

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA

HSC Core: Social and Cultural Continuity and Change – Papua New Guinea

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Syllabus Content

The near future (5 to 10 years)

Students are to:

- determine current trends and suggest probable future directions for the aspect of the country studied in the focus study
- evaluate the impact and implications for the aspect of the country studied of: – likely changes – probable continuities
- predict the importance of technologies to the country studied

Rationale

The following resource can be used to help students explore the Near Future within the Country Study of Papua New Guinea. Utilising Scenario Planning as the framework for analysing preferable and undesirable future possibilities, students are challenged to extrapolate from trends already examined within the course to fully come to evaluate the complexity of Near Futures within Papua New Guinea.

Syllabus Outcomes

- H3 analyses relationships and interactions within and between social and cultural groups
- H5 analyses continuity and change and their influence on personal and social futures

Related concepts

- continuity and change • modernisation
- tradition • beliefs and values



Dancers at the Hiri Moale festival in Port Moresby, PNG. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Change is the alteration in patterns of culture, social structures and behaviour over time. No society can successfully prevent change, even though some try to do so... Is change the only constant? (Robertson, p507). Why is change so ever present in our lives? There are so many factors which can vary: the environmental, the technological, the cultural and social, the economic, the political, the spiritual and the personal aspects of our lives.



Continuity is much less obvious, as we seem to be obsessed by change. Heritage, tradition, way of life are equally dynamic elements of our lives. Acknowledging the traditional owners of the Land is about maintaining continuity. Whilst, we generally change readily when it comes to adopting technology, it is our values and beliefs which can typically take much longer to change. Consider the continuity in the Australian values regarding Gallipoli and ANZAC. Legacies and memories can linger longer than lifetimes.

Time is depicted as a multi-directional arrow \longleftrightarrow in the Society and Culture course diagram. Like a sword, the arrowhead must have twin edges: one edge is change, the other is continuity. The arrow also points 'forward and back' to represent the past and the future.

Scenario Writing

Proverb in Tok Pisin: *Mani em i no laip.*

Translation in English: *Money is not life.*

Meaning: *Expense doesn't matter when it comes to taking care of your loved ones' needs.*

How can we really know the future? What are the possible futures for the people of Papua New Guinea (PNG)? Will modernisation change people's lives? Will there be any changes in gender roles and the relative status of men and women? Scenario Writing is a technique for systematically considering a range of possible futures. But to do scenario writing well you need to get substantial background information, statistics, in fact, have access to expert advice of the current situation in the culture or group to which the process is being applied to. For example:

- Historical background to in the culture or group from more than one perspective
- Religious and cultural values in the culture or group
- Economic, work and wealth information in the culture or group
- Political, government and authority structures in the culture or group

Specific detailed background information could include:

- Birth and death rates
- Workforce participation for both men and women
- Levels of work availability and general economic situation
- Housing and numbers of people living in each house
- Literacy and numeracy levels and engagement with education
- Extent of connection to traditional culture and ceremony, as well as any impact of Westernisation and modernisation
- Availability of information and communication technology
- Past, current and likely future Government policies
- Impact and influences of corporations eg mining companies
- Impact and influences of foreign governments eg Aid and investment by Australia and China.

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA

From your informed position, the possible range of S.T.E.E.P options are considered to decide which TWO factors are going to be the *major determinants* of the future of country you are studying.

S.T.E.E.P. stands for:

Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political.

The select pair from STEEP which are the major influences you have decided will shape the future of your country of study. Apply your knowledge to the possible futures that might occur if the influence of each of these varied from the positive and to the negative.

Applying Futures Scenarios to PNG

1. Determine current trends and suggest probable future directions for aspect of the county studies in the focus study
2. Evaluate the impact and implications of the country studied, considering likely changes and probable continuities?

The people of PNG have experienced many changes from their traditional culture. They are traditionally a collectivist society who bases their society on principles like Wantok, that is obligation and reciprocity. Over time, a definite change has been observed due to arrival of Christianity, capitalism and consumerism. However, the future for the people of PNG depends on many variables, particularly influential will probably be technological and economic changes.

The two possible major influences on their future:

1. **Technological:** increased access to internet, mobile phone, including mass and social media.
2. **Economic:** in relation to work and financial opportunities for people which ideally benefits both men and women and provides improved standard of living to families, whilst maintaining respect for traditional values.

See Scenario Diagram below

The four possible scenarios outline what life for those in PNG will be like if either of these major influences improve or decline. The purpose of this process is to determine which future/s is preferred and then set about ensuring that actions are taking to work towards the preferred future being the likely one to happen and to avoid those considered inappropriate.



Image by Christopher Michel.
Source: Wikimedia Commons

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Overview

The changes within technology and economic development for PNG peoples, and whether they decline or improve, have the ability to produce four possible scenarios for the future. Positive improvements in both economic and technological change (**Scenario 1**) would allow for the traditional culture to be sustained through awareness by new ideas and strategies for communication such as the traditional media such as film via high speed downloads and also through social media. **Scenario 1** would allow traditional culture to be sustained through a positive introduction to the internet via positive social context of engagements to support schools and promote education, as well as promoting health service with options for on-line diagnosis by doctors in major centers like Port Moresby. This would significantly reduce ongoing transport cost and allow PNG tribal peoples to stay connected in community with their traditional networks and lifestyle. The film *Tanna* is celebrated globally but also through the Melanesia world and promotes a revival in culture in a modern context. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tb3Vslnviwo> Many new films and TV spin offs and documentaries promote celebration of Melanesia culture and there is a growth in eco-tourism which bring ethically inspired tourists interested in this evolving traditional culture. This reinforces both traditional and modernised ceremony and cultural practices. PNG Big Men lead workshops for male tourists in compassionate manliness and develop strategies for reducing domestic violence worldwide. Growing global respect for values evident in Indigenous cultures that maintain identity but embrace both gender difference and equality. PNG men and women present this revolution in gender roles and status to the United Nations General Assembly.

The two scenarios which see the increase in technology (**Scenarios 1 & 2**) and the application of Moore's Law (the exponential increase through the doubling of capacity of computer technology every two years) would be promoted through roll out of the fibre-optic cables and wireless access into villages via programs like the creating a dynamic and varied choices for PNG communities to embrace new ideas.

Scenario 2

A decline in economic progress but an increase of technological change would cause traditional culture to shrink, due to the assimilation of the Western culture by causing a desire for consumer goods, watching sports with massive popularity of the NRL but also problems such as online gambling on sports results. This loss of productive time and huge shifts in income availability creates tensions in communities and in family groups.

Scenario 2 would cause a loss of PNG traditional culture due to a interest in the Western culture and its emphasis on individualism. PNG traditionally are a collectivist society, which work for the greater good, where Western cultures typical promote the independence of each person with a focus on materialism. In this future, the availability of the Internet could cause this generation to begin to desire consumer items and a disinterest in the traditional values. Teenagers especially feel the pull between being traditional or assimilating into Western values, especially if they have been socialised with an emphasis on materialism. The issues of access on the Internet also have the possibility to impact negatively on the future. The availability of online gambling could be extremely problematic, with a high rate of Yolngu people already having addictions. This could lead to high issues of debt.

Scenario 3 identifies a future with a decline in economic and social situations and decline in capacity to embrace new ideas and new technology, causing isolation, conflict and a sense of lack of options and alternatives.

Finally, **Scenario 4** would see a growth in economic opportunities but increase in technology, leading to income, however isolation from ideas of change and there is a regressive worldview, with more patriarchy and reinforcing of traditional gender roles and status.

See following page for Scenario Diagram version.

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Economic Change +

Scenario 4: Same, Same, No Different

Traditional Culture survives in return to past era:

- Limited access and impact of information technology
- Traditional values and practice maintained due to cultural revival and leadership by Big Men
- Work opportunities in local markets grow with traditional gender roles maintained
- Regressive change with return to traditional tribal conflict but expressed through business practices and not arrows
- Traditional gender roles maintained with patriarchy reinforced. New ideas related to modernisation of gender roles and status rejected in government policy and in educational practice

Scenario 1: The Romantic and the Real

Traditional Culture thrives Globalised Context:

- Traditional cultural values respected through awareness of strength of Indigenous culture via celebrations in film, notably Tanna and spin offs
- Opportunities for men and women to work in commercial markets grow with men in charge of security and women managing produce and finance.
- Online marketing of carvings (men's) and weavings (women's) brings income to villages
- Promotion of eco tourism and cultural tours bring employment and validates traditional culture
- Economic cooperation brings social harmony and significant reduction of domestic violence

Technological Change -

Scenario 3: Payback Hell

Culture Eroded in Economic Decline:

- Traditional cultural values respected through awareness of strength of Indigenous culture via celebrations in film, notably Tanna and spin offs
- Opportunities for men and women to work in commercial markets grow with men in charge of security and women managing produce and finance.
- Online marketing of carvings (men's) and weavings (women's) brings income to villages
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Technological Change +

Scenario 2: Footy Madness

Traditional Culture shrinks due to impact of Information Superhighway:

- Impact of Western culture and desire for consumer items creates disinterest in trad values in most PNG communities
- Fascination with Australian and Chinese events eg. drinking VB, Rugby League, football, shopping online but with little Kina to spend
- On-line gambling erodes social cohesion and available income
- Traditional art and customs not passed on to next generation due to interest in new technology and there being no links to past ways of living
- Debt burden becomes a real issue for families and conflict increases.

Economic Change -