



LSPNG CONFERENCE 2019

Hosted by the University of Papua New Guinea
Port Moresby, 23-24 September, 2019

Conference Theme:

**PROMOTING UNITY IN DIVERSITY:
Celebrating the indigenous languages of the South Pacific**

CONCEPT NOTE

LSPNG: the Road Travelled

The Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea was founded at a meeting of University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) staff and students on the 11th of October 1967, with the aim of promoting the languages of Papua New Guinea through research and advocacy of literacy and language education. LSPNG achievements in these and many other areas of Papuan, Austronesian and general linguistics have raised the visibility and awareness of Papua New Guinea on the world stage. Going back over half a century, the archives of our online journal, *Language & Linguistics in Melanesia* (LLM) at www.langxmelanesia.com, are an invaluable resource for linguists, anthropologists and education specialists nationally and all over the world.

LSPNG: CELEBRATING UNESCO'S International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019 (IYIL2019)

Papua New Guinea, a.k.a. the "Land of a 1000 Tongues," is an ideal place to hold a conference celebrating UNESCO's IYIL2019. The unique tapestry of South Pacific languages and cultures has attracted a lot of interest from around the globe. LSPNG researchers have described hundreds of previously unwritten indigenous languages, breathing new life into them through orthography development, descriptions of their structures, and the promotion of vernacular literacy in remote communities. Working with the last remaining speakers of many endangered languages, they have preserved for posterity a record of these languages. This conference will create a forum for researchers and policy makers to exchange ideas about the best way to maintain, document and promote the traditional languages and cultures of Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific region, while at the same time keeping up with the demands of the 21st century. 'Unity in Diversity,' the long-celebrated ideology of the Independence era in PNG, is again the focus of academic deliberations and public debate. How can the unique linguistic and cultural diversity of the South Pacific survive the leveling convergence of human cultures in our Global Village?

It is often said that linguistic diversity is an obstacle to social contact. This is not necessarily the case, since humans have always been able to learn their neighbors' languages and even to create new languages out of existing tongues when the need arose. Yet our modern world requires the use of internationally established languages to ensure socio-economic development in our Flat World. How can the acquisition of the 'bigger' languages such as English go hand in hand with the preservation of indigenous, ancestral languages that reflect important local identities? This is the challenge that PNG must face. By providing a forum for an exchange of ideas between scholars and policy makers on language education and language-related issues, LSPNG 2019 aims to help find the optimal way forward in language education policy, to ensure that **Vision 2050**¹ becomes reality, and that the people of Papua New Guinea can effectively manage their own 'neighborhood' in the Global Village, as well as actively participate in the world economy.

¹ Actively participating in the United Nations development agenda, Papua New Guinea launched a long-term national development strategy, Vision 2050, which is 'the most ambitious planning document in the country's history,' according to the Oxford Business Group website (2).

Outstanding linguists and long-time members of LSPNG, such as Malcolm Ross and Andrew Pawley (ANU), John Lynch (USP), Bernard Comrie (UCSB) and William Foley (University of Sydney), will be invited to address the Plenary Conference Session, sharing with us their view of the road covered; leading International and National educators and language policy makers, whose names will be announced in our soon-to-be-released call for papers, will also address the Plenary Session, presenting their ideas with regard to the best way forward towards addressing the need to preserve our languages and cultures, as well as the Strategic Development Goals of Vision 2050 (Fig. 1: SDG 1).

PNG Vision 2050 National Strategic Plan (2) focuses on seven broad strategic areas (or pillars):

1. Human capital development, gender, youth and people empowerment;
2. Wealth creation;
3. Institutional development and service delivery;
4. Security and international relations;
5. Environmental sustainability and climate change;
6. Spiritual, cultural and community development; and
7. Strategic planning, integration and control.

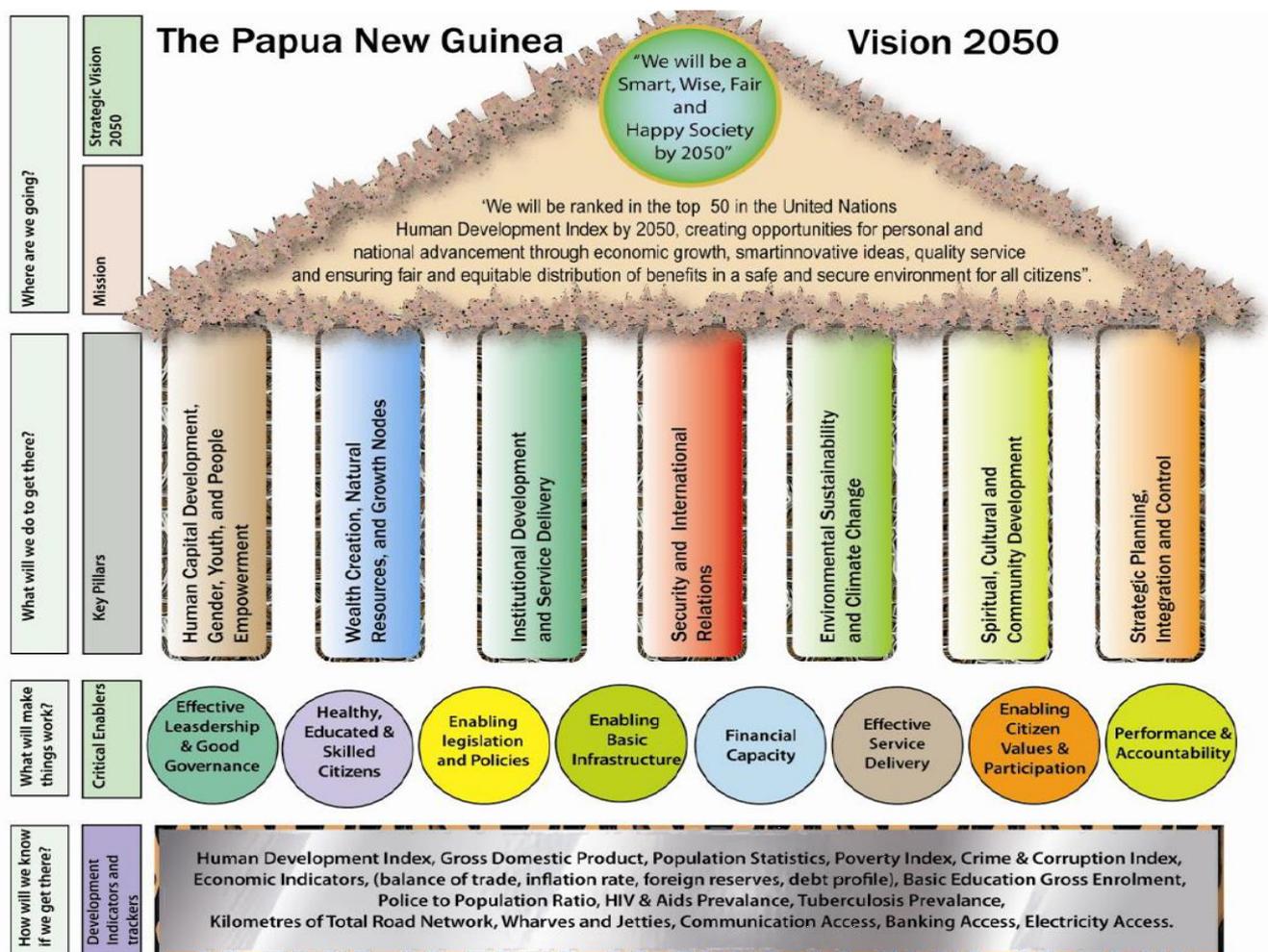


Fig. 1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Vision 2050

Amongst the Strategic Policies designed to position PNG globally, the Population Policy comes first, even before the Strategic Food Security Policy and the Strategic Energy Security Policy; this is because PNG policy makers recognize that all social development hinges on knowledge, which we acquire only through language. In partnership with UNESCO and other international and national organizations and stakeholders, this conference will focus public attention on the importance of documenting, maintaining and promoting unique systems of knowledge and understanding of the world, embodied in our indigenous languages. It will provide a venue for defining the best ways of ensuring sustainable development, investment, peace building and reconciliation (3). The conference will also explore innovative ways of ensuring that the linguistic rights of the smaller communities are protected through quality Mother Tongue (MT) education (4, 5).

LSPNG 2019 theme, **“UNITY IN DIVERSITY: Celebrating the indigenous languages of the South Pacific”** cuts to the core of the interrelated, cross-disciplinary issues that determine all socio-economic and cultural development. While papers on any subject dealing with topics in the languages of the South Pacific and general linguistics are welcome, the conference will focus mainly on issues pertaining to the role of indigenous languages in PNG society, with particular attention paid to the impact of national language education system on sustainable socio-economic development of Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific Region. Language change in the changing world, the impact of modern technologies on the way we communicate, and the use of the Internet and digital devices in language education will also contribute to the fabric of fascinating discussions.

Conference Objectives:

1. Support the PNG Government in its long-term national development strategy (Vision 2050) by highlighting the crucial role of human resource development in attaining all other Strategic Development Goals (SDGs)
2. Stimulate research and exchange of ideas in the areas of language education, sociolinguistics, cultural studies and anthropology
3. Develop programs to document endangered languages
4. Define and help shape an effective language education policy for sustainable development
5. Advocate adult literacy programs and the implementation of an effective language education policy for sustainable development
6. Present research findings in the areas of language education and literacy in PNG that will help shape PNG Sustainable Development (SD) policies
7. Create national educators’ networks, promoting awareness of the importance of indigenous languages and cultural practices
8. Contribute to the work of the UN Commission for Sustainable Development by promoting indigenous languages in the national language education policy
9. Showcase successful programs and projects in literacy / language education
10. Forge important partnerships for development between LSPNG and the Department of Education (DoE), government and private sector organizations, international agencies and research institutions.

Expected outcomes:

- Fruitful exchange of ideas on the best way forward in the preservation of indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific region
- Important interaction with international and national stakeholders with respect to documenting, maintaining, and promoting linguistic and cultural diversity in the region

- Suggestions and recommendations with regard to shaping an effective language education policy in PNG
- Publication of conference proceedings in the free-access online journal of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea, *Language & Linguistics in Melanesia* Vol. 37/2, 2019
- Successful realization of Vision 2050 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), primarily that of human resource development, through implementing an effective language education policy.

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