



Michelle discussing her research (Credit: Nicole Yariyari)

Taking research back to the community

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

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

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

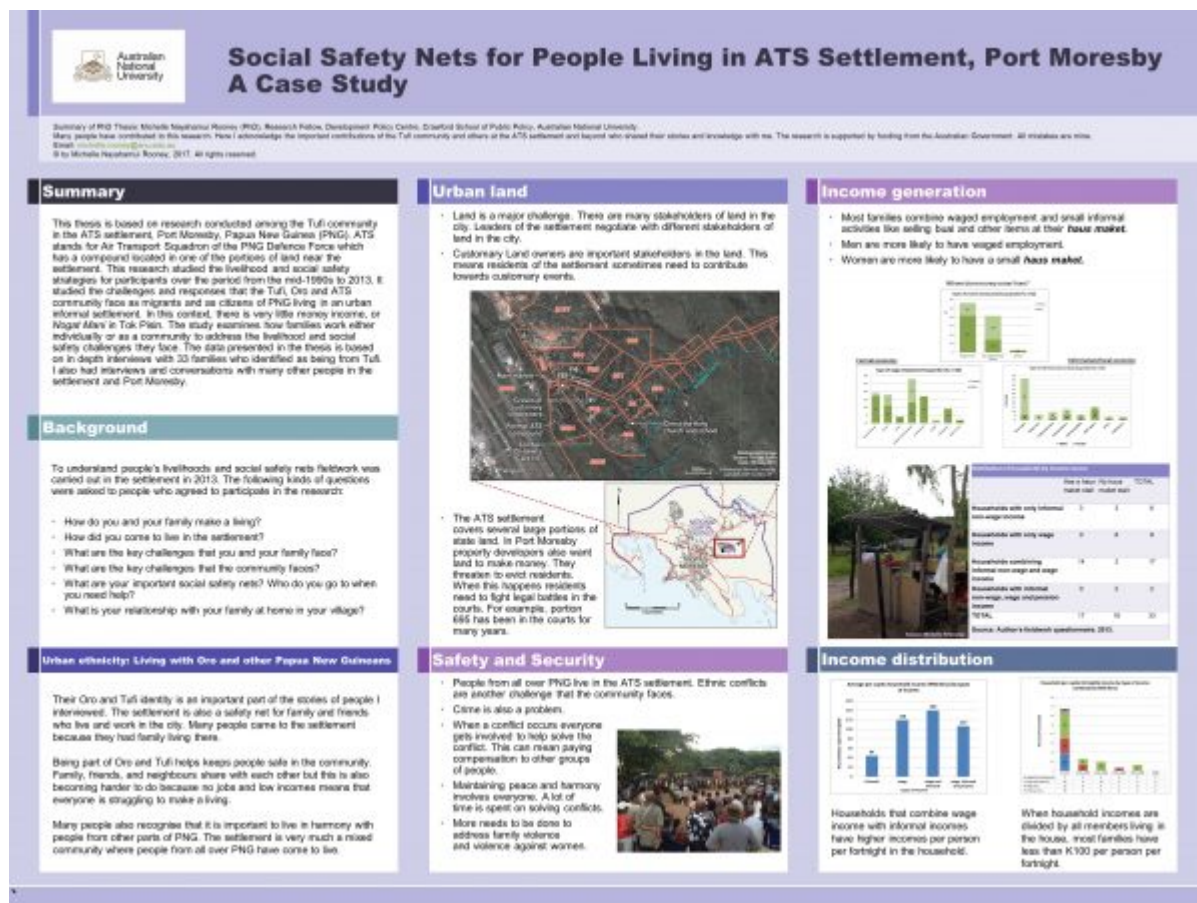
Had I consulted all the necessary and relevant sources and literature? Did I act ethically? Will my research lead to conflict? Did I understand what people were saying to me? Had I interpreted them accurately? Did I portray people's lives honestly? Had I reflected my own positionality, which may have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

In addition, my field site of urban Papua New Guinea is also an increasingly contested


space. Increasing land values, evictions, legal battles, inequality and other social, cultural, political economic forces means that the research touches on important issues in Port Moresby. We also research during a time when social media like Facebook, Twitter and blogs have helped to break down the barriers between researchers, the general population, and research participants. Mainstream print media is readily available in Port Moresby and the population has a higher education level. All these mean that debates can be intense. In addition, I am not an outsider to the fieldwork site. I lived in Port Moresby for a long time and have family and friends there who might be interested in what I had to say about home.

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

Poster 1



Poster 2



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

Summary of PhD Thesis, Michelle Scahramon/Portmoresby (PNG), Portmoresby-Police, Development/Police Centre, Criminal Justice of Public Policy, Australian National University. Many people have contributed to this research. Here I acknowledge the important contributions of the ATS settlement and/or person who shared their stories and knowledge with me. The research is supported by funding from the Australian Government. All relationships are mine. Email: msc@anu.edu.au. © by Michelle Scahramon/Portmoresby, 2017. All rights reserved.

Summary

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

Urban land challenges

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


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

Urban services

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

Water in Port Moresby

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



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

Citizenship: Make your own poster

CANDY sorts by:

- Citizenship** at the Community Level in urban PNG is **Citizenship**. Citizenship is a democratic society like PNG's business. Being the being included in national politics, participating in development, transparent processes, and equal and equitable access to services for everyone. The first status of ATS and other groups is that it is hard to make sense from them. From these democratic principles.
- Action** from people living in the community is important. The way that the ATS community manages water shows how local action and partnerships with other residents in the city make the community in several ways.
- Managing** a space of hope, inclusive thinking, violence, and inclusiveness to urban challenges is important.
- Development** takes **Disempowerment** and writing towards our **Dreams**.
- Youth**... Young People New Outcomes are not future. They hold the answers.
- The **Christ The King Primary School** and the **Tembari Children's Centre** are great examples of the way that the ATS community and its leaders have demonstrated **citizenship** through action, nurturing inclusive thinking to achieve **development** for young people in the community.


For your poster think about the following questions:

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

CANDY
WORK IN TEAMS AND BE CREATIVE!


Education: Christ The King Primary School

- Christ The King Primary School was established in 2008 by the Anglican church community.
- Government of PNG education policies require communities to make land and other resources like water available before the government can fund schools.
- Because the community at ATS settlement do not legally own the land they are not able to register the school and therefore cannot qualify for government funds.
- Despite these challenges the community have demonstrated citizenship by working in partnership with the church and non-government organisations. These organisations also receive funding from donors.
- The community raises funds locally to support the school.
- In 2017 the school is graduating its pioneering grade 8 students.



Education: Tembari Children's Centre Inc.

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



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

One woman who was also an important collaborator who guided and supported the research asked an important question: "What's next?" This question lingers with me and I am sure with her. It brings home the obligation we as researchers have to thinking through the implications and outcomes of our research. Without responding to this question, the

research remains just a document. I like to think that it will generate conversations, add to the debates, and help people, including policy makers, think through the issues in the thesis. However, I do still think about how I might more concretely respond to my collaborator's question.

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

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

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

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

About the author/s

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