



TINGIM LAIP SOCIAL MAPPING REPORT: SEASONAL WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES AROUND OIL PALM PLANTATIONS



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SEASONAL WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES AROUND OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This section of the Tingim Laip Social Mapping Report explores how ways of living, including social and sexual connections, increase risk of and impact from, HIV among particular populations in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas. Our field visits were to Alotau (Milne Bay) and Popondetta (Oro). Ramu in the Markham Valley was explored as part of the Highlands Highway corridor. Oil palm plantations represent a setting of risk and impact for HIV due to the large numbers of people accommodated on company and smallholder plantations, the money arising from employment in these areas and the potential for multiple concurrent sexual partners amongst people who move away from families and birthplace to seek opportunity and income.

Field research was conducted within oil palm plantations and surrounding areas from November 2011 to February 2012.

OVERVIEW OF OIL PALM PLANTATIONS AND SURROUNDING AREAS

Palm Oil is the highest export-earning agricultural crop grown in PNG. In 2007, the value of exported palm oil from PNG was 800 million Kina and nearly half of the area planted to oil palm was grown and managed by smallholders (OPIC, 2007). Oil palm trees dominate the rural landscapes of Milne Bay province, Oro province and Ramu in the Markham Valley. Harvest-time is a busy season with increased numbers of field workers employed from surrounding villages or further afield. Our Social Mapping team visited estates run by New Britain Palm Oil Limited (NBPOL) outside Alotau and Popondetta. We also visited Village Oil Palm that is a conglomerate of customary landholder palm oil producers in Milne Bay and Oro provinces. The Oil Palm Industry Corporation (OPIC) is a central body that provides services and support to oil palm smallholders across PNG (OPIC, 2010).

Two categories of smallholders were identified during our field visits, and there is increasing land pressures amongst both groups. Firstly, there are large numbers of smallholders growing oil palms on small parcels of land passed down through family generations. Some parts of Milne Bay operate under a matrilineal system in which the eldest daughter inherits land upon the death of her parents (KI5 Alotau). This encourages brothers to stay on birthplace soil and raise their own families with their older sisters. There are increasing numbers of people now living on these plots of land and this has resulted in both overcrowding and diminishing returns on oil palm revenues – the lands are full of houses rather than crops. Traditionally, men do much of the talking about land, but in these situations the men cannot make decisions without the sister's consent (KI4 Alotau).

The other group of smallholders are those who were allocated land by the government during the 1960s, when palm oil production was particularly lucrative. The government divided up land into six-hectare blocks and allocated these to local residents to promote production of palm oil. Similar pressures have emerged for this group of smallholders, as extended family from around the country arrive to share their land. One landowner

told us, “how do you say that your relatives cannot come to live off this land when you have a way to make living [and they don't]” (GT Alotau).

Alotau is the capital of Milne Bay Province and is situated in the south east of PNG, with daily flights to and from Port Moresby. It is a gateway to inland areas of the province and to a range of remote island communities that commute by boat to the town for supplies, health care and government services. Island people travel to Alotau to sell home-grown tobacco, buai and other fresh produce. The population of Milne Bay at the PNG Census 2011 was estimated to be 269,954 with 94,430 living in Alotau District.

Government workers from the islands collect salaries in Alotau every fortnight, much of which is spent whilst in town. There were approximately one hundred small boats moored in the harbour during our Social Mapping field visit. The owners of most boats sleep on their vessels. Ocean liners and logging ships move in and out of Alotau port continuously, usually from Port Moresby and Lae. The journey to either city on the ferry costs around thirty Kina and takes two full days. There is some movement of buai and marijuana traders along these ocean routes.

Respondents reported levels of street violence in Alotau as much lower than in other PNG towns. Around the Tourist Centre there is often island people sleeping rough on the streets, having travelled to Alotau and unable to afford the return boat fare home. The women congregate in front of local stores and sleep together. They stated feeling safer in these areas with security guards patrolling shops in the centre of town. There are hundreds of unemployed young people on the street looking for local work (FGD1 Alotau), many of whom are the children of palm oil workers (KI3 Alotau). Women engaging in sex work also regularly sleep on the streets in Alotau. They gather in a permanent place outside 'Boss Mai', a food shop and meeting place with long operating hours that is covered and protects them from rain.

At one end of town is Nako Market, where many fishing boats dock overnight. There are three or four hundred people moving through this market during the day and a number of these people sleeping on the grounds at night. It is common for mothers and daughters from the islands to travel to this market where they cook and sell tea, noodles and rice. They sleep out in the open.

Almost every street corner in Alotau holds a buai stall selling water, cordial and mobile phone recharge cards. Street stalls, operating twenty-four hours a day, also sell earrings, fingernail polish, noodles, rice, tinned fish, lighters and cigarettes. There are a number of guesthouses around town including Beto 1 and Beto 2, Drift House, Uweuwere, Babylon, Masurina, Jay's Hotel, Greta's Transit House and government hostels.

We identified a common pattern for nightlife in Alotau during our field research. Napatana Lodge attracts employed people straight after work to its restaurant and bars with key draws, chicken bats and other raffles. Those who continue to socialise then venture to the Jetty Night Club. During our visit to the Jetty, a group of young girls were waiting outside the club and explained, “it is a K15 charge to get in”. They would wait for someone to pay their entry then “we usually find someone to give us a ride home”. When the Social Mapping team left the venue the girls were drinking in the club with a group of young men.

Settlements in Alotau have a fairly consistent supply of electricity and water. Some houses are well constructed timber units and there is more space within these compounds than at other settlements we visited during this Social Mapping exercise. Duau Compound is said to be the settlement where many local women selling sex come from. Red Hill sits high upon a ridge and Nuigini Compound is reportedly the most violent of local settlements - we were told this is where homebrew is produced and marijuana is parcelled. The Daga and Ganaibeu compounds house around two to three hundred people, and there were descriptions of high levels of public and domestic violence within these open-space settlements.

Although violence on the streets was reported as lower than in other parts of PNG, many people we spoke with described high levels of hidden violence. The Provincial AIDS Committee (PAC) has responded to high levels of domestic violence by establishing safe houses for women in both Alotau and Gopiya Village nearby.

Igat Hope (the PNG national PLHIV organisation) has a branch at the local PAC office and a small group of PLHIV meet regularly there for support. Hagu Clinic is the VCT and HIV treatment clinic based at the local government hospital, with The Star of Hope VCT Centre also providing counselling and testing facilities.

The road inland from Alotau first passes Gili Gili Oil Palm Plantation Estate near the airport and then meets Hagita Estate on the banks of the Hagita River. NBPOL manages five company estates in this area: Hagita, Waigani, Sagaria, Padipadi and Mariawati. Independent smallholders and Village Oil Palm provide the remaining palm oil fruit and product that is grown and sold from Milne Bay. Settlements have developed around all oil palm plantations and the settlement compounds, over time, have been populated by people from across PNG.

Hagita Estate, just outside Alotau, houses three hundred workers and their families in overcrowded residential compounds. Some workers live in settlements or villages close by and commute to work. The management compound contains high quality housing with a tennis court, swimming pool, gym and local bar - in stark contrast to the basic field-worker accommodation. We identified a number of hotspots within the Estate that represent spaces of increased risk and impact of HIV, including the boom gates at the main office area and a venue for dancing behind the local high school. Transactional sex was also found to be occurring at high levels both within the housing areas and the oil palm forests.

Whilst alcohol is formally banned at Hagita Estate, there remains a vibrant trade in homebrew and marijuana on the premises. The Estate experienced a well-publicised outbreak of syphilis during 2010 in which twenty percent of a worker sample returned positive results (KI11 Alotau). There is rapid HIV testing available at Hagita Estate and evidence that local residents and workers do go for testing at this clinic site (KI11 Alotau). No CD4 machine is available anywhere in Milne Bay Province.

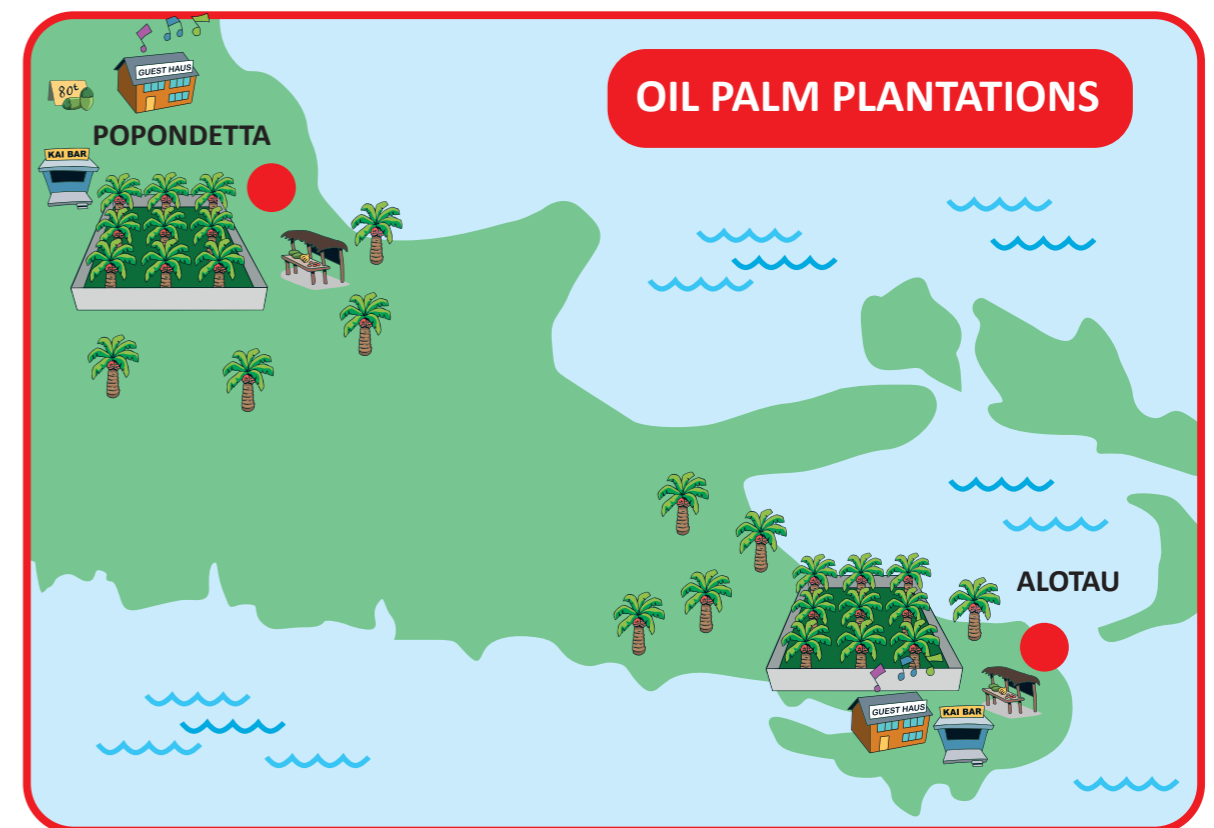
Popondetta is the capital of Oro (Northern) province and according to the PNG Census 2011, has approximately 196,206 inhabitants. Ijivitari District, including Popondetta, has an estimated population of 91,115. A five hundred kilometre highway connects Oro Bay, Popondetta and Kokoda. Oro Bay, forty-five kilometres from town, has a harbour for ships unloading cargo and supplies including palm oil. Kokoda district is a high altitude region in Oro where locals travel to grow cold weather vegetables for sale in Popondetta markets. The area produces cocoa, coffee, rubber and palm oil, with buai also grown all year round. The soil is reportedly very fertile as a result of a large volcanic ash spray from Mount Lamington during the 1950s. Cyclone Guba devastated Oro in 2007 and destroyed most of the province's main bridges and infrastructure. Poor quality reconstruction has resulted in continued access challenges. In November 2011, three bridges collapsed during flooding, leaving Popondetta isolated and unable to access food, medical supplies and other essential items for significant periods of time.

In contrast to Alotau, Popondetta is described by many as a place with a high degree of lawlessness, violence and crime, including petty theft. It is considered unsafe to walk around town, with pickpocketing and street violence common. The early mornings are busy, with crowds arriving from surrounding villages to shop or sell goods at local markets. At night, the risk of violence increases, and as a result many shops in town close before 4pm. There are a number of settlements close to Popondetta town, including Niugini Compound, Mendi/Tari Compound and the SBS Compound. High levels of violence are described within each settlement, and the police were reported to be brutal. Respondents told stories of young men being shot whilst running away from police. Popondetta has a mobile police force that is flown in from Mt Hagen or Lae and some participants attributed a lack of accountability for police violence, to this 'fly-in fly-out' system.

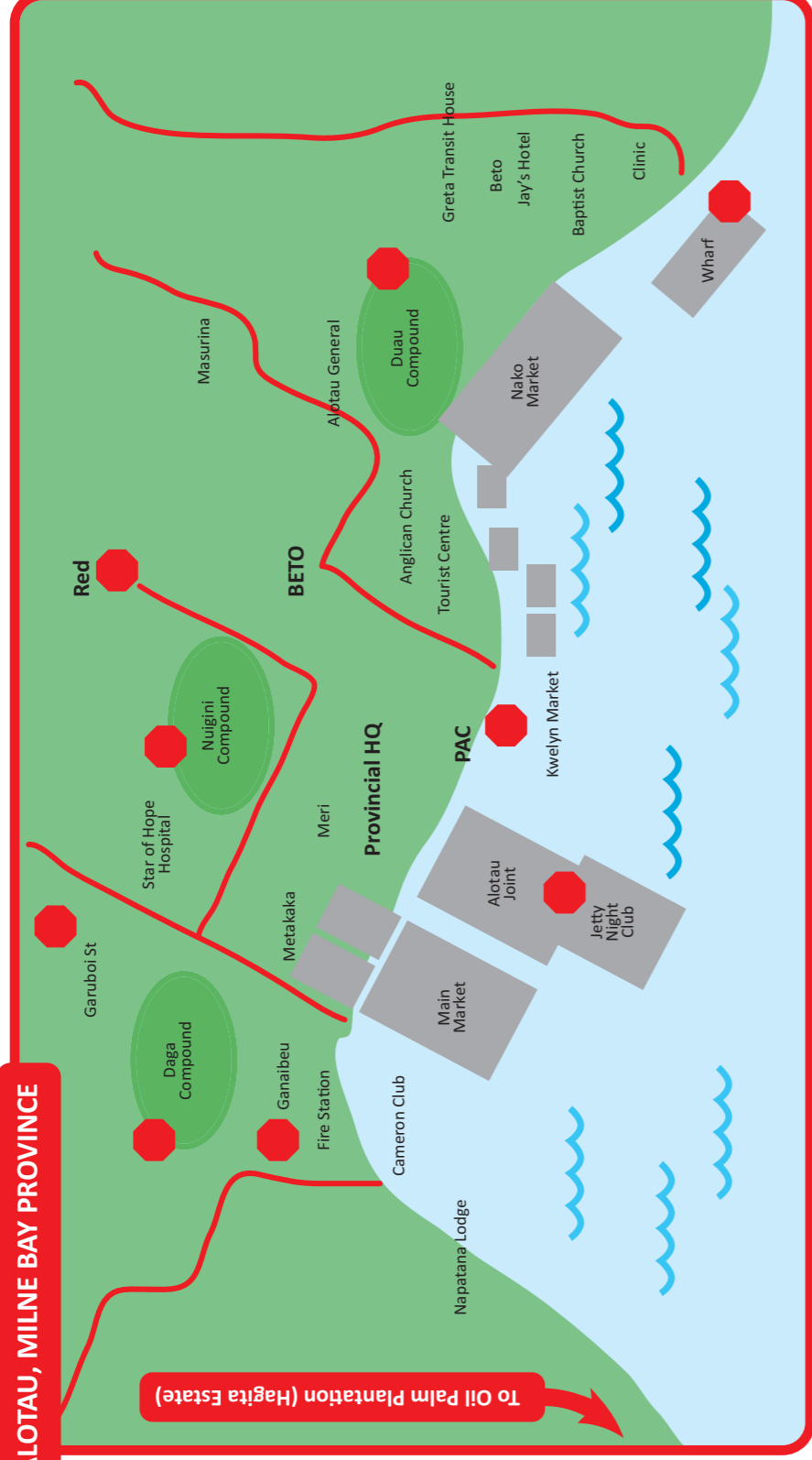
Cocoa is grown in the area and people who own cocoa-fermenting factories are said to be highly respected amongst the local community because "there is a lot of money in it" (KI1 Popondetta). One respondent told us, "I have a fermentary and make my own dry beans. I intend to get an export license and sell my cocoa directly to overseas markets. In that way I will become a millionaire in a very short time" (KI2 Popondetta). Logging is another important industry in Oro Province, attracting large numbers of Asian workers and "plenty of mixed-race children are being produced in this way" (KI1 Popondetta). Trackers and porters are said to have large amounts of cash from their connection to Australian and other tourists who walk the infamous Kokoda

track and "young girls sell sex to get money, especially from the porters" (KI1 Popondetta). Gold panning is undertaken at Mamba River and young women are also engaged in trading sex with these miners (KI1 Popondetta).

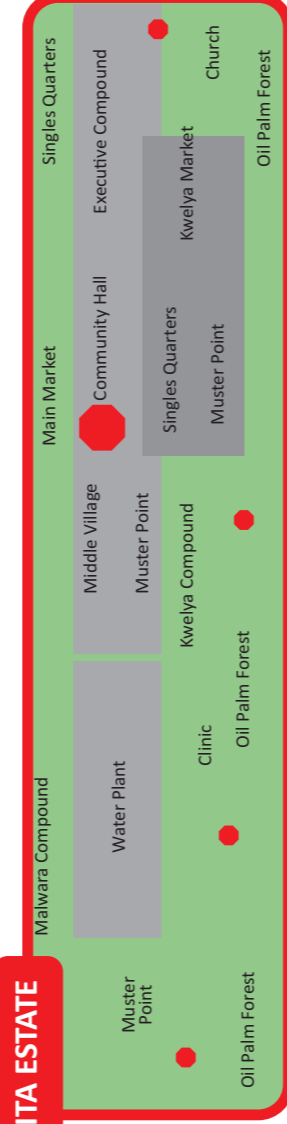
In Oro Province we visited a number of palm oil sites including Sangara and Ambogo Estates as well as villages situated on the outskirts of plantations and smallholder fields. A number of villages are purpose-built compounds of around fifty small houses for palm oil workers and contain health centres, community halls and small supermarkets. They are not gated compounds but have an allocated warden responsible for managing safety and other issues. Marijuana and homebrew are said to be sold in the nearby plantations where gambling and transactional sex also occur. Siroga village has between three and four hundred residents and the local health centre received significant support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Enclaves Project. Until the project ceased in 2011, the clinic had an antiretroviral treatment prescriber, a CD4 machine with a trained lab technician and a nurse to distribute HIV treatment to local people. The system for clinical support of local people with HIV is reported to have since disintegrated. Two vehicles provided by ADB appeared unable to be accessed by government or clinic staff during our visit, and an incident between the HIV nurse and local palm oil company had led to collective resignation of the entire health centre team.



MAP OF ALOTAU, MILNE BAY PROVINCE



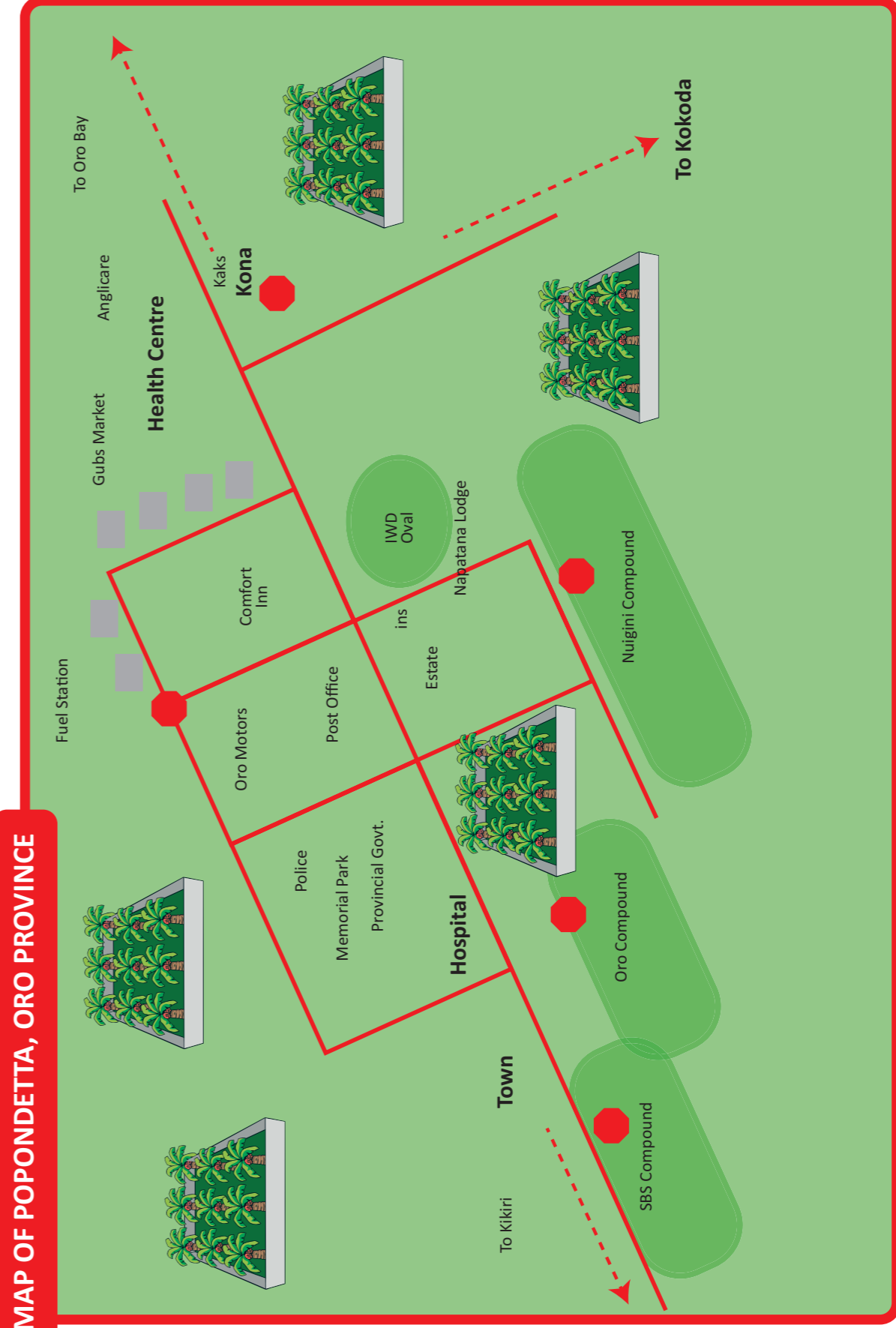
HAGITA ESTATE



KEY



MAP OF POPONDETTA, ORO PROVINCE



SOCIAL CHANGE AND HIV

CASH, CREDIT AND HIV

The towns of Alotau and Popondetta, as well as the palm oil villages, were found to have vibrant sex work cultures and credit sex systems operating. A man has sex with a woman and pays on his next payday (K16 Alotau). Each fortnight, the women wait at the bank for each man, to collect debt repayments. A palm oil worker stated, “credit sex is happening here. The sex workers get paid during the payday. They come and stand at the ATM or pay office and wait for their sexual partners to give their money for sexual favours done in the past few days or weeks” (FGD3 Popondetta). Another participant explained, “the girls have sex credit schemes and sell their bodies on credit and get paid on fortnight days. About ten to twenty girls I know are involved. They ask for K50 per person so, ten customers a fortnight is K500 per fortnight. These are school girls ... their clients are tango (truck) drivers, buai sellers and block holders (smallholders) who have a lot of money” (K12 Popondetta).

Some men reportedly end up in debt after repaying these credit lines, or have as little as K40 left to feed themselves and their families for the fortnight. A revolving cycle of credit and debt then emerges as further loans are accepted, only to be spent on food then further sex. A respondent said, “here at the Estate, most people are living on credit, from Market Mamas. So when they get paid, it all goes to debt, and so they’re stuck in a vicious cycle” (K19 Alotau). Primarily market women, drug dealers and home brewers are the sources of further loans, as the ones who manage income hold the capacity to lend. One group of respondents told us, “money is something that is not ours ... money is new in our society. Papua New Guineans don’t know how to use it, because we were not using it traditionally. We only know how to spend, but to budget, we don’t know” (FGD4 Popondetta). Mothers and young boys are setting up small businesses outside their houses, and lend money from these tables. A security guard in Alotau explained, “Now you go and get the money on the fortnight pay and you use it and at the end of the day you go back to the credit guy and you say you want more money – even though you’ve already paid him that morning ... It’s forty percent interest on every K10 borrowed” (GT Alotau).

The stories of these credit cycles dominated our conversations in Alotau and Popondetta. Domestic violence related to debt pressures is reportedly common. If a person cannot repay debt in a fortnight then the standard interest increases to eighty percent. If it remains unpaid, the person will be beaten and taken to court. Lenders give to those they know are on the payroll of palm oil companies.

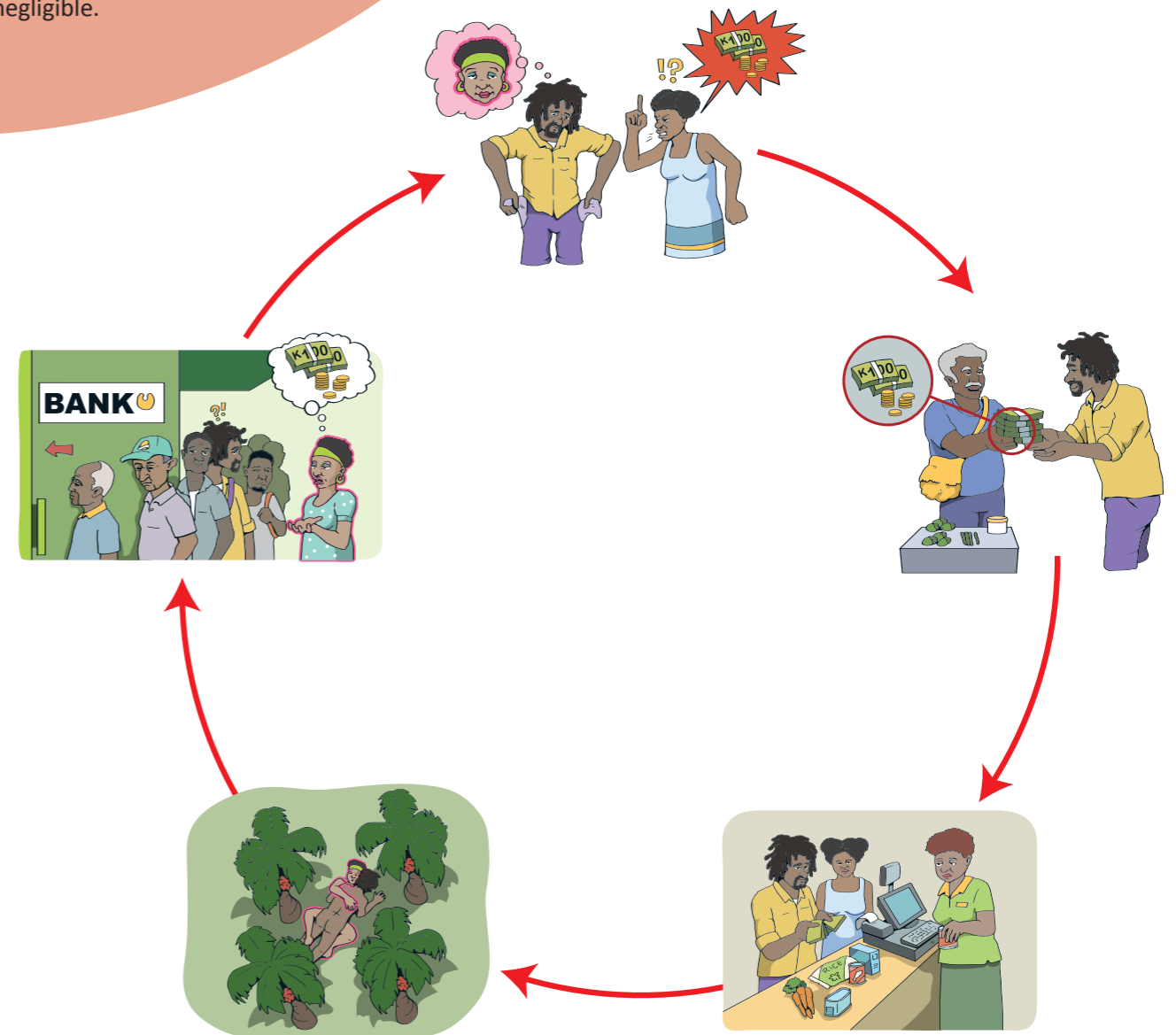
To alleviate debt, married women often seek alternative ways to bring cash into the household. Selling of goods from street-side or market stalls, distilling and marketing homebrew or engaging in sex work provides the cash to live and feed themselves and their children each day. Some become ‘line-sweepers’ who are the lowest paid group of workers on an estate. “They clean and cut grass around the Estate and are paid K100 a fortnight” (K19 Alotau). Some wives also become field workers.

The wantok system, in and around oil palm plantations, results in people avoiding carrying large quantities of cash. One respondent told us, “there is much pressure if you have cash money ... you have to give people things. If you are seen as a miser then someone will put a hex on you. There is a pressure to share” (GT Alotau). This trend has an obvious impact on local buying preferences and the marketing of goods. People tend to buy produce and household products in small quantities - small packets of soap, small bottles of dishwashing liquid, loose cigarettes rather than a packet or just K3 of credit for their mobile phones. A large quantity of essential items at home also must be shared with extended family, neighbours and friends. A common thought expressed was to just carry enough for the essential items of daily survival.

“It’s not only men who pay for ‘kari’. Women also pay for ‘kok’”

Male Volunteer (FGD4 Popondetta)

There are vibrant sex work cultures and credit sex systems operating in and around oil palm plantations. This has resulted in cycles of debt for men and women, who lend from local small businesses to repay their credit lines. Domestic violence was reported as a common outcome of continuing debt pressures in families. The significant outbreak of syphilis in Hagita Estate during 2010 provides evidence of the potential for STI and HIV risk and impact. Access to sex, even in the absence of resources to pay, creates an environment for increased poverty and spread of sexual disease. The presence of condoms at company headquarters and clinics was promising, although reported condom use remained negligible.



CREDIT SEX SYSTEMS WERE REPORTED TO LEAD TO CYCLES OF DEBT

TRADITION, FAMILY, ALCOHOL, HOMEBREW AND HIV

Many oil palm plantation respondents made links between the breakdown, collapse or disintegration of traditional social and family systems and homebrew, marijuana and the selling of sex. The traditional systems described included family structures, customs and practice as well as respect for the church and fear of God. Some respondents explained that the role of the father as head of the family, financially supporting his wife and children, has broken down. The breakdown in this structure was blamed on extramarital affairs, domestic violence and parents no longer providing financial support to their immediate families.

It was said that, in traditional customs, children were obliged to remain supportive of their parents for life. Some of our respondents felt that the breakdown of parental responsibility to children also resulted in children no longer honouring the traditional custom of caring for elders. Nowadays, it was explained, young boys are selling marijuana to pay school fees, to buy stationery and to have pocket money, whilst fathers are taking extra women as girlfriends or wives. Mothers have been pushed to work in the informal economy to earn daily cash for themselves and their young children. The young men and women in these families are just “pleasing themselves”, drinking, smoking marijuana and having multiple sexual partners – “once children are sexually active they follow the paths of their parents” (GT Alotau). There is “no respect between children and their parents” (GT Alotau). Disintegration of traditional family obligation was described not just in relation to immediate family, but also to the extended family. The theme of disintegration also extended to include the abandonment of gardening and transition towards making fast cash by being an oil palm field worker or making money in the local informal economy.

A seventeen year-old schoolboy from Popondetta told us that he was funding himself through school by selling goods at a market table. The boy, unhappy with his father’s treatment of his mother, refused to accept any financial support from him. Instead, he established a pattern of buying goods in bulk in town and then selling them at a marked-up price from his market stall. With the profits he was able to pay for his lunches, bus fare and school fees.

Most stories we heard, from oil palm plantations and surrounds, focused on what is being lost, rather than what is emerging in the place of traditional customs and agreements. A major difference between discussions around oil palm plantations and along the Highlands Highway was that friendship networks in palm oil communities were not viewed as strongly and did not represent a wantok system. In Alotau and Popondetta there appeared to be disconnect during times of crisis for friendship groups. One young girl recounted, “when I was sick my friends were not there for me. I had treated my family badly and dumped nine children on my parents ... yet my parents sent my brother to pick me up and I came home ... friends will never be as true as family” (GT Alotau). There remains a close tie to family obligations around Oro and Alotau, and this is challenged by evolving social dynamics associated with palm oil, employment, working away from home, gender role shifts and increased substance use in leisure time.

The sale and use of marijuana in Alotau was found to be discreet, with marijuana not sold openly at buai stalls and young men not offering sales to strangers on the street. Instead, “you just know a guy [who sells marijuana]” (GT Alotau). A ‘half cut’ is a mixture of fifty percent marijuana and fifty percent tobacco and costs just fifty toea per joint. Marijuana is mostly grown in Popondetta and shipped in rice bags to small ports in Alotau as Milne Bay generally has a less favourable climate for marijuana cultivation. It was reported to be sold

“My parents don’t treat me well ... unlike my brother who is married and gone to live with his wife’s people. When I ask for money they swear at me and tell me ‘Go and find men’. I was still in school when they said this to me”

Daughter in Oil Palm Family (PS4 Popondetta)

mostly to foreign tourists who come in on big ships or yachts. The going rate for a ten-kilo bag is AUD1,000. Yachts will stay moored on the islands and send local boys into Alotau to exchange cash for large sums of marijuana.

There was high demand for homebrewed alcohol reported in Alotau and Popondetta, with production in local settlements and surrounding villages. “Everybody is consuming it [homebrew] ... young boys, married men and some young girls are drinking it” (KI10 Alotau). Another group of respondents told us, “this is a big problem. They make this [homebrew], boil it under the palms and come sell it in the compounds. Beer doesn’t get men drunk and it’s expensive” (FGD8 Popondetta). Single mothers and young people without fathers or family to support them are making homebrew for a living (KI10 Alotau).

In Popondetta, we met a number of young men who cultivate marijuana and produce homebrew. One group of security guards told us “every youth knows how to brew it” (FGD2 Popondetta). People observed to be drunk in ‘off-pay’ weeks are assumed to be drinking homebrew, as their salaries would have been spent in the previous week (FGD2 Popondetta). Home-brewing and marijuana cultivation are attractive ways to make a living because it allows families to work together in business (GT Popondetta). We interviewed one family (a widow and her two sons) who generate income of between K500 - 600 a week from homebrew. A two litre bottle of Grade A homebrew sells for around K10, making it a cheap way to get drunk. This family reported that police and security guards as well as palm oil supervisors and managers were some of their best customers.

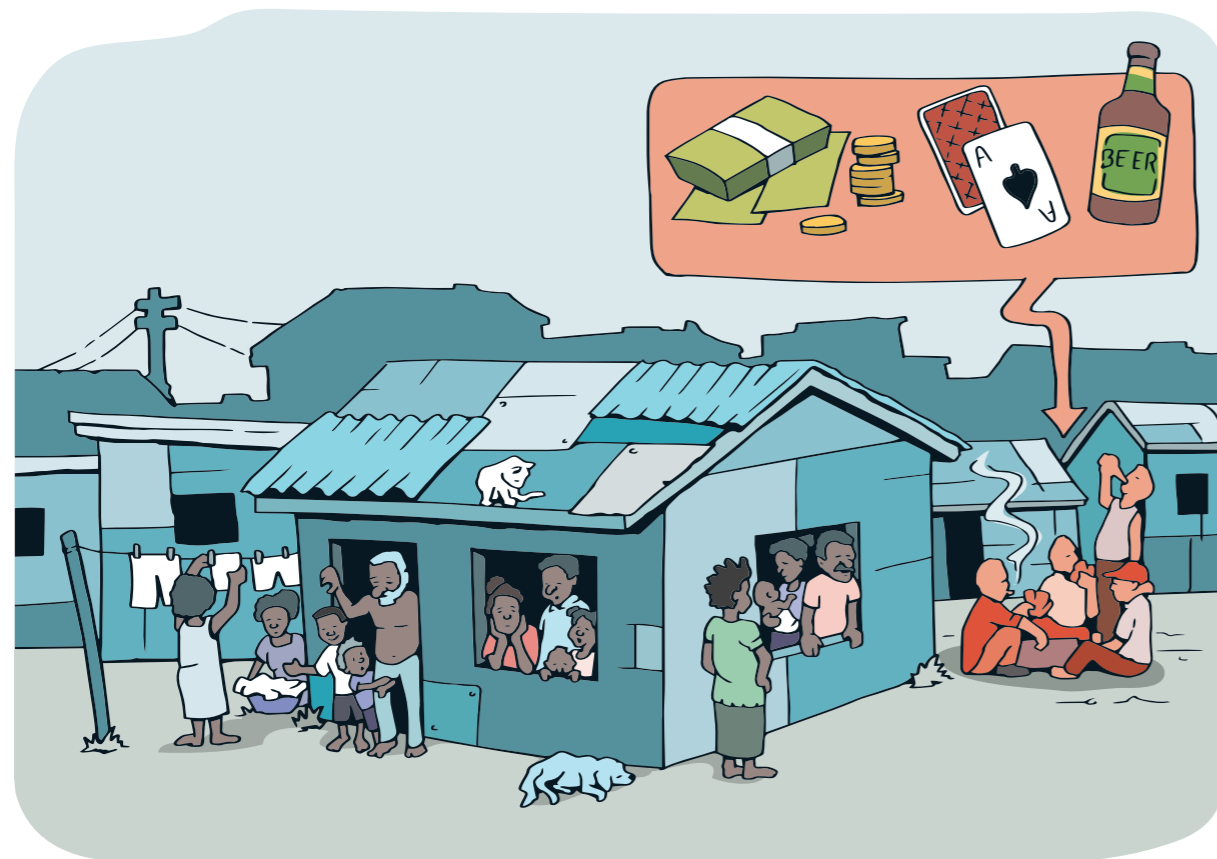
Due to the fertility of soil in Popondetta, there is an active informal marijuana cultivation and export industry. Marijuana growing started in Oro because the soil is so fertile (FGD2 Popondetta). Respondents reported that much of the potent marijuana sold along the Highlands Highway comes from this region. Highlanders travel to Oro from Lae on banana boats, to purchase large quantities of marijuana that they then transport back to the Highlands for sale.

“For money, we sell marijuana. This is good money, second to gold. My mother knows and is happy because she benefits. She tells us to hide it because it is illegal. But the police and company security are our customers”

Young Man (KI10 Popondetta)

Changes in social dynamics related to employment, overcrowded housing, a cash economy, shifts in gender roles and living away from home for work are marked in and around oil palm plantations in PNG. There is a reported general shift away from wantok and extended family commitments, to prioritising individual needs and that of immediate family.

Use of marijuana and homebrew is evident throughout the oil palm plantation areas and surrounds we visited, though with markedly higher links to violence reported in Popondetta than Alotau. The cultivation of marijuana, especially prolific in Oro, was far more discrete than along the Highlands Highway but appears to be widely sold across PNG from this region. The role of alcohol, including homebrew, on HIV risk and impact is further explored in the following sections of this report.



HOUSING ON THE PLANTATIONS CAN BE OVERCROWDED

MARRIAGE, COMMUNICATION AND HIV

Lack of communication was highlighted as a major cause of marriage breakdown and disunity throughout our research in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas. One welfare worker told us that most breakups and domestic violence cases occurred amongst couples below the age of thirty-five years. This respondent explained, “they are not prepared for marriage ... [they] lack the communication skills ... jealousy is a major driver” (KI4 Alotau). One man’s story illustrates these communication difficulties. He told us, “because of my previous girlfriends, my wife always got jealous and we did not have a good relationship at home”. He described how she would contact his family, friends and work to ask if he was seeing other women and eventually this resulted in him moving the family to a more isolated palm oil site. His “wife and children did not like it ... we were sharing a house with four other families” and “the house was so crowded that we agreed my wife and children would go to the village to reside with my parents.” His wife continued to hold the man’s bankcard to feed herself and the children but “because of the experience that we had in Popondetta she did not have good thoughts about me” and remained jealous and distrustful. They argued constantly on the phone, however, he was so busy with work there was “no time to travel to the village to visit the family” (PS6 Popondetta). Ultimately, the lack of trust and arguments between them forced separation, and ultimately divorce.

Respondents reported high levels of domestic violence in and around oil palm plantation areas. Financial stress, extramarital affairs, jealousy and alcohol were cited as the main causes. In palm oil villages and settlements, the residences are overcrowded and this was reported as a key cause of significant family conflicts. “Where two or three couples live in the same house ... if one husband goes out for the night shift, the husband of the other woman who shares the house will have an affair with her while the husband is away in the night. Same with the day shift” (KI7 Alotau). Some respondents talked about the ‘game’ played between women and men, both sexually and in terms of negotiation for power, and the way in which extramarital affairs and violence become part of the tussle for authority between married and unmarried couples (KI7 Alotau, FGD2 Popondetta).

There were concerning associations expressed by participants between violence and HIV in marriages. A respondent from Alotau spoke of HIV “coming to be because of violence in the family”. In similar accounts, wives start their marriages faithful to their husbands, then alcohol triggers violence and “violence then causes the woman to go out of the marriage and engage in extramarital affairs” (KI12 Alotau). The major implication in these stories was that the woman is blamed for bringing HIV into the family.

One respondent said that men were unable to talk openly about issues when they are sober (KI4 Alotau). And when they are drunk, men attempt to confront issues with their wives and get violent. A palm oil worker shared a story of a friend who “bashed his wife because she didn’t want to give him sex. He smashed her head on the floor and she blacked out. I talked to the woman, she explained what happened – that he was jealous,

“I used to sell scones at the hospital to get money to buy food and to look after my baby and husband. Then one day I walked into the ward where my husband was admitted and a young guy told me ‘this ward is where most of the people die, don’t let uncle sleep on his own’. So that made me think ... I went and asked my husband what’s going on and he hesitated to tell me. So I went and asked the doctor [and] he told me to take the baby and myself to get a blood test”

Woman living with HIV
(PS Popondetta)

thought she was sleeping with someone else. This was one of my workmates and he did this to his [own] wife” (KI9 Alotau). Another participant echoed that violence is a result of jealousy – “a husband found his wife with another man and stuck him with a spear” (FGD8 Popondetta). Women were also reported to bash husbands for infidelity, although it was expressed that it is embarrassing for men to report being beaten by their wives, so there is less reporting by male victims (KI4 Alotau).

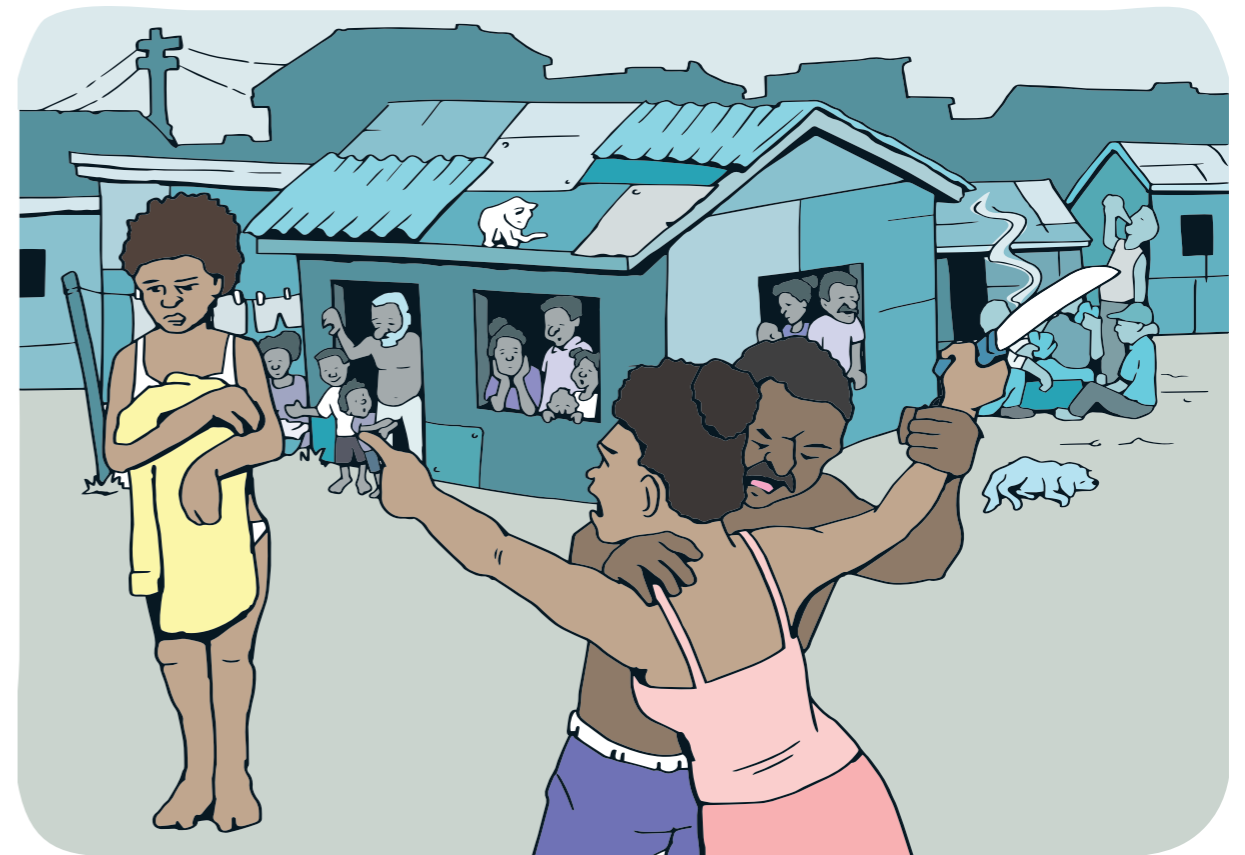
Some women reported that refusal to have sex with their husbands, or the type of sex that he wanted, often resulted in marital rape and violence (KI4 Alotau, KI6 Alotau). One male respondent told us, “my wife works in the field and when I hear rumours that she is sharing betel nut and mustard with other men I become suspicious and try to get even and do the same with other women. As a result, violence happens in the home” (FGD3 Popondetta). A group of security guards in Popondetta told a different story about the connection between violence and sex in marriage. They explained, “in matters of sex the man is in control, but women have more control. Women have climaxes later than men, so she wants more, but once the man has released his sperm he cannot satisfy her. So he uses violence to shut her up or even make her feel good, since he cannot fulfil her needs” (FGD2 Popondetta).

Incest was reported to be on the increase in Milne Bay province and specific sexual health and crisis counselling services have been established there to address this problem (KI5 Alotau). One respondent told us, “it is young girls who are the victims of incest here” (KI5 Alotau) whilst a health care worker relayed, “a 15 year old girl came in just before Christmas. She had been raped by her father for over a year” (KI4 Alotau). Surrounding neighbours apparently knew about the ongoing sexual violence but were afraid to act. Eventually, the Ward Counsellor organised the young woman’s escape.

The lack of physical safety in Popondetta was reported by participants to be driven by young men and boys on the street, with alcohol stated as a common trigger for public violence. Young women and girls are at risk of sexual violence if they attend a party with male friends in isolated oil palm plantations. We heard stories of young girls socialising with young men and the parties being gate crashed by large numbers of males who tie the girls up and pack rape them (lainaps). Justice for such offences is rare, especially in Oro with only one magistrate in the province. We were told “cases are not heard quickly, therefore perpetrators are released or bailed or something else happens and that person runs around free on the streets to continue his trade” (FGD6 Popondetta).

Lack of communication in marriage was touted as a major reason for the breakdown of family units during our Social Mapping visits to oil palm plantations and surrounding areas. Poor communication is confounded by overcrowded housing, with three to four families attempting to live under a single roof and without space or privacy for intimacy and discussion.

Domestic, sexual and public violence were dominant themes during our field research in oil palm plantations, though reported at much lower levels in Alotau. Alcohol, including homebrew, was presented as the main trigger for violence in the home and breaking out on the street. Other catalysts suggested were jealousy and sex refusal by wives. Sexual violence again places women at increased risk of, and impact from, HIV as men with money – who are employed within oil palm plantations – have greater access to alcohol. This vulnerability extends, and is further increased, amongst the described children of increasing incest and young women who are survivors of lainaps in these areas.



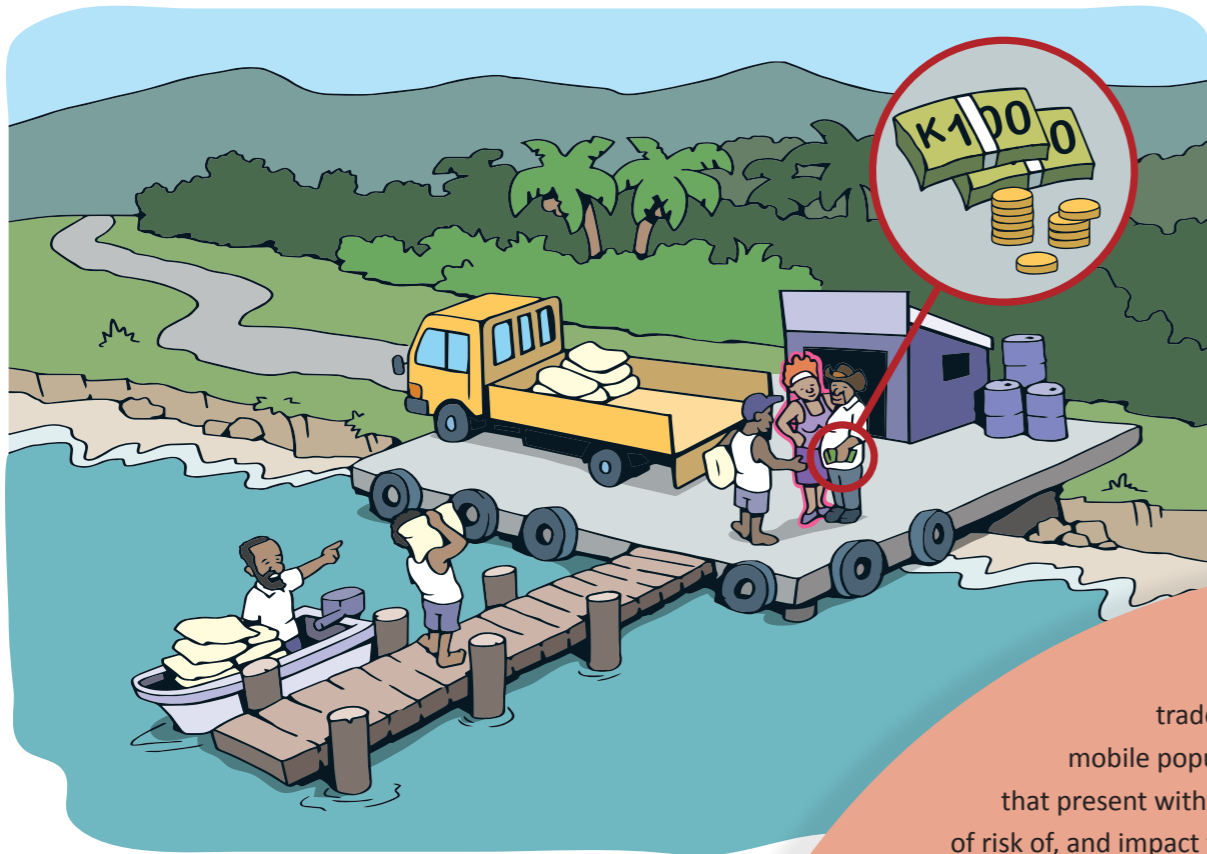
THERE WERE FREQUENT ACCOUNTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

BUAI TRADE AND HIV

“Betel nut is available all year round. The betel nut buyers come here when Ramu and Markham buai runs out”

Male Participant (KI1 Popondetta)

There is a vibrant buai trade in both Milne Bay and Oro provinces. As described in the Highlands Highway chapter, fresh grown produce is transported overland from Madang and Wewak to Lae where it is then shipped by banana boat to Popondetta markets for wholesale distribution. There is also a network of buai traders from Morobe and the Highlands who trade with local communities in Oro Province for buai (KI1 Popondetta). The sea journey is dangerous and arduous and death by drowning was described as common. A banana boat will carry up to sixty large bags of buai and travel from Lae to Kikiri before unloading and continuing the journey overland to the markets of Popondetta. Oro also cultivates its own buai but it is not considered as ‘sweet’ as that grown in Wewak and Madang. Betel nut seasons differ across PNG with Madang and Wewak producing from November to March each year. In April through to October people travel to Popondetta from across PNG, to purchase local buai for personal use and to sell on return to local markets. They travel up to the Kokoda Highway to trade with local buai growers then return to Popondetta and Kikiri by land, before heading by sea to Lae and then by land back to home markets.



BUAI TRADERS ARE A HIGHLY MOBILE POPULATION IN ORO PROVINCE

Buai traders are a mobile population that present with a level of risk of, and impact from, HIV due to the described levels of sex with each other, poor reported condom use, lack of health service access and engagement of sex workers at stop points. The role of Popondetta and Oro Province in buai trade across Papua New Guinea demands recognition of these mobile populations in local HIV response.

POWER, WITCHCRAFT AND HIV

Throughout our field research in oil palm plantations and beyond, men told us that the “father is the head of the house ... in terms of sex, the father is also in charge” (FGD3 Popondetta). One said the man “is the one who makes these decisions ... mothers are the ones who control their children” (FGD3 Popondetta). Others explained, “men have power because they are working and have money. He has the right to make the decisions. Sometimes women work but men normally boss women ... controlling women’s money” (FGD4 Popondetta). In palm oil communities, it is the supervisors and managers who have power and influence over others around them. A respondent told us “drivers listen to their supervisors. The supervisors listen to the senior plantation manager. The hierarchy works. There is respect” (KI3 Alotau).

Belief in witchcraft and sorcery is particularly strong in Milne Bay and Oro provinces (FGD2 Alotau). Sorcery and witchcraft are traditional ways to enact payback and revenge (KI3 Alotau). We were told that when someone dies it is common to believe that a sorcerer has caused the death, and almost every passing is blamed on witchcraft (FGD1 Alotau, KI4 Alotau). Love potions may be used to attract particular partners (KI10 Alotau). Bad and erratic behaviour, such as violence by men when they are drunk, can be blamed on a woman who is a ‘witch’ with jealousy reported as common motivation to use this term. Sorcery is “the great economic equaliser ... if you are too showy, build a nice house, they say that witchcraft will get you. You get a new car and people say you will die” (KI4 Alotau). AIDS-related illnesses and deaths are sometimes blamed on witchcraft, though witches are also believed to be able to help with HIV healing. Some believe that a local herb can cure HIV illness.

We interviewed a man who was referred to as a ‘sorcerer’ in Alotau (KI1 Alotau). He told us that men fear women’s magical power. Sorcerers are men but they are said to have less magical power than women (KI5 Alotau). A witch mother is said to teach a daughter her magic. He said that the women in town have lost knowledge, but women in the villages have maintained their powers and, as a result, they are targets of violence and retribution for causing illness and death amongst others.

The belief in punishment through illness is very powerful, as is the belief in healing. In Milne Bay, “witchcraft is not spoken about because if you talk about it something will happen to you” (GT Alotau). There were stories told though of young girls able to transport men and boys in their sleep to a cold field outside their homes. This power that women have for strong magic, however, does not translate into greater power for women in society. Instead, it provides an avenue for blaming specific women for things that are beyond men’s control. One man we spoke with had an unshakeable belief in the power of magic. His grandmother, he said, was a super witch who had flown to the moon. “They have symbols and things they do and this can affect your life ... improve your hunting, your income. It gets under your skin” (KI1 Alotau).

Illness is strongly associated with magic, sorcery and witchcraft in Alotau (FGD1 Alotau). Many people believe witchcraft makes them sick and they also believe that HIV arose from magical causes. “Doctors won’t be able to find the sickness because it started from different things, the sorcerer told us” (KI1 Alotau). In some Milne Bay villages, when a person in a family is very sick, a public gathering will be held. The family will pay a sorcerer to conduct a ritual to determine which woman has cast a spell on the family member or to convince the women to ‘lift’ the spell (KI1 Alotau).

Local people tell stories of magical cures for HIV and AIDS-related symptoms (FGD3 Popondetta). A man who was diagnosed with HIV was said to go in to the forest to eat noni, a local fruit. When he returned he was cured

“My cousin’s sister was HIV positive and the family disowned her. But her father took her to a sorcerer and he applied herbs. And now she is healthy and is testing negative”

Female Participant (KI3 Alotau)

of HIV. “Noni can cure sik-AIDS” one young woman told us (PS2 Alotau). Another respondent explained that a cure for HIV had been discovered in the area - “a weed taken from the hands of a mermaid had been found to cure HIV” (KI1 Alotau, GT Alotau). In Popondetta, the white pandanus tree is used to ‘cure’ HIV, by “cutting the top and putting the container to collect the sap. They use the sap to inject and cure HIV” (FGD4 Popondetta).



THERE WERE CONFLICTING VIEWS HEARD ABOUT WITCHCRAFT AND HIV

Witchcraft and sorcery is widely accepted and feared in Milne Bay and Oro provinces. Witches are women, who are often blamed for deaths or illness within families and communities, although they are also known for magical healing powers and love potions. Sorcerers are men who perform magic, though their power is said to be less than that of witches.

Witchcraft is believed to influence both HIV illness and treatment. Spells are reported to inflict HIV on people, however, witches will also be sought for provision of healing and access to herbal remedies believed to cure sik-AIDS. In particular noni, a local fruit in Alotau, and the white pandanus tree of Popondetta are locally-claimed cures of advanced HIV illness. There is obvious increased risk of, and impact from, HIV in the setting of traditional witchcraft and sorcery belief systems. Retribution of women accused of casting spells, preference for local remedies over antiretroviral treatment and hope of herbal cure potentially decrease the importance of HIV prevention and health service access amongst key populations at risk in these regions.

SEX, SAFE SEX AND HIV

Hospitals and clinics in and around the Alotau and Popondetta oil palm plantations reported high local rates of gonorrhoea and syphilis, suggesting high levels of unprotected sex in these areas (KI2 Alotau, FGD4 Popondetta). A major problem expressed by health staff was loss to follow up, especially amongst those diagnosed with syphilis. One clinical practitioner told us of a young man who “got his medication and went for good. Most workers do that”, she said. “They don’t come back to the clinic for review or [to] complete their medication and it is very dangerous” (IC2 Alotau).

HIV awareness is said to be poor, with confusion exacerbated by provision of misinformation. One group of HIV volunteers told us, “HIV pamphlets have been distributed but no one understands them” (FGD4 Popondetta). In Popondetta, a group of male security guards spoke of sex in regards to paydays - “sex happens during [pay] fortnight weeks, especially after card games in the settlement areas. Sex happens in the palm area. Sex occurs in the field, any time of the day” (FGD2 Popondetta). Another group of men associated with palm oil production explained, “the compounds are overcrowded, so the people go under the oil palm trees in the night or day to have sex” (FGD3 Popondetta). We also heard about water tanks, septic areas and dormitories as places where sex happens (FGD8 Popondetta).

Our participants spoke openly of sex for sale, and transactional sex around the oil palm plantations, with statements such as “if you have K50 you will get sex easily” and “men go around openly looking for women and women do this too – they don’t hide. The police come to drink, they park the car and women see the car and go to drink and get money from the men. These are the compound women; they go even with lapun (old) men – they want the money” (FGD8 Popondetta).

Even with condoms observed to be readily available, there is ambivalence about their use. “People know the sick exists”, one group told us, “but they forget about condoms. They don’t [use] condoms. The condoms at the office are always there” (FGD8 Popondetta). This statement was clarified to explain that stocks never require replenishment, as no-one takes them. A young girl told us, “I do not want to take them [condoms] because the health workers would ask me what do you want to take them for?” (PS4 Popondetta). A woman who sells sex informed us, “most girls are not using condoms. They accept what is happening to them. Through my experience, I never used condoms. I heard of them but never used them” (PS3 Alotau).

The churches are reported to vary considerably in acceptance of condom use in HIV and STI prevention in these areas (KI6 Alotau). Church leaders do not talk about HIV, according to one respondent (KI3 Alotau). One group of volunteers told us, “some leaders are not happy hearing about HIV and condoms. They think condoms promote sex ... people pretend to blame condoms for sex” (FGD4 Popondetta). In Popondetta, there was visible social marketing of Population Services International (PSI) Saif Raida condoms and these were available for sale in some local stores. PSI has also undertaken trainings here with women to encourage them to use the female condom (FGD8 Popondetta). Despite the presence of condoms at shops, government services, company offices and clinics there was found to be social shame and high levels of embarrassment during discussions on condoms in both Alotau and Popondetta.

Sexual and spiritual confusion about condom use was illustrated by one male security guard, as he explained, “they [condoms] are readily available here. The Tingim Laip Officers here distribute them. I have condoms on me, but I will not use them because I must be faithful to my wife. I take condoms with me, not to use them, but

“Here in Oro they don’t want to have sex with plastic [condoms]. We want meat-to-meat and skin-to-skin, not plastic-to-plastic”

Focus Group Participant
(FGD3 Popondetta)

for safety” (FGD2 Popondetta). This statement made little sense to our field researchers but illustrated an inner conflict between sex and spirituality or morality within this respondent. Another group of men told us “alcohol is a contributing factor ... under the influence of alcohol, protection is being thrown to the wind, and unsafe sex is practiced” (FGD3 Popondetta). One of our field team sought condoms from a clinic, but when he had them visible on the street a local volunteer requested they be hidden so that others didn’t see them. Some respondents described using a person’s general appearance and perceived level of health, to help them decide whether condom use is necessary. And others spoke of using condoms with strangers but not with people they know (KI7 Alotau).

Women engaged in sex work reported an awareness of the need for condom use. The sex workers we interviewed in Alotau carried condoms with them, but one guesthouse owner who actively procures women for guests believed that most women don’t actually use them. “I tell them there is a condom,” she informed us, “but it’s up to them. Most do not get condoms” (KI8, Alotau).

Multiple concurrent sex partners, and the engagement of women selling sex in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas determines a significant level of risk of, and impact from, STIs and HIV. Whilst there are active condom distribution and sales programs, along with community education, there were very low levels of condom use reported. The reasons provided for not using condoms vary and include spiritual and moral conflict, embarrassment and general ambivalence.



WHILST CONDOMS ARE AVAILABLE IN OFFICES AND CLINICS, THERE WERE VERY LOW LEVELS OF CONDOM USE REPORTED

POPULATIONS, PEOPLE AND HIV

WOMEN AT RISK

Women living in and around oil palm plantation areas are exposed to overcrowding, with many field worker residences housing three to four families in a single unit. Further challenges for these women emerge from husbands and partners making money, and the potential this provides for increased alcohol use, gambling and multiple concurrent sexual partnerships, including use of women selling sex. With family breakdowns amidst these pressures and debt cycles, women seek access to the local cash economy through formal and informal avenues. The particular groups of women we identified in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas at increased risk of, and impact from, HIV were women involved in transactional sex and women engaged in sex work.

“One time there was a client who gave K2,000 to one of the girls. She must have done him good, that’s why he gave her that”

Guesthouse Manager (KI8 Alotau)

WOMEN INVOLVED IN TRANSACTIONAL SEX

In Alotau and Popondetta stories of local women involved in transactional sex for money, goods or favour were common. And there were often blurred lines between selling of sex and high levels of transactional sex by those who do not identify themselves as sex workers. Sex appeared to be part of a broader bartering and wantok system that exists around oil palm plantations, through which favour can be exercised (KI6 Alotau). Transactional sex was also said to help young women get jobs in local supermarkets and stores, and even apply to employment of women in local government departments (FGD1 Alotau, FGD2 Popondetta).

Sex as a form of exchange, “becomes a groove that women get into” (GT Popondetta). Young girls have sex with older guys or supervisors at work because they are largely uneducated and they maintain favour through providing sex, or extract money for the sex (KI7 Alotau). One respondent told us about her friend who “was a female security guard who has sex with other security guards, mill workers, admin workers and even our security boss. The wife of the boss got on her and bashed her” (KI9 Alotau). Another participant spoke about a system of engaging women for sex within the palm oil employment structure - a field supervisor with twenty-five positions to fill will hire twenty staff, then if a young woman approaches him, he will request sex in exchange for one of the five remaining positions. “We see that all our bosses are doing this,” this respondent told us (GT Popondetta).

The pattern of sexual exchange that was described in and around the oil palm plantations includes a lifestyle of drinking, smoking dope, travelling and quick, easy access to cash. One young woman told us how she helped other young women to get better at giving sex in exchange for money and favour saying to them “that is so cheap. You cannot be getting such money. You should be getting higher than that” (FGD1 Alotau).

Despite the stories of power and influence that women involved in transactional sex told, there remained a high level of stigma and judgement expressed about women and girls exchanging sex in this way. One group of men told us “fornication should be outlawed” (FGD2 Popondetta) and another group told us “sex workers are selling sex and spreading the HIV virus” (FGD3 Popondetta).

WOMEN ENGAGED IN SEX WORK

Gender, power and money were common themes emerging from our discussions in and around oil palm plantations. “Men have power because of money. Most women are weak. Women are most vulnerable [because] men have money and tell them to do things. They give them money and have sex” (K17 Alotau). This power was described as extending from the family home through employment into street life, and in these stories it was men’s desire for sex, combined with women’s “need” for money, that allows for collective meeting and exchange. “The girl’s eyes are hard, and they do this [sex work] for a living,” a guesthouse manager told us (K18 Alotau). “Mothers and daughters, sisters and sisters come together and have sex with the one person. They have group sex with a man just to get money” (K18 Alotau).

Some of the women we interviewed expressed that men use their physical and financial power to manipulate women. One respondent explained, “men have more power than women and over women ... most of the time the problem is that the man wants to get his wife out of the house so he can marry again” (K19 Alotau). Violence was one of the most commonly described ways that men manipulate sex from women. One respondent said, “men want to have sex and women refuse” so “the men get violent” (K14 Alotau). Another respondent told us, “when girls walk alone at night, they get raped. One lady used to finish work at 6pm and walk the main road leading out of town. She did this every evening before one night she was attacked and raped by two young local men” (K15 Alotau). In settlements, palm oil estates and even in schools “there will be a girl and a group of boys line up and take turns to have sex with her” (K17 Alotau).

Women selling sex expressed a preference for older men, and stated that young men are more likely to want violent sex and to be violent in sex. Older men were viewed as being less violent, more gentle and easier to be with (PS2 Alotau). “In young men their sex drive is very high whilst in older men their ‘fire’ needs fuelling by young women” (FGD3 Popondetta). Verbal manipulation was described by our female participants as a technique men use to get sex. A respondent detailed, “young teenage girls ... they are easily convinced by men to engage in sex. Especially now, the young girls like to have nice things and if they can’t get from their parents they look elsewhere – they look to men with money” (K15 Alotau).

Women respondents were very clear in their distinctions between young girls in rural and urban settings. One explained, “a young girl in town is different from a young girl in the village. Their needs differ, and that determines the types of activities that young women are engaged in” (FGD1 Alotau). Young girls in town have more freedom to move around and they “find their way to nightclubs where the men will pick them up and take them out for sex for money ... in the villages parents are more strict on their movements” (FGD1 Alotau). Young women in town were also said to have increased freedom and an opportunity to join the formal working class. When employed, access to money allows them to satisfy their own libidos. We were told, “they [working class women] pay good-looking boys to have sex with them. They want the boys to ride them” (FGD1 Alotau).

The opportunity to become a working class woman with financial freedom also emerges on palm oil estates. One female oil palm field worker explained, “now I have the money I can buy boys for sex in the field” (GT Alotau). Another group of respondents told us, “women do pay for sex here at the compound site. Those women who are working are paying men to have sex. Especially young married couples ... married people, both husband and wife pay men and women to have sex. Because money is here, there is cash flow” (FGD4 Popondetta).

“When I was working as a sex worker I educated the other young women [around me about] how to do it. I am very clever ... I can rob a man of K1,000”

Young Woman (FGD1 Alotau)

Sex for money, goods or favour in Alotau appeared to be more discreet. Most venues that provide short-term rooms for sex are not party places where alcohol can be purchased or where guests can engage in gambling, and this makes them relatively inconspicuous. A synergistic relationship exists between the guesthouse managers of these establishments and women and girls engaged in sex work. Guesthouse management actively procuring women for guests plays a pivotal role in the sex work system. Guesthouse managers are focal points for condom distribution coordinated by the Provincial AIDS Committee (K18 Alotau).

The women we interviewed told us that men would arrive in town in the morning, have sex with one girl in the morning, another at lunch time and one again in the evening. “This I see with my own eyes,” one woman told us. “The seamen who come here are all the same. They change girls one after another. In the morning they would be with one and in the night they get a different one” (K18 Alotau). It was not uncommon to hear of a mobile man with money, both local and temporarily in town, having sex with four women a day. Men and women spoke openly about their enjoyment of sex during our discussions, using a Tok Ples (local language) term “feelings haubaina” meaning ‘sex for pleasure’.

Some women engaging in sex work in Alotau sleep nomadically in the settlement homes of their friends and have to move regularly from one house to another. The other visible group of women in sex work sleep rough on the street outside ‘Boss Mai’ Kai Bar in town. These women have formed an organisation called Buyetta (Frangipani) that was not yet registered at the time of our visit, but was involved in STI and HIV prevention activities with the support of the Provincial AIDS Committee. They were lobbying for a transit house in Alotau, as a place for women engaging in sex work to live.

In Popondetta, women selling sex congregate in local guesthouses and hotels as well as bottle shops in compounds and settlements (FGD6 Popondetta). One respondent stated, “high class people in dark glassed vehicles – businessmen, LNG workers and betel nut buyers – are the ones the girls make money from” (K12 Popondetta). Young girls were reported to stand on main roads and the highway from late afternoons through to night, waiting for truck drivers on their way to collect palm oil fruit. “They will flash a leg to the drivers and, if the driver stops, they will travel with him” (FGD7 Popondetta). There was acknowledgement in Popondetta that, “those inexperienced in having sex are at particular risk of contracting HIV”, with inference to younger girls being more naïve and vulnerable in negotiations of safer sex (FGD6 Popondetta). Women in sex work that we spoke with often took pride in their increased capacity for negotiations and even ability to con men. One young woman spoke of wearing two layers of clothing so she is able to hide money in her underlay. She described this as “working the hustle ... the con” (GT Alotau).

Registered ‘Loose Fruit Mamas’ wait along the road outside villages with home-grown palm oil fruit, waiting for company truck drivers to stop and buy their produce. Some of these women were described to have relationships with regular truck drivers, and this involves travelling with them, partying and having sex. When the driver stops to collect the woman’s palm oil fruit she will demand extra produce weight and so the driver ‘pays’ for sex by adding weight to the load (FGD7 Popondetta).

At a saw mill outside Popondetta, respondents reported that it was common for young girls to stand outside the work compound and wait for collection by Asian workers who live at the back of the mill. At a local market, young women and girls also wait on the side of the highway for drivers passing by. When men stop for buai, drink or food at the market they introduce themselves by saying “give me a cigarette” or “buy me a beer” (GT Popondetta). The women outside the markets and saw mills reported no negotiation in payment for sex and just acceptance of what male clients offered. There was also no identification of their behaviour as sex work. Neither the women nor men viewed these interactions as a commercial exchange, hence the avoidance of setting a ‘price for sale’. Some respondents told us that subtlety in negotiation is “working the long game” (GT Popondetta). The women develop a relationship with a man who is a potential resource to them over time. We heard of brothers in a family offering their sisters to police or security guards for sex. But nothing is free in these negotiations and later that brother will be able to say, “I gave you my sister, my friend, and now I need something in return” (GT Popondetta).

The developmental pathway of women engaging in sex work in and around oil palm plantations was found to follow a similar pattern to other corridors researched during this Social Mapping. In Alotau, young girls have little education and few ways to make a living – some engage in sex for money, goods or favour to enhance their incomes and to put themselves through school (KI4 Alotau). One respondent told us, “At 22 I was a widow. I stayed in a settlement in a house with friends. I helped these friends prepare and bury their sister [and] so they took me into the family” (PS2 Alotau). Finding it difficult to make money this young girl began to sell sex for cash. She explained how she goes to local drinking places and, “I drink so that I’m not afraid and then I take only older guys – they are not as violent as young guys” (PS2 Alotau). Another woman told us, “I got into this [sex work] because of my broken marriage. When my marriage broke up I had three kids. My husband was having an affair [and so] I then had an affair. We went to court and he didn’t pay compensation so he went to jail for a few months. He was released because his parents told the court that I was with other partners” (PS3 Alotau).

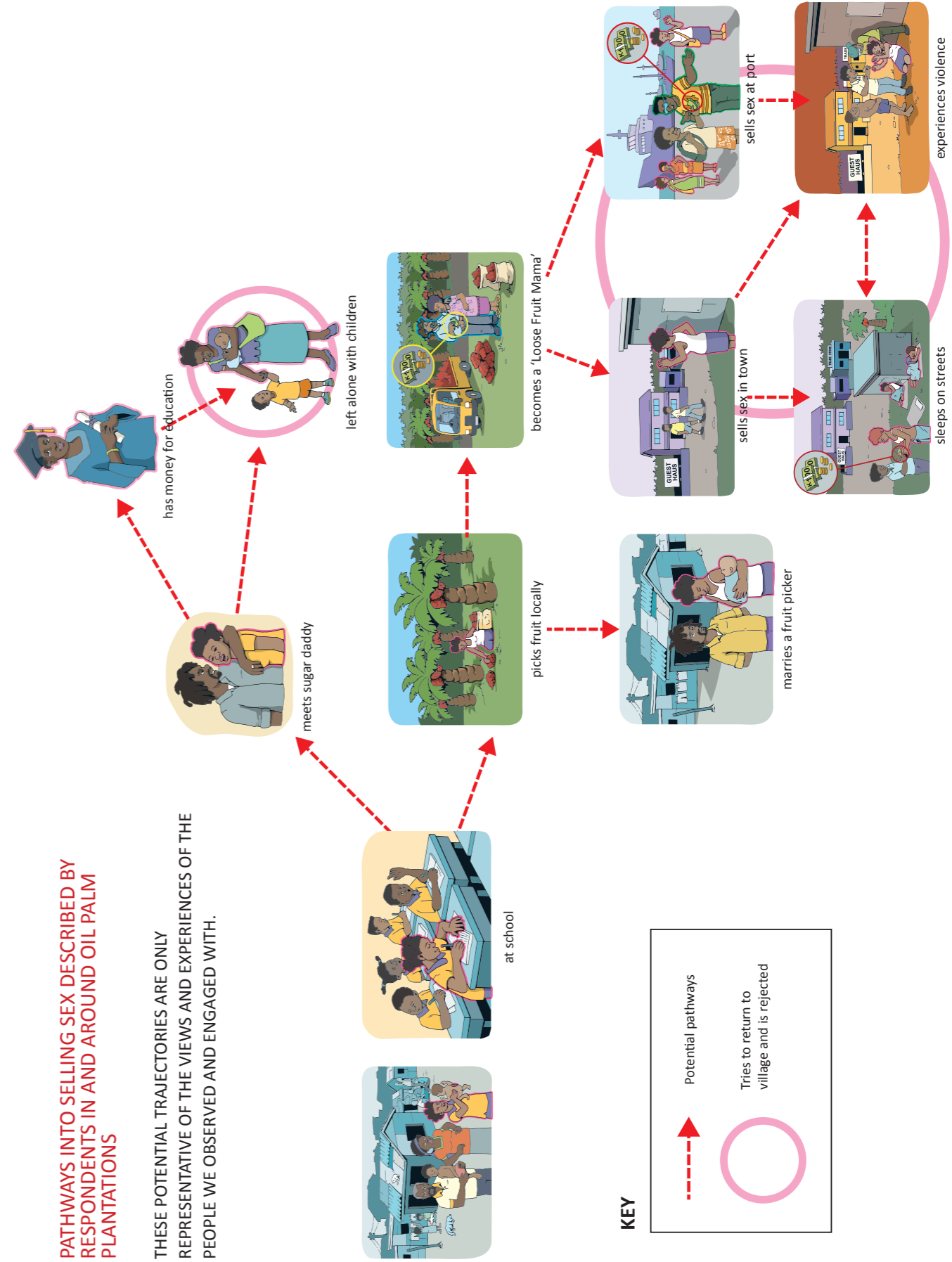
The marriage of teenage brides, with separation or divorce by early twenties, was another common trajectory to sex work described. There were stories of mothers and daughters from settlements around oil palm plantations engaging in sex work together, to earn enough money to feed their children and grandchildren. We interviewed a young woman who had married at a young age and had two children. Her husband died unexpectedly leaving her without any support. She began to work on the street selling sex to support herself and her two sons. As she told us her story, she began to weep. Police reported having very little experience with local women engaging in sex work. One respondent asked, “what is that? I’ve heard the term but I don’t know who they are” (KI5 Alotau). It appears that local women in sex work in and around oil palm plantations are solving arising issues amongst themselves and with the help of young men. “They don’t report their difficulties to the police” (KI5 Alotau).

The trajectory into sex work for young women living in and around oil palm plantations follows a similar pathway to other corridors researched during this Social Mapping. Differentiation between sex work and high level transactional sex was difficult in these regions. Women involved in transactional sex for money, favour and goods do not identify as sex workers, however, often present with very similar patterns of negotiating and exchanging sex as those who do.

There are large groups of women not employed by the palm oil companies that are accessing the cash economy by having sex with mobile, and permanent, men with money. The reports of men having sex with up to four women a day increases risk of, and impact from, HIV amongst all exchanging sex, especially in consideration of poor reported condom use despite significant efforts by the Provincial AIDS Committee, local sex worker networks and local guesthouses.

PATHWAYS INTO SELLING SEX DESCRIBED BY RESPONDENTS IN AND AROUND OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

THESE POTENTIAL TRAJECTORIES ARE ONLY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE PEOPLE WE OBSERVED AND ENGAGED WITH.



MEN AT RISK

Some male respondents, in and around oil palm plantations, described a local cultural belief that having sex with multiple partners validates your health and virility. “If he [a man] is not having sex with many women they will say you are not fit ... you are not a man” (GT Alotau). Masculinity and virility, especially in Milne Bay, for men and boys was found to be prized. One respondent told us “tokumatala is a man who does not have sex. He is a very miserable man” (KI2 Alotau).

Interviews with men in these settings also highlighted the impact of churches on gender roles. They told us, “God created man and made man the head of the family, so this is the case ... mothers do not manage things properly so the man takes control”. They told us that, “all decisions are made by the husband; but regarding the kitchen, the mother makes all the decision” (FGD2 Popondetta). The particular groups of men we identified at increased risk of, and impact from, HIV in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas were mobile men with money including truck drivers, taxi drivers and palm oil workers, men who have penile modifications and men who have sex with men.

MOBILE MEN WITH MONEY

There was open discussion amongst men about sex in Milne Bay and Popondetta, with a quality of boasting in discussions about the number of actual, or potential, partners. The men in this setting assigned a great deal of sexual power or ‘agency’ to the women and girls they engage with. One respondent explained, “women have power to attract us men. They make us men get sexy and have sex with them” (FGD7 Popondetta). This story of female power was mirrored in some interviews with women who said, “sometimes I can earn up to K1,000 a day without having sex with men. I control my body and decide when to use it and with whom I want [to use it]” (FGD1 Alotau).

Male respondents in oil palm plantations and surrounds appeared aware of the need for some women to access cash, and transactional sex being an avenue to money. One group of men told us, “women have different needs such as school fees, mobile phones, beer ... therefore they sell sex. Mobile phones today have blue movies [pornography] inside, so young girls in school are watching these things and going out looking for sex. They sell their bodies to make money” (FGD3 Popondetta). It was common to hear that young boys are having sex with older women and older men are having sex with young girls. A group of men spoke of young school age girls approaching them to say, “Your fire [sexual drive] wants to die, so come and we go and start the fire” (FGD3 Popondetta).

There was acknowledgement of forced and violent sex amongst the men we spoke with. One man explained, “in the home, the father is in charge ... when the man is in the mood and the woman refuses to have sex that is the time when violence is used by the man to meet his desires even if the woman refuses” (FGD7 Popondetta). But there were noted discrepancies between men and women about who has more sexual power. Men we interviewed expressed, “both partners have power in sex ... when the woman refuses they stand on it [repress urges] and sometimes the man uses violence to meet his needs, but both men and women have power to decide things” (FGD4 Alotau). A group of male security

“People who earn a lot of money, they are the ones who are the sugar daddies”

Local Leaders (FGD1 Alotau)

“The women’s hands, bodies and words are poison and they really kill us and encourage or incite us to get in to the mood for sex”

Truck Drivers (FGD7 Popondetta)

guards told us “women have power over sex because the way they are made and their approach causes men to consent to have sex” (FGD5 Alotau). This group of men conceded that “wife beating is a major problem”, however this was justified as, “women do not fulfil the wishes of the man and this causes violence in the family” (FGD5 Alotau).

Mobile men with money travel into Alotau for meetings and workshops from Port Moresby or arrive in from the islands for fortnight payday if they are government or company workers. Ships dock in the port and the men from these vessels spend rest time in town: drinking, partying and procuring women for sex. Government workers from the islands stay at government guesthouses in town and engage with women, including sex workers. There are also coal miners, labourers and construction workers along with the palm oil labourers and managers, who reside in or pass through, the estates and nearby towns. There is an increased access to money in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas, and this increases formal entertainment markets such as bars, guesthouses, restaurants and clubs as well as the informal industries of sex work and high level transactional sex.

Guesthouse owners and managers in Alotau spoke of regular male patrons who are coal miners from Lihir, Misima and New Ireland. The staff spoke of arranging women to come to the rooms of these men. There is an established system for procurement of free condoms from the Provincial AIDS Committee office, yet some guesthouse managers we spoke to said they do not distribute them. Those who displayed evidence of condom distribution (placing them in rooms or at front desks) stated that they rarely required replenishment.

TRUCK DRIVERS

The palm oil industry employs a large number of truck drivers in Oro and Milne Bay provinces. Truck drivers spend up to twelve hours on the road, driving between palm oil estates collecting fruit which they then transport to the mill for processing. Once processed, they take the product from the mill to the wharf where it is pumped onto sea vessels and transported onwards. The ships are mostly international, with crews from overseas. The general population in these provinces do not have access to vehicles, so driving a car or truck provides high status. Young girls spoke of wanting to get into vehicles with these men and the excitement of travelling around the province to places not seen before.

Transport divisions and companies employ drivers for a range of jobs including collection of palm oil fruit as well as excavation and transport of heavy materials (KI3 Alotau). In Popondetta, there was a described system of sex exchange for added palm oil fruit weight, between truck drivers and local women. There is a great deal of opportunity for truck drivers travelling day and night to connect with women for sex. “Drivers are the ones who have money all the time”, a group of security guards told us, “so they pick up girls and have sex with them” (FGD2 Popondetta). The women reported interest in these drivers for access to new places and for the cash that they will spend on them.

Many drivers we spoke with said they keep condoms in their toolboxes but find it hard to hide these condoms from their wives and supervisors (FGD7 Popondetta). Nevertheless, there was evidence of condom use among drivers. One respondent told us, “condoms are readily available here. A driver colleague of mine picked up a girl but had no condoms so he stopped my vehicle and I gave him a box. And he said it was for safety and went with the lady in his vehicle” (FGD7 Popondetta).

“Females dress themselves up nicely, try to attract the drivers, ask for smoke, buai and later ask for beer and sex. She sells sex to the trucks or anybody else to make money”

Truck Drivers (FGD7 Popondetta)

“I would go and tell the girls that there is a man that wants someone to make him warm at night and that is when they would say yes and I will take them to the man”

Taxi Driver (PS4 Alotau)

TAXI DRIVERS

Alotau has a large supply of private taxis for hire. Taxi drivers here play an important role as negotiators of sex between local women and mobile men with money who travel into town for business. Women engaging in sex work reported asking taxi drivers about any new faces in town, and mobile men with money ask drivers to procure local women and bring them to guesthouses or hotels for a fee. One taxi driver explained, “I go to compounds like Duwau at Sanderson Bay, Goilani Compound, Kitava Compound and Red Hill Compound. Mostly it’s at the compounds here in town” (PS4 Alotau). Another detailed, “the girls that are doing that [selling sex] are sixteen to eighteen years old and these men pay them 50 to 400 Kina night” (PS4 Alotau).

Mobile men with money are said to invite drivers to drink with them at local entertainment venues and then use the taxi service as a go-between for sex negotiations (GT Alotau). One driver told us about a recent encounter with a mobile man with money - “he asks me to buy a beer for a woman and he will give me K100 to buy the beer. One night I bought beer for five

ladies. When the dance finishes, they want to head back. They have five women with them and they all want to be with that man. They had sex in the car while I was driving him back to his hotel” (GT Alotau). A number of drivers spoke of having a steady supply of condoms, organised through the Provincial AIDS Committee, because of their role in negotiating sex for this mobile population of cashed-up men.

MEN WHO HAVE PENILE MODIFICATIONS

Penile modification involving clinical procedures is ‘big business’ in both Alotau and Popondetta (KI10 Alotau, FGD2 Popondetta, FGD3 Popondetta). There were a range of ‘cut styles’ described by our participants for circumcision including the ‘V cut’, the ‘sunflower cut’ and the ‘apple cut’. Circumcision is reported to be popular amongst young boys around thirteen years of age. They are said to perform these cuts on each other, except for the ‘sunflower cut’ which is very complicated and requires someone with surgical or clinical skill. The surgical procedures are often performed by people not clinically trained, in unsanitary situations and without proper sterilisation of the equipment. Penile modifications are said to be a sign of masculinity (KI10 Alotau). The alterations signal to women that a man is capable of withstanding considerable pain and therefore more virile and more of a ‘man’ (GT Popondetta).

Another procedure described in these settings was injecting sap from the pandanus trees. The sap is said to be extracted from the root of the plant, mixed with baby oil, boiled and then injected into the penis. In Alotau injections of this, or other substances, cost K100 per injection (KI10 Alotau). In Popondetta, the procedure is reported to cost between 10 and 20 Kina per millilitre.

“Reasons for doing this [penile modification] are mainly for pleasuring themselves and women. Although boys say it is done for the purpose of health and hygiene ... main reason is to feel pleasure. Condoms are hardly used when [after] boys do this. They believe it protects them from infections and diseases”

Raskol from Settlement (KI10 Alotau)

The insertion of ball bearings and rings was also reported, especially within the prison systems around the settings of our research. One respondent described how bearings are created out of toothbrushes and rolled until they are round and smooth. The foreskin is then cut and the bearings placed into the side and around the penis, just below the head. Young boys stated learning about these procedures from released prisoners (KI10 Alotau).

A further modification involves the leaf of a particular plant with numbing properties that is applied to the penis. The leaf itself contains small spikes and these pierce the skin of the penis, acting as an irritant but also numbing the glans. ‘Bashing’ the penis was described as part of the procedure. Young men reportedly undertake this procedure just before sex to achieve a temporary lumpy and swollen penis. The numbing qualities of the leaf also allow for a delay in ejaculation.

The men we spoke with said these methods for enlarging and modifying the penis were to provide increased pleasure for women. However, the women interviewed stated that men pay “K20 for an injection to make a big cock”, and believed this to be the real motivation for penile modification (FGD8 Popondetta). Women also described adverse side effects of the procedures including, “one man [who] got the injection and his legs swelled and it was hard for him to walk about (general laughter among the group)”, and another who, “has trouble wearing trousers” (FGD8 Popondetta).

Infections resulting in skin integrity breakdown, altered membrane surfaces and the potential for trauma in penetration all increase the risks of STI and HIV transmission for men with penile modifications and their sexual partners. There was very little recognition of any adverse effects, or need for increased protection following penile modification procedures amongst the Social Mapping sample in this setting.

MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN

Like other settings researched during this Social Mapping, oil palm plantations and surrounds also provided evidence of dangers for men having sex with other men to be open about their behaviours. MSM were referred to as ‘girlie-girlie’ during our discussions and people, “make fun of them” (KI12 Alotau). One community leader told us “this guy [an MSM] has been trying to go out with my son-in-law and he [my son-in-law] was so angry that he tried to beat the hell out of that man” (KI12 Alotau). Another group of men spoke of a high school boy, “who goes around with girls and has abnormal sex [anal sex with men]” (FGD3 Popondetta). During a group interview with community HIV volunteers there was little response – “eyes down ... sideways glances” - when the interviewer asked about men having sex with other men (FGD8 Popondetta). A healthcare worker said, “I know about three [local MSM] but they don’t come for services here” (KI4 Alotau).

Sex between men in prisons was widely discussed (FGD1 Alotau, FGD4 Popondetta) and, “even in the cells in town the policemen are asking for sex from the

“With some of them [other men] I use condoms, with others I don’t. When we use condoms it’s not good. But I want them to use condoms with grease when they do it to me during anal sex. It feels good. With my girlfriends I always use condoms because I don’t want to be a father. The girls too don’t know who I really am. They don’t know that I have boyfriends as well.”

Young Man (PS1 Alotau)

prisoners so they can set them free” (FGD1 Alotau). We heard the occasional story during individual interviews about MSM and one respondent told us, “I have a friend who has sex with other men and every time we are together he describes the men and boys. He is a successful businessman and the other men go to his house for help, seek his advice when they have problems. There is discrimination ... it is not being accepted by the community” (FGD1 Alotau). This respondent continued, “they [MSM] are afraid. There are threats of violence. We have a man who comes out, openly dressed like a woman and goes around the town. He has been raped because he has come out openly” (FGD1 Alotau). A local woman also spoke of, “a leader who attended a workshop for female sex workers and men who have sex with men and she got traumatised because she saw men hugging and kissing each other in front of her” (KI12 Alotau).

A young man disclosed to us that after having anal sex with a man for the first time he lost interest in girlfriends (PS1 Alotau). “I really enjoy it with men more than with women” he told us and reported currently having two girlfriends and four boyfriends. The sex he described with some men is in exchange for money and goods - “The teacher buys food ... another gave me K500 for oral sex”. This young man spoke of transactional sex as his income for survival, living from day to day for cash access, but readily stated, “I do it because I enjoy it. It’s not like I like to get money. I don’t like to be seen as those prostitutes” (PS1 Alotau).

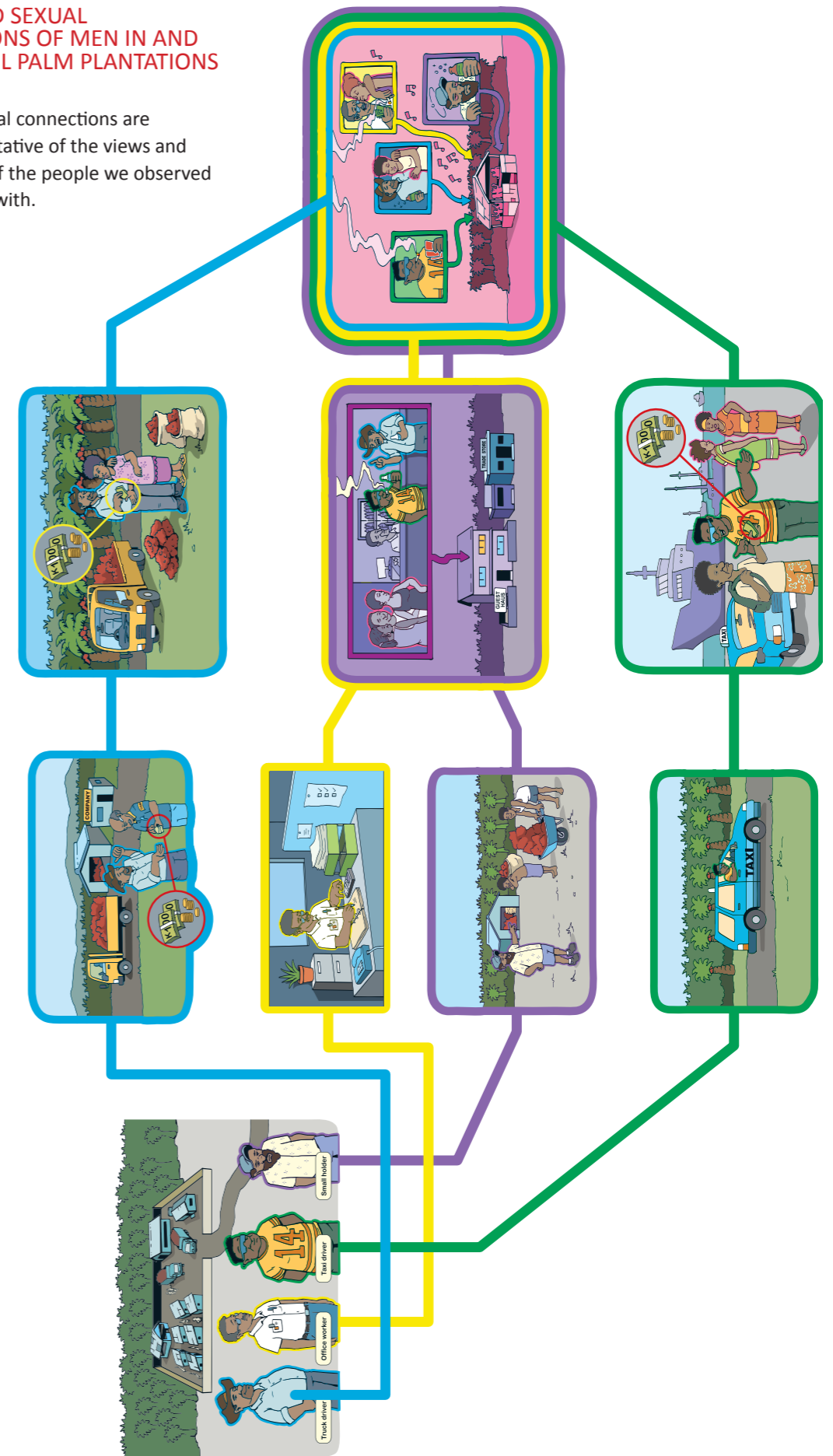
Oil palm plantations and surrounding areas are settings filled with mobile men with money. As found in the other corridors explored in this Social Mapping, truck drivers, company workers and government employees are spending cash, especially during pay weeks, on women selling sex and transactional sex exchange. In Alotau, taxi drivers facilitate procurement of sex workers for mobile men with money visiting the town. There was higher reporting of condom use amongst truck drivers in these settings, and taxi drivers were also found to carry condoms for use by their passengers. An active condom distribution system, coordinated by the Provincial AIDS Committee, is evident throughout Alotau and surrounding areas.

Penile modifications were widely described in these settings and provide increased risk of, and impact from, HIV (and STIs) through infection, alterations to membranes and potential trauma in penetration. This risk exists for the man, and his partners.

MSM remain stigmatised in and around oil palm plantations, although with less threats of violence than along the Highlands Highway.

SOCIAL AND SEXUAL CONNECTIONS OF MEN IN AND AROUND OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

These potential connections are only representative of the views and experiences of the people we observed and engaged with.



PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

During our field visit to Alotau there were 132 people living with HIV registered at the local clinic. Forty-eight were prescribed antiretroviral therapy and twenty-eight were on prophylactic antibiotics to prevent opportunistic infections. The Provincial AIDS Committee no longer provide HIV testing and counselling services in Alotau and now relies on The Star of Hope, Goinai and Hagu Clinics to provide these services to the community (KI6 Alotau). Hagita Oil Palm offers HIV rapid testing with confirmatory tests performed at the main government hospital laboratory (KI6 Alotau).

Within marriages, we heard that both partners living with HIV results in few problems, but, “where one partner is HIV positive and the other negative, there are problems most are encountered with bride price” (FGD3 Popondetta). HIV positive status was said to determine that a woman cannot attract bride price from her prospective partner’s family. People reported high levels of stigma toward people living with HIV. One respondent told us, “I have known of a sex worker who is HIV positive but she died. There was violence happening when people found out that she was HIV positive. They started bashing her. She was attacked and was killed in the attack. It was so well hidden that nobody talks about it. Even the police did not do anything about that” (KI12 Alotau). In another story, “one family rejected their daughter who had contracted HIV so she went to Lae and died” (KI6 Alotau).

In Popondetta, a Positive Network for people living with HIV has been operating since April 2011. Eight infants are reported to have been diagnosed with HIV in that network of adults since its formation. In Alotau and Popondetta, sorcery is often believed responsible for HIV-related illness and death. A known HIV positive individual will be ostracised by the community, with locals fearing touching or coming close to the person. One PLHIV interviewed said that neighbours will not even allow their children to play with his children. “The neighbours will yell to their children that Uncle is sick” (GT Popondetta). One respondent illustrated the complexity of receiving HIV care and support in a discriminating environment. He explained, “people did not know about our status but when the Tingim Laip team visited us with some food and stuff it had become obvious to the surrounding communities that we are infected” (PS7 Popondetta).

Health workers interviewed in both Milne Bay and Oro provinces felt that people are not presenting for HIV testing in large enough numbers to interrupt transmission and the spread of illness. There was a common rhetoric of limited capacity to provide HIV testing and prevent mortality caused by AIDS-related complications in these settings (GT Alotau, GT Popondetta, FGD8 Popondetta). Interrupted supplies of antiretroviral treatment and regular stock-outs of essential prophylaxis were reported. A group of people living with HIV interviewed in Oro told us that they no longer have an antiretroviral prescriber at the hospital and that, “the system has broken down” (FGD6 Popondetta). This claim was refuted, however, by a clinical representative who stated that there was advertising underway for a new prescriber (PS1 Popondetta).

A further story of HIV service breakdown was described in Oro, with an ART prescriber attached to palm oil infrastructure allegedly accused of illegal activity. Palm oil security responded to the claims by tying her hands behind her back with cable ties and transporting her to the police station in front of a number of other staff. The allegations were later found to be false, but the incident led to mass resignation of the entire HIV clinical team at this site (PS2 Popondetta).

There were obvious challenges in delivery of integrated HIV prevention, testing and treatment during our field visit to Popondetta. A respondent that we interviewed spoke of being tested for HIV in 2008, receiving his initial reactive result six months later and then not hearing results of his confirmatory testing until 2009. At the time of informed diagnosis, his haemoglobin level was low and a blood transfusion was required before treatment could commence. On returning to the government hospital for antiretroviral prescription, the man described

**“To
this day I
am still waiting to
start [treatment]”**

PLHIV, (PS7 Popondetta)

People living with HIV in and around oil palm plantations continue to face stigma and discrimination. Access to health care varies according to locality, with challenges in HIV infrastructure, testing and treatment supplies identified in both Alotau and Popondetta. The churches play a significant role in the HIV response in these settings, including provision of travel money for access to HIV treatment and hospital services.

not being attended to or supported by hospital staff. The palm oil company placed him on probation for excessive sick leave and he was eventually dismissed (PS7 Popondetta).

Anglicare in Popondetta and surrounding villages appeared to play an essential and supportive role for people living with HIV through provision of travel money to and from the hospital for check-ups and treatment access during the time of our field visit. Comparitively, our sample of PLHIV in Alotau were in poor health, presenting as thin, with coughing and obvious skin infections. There was no CD4 machine in Milne Bay province during our period of research, so people were generally initiated onto antiretroviral medication with onset of clinical symptoms (KI1 Alotau). We were informed that there is no HIV testing performed in health clinics on the islands surrounding Alotau, and people living with HIV must travel to town by boat to access HIV treatment and care. The Catholic Church provides VCT in and around Alotau, and also provides travel money to island people living with HIV for regular access to antiretroviral treatment collection and hospital care.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored how ways of living, as well as social and sexual connections, in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas may increase risks of, and impact from, HIV amongst particular populations. Social dynamics and interactions between men and women in palm oil settings have changed dramatically over the past decade, with increased sexual activity driven by a growing cash economy through an informal, yet self-organised sex work industry, and high levels of transactional sex for money, goods and favours.

Towns and economic enclaves, such as purpose-built villages and settlements, are becoming places of increased social and sexual freedom for women. These places offer new choices for women and girls including access to an independent income and opportunity to become part of a working class. Palm oil settings, being filled with men with money, some of whom are mobile, also provide increased opportunity for men and boys to seek multiple concurrent sexual partners – either through sex workers or transactional sex relationships. For both men and women, these opportunities increase the level of risk of, and impact from HIV.

Communication within marriages emerged as a major theme of vulnerability for families during our field research in palm oil settings. Difficulties in parental relationships, dishonesty and concealment between partners are compounded by the social pressures of crowded residential environments. Debt cycles, driven by credit sex and excessive spending on gambling and entertainment, result in family breakdowns. Wives are left financially vulnerable in these circumstances and some seek access to money for survival, for themselves and their children, in transactional sex or as self-identified sex workers.

The exchange of sex is woven into the fabric of economic and social negotiation in oil palm plantations and surrounding areas. There is a very high level of sex occurring for money, goods and influence between people in these settings, including sex for favours such as employment. Categorisation of these transactions as sex work would be resisted by the multiple men and women involved.

Witchcraft and sorcery beliefs continue to play a role in perceptions of illness and death among local people, and conversely, magic powers are also sought for HIV healing and access to locally claimed herbal cures. The level of stigma and discrimination toward people with HIV is high, and has resulted in violence and death in and around oil palm plantations.

HIV health services and supporting infrastructure appears non-operational in all but a few places. Government services present as lacking consistency in delivery of treatment and care for people living with HIV. Most settings visited during this Social Mapping exercise had no CD4 machine and rely on the onset of clinical symptoms for commencement of antiretroviral treatment.

Oil palm plantation estates did provide functional HIV testing services, although complications with human resources and management had resulted in disruption to HIV services at one clinic. Condoms were available through an active Provincial AIDS Committee in Milne Bay, and at a number of government clinics, company offices and guesthouse establishments. Despite easy access, however, there remained a level of embarrassment and ambivalence to condoms across the palm oil settings.

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