Inuma and Alepa Villages, Central Province

Opening Story

The villages of Inuma and Alepa are small, subsistence-based villages located four hours drive out of Port Moresby, south-east on the Magi Highway. Inuma was originally part of the larger village, Alepa, an hour’s walk away. It was established in the early 1980s when one of the Alepa clans—the Kwaruve—relocated to be closer to the newly-constructed highway. There are now around twenty households in the Inuma village, surrounded by savannah grassland hills and patches of forest. The village has a small shop, owned by a man who runs a PMV to and from the city, carrying passengers and bringing back foodstuffs and goods to sell. It has a tiny elementary school with one teacher, which is attended by sixteen children who learn mathematics, arts and crafts, religious education, community-living, health, and language skills. And then, just off to the side the road, it has a massive, stunningly designed church, big enough to hold its entire population many times over. With its high ceiling and metallic-blue sloped roof, the church towers above all the other buildings in the village, and dwarfs the tiny school which sits beside it. Understanding the process that lay behind the building of that church provides an entry point into the complexity of community relations that crosses the usual renditions of the rural-city divide, qualifies conventional descriptions of clan relations and bounded community-life, and recognizes the social impact of something as apparently simple as major road going through an area.

The construction of the church has been organized and initiated by the Inuma community itself. In particular, they have utilized local professional support as well as the wantok and denominational connections of community members now living in Port Moresby to raise significant amounts of funding. In doing so, they have been able to elevate the religious-institutional status of their own village within the Rigo area, and given it a relatively independent status in relation to the older tribal connections to Alepa. Planning for the church began many years ago. After the first of the
Kwaruwe clan left Alepa to establish Inuma, the local Seventh Day Adventist mission requested that the District Headquarters of the mission also relocate to the Inuma site in view of the increased accessibility offered by its location. The Headquarters moved over in 1983, and a temporary church building was erected shortly after. In December 2000, when family members living in Port Moresby returned to the village to celebrate Christmas as they do every year, discussions began about the need to build a permanent church. A Building Committee was established, with Dickson Guina appointed as its chairman.

A number of the Committee members, including Dickson, live and work in Port Moresby. In fact, around thirty members of the Inuma community are now based in the city, working in the public service, private industry and business. Charged with raising the money required to build the new church, the Committee set about self-consciously drawing upon the connections of these community members and wantok. Over a period of several years, they held fund-raising events, corporate dinners, and invited their friends in the city to come to Inuma and see the work being prepared. Their friends included the then-NCD governor Wari Vele, and his brother Anderson Vele, who was at that time the local member for the Rigo area. Alphonse Moroi, the Governor of Central Province, sent four representatives to a ground-breaking ceremony held in Inuma in 2005 to mark the beginning of the construction. A traditional welcome was organized for the invited guests, followed by the modern ground-breaking ceremony and the formal presentation of cheques which the national media outlets were invited to cover. All up, fundraising efforts and contributions from strategically important individuals meant that by the beginning of 2008, the Building Committee had raised in excess of 77,000 kina.

In the design and construction of the building this tiny rural community also used the national and international training of its wantoks, both inside and outside of its own village. An architecture lecturer from the University of Technology in Lae—originally from a neighbouring village in Rigo, and one of Dickson Guina’s in-laws—was commissioned to draw up the plans for the church. Another of his in-laws—a chief estimator educated in Melbourne—drew up the list of materials based on the plans. A carpenter and builder, from Abau village east of Inuma and educated at Madang Technical College, had previously built Dickson’s house in Inuma, and based on that work the community decided that he should be engaged as the foreman and builder for the church. The bulk of the construction work, however, was taken on voluntarily by the community members themselves.

During the week, groups of villagers would take turns alternating between working in their own gardens and going to the bushland nearby the village to cut the timber required for the frame of the building. On Fridays the community rested, and on Saturdays they gathered for worship. Every Sunday they would go back to the bush and move the timbers back to the
building site. Local kwila and thon woods were used for the main structure of the building. These are hardwoods, making them impervious to termites but also very heavy, and so most of the tall logs were transported down the Ormond River. Those that the villagers could manage to carry were moved that way. This work continued, week in and week out, for a year. Every household in Inuma contributed to the church’s construction.

When the RMIT and DfCD research team visited Inuma for a second time in October 2007, building on the church had already been going for close to a year. The frame had been erected, and the huge timbers cut from the neighbouring forests were supporting the high, metallic blue colourbond roof, bought in the city. At that stage the sides of the building were open, letting air flow through and allowing a clear view of the hills and trees leading out to the horizon. The Building Committee had plans to erect louvers along the sides, with glass panels at either end so the spaciousness and light remained a feature. The villagers were preparing then to lay the cement floor, but the building was already being used for twice daily services, with a main worship service held each Saturday.

When it is completed, the church will predominantly be used for the Inuma community to gather and worship. However, the elevation of the local mission’s status to that of District Headquarters means that when it is finished the building will also be used by the broader Seventh Day Adventist community in Rigo for big meetings, seminars and workshops. For a tiny community of twenty households, which only established itself twenty-
odd years ago, Inuma has successfully built upon its proximity to the Magi Highway and its connections to governmental and business circles in Port Moresby to create itself as a strategic centre in the Rigo District.

Of course, not every community in PNG has thirty of its members in positions of well-connected employment in the nation’s capital. In building its church, Inuma was able to capitalize on strategic connections and advantages which it was fortunate to enjoy. The story of the Inuma church illuminates key factors which have shaped the nature of this particular community: the construction of the highway and the resultant increase in the strategic importance of the village within the wider Rigo area; the presence of a number of highly-educated community members employed within the city and with access to key political and economic resources as a result; and cohesive structures of governance and organization within a community knitted together through membership of a single clan. However, the story of the church also points to characteristics and dynamics which are affecting communities across PNG in a period of change: the intersection of tribally-based systems of social relations with those clearly informed by the modern; the profound centrality of religion and its capacity to mobilize communities; the spreading out of networks of social connection beyond local sites; and complex relationships between the urban and rural as familial, clan-based and wantok relationships retain a deep importance in the face of growing urbanization.

**Place—Past and Present**

Inuma village is located within the Rigo District in the Central Province, south-east of Port Moresby. Historically, the villagers at Inuma were part of a larger community based in Alepa village, which is south-east of the town of Kwikila and about one hour’s walk from the Hood Lagoon near the coast of the Coral Sea. The people who now form the Inuma community are members of the Kwaruve clan, which was originally one of a number of clans within Alepa Village. In the early 1980s the clan left Alepa, relocating to a new site near the newly-constructed Magi Highway, and building a new village—Inuma—on what their elders considered to be their proper tribal land passed down by their ancestors.

The land on which Inuma was built is green and lush, as it is throughout the Rigo area as a result of regular rainfall and the proximity of the Ormond River which runs down into the sea. A network of smaller rivers runs across the area, flowing down in the valleys between the mountains and providing a source of irrigation for crops. The geography of the area is predominantly lowland mountains, with large areas of savannah grassland and smaller patches of forest. There are rainforest areas towards the north-west, and the mountains there are more densely forested. The land is fertile, and gardens are filled with bananas, yams, cassavas, coconuts and sweet potatoes. Inuma village itself is situated right on the side of the Magi Highway, which connects the Rigo District with Port Moresby.
The small community of around twenty households forms one village in a group of villages located within the area. The ‘big village’—Alepa—is much more geographically isolated than Inuma. Konako Village sits between the two, and is closely connected to Alepa. Another village, Varokogena, is a half to full-day’s walk upstream from Inuma, heading north-east along the Ormond River. The fifth village is Abau, also within walking distance. These villages all speak a common language—the Rigo dialect—and Inuma is connected to each of them through family relationships and inter-marriage. Inuma’s proximity to the highway means it is by far the most accessible of the villages in the area. The secondary roads which lead to Alepa, Konako, Varokogena and Abau are all in poor condition, and the primary mode of access is by foot. In contrast, Inuma has direct access to Port Moresby, with PMVs running the four-hour route daily; as well as to Kwikila, which is an administrative centre in the region and boasts a large outdoor market, a supermarket and other shops. The accessibility which Inuma enjoys shapes the nature of the place: its geographical proximity to Kwikila and Port Moresby gives it easier access to the cash economy within these places, and makes the village a point of transit for others heading to and from the urban centres. Most people have family members who live in Port Moresby, meaning that there are ongoing connections between village and city, and regular flows of people and resources back and forth.
Within each of the villages, people live with their extended families in clusters of houses, with shared huts used for cooking and preparing food. Most households tend to have five or more people within them. The houses are built using wood from the forest, as well as modern materials such as fibro-cement. Some people still make traditional thatched walls, weaving bamboo slivers together according to colourful patterns passed down within families. There is no electricity, although many households do have access to running water. There are two Aid Posts within the cluster of villages, and three elementary schools. For some people, access to these services means walking for hours along bush tracks. Communication networks have, for a long time, been dependent on the passing of oral messages through people travelling between the villages. The extension of mobile phone networks in the Central Province, however, means that an increasing number of people are able to communicate with people outside their village via phone.

**Organization and Governance**

The sense of community in Inuma is strongly defined by fact that the village consists of just one clan. As community leader Dickson Guina described it, ‘we are from the same clan [so] we think the same, we do things—there is co-operation, there is understanding about the land-use’. The community is small, and tightly cohered around shared family connections. The Inuma people’s self-understanding of their community is reflected in the responses to the Community Sustainability Questionnaire, where 46 per cent of respondents identified ‘a particular group of people’ as their main source of community, a much higher figure than the overall average of 14 per cent. Clearly identification with land is important, as Kwaruwe clan had long-standing ancestral connections to the place to which they relocated was. However, given the relatively short length of occupancy on the site, and the centrality of clan connections in establishing the community, it is understandable that ‘a particular group of people’ would be rank highly as a source of community identification in the village.

What is interesting about the community in Inuma, however, is the nature of its relationship to the big village, Alepa. Inuma has its own systems of governance and organization, and there is little day-to-day contact between the two places. However Inuma villagers still consider themselves part of Alepa, and their own village is known as the ‘small village’ in relation to the ‘big village’ from where they originally came. The two locations have a sense of common identity constituted through shared history, language, ancestors and relationships of trade and intermarriage, even if those points of commonality are infrequently enacted in daily life. To some extent, the sense of common identity extends as well to the other villages in the surrounds of Inuma. Layered upon the familial, village and clan modes of identification is another layer of identity founded on common location within the Rigo District. Located within relatively close proximity to each other, the five villages around and including Inuma have semi-regular contact with each
other, and the flows of people between them has been demonstrated in the process of the construction of the Inuma church.

Within the cluster of villages around Inuma, strategic conversations and the results of the Community Sustainability Questionnaire point to high levels of community wellbeing. For instance, 89 per cent of respondents indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their community neighbourhood, a figure higher than the average of 78 per cent across all the research sites. Similarly, 86 per cent of respondents said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their feeling of safety in Alepa, again higher than the overall average of 72 per cent. People talked about the strength of co-operative activities, such as the building of the new church, and community celebrations and organized sports activities. Many community activities are organized through the churches. In particular, the United Church and Seventh Day Adventist Church are prominent institutions, and organize many of the cultural and social events which bring people together within their villages. It is through the churches, as well, that villagers contribute resources and income to buy communal assets such as chain saws and other tools and equipment.

As in many communities, the church has considerable influence and plays a major role in the organization and governance structures within Inuma. Elders are appointed by the Church minister, and while other people have influence, it is they who carry the most power. The church elders from the wider Rigo area (now effectively standing in for the customary leaders) meet regularly to talk to each other about issues and problems within their communities, and plan how to act and respond. When they reach consensus, decisions are passed down to all the people within the four villages. One of the recent focuses of the elders has been the efforts to curb the production and consumption of homebrew—steam—which is considered by many villagers to be a source of social tension and disharmony within the community.

Some of the elders have also been working to change some of the blurred customary-modern practices in the community. Many wish to see changes in the practices associated with bride-price. Increasingly, bride-price is being measured and paid with cash, as well as or instead of the crops, pigs and other goods which were traditionally used. The function of bride-price as expressed by locals is to compensate the family of the bride—particularly the father—for the loss of their daughter through marriage. Women, it is said, further intoning modern notions of worth, are valuable assets within families—looking after gardens, cooking, keeping the house and caring for other family members. However, as the people of PNG negotiate the intersection of customary tribal, traditional Christian religious and modern customs and practices—and particularly as bride-price practices are increasingly influenced by the emerging cash economy—there is extensive discussion around its ongoing place and relevance in some communities.
One woman described how her father, who is one of the founding members of Inuma village, has refused to set a bride-price for her. Instead, he has said that he wants an assurance that his children will be able to come back to the village and look after him when he is old. In this sense, the discussions happening within the Alepa community, and amongst the leaders of that community, point to the negotiations around relationships, changing forms of family and reciprocity which are taking place in communities in contemporary PNG.

Forms of community organization and leadership appear to enjoy a broad level of support amongst people in Inuma. Eighty-one per cent of respondents to the Questionnaire either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘Decisions made about life in my neighbourhood are made in the interests of the whole community’, with only 7 per cent disagreeing. When compared to the overall average of 62 per cent across all the surveyed sites, this suggests well-functioning structures of community governance.

Broadly, structures of organization and governance within Inuma are shaped by the influence of modern representative forms of leadership, and the impact of the church. The systems of relationship embedded within the clan structure remain important, but they are changing and adapting within a complex social and political landscape. In other words, elders are central, as they always have been, but they are now, in effect, appointed through the church on the basis of traditional-modern considerations of faith and upstanding practice. Meanwhile the hereditary chief lives in Port Moresby and is largely absent from the village. As in many communities in PNG, committees are increasingly adopted as the dominant modality of organization and leadership. Dickson Guina is chairman of the Building Committee, but he is also chairman of the Clan Committee, a role which draws subjectively on conceptions of customary leadership as well as being shaped by the modern. He describes some of the changes which have taken place:

In our customary leadership, because of patrilineal society, our leadership is always the one who is the first-born child—he becomes the leader. In this case, my dad is the first-born child of our grandfather. So he is recognized to be a leader of our community, our clan. Now, time has changed. Because of our education, and people separating, time has changed. And now they see who within the clan has the potential to be recognized as a leader. So in this case I was chosen to be the leader, because of the qualities in me, which my other brothers and cousins and uncles recognize that I can make a difference. So they decided, my elder brothers too, they agreed that I should get the leadership.
Livelihood and Provision

Subsistence agriculture is the predominant form of livelihood activity for the large majority of households in Inuma and Alepa. Regular rainfall means that there is no shortage of water, and excellent conditions for growing crops. Gardens are filled with banana palms, yam plants and cassava, as well as other crops such as tapioca, corn, pumpkin, coconut and papaya. These gardens are overwhelmingly the main source of food for households in the community. Across all the villages around Inuma, 92 per cent of respondents to the Questionnaire stated that the main way they got their food was through work done on their own land or by fishing. The other 8 per cent identified food markets as their main source of food.

After crops are put aside for households’ own consumption, surpluses are sold at markets in Kwikila or in the National Capital District. Predominantly, the crops sold are bananas, yams and cassavas. There have previously been strong relationships of exchange between the people in Inuma and those in the surrounding villages. Once-a-month bartering systems took place, for instance, between the people in Alepa and Konako, and those in Inuma, where fish was exchanged for cooking bananas from the more inland areas. These forms of regular exchange ensured a diversity of foodstuffs for people within the community, while also serving to maintain the relationships between the different villages. Increasingly, though, the emerging cash

Sibbie Dovabbie, the local teacher in Inuma, sits in the small one-room elementary school. Students wanting to go on to higher levels have to travel outside the village.
economy is replacing form of barter exchange, and people’s own garden produce is supplemented with rice, tinned fish and other foodstuffs bought at trade stores.

Of those people surveyed by the research teams, 71 per cent sold goods at market as their main form of work. Another 21 per cent worked within the household, and only 4 per cent listed their main way of making a living as being a casual labourer or service worker for cash. None of the respondents indicated that they worked for a wage from the state of from a business. We know, however, that there is a sizeable contingent of the community which lives and works in Port Moresby, with regular and ongoing connections to family members in the village, and because of the location-based use of the questionnaire in the initial round these persons are not part of the respondent group. The community is multi-sited, and some people living in the village receive money from wantoks working in the city. Within the village, there are also some small-scale instances of informal-sector enterprise. For instance, Ben Giula operates a PMV which runs between Inuma and Port Moresby each day, transporting people and goods. Other households sell diesel, and some raise chickens or ducks for sale, advertising their goods with signs erected in view of the highway. On the whole, however, while there is an abundance of food there is a scarcity of opportunities through which to generate income while living in the village. Most households consider themselves to be struggling financially.

Learning and Education

Access to formal educational opportunities in Inuma is limited. There is a small elementary school, but students must travel to attend higher levels. Two other elementary schools are located within the cluster of five villages. Within the group of villages around and including Inuma, 15 per cent of respondents to the Community Sustainability Questionnaire had not completed any level of formal education, compared to 9 per cent across all the eleven research sites in PNG. Forty-two per cent had completed primary school, 23 per cent had completed some secondary school, and only 12 per cent had finished secondary school. Eight per cent had completed some form of trade training, less than the overall average of 13 per cent across all the sites, and none of the people surveyed had undertaken undergraduate or postgraduate study. This suggests significantly divergent levels of education, with a small highly-educated and trained portion of the community — many of whom have now left the area for jobs in Port Moresby — and a majority with low levels of income and little formal education.

Beyond the formal education system, the communities have had relatively little in the way of skills training or other community development workshops. Villagers in Inuma have said that requests to the local administrative centre for training, specifically in vanilla-growing techniques, have gone unmet. Local people expressed a sense of frustration at their lack of contact with administration officers from the Central Province Office,
despite their proximity to the Kwikila station. When asked about training and education in the community, 89 per cent of Questionnaire respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘I would like to learn how to do my current work better’. Most of the respondents—76 per cent—identified agriculture as a particular area where training was wanted. After this, the second most sought-after type of training was in family life, with 15 per cent of people expressing a desire for this. Relatively few people expressed a desire for training in literacy, management or technology. In conversations with researchers, villagers in Inuma and Alepa identified a number of particular areas which impact centrally on their livelihood activities. For instance, pests and diseases decrease the quality and quantity of the harvest. People have been told to buy chemicals to eradicate the pests, but the financial burden of regularly buying the chemicals themselves is creating new problems. Problems like these are particularly relevant to the people in these communities, and training in agriculture is undoubtedly a key priority.

Training and education initiatives need to be appropriate and responsive to the needs and conditions of local communities. In a predominantly subsistence community where livelihoods are dependent on the capacity of households to grow sufficient crops to feed themselves, training in agricultural skills and techniques is a natural priority for the people of Inuma and Alepa. Moreover, community learning strategies should ideally build upon the strengths and skills already present in communities. Within Inuma, instances of collective activity, such as the building of the church, point to a diversity of existing skills and experiences which can be harnessed and used by the community.