



House of Representative

'The Challenge of Urbanization- Parliaments Role'

The Challenges of Political Representation to protect cultural identity and traditions.

Bougainville is located east of the mainland capital of Port Moresby; Bougainville is the most remote of Papua New Guinea's 22 provinces. The Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville aims to uphold Christian and similar moral and spiritual principles and to honour our heritage and ancestral spirits and our worthy customs and traditions.

With a population of more than 200,000 speaking 21 distinct languages, 8 sub-languages, and 39 dialects, and with considerable cultural diversity both within and between language groups, Bougainville fits the Papua New Guinea pattern of remarkable cultural and linguistic diversity.

Land has a special place in Bougainville's society.

Bougainville's culture is kept alive in a form of traditional rituals surrounding birth, death, marriage, reconciliation and initiation.

The Challenges of political representation to protect cultural identity and traditions are real in an ongoing search for meaningful participation in political, social and economic developments amidst introduced foreign concepts and systems in the third world.

Cultural identity and the upholding of traditions is a statement that peoples 'representatives' in third world countries often echo in national and regional Parliaments as well as at the national and international forums. Most of the third world countries that envy the principles of democracy have adopted the Westminster system of governing their affairs as a direct result of colonization. They did not have much choice to consider the pros and cons of the systems.

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The struggle for the protection of indigenous rights has elevated political representatives to openly debate and advocate on the protection of cultural identity and traditions. The role of a Bougainville legislator, in fact, challenges politicians to effectively exercise their duties and responsibilities to legislate and formulate policies that implement section 13 of the Bougainville Constitution in strengthening of customary authority.

There hasn't been a precedent set to elevate the customary authority or structure to replace the Westminster system of governance. The political representation to protect cultural identity and traditions therefore has its own challenges in different levels of authority.

Bougainville's cultural and traditional values of today's society are fundamental to the protection of our identity, our environment, and natural resources. Political representation provides an opportunity to raise awareness and advocate on some political, social and economic actions to protect indigenous culture and traditions.

Political representation is not about working in isolation but in collaboration for better outcome. The Autonomous Bougainville Government future plans is to establish cultural centres and museums, Arts Schools etc. have their own challenges to protect cultural identity and traditions.

With continued awareness on the conduct of the Bougainville Referendum by the Members of the House in their respective constituencies. The Constituency Referendum Ready program remained a priority activity for the Autonomous Bougainville Government despite other challenges faced by Parliament. Autonomous Region of Bougainville is divided into three regions; South Bougainville, Central Bougainville and North Bougainville that comprises of different cultures and traditions. These regions are made up of single member constituencies.

The Challenges of urbanization brings forth positive and negative effects as Bougainville is preparing for referendum in a few days. Our people will be able to exercise this rights of self-determination and participate in the social economic political life and in this way they would have a sense of fulfillment and they will gain a sense of confidence that the future holds something good. Infrastructure plan

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goes very much in line with our new vision to make our region of Bougainville economically independent.

The biggest challenge now for Bougainville members is to establish structural and financial mechanisms to enable Bougainvilleans to participate effectively in decision-making by influencing the outcomes of major government development priorities. The Challenge of Political representation to protect cultural identity and traditions in rural to urban centres of Bougainville is slowly shifting to a new dimension as result of foreign factors, push and pull factors. Just like in Bougainville were you have many languages and different cultures. The indigenous tribal people's own land and resources yet adequate transfer of wealth to our people has not taken place as we do desire yet.

The impact of change on the preexisting social structures in Bougainville have been immense. A wide range of new ideologies were introduced to this generation. The people identified the election of persons other than chiefs as community governments members, village courts magistrates, and the continuing influx of outsiders as challenges to customary authority.

In the process, customary social structures and their associated traditions were altered. Yet customary social structures including authority in many ways remained strong and vibrant. In particular, customary authority remains important to decision making and dispute resolution.

There are concerns within the community that culture and custom is either dying or being ignored. The increasing availability of education, together with new forms of economic activity and increasing mobility, reduced social cohesiveness, the increasing role of government institutions and large population of unemployed young people who are less willing to accept customary authority pose threats to custom and culture. This also caused internal migration from remote areas to urban centres of Arawa & Buka. Thus, customary traditions are threatened by the disinterest of the new generations.

While urbanization of Bougainville's population is caused by social factors, employment opportunities, lack of jobs, rural urban transformation, cultural activities, social services and that includes religion has impact the three regions to adapt to this change. However, urbanization in Bougainville is not much felt due to

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population and the geographical location. Most of rural to urban migration from South and Central Bougainville to North Bougainville is for employment and businesses are locally owned. There has been debate on Parliament to control migration and illegal settlement in the headquarters. Thus, creating a lot of social issues driven by technology and demand of living.

The Regional Parliamentary Committee in North, South and Central Bougainville have worked in partnership to address the challenges of preserving cultural identity and custom. We want to promote our cultures and traditions by controlling movement of services coming to the remote areas and focus on urban centres. Most importantly is to have a change of mindset and attitude for Bougainvilleans to accept or do away with negative impact of urbanization and in the long run to preserve our customs and traditions.

In recent times the women in Central Bougainville protested over the use of the upe (the unique traditional symbol on Bougainville flag) being used by Chinese shops in Buka, used on printed shirts, cars etc. The government was challenged to legislate a Symbolic Act to protect the use of Bougainville most unique symbols. On June 14th 2018 an Act was passed by the House.

ABG government continues to encourage regional and international arts, culture and music festivals and staging of Bougainville cultural festivals. Women Leaders have been empowered to promote our cultural heritage and creative arts through small medium enterprises. Festivals in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville is hosted annually for people to show their culture, beauty and diversity through dancing, songs, plays and other traditional and creative arts. We are continuing to mobilise women and youths to be constructive agents of change, amplify their voices and engage in a broad range of issues in Bougainville.

Constituency Members are working in collaboration with the community so that people have a sense of ownership and belonging to something good. The aspiration of the Bougainville people is to create a prosperous and strong region. As political representative the challenge is to encourage the growth of urbanization but not on a permanent basis. We want to see people drive change to improve prosperity and resilient Bougainville, that promotes respect, trust, our Christian and cultural values, and recognize the identity and rights of our people.

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We are Bougainvilleans. Our identity must be incorporated into every aspect of the political, economic and religious institution and how they interact with each other as individuals and communities. We will seek to promote our traditional ways such as participation, consultation and seek consensus in how we go about the business of government.

While the ABG will always have diversity and differences among ourselves as individuals, families and communities we are united in our desire for a strong Bougainville. We will unite to implement the Bougainville Peace Agreement and the Referendum peacefully and let it be a process of integrity.

Respecting human dignity and life, and living according to our moral, spiritual and cultural values will enable us to be a free people who respect each other's right to live peacefully in Bougainville. Our challenges for peacebuilding and reconciliation will operate within the paradigm of a strong desire for unity, underpinned with often strong differences in language, culture, length and intensity of colonial contact and economic status.

A large youth population lost schooling time during the Crisis, and are today referred to negatively as the 'lost generation.' This generation epitomizes lack of skills and competencies, poor or unacceptable social behavior, excessive substance abuse including alcohol and drugs. Urban development comes with a prize. As leaders of a new future, we are challenged to be inclusive, youths and lost generation need to be given space and access to participate in the governance process and regain what was lost.

Whilst we are aware of the challenges of urbanization, environment and climate change also affects our lifestyle. The environment (land, sea, water, air, flora and fauna) needs to be protected, restored and regulated in a manner that blends with the cultural and social needs of the people of Bougainville. It is where we breathe, and relate with mother nature.

The people are concerned about the challenges created by uncontrolled economic activity in Bougainville. They are unsettled by the apparent inability to control immigration; foreigners participating in certain retail and industrial sectors; and the uncontrolled expansion of towns.

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Therefore, ABG plans have been set up that considers controlling of urban/town expansion; establishing satellite towns in all districts so that services reach all individuals, to stop the rural-urban drift and implement law on vagrancy. Government will develop a policy and laws for reserved economic activities for Bougainvilleans. At the same time to increase support for protecting culture and heritage including arts and crafts, traditional dancing, carving, weaving, musical instruments, weaving of bamboo walling, storytelling, clan systems and much more.

Thank you.

*Hon Francisca Semoso
Deputy Speaker
Bougainville Parliament*

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