

- The Treaty of the High Seas
- My Education Journey from Jiwaka to the University of Papua New Guinea
- Papua New Guinea can improve energy access and reduce carbon emissions simultaneously

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“When nature is viewed as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society.”

~ Pope Francis

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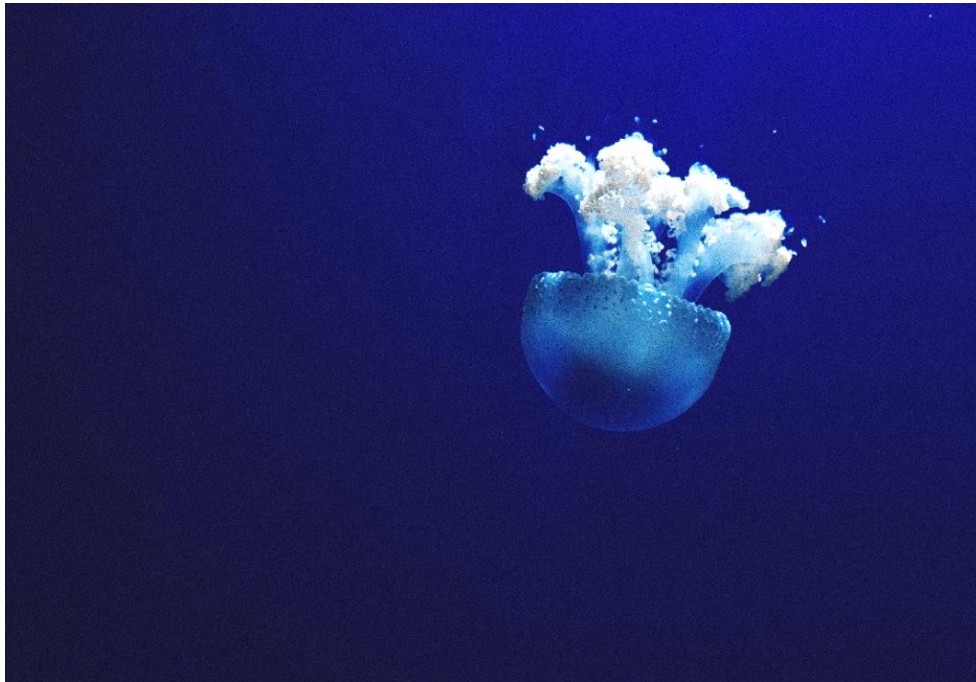


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THE TREATY OF THE HIGH SEAS

It has been almost two decades in the making, but finally there is a treaty to protect the high seas. The treaty of the Biodiversity of Areas Beyond Marine Jurisdiction, also known as the Treaty of the High Seas, is the first international treaty on ocean protection, since the United Nations Treaty on the Law of the Sea in 1982. The ocean covers about two thirds of the surface of our planet and is home to 50-80% of all life on Earth. The ocean generates 50% of the earth’s oxygen , absorbs 25% of all carbon dioxide emissions and captures 90% of the excess heat generated by these emissions. Sixty-four per cent of the ocean is considered “high seas”, and in terms of volume the high seas represent 95% of the planet’s habitable space. They are hugely biodiverse, teeming with plankton and with extraordinary eco systems, such as deep-water corals, as well as migratory routes for the ocean’s whales and sharks.

As owners of 20% of the world's Economic Exclusive Zones, the Pacific Island countries have long lobbied for an international legally binding document under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond nation jurisdiction. The Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands and Pacific Islands Forum Chair praised the Pacific negotiators for their work.

“As people of the ocean, our Governments have continued to demonstrate leadership when it comes to the ocean and international law.” He called the adoption and ratification of this important agreement to be fast tracked.

“Our Pacific people are the custodians of the largest Ocean on this earth and the health of our Ocean remains a key priority for our region and our Forum Family.”

The treaty is essential for enforcing the 30x30 pledge made by countries at the UN biodiversity conference in December 2022 to protect a third of the sea (and land) by 2030.

During negotiations last year, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) Secretary General, Henry Puna stressed the importance of the treaty as it would “contribute to the health, productivity and resilience of our Ocean, rooted in inter and intra generational equity.”

A component of the Treaty of the High Seas is the Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits countries to protect and conserve at least 30% of the ocean and ensure 30% of degraded areas are under restoration by 2030.

The World Wildlife Fund believes the agreement will allow for the establishment of high seas marine protected areas and help fill the gaps in the current patchwork of management bodies, resulting in better cooperation and less cumulative impact of activities on the high seas, such as shipping, industrial fishing and other resource exploitation.

Nearly two thirds of the ocean lies outside national boundaries on the high seas, and “fragmented and unevenly enforced rules fail to safeguard high seas biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations,” says Mark Brown. Once the treaty is ratified activities in the high seas will be subject to environmental impact assessments. It will provide the opportunity to halt damaging activities. This would be particularly important for activities such as deep seabed mining and deep-sea carbon capture and storage, of which very little knowledge on the impacts currently exists.

Sources: ‘Almost two decades of negotiations lead to High Seas Treaty’ by Elenoa Dimari, 7 March 2023, Pasifa Environews; Statement by Pacific Islands Forum Chair, 7 March 2023, www.forumsec.org; Landmark High Seas Treaty agreed, ushering in new rules for two-thirds of the ocean, 4 March 2023, World Wide Fund for Nature.

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‘MY EDUCATION JOURNEY FROM JIWAKA TO THE UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA’ BY ROBERT MEK

I was born in Gulka (Kimil), a remote village in Jiwaka Province. Growing up I learned the cultures of and lifestyles of Jiwaka and nearby Western Highlands Province. I am the third child of Simon and Polti Mek and I have five siblings. My parents are subsistence farmers and sell bananas, greens, peanuts, red pandanus and pigs. Dad dropped out of school in grade four. Mum has never been to school.

We have no access to proper roads and electricity. The rugged terrain, jungle, valleys and big rivers in the region make access to basic services difficult. Illiteracy and birth rates are very high, and some mothers die giving birth. We often have shortages in drugs and medical facilities in our community health centre. Growing up here made it extremely hard to access education. Despite that, I made up my mind to go to school.

In 2007, I was enrolled to do kindergarten (prep) at Gulka Elementary School. I woke up at 4am to prepare for school. Mum cooked four sweet potatoes: one for breakfast, one for lunch and two for afternoon dinner. Because the distance from home is five kilometres. and frequently the weather is bad, no one else was interested in going to school, so I walked back and forth alone and was often late for class. I sometimes missed classes due to heavy rain, floods and landslides.

For grade three, I went to Kimil Primary School, a Catholic mission school. At first, I did not understand anything I learnt in class. When a teacher asked me a question, everyone laughed because my answers were always wrong. At the end of term, my report ranked last. My parents could not read it, they thought everything went well. I cried, but I did not give up. Apart from helping Mum in the farm garden, I committed all my remaining time to studies. I read many textbooks. I consulted my teachers for help after hours.

My marks slowly improved. I completed grade eight in 2015 with good grades. Many people did not think I would get a secondary school offer for I was a village kid. But my parents had great hope for me and motivated me when I lacked motivation.

Waghi Valley Secondary School was far from my village. I walked to the bus and the trip took three hours. When I had no bus fare, I took the shortest route through the bush. The track was in bad condition, and it took me six hours to reach school. During the highest rainfall around June, July and August, I had the most difficulty getting to school. But I completed grade nine.

The next year an election-related fight broke out, which lasted two months. Some of our classrooms were burnt down, the teachers left in fear. I was unable to attend because it was on my enemy's land. Classes recommenced, but we had lost so much precious time to prepare for exams. Our teachers gave us piles of handouts, old exam papers and reference books. When I went home, I had no time for my friends and family. I sat in my room and studied. At night I used the old torch that my grandmother gave me for light.

In January 2018, the selection list for grade eleven in Jiwaka secondary schools was posted at our district office. I couldn't find my name. My parents shared my pain. Then a few days later I received a phone call from my uncle in Port Moresby who said I had been selected to Sogeri National High School. It was one of the most exciting moments in my life. Everyone in my clan and tribe was so proud of me.

I met new friends from across the nation. Their cultures and lifestyles were so different. Studying in a very competitive institution was the greatest challenge. Many students came from international and private schools with better grades. I was the smallest fish in an ocean of whales.

I started to make friends with everyone. People were so kind and caring and we built an unbreakable bond. My mind settled and I fully focused on school. I scored high grades which boosted me to study extra hard. Unexpectedly, I secured the top placing across all subjects. At the end of the year, I was awarded the dux of humanities and social sciences. It was beyond my expectation.

I was accepted to study business management and accounting at the University of Papua New Guinea – it is what my parents dreamed of for me. I'm now grateful to be a final year economics student here. If it was not for the commitment, sacrifices, courage and priceless advice of my beloved parents, I would not have come this far. If I'm lucky enough to become successful with riches one day, I will establish a school back in my village, so my younger siblings and future generations do not face the problems I faced.

Source: This is an edited version of 'My education journey from Jiwaka to UPNG' by Robert Mek, 18 April 2023, which first appeared on [Devpolicy](#), published by the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University. The writing of this blog was undertaken with the support of the ANU-UPNG partnership, an initiative of the PNG-Australia Partnership, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views are those of the author only.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA CAN IMPROVE ENERGY ACCESS AND REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY

In December 2020 the GJOP Pacific Outlook Bulletin looked at PNG's commitment to connect 70% of the country to electricity by 2030. Papua New Guinea (PNG) is one of the world's least-electrified countries. Just 13-15% of the country's eight million citizens have the power on, and most of them are in urban areas.

A report launched in January 2023 has found that PNG can reach its goal of improved energy access and also meet its commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement to reduce carbon emissions. *Building on What Works*, a collaboration between the Papua New Guinean environmental group Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights (CELCOR) and Jubilee Australia Research Centre, confirms that it is cheaper to produce electricity from renewable energies – especially solar and hydro – than fossil fuels. PNG government agencies have already identified a host of renewable energy projects that, if all went ahead, could supply 78% of PNG's on-grid electricity by 2030, while achieving the target to expand electricity access to 70% of households by 2030.

Peter Bosip, the Executive Director of CELCOR, said: 'Some might think that it is not possible for PNG to pursue these two goals at once: ie improving energy access and cutting emissions. We believe that the opposite is the case – that the expansion of renewable energy technologies in PNG will help us meet our energy access targets faster and cheaper. However, it means a significant change to our energy systems and to the ways in which we have been operating for many decades.'

Poor electricity access is one of the most critical development issues facing PNG today. Large parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, have poor electricity access, and for those who do have access, supply can often be unreliable. While renewable energies can face higher initial upfront costs, they have cheaper and less volatile energy prices, and maintenance on existing renewable energy infrastructure such as hydroelectricity is also highly cost effective.

But fossil fuel companies are resisting PNG's move away from fossil fuels. In 2019 an agreement was signed for between the state-owned PNG Power Limited (PPL) and NiuPower for a 58MW gas-fired power plant near Port Moresby, and a 66MW fossil gas-fired power plant is being built in Hela province, with a 20-year contract until 2042.

A potential risk to renewable energy expansion in PNG is that renewable energy may become 'locked out' of markets or be less attractive for financiers because fossil gas has already been 'locked in'. *Building on What Works* says that PNG does not need to build or buy new fossil gas-related infrastructure and can transition directly to renewable energy. Currently, national grid relies on diesel for 37.4% of its energy needs (39.7% from hydropower, 14.1% from fossil gas and 9.1% from geothermal).

'If PNG is able to take successful steps in cutting its own fossil fuel emission, it will strengthen this strong moral voice of ours in regional and international climate negotiations. This will in turn put pressure on high-emitting countries to do better, and ultimately result in a more liveable planet for everyone, not least us here in PNG,' said Peter Bosip.

Source: 'Building on What Works' by Shona Hawkes, January 2023, Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights and Jubilee Australia Research Centre.

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