



State, Society & Governance in Melanesia

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New Developments in Papua New Guinea's Research and Development Regulatory Framework

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This In Brief updates In Brief 2015/24 that first reported on the emergence of a new regulatory framework around research and development in Papua New Guinea (PNG). It outlines developments in this area over the past 18 months, including the most recent event, the National Forum on Intellectual Property and Research and Development, held in Port Moresby 1–2 September 2016. It is important that researchers, donor agencies and PNG government departments are aware of these developments because once the new arrangements are in place they will have considerable impact upon the regulation of research and development in PNG. For instance, there will be greater national coordination of research and more requirements on researchers to pay attention to the national research priorities and comply with codes of ethical practice.

The Secretariat of Research, Science and Technology was established under the leadership of Professor Matainaho following a National Executive Council directive in 2013. The secretariat services the Research, Science and Technology (RST) Council, which has a range of important functions in relation to research and development in PNG as mandated by the [PNG Science and Technology Council Act 1992](#). These include 'to review and co-ordinate prospective aid projects specifically related to science and technology and to advise upon priorities for additional donor assistance' and 'to facilitate effective links — including joint research and the exchange of specialists between universities, research institutes, statutory authorities and the private sector'. The RST Council is not fully established, but its inaugural membership body has been identified and is awaiting final endorsement by the National Executive Council. RST Council members are drawn from key areas of the hard sciences and health, social sciences and humanities, agriculture, manufacturing and environment.

In the past 18 months, the secretariat has workshopped and drafted the following key policy instruments for research and development in PNG:

- **National Research Agenda** — this sets national research priorities to guide both government-sponsored and foreign researchers. Seven focus areas have been adopted, supporting [Vision 2050](#): human capital (health, youth and gender); wealth creation; institutional development and service delivery; security and international relationships; environmental sustainability and climate change; spiritual, cultural and community development; and strategic planning, integration and control.
- **National Research Code of Ethics** — this sets out the rules and responsibilities of researchers and institutions in the engagement of research and provides mechanisms for dealing with breaches of the code and research misconduct.
- **Overarching National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy** — this provides a road map to define the role of education, science, engineering and technology in the growth and prosperity of PNG. The vision that underpins the policy is to shift PNG from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based society.

These key documents are expected to pass before the National Executive Council for approval shortly.

The following policy strategies and projects are currently under development:

- **Alignment of National Research System** — to ensure better coordination of the various research agencies and institutions in PNG.
- **National Research Grants Guidelines and Management** — to allocate government research funding so as to build a strong science and technological capability within PNG, thereby promoting economic productivity. Vision 2050 foreshadows an annual budget of 5 per cent of the Public Investment Budget be appropriated for research and development. To date no specific appropriations have been made. In

opening the intellectual property forum, however, the Minister for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology undertook to ensure that an appropriation is made in the next budget.

- **National research database and knowledge hub** — this is intended to be a mechanism to facilitate data collection and storage by government departments and to ensure that findings from research carried out in PNG are made readily accessible to the people of PNG.
- **National Research and Development Capacity Assessment** — this is an ongoing project that is using a comprehensive survey to track the current state of research in PNG across all sectors.

The RST Council and secretariat also exercise responsibility for approval and oversight of research activities in PNG by foreign researchers and institutions. New systems being established will overcome the current problems with multiple overlapping research permit systems. They will also be an important mechanism to ensure that foreign-supported research activities are in line with the priorities identified in the National Research Agenda.

The most recent event organised by the secretariat was the National Forum on Intellectual Property and Development. The forum was co-hosted by the Intellectual Property Office and the Constitutional Law Reform Commission. It was well attended by academics, researchers, research institution and government agency representatives, industry leaders and others. The forum was the first occasion since 1997 that a public space was made for debate about intellectual property policy, and there was overwhelming consensus that the debate was well overdue. It became clear during the presentations that intellectual property policy and regulation in regard to research is fragmented, and that many laws and policies — particularly those concerning local knowledge and expressions of culture and genetic resources — have been developed but never enacted into law. It was also apparent that many different sets of protocols regarding issues such as access and benefit sharing are in operation.

The forum was intended to form the basis for development of a national policy on intellectual property in research and development. As such, participants identified many key concerns around intellectual property in the context of research and development. These included difficulties in determining how to respect rights over local knowledge (genetic resources, knowledge about herbal medicines, songs, etc.), particularly in light of the recognition that knowledge is often shared by different groups; questions about whether

state research institutions should claim intellectual property rights or whether the new knowledge should go into the public domain; questions about who should claim intellectual property rights in an institutional context and in research collaborations with foreign research institutes and also with local communities; lack of awareness of intellectual property procedures; lack of technical capacity to apply for intellectual property rights; and the difficulty in accessing previous research conducted on PNG and in sharing datasets between government departments.

The participants also agreed on some fundamental principles to be incorporated into the policy. One is the need to embrace local and traditional knowledge in PNG today and that one avenue to promote its diversity is through developing authentically Papua New Guinean products and services. Another was the importance of supporting PNG researchers to add value to their inventions and creations in PNG, both to benefit PNG and to export knowledge-based products and services to the world. A third was the need to ensure access to research findings in a way that they can be used by communities, industry, policymakers and others. There was also wide appreciation for the secretariat's proposed role in better aligning and centralising policies and regulatory mechanisms regarding intellectual property and research and development across different government sectors and research institutions.

One of the unique and memorable features about the forum was a metaphor of water lilies developed by Dr Moutu from the National Museum that captured the imagination of all present. He used it in order to illustrate the hidden and subtle ways in which Papua New Guinean society is joined together. However, it is hopefully also a vision of a future in which research in PNG occurs in different ways in different places and yet is linked in a mutually sustaining and enriching fashion.

Author Notes

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