

# A Preliminary Study on Food and Livelihood Security in Highland Wamena, West Papua, Indonesia

Jonatan Lassa



© Pictures: above left ©Baliem Valley Resort, above right © SH/Adiseno & below is © from “Papua History” at <http://www.janesoceania.com/>

Some groups of people in the Baliem Valley in the highland of West Papua, especially in the remote villages are still “hunter and gatherer” society (Right picture). The picture on the left is the Baliem Valley Resort ([www.baliem-valley-resort.de](http://www.baliem-valley-resort.de)) situated on a 1000-hectares bought by an European investor for only Rp. 1 billion (£ 117,647). It means, 1 m<sup>2</sup> is valued at 1.18 British pence. The cheapest rate of the hotel is Rp. 700,000/night (£40/night). NGOs claim that the land contains gold. It might be true because in this largest island of Indonesia, there are lots of mineral resources such as gold, oil, and copper.

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# **A Preliminary Study on Food and Livelihood Security in Highland Wamena, West Papua, Indonesia**

**Jonatan Lassa<sup>1</sup>**

## **ABSTRACT**

This working paper is developed based on my experience as a principal facilitator during one-week workshop on “Food, Livelihood Security and Gender” in the Baliem Valley - highland Wamena<sup>2</sup>, West Papua in May 2004. However, this paper is drafted from April – December 2004.

Sustainable Livelihood Framework of DFID was used as a primary framework. The study was intended for finding the better development interventions within its complexity, shock and vulnerability and policy context.<sup>3</sup>

It was based on the presumption that “every livelihood asset counts” in order to list the capacity of the people of Wamena. The background of the people of Wamena is presented in the part of vulnerability context. It is recognized that due to the short period of study being taken, it is not enough to present all the assets, vulnerability context and processes & institutions that exist and interact within the Baliem Valley.

## **1. INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW OF SL FRAMEWORK**

Sustainable Livelihood Framework/Approach (SLF/SLA) can be applied to Natural Resources Management, impact assessments and livelihood projects (Ashley, 2000, Turton, 2000, Young et. al., 2001). SLF can also be used to analyze food security status and project planning (IFSP Sri Lanka, 2003), the livelihood within locality and globalisation context (De Haan 2000), poverty reduction program (Ellis, F. & Bahiigwa, 2003), Ellis, Kutengule, Nyasulu, 2003 and Ellis & Freeman, 2002), Gender and Power relations, poverty and inequality (Carney, 2002). It is even used for famine early warning

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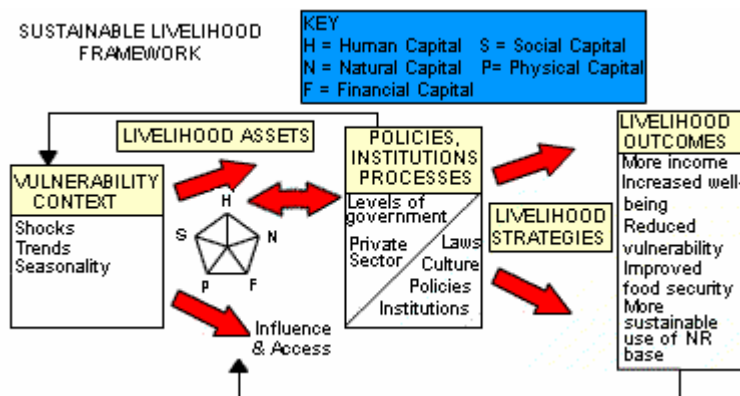
<sup>1</sup> Program Officer Disaster Management in PIKUL (Penguatan Institusi dan Kapasitas Lokal) based in Kupang

<sup>2</sup> The valley is situated in 45 km<sup>2</sup> at 1.500 MSL with average temperature between 15-29 C°.

<sup>3</sup> Apart from the SL Framework, Food Entitlements Mapping (Sen 1981) was used as an entry point. It was a preliminary participatory study which involved more than 40 local volunteers and NGOs with different backgrounds. The SL Frameworks elements was used as the master framework that tailored all the ‘facts’ within one framework.

and food security monitoring (FKPB, 2003). Twigg (2001) shows that SL framework can also be incorporated into mainstreaming disaster risk reduction.

‘Livelihoods analysis can be done without the SL framework, but the framework helps to broaden and structure the scope of enquiry’ (Ashley, 2000:7). It can serve a wide variety of applications, such as: livelihood program intervention, impact assessment, and natural resources management. No wonder why it is called that the SL framework has been a kind of panacea for all development experts and workers (Hussain, 2002, p.11).



**Figure 1.** SL Framework of DFID (copied from DFID, 2000)<sup>4</sup>

Despite of its comprehensiveness in itself, one of the critics to the assets approach is that it doesn't explicitly count political assets. I would argue that a person who has some political roles in a rural village in a third world would have better access to food (aid) than those who don't (IFSP- Sri Lanka (2003, p.3). For instance, someone who is a

<sup>4</sup> Take any unit of analysis, either gender, household or one community group whose a set of capital assets within 5 categories (figure 1): human, social, natural, physical and financial, which exist in a given vulnerability context and shocks (either seasonal or long term). On the other hand, the drivers (policies, institutions and process) that dialectically affects both assets and vulnerabilities. For any given unit, say a household or an individual must have a set of livelihood strategies towards better livelihood outcomes. Therefore, sustainable livelihood depends on five interrelated elements: vulnerability context, livelihood assets, policies/institutions and processes, livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes.

member of a village committee, a church committee, and at the same time an NGOs' contact person, is likely to have better opportunities to food aid than ordinary villagers.

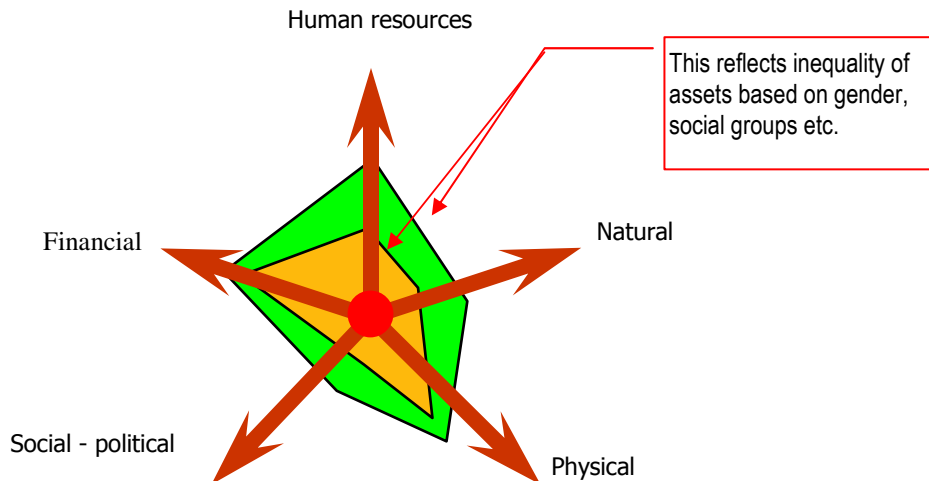


Figure 2. Modified version of Livelihood Assets

Another critic is that applying all the SLF, will result in abundant of data which might not relevant to peoples' livelihood. However, livelihood assets as shown in figure 2 is a powerful tool to illustrate asset inequalities that exist within the community based on gender, age and social groups such as religion, and race.

Insights from IFSP Sri Lanka (2003, p.4) suggest that the SL Framework yield two essential questions: firstly, which capital assets (resources) can a household (or a group/an individual) rely on in order to deal with food insecurity (or livelihood security) in a given vulnerability context? Secondly, how do structures and processes influence the access of a household (or a group/an individual) to their capital assets?

### **3. Wamena Livelihood Context**

#### **3.1 Complex Vulnerabilities: Reality of Conflicts and Disaster**

People of Wamena<sup>5</sup> made first contact with outside world just recently in 1954<sup>6</sup>. Before the “integration” of West Papua New Guinea to Indonesia in 1969, Christian missionaries were the only outsiders. After the integration to Indonesia in 1969, there are a lot of outsiders from Java, Sulawesi and some neighboring districts in Papua, primarily working as teachers, civil servants and military troops.

After the integration, the history of Baliem Valley is the history of blood conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Revisiting the *blood history* of Wamena, the capital of Jayawijaya district, in 1977, where at least 12,000 people were killed by Indonesian military forces, in complex combination with geographical isolations, are a few factors to be blamed for the reasons of the current ‘backwardness’ of the people of the Baliem valley.

‘Invisible hands’ keep prolonging people’s vulnerabilities by means of conflict that happened in 1975-1977, 1984/1985, 1996, 2000 and 2003. Silent violence still exists even in December 2004 in the neighboring district of Wamena.<sup>8</sup>

The development features in the district of Jayawijaya, West Papua has been so-called stagnant in terms of several indicators. It experiences high mortality rate. UNICEF

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<sup>5</sup> Wamena is the capital of Jayawijaya district, the largest district in West Papua. The district's population is about 426,414 with density population is 8,06 jiwa/Km2.

<sup>6</sup> 20th April 1954 - Lloyd van Stone of CMA (Christian & Missionary Alliance) began preaching amongst the Dani tribes. See: <http://www.koteka.net/history.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Richardson (1974, 1977) wrote the first anthropological publications about Yali tribe in the highland of West Papua. The Peace Child (Richardson 1974) unravels the fact that tribal conflict in the highland West Papua is actually a ‘normal’ practice among tribal communities. Interestingly, he found that there was local capacity to tackle conflict between tribal communities. This inspired him to write about “the Peace Child”, that is the practice of “community based conflict resolution” where two child of each conflicted community are exchanged to cease fire. Nevertheless, the communities are indeed culturally prone to tribal conflict.

<sup>8</sup> Violent conflict in Wamena is predicted to get worsen. Latent conflict is believed maintained by the state. This assertion is made based on the fact that some military members trained one of the tribe leaders to become jihad Moslem. Consequently, the leader influenced his community to follow Moslem way of life. Later on, the leader was trained to become a jihad in the highland of Jayawijaya, West Papua (See: ICG Report, 2002, p. 2, 8-10). Just recently, the wife of the trained jihad was shot by a sniper next to a Christian village. It creates tension between Christian and Muslim communities which might lead to violent conflict. Based on cultural vulnerability, Wamena communities are prone to tribal violent conflict. Taking structural conflict of 1969, 1977, 1984/5, 1996, 2000 and 2003 into account, people are at risk of violent conflict.

See ELSHAM website <http://www.geocities.com/elshamnewsservice/>. Accessed December 2004.

data shows at least 2,500-3,000 mother die every year (Rigo, 2004). Some ‘anecdotal data’ mention that the region experiences negative population growth.<sup>9</sup> This causes local NGOs’ activists to conclude that “there is a systematic effort from the state to implement a genocide strategy through forced Family Planning”<sup>10</sup>.

In fact, the Family Planning program since Suharto period has been used as “one size fit for all approach”. Family Planning program was forcedly imposed in the under-population region such as West Papua, while it solves under-population in Papua through transmigration of people from over-population islands such as Java.<sup>11</sup>

During 2003 conflict, rice price was rocketing from US\$ 700<sup>12</sup> per metric ton to around US\$ 2,000/mt in Wamena local markets. People are driven to shifting their ethno-food (*hipere*) to rice which hardly grow locally thus creates dependency. Rice is imported from outside by very expensive but the only means of transportation: air plane. Rice consumption is equivalent to US\$ 17 per-week/household (20% of weekly total household expenditure).

The shifts in food consumption is considered as not sustainable because people grow no rice at all.<sup>13</sup> Figure 3 shows that People in Wamena are at risk due to existing

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<sup>9</sup> Most participants believed that the population in the Valley is decreasing due to high mortality rate, low life expectancy, HIV/AIDS epidemic, and conflict related deaths.

<sup>10</sup> Forced Family Planning was once implemented by the dictatorship, President of Indonesia, General Soeharto. Every male in the district was forced to apply vasectomy which later affect their food productions. People are moving to rice dependency which imported from outside. Furthermore, people in sub-urban areas are starting experience land scarcity for *hipere* production

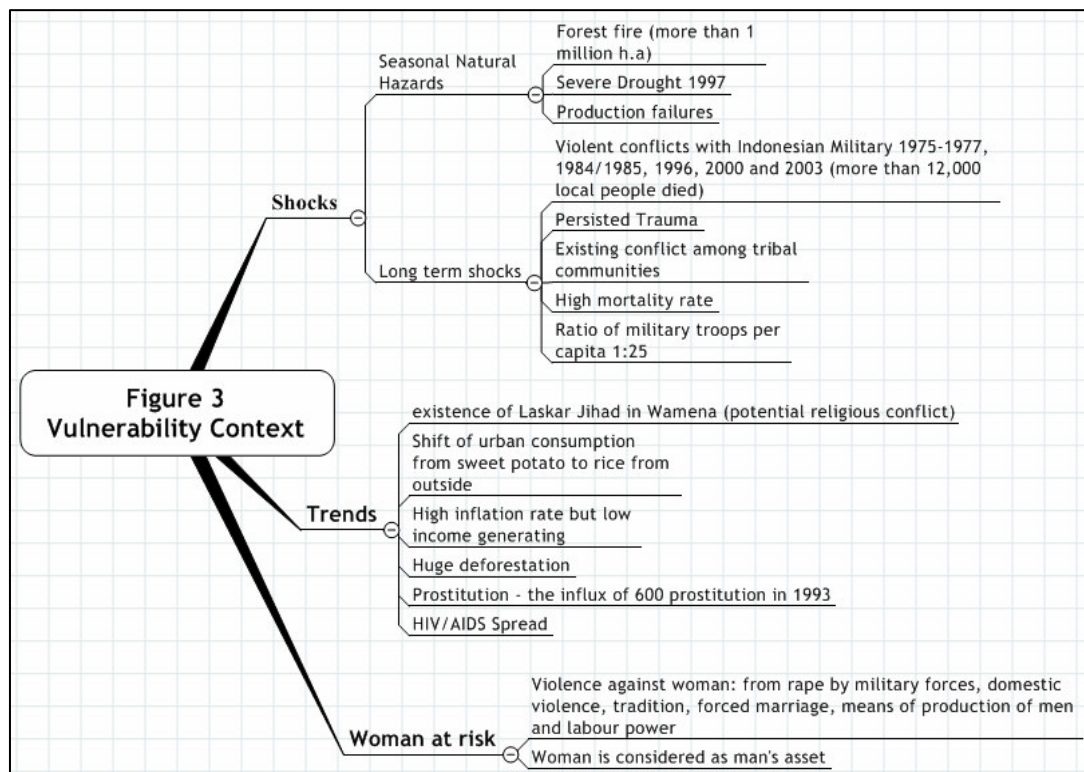
<sup>11</sup> This politicized program is later proved effective in controlling its territory at the border.

<sup>12</sup> International rice price from Food Outlook Dec 2004, especially Thai Rice 2<sup>nd</sup> grade is reached its peak at about US\$ 240/mt. In Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, the same rice is at about US 350/mt. Therefore, Wamena rice price at normal situation is already double than that of Jakarta.

<sup>13</sup> World Vision International (WVI) found that in general, rural communities in Wamena spent an equivalent of 22-27 US\$ per-week for local sweet potato called *hipere*. *Hipere* is produced locally but the consumption pattern has changed in town. People are moving to rice dependency which imported from outside. Furthermore, people in sub-urban areas are starting experience land scarcity for *hipere* production.

vulnerabilities and several shocks. (this figure is developed based on preliminary participatory research on Conflict, Food and Livelihood Security in Baliem Valley combine with some secondary data).

The data is too complex to be presented here because, however, the list of vulnerabilities can be seen from figure 3. Women are also at risk by a set of experiences: Violent against women from rape by military forces, domestic violence, forced marriage, means of production of men and labour power and HIV/AIDS.



Still today, women are considered as men's asset. A local woman activist believes that women are still being raped by military 'oknum' (personel) in Mapnduma sub-district. Since women are the central actor to household food management, food production and post harvest management, such a condition might have direct implication to which affect household food security. "Without gender justice, there will be no food

and livelihood security” was actually a tag lines in the workshops undertaken in May 2004.

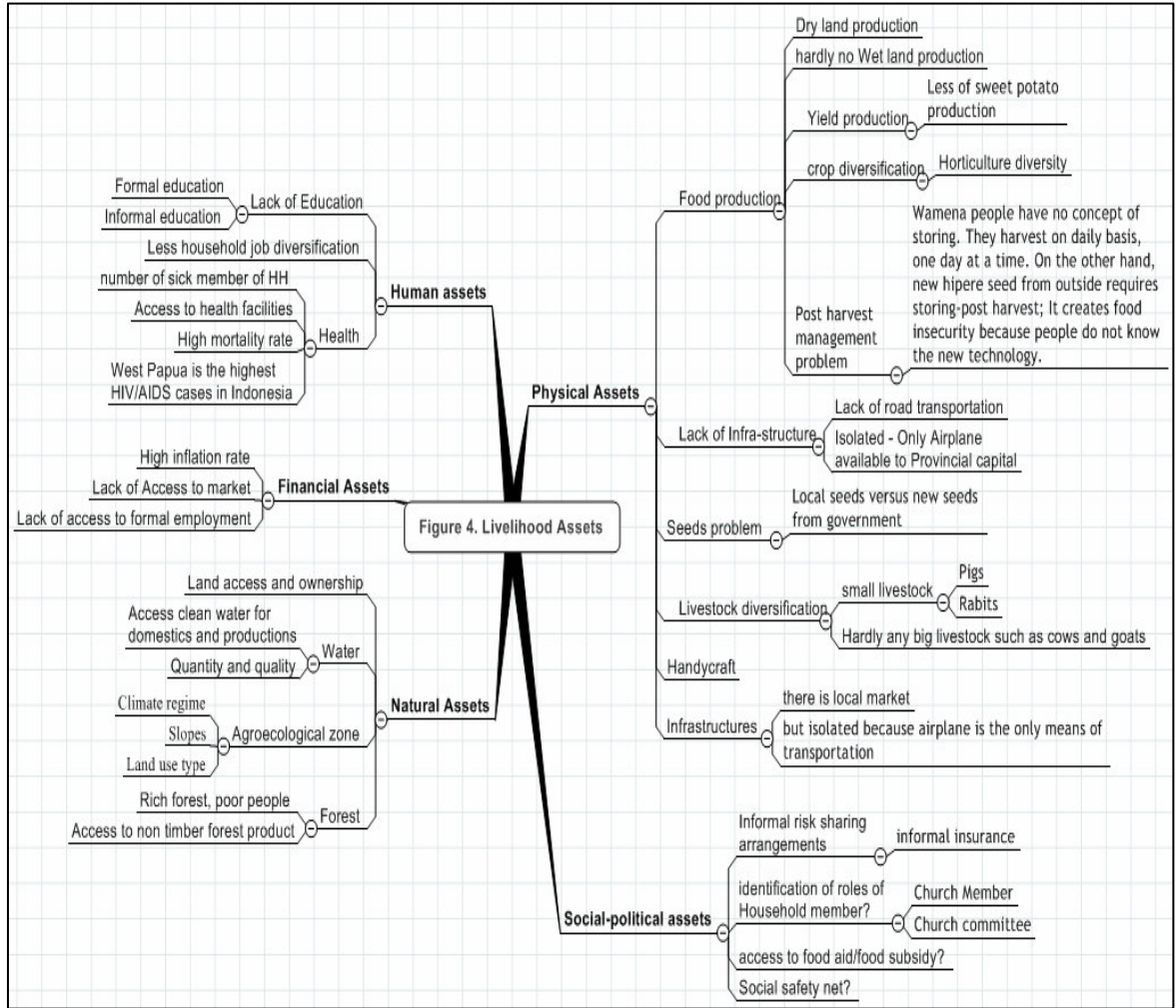
### **3.2 Livelihood Assets**

Furthermore, people in sub-urban areas are experiencing land scarcity for *hipere* production. The Indigenous people do not recognize the concept of private land ownership. However, they have to accept Indonesian Agrarian Law and Regulations which in favor of private land ownership rights. The immigrants who work mostly as government officials and in private sectors and churches own most land in both urban and sub-urban.

The communities experience poor transportation and infrastructure because the only available mode of transport is by air. This exacerbates people’s livelihood condition; the isolated communities then experience the highest inflation rate. Gasoline in Wamena and the highland West Papua is probably the most expensive in the world. In Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, gasoline is sold at £0.22 per litre but in Wamena it is sold at £1.75-2.0. Such conditions affect food prices such as rice and *hipere*.

Most people are still hunter gatherer in the villages. They depend on forest products, some non timber forest products including animals’ hunting such as pigs. However, some local NGOs activists claimed that huge deforestation and the existence of military troops in the forests discourage people to hunt for pigs.

In addition, ‘widespread abuses by logging companies which exploit and deceive local people, pay little or no heed to environmental sustainability and rely on the military and police to intimidate villagers who protest’ (ICG Asia Report 39 2002: ii)



Previously, far before Wamena is introduced to modernity, assets that had direct contribution to daily consumption are simply land for *hipere* production, *hipere* seed and and pigs. The People were indeed ‘semi hunter-and gatherer society’ with *hipere* production as the only commodity of food crop.

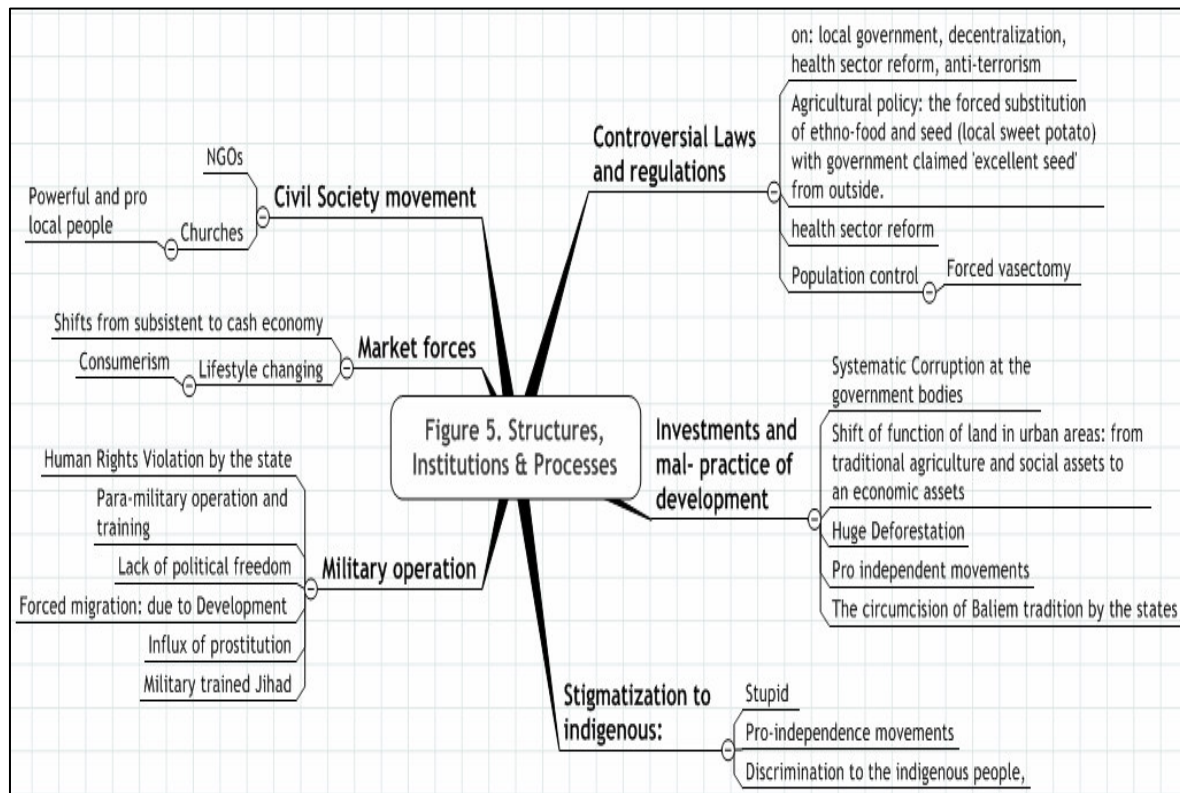
To date most people in the villages are still doing the same. While pace of changes in food consumption are quickly change in the town, people in sub-urban are growing very little alternative food crops from outside.

### 3.3 PROCESSES & INSTITUTIONS

#### The Military Operation and the creation of militia

Local NGOs claim that there are even more than two military troops in each village. The ratio of military troops per capita (Police excluded) in Wamena as of April 2003, is 1:25<sup>14</sup>. This figure does not count the so-called OPM Plat Merah accused as trained militias of the Indonesian military.

Activists believe that the militia is created by the military and hence violent conflicts in the highland often happen not because of the pro-independent movement (OPM) but the imitation of OPM which is the military created militias. At least this is the perceived realities shared by many local NGOs activists in Wamena.



<sup>14</sup> Conflict in 2003 is used by the military to hugely deploy at least 21,891 troops to the highland. The figure is self-developed based on data from the web: <http://www.westpapua.net/cases/war/wamena/070403.htm>

Indonesian government believes that the Papuan Pro Independent movements (OPM) should be vanished. Hence, the government is likely to implement military operation area (DOM) in West Papua, especially at the highland districts including Wamena.

In urban areas such as Wamena, prostitution camps increase significantly. Back in 1993, at least 600 prostitutes were 'imported' to the very small town such as Wamena which soon causes the spreading of sexual diseases to the villages. To date, local regulation has accommodated prostitution business (mostly owned by high level government officials) which exacerbates the situation. Such processes work in combination with existing subordination of women contribute to domestic violence.

## **FOOD & AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

Food security is at risk not only because of violent conflict alone but also because of food policy of the state. Baliem valley communities have been subsistent long before its first exposure to external influence in 1954. Their sweet potato called *hipere* is cultivated and harvested one day at a time. The current government has introduced some *hipere* seeds from Java which is very incompatible with their traditional cultivation system.

The original seeds are plant and stored within the seedbed over twelve months. Every morning, women harvest *hipere* for daily consumption. The new imported seeds from outside, promoted by the state (Dinas Pertanian) as excellent seeds, should be one-off harvested which requires space for storing – a new post-harvest problem for the communities.

## **Another Drivers**

Figure 5 presents complex drivers that are: the Controversial Laws and regulations on: local government, decentralization, health sector reform, discrimination to the indigenous people, Human Rights Violation by the state, forced migration due to development, influx of prostitution, the emerging roles of lokal Jihad, market forces that drives the community from semi hunter-gatherer (or semi subsistent) to cash economy within 30 years, the change of Lifestyle changing and tendency to consumerism, the roles of NGOs and the influence of churches are drivers that will not be discussed here and need further research.

### **3.4 Livelihood Strategy**

This preliminary research did not find enough information about people's livelihood strategy. However, there are some activities that worth to be noted down here. Firstly, indigenous people of Wamena have been pigs' breeder long before the year 1954.

Hardly any other significant cultivated animals besides pigs. New introduction to cows and goats breeding is underway at a very small level. But it is likely that now most households breed rabbits at significant scales. Rabbit meat market is on the rise with average rate £3/rabbit. Therefore, diversification of breeding could be promising source of food security and hence of livelihood security.

Agriculture diversification is still uncertain. However, cash crops are grown by most of sub-urban community but little are grown at the remote villages because of local thin market and hardly exist market access outside the district due to the absence of adequate transportation system. Proper information on migrations, and off-farm based livelihood are not available yet.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper is really a preliminary study that presents raft ideas about livelihood context in Papua. It needs to be improved through a more comprehensive study. This exercise of using SL Frameworks could be seed as an efforts in solving problems and puzzles that exist in the Baliem Valley region.

Local food inventory that identified during the workshop and also refers to the work of others such as Boissiere, (2002) should be including in the future studies.

In short, for better livelihood outcomes, it is argued here that in the future, there are many efforts needed towards a sustainable livelihood, by eliminating risks that rooted in conflicts, natural shocks and discrimination against women in Wamena, Jayawijaya district, West Papua.

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