

# Martha: My Friend, My Role Model

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Martha and I met in 1995 at La Trobe University in Melbourne. She asked if I was from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and if I knew how to speak Tok Pisin. When I answered ‘yes’, she asked if I could teach her Tok Pisin. This was when our friendship started—we have been friends ever since. Although we do not contact each other regularly, our friendship remains intact.

Our Tok Pisin lessons started the week after our initial meeting. Martha knew exactly what she needed to learn, and we straight away began meeting specific objectives she had set for herself. During the lessons, she would have her list of English words she wanted the Tok Pisin translations for, and we would take it from there. That method appeared to work for Martha. There were no tests of any sort.

Martha eventually met my family—my husband Albert and our three children: Annitha (four), Albertine (three) and Kingsbury (five months old). She met Daniel, the last of my children, several years later in Port Moresby. In 1995, on Christmas Day, my family and I met her family—her husband Stuart and their two daughters.

Since then, Martha has been one of my role models, influencing me through her positive attitude and many words of encouragement spoken softly but with authority. Her words have had a great impact on me as a professional Melanesian woman and, most importantly, as an academic, particularly in a developing country that experiences challenges related to low development indicators. She shared a lot of her experiences of the impacts of mining stretching across economic, political, environmental

and social dimensions (as is also reflected in many of her published articles). Some of the experiences she shared with me were centred on inequalities in culture that undermined the ability of women to be equal partners in development. Women were, and still are in many ways, seen as less important by their male relatives, who sometimes make decisions on their behalf. Many of these decisions have had a negative impact on the lives of these women, including sometimes in their relationships with men on the mine sites who were away from their wives and children.

My career—especially as a Melanesian woman—is surrounded by cultural expectations and challenges influenced by norms and I value my friendship with this empowering academic who had the time to persist not only verbally, but also by her actions. By involving me in research activities, Martha created the interest in me to pursue a career in academia. Little did I realise that being friends with Martha would influence me in my career. Martha reminded me of a *bilum*, a traditional PNG bag, either knitted or woven by hand. I could say that she was the *bilum* full of things (including knowledge) that needed another *bilum* to unpack some stuff into, to share the load.

I remember Martha, through her actions, involving me in one of her research projects with the Royal PNG Constabulary in Port Moresby. She talked to the police personnel and I observed how she was conducting this research. Although I had completed a master's by coursework in social work, at that point, I had not been involved in any research or consulting work—this was an important learning experience.

In 2004, Martha and I caught up in Madang at a conference on 'Women and mining in Papua New Guinea', at which she presented a paper. During the conference, someone asked Martha who I was; she introduced me as Dora, who has completed a Master's in social work, and said 'I will make sure she goes further to do a PhD'. At that stage, I had hardly thought about embarking on a PhD; however, my role model was miles ahead and foreseeing me as a 'doctor'. During this conference, among other things, she also introduced me to her women group from Lihir Island—little did I know that I would one day choose Lihir as a case study site for my PhD studies. Almost six years after that introduction, I pursued my doctoral studies and chose Lihir, Misima and Hidden Valley as my case studies. I used Martha's network to connect with interviewees in Lihir.

When I was in Port Moresby preparing for my fieldwork, Martha gave me the name of her friend on Misima, who I then visited. I appreciated the fact that there was someone, at least, in the community where I was doing fieldwork that I could connect to. I used this link to begin familiarising myself with the people and culture of my research context.

Through my conversations with Martha, I understood the impact of mining, including issues that related to women and children in PNG communities. These conversations created my interest in mining, which later developed into me choosing the following PhD topic 'Building community resilience in mine impacted communities: A case study on the delivery of health services in Papua New Guinea' (Kuir-Ayius, 2016). I set out to explore the notion of community resilience in mine-affected communities in PNG. The research used the case of health, specifically the delivery of health services, as a lens for understanding resilience in three of these communities. The resilience and sustainability of these communities were explored through the concept of 'community capitals' (CCs). In this study, CCs were natural, human, financial, cultural, social, political and built capitals. In my thesis, the CCs were also viewed through a Melanesian lens—I proposed a '*Bilum* Framework' to better illustrate the ways in which strengthening these entwined capitals can build community resilience. It was chosen as a metaphor because the many strings used to weave it resemble the interactions of CCs that can build more resilient communities. An explicit aim of the research was to understand how the strengthening of the various capitals can improve resilience to achieve more sustainable communities.

The findings drew together three main themes that underpinned my study: 1) the lack of policy alignment between the different actors in terms of health service delivery, 2) the lack of access to health services in mine-affected communities and 3) the fluctuating levels of community resilience across stages of mining. The study discussed how these issues affected the building of resilience in mine-affected communities and how the interconnectedness that underpinned the *Bilum* Framework could provide new ways of approaching the building of resilience for these communities.

I also appreciate Martha's research and publications on other topics, besides mining, that relate to PNG culture. When I was writing a section in my thesis on 'traditional and informal approaches to healing', I came across her (and others') article on 'Medical pluralism and the

maintenance of traditional healing techniques on Lihir, Papua New Guinea' (Macintyre et al., 2005). My discovery prompted a sigh of relief because I had searched for months for a relevant article to support what I had written.

Martha has a '*naispla lewa*'—a good heart or passion to encourage others and bring out the potential of those she interacts with in one way or another. My friend and role model is like a *bilum*, full of knowledge, wisdom and love that has flowed and is still flowing far and wide to discover the unknown and make it known.

*Martha apet! Ateu oa! Mi kaikai lewa blo yu!*  
Martha, thank you! My heart you! I love you!

## References

- Kuir-Ayius, D. (2016). Building community resilience in mine impacted communities: A study on delivery of health services in Papua New Guinea (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Macintyre, M., Foale, S., Bainton, N. & Moktel, B. (2005). Medical pluralism and the maintenance of a traditional healing technique on Lihir, Papua New Guinea. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 3(1), 87–98.

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