



KASTOM GIRAUN

The importance of customary land
in Papua New Guinea

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WHAT IS CUSTOMARY LAND?

Customary land is land used and controlled by local people.

Customary land is managed according to local customs rather than ideas and laws brought in from outside.

A long time ago, all land across the world was customary land. But today it remains in only a few places, mainly in Africa and the Pacific islands.

Customary land in Papua New Guinea

Most land in Papua New Guinea is customary land.

Our customary land links the earth and the sky, the sea and the clouds, the past and the future. It includes all the ground, rivers and oceans that have provided and cared for us as Melanesian people since we first inhabited this earth.

Customary land holds our names, stories and knowledge. These bind us to the land and binds the land to us.

Our customary land is where we are born, and where we return to when we die. It connects us with our ancestors and those yet to come.

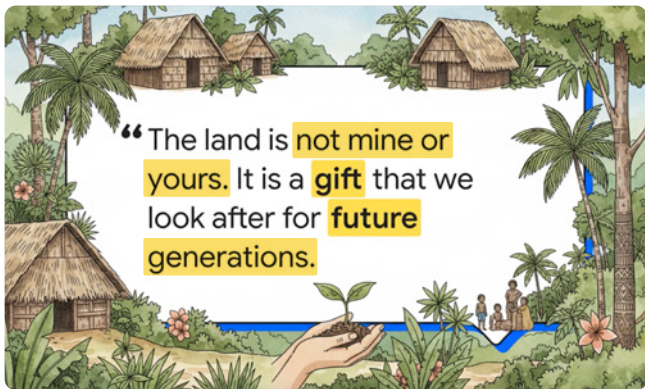
The land is not mine or yours. It is a gift that we look after for future generations.

Customary land gives us food, housing, medicines and clean water. It is the basis for our different cultures and beliefs. It holds our communities together.

Customary land makes us proud of our identity, home and community.

The importance of customary land

Customary land supports happy, healthy communities, a strong economy and local decision making. It is our most important national asset.





Essentials of life

Customary land provides families with all the essentials of life - a place to live, food to eat, housing materials, clean water, traditional medicines, a place to work and play. It is the foundation for our many different cultures, customs and beliefs.



A strong economy

Customary land promotes a strong economy, providing jobs and incomes to millions of people who grow and sell food, cash crops and handicrafts.



Safety net

Customary land provides comfort and security. It provides food and community support in times of natural disasters or hardship. It provides a safe place for old people to live with respect and support.



Identity and pride

Customary land gives us our identity. It makes us proud of our home and community.



Self-reliance

Customary land makes us strong and self-reliant. It gives us control over decision making. It allows us to care and provide for ourselves, our families and communities.



Equality and sharing

Customary land supports a fair and equal society. Everyone shares the land.



Healthy environment

Customary land connects people to their rivers, forests and seas. They understand how to manage and protect them.



Good governance

Decisions about customary land are made by local people and everyone knows what is decided.

The idea of land ownership

In many countries, land is seen as just an item that can be bought and sold like any other product.

The land has fixed boundaries and each piece of land is owned and controlled by one person. Often the owner does not live on the land and they can own many pieces of land in different places.

Most people do not have any land. They have to pay rent for the house that they live in or borrow money from the bank to buy a home. There are very few public spaces. People cannot grow their own food. All land is controlled by the same laws and disputes have to be settled by the courts.

This is all very different from customary land in Papua New Guinea.

Our customary land is not owned by anyone.

We care for and protect our customary land so it provides for us, our families and communities and will do the same for future generations.

In Papua New Guinea, customary land is much more than just an item that can be bought and sold.

Everyone is connected to an area of customary land and it gives them their identity.

Land as a Product



Land as a Relationship





WHY IS CUSTOMARY LAND SO IMPORTANT?

In Papua New Guinea the vast majority of people live in rural communities.

Their customary land provides for all their daily needs.

Customary land gives them a place to live, food to eat, housing materials, clean water, medicines, a place to work and earn money and somewhere to play

Customary land supports healthy communities and our different cultures, customs and beliefs.

Customary land is our most important asset.

All the essentials of life

Customary land provides people with a place to live and a community to support them.

Customary land provides the materials to build houses and shared places like meeting halls, classrooms and churches.

Customary land provides families with places to grow their food, to hunt for meat and catch fish.

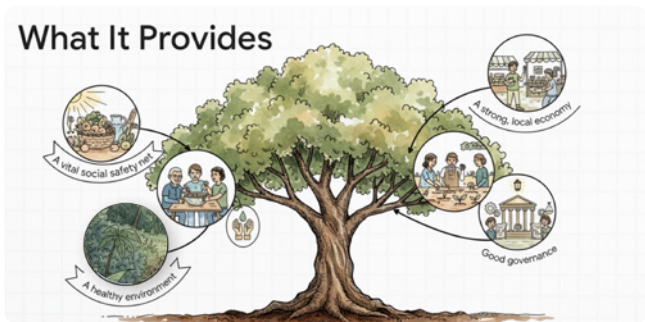
Customary land also provides clean water for drinking, cooking and washing.

People collect plants and herbs to use as medicines and use local materials to make mats, canoes, tools, jewelry and household essentials.

Customary land provides people with jobs and cash incomes.

Most importantly, customary land gives people knowledge. Knowledge about their land and places and how they were created. Knowledge about everything that exists in the local environment and how it can be used and cared for.

Customary land provides the beliefs and cultures that bind families and communities together.



A Strong Local Economy

Step 1

People work their customary land.

Step 2

They grow food and cash crops (cocoa, coffee, etc.).

Step 3

Goods are sold in local markets and some are exported overseas.

Step 4

Money supports other village businesses.



A strong economy

Customary land supports a strong economy and is the biggest job provider in Papua New Guinea.

Millions of people work on their customary land every day, growing food in their gardens for their families or to sell in local markets. Other people grow cash crops, while some go hunting for meat or fishing in rivers and the sea.

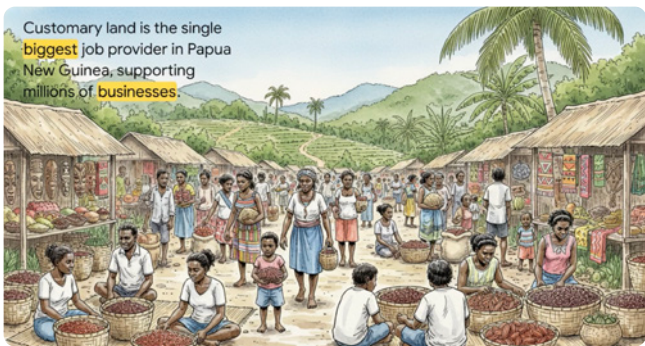
Common cash crops include cocoa, coffee, coconut and betelnut.

People are also involved in small businesses on their customary land like poultry and fish farming, bee-keeping, spice production, floriculture or making beauty products, medicines and arts and crafts.

The money that people make from their customary land also supports other small businesses such as village trade stores and PMVs.

All these small and medium enterprises depend on customary land.

Customary land is the single biggest job provider in Papua New Guinea, supporting millions of businesses.



Safety net

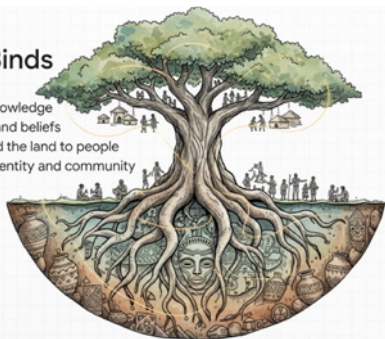
Customary land provides food, comfort, community support and security in the face of family hardship or natural disasters like floods, drought or earthquake.

Customary land provides a safe place for older people to live with dignity and support.

People living on their customary land have a long tradition of giving and sharing with others, caring for those less fortunate and supporting each other.

The Land That Binds

- Holds names, stories, and knowledge
- Forms the basis for culture and beliefs
- Binds people to the land, and the land to people
- Provides a proud sense of identity and community



Identity and pride

Customary land gives people a sense of who they are and an identity and pride that is connected to their family and community and local area.

Customary land is where we are born and where we return to when we die.

It connects us with our ancestors and those yet to come.

Customary land holds our names, stories and knowledge. These bind us to the land and binds the land to us.

It is the basis for our different cultures and spiritual beliefs, and it holds our communities together and helps maintain order.

The land is not mine or yours, but a gift that we hold and care for for future generations.



Self-reliance

Customary land makes us independent and strong. It provides all our essential needs.

Customary land promotes community participation in decision-making, ceremonies, festivals, rituals, house building and making gardens.

These all strengthen the bonds between people. They help us feel safe, supported and protected.



Equality and sharing

Customary land provides for everyone. It supports a fair and equal society. Everything is shared and people care for each other.

Customary land provides everyone with a place to live and ways to provide for their family. This helps maintain happy and peaceful communities.

Customary land prevents a few people from owning land as their private property.



Healthy environment

Papua New Guinea has more plants, animals and insects than almost any other country on the planet. Many are found only here in PNG.

This healthy environment exists because of the wise management and protection by generations of people living on their customary land.

Knowledge of how to look after our land is found in our local customs and beliefs which are handed down from generation to generation.

Sacred places and burial sites are landmarks preserved and protected as the homes of our ancestor's spirits.



Good governance

Customary land provides us with our traditional laws and customs. These unite our communities and keep us safe.

Customary land boundaries are not fixed and change over time.

Decisions about customary land and people's needs are made fairly and openly by the community.



As we have seen, customary land is extremely important to the people who live in rural communities.

Our customary land is also seen as valuable by outsiders.

Big companies, business people and politicians want our customary land for mining, logging or growing oil palm so they can make money.

Working together they have created land registration and incorporated land groups.

These are promoted as ways to bring development but they are very dangerous.

Once land is registered or land groups are incorporated control over customary land is taken away from local people.



Incorporated Land Groups (ILG)

An Incorporated Land Group (ILG) is a legally registered body that has control over a specific area of customary land.

Each ILG is run by an appointed chairman and committee.

They are allowed to make decisions about the use of the customary land.



ILG: Decisions by a **small, appointed** committee that can act for everyone.



ILGs were originally intended to allow communities to take back land used as plantations in colonial times.

Today ILGs are often used to obtain community agreement for mining, logging and oil palm and to distribute royalties.

An ILG must also be formed before customary land can be registered.

Problems with ILGs

The process to incorporate a land group is long and complicated.

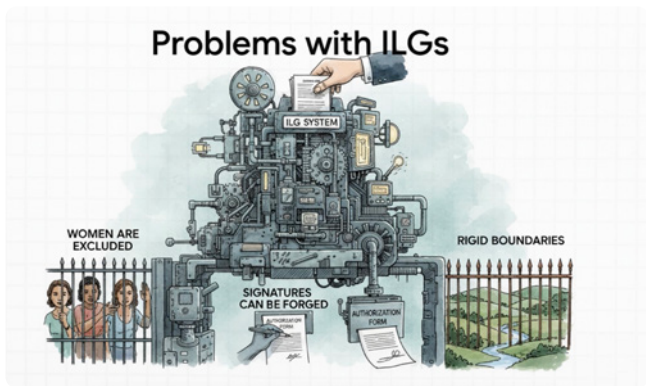
Many people do not understand the steps and the Department of Lands does not have the resources to help.

This allows mining or logging companies to drive the process.

All the people connected to the land should to be listed and give their consent.

In practice many people are left out and some signatures are forged.

Often the important role of women in making decisions about land is ignored and their voices excluded.





Big companies, business people, and politicians want customary land for mining, logging, and oil palm to make money.

This creates conflict when people find out they are not included and benefits are not shared.

Rather than decisions being made by clan leaders in consultation with their people, the ILG chairman and committee can make decisions for everyone.

This creates the opportunity for corruption and mismanagement.

When an ILG is created the boundaries of the customary land are drawn on a map.

The boundaries are meant to be agreed with neighbouring clans and any disputes settled, but this rarely happens.

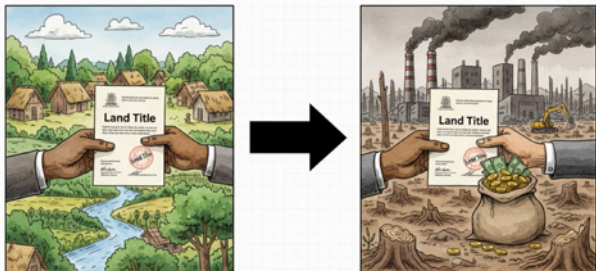
Once registered, the boundaries can only be challenged through the courts.

Before an ILG is approved the details should be published so everyone knows what is going to happen, but many people don't see the adverts in the newspaper.

Land Registration

An incorporated land group can apply to the Department of Lands to register their customary land.

Once the land is registered, a land title is issued. The land can then be sold or subdivided or leased.



Why is Land Registration Dangerous?

Land registration is dangerous.

The land title can be sold or the land leased for mining, logging or oil palm without the agreement of local people.

The new owners can stop local people from accessing their own land.

Any disputes about the land are decided by the courts and not by local people.

Land Registration undermines our Papua New Guinea Ways





Land registration and our National Goals

Land Registration undermines the five National Goals in our Constitution.

1. Integral human development

Without customary land the opportunities for personal growth and development are limited.

2. Equality and participation

A few people get rich while others are made to struggle.

3. National Sovereignty and self-reliance

Many people are no longer involved in decision making and some struggle to provide for themselves and their families.

4. Wise use of natural resources and the environment

Logging, mining and oil palm all consume our natural resources and destroy the environment.

5. Papua New Guinean Ways

Without customary land our traditional laws and customs are undermined.





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