Participatory Democracy in Bougainville:

Factors affecting participation of youths of Buka Town in the parliamentary process of the Bougainville House of Representatives (BHOR)

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Abstract

It has been noted that despite relatively young generation of leaders were elected in the ABG 2020 General Elections, the youths stay at a distance and do not communicate with the elected leaders. The present research explores the factors affecting the participation of youths of Buka Town in the parliamentary processes. This is a qualitative study which used semi-structured interviews for data collection. Six focus group discussions with 44 participants and 10 individual interviews were conducted. Gender balance was kept. The findings indicate that there is minimal youth participation in parliamentary process at the current stage. The factors affecting youth participation in the parliamentary process are associated with governance and leadership, social, economic, education, culture and personality of individual youths. Importantly, the Autonomous Bougainville Government needs to develop a policy and legislative framework to address the factors through its governance framework where the Department of Community Development would take lead in defining the pathways for youths to take part in policy and legislation development. For short term remedial, Parliamentary Service may conduct civic education programs to educate the young people on the parliamentary process so they can effectively participate by contributing towards development of the society. The research has also identified the outstanding issue of the education disparity caused by the Bougainville conflict, and the need for developing a curriculum for school children on the role of the Bougainville House of Representatives to fill the gap between the youths and the Parliament.

Introduction

The present paper explores the factors affecting the participation of Bougainville youth in the parliamentary process. In the ABG 2020 General Elections, relatively young generation of leaders were elected. Yet the youths stay at a distance and observe without communicating with the elected leaders. The youths are still unhappy although there is a Bougainville Youth Policy that enables the ABG to support youths' programs in Bougainville in partnership with development partners. This is the phenomenon explored in the research that is the basis of this paper. After describing the background, the paper explains the methods adopted in the research, and then the findings which also includes suggestions from the youths to improve youth participation, which is followed by a discussion section and conclusion.

Background

The legislative power of the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) is vested in the Bougainville House of Representatives (BHOR). BHOR comprises of the Speaker, the President, representatives of thirty-three constituencies, three regional seats for women and three regional seats for former combatants. The executive power of the ABG is vested on the Bougainville Executive Council (BEC). The BEC is made up of fourteen ministers including the President. The BHOR is responsible for law making while the BEC is responsible for the management of the affairs of the region by implementing the laws. Bougainville youths have been demanding to have representation in the BHOR so they can participate in the parliamentary process.

Parliamentary process involves making of laws and providing oversight and scrutiny on the role of the Executive. The law making process involves what happens in the chamber of the Parliament and what happens outside of Parliament when a bill is referred to a parliamentary committee to conduct further enquiry on the proposed law. Inside parliament, a proposed law would go through three readings before

the bill becomes a law. Vote is taken at every stage of the bill and may be referred to a committee at a stage specified by the Standing Orders. In Bougainville, the Standing Orders of the House specifies that a bill can be referred to a parliamentary committee at the second reading stage to further consult the people on the proposed bill. Outside of Parliament, the committee does the consultation, gauges views of the people on the proposed law and a report is presented to the parliament. Based on the recommendations in the report, the Parliament would take a vote on the bill. The three readings give opportunity for members to consult the citizens so they can represent their views during the debates at every stage of a bill.

Participatory democracy is a hot political agenda for Bougainville particularly for the youth. Most of its current youths were born during the Bougainville Conflict. Some of these young people missed out on formal education whilst other young people were fortunate to go to school when government services were restored on the island. In Bougainville, this generation of young people who missed formal education are called the 'lost generation'. To bridge this gap in the life of the youth, the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) have developed youth rehabilitation programs. Bougainville youths have expressed their ambitions for participation in the parliamentary process during the government organized programs like the Bougainville Youth Parliament, youth forums and meetings, and have formally requested the government to add three reserved youth seats in the BHOR. The ABG has not taken any action on this demand. To date, Bougainville youths continue to argue that the parliamentary process does not involve the youths.

Democracy and participation

Democracy is defined by Pogrebinschi and Samuels (2014) "as an institutional arrangement in which leaders acquire control over government through a competitive electoral process" (p. 313). Participation is a governance mechanism where citizens involve in debates in shaping decisions on national policy (Pogrebinschi and Samuels, 2014; Jamieson, 2005; Abdelgaba, 2013). According to Wolfe (1985), participatory democracy is a theory in which citizens participate and take charge of issues, discussions, decision-making and implementation of government legislations and policies. Political participation emerged from the theory of civil society and social capital (Jamieson, 2005). Social capital is the basis of the idea of citizenship where personal and political trust is built through public engagement in decision-making. Sloam (2007) notes that citizenship focuses on political culture of individuals where youths become active citizens or passive citizens. According to Ochoa, participatory democracy affirms that "authority over a people can only be legitimate if it leaves those who it governs as free as they were prior to their submitting to that authority" (Ochoa, 2008, p. 7).

Democracy and youth participation

According to the United Nations' definition, youth is inclusive of persons between the age of 15 and 24 (Lee, 2019). Lee, however, notes that "there is no widely accepted definition for youth in the Pacific" (p. 2). In PNG, the term 'youth' refers to young people starting from late teenage to the late 20s. Jiru et al. (2020) and Mindzie (2015) observe that youth participation in parliamentary committee inquiry process has been affected by distance between location of public hearing, limited time to response on the matters, language used, ruling party's involvement in incorporating public input, and political barriers created by older elites who dominate politics and monopolize the political power. Lema et al. (2020) note that, as a result, young people lose confidence in parliamentary authority. Pedersen et al. (2014) highlight that participation in the parliamentary law-making process is determined by 1) cost of involvement at the parliamentary phase or administrative phase; 2) relationship with members of parliament; 3) groups with broader political interest; and 4) Privileges including money, staff and position.

A number of studies have shown identical factors determining participatory level in debate on general political issues globally (Fraser, 1990; Mindzie, 2015; Sika, 2012; Terriquez, 2019; Wilde, 2017). Those factors are gender, class, ethnicity, economic inequalities, financial constraints, political status, personal interest, disconnection to society, cynicism, hopelessness, insufficient knowledge on civic and political affairs, conflicting roles (state vs self-interest) and socioeconomic status. Research also indicates that attitude of individualism, social exclusion, education disparities, civic learning and

practice disparities, unemployment and marginalization do affect youth participation in the political process (Jamieson, 2005; Sloam, 2007; Rogers et al., 2012a; Lee, 2019).

Concerning youth participation, Lee (2019) observes that weakening social structures and cultural perspectives affect youth participation, in the Pacific Region. MPs in Solomon Islands use discretionary monies to have direct engagement with youth to discuss issues. On the contrary, political leaders in PNG serve personal interest and "are driven by personal and individualistic interests, not by the interests of youth" (Lee, 2019, p. 194). In short, social and cultural transformation in the Pacific Island countries influence the way Pacific youth participate in the political process.

Studies have shown policy and legislative framework as effective means to legitimize the involvement of youth in the political process (Marzo, 2016; Pogrebinschi and Samuels, 2014; Wilde, 2017; Jamieson, 2005). Countries like Egypt, Denmark, Venezuela, Brazil and United Kingdom have championed the youth participation in political process through framework that provides opportunities for the government to listening to youth concerns, empowerment of youths, heightened political knowledge and mobilization of youth actors (Sika, 2012; Pedersen et al., 2014; Sloam, 2007;Pogrebinschi and Samuels, 2014). Countries like United Kingdom, Egypt, Tunisia, Tonga and Venezuela have policy and legislative framework to support the advancement of youth participation as part of nation-building (Jamieson, 2005; Sloam, 2007; Marzo, 2016; Wilde, 2017; Lee, 2019). In these countries, youth themselves take the initiative to institutional innovation and development (Jamieson, 2005). Most countries are beginning to place more emphasis on participation of society at large in the political process. Lee (2019) notes that majority of Pacific youth are driving economic development and contributing to common good for the society. For instance, in Suva and Honiara youths are "creating spaces for other young people to develop personal and professional skills, as well as acting to influence policy agenda" (Lee, 2019, p. 145).

Youths can be frustrated and violent if they do not participate in the parliamentary process. Tunisia's experience of internal political tension, socioeconomic pressure and terrorist threats indicate that skeptical and frustrated youths were the "soul of revolution" (Marzo, 2016, p. 14). Therefore, Munn (2012) suggests that youths must be involved in the political process at the earliest stage.

Methodology

The research was done with a post-positivist worldview with an interpretivist epistemology. This was an exploratory study using a qualitative approach. The data collection instruments were focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. Semi-structured questions and structured observation method were used to collect data. The data collected were analysed using QDA Miner Lite software.

The study location was Buka Town, North Bougainville in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. For focus group discussions, the researchers used cluster sampling method to interview participants from six youth groups of the wards, namely, Sohano, Buka Town, Ieta-Kuskus-Airport, Ieta-Mouna Sisi-Kukul, Kubu-Kukul and Hutjena. A total of 44 people participated in the focus group discussions and 10 individual interviewees keeping gender balance. Ethical clearance was obtained from Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Divine Word University.

The Findings

Factors affecting Youth participation in the parliamentary process

The research explored the factors affecting the participation of youths of Buka Town in the parliamentary process in Bougainville. The factors affecting youth participation are categorized into the following main areas: governance, social, economic, individual personalities and cultural norms. This section will discuss in detail the factors affecting youth participation in the parliamentary process in the Bougainville House of Representatives.

Factors relating to governance and leadership

One of the factors identified from the research is related to the leadership and governance at the ward and constituency level. Participant LW argued that the main reason for youths not participating in meetings organized by BHOR Members is that when youths put request to members for projects,

members hardly give the youths a project or incentive. Youth Group F participants also observed that while the past governments used to organize open forums to gauge public views and opinions on certain subject matters and debate on matters of public importance to Bougainville, the present government does not seem to show interest in such. Participant LY and Youth Group E participants noted that after elections are complete, the elected leaders turn their back to those who campaigned against the elected ones.

Another point highlighted was that youth associations do not have a uniform election period for electing office bearers in the District/Urban Youth Association and Ward Youth Groups. There is inconsistency in electing office bearers in the youth associations and ward youth groups which affects the consistency of work in the associations or youth groups. A few participants said that the term of office in the Bougainville Youth Federation, District/Urban Youth Associations and Ward Youth Groups differ. There is no fixed term of office for office bearers to serve. LY claimed that donor partners facilitating youth programs and projects also involve in the election of new executives at the District General Meeting without the involvement of the Department of Community Development. Therefore, there is no consistency in the leadership of youth organization and some associations become dysfunctional due to such changes and cannot address youth issues.

Another factor is structural deficiencies. Many participants noted that the connectivity in the structure of governance from the parliament to constituency member and to the ward member seems to be absent. Most participants contended that youth organizations are disorganized and fragmented because most youths do not understand the governance structure of youth organizations, from Bougainville Youth Federation to Buka Urban Youth Association and Ward Youth Groups. Most participants expressed their concern about the youth organizational structure in Bougainville which they maintained, does not connect to the youths at all levels and no information reaches the youths at the ward. Youths at the ward level do not know the executives of the Bougainville Youth Federation and their management plans. During an FGD, one participant said:

> Youth Associations were established some years ago but some of the things did not work well with the structure and the youth organization collapsed. That is why you will see many youth groups do not operate for a long period, not only here in Buka Town, but everywhere in Bougainville. Youth do not see anything address to the authorities (Youth Group B).

Due to this communication breakdown and the dysfunctional organizational structure, the youths receive no proper feedback from Members. Sometimes, information is distorted in the process of communicating between the levels of governance (parliament-constituency-ward) structures and eventually affects youth participation. Most participants claimed that they do point out issues to their ward members to bring it to the attention of the constituency member for presentation in the Parliament but there is no feedback received on the issues. As a result, most youths feel discouraged and they give up raising the issues to their leaders.

Nearly half of the participants remarked that youths distrust the capability of the leadership at the ward or constituency levels to address the youth issues or even bring issues to the Bougainville House of Representatives for consideration. Youth do not want to raise their issues with their mandated leaders because leaders have overlooked existing and pressing youth issues for too long. A few participants said that youths have gone to a stage where they think leaders usually support youth programs for their own benefit and not to the benefit of the youths. Youths claimed that leaders will use youths to conduct programs only for their benefit.

A few participants expressed that youths have been marginalized and discriminated through government structures, while others are incorporated, like former combatants and the women through reserved seats in BHOR. A participant commented that:

> For the last 5 to 15 years, many youths have said that we have been suppressed and discriminated. There is a former combatant seat and veterans get assistance themselves when the three former combatant members get funding. When you look at women, they are also getting assistance because women members are getting funding from government. This is the

scenario which youth perceive that we have been marginalized and discriminated through the government structure of ABG (LY).

Another identified factor is related to urbanization and migration. The town life attracts youths and they migrate to Buka Town. Youths stay with their relatives for some time and occupy executive positions in youth organizations and later they would leave the town. Youth migration or movement without permanent residency status contributes to discontinuity of leadership roles affecting youth participation. Youths come and go leaving leadership vacuum in the youth groups. They leave the leadership roles without being properly handed over to the incoming leadership since Buka Town is currently a place of fluctuating youth population.

Social factors

The research found out that there are social factors that affect the youth participation in the parliamentary process. The first one identified is unemployment. More than half of the participants in focus group discussions expressed that many youths end up unemployed because their parents could not afford school fee to complete their studies. As a result, youths end up in stealing for livelihood which affects their character and personality development.

Closely related to the above mentioned factor is that frustrated youths can resort to negative sort of activities. Thus, it has come to light that many youths are attracted to drinking alcohol. The participants felt that this is one of the results of unemployment and it leads them backward. Leader F said 'plenty of youths have problem with drinking and create many issues but all these have root causes'. He proposed to 'provide counselling to youths and help them understand and know how they can help themselves.'

Educational disparities and the level of literacy rate affect youth participation in the parliamentary process. The level of education among the youth differs; from those youths with no education at all, some youths only educated up to elementary level, most youths educated at the primary and high school level. This factor makes most of them less self-confident. One participant stated that "youth do not have enough education to express themselves in public" (Youth Group F). A participant insisted that, "if you ask the same question you are asking to the youths who went as far as Grade 8 or Grade 12, they would tell you that they do not understand the parliament processes" (Youth Group F). It is therefore, important to conduct awareness on parliamentary process so the youths in Grade 8 and Grade 12 can understand and meaningfully contribute to the decision-making process of parliament.

Factors related to infrastructure and communication

Concerning infrastructure, it has been raised that there is lack of facilities for youth to gather. Due to this situation, youths cannot invite people to come and disseminate information with them. LX revealed that since there is no proper place for youths to meet, sometimes they meet under the trees. The participants revealed that there is a strong feeling that the youth are not getting enough attention from the government in terms of empowering them to become key agents of change in their wards. When the government is not providing facilities and incentives to motivate the youths, the youths are discouraged and they see no meaning in participating in parliamentary process. Vast majority of participants in the focus group discussions perceive that convening meetings in public areas and at a distant location affects youth participation. Public places like Bel-Isi Park would not be an ideal location to meet the youths at the ward level.

Another factor identified is that insufficient knowledge and lack of information on political process do affect youth participation in the parliamentary process. More than half of the participants from group discussion expressed the same sentiments relating to lack of information on political process. Youths do not have clear understanding on how parliament works and how parliamentary committees carry out their duties because no awareness programs on the parliamentary processes are available. A participant said that "participation is a by-product of knowledge and when you do not have the knowledge, how would you want to participate?" (Youth Group F). Some participants said that they observe there is political barrier between the members and the youths that hinders the youths to have access to the office of the member. The research identified that old people have more access to constituency and ward members compared to youths who usually miss out on projects and even information. One participant

said: "Members do not go down to the youths and ward members do not share information. The ward members also go against youth initiatives" (Youth Group B). All these feedbacks indicate that information from the Parliament does not reach the youths.

An added issue is that there is poor Digicel network coverage in rural communities in Bougainville. This aggravates the problem of communication breakdown. One participant said: "Communication barrier is the main factor for youths not participating in parliamentary processes and committee work" (Youth Group D). It is observed that even at the constituency level, the relationship between the Urban Youth Association and the Ward Youth Groups is dysfunctional because there is a communication breakdown between the youth leaders. The youths at the ward level are often missed out on government sanctioned activities and information because of the disconnection between youth leaders at all levels of the youth structure.

Factors related to personality development

Personality development is another factor identified. Youths' shyness or being ashamed of speaking in public affects their participation in the parliamentary process. Nearly half of the participants in FGDs said that the youths feel shy of speaking in front of the elders because of respect. In addition, youth would appear disrespectful if they stand or argue with their leaders in the community. To the question about youths' fear to speak in public, the responses differed. Some participants said that there is no fear in the youths to speak but there is fear on what to say because they are often not familiar with matters being discussed during public meetings. On the other hand, some participants maintained that the youths lack confidence to speak. The lack of confidence among the youths is because of their lack of public speaking skills. Youth also expect some acknowledgement from their leaders in the community if they participate in the meetings held in the wards. One participant stated that "they [youth] expect to be acknowledged because they feel inferior" when speaking in public places (Youth Group A). Another person observed: "During the meetings, when one person raises a matter, everyone will only agree with him or her because youths are not familiar with issues" (Youth Group C). Some participants, however, disputed the view that youths are ashamed of speaking in front of the public and alleged that shyness is part of human behaviour and as youth grow mature, they become confident in public speaking.

A few participants said that the language and the type of words used by experienced speakers can create inferiority complex in the youth which can lead to non-participation in public discussions. When complicated terms are used in the speeches at the meeting, youths feel inferior and lose confidence resulting in declining from speaking publically. Participants alleged that youths at the ward level can only talk publically if they consume alcohol but if they become sober, they will remain silent. A participant said:

> In public meetings, when some speakers go and talk in front of the meeting, youths will ask, what will I say when I go in front? When experience speakers use different kinds of terms, some of the youths do not understand English, and when someone speak in English, the youths will not have a chance to talk (Youth Group F).

Most participants said youths' personal character and attitudes also affect the level of participation. Attitudes such as arrogance, individualism, no care attitude and non-cooperation, etc., affect their participation. Some youths engage only in fun activities like music and not serious matters that contribute to nation building. Thus, youth neglect their duties toward the nation.

Factors related to cultural norms

Majority of participants in the focus group discussions said that cultural values, norms and perceptions of 'Bikman' mentality also affects youth participation in the parliamentary process. Youths cannot express their views and concerns in the presence of respected elderly people or Members and Ministers of government. Youths contended that they cannot stand in front of their elders because if the youths raise their voice, the action may intimidate the elders. A participant said:

> When there is a meeting in our village, some of us attend the meeting but to raise concerns and issues affecting the youths, we don't do because of the respect we have for the elderly people's

presence in a meeting. This is a custom we uphold because of the common understanding and respect we have when elderly people are present in a meeting. Youths are only expected to sit and listen while the elderly people discuss (Youth Group C).

It is also pointed out that wantokism, favouritism and nepotism do affect the youth participation. For instance, the youths from a constituency outside of Buka Town, who are current residents of Buka Town, claimed that there are elements of wantokism at the leadership level of their youth organization. They contended that wantokism is obvious in the youth organizations where only the youths within Tsitalato have opportunity to get elected at the executive level of the Buka Urban Youth Association. The youths of other constituencies living within Buka Town are part of Buka Urban Youth Association but they hardly get elected to the executive of Buka Urban Youth Association. One participant observed that the constituency member only supports the Tsitalato Youths. This perception emanates from their experience when they write to the constituency member requesting for assistance, they cannot get a response from the Office of the members. However, some participants from another constituency, currently residing in Buka Town, stated that they receive support from members.

Youths' understanding of the parliamentary process, roles and functions

The study revealed that a majority of youths do not have a fair idea on the parliamentary process although most of the research participants said that they understand the parliamentary roles and functions. It also came to light that only those who have tertiary education have some fair idea about it. A few participants asserted that youths at the executive level of the Bougainville Youth Federation and the youth associations understand parliamentary process because of their exposure and previous engagement in mock parliaments. These youths had exposure by participating in the governance programs conducted by Transparency International Inc. and other organizations. The important role played by nongovernment organizations in conducting youth programs has been discussed by Terriquez (2019) and Sloam (2007).

The study found that some participants did not have a clear understanding of the role of the Parliamentary Service. They could not make a distinction on the roles of the Parliament, the Parliamentary Service, Bougainville Executive Council and the Bougainville Public Service. During the interview, they were unable to differentiate the roles and responsibilities of the Bougainville House of Representatives, the Parliamentary Service, the Bougainville Executive Council and the Bougainville Public Service. For instance, when they were asked to explain the role and responsibilities of Parliament, their explanation included the role of the executive or when they were asked to explain the role of Parliamentary Service, their explanation made reference to the roles of the Bougainville Public Service. Similarly, the youths were unable to differentiate the role of the Bougainville Executive Council and Bougainville House of Representatives.

The other factor that also affects youth participation in the parliamentary process is the misconceived understanding of the role of the Parliament and the role of a Member of Parliament. For instance, the participants expressed that all the people including the youth perceive the parliament like a bank, similar to BSP and a member as an ATM. They think that people vote for members to occupy an office and in return give money to the voters including youths. Youth Group F participants made an illustration of members being described as 'fat cows with more milk and they are milked until they become thin'. The analogy of a fat cow implies that when members are voted into parliament, they have more money so people continue to ask them for money until the funds are depleted. This analogy clearly indicates that there is a misconception on the role of parliament and the parliamentarians. Therefore, awareness on the role of Parliament and parliamentary process need to be conducted targeting youths of Bougainville.

Possible initiatives for improving youth participation

Policy and legislation

More than half of the focus group discussions identified an urgent need for policy and legislative framework developed to address the long standing youth issues like the demand for reserved seats for youths. There is also the need for a policy to define the relationships between Bougainville House of Representatives and the Bougainville Youth Federation, Urban and District Youth Associations and Ward Youth Groups. Participants highlighted the need for legislation to create clear links between the

Ministry of Youth with its Department of Youth. These policy initiatives can bring about structural improvements in youth participation. It is suggested that the Department of Community Development may take a leading role to develop youth policies and legislations.

Another area is election of youth leaders. Participants noted that there is no uniformity in electing executives of District/Urban Youth Association and Ward Youth Groups. Therefore, policy is needed to be developed to guide the election of new executives of the associations and groups. The research noted that Bougainville Youth Federation is currently working on the new youth policy and they hope to capture some of the issues discussed in this paper.

Government initiatives to promote youth participation

A few participants proposed that the roles and functions of Bougainville House of Representatives must form part of the educational curriculum for Bougainville. Thus the children can learn about the parliamentary process and the work of parliamentary committees. This will inform them of civic duties and leadership which will instill in them an interest in the nation building activities by active participation in the public life. It is underscored that if the roles and functions of parliament can be taught in the primary school as part of the curriculum, the future youths will have a clear foundation about the nature of a healthy democratic society.

Another government initiative suggested was training of trainers (TOT) and other training programs for the youth. TOT is an important tool to train youth leaders so they can conduct training for the youths in the wards. LX said that 'it is important to conduct training for youths and provide factsheets so they can understand the laws.' Participants also recommended the content for the training to include topics like Small Medium Enterprise (SME), law and order and counselling.

Another important area is finance. The participants were univocal in acknowledging finance as a driving force of any activity irrespective of the government or private sector. Government will require funding to create opportunities to support the youth activities. An example would be promoting and supporting SMEs so the youth can generate income. This will engage them in creative activities and discourage them from anti-social activities such as stealing and creating social unrest. Youths have hidden talents that need to be exposed and developed with a view to making them assets to the community rather than liabilities.

Improving communication

The participants unanimously recommended that civic education programs on the role of the Bougainville House of Representatives be conducted by the Parliamentary Service. This should include programs to create awareness on parliamentary procedures and role of the committees in order to improve parliamentary engagement and youth participation (Youth Groups A, B, C, D, E & F). The participants proposed that awareness must not only focus on the parliamentary process or the role of committees but also include administrative roles relating to the operations of the Parliamentary Service. The locations for the awareness program should be ideal, especially at the ward level where many youths can attend the program. The awareness program needs to be accompanied by factsheets, brochures, pamphlets or booklets for the youths for future reference. Some participants pointed out that Buka Urban Council Office has pigeonholes assigned to the ward members and proposed that the Parliamentary Service can use them for correspondence. Awareness can also be made using local radio stations and daily newspaper. A segment of a radio program can be broadcast weekly to disseminate information on the roles, responsibilities and activities of parliament and the parliamentarians.

Participants also indicated that information can be disseminated to the youths through music, sports and church activities. Many youths follow sports, music and church service, thus these activities can be used to educate the youths on parliamentary processes. Parliamentary Service can engage with the youths before the game starts and where sports tournaments are hosted, information can be disseminated to the youths at night after the games. The other opportune times are when there is church service, Gospel Concert or Church Crusade. Music Concerts can be held at public places like Bel Isi Park. In such occasions, explanations on the role of Bougainville House of Representatives can be made in between the songs. In these activities, the youths also can be involved.

Effective use of digital media was another suggestion. Some participants recommended for the Parliamentary Service to create a Facebook account or upload short video footage in YouTube because most youths use mobile phones to access internet. Another suggestion was that Bougainville House of Representatives may create a website to publish information. It was suggested that Parliamentary Service can organize brochures and pamphlets to upload on the parliament's website. This will open the doors for parliament to engage with the people of Bougainville through digital media.

Parliamentary Service could host annual 'Parliament Youth Open Day' and invite youths from all over Bougainville to participate in the event. Each section or offices of the Parliamentary Service could have a stall to display what they do. An open booth can be put for discussions and questions and answer sessions. Youth can organize into groups so they are able to participate in discussions. Parliamentary Service staff can display materials and explain the role of the Bougainville House of Representatives. If Parliament Youth Open Day is made an annual event, it will be an ongoing informal education for people which will repeat every year. When Parliament continue to host the event, it will ignite change in the youths of Bougainville. Aside this, youths can be organized to visit the parliament where Parliamentary Service can conduct an awareness on parliamentary process. At the conclusion of the awareness programs, mock youth parliament can be staged to engage with the youths.

Bridging the gap between youths and Parliament

Regarding closing the gap between the youth and the Parliament, the two major suggestions proposed are reserved seats for the youths and creation of a youth desk. The participants highlighted that the idea to have three regional youth seats, in the Bougainville House of Representatives, has already been recommended in the youth policy paper but it has not been implemented. The second recommendation is the creation of a youth desk and a designated position in the Parliamentary Service. This can be similar to the position of the youth coordinator in the Department of Community Development. The youth desk will be linked to the Bougainville Youth Federation and District and Urban Youth Association. A youth leader from Youth Group C said: 'I think there must be a desk in the Parliamentary Service, when any decision is about to be made, the youth officer can inform the youths through the youth network'. The role of the officer will be to gather information from the youths for parliament to take note and disseminate information from the Bougainville House of Representatives to the youths through their established youth network or structures. Having a youth designated parliamentary officer will ease the burden of accessing Members of the House.

Discussion and reflections

The findings of this study has demonstrated some of the globally discussed factors that affect youth participation in the parliamentary process. The factors affecting youth participation include economic inequalities, financial constraints, political status, self-interest, cynicism on political leadership, insufficient knowledge on civic and political affairs, and socioeconomic status. These factors are similar to some of the findings of Fraser (1990), Mindzie (2015), Sika (2012), Terriquez (2019) and Wilde (2017).

Jamieson (2005), Sloam (2007), Rogers et al. (2012) and Lee (2019) highlighted social exclusion as one of the factors affecting youth participation in the decision-making process. This research affirmed that youths have experienced social exclusion at many levels, that includes Bougainville Youth Federation, Department of Community Development, Parliament, Constituency and Ward members. The youths feel that these institutions have not provided sufficient opportunity for them to participate in the economic and social activities, governance, cultural and infrastructure development, etc., thus, affecting youth participation in the democratic processes. Social exclusion can be remedied by involving youths in the decision-making process, through awareness programs, workshops and conferences organized for the youths and thereby guiding them into the main stream.

Promoting education and training is another area where Government can take initiative. Subsidizing school fees would be a relief for people in the context of rising price of goods and services. Unemployment is obvious among the youths in Bougainville and they expect the government to create job opportunities. More importantly, supporting the youths to initiate business projects for their financial development will be a stepping stone towards the economic stability of the society. Economic

inequality, as pointed out by many participants, is a real problem and the government's involvement seems urgently required to balance the development in all the three regions of Bougainville.

Youths' initiative, on the other hand, is an equally important element. They need to address their own leadership and organizational issues. They are required to develop self-confidence to utilize available opportunities and to create new opportunities to contribute to the nation building activities. An example would be the youths' active participation in the public discussions of common interest. They need to fruitfully represent themselves in forms organized by the government, their constituency members or their ward members. Cultural norms such as respecting the elders should coincide with demonstrating their interests in becoming part of important discussions at various levels of social structure. In this way, the youths can take initiative in bringing about social change as well.

It has been brought to light that there are existing mechanisms that need to be strengthened to ensure youth participation in the parliamentary process. One of the most important mechanisms is the parliamentary committee network for communication with the citizens. The parliamentary committee communication strategy needs to be strengthened and the youths as key stakeholders are to be included in it. The relationship between the Bougainville House of Representatives, Parliament Service and Department of Community Development can also provide a platform for the parliamentary committee to reach out to the youths of Bougainville.

Lee (2019) noted that Members of Parliament in Solomon Islands do engage with their youths while political leaders in PNG serve their personal interest more than the interest of the youths. Most youths attend the meetings and remain as observers without contributing to the discussions. The research revealed that some youths do attend meetings hosted by ward or constituency members while other youths are just ignorant about them or choose not to attend them due to frustration. It was noted that most youths are upset because their concerns have not been addressed. It is important for the future of Bougainville to address this situation with immediate and effective measures.

Another area is improving the policy and legislative framework to empower youth participation in the parliamentary process. The recommendation for legislative changes to the composition of the membership of the Bougainville House of Representatives by creating three reserved seats for youths is the most important in this regard. To achieve this end, the youths have to take a proactive approach through the Bougainville Youth Federation to initiate discussions and compile a proposal to amend the current constitution. On a global front, research has shown that countries like United Kingdom, Egypt, Tunisia, Tonga and Venezuela have been putting focus on policy and legislative framework to support the advancement of youth participation as part of nation-building (Jamieson, 2005; Sloam, 2007; Sika, 2012; Marzo, 2016; Wilde, 2017; Lee, 2019).

The youths suggest that ABG should embark on a policy to strengthen administrative mechanism linking the Parliamentary Service, Department of Community Development, Bougainville Youth Federation, District/Urban Youth Associations and Ward Youth Groups. The administrative relationship of the Bougainville Youth Federation with the Department of Community Development can significantly contribute to the administrative support needed for the youths. One of the government policies that can address youth participation is to initiate youth projects and making information about job opportunities and funding possibilities, more accessible to the youths. Government can build regional information hubs so youths can have easy access to government information. Youths' recommendation for the Department of Education to develop a curriculum on the roles and responsibilities of parliament, executive government and judiciary including the administrative services of government seems very important. Once this curriculum is embedded in the education system, it will have long term benefits for people of Bougainville.

It should not be left unnoticed that the research participants feel that the Autonomous Bougainville Government has left the youths to be trained and controlled by the donor partners. The research participants are concerned about the fact that although donor agencies are supporting many youth programs there is a danger that one day, the youths might turn against their government. For instance, programs about governance and corruption impart negative impression to the youths when governance is discussed in general. The Tunisia experience shows that skeptical and frustrated youths were the

cause of the revolutions that resulted from political tension and socioeconomic pressures (Marzo, 2016). Therefore, the Department of Community Development has to consider how they can balance the donor programs with ABG programs targeting youths.

Conclusion

Participation in the decision-making process of the parliament is a significant feature of democracy that legitimizes the authority of a governing body. The significance of exploring the nature of participatory democracy in the context of a post-conflict society like Bougainville cannot be emphasized enough. Bougainville has most of its young generations who were either born during the crises or are kids of parents who grew up during the conflict. This makes the political context of Bougainville somewhat unique in the contemporary times. Against this background the youths' cry for equal opportunity for participation in the decision-making process at all levels of governance demands particular attention from the society.

The research not only focused on the factors affecting youth participation, but also it explored some initiatives that have to be undertaken to improve youth participation. The initiatives identified along that lines include short term, medium term, and long term measures. Short term measures include improving communication platforms between Bougainville House of Representatives, Department of Community Development and the Bougainville Youth Federation. Medium term measures involve conducting awareness, and trainings to educate the youths on the parliamentary process. Long term measures are establishing a youth desk including creation of youth position within the Parliamentary Service organizational structure, creating three reserved seats for the youths, developing the school curriculum. A combined effort from the people of Bougainville with determination and commitment can achieve the dream of building a society with peace and prosperity as its outstanding characteristics.

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