



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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MUKHERJEE: It is the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, 2010, I am with Dr. Alphonse Gelu who is the Senior Research Fellow at the National Research Institute in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea. Dr. Gelu could I start by asking you to provide a brief introduction of yourself and how you got involved in studying Papua New Guinea politics?

GELU: *My role in politics started when I was at the University of Papua New Guinea, that's where I did my undergrad studies and that was 1983 to 1987. Then because from there I developed this interest in academia, and I started at the University of Papua New Guinea as a Teaching Fellow, more or less like a teaching assistant. And then I went off to the United States, at the Ohio University, Athens, got my Masters in Political Science. Then I came back to the university, and I started teaching again and was involved in a number of research works and projects, consultancies.*

*Then in 1999 I won a scholarship at New Zealand where I went to do my PhD in Political Science. My interest in this area basically was in between those times when I was teaching at the University of Papua New Guinea, as well as when I was researching for my Masters as well as my PhD qualifications.*

MUKHERJEE: So the period of time that I'm mainly interested in is the 1990s, starting with 1992 when Mr. Paias Wingti came into the Prime Minister's position and announced that he would reform the provincial government system. Could you talk a little bit about his motivations for doing so?

GELU: *That's very good. In fact, the National Research Institute, we did a different study on that. Basically you will find that, since the introduction of the provincial government system, even in the days before that, in 1976, whatever leader is in power, Prime Minister, that's one of the things they would always say, that we want to look into the provincial government system. Some things are not working, some things are working. Paias Wingti, the comments he made back in 1992, the 1992 election, were typical.*

*I think by then one of the motivating factors then in all this was that by the time the relationship between national politicians and their provincial counterparts really deteriorated to an extent that the national government basically was suspending provincial governments at its own will. To many, they see that as basically a result of this rivalry. What we were finding is there may be premiers who were then the heads of provincial governments. If a premiere's allegiance to a party is not the same as the ones in power, then those provinces basically would get less attention from the national government. So when it was common, people can really see that.*

*What Paias Wingti proposed when they came into power was basically to try and maintain the dominance of the national politicians, the dominance of the national government over the provincial governments.*

MUKHERJEE: Earlier, going a little further back in 1976, decentralization was essentially universalized by the demands of Bougainville.

GELU: Yes.

MUKHERJEE: So, in a way, was there any concern that the system since 1976 had sort of empowered certain regional identities by giving them more autonomy as Bougainville had had?

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*GELU: Definitely. In fact, you can look at the origins, you know where this idea came from. It would basically lead you to that. Decentralization—as to some of our founding fathers, according to them decentralization originated from the people, it was the people who wanted the government to be closer to them. That was a general statement. We want the government to be located closer to us. The question from that is how close. The government decided that okay, it should be at the provincial level. But I think if you really look at it, I think the people wanted—at the provincial level it is still a little bit too far, it should come down further down to them, more or less at the local level. That is what the people wanted.*

*So Bougainville, you have to go back in history if you want to really understand the recent way Bougainville was out there. John Momis himself was part of that, he was part of that movement where they saw that they can govern the affairs of their province on their own without any directions coming from the top or from the center. So it was an historical sentiment, historical movement that originated in Bougainville that contributed to them as decentralization would be that way, or the means that would allow them to be given greater powers under an autonomous type arrangement.*

*But Bougainville compared to the other parts of the country disputed become autonomous, but remaining with Papua New Guinea or to the extreme of seceding from Papua New Guinea. So those were the two issues. For Papua New Guinea itself, you've got to say that decentralization—I think this is one of those things that the current Prime Minister, who then was the Prime Minister or former Prime Minister, used decentralization as a yardstick in keeping this country together because of the demands coming from Bougainville.*

*But when he gave the provincial government system away, because Bougainville was the first, their district that was given the provincial government system, when he gave it away, he did not give too much away in terms of transfer of powers. So Bougainville was the first province to be given the provincial government system that would at least make them happy that the national government is concerned, the national government is trying to address their concerns.*

*So when the system was given to them, they accepted the system and they started working the system according to what they think is best for them. That is the reason why the former system worked really well in Bougainville because they wanted it, there was a demand for it on their part. And when the government gave them a system, they really worked on it. If you compare Bougainville's experience with other provinces who basically were still half asleep and they didn't know what was happening, and when the system was given to them, even to this day some of them are still struggling. They are still struggling to try and run that system.*

*So Bougainville, they already developed this notion of self rule. They already developed this idea that once the system is given to them they will work on it and if they work on it well there will be more powers given to them and then they'll be a state. In fact, if you look at the current arrangement of the autonomous arrangement with Bougainville, that's basically what they wanted in '76. They will give them powers as under the current arrangement, the legal arrangements and then through a referendum then they will decide whether they want to remain with Papua New Guinea or not. So that's basically their thinking back in 1976. That's the thinking back in 1976. Unfortunately it did not happen and now it is happening. But unfortunately it has happened after a bloody crisis with a result of a number of deaths. When I say deaths I mean mostly innocent people, children,*

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women and men who lost their lives to, I think Papua New Guineans or many Papua New Guineans would say, a totally national crisis, a crisis that should never have happened in Papua New Guinea.

But Bougainville I think, going back again, it was ready for decentralization and that system worked well for them. In fact, just before the crisis, before the crisis in the 1980s, the government, the national government already was giving them, transferring more powers to them. One of those was the financial powers, giving them the autonomy to raise their own taxes, to make businesses and their own finances and so forth. The practical arrangement was going to work with the provincial government, I think it was eastern islands. But then when the crisis came it just disrupted everything and then when the 1995 reform came, it just displaced all that what the national government was trying to do there. So that's basically the issue on this autonomy coming from Bougainville.

MUKHERJEE: In terms of the performance of different provinces under the decentralization after 1976, was there a correlation between the strength of regional identity and the ability of the province to perform better under that system? To grab what was given to them and use it for their benefit?

GELU: Oh yes, I think, you could see, pieces of it. I think it was quite obvious in any of the islands. The New Guinea Islands, besides Bougainville, you find that the other provinces there, Manus, West New Britain, East New Britain, New Ireland, they, the system was quite working for them. In fact the leaders, the premiers in those provinces were very vocal leaders. They became highly respected. They became highly respected leaders.

I think one of the reasons why the New Guinea Islands was different from the other regions was because of this high level of consciousness on their part, on they're knowing what this whole package is, on what decentralization is all about. You know, it led to a situation where there was cooperation on the part of these leaders. Like, for example, going back again to the issue of leadership, in Manus, Stephen Pokawin stood up as a very, very strong advocate of decentralization. He became a very strong advocate of that. Also one of the things was that, with the disappointments that these people found at the provincial level, the provincial government system then also enabled them to take a step further in many of those leaders becoming national politicians using the provincial government system. But basically their decision to enter national politics is through frustration they faced while they were down at the provincial level. So that's one of the reasons that compelled a number of them to make it into national politics.

You have Stephen Pokawin in Manus, you have Bernard Vogae in Western region. Those were the examples of that. A number of those in New Ireland as well as in Bougainville they tried but they were unsuccessful. But for New Guinea Islands, the decentralization system basically gave them this sense of identity as being New Guinea Islanders. For many of them, the premieres, they decided to form this, a very highly successful Secretariat. I think it is called New Guinea Islands Secretariat whose main role basically was to look into the main issues and challenges facing the provinces in the region.

The Secretariat comprised of lawyers and economists and other individuals in other fields who are basically there to look into the needs, identify needs and maybe identify messages they could address, the needs of the provinces there. That's New Guinea Islands and also up in the highlands.

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*To go back prior to independence there was this movement that was growing, and people like Paias Wingti were part of the movement, former Prime Minister, and that was the Highlands United Front (HUF). The Highlands United Front was formed at the University of Papua New Guinea by students from the region, and their concern was basically that the islanders have been dominated by the coastal people. So most of the thinking, statements made by the premiers from the highlands regions was basically about them wanting to form themselves a strong block, a strong political block that would basically enhance their interests in the areas of politics, in the areas of the economy.*

*Then they got together, it was working for them. At the political level they were divided because of leaders belonging to different political parties. You had PANGU (Papua and Niugini Union Pati), (Michael) Somare was then the head of the PANGU party and the islands, MPs were with PANGU party. PPP, the People's Progress Party was also quite a domineering party up in the highlands. So at the provincial level you'll find that there is more cooperation between the different leaders at the provincial level. But at the national level, there was this division.*

*The division basically was the result of them aligning themselves with these different political parties. So that was a concern, it was a concern on that because I think it will be at the national level if there is going to be any sense of creating identity. It would really work at the national level. But at that time it couldn't because of divisions in terms of political party membership.*

MUKHERJEE: The Highlands United Front, what was their stance, what was their position on decentralization? Were they against provincial governments or for provincial governments?

GELU: *The block itself was not—it doesn't stand out—or stood out in terms of what it thinks about decentralization. It was more or less talking about this issue of being marginalized by the coastal people. That was their main concern that they've been marginalized and they have been dominated. Decentralization wasn't really an issue for the HUF; it wasn't really an issue there. I think one of the things they wanted was all this talk about being self-reliant, all this talk about strengthening the economic base. Now what it comes from basically was the strength of the region in terms of coffee and tea production. But on decentralization itself, it was not that obvious within the HUF.*

MUKHERJEE: But do you think that Mr. Wingti's involvement in this political front or movement would have later influenced his views on how to tackle the New Guinea islanders when they protested against his reforms?

GELU: *Oh yes, it might have been, but this is someone who wasn't in Papua New Guinea. He left the university and then he went back to his province. It was there that he contested and he won. So I think most of what Wingti had, because when he became a member of parliament, you know he was a member of PANGU party. Then PANGU party, then there were some problems with the internal problems. Then he formed himself this PDM, the People's Democratic Movement. Most of what Wingti expressed through his—I don't know whether it is his policies or statements when he was the Prime Minister. I think they were basically things that he acquired when he was in parliament. I don't think any of the things that he was preaching about when he was a member of the Highland United Front influenced him when he became the Prime Minister because, you know, one of the obvious things too was when he was the leader of the People's Democratic Movement, a good number of its members were not from the*

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*highlands, they were from Momase, Southern, or even from the New Guinea Islands. In fact he had a large following from the New Guinea Islands.*

MUKHERJEE: Could you talk a little bit more about the New Guinea Islands Secretariat, you mentioned that.

GELU: Okay.

MUKHERJEE: Who set it up and what was its sort of composition?

GELU: *That's a very good—. The Secretariat itself, it's like an advisory organization whose role basically is to provide advice to the premiers. Back then in the old system we used to have what they called the Premiers' Council. I tell you that the Premiers' Council is one of the most powerful organizations, and that's the only time when the premiers then will meet with the ministers at the national level. It will be an encounter, premiers, ministers. The premiers basically would tell the ministers what they think about issues. I think it was a really good system because it really worked. It gave the premiers opportunity to sit next to the ministers and tell them that on the issue of this or that is what is happening in my province. The Minister for Policy is right there, would be listening, taking notes, and even offering advice.*

*The job of the Secretariat is basically to provide advice or support to the premiers when they are in such a conference. At the same time the Secretariat also identifies ways of making improvements on areas of policy, areas of policy or research and thirdly is basically this role of providing the provision of advisors, legal, economic, or financial to the premiers when they are required. So it was a body—and it makes sense. It makes sense to this whole decentralized system that we had. After 1995, the particular organizations just disappeared.*

MUKHERJEE: But who was it that actually set up—was it the premiers of the New Guinea Islands?

GELU: *It was the premiers of the New Guinea Islands, yes. Also, I think the particular idea was translated, it was translated to the other parts. But it was here in the New Guinea Islands that it was the most effective. The Highlands did it, the Southern area, even Momase, but for other reasons it wasn't as effective as the one in the New Guinea Islands. In fact, for the New Guinea Islands there were a couple of expatriates who also were recruited to work there.*

MUKHERJEE: It appears from some of the background work that we've done the Secretariat actually played an important role in pushing the premiers, or supporting them in opposing the reforms of 1995. Do you know how that dynamic worked?

GELU: *Oh yes, in fact, that was the—it resulted in an attempt for the region to secede from the rest of Papua New Guinea. In fact, I was talking to one of my friends who was part of this whole group. They were in Kimbe in West New Britain for a meeting and I think it was there that they decided to raise the flag for the New Guinea Islands. The police were called in to arrest everyone. What I was told was that the meeting in Kimbe was organized in the guise of them trying to do this, trying to do a proclamation or some sort of a thing. In fact, the police were sent in and a few members of the group were arrested and among them were members of the Secretariat themselves. A couple of them were expatriates. I think that I've learned that one or two of the expatriates have been blacklisted to never ever come back to Papua New Guinea again by the Department of Foreign Affairs because of their involvement in that particular case.*

MUKHERJEE: What do you think motivated these expatriates or even the members of the Secretariat to push so hard towards secession?

GELU: *I think the reason, you see, what was happening, and I think it is, the dispute over the, I think the whole spirit of decentralization. What Bougainville was expecting, what Manus was expecting, what west and east and even New Ireland were expecting, weren't coming. They were not forthcoming. The only rationale then, what decentralization is all about, getting the government closer to the people. By getting the government closer to the people would enable the people to participate, it would empower the people. I'll tell you what they were seeing was that it wasn't happening. It wasn't happening.*

*To many of them they were thinking about the system back in the colonial days. During the colonial days we didn't have provincial governments. We had a colonial administration. But we had a very, very effective local level government system in place in the New Guinea Islands. Also in other parts of the country as well, up in the Highlands a local government council was quite effective. In parts of the Southern Region and in parts of Momase, but New Guinea Islands stood out, it stood out.*

*So when the provincial government system was introduced in 1976, it basically removed the authority and also we might say the legitimacy of the LLGs, the local level government councils. The people were used to the local level government, they were not used to the provincial government. When the provincial government was introduced, the people felt that the provincial government is still located far, far from them because local level governments basically are located within the village setting. The provincial government was located away from them. So that is the dilemma. That's the dilemma and that's the main reason why the New Guinea Islands decided to put up, to come up with that particular stand that what was promised to them was not forthcoming.*

*At the same time I think it was the frustration that many of the leaders at the provincial level were also experiencing. I think, to me personally, I strongly believe that if you want to run with a successful policy or process of decentralization in any country for that matter, especially in a setting like Papua New Guinea, you have to have money, adequate money to give to the sub-national levels in order for them to provide those essential services to the people.*

*So what was happening after 1976 was not that. Many of those people were frustrated. How can you set mini Waigani's in all the provinces, but yet the Waigani is not adequately funding those mini Waigani's. Not at the provincial level. Beside the other problems, the conflicts, violence, whatever was going it, it just killed that spirit of decentralization.*

MUKHERJEE: And yet between 1976 and 1995, as you said a lot of the New Guinea Island provinces did better than the rest of the country under decentralization. Now, was there a concern among those who championed the '95 reforms that had they not removed provincial government, these provinces might have done even better and then gradually moved towards secession anyway? Was there that kind of fear?

GELU: *I still don't know the rationale behind the 1995 reforms. In fact the funny thing was that the main players behind the 1995 reforms were from the New Guinea Islands. The chairman himself, Ben Micah. The Prime Minister who was in power was from the New Guinea Islands, the current governor for the New Ireland. And back then it was trying to improve the system, to keep the country together. Now*

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*you find that now he is trying to secede from Papua New Guinea. That's quite an irony. You know irony from someone who back then was talking about this, and now he's talking about something totally different. So they were from reason these leaders. You can tell again that it is still this distance that exists between the provincial and the national.*

*They might know that things are working for them. In fact, you will find that when they were coming with a proposal, those people at the national level to the extent were not—I think you could tell that they displayed this character of not knowing what is happening at the provincial level. Again, despite the fact that Ben Micah is from the New Guinea Islands, he totally saw this, this character that he didn't know what was happening in Bougainville and the successes of Bougainville. What was happening in Manus, because I remember Stephen Pokawin, the premier for Manus then was very critical of this particular committee, the Ben Micah committee. But Ben Micah with his committee and the supplies he was getting from the backbenchers was, it was just covered, it just covered, it was just—basically blinded them from listening to what these people were doing.*

*One of the problems is, then was trying to do was to show that the system is working, that they want the system to remain. But Micah and his committee they thought otherwise. Okay, they thought otherwise. The only concern that they had was that you guys are now being our rivals. We are having really big problems trying to make way into the different electorates, localities, because the leaders at the provincial level are the ones that are with the people. The leaders, the national leaders are the ones who, they lead here only in Waigani. It makes it very, very difficult for any—it became also a very expensive exercise for them especially if they seek reelection because they have to spend so much money trying to convince those people, I'm the person that you must vote for.*

*The turnover rate of MPs (members of Parliament) during that period was also quite high. Many incumbents. People just stay in office for one term, so—. I think Ben Micah was leaning more towards trying to address the interest of politicians at a national level, that he basically did not see what was happening in Bougainville or what Bougainville can prove to him that decentralization is working or what Pokawin can prove to Micah that the system is working in Manus, in Bougainville I think it was Dr. Alexis Sarei, who was the premier. A very articulate individual. If only Micah had given him the opportunity to show him that you know the system is working for us, come and see, the system is working.*

*Because the system is working for us please give us more powers, and we will develop the province under the current system. But that wasn't the case with Micah.*

**MUKHERJEE:** But on the issue of Bougainville and its impact on the way things played out in decentralization, before 1988, Bougainville was considered the model of a provincial government. Do you think that the resumption of the conflict, the insurgency in 1988 really damaged the credibility of those who supported provincial government?

**GELU:** *Oh definitely. It really did. But I think, you know, we have to be careful there too because most of us want to, great advocates on that were also part of that thinking for Bougainville moving away, breaking away from Papua New Guinea or this whole issue about benefits coming out from the Panguna mine. They were all part and parcel of the old packets. You cannot separate this whole thing from them. They were, on the one hand you'll see they're talking about improving the*



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*decentralized system and then Bougainville is doing very well. Then you'll hear them talking about the benefits that we're getting are not adequate. The same people will be talking about environmental damages being done to Bougainville and the same thing will be talking about them will be different.*

*So you cannot separate this how Bougainvillians see themselves. Whether it is all the issue of decentralization or if it is the issue of environmental degradation or on the issue of benefits coming from the Panguna Mine. They were all part and parcel of the old—of what took place in Bougainville, even leading up to the crisis itself.*

MUKHERJEE: And the final organic law of 1995 recommended doing away with the elected positions in provincial government. But surely that was not the only option that they must have considered. They must have considered a variety of options of what to do with this system. Do you know anything about the debates that went on between the people and the options that they might have thought about?

GELU: *That's a very good—in fact, the legislative review that we prepared, you'll find all of those things in there. But to tell you the truth, one of the things that happened then was the system itself that was put in place for 1995 and after that was a system that was basically decided by politicians, by politicians and not by those consultants and advisors. The CDC, it was called that, the Constitutional Development, sorry, the CRC, Constitutional Review Commission. Then it was changed to CDC, Constitutional Development Commission. People were—various people were engaged as consultants, as advisors. The consultants and advisors would have their own views that they would put down on paper. They would give it to the politicians and what comes back to them would be totally different, would be something totally different.*

*I did a presentation last year to the union movement. They wanted me to just say a few things about the Organic Law on Provincial and Local-Level Government, the Organic Law of 1995. They asked me to identify the strengths and weaknesses. When it came to the strengths, I couldn't find any; when it came to the weaknesses there was a long list.*

*One of the people in the room was a member of the CRC, and he told me that's what happened. Whatever goes to the politician is something and what comes back to us is totally different. What was eventually passed on the floor of parliament was not what the experts wanted. Okay? Of course there would be different options that they would have looked at, there would have been different options. One of those critical options was to remove provincial governments altogether, OK, remove provincial governments so we would have only a two-tiered system of government. That particular option has not died out. In fact just last year it came back again. In fact it was one of the things that I said in the commentaries that I made, a public commentary, that many of the issues that are confronting the decentralization system in Papua New Guinea are not new. They are not new.*

*There is this issue of autonomy for instance of New Guinea Island, this issue about new provinces, this issue about powers between provinces, these are all old issues, they have always been around. So I say it is one of those things typical of decentralization in Papua New Guinea where you have issues back then and if you're not satisfied because the government failed to address it, you'll find that that issue would keep on recurring, recurring, recurring as time goes on. So that was one of the major options that they also looked at, was to remove the provincial government system and just deal directly with the LLGs.*

MUKHERJEE: And what swung the balance in the favor of the other option which was finally decided?

GELU: *The political support at the national level. That's the bottom line. There is nothing more, there is nothing less. It was the backbenchers, the backbenchers. The backbenchers were the ones who had a really, really big problem and tried to penetrate the electorates because of the rivalry at the provincial level. So it was the backbenchers that basically gave the support and it went through.*

MUKHERJEE: But surely they would have preferred to just remove the provincial government altogether. Why did they chose this other option where there were some left, some amount of provincial government left, but they removed the elected leaders from that?

GELU: *They saw the system, the current system, as the way to go for them. It was the way to go for them. In other words, there is already a system that runs all the way from the national right down to the local level. That system, according to them, they are to maintain that system and place them in a different level of that system. So if you come with a new system it may not make sense to the people. I'll tell you, when the provincial government system was introduced back in the 1970s I was in primary school. I remember in 1973, I was in grade three in primary school. Our teacher asked us to go enjoy these celebrations for this thing called provincial authorities. Not provincial authorities sorry, area authorities. Area authorities were basically interim to the provincial governments*

*In the area authority, the members of the area authority were all the presidents of all the local-level governments. Presidents of all the local governments, automatically become members of the area authority. To me I thought—not back then, but after the union and all that, I thought that was brilliant. I thought why can't we use that system now, because having the presidents sitting in area authorities at a provincial level, they will be dealing directly with the issues and problems from the people at the local level.*

*But when the provincial government system came in, it displaced it, it totally removed the presidents. Then what happened, we had these elected bodies. It was quite confusing because of the period, the transition period was quite short. From 1973 you had the area authorities, then in '75 independence, 1976, provincial government system. So the poor guys, poor people, they were still trying to work it out. We just had area authorities two years ago, we're independent, now we have this provincial government system. What's going on?*

*I know, talking to people back in the village, and me also while growing up, I was trying to work it out, what this new transition, what these new processes are, what these new institutions are. So it was also a period of great confusion for the people moving from one institution to another. So for the politicians—sorry, going back to the question, the system was already in place and it was just a matter of removing their rivals from the system and placing them in the system. You can see how the system is now working for them. You have the governors at the provincial level and the open MPs. You have the open MPs at the districts who could easily influence the districts and the local-level governments. Thus just making local-level governments totally ineffective. In some districts now you'll find that the open MPs are now doing the work of the local-level governments. They are going to villages and initiating projects, build a new classroom or put up a new post. That is not the work of the open member, it is the work of the local level government.*

*You look at the Organic Law, the Organic Law stated that very, very clearly. Open members have assumed that responsibility. To them they think that now when it comes to this, these issues, it is their responsibility. When you look at the system it is not their responsibility.*

MUKHERJEE: At the time when these things were being debated in the mid '90s, before the Organic Law was passed, there were some members of Parliament who were in favor of keeping the system. Could you talk a little bit about what kind of arguments they made for keeping the system and who these people were?

GELU: *There were a number of them; especially Somare himself was quite open about the system. In fact recently he said that it was a mistake. But Momis himself, Momis, (Bernard) Narokobi, they were the ones who were quite vocal about keeping the system. One of the main agreements that they put up was this agreement of what they wanted and that was their vision, that was their thinking back in the 1970s was for more powers to be given, okay, that was one. Secondly, on the other hand, they saw that the 1995 reform basically would centralize powers. It would remove powers from the provincial governments and take it back to Waigani.*

*So those were the two lines of arguments that the opponents of the 1995 reform were pushing. The third major argument was that the provincial government system prior to 1995 would effectively operate if they were adequately funded. There is evidence to show now through the work of the National Economic and Fiscal Commission, to show that, very, very clearly, if only adequate funding was given to provincial governments that would have at least solved some of the problems that provincial governments were facing because the funding level was basically—one, it was a very important factor.*

*So those were the three lines of arguments that the opponents of the 1995 reform were pushing, centralization of powers, the funding, and of course the third one in which, it was more or less a center of what Momis and Narokobi were pushing, part of resources, part of the policies of their party. That decentralization should be the way to go to work for this country and not otherwise.*

MUKHERJEE: On the issue of funding, do you think it was low for the provinces because, precisely because of the political competition that took place between national MPs and provincial premiers?

GELU: *Definitely it was. It was quite low. To make matters worse, the 1995 reform, the Organic Law just totally messed, it just messed up, it messed the old formula, this formula of 20 kina per head. The national government was not paying 20 kina per head, it was paying 5 kina per head. So how would you expect provinces to get enough money based on the formula that was part of the 1995 reform? So it was a really, really bad change. Very, very bad level of funding that was part and parcel of the 1995 reform. It just contributed badly to the ability of the provinces to have the money, the funds that would allow them to continue to carry on their functions of the district as well as down at their election level.*

MUKHERJEE: Going back to the New Guinea Islands protest against the passage of the law during that period between '92 and '95. You mentioned that they tried to secede and they did set up something called the Federated Melanesian Republic.

GELU: Yes.

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MUKHERJEE: Could you discuss a little bit about how that came about, whose idea was it to set up that federation and what shape did they want it to take, what vision did they have for that?

GELU: *Well, it was going to be a republic. That idea basically was generated from a meeting of the premiers of the region. The name itself, the flag was ready. There was already this talk about setting up a university for the region. It was to be located I think at East New Britain or in West New Britain. So the idea was already there. And all this was, it was basically because of, you know all this talk about removing the provincial government system. The region basically said no, decentralization is a good process and a policy. We want it to continue while the national government thought otherwise. These were all the things.*

*The government, for the region, as decided by the premiers would be, I think, at that time obviously it was going to be located in East New Britain, but I think there were also some discussions that New Ireland might be a possibility. It will be for all these islands. They had a flag. They were going to go ahead with the signing of currency, and then they were going ahead by working on the constitution of the new republic. So more or less they were gearing up for that. It would be eventually the 1995 reform that would be the time. That meeting in Kimbe was basically to tell the rest of the country and the world that this was what they were going to do. They were serious. I think that's one of those things that we can say. They were serious about all this. They were going to go ahead and do it.*

MUKHERJEE: How did the national-level leaders perceive them? Did they take them as a credible threat?

GELU: *Definitely, especially from the New Guinea Islands. [break]*

*Especially if it's coming from the New Guinea Islands, they have to take them seriously. Most of the people over there always mean business. You have to take them seriously. That's why they've been in Bougainville. Bougainville kept on demanding the government there, please, can you do something? The government didn't and the crisis started.*

MUKHERJEE: So if they did take them seriously what kinds of compromises were they willing to make to satisfy their demands?

GELU: *Back then there was—I already spoke a little about how Micah turned a blind eye on—they were willing to come to some sort of an agreement, an arrangement. Like, for example, for Momis, Narokobi, together with his colleagues from the New Guinea Islands. You know later on Pokawin also joined the military alliance, he was a member of the military alliance. Then, later on, now he is with the National Alliance. I think one of the things that they will negotiate on was this giving more powers to the provinces. But maybe, it might be in the structural aspect of the system. What I mean by structural is that they might decide on making some changes to maybe the makeup of the Provincial Assembly, or maybe the makeup of the local-level government councils that would allow maybe the presence of some MPs or give more leverage to the MPs to have more say over the districts or something like that. But you know that never eventuated. It didn't come about because of the way in which Micah and his committee was driving the agenda.*

MUKHERJEE: Were they not afraid that if they drove too hard these islands would actually secede in the federation?

**GELU:** *I'm not too sure. But I think to Micah, by then this little Micah, he already made up his mind. Basically what Micah was doing was, he was running with an agenda of what he and all his colleagues in national parliament were all thinking. The agenda basically is to remove those people down there, that's the agenda and nothing else, despite the fact there was some suggestions that were given, some counter—. You know one of the questions you have already asked. But these people, they never listened, they just waved them away and they went on.*

**MUKHERJEE:** So what was the—when, there must have been a point when the island provinces' premiers realized that their demands were not going to be met.

**GELU:** Yes.

**MUKHERJEE:** So what was the reaction at that time? Did they chose to stand down and just accept what was happening?

**GELU:** *They were going to, but that meeting in Kimbe was basically an outcome of that, of that situation, that they were not going to do that, regardless. But then again you'll find that they also needed support from the national MPs. OK, the support from the national MPs. Obviously that support was not forthcoming. That greatly affected their ability to connect with themselves at the provincial level and the MPs at the national level. Imagine, the Prime Minister was from New Guinea Islands and the guy running the reforms was also from the New Guinea Islands. So it just didn't work for the premieres that the support was not forthcoming, especially from a national level. If they had support, if they had the support it would be a different story now.*

**MUKHERJEE:** Why didn't they have that support from the national level?

**GELU:** *Because you'll find again, political reasons, at the same time you know try to push the interests of the national MPs. They came together as a unit. Over the years they came to realize, all of them came to realize that one of the reasons why we're having problems down at that level is because of those people down there. So whatever happens, as I've already said, that the bipartisan committee, so-called bipartisan committee was made up of all backbenchers. All backbenchers from all the regions. Regardless of where you are from from the New Guinea Islands or from the Highlands, there's only one common thing that you are running with, and that is to get rid of those people down there.*

*So what was happening in the New Guinea Islands? The noises that were coming from them basically were totally disregarded. The only thing for them to do was to remove them, change the law.*

**MUKHERJEE:** Who was it that called for that meeting in Kimbe when the premiers met? Was it a collective decision to meet there and take steps from there?

**GELU:** *It was a collective decision. By then Pokawin was in Manus and Vogae was in West New Britain. These guys were all—they were ready to do something drastic about this as a way of showing their protest against what the national government was doing. Like I said, I think, one of the things that we must also take into account was consultation was not made enough, there wasn't enough consultation. For a major change such as the Organic Law, dealing with decentralization, you need to do a lot of consultation. When I say a lot, you have to visit the districts, visit the local-level governments, visit the villages. Go down to the people and you explain to the people why you are changing the Organic*

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*Law, why there will be a new system in place after the new Organic Law comes into place. That was not done. There were a few meetings in Goroka, in Eastern Highlands, it's Goroka. The majority of people there live in Goroka. There were a few meetings in Kerema. Not all the people in Kerema, Gulf people, live in Kerema. But through these people they say there is consultation and they justify that there has been consultation. Where is that consultation? But it wasn't. So that was one of the important factors that also contributed to this.*

MUKHERJEE: So what exactly happened after the order to arrest these individuals was issued? Were they actually arrested?

GELU: *A few were arrested. A few were arrested, and I think one of the reasons they, they were asked why they were meeting in Kimbe. In fact the intention of the meeting was for them to make a declaration. That was the original intention. But when they were asked why they were meeting in Kimbe, they were told that was a setting up meeting. I was told about this by a friend of mine who was there. He is now working at Waigani. Do you want to have a—?*

MUKHERJEE: Yes.

GELU: *So write his name down, his name is Cletus and the surname is Ngafkin. This guy was there.*

MUKHERJEE: In what capacity was he?

GELU: *He was with the Secretariat so you'll have a good—. He was also currently the member for the autonomy committee for New Ireland province. My brother, other brother, he was the state solicitor for the government, lawyer for the government. He was the one who issued the instructions to arrest these people because NEC (National Executive Council) instructed him. My brother is from New Guinea Islands. This guy is also from the New Guinea Islands. He'll tell you all the stories. Will you still be here next week?*

MUKHERJEE: Yes.

GELU: *Okay, what I will do is I'll get in touch with him this afternoon. I'll call you. I'll talk to him today. My wife is with the Department of Justice, an attorney general. I'll talk to him. Then you can also—how familiar are you with the Waigani offices?*

MUKHERJEE: I can find it.

GELU: *The Somare Foundation, the Sir Buri Kidu House.*

MUKHERJEE: Maybe.

GELU: *That's where the Justice Department is. It is on the way to the Parliament. It is a former Australian High Commissioner building. It was sold and they bought it off and Cletus is there. But Cletus will tell you more about what happened and already, since behind all this and what really actually happened during the raid by the police and all that. He'll tell you the stories about that.*

MUKHERJEE: So eventually of course the 1995 Organic Law was passed.

GELU: *It was passed, yes.*

MUKHERJEE: How long did it take for it to be implemented?

**GELU:** *It's still taking. That's one of those—it is totally insane. There are many aspects of the Organic Law which to this very day have not been implemented. So I really like that question, it is a very, very good question. If you look at the various provinces or LLGs, what's happening to LLGs. We have done a lot of studies on LLGs and districts. We'll be working this weekend to try and finish off the pilot study that we did for the southern region. We went to some of the remote districts and LLGs, there is nothing happening. There is nothing happening, despite the fact that the major justification for the 1995 reform was that the reform would improve service delivery. You don't have to be a rocket scientist, just go down 1-2 km on the road, go for a drive and I'll show you what's happening. You can see it with your own eyes that things are not the same.*

*Once upon a time, you'll find a government station in a very remote area, it's so beautiful. The grass has been cut, there is electricity, there is water. You go there now, the grass, the buildings are overgrown, and the buildings are falling apart. Everything—I just thought of something. I don't know if it is on my desktop [end of file two]*

*So that's the justification for the 1995 reform, that we are changing the law because services are not reaching the people, infrastructure is falling apart, its roads or buildings, utilities, no communication. So 1995 reform basically is to make improvements. But one of them was, especially the 1995 reform to tell you the truth is the funding. OK? They totally forgot about all the differences that exist in provinces.*

*If you look at the map of Papua New Guinea, OK, the map up there, all the provinces are not the same. There are provinces that are connected, there are provinces that are not connected. So how can you say that there is a level of funding that should go to Central province should be the same as East Sepik? Central is well connected by roads, health clinics some kilometers down the road. If they need some drugs, you drive from here down there, and there are drugs. In East Sepik, you have to fly there and then you have to drive and then you have to walk to get delivery because there are no road networks. So the amount of delivery services in the provinces is not the same.*

*So the Organic Law of 1995 did not take that into consideration and also, again going back to your question, there are many aspects of the Organic Law that have not been implemented.*

**MUKHERJEE:** And has there been any sort of movement from the grassroots now to reverse this trend and actually get back to the previous arrangement that was there before the Organic Law or not?

**GELU:** *Not really. But under the arrangement before, sorry, the autonomic proposal from East New Britain and from New Ireland, basically that is one of those aspects they are now looking at, that some of those arrangements in the old system are better than the current system. So it's not that they want the old—they want to get everything back, no. There are certain things that they want, like, for example, they want the assembly to be an elected assembly again. They want a true representative assembly that is mandated by the people through election in electing the people. That is one of them.*

*They also want the financial powers that were once enjoyed by some provincial governments under the old system to be given to them. The control of the public service. Right now we have only one uniform, sorry, not uniform, one unified*

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*public service. They also want to have some of those responsibilities given to them. So those would be some of the aspects of the old system that they want to be brought back. Not so much on a civil society groups, but more or less from a collective, views from different sections of a province and be in the form of a proposal, proposals coming from East New Britain or from New Ireland.*

MUKHERJEE: Some people have argued that the reason why service delivery has actually gotten worse since the 1995 reform is that the local-level governments in many places were not ready to take on those kinds of responsibilities because they had lost a lot of their capabilities while the provincial governments were actually in place.

GELU: *Uh-huh.*

MUKHERJEE: Was there any effort to improve the skills and the manpower quality in the local-level governments?

GELU: *That's a very, very good question. When the provincial government system was established all the attention and focus was on to the provincial governments, and local governments basically were neglected. There was a reason why the 1995 Organic Law, the previous Organic Law was called Organic Law on Provincial Governments. The 1995 Organic Law was called the Organic Law for Provincial Level Governments and Local-Level Governments. It was basically an attempt to get local level governments back, which it did by law, but still not through serious attention being given.*

*One of the requirements of a local government council is that they must have offices; they have to have a council chamber. The councilors will meet to have their meetings. For many of the provinces we visited, there is nothing. Some are even having their meetings under the trees. They don't even have proper records of their meetings. The funding is only enough to pay for the salary of the LLG manager. So this is nothing going for them.*

MUKHERJEE: Why do you think there has been no effort to improve their capacities?

GELU: *For?*

MUKHERJEE: For the local-level government.

GELU: *I think it is coming from the center. Under the system that we have, we have national provincial LLGs. We have got these other things called the districts. The district would exist between provincial and local-level governments. The district is supposed to be the administrative machinery, nothing more. Then districts are made up of public servants and their role is basically to deliver now what is decided at the provincial level. It is an extension of the provincial administration down at the local level. But what has happened is that districts have transformed into a political animal whereby open members are more or less in charge of the operations of the districts.*

*They have been turned into political entities, and that is really affecting the ability of the districts to work very closely with the local governments because their role is basically to provide support. In a district you might have four local-level governments. The job of the district administrator is to work with the presidents of those four local level governments, to deliver projects. The open MPs have come in and have twisted that system. Where all the resources are kept in the district, and him and his team basically are the ones that decide where it should go. If*



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*district one and two did not vote for him, then some open members, members of parliament are quite frank about this and are quite open about this. If LLG one and LLG two didn't vote for him in the last election, they will be totally neglected and his concentration will be on LLG three and four. Quite depressing.*

MUKHERJEE: So let me ask about Bougainville now. Now that there has been some amount of resolution of the conflict that took place and there is an agreement on autonomy, how has that impacted the debates on provincial government post '95, post 2001, in the current decade.

GELU: *That's good. East New Britain was the first province that came up with the idea of autonomy. When they came up with their proposal, one of the first things they stated in their proposal, in the introduction of the proposal, was that they were requesting for was not like Bougainville. They wanted to be part of Papua New Guinea, they want to remain with Papua New Guinea, but they wanted some more powers to be given to them. So that could be, from one angle, we can argue that way, but when it comes to financial, the demands for financial autonomy, I tell you that the system they are asking for is the same as Bougainville. So more or less you'll find the case for Bougainville after the crisis has to an extent influenced the thinking of some of the people, leaders, members of the various committees in these two provinces, in East New Britain and also in New Ireland.*

*Of course, East New Britain and New Ireland are within the New Guinea Islands region. There will be talking between the different leaders about all these things so there could be a major way in which we could say that the Bougainville arrangement to some extent has some impact on the thinking of these leaders.*

MUKHERJEE: And when was it that these two provinces made their demands? When did they put up these proposals to the government?

GELU: *For East New Britain, this was done, it was prior to the 2007 election. Somewhere, I think 2003, 2004, for East New Britain, 2003, 2004, that's when they started talking about autonomy. For New Ireland it was after 2007 when Sir Julius Chan became the Governor. That's when this talk about autonomy for New Ireland came about. I already said that Cletus Ngafin is a member of the New Ireland autonomy committee.*

MUKHERJEE: So would it be safe to say then that the issue of secession of the New Guinea Islands is not fully resolved yet because there is still talk about more autonomy leading up to these kinds of—?

GELU: *It will continue, it will continue for some time. The New Guinea Islands will always be that region of the country that will always talk about these things. Recently in a commentary that I made, I said something about these new provinces. We're going to have two new provinces in 2012, that's Hela and Jiwaka in the islands. If you look at the number of representation in Parliament, you'll find that the New Guinea Islands would become a minority. It will become a minority. Manus is only one, one province and one district. They wanted two members in Parliament. New Ireland, they have three in Parliament. West New Britain, they have three. East New Britain they have five, that's it. You look at provinces like Morobe which has ten, Southern Highlands which is a—Morobe eight, Southern Highlands ten. There is already this big imbalance in terms of political representation at the national level.*

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*I'm from New Guinea Islands and that's how I feel as well. It doesn't mean that I have all those ideas about secession and all that, no I don't. It's just that I'm greatly concerned about the imbalance, because we in the New Guinea Islands will continue to be marginalized. We will continue to be dominated by these other regions. This might also result in our ability to maybe gain top jobs within the political arena. We don't have the numbers and we can't—we don't have the ability to get support from the others. We might always be down there.*

*If that happens then I know obviously maybe the islands will continue to bring to light that things that they have been doing since 1975.*

MUKHERJEE: Okay, I think that pretty much covers everything that I wanted to discuss. Is there anything else you'd like to conclude with on the subject of provincial governments?

GELU: *Yes, one of the things that I was tell you when I was talking with Matt (Devlin) was the fact that I have termed, we have coined this decentralization system in Papua New Guinea into three waves. The first wave, second wave, and the third wave. The first wave was from 1976 to 1995. The second wave was from 1995 to 2000, and the third wave was from 2000 up to now. What is happening now is that there are initiatives currently running at the national level targeting provinces, districts and LLGs. Basically what they are trying to do is to make improvements to the 1995 Organic Law. The Organic Law is messed up. The Organic Law has not been accommodating things and trying to fix problems at the provincial level, district level, LLG level. So these initiatives are now being done basically to try and make corrections, to make improvements to that.*

*One of the exercises that was done, the first one that was done was to review the entire Organic Law. The review was done and was completed. A number of recommendations were made in which we need to make some changes. Whether it will be through legal changes, through the parliamentary process or administrative changes or changes or issues that need work to be done on. So that was one of the first ones.*

*The second one, and this is the most important, the most important reform that has ever been done to the decentralization system in Papua New Guinea was the work done by the National Economic and Fiscal Commission (NEFC). That was the work they did on RIGFA, RIGFA stands for Review of Inter-Governmental Funding Arrangement. So what has happened since the work of the NEFC was basically, it is based on this principle that all the provinces are not the same. So the amount of money that is given to provinces should be based on the cost of delivery of services. In Sandaun, Sandaun has four provinces, only one is accessible by road. Three are not accessible by road, by airplane. You know the cost of hiring planes is very expensive. So something has to be done. So money that should go to Sandaun based on this principle must be more than the money that would be given to lets say Central Province, which is well connected by road. There is one district in Central that you need to fly and that is in Goilala District. So that's the most important.*

*The good face of the government has responded. The national government has responded, and if you look at the figures for the 2009-2010 budget, it has clearly reflected this new funding arrangement. Parliament has made changes to the Organic Law to remove the most silly formula that the 1995 reform came up with and now it has been replaced by this new funding arrangement based on this very important principle of provinces are not the same, therefore funding that*

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*should go to them should also reflect that. So I think that's one of the final things that I want to say about this.*

MUKHERJEE: Thank you very much.

*GELU: Basically the point is there are people who are committed, the government is not committed. A lot of people are making noises about this. We all hope that this will continue and the government should continue support and enough for things to improve at the districts and the LLG level.*

MUKHERJEE: Thank you.