his essays in this collection he observed:
“There were eleven of us paraplegics living in Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital. Many call it quits and lose their lives. Seven have passed on. The main contributing factor to their demise was self-defeatism due to misery. They did not fight for survival.”

Francis fought. He fought health problems like pressure sores, bladder and kidney stones and other ailments like the development of necrotic tissue that particularly effect immobile people. They simply gave up. At one time, Francis was confined to bed for a full year. There was no giving up:

“In my life as a paraplegic, I have been confronted with all kinds of challenges, both physical and spiritual, and some of them are very painful but I don’t whine and cry. I have always asked myself: would whining and crying help me? And I find that they don’t. They only weaken my spirit and my strength and make my condition worse. So, I have developed an iron-hearted approach to the challenges that come my way.”

“I couldn't believe it,” said Charlene Nii who was with her father when he died. “My lovely father was a strong man even to his last minutes with us. He passed away on Sunday the 2nd of August at around 1:20pm.”

Philip Kai Morre was with Francis during his last hours:

“The hour before his death I was with him at his bedside but no words were spoken from him. He glanced at me with a smiling face for the last time. His wife, Cathy told me, ‘He talks about you and all the writers to say thank you.’ Francis died a hero's death. He was a man who could have died a long time ago, but his inner strength made him live longer.”

And so, Francis Nii died and the news sent the people in Simbu and beyond into great grief. Mathew Komabo, a tribesman, wrote:

“It was with great sadness that Yobai Village of South Simbu lost its literature star. Francis, if it wasn't for you, the people of Simbu, Papua New Guinea and the rest of the world would not know about our small village, the name of our water source, the name of our elderly fathers. Your creativity has put us on the map. You left Yobai to put us on the map. Now that you are returning home, we are heart broken.”

Fellow author Baka Bina from the Eastern Highlands Province and an assistant registrar of the PNG National Court wrote:

“I feel numb... I just can’t continue with keyboarding today. A kindred spirit, a whisperer in my head has moved on. Many a time when I have faced tough moments in writing, I’ve had FN as an
inspiration. He was a voice in my head always imploring me to get off my ennui and pen that one sentence, that one line, that one word. That smile from his haggard face down by Wara Simbu long ago stamped in my head and always urged me on. It is a space that will be hard to fill.”

After Francis died on that Sunday, his body was taken to the funeral home in Goroka to be prepared for interment and then returned to Kundiawa on Wednesday 12 August.

On the following day, Francis’s body was taken home to Yobai village in Salt Nomane, a four-hour drive along deteriorated bush roads south of Kundiawa.

The funeral service, conducted by the Lutheran church, was held in Yobai on Sunday 16 August and in what Mathias Kin described as “a very solemn and peaceful burial in a beautiful graveyard” Francis was interred beside his father, who had predeceased him just three months earlier.

But the gravesite, designed by his brother, Edwin Wem, an architect, was incomplete because the family’s money had run out. It is customary for the family to fund the burial site and Charlene Nii and her sisters found themselves in the unenviable position, amidst their grief, of having to scrape together whatever money they could.

Finally, needing something over K2,000 to purchase materials to complete the grave, Charlene turned to PNG Attitude, whose readers had donated K15,000 to finance the publication of this book.

And so, it was that readers also financed the completion of Francis’s grave.

The circle of friendship was complete.
“Nere-tere – eat and give - is a well-known election catchphrase in Simbu. Consequently, when the new member gets elected to parliament, the first thing on his mind is to recoup what he has spent.”
Sarah, Terry Shelley, Francis and Lyn
LIFE AND LITERARY EVENTS

1963 – On 1 March Francis Nii Sina Anguary was born at Yobai village, Salt Nomane, South Simbu into the Moiwo Buba Tribe
1973 - Formal education begins at Diani Community School
1979 – Enrols in Grade 7 at Chuave Provincial High School, where he develops a love of books in the library built by Murray Bladwell
1984 – Elected inaugural vice president of the PNG Writers Union (November 1984). Experimenting with poetry, participates in recitals and publishes a number of poems in the magazine Ondobondo and a university collection, Through the Eye of Melanesia (Macmillan Press Australia)
1985 – One of the committee that establishes the magazine, PNG Writer, at the University of Papua New Guinea
1987 - Graduates from the University of Papua New Guinea with a bachelor of economics
1988 – Joins Agriculture Bank and served for 12 years in Rabaul, Bialla, Manus and Goroka
1999 – On 9 February he is badly injured in a car accident in Goroka that leaves him a paraplegic. Two months later, dissatisfied with the lack of treatment, he discharges himself from hospital and spends rest of the year using his small public service entitlement to establish a home for his children in Goroka
2000 – In February he is transferred to Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital in Kundiawa for further treatment. Here he finds a permanent home and for the rest of his life is treated by the Polish missionary surgeon and priest, Dr Jan Jaworski, who becomes a close friend
2001 - Spinal fixation surgery is attempted but there are major complications and it fails
2003 – Begins to write the novel, Paradise in Peril, from his hospital bed on scraps of paper found around the hospital
2004 – Meets Simbu entrepreneur and philanthropist Jimmy Drekor who becomes a friend and strong supporter
2005 – Publishes his first novel, Paradise in Peril, through CBS Publishers in New Delhi, India
2007 - Attends Asia Pacific regional seminar in Port Moresby on capacity building for self-help organisations of people with disabilities and forms Simbu Association of Persons With Disability
2010 – Establishment of Crocodile Prize announced on PNG Attitude (16 September)

2011 - Jimmy Drekore introduces him to PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize and has a short story published in The Crocodile Prize Anthology. In September he attends the inaugural Crocodile Prize awards at the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby

2012 – In April he is appointed the first administrator of Simbu Children Foundation

2013 Wins Crocodile Prize award for essays and journalism for If Dekla Says Papua New Guinea is Eden, Then It Is! Revised edition of Perils in Paradise is published through Pukpuk Publications, which has been established by Phil Fitzpatrick specifically to support PNG authors

2014 – Assists establish Simbu Writers Association (SWA) and is appointed Treasurer. SWA embarks on a major project, the Simbu for Literary Excellence Program, to create a writing culture in Simbu schools through annual literature competition debates and quizzes for provincial high and secondary schools. Edits the Ku High School Anthology

2015 – Assists organise Crocodile Prize awards in Kundiawa, first and only time they were held outside Port Moresby. Publishes his own book, Reading Comprehension. Edits and publishes the Simbu High and Secondary Schools Anthology for the Simbu Writers Association, Philip Kai Morre’s The Dangers of Drugs and Their Effects in PNG and Jimmy Awagl’s two collections My Struggle and My Journey

2016 – With authors Rashmii Bell, Daniel Kumbon and Martyn Namorong, is invited to present a session on PNG writing at the Brisbane Writers Festival. A major effort by PNG Attitude raises the funds to finance the trip. Simbu Children Foundation president Jimmy Drekore wins the prestigious World of Children Award. Publishes A Contemporary Voice by Jimmy Awagl

2017 – Publishes three of his own books: Tears, Walk My Song and The Resonance of My Thoughts. Publishes Jimmy Awagl’s Echoes of My Heartbeat

2018 – Francis publishes his own book Language and Literature as well as My Chimbu by Mathias Kin, Quest for Education by Pole Kale and My Hobby by Jimmy Awagl. Republishes his own book Paradise In Peril in a revised edition
2020 – Publishes The Flight Of Jungle Eagle By Wake Goi and Prized Possessions by Dominica Are. On Sunday 2 August Francis dies at Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital, Kundiawa

“Till man’s strength grows grey/And his breath ceases / Only then peace avail/Only then destiny at last.”
BOOKS AUTHORED AND PUBLISHED
AUTHORED


This was Francis Nii’s first published book, its first edition appearing in 2005 with the assistance of Sir Paulius Matane. Paradise in Peril was extensively revised in two more editions – the first in 2013 and again in 2018 with a new cover and layout. The book observes a society where traditional culture is rapidly breaking down and corruption and greed have become a way of life. The boundaries between what is legal and what is criminal are blurred and stretched to the limit.

For brothers Rasta Fitman and Abe Raitman and their cousin Ongi Cooks the only way they can see out of a meaningless and poverty-stricken future in the village is to turn to crime. Using the proceeds of a daring heist they enter the dark world of drug running and are soon joined by an Australian and two Asian businessmen. Life looks good but can it last? Paradise in Peril is a chronicle of the times in Papua New Guinea and written with a distinct Melanesian voice.


As the Simbu Writers Association extended its activities, Francis not only travelled the province encouraging students to read and write but he decided to publish a book directed at providing them with technical skills. This book compiles 25 of his own short stories, essays and poems attaching reading comprehension exercises to each so Grade 10-12 students could test their literacy skills.

“Literacy is a major component of a good education and lays the groundwork for a successful employment future,” he said. Francis was hoping that the Education Department might see merit in the textbook but was unsuccessful in generating any interest. Nevertheless, he persevered to produce three editions of the book.
TEARS (2017)

This short novel is significant because it directly addresses physical and psychological problems, confronting disabled people in Papua New Guinea. Francis draws deeply on his own experience as a paraplegic in the book. “Discrimination, ignominy and even atrocity against fellow human beings on the basis of physical or mental disability still exist in Papua New Guinea despite the efforts to address this societal illness,” writes. “These people are confronted with stigma, prejudice, injustice, inequality and exclusion almost every day of their life and in every community activity.”

In a fictitious setting, Francis delivers a powerful narrative in a framework of engrossing suspense and mystery. In the novel, the first child of a millionaire couple is born with deformed lower limbs. In fear of the stigma the child might bring upon the family, the couple abandons the infant in a trash bin to die. What happens next makes for compelling reading.

WALK MY SONG (2017)

Francis had been writing poetry since his school days not only as a means of expressing himself but to hone his writing skills. “I don’t call myself a poet but my interest in writing began with poetry when I was in high school and then university,” he says. This collection illustrates the full range of his thinking and writing. His target audience was principally students in the hope that he could encourage them to write about their own lives and ideas.

“The direction of most of the pieces in this collection aims at educating young and older Papua New Guineans to become patriotic and conscious of the evils affecting our country so they can play their part in building a prosperous and progressive nation. We must restrain ourselves from getting involved in any form of vice, vileness or dishonesty, and make sure our countrymen and women, including our children, are not infected by it.”
THE RESONANCE OF MY THOUGHTS (2017)

This collection of essays reminds readers that Francis is an award-winning essayist (Crocodile Prize 2013) and encourages student readers to write for themselves. The book collects some of his journalism on social, economic and political issues affecting Papua New Guinea today. They provide for interesting reading and thought-provoking educational material for secondary schools and colleges.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE SKILLS (2018)

A practical, competency based textbook complete with exercises designed for grades 10, 11 and 12 students in Papua New Guinea and neighbouring Melanesian countries of Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji.
EDITED AND PUBLISHED

ANTHOLOGY by Ku High School Students (2014)

This book was published as part of a pioneering project of the Simbu Writers Association to encourage provincial school students to write to improve their English language skills. It includes short stories, poetry and essays.

It was a landmark publication and symbolic of the SWA’s objective to promote home-grown literature more widely. It was launched by the member for Sinasina Yonggamugl, Kerenga Kua, now a senior minister in the PNG government. In addition to producing an anthology it was expected that an annual literary competition would be held.


This second anthology of short stories, poetry and essays published by the Simbu Writers Association drew its content from schools throughout the province as part of its continued literary encouragement of Simbu students.

Francis Nii wrote: “SWA members climb rugged mountains and cross ferocious rivers amidst scorching heat and bone-shattering cold to inform and spread the idea of Papua New Guinean literature and reading to students and teachers. For the SWA leaders, getting students and teachers fully versed with their intentions was critical if they are to value Simbu for literary excellence and get involved in it. Communication is very important and a task that has to be accomplished by every possible means.”

THE DANGERS OF DRUGS AND THEIR EFFECTS IN PNG
by Philip Kai Morre (2015)

Locally grown marijuana and homebrew alcohol are major contributors to health, crime and other socio-economic problems in PNG. In this book, Philip Kai Morre, a drug educator and addiction
counsellor for many years, seeks to educate readers about the types of drugs available, licit and illicit, and the risks involved in taking them. This is probably the most difficult book that Francis edited because of its technical nature which required considerable scientific knowledge to write and then express in simple terms for a general readership. Striving for accuracy and clarity, he collaborated with several knowledgeable people to ensure it would become a standard reference work suitable both for practitioners in the field and a student audience.

MY STRUGGLE by Jimmy Awagl (2015)

Jimmy Awagl is Vice President of the Simbu Writer’s Association and an educationist, teaching Language and Literature at Ku High School. He holds a Bachelors’ degree in Education from the University of Goroka. Jimmy comes from the Sikaku Tribe of Yongomugl area and has been described as “a raw talent writer with a quixotic approach and a willingness to tackle any subject.” This was his first collection of short stories, poems and essays.

MY JOURNEY by Jimmy Awagl (2015)

Jimmy’s second collection of short stories, poetry and essays accompanied his field work in Simbu as one of the driving forces in promoting literature in the province’s secondary schools. Introduced to PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize only in 2014, he had rapidly emerged as a prolific writer. Much of the work in this volume was first published in PNG Attitude. In 2015, in the PNG Peace and Harmony Writing Contest, he received the judges’ award for consistency and diligence in writing.

A CONTEMPORARY VOICE by Jimmy Awagl (2016)

Jimmy’s inexhaustible energy in creative writing had produced two books in 2015 - My Struggle and My Journey – and this third book, comprising only poetry, is a collection of 100 poems largely depicting
the social life of modern Papua New Guineans. Most of the poems depict contemporary themes and offer a colourful introduction to the concerns, dreams and activities especially of people who live in villages and townships.

ECHOES OF MY HEARTBEAT by Jimmy Awagl (2017)

The evocatively titled Echoes of My Heartbeat shows Jimmy’s poetry capturing the political, economic and social issues that affect Papua New Guinea. In this fourth book the author was more determined than ever for Papua New Guineans to read and think about important issues. The book is intriguingly interspersed with amusing PNG anecdotes and romantic verses to keep the reader captivated and engrossed. Echoes of My Heartbeat is a good resource for educational institutions introducing their students to poetry.

MY CHIMBU by Mathias Kin (2018)

This landmark volume represented a rare event in Papua New Guinea – not only the first comprehensive history written by a Chimbu but one of the few histories of PNG to be written by the colonised in a setting where most telling of history remained with the colonisers. Many years in the making, this epic book by Mathias Kin explores the full range of research and writing on the Chimbu people by others and oral, often first-hand, information collected by Mathias as he sought to tell a story that had never been fully – or even fairly – told.

Its nine chapters include material never previously revealed and cover pre-history, the arrival of outsiders and the ensuing conflicts, the peace-making and development that accompanied colonialism, the subsequent period after independence designated by Mathias as “three decades of growth and decay” and some final reflections on the future of the Chimbu people, whose resourcefulness and energy has not been constrained by the dearth of resources those steep mountains offered.

This is a most important book on the Chimbu lands and peoples. It encompasses a magnificent sweep of history and discloses new understanding about the clash of cultures that occurred as white
pioneers, always ready for a fight, came into conflict with a sophisticated culture where the people had an ethos of always being ready to protect the precious society they had built.

**QUEST FOR EDUCATION** by Pole John Kale (2018)

This biography of Pole Kale, subtitled From Selling Firewood to Yale University, was Francis Nii’s first commissioned work under the Francis Nii Publications imprint. He had previously been approached by several people to publish novels, poetry and biography but wanted to be selective in who he assisted. At the core of his publishing rationale was a need to inspire readers, particularly young Simbu readers, and Pole Kale’s autobiography met that criterion admirably.

Pole was the only son and ‘dream child’ of aging couple Thomas Kale and Monita Nirua from the Mian Tribe of Gumine whose great desire was to see their son well educated and succeed in life. This he did beyond their highest aspirations, rising from typically poor village life to win a place at Yale University in the United States. Pole had helped Thomas well firewood to finance his education and this book is a poignant and inspirational reminder that a dedication to learning is an exceptionally powerful means of realising dreams.

**MY HOBBY** by Jimmy Awagl (2018)

Jimmy’s fifth book is titled after his hobby, which is creative writing of all kinds. This volume includes a range of fascinating and captivating short stories, essays and poems mostly depicting social life and political and other issues facing Papua New Guinea. It is targeted at a general readership but is also suitable for educational use at high school level.

**PRIZED POSSESSIONS** by Dominica Are (2020)

Francis published Dominica’s first poetry collection as his health was in steep decline in March 2020. “His guiding hand will always be on our shoulders,” writes Dominica. “He always radiated so much positive vibration to those he crossed paths with, and for that he will
always be remembered and treasured.” Ed Brumby writes of Dominica’s poetry:

“She brings the particular perspective of a woman who has endured, like nearly all Papua New Guinean women, more than her fair share of tragedy, violence and loss. Yet, even while living, in her words, an ‘oasis of chaos’, her indomitable spirit of optimism, strength and hope comes to the fore in these poems.

“Even while acknowledging the beatings and bruises she has suffered, Dominica is able, through her strength of spirit, to find solace and hope and enjoy the ‘euphoria of the cuddly bodies, yelps of delight and bear hugs’ of her children. There are elements of irony in the title of this volume because, apart from her children, so many of her prized possessions are no longer within her physical reach and remained confined in memory.”

EFFECTS OF DRUGS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA by Philip Kai Morre (2020)

Revised second edition of the 2015 book, The Dangers of Drugs & Their Effects, which was completed shortly before Francis died. All 300 copies were quickly sold to institutions and individuals. In thanking Philip Fitzpatrick for his assistance, Morre wrote that writing and editing the book was, “a tedious process requiring time and patience. I need to thank the learned chemist, your tambu, for checking the technical aspects of my book.”

FLIGHT OF THE JUNGLE EAGLE by Wake Goi (2020)

The final book Francis edited and published and the last he worked on was completed during the final stages of his illness and was a difficult task for him. It was a struggle to get it finished and one small example of this was the omission of the word ‘A’ from the title.

The Flight of Jungle Eagle is an inspiring account of a Jimi boy born and raised in a poor village. It describes his life as a child, the emergence of western civilisation, his struggle to gain an education and a job. It is a highly motivating story for young Papua New Guineans to read and learn from as Wake Goi became the MP for
Jimi District and is now Minister for Youth, Religion and Community Development in the current government.

“Like the bee/I buzz away/Ignorance rules my warm hive / Yet I buzz on/Not sure of my destiny/In fact there is no destination /Only dreams of /Eurocentric luxuries.”
TRIBUTES

Francis Nii's grave
“I am totally in shock. PNG has lost a man of great talent and dedication who contributed to PNG literature until his passing. Francis Nii, a Papua New Guinean writer, editor, publisher and author. Your legacy in literature will live forever” - Betty Gabriel Wakia (Port Moresby)

“Turangu Francis Nii. Very sad to lose this great Papua New Guinean literatus. Sori tru! Bai em inap silip wantaim bel isi bilong bigman nau na oltaim” - Gregory Bablis (Port Moresby)

“Yalkuna Francis! A great soul and gentleman. A free thinker and straight shooter. I have been blessed like many others to grace your presence. You are finally free, free at last. I share a tear as I write this but your legacy through your community spirit, your books and contribution to literature in Simbu and PNG and the world will live on. Your spirit to transcend personal challenges and bear your attention on bigger issues will be our greatest inspiration for me and many others” - John Kaupa Kamasua (Port Moresby)

Bro, I was lost when I heard of your passing. I know I never visited you over the last two weeks but I told you I won’t be coming back again until my knee condition improves. But it’s so sad that that visit happened to be our last meet. Till we meet again, bro, rest in eternal peace – Arnold Mundua (Kundiawa)

“You were an inspiration to PNG writers, Francis” - Joe Herman (Seattle, USA)

Daniel Kumbon wrote, and pardon me to repeat the words, that he “saw the back of [Francis’s] head most of the time” as they trundled through Brisbane. Customary for folk in PNG yet perhaps not for folk elsewhere moving along single-file paths necessitating that configuration of conversation, an expectancy of all journeys, perhaps life itself. Add also the reality of battles in ancient times, where the leader was ever the person of whom you would see only the back of his head. Francis’s gift was that he was always ahead – Lindsay F Bond (Brisbane, Queensland)
What an amazing person you are Francis. You have blessed so many people with your life story and gift of writing. You will be missed dearly - Dominica Are (Goroka)

They always say you live on as long as people still remember you and you are not easily forgotten! Rest easy Francis Nii - Phillipa Jenkins (Sydney, NSW)

Rait man ya! Sori nogut tru - Dave Ekins (Richmond, Tasmania)

Sincere condolence to all the family of Francis Nii, and to all his friends. May his life and writings continue to inspire others - Fr Garry Roche (Dublin, Ireland)

I am still in shock and deeply wounded by the death of a man who I came to know as a mentor and friend. Although we never met in person, we were always in constant communication. Rest in love champ - Caroline Evari (Port Moresby)

I met Francis at the Brisbane Writers Festival several years ago and it is quite sad to hear about his death - Bernard Corden (Brisbane, Queensland)

Francis, I can’t believe that you are gone. You are truly leaving a void in my heart where no one will fill. You know I was new to this environment of literature and like a toddler I was crawling and you pulled me up. Even through our paths never crossed I trusted Francis Nii and asked him to publish my book. And he did. He published my book and I am glad of this man. I can see Francis tirelessly promoting reading and writing not for his own benefit but for the country as a whole. My hero, champion, my mentor Francis. My soft-spoken Francis. Rest in eternal peace - Kenny Pawa (Port Moresby)

Francis Nii, hale, hearty and always well met, what more can I say. PNG is a much lesser place without you. I never met you in person, but as we discussed, I traversed the new Salt Nomane Road at your place when it was opened by Administrator David Hay in 1970. Vale Francis - William Dunlop (Darwin, Northern Territory)

Rest easy champ! - Jordan Dean (Port Moresby)
I met him but once and, like Phil, wish I’d known him better and longer. He was a truly gentle man and a true gentleman and an inspiration to so many others. Rest in peace, Francis, you truly left the world a better place - Ed Brumby (Melbourne, Victoria)

I feel I lost a great man in literature. My tears and agony go with him into the grave. Rest in eternal peace my mentor and hero, Francis Nii. I salute you - Jimmy Awagl (Chuave)

Vale Francis Nii. Glad to have shaken hands with this man. I have received my copies of Dried Grass Over Rough Cut Logs, which my co-author and I plan to edit for re-issuing with a dedication to Francis. His faith in us writers, his tireless support and stoicism are truly representative of the best and deepest strengths of a Simbu, a trutru nationalist and a very, very good man, and I am a better person for having met him in life - Michael Dom (Lae)

I do not know Francis personally, but through his writings and literary achievements I have come to know him. He is an inspiration. He is a legend. I was shocked and truly saddened by this news. Papua New Guinea literature has lost a giant of a man in Francis. I still recall the time I purchased, with my meagre pocket money, a copy of Through Melanesian Eyes for my post-colonial literature class. I scanned the cover, look at the price tag and made a rash decision to buy my copy. It was the only collection of Papua New Guinea writing available for me to read. I went through the contents and can still remember the printed name ‘Francis Nii’ in the book. In the mid-2000s I realised there was no new PNG writing. All were from the 1970s and 1980s. I made a decision to create something but never understood how to create this ‘something’. It would take some years before I was able to when I started reading the PNG Attitude blog. Francis is a great role model and a true patriot. God bless you, sir - Raymond Sigimet (Dagua)

He will continue to be an inspiration to future PNG writers - Chips Mackellar (Toowoomba, Queensland)

Poet, essayist and novelist. A champion of Papua New Guinean literature in both word and deed. I only knew him over the last 10 years but I wish I had known him longer. A towering figure in Papua New
Guinea in the 21st century. Now walking in that green and sunny highland valley with the God in whom he placed so much faith - Philip Fitzpatrick (Tumby Bay, South Australia)

I am very sorry to hear of Francis’s death. My deepest commiserations go to his family and friends. His was a life well lived in the face of many trials. Vale Francis - Chris Overland (Adelaide, South Australia)

Francis has left a legacy sure to inspire future literary - Robin Lillicrapp (Melbourne, Victoria)

Francis was a graceful talker and he had a heart of a lion that thirsted for success – Jimmy Drekore (Kundiawa)

Francis, you are a legend, a living example and a challenge to other people living with disability. Mental fitness you have displayed to overcome the circumstances surrounding your physical and social emotions. May your courage be the shining star to others like you and a challenge to the ables to recognise the people living with disabilities - Steven Thomas (Port Moresby)

Francis, you had a powerful voice. You spoke for the powerless. Your voice is in your books, in the articles you write, your spoken word. That was your gift. That was your purpose in life. The voice of Francis Nii will continue to inspire generations into the future. Hold your head high - Daniel Ipan Kumbon (Wabag)

Fr Enio Montevani SVD baptised Francis. He was well-named, following the charisma of St Francis of Assisi: “Where there is hatred, show love; where there is injury, show pardon; where there is sadness, bring joy.” He was a writers’ writer, full of talent and wisdom; a man of humility, an advocate for social justice who feared nobody. No one will ever publish a book in his dying moment with almost half his body faded away. It was a miracle I had witnessed - Philip Kai Morre (Kundiawa)
“People get fed up when justice is constantly deferred only, in the end, to be dismissed or quashed in what people believe are dubious circumstances.”
GLOSSARY

ABC – Australian Broadcasting Corporation
amamas stap – happily waiting
ambai - girl (Kuman dialect of Simbu)
APEC – Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
askim – ask, question
ASOPA – Australian School of Pacific Administration
AusAID – Australian Agency for International Development
Australia em mama – Australia is our parent
bai yumi stretim long namel – we’ll sort it in the middle
baiim – buy, hire
balus – aircraft, bird
beast – slang expression for crocodile prize
bel gut – generous, kind
bel isi – easily, in good conscience
bigman – chief, leader
bihain – later, future
bilas – decorative dress, costume
bilong – of, from
bilum – woven fibre bag
binatang – insect, germ, bacteria
blong wanem – why
boomerang aid - aid funds provided to PNG but spent on Australian
goods and services
bris – bridge
buai – betel nut
bun baksait – backbone
choppered – flown by helicopter
DFAT – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
dinau – debt
dokta – doctor
drai – dry, healed
eem – it, he, him, she, her, this, that
EU – European Union
GIS - geographical information systems
givim - give
go het – proceed, continue
gutpla – good, fine, excellent
had – hard
halivim – help, assist, assistance
hamamas – happy
hangamap nating – hanging around, squatting
harim – hear, heard
hat - hard
haus – house
haus krai - wake
haus tambaran – spirit house, Parliament House (usage)
hausik – hospital
hauslain – village, hamlet
hausman – men’s house
heven - heaven
hevi - problem
holim - hold
husait – who
ICAC - Independent Commission Against Corruption
ileksen - election
inap – enough, can
ino planti – scarce
IPA – Investment Promotion Authority
ka – car, vehicle
kaikai – food, eat, chew
kaikai tit – grind your teeth
kaikaim – ate, destroyed
kain – type
kam bek – return
kamap – came, arrive, bring
kapa - cup
karim – carry, continue
kaukau – sweet potato
kiap – government officer
kiau - egg
kilim – kill, hurt, injure
kina – Papua New Guinea currency
kirap nogut – surprised, shocked
kisim – catch
klin – clean
kondai -
kundu – hand held drum
kura hamil – external war
kura magi – internal war
laip – life
laka – isn’t that so [question tag]
lasi – nothing, none
LNG – liquefied natural gas
long – above, under, beside, below, toward etc etc [used in various phrases]
lotu - church
lukautim – look after
lusim - leave
MAF – Missionary Aviation Fellowship
maket moni - loan
malolo - rest
malomalo - soft
mama lo – PNG Constitution
man – man, male
marasin – medicine
marit - married
MBE – Member of the British Empire
mekim save - vow
meri – woman, female
mi – I, me
mipela – we, us
moni - money
MP – Member of Parliament
mumu – earth oven
na – and
na bai yu save – you will understand
nais – tidy, pleasant
nambawan – first, best
nambiriwa -
nau - now
NBC – National Broadcasting Corporation of PNG
NCD – National Capital District
nere-tere – eat and give [Kuman language]
ers – nurse
nogat – no, not
OBE - outcome-based education
ol – all
olgeta – all, completely
oli – all (people)
oloman – crikey [exclamation]
olsem – as, that
olsem wanem - how
oltaim – forever, always
oraitim – fix, heal, make good
Pangu – Papua and New Guinea Union Party
papa blong em –his father
pasin – way
peles – place, home
pikinini pukpuk – baby crocodile
piksa – picture, photo, display
piksa buai – display nuts
planti – plenty, plentiful
ples balus – airport, airstrip
PMV – public motor vehicle
PNC – People’s National Congress Party
PNG – Papua New Guinea
PNGDF – Papua New Guinea Defence Force
pukpuk - crocodile
putim - put
raison d’etre – reason for being
rait – right, write
raitman – good man
rit - read
rot - road
rulim lain – rule a line
sampela – some
save – knows
silip – sleep, stay
singsing – dance, festival
singsing bilas – dress for traditional dance or festival
sista – sister
skul tok – learning, ancestral learning
smel – smell
smuk balus -
sori – sorry
sori nogut tru – extremely sorry
sori tru – very sorry
SP – South Pacific beer
stret – exactly, honest, really, true
sua – sore
sukundumi
sumatin - student
taim – time, when
tambaran – spirit
tambu – friend, clansman
tanket - leaf
tasol – but
TFF – Tuition Fee Free
TFS – Investigative Task Force Sweep
toea – PNG coin, 100 to the kina
Tok Pisin – Pidgin English
tokim – talk, told
tru – very, correct, true, truth
trutru pasin – right way
tulait – daylight, dawn
tulait tulait – overnight
tupelo – two, both
turangu– poor, miserable
tus - tooth
Waigani – the former administrative centre of PNG
waitman – white man, caucasian
wanpla – one
wantaim – with
wantok – clansman, tribesman, friend
wantok prais – special favour or price for wantoks
wantokism – wantok system
wara – river, water
wastim – waste
wok – work
yalkuna -
yet – yet, still
Francis Nii, an educated man of sublime intellect and acute judgement, had a bright future ahead of him when his body was mauled in a tragic motor accident that left him paraplegic living in a ward of an under-resourced highlands hospital in Papua New Guinea. Around him, men with similar injuries lost the will to live and died.

Through a combination of innate personal strength and faith, Francis reinvented himself as an author and advocate for many causes, including the proper development of a native Papua New Guinean literature.

From his hospital bed and battered old wheelchair, he became a published novelist, an award winning writer, a mentor of other writers and eventually a publisher.

He was humble man who did not seek personal wealth or fame but his energy and charisma had a profound impact on helping to sustain a perpetually struggling Papua New Guinean literature.

On 3 August 2020, aged 57, he finally lost the fight with his disability and died.

Francis Nii’s influence was such that his legacy lives on and the symbolism of the wheelchair-bound author pushing forward the frontiers of literature has become an inspiring example for scores of other home-grown writers in Papua New Guinea.

This volume of his collected works, and stories of a life exceptionally led, not only provides a wonderful introduction to Papua New Guinean writing but shows the great benefits that an indigenous literature can offer national culture, society and a country’s place in the world.