

Surviving in the Post-Repatriation Era: Challenges and Opportunities for Papuan refugees after returning from Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

Although many studies have been carried out on the living conditions of Papuan refugees in Papua New Guinea, little is known about what happens to them once they have been repatriated to the Indonesian province of Papua. This study seeks to fill this void. By focusing on two areas of repatriants' settlement in Papua Province (Kwimi village of Keerom and Nasem village of Merauke), this article examines their living conditions in the post-repatriation period and identify ways in which the Indonesian government can improve its repatriation program. Data were gathered through focus group discussions, observation, and library research between the second and third week of December 2021. This research, based on a qualitative descriptive approach, found that Papuan repatriants faced difficulties adjusting to life after repatriation. Among their challenges are reintegrating into the community, finding employment, funding their children's education, gaining livelihoods, and clashing with land settlements. These difficulties stem from the government's inability to provide proper assistance to repatriated individuals within the first five years of their settlement, which results in challenges for them during the reintegration process. This research also offers recommendations for Indonesia's central and local governments to formulate a coordinated policy in handling repatriants; develop a project plan in the first five years covering the principles of safety, protection, mentoring, empowerment; and consider the repatriation issue in the country's best interest.

Keywords: Papua; Papua New Guinea; repatriants; refugee

ABSTRAK

Penelitian tentang keberadaan para pengungsi asal Papua di Papua Nugini telah banyak dilakukan, namun perkembangan pengungsi yang kemudian dipulangkan kembali ke Indonesia (Provinsi Papua) belum banyak diketahui. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meneliti hal tersebut dengan fokus pada dua kabupaten di Provinsi Papua (Kampung Kwimi di Kabupaten Keerom dan Kampung Nasem di Kabupaten Merauke). Penelitian ini menjelaskan tentang kondisi kehidupan para pengungsi setelah proses repatriasi (pemulangan kembali) dan mengidentifikasi hal-hal yang perlu ditingkatkan oleh Pemerintah Indonesia dalam program repatriasi. Sumber data diperoleh melalui kelompok diskusi terarah, observasi, dan studi pustaka yang dilakukan pada minggu kedua dan ketiga di bulan Desember tahun 2021. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dan penelitian ini menemukan bahwa para repatrian mengalami kesulitan dalam beradaptasi dengan kehidupan di Papua. Tantangan yang dihadapi repatrian seperti: beradaptasi kembali dengan masyarakat, mencari pekerjaan, membiayai sekolah anak-anak, mencari nafkah, dan masalah tanah pemukiman. Berbagai kesulitan ini diakibatkan oleh ketidakmampuan pemerintah dalam mendampingi mereka pada masa lima tahun awal kembali ke Papua yang menyebabkan repatrian mengalami kendala dalam proses reintegrasi. Penelitian ini juga memberikan rekomendasi bagi Pemerintah Pusat dan Pemerintah Daerah setempat dalam menyusun kebijakan

yang terkoordinasi untuk penanganan repatriasi; menyusun rencana lima tahun pertama penanganan yang meliputi prinsip keamanan, perlindungan, pendampingan, pemberdayaan; dan juga menjadikan isu repatriasi sebagai bagian dari kepentingan negara.

Kata kunci: Papua; Papua Nugini; repatriasi; pengungsi

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the political situation in Papua has exerted influence on the relations of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Papua is the most eastern province of Indonesia, which was integrated after implementing the Act of Free Choice (Indonesian: *Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat*, PEPERA) in 1969 based on the New York Agreement of 1962. Scholars such as King¹, Elmslie & Webb-Gannon² observed the PEPERA was conducted under coercion, intimidation, and military violence. Nonetheless, the United Nations General Assembly noted the results of the Act of Free Choice in resolution 2504 on 19 November 1969³ – causing Papua to be an inseparable part of Indonesia.

Concerning the integration process, the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) recorded that at least forty-four military operations were carried out in Papua from 1961 to 1998. The Komnas HAM divided the military operation model into two stages: 1) before the implementation of PEPERA, aiming to win PEPERA; and 2) after the implementation of PEPERA, purposed for maintaining the results of PEPERA, ensuring a successful election, and crushing the Free Papua Movement (Indonesian: *Organisasi Papua Merdeka*, OPM).⁴ These military operations had caused fear among Papuans, forcing thousands to cross the border to seek sanctuary as refugees in PNG.⁵ Despite the fact that they have been living in PNG for years, some of them have made a decision to return to Papua – either through the repatriation program or voluntarily. In 2019, there were 75 households with 322 people who were repatriated from PNG to Papua province.⁶

According to historical records, when the Papuan refugees arrived in PNG in the 1960s, the PNG government had not yet signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, creating an implicit rejection of the Papuan refugees. On 17 July 1986, the PNG government became the party of the Refugee Convention⁷ and later changed its tune to recognize refugee camps in PNG territory. Durable solutions were subsequently offered for Papuan refugees: returning voluntarily, resettling in third countries, and granting permissive residents. Additionally, the PNG and Indonesian governments elaborated on article 3 of the 1974 Agreement regarding administrative border arrangements pertaining to the border between their countries, which specifies the right of the two countries to cross the border for traditional

¹ Peter King, “Autonomy, Federalism or the Unthinkable? Indonesian Debates and the Future of West Papua,” *South Pacific Study* 21, no. 2 (2001): 45–60.

² Jim Elmslie and Camellia B. Webb-Gannon, “A slow-motion genocide: Indonesian rule in West Papua” *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity* 1, no. 2 (2013): 142–66.

³ Richard Chauvel, *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation* (Washington: East-West Center Washington, 2005).

⁴ ELSAM, “Operasi Militer Di Papua,” 2014, <https://referensi.elsam.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/OPERASI-MILITER-PAPUA.pdf>.

⁵ Speaking of refugees from Papua, many references tend to use ‘West Papuan Refugees.’ Yet, this article prefers using ‘Papuan Refugees’ to depict people from the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya (now: Papua Province and West Papua Province) who crossed the border to seek sanctuary in PNG and become repatriants now, either facilitated by the government or come back voluntarily.

⁶ Hendrik Rikarsyo Rewapatara, “Gelar Pembinaan Wawasan Kebangsaan ke Warga Eks Repatriasi PNG, Ini Harapan Pemprov Papua,” *Tribun-Papua.com*, 2023, <https://papua.tribunnews.com/2023/05/13/gelar-pembinaan-wawasan-kebangsaan-ke-warga-eks-repatriasi-png-ini-harapan-peprov-papua>

⁷ UNHCR, “States Parties to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol,” n.d., <https://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf>.

and customary purposes. The article regulates traditional border crossing activities, including marriage, gardening, other land uses, collecting, hunting, fishing, and traditional barter trade, in addition to ensuring that they are not refugees.⁸

Throughout the years, political conditions in Papua Province have improved, encouraging Papuan refugees living in PNG to consider returning home. This article notes two significant waves in repatriating Papuan refugees from PNG. The first cohort was in the 1990s (1991, 1995, 1999). Most people returned home voluntarily during this period, both individually or in groups. During this period, the government of Irian Jaya (Papua) also assisted some other refugees in returning home. The economic difficulties in the refugee camp and the children's educational situation in PNG were of particular concern to the refugees when they returned to Papua province. The second wave was in 2009. The situation was similar to that of the previous wave, in which some refugees returned to their homeland voluntarily, while others returned with the assistance of the government. A significant factor in their decision to return to Indonesia was also the promise that the government would provide them with housing, free education, jobs, security, and so forth. With that being said, the question remaining is, what are the conditions of the Papuan refugees after they are repatriated?

The existing academic literature generally examines Papuan refugees while they were still living in refugee camps in PNG. As an example, Glazebrook examined how the PNG government assisted Papuan refugees under an asylum policy by providing them with assistance to decide whether they would return to Irian Jaya (Papua) or be integrated into local communities in PNG under temporary entry or permissive residence.⁹ Similarly, Toam investigated how the international effort (UNHCR) can resolve the problem of Papuan refugees in the East Awin refugee camp. Not only did the UNHCR successfully facilitate Permissive Residence in cooperation with PNG, but it also issued birth certificates for PNG-born children under the age of 20.¹⁰ Tay et al. also scrutinised Papuan refugees in PNG, focusing specifically on their experiences with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The findings of the study confirmed that the Papuan refugees suffered traumatic experiences as a result of witnessing murders in conjunction with a sense of injustice.¹¹

Munro also visited the Rainbow settlement in Port Moresby in 2016 and observed that Papuan refugees were unable to access education and health services. In spite of the fact that their children were born in PNG, they still found it difficult to send them to school. As with other urban residents in Port Moresby's settlements, parents struggled to provide food and clean clothes for their children, as well as transportation or extra costs associated with attending school. Papuans who have already become citizens of PNG were also denied the right to settle down.¹² Even though these academic scholars (Glazebrook, Toam, Tay et al., and Munro) provide insight into the condition of Papuan refugees, they do not extend their research to include the condition of refugees after being repatriated to the Indonesian Province of Papua. This article will therefore fill this gap, contributing to the existing literature.

⁸ "Agreement Between The Government of Australia (Acting on Its Own Behalf and on Behalf of The Government of Papua New Guinea) and The Government of Indonesia Concerning Administrative Border Arrangements as to The Border Between Papua New Guinea and Indone," United Nations Treaty Series, n.d., <http://gis.nacse.org/tfdd/tfddddocs/362ENG.pdf>.

⁹ Diana Glazebrook. "If I Stay Here There is Nothing Yet If I Return I do not Know Whether I will be Safe": West Papuan Refugee Responses to Papua New Guinea Asylum Policy 1998–2003." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17, no. 2 (2004): 205-221.

¹⁰ Elys Lusiaru Papuana Toam. "Upaya Internasional dalam Penyelesaian Masalah Pengungsi Papua di Di East Awin-PNG." S1 Thesis, 2019, Universitas Kristen Indonesia.

¹¹ Tay, et al., "The structure of post-traumatic stress disorder and complex post-traumatic stress disorder amongst West Papuan refugees." *BMC psychiatry* 15 (2015): 1-17.

¹² Jenny Munro, "West Papuan Refugees in Papua New Guinea: On the Way to Citizenship?," *State, Society & Governance in Melanesia*, ANU, no. In Brief 2016/19 (2016), <https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2016-07/ib-2016-19-munro.pdf>. See also "Port Moresby Evicts West Papuan Refugees from City Settlement," Asia Pacific Report, 2019, <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2019/06/25/west-papuan-refugees-evicted-from-port-moresby-settlement/>.

This article is organised as follows: The first section presents a conceptual framework to examine further the variables that are the focus of this study, followed by an outline of the methods used in this study. Next, this article describes the results and discussion consisting of stories from repatriants in Kwimi village of Keerom and Nasem village of Merauke, the four basic principles in the pattern of repatriation (security, protection, mentoring, empowerment), and SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats regarding Papuan refugees in the post-repatriation era. Finally, this article summarises some important points and offers some recommendations

Conceptual Framework

Chiang et al. emphasize the importance of differentiating ‘Who are repatriates and what is repatriation?’.¹³ Repatriates can be understood in various ways, one of which refers to people who have returned to one’s home country from an extended foreign assignment.¹⁴ The term ‘repatriates’ has a similar meaning to ‘repatriants’, which UNHCR mainly uses.¹⁵ Accordingly, this article chooses to use ‘repatriants’. Repatriation, on the other hand, is considered a transition from a foreign country to one’s home country after living overseas for a significant period.¹⁶ The International Organization for Migration (IOM) also defines repatriation as ‘the personal right of a refugee, prisoner of war or a civil detainee to return to his or her country of nationality under specific conditions laid down in various international instruments’ (Geneva Conventions, 1949 and Protocols, 1977, the Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Annexed to the Fourth Hague Convention, 1907, human rights instruments as well as customary international law).¹⁷ In a nutshell, ‘repatriants’ refers to a person, while ‘repatriation’ is a process experienced by repatriants.

Bernstein acknowledged repatriation as a process of restoration and return to the country of origin. However, he endeavoured to extend this understanding to include a collaborative process based upon two underlying principles: dialogue and trust.¹⁸ He emphasized the importance of establishing these principles through agreement with two actors who would cooperate in the repatriation process. In the same vein, Hathaway maintained that repatriation could be viewed through the perspective of refugee law as a means of ensuring basic rights, rather than through the perspective of immigration. Because the status of refugees depended on the situation of their own countries following immigration laws, and where the situation was safe and the refugees were not at risk, there was no reason why countries should not repatriate refugees. There is an exception to this rule when international law recognizes the right of refugees to live wherever they wish after their application has been approved, and this is generally based on the assignment of people to specific states.¹⁹

The topic of repatriation can also be considered in a broader context and beyond its definition, including issues of human rights and livelihoods. Widagdo et al. for instance, in their article *Repatriation as a Human Rights Approach to State Options in Dealing with Returning ISIS Foreign Terrorist Fighters* emphasized the importance of ensuring the rights of convicted criminals in

¹³ Chiang et al., “Repatriation: What Do We Know and Where Do We Go from Here,” *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 29, no. 1 (2018): 188–226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1380065>.

¹⁴ Hung-Wen Lee & Ching-Hsiang Liu, “An Examination of Factors Affecting Repatriates’ Turnover Intentions,” *International Journal of Manpower* 28, no. 2 (2007): 122–34, <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437720710747956>.

¹⁵ UNHCR, “Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection (Handbook),” 1996, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/3bfe68d32.pdf>.

¹⁶ Mukta Kulkarni, Mark L. Lengnick-Hall, and Reimara Valk, “Employee Perceptions of Repatriation in an Emerging Economy: The Indian Experience,” *Human Resource Management* 49, no. 3 (2010): 531–48, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20352>.

¹⁷ IOM, “Glossary on Migration (2nd Edition),” International Organization for Migration, 2011, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml25_1.pdf.

¹⁸ Bruce Bernstein, “Repatriation and Collaboration: The Museum of New Mexico,” *Museum Anthropology* 15, no. 3 (2008): 19–21, <https://doi.org/10.1525/mua.1991.15.3.19>.

¹⁹ James C Hathaway. "The meaning of repatriation." *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 9 (1997): 551.

conjunction with international human rights law during their transfer from one country to another.²⁰ That is to say, the countries need to uphold the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality. Considering that repatriation is the next step after refugee protection, Hathaway also argues that a human rights-based and practical understanding of mandated repatriation can be developed. He explained that since the repatriation process was enacted in law, we should not consider the repatriation voluntary.²¹ In this regard, repatriation can also be understood within the context of indigenous peoples' cultural heritage. Federico Lenzerini in his article *Cultural Identity, Human Rights, and Repatriation of Cultural Heritage of Indigenous Peoples* contend that it is essential for indigenous communities to preserve their cultural heritage in order to fulfill their internationally recognized human rights.²²

Repatriation process also presents challenges in the context of livelihoods. George et al. in their study *Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in India: Conceptual Framework of Repatriation Success*, provided insight into how Sri Lankan Tamil refugees encountered challenges after being repatriated to Sri Lanka. One of the four challenges they identified was the development of livelihoods, which include housing, education, health, and employment. It occurred as a consequence of the Sri Lankan government's failure to provide support to the refugees following their return. Moreover, it is worth noting that while in the refugee camps in India, Tamil refugees have greater access to services such as finance, healthcare, education, but when they returned to Sri Lanka, they received a limited degree of assistance. Bakewell, in his study *Repatriation and Self-Settled Refugees in Zambia: Bringing Solutions to the Wrong Problems*, also examined the movement of people from Angolans crossed the border to move to Zambia, called themselves as repatriating refugees. Bakawell found that the main reason they moved to Zambia was because they seek to find better livelihoods. In sum, livelihoods and employment have become a crucial issue for those who have returned from exile.

Against this background, questions remain regarding the repatriation process of Papuan refugees from PNG. They include questions such as what is the condition of Papuan refugees after they have been repatriated to the Indonesian province of Papua? Have the Indonesian authorities fulfilled their promise to assist the repatriants five years after occupying the settlements, including their basic rights and livelihoods? To examine a cause-and-effect relationship, this article identifies two key variables: the treatment offered by the Indonesian government to Papuan refugees in the post-repatriation era (independent variable) and the living conditions of Papuan repatriants (dependent variable). In the following section, this article describes the methodology used in this study.

Methodology

Given the fact that the repatriants settled throughout Papua Province, this article focuses on those who settled in Kwimi village of Keerom Regency and Nasem village of Merauke Regency. These two areas are selected to geographically represent Papua province's northern and southern borders with PNG (see figure 2). This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine follow-up treatment provided by the Indonesian government towards Papuan refugees from PNG in the post-repatriation era. Data were gathered through 1) focus group discussion (FGD), 2) observation, 3) library research. This study focuses on settlements where repatriants currently live²³ and attempts to

²⁰ Widagdo et al., "Repatriation as a Human Rights Approach to State Options in Dealing with Returning ISIS Foreign Terrorist Fighters." *SAGE Open* 11, no. 3 (2021): 21582440211032679.

²¹ James C Hathaway. "The meaning of repatriation." *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 9 (1997): 551.

²² Federico Lenzerini. "Cultural identity, human rights, and repatriation of cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 23 (2016): 127.

²³ Based on field data, Papuan repatriants were identified in five regencies and one city in the province of Papua. They include the Regencies of Jayapura, Keerom, Merauke, Boven Digoel, Pegunungan Bintang, and the City of Jayapura. Due to limited data and case study selection, the authors only selected Keerom and Merauke Regencies as representatives of Papua's northern and southern borders.

uncover their stories. In particular, the research location took place at Kwimi village of Keerom and Nasem village of Merauke.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the local government (Merauke and Keerom) in which several stakeholders involved in the repatriation process as well as the repatriants were invited to participate as well. The FGD participants in Merauke included the Head of the Sota Cross-border Post; District Head of Nasem Village; representatives from Samkay, Pamyun, Nasem and Tomer wards; the Merauke Regency Social Service Head; the Human Development Head of Bappeda Merauke district; and representatives from repatriants. There was a total of 47 participants. Meanwhile, the FGD participants in Keerom included the head of the Keerom border agency; the National Unity, Politics and Community Protection Agency (Kesbangpol); representatives from the Social Office; Municipal Representative of the Manpower Ministry and Transmigration; Head of Arso District; and representatives from repatriants. There was a total of 33 participants. Participants of the FGDs in Merauke and Keerom were all selected based on their involvement with the repatriation process, involvement with trainings for repatriants, and grappling with the issue of repatriation.

The observation, conducted in Kwimi village of Keerom Regency and Nasem village of Merauke Regency, focused on first-hand examination of repatriants' settlements, the way in which they socialize with the existing community, the language they speak on a daily basis, access to health, education, and livelihoods. A two-day observation was conducted in Kwimi village, and a three-day observation was conducted in Nasem village. The FGDs and observation were conducted during the second and third weeks of December 2021 as the researchers travelled from the north to the south of Papua. In addition to this, library research was also collected as secondary data to support primary data. The logical framework of this study is the following:

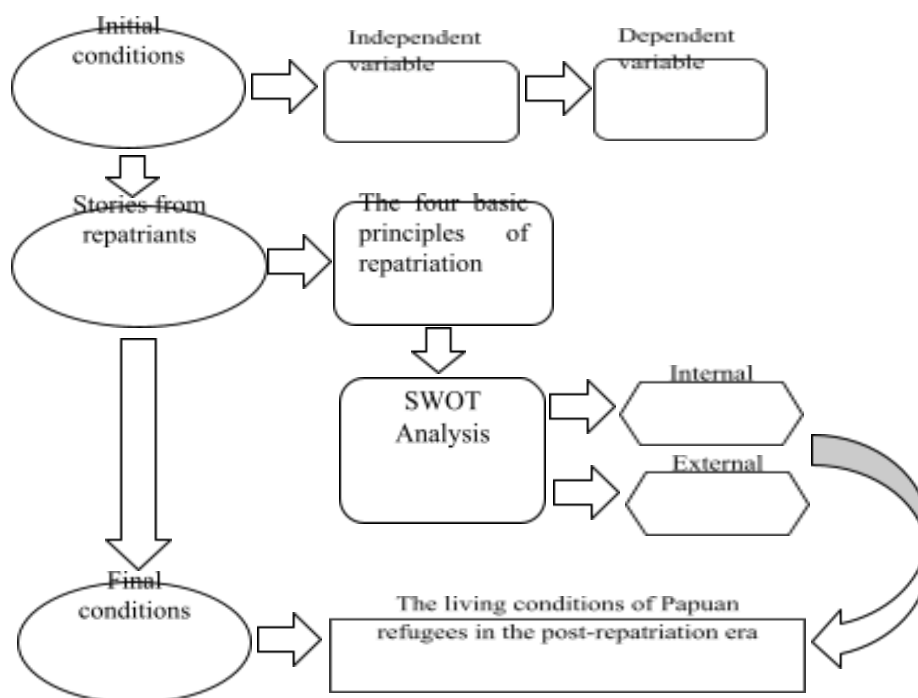


Figure 1. The logical framework for Papuan refugees in the post-repatriation era

Analysis

a. Stories from repatriants in Keerom Regency

Keerom is one of the Papuan regencies that are adjacent to PNG (see figure 2), which allows people to move between the two nations more easily. As a result of this geographical situation, Keerom was chosen to be the site of the repatriation, and the local government decided to settle the refugees in Kwimi village. According to the FGD, the government initially located 18 heads of households together in Kwimi village in 2009; unfortunately, 3 families later decided to return to PNG. The result was that only 15 heads of repatriated families remained in Kwimi since 2010, consisting of approximately 45 people with children and their parents. The repatriants settling in Kwimi Village previously lived on Manus Island, PNG. This island served many purposes, one of which was to avoid a diplomatic confrontation with neighbouring Indonesia by alienating some Papuan refugees there.²⁴ The reason the Papuan refugees returned to Indonesia in 2009 was due to the well-established communication between the Indonesian and PNG governments. This was also documented during the FGD in Kwimi village that the Indonesian government informed the repatriants that it would ensure their security and life for the first five years, which encouraged them to return.²⁵

In the group discussion, it was also noted that the repatriation process of Papuan refugees from Manus Island (PNG) to Indonesia was being assisted by both UNHCR and Indonesian authorities. Upon their arrival in the Indonesian province of Papua, the local government then settled the repatriants in Kwimi Village. During the initial period of repatriation, Keerom Regent Celsius Watai was very cooperative and friendly. He provided excellent service to repatriates, including enabling their children to attend school and accessing health care to improve their quality of life. Apart from the promise of five years' support from the government, FGD participants also expressed that their desire to return to Papua reflected their love for the country – as mentioned by one participant “our return to Papua was motivated by a longing for our homeland, our relatives, and most importantly, to give our children an opportunity to get to know the land of their ancestors” (Anonymous, 2021).

Unfortunately, the government's support for a five-year term did not work as expected. The local government attempted to provide some necessities, yet incapable of offering other requirements. For instance, although the government constructed houses for repatriants in the Kwimi village, the cost of maintenance was later a problem for the repatriants. Over time, another issue also arose regarding the status of land occupied by repatriants.²⁶ Based on the FGD, repatriants' settlements were located on customary land. In some parts of Papua, customary land is often owned by a clan or ethnic group, and anyone wishing to settle in that area must deal with the clan or ethnic leader to liberate or pay for the land. It is quite common for people in Papua to have problems if they settle on customary land without paying for it properly. It was also experienced by repatriants in Kwimi, where the government has not yet resolved the issue of land ownership, nor had the government received approval from the landowner to purchase the land.

Despite returning to Kwimi village for thirteen years, the government's promises to the repatriants were still far from their expectations. Indeed, most repatriants expressed profound disappointment over the government's commitment to assure their living conditions for a five-year period during the FGD, as stated by one participant:

“As a condition of returning to our homeland (Papua province), the Indonesian government at the time promised to provide us with assistance in the areas of education, food, and clothing, with the aim of enabling us to become independent after five years of adaptation. However, this promise was never fulfilled. Therefore, we, the repatriants living in Kwimi village, expressed

²⁴ Stefan Armbruster, “Almost Half-a-Century after Australia Set up Its First Refugee Processing Centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, Its West Papuan Residents Have Been Offered PNG Citizenship.,” SBS News, 2017, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/fifty-years-in-the-making-refugees-in-australia-s-first-manus-camp-offered-png-citizenship>.

²⁵ FGD Keerom, 2021.

²⁶ FGD Keerom, 2021.

our disappointment and would consider returning to PNG. Our reasons include the consideration over our well-being which was not significantly improved, our children dropped out of school due to financial constraints, and we were unable to cross the PNG border freely to reach our families and children on Manus island, since our red card (*a Traditional Border Card*) was only valid in Vanimo. In addition to this, some of us also encountered difficulties in obtaining an Indonesian identity card (Anonymous, 2021)”.

Moreover, the status of their settlement in Kwimi Village remained unclear even though they identified themselves as Keerom natives. Before fleeing to PNG in the 1960s, the repatriants owned land in Keerom; yet after returning from PNG, it turned out that their land had been transferred to another family or owned by someone else. The repatriants in Kwimi had raised complaints against the government, however, there has been no response from the local government regarding their settlements yet. Their houses also started to tear down due to three heads of families being put together. This condition continued to occur because the government had offered no land and funds to build a new place so far. These disappointments had occasionally made repatriants think about returning to PNG. In addition to this, the participants of the FGD in Kwimi village also noted the rising cost of education and their incapability to fund children’s schools. They mentioned that elementary schools were easily accessible since they were located in the respective settlements of the repatriates, however, junior and high schools were difficult to access since they were located outside the settlements, resulting in high transportation costs. On top of that, they also have difficulty paying for the education of their children as they are reliant solely on farming for a living

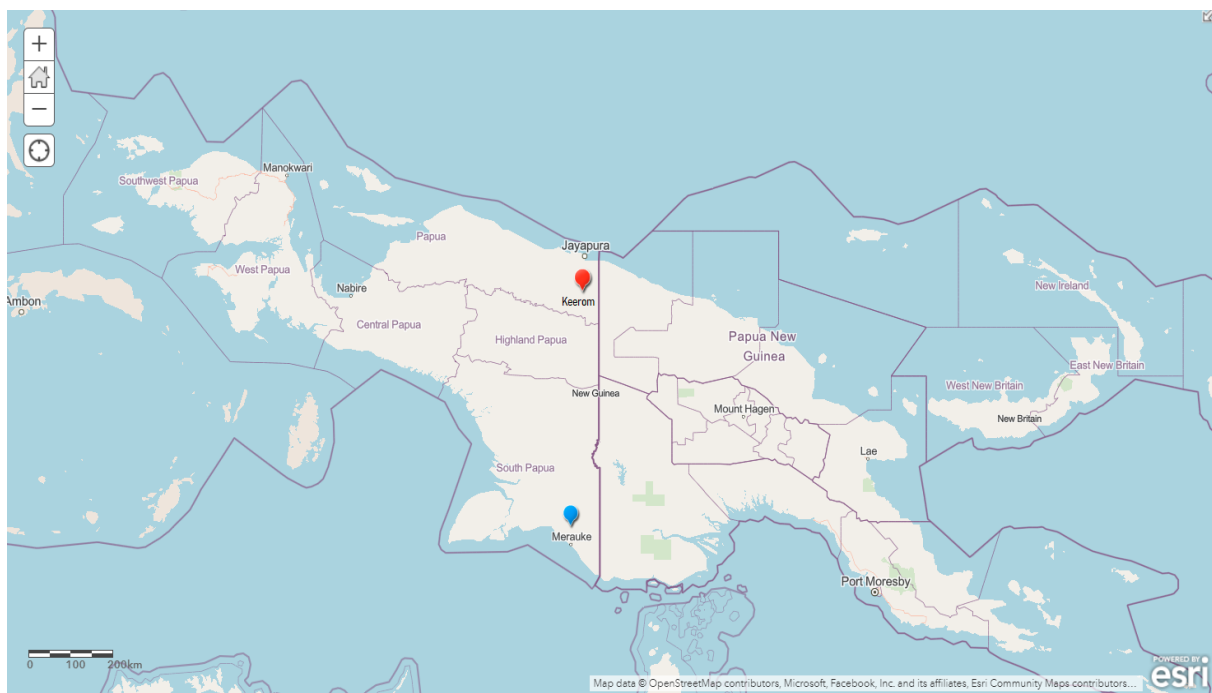


Figure 2. The Map of Indonesia-PNG border with a focus on Keerom and Merauke regencies. Notes: Keerom is shown in red markers, while the markers for Merauke is blue.

Source: drafted by the authors using ArcGIS (2023)

b. Stories from repatriants in Merauke Regency

The proximity of Merauke Regency to PNG also facilitates the repatriation process and the settlement of the repatriants (see figure 2). Merauke’s repatriation process was voluntary and

conducted in two phases, involving the governments of Indonesia and PNG, as well as the local government. The first phase of repatriation was carried out in 2002 and continued with the second phase in 2005 and 2009.²⁷ When the authors visited the repatriants in Nasem village, one of the repatriants told a story where his parents took him along with his relatives and other Papuans to escape to PNG due to political matters.

“... It was between 1962 and 1963 when Indonesia and the Netherlands fought in Irian Barat (Papua), driving thousands of people to flee to Papua New Guinea. As a family, we walked along the coastal route in order to reach PNG. We lived in the border area until 1965, then moved to Port Moresby in 1964, and eventually settled in Samarai in 1965” (Anonymous, 2021).

Moreover, the FGD noted that the government facilitated the return of 14 heads of families to Merauke in 2002. In the following year, the Regent of Merauke John Gluba Gebze provided funds for the repatriation of approximately 243 refugees. Some repatriants were willing to return to Indonesia during that time period, while others were afraid of returning due to their belief that they would be killed if they returned. In spite of this, the majority of them expressed a willingness to return to Merauke. Upon their arrival in Merauke, the repatriants lived in a temporary shelter called ‘transito’, and shortly thereafter, they were relocated to several villages, including the village of Nasem. As of now, there are 40 households in Nasem village, consisting of approximately 200 people, including their children and parents.²⁸ It was also mentioned by one participant during the FGD that “the majority of repatriants, approximately 90%, were indigenous Papuans, and only a small number had wives or husbands who were PNG citizens” (Anonymous, 2021).

The FGD recorded that the local government provided repatriants with housing, food, clothing, and *Bantuan Langsung Tunai* (BLT- Direct Cash Transfers). In the initial stages of the repatriation, the local government offered only five units of accommodation to repatriants who returned from PNG. However, over time, the number of units increased as more families came from PNG to Merauke. The government also built houses for repatriants returning during the second phase, located in Tomer and Bati village. Nevertheless, the local government was later unable to assist the repatriants due to a lack of funding. In parallel with this repatriation program, the central government also created a transmigration program in Merauke, through which repatriants were placed in three villages: Samkai, Nasem, and Tomer. They were also provided with tools for fishing and gardening, as well as education for their children by the government. In the FGD, one participant from the government well documented this situation:

“The repatriation process was indeed conducted in conjunction with the transmigration program of the central government. As a result, when the repatriants first arrived, they stayed in transit centers (transito) provided by the local government. A monthly allowance was provided to the repatriates in the form of food, clothing, and pocket money. On top of that, the government also provided them with a house, tools for farming and gardening, as well as direct education in the district where they settled. Sadly, over time, some repatriants sold their houses, leaving them homeless” (Anonymous, 2021).

The repatriants also noticed the involvement of the non-governmental organizations in the repatriation process between 2001 and 2002. They include the Secretariat of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of

²⁷ FGD Merauke, 2021.

²⁸ FGD Merauke, 2021.

Creation (SKPKC) and the Church in Merauke. These two actors came into play because the government found it difficult to conduct further repatriation, and for some considerations, repatriation remained a sensitive issue. The Bishop of Merauke even issued an open letter in 2001 to the PNG Government not to impose the Papuan refugees on getting out from PNG without the proper process. The communication was also established with the Indonesian Ambassador in PNG between 2005 and 2010 to facilitate repatriation but experienced difficulties in coordination because it involved various agencies in the repatriation program.²⁹

The Bishop of Merauke (Mgr. Petrus Canisius Mandagi, M.S.C.) and two other Bishops in PNG (not named in the FGD) urged the two governments to find a solution to the repatriation issue. As a result, the church provided financial assistance for the repatriation process from PNG to Merauke under the pretext that its action was a humanitarian mission. The church, however, later received a bad reputation as a supporter of the Free Papua Movement (OPM). During the repatriation process, the church served as an observer and organized the process in Port Moresby and Vanimo.³⁰

c. The four underlying principles of repatriation

Having observed and conducted FGDs with community and government in Keerom and Merauke regencies, this article proposes four principles underlying the repatriation process. First, there is the security principle, which provides a sense of convenience to repatriants when they are returning to Indonesia. It is the responsibility of the country to ensure this security. Providing greater security is vital because security concerns are the primary reason for repatriants to leave Papua region in the past, which explains why security should be taken into account. Indeed, if traced back, Papuan repatriants escaped to PNG due to fear and anxiety about their lives during the political upheaval in Papua in the 1960s. Therefore, the central government should create a safe political atmosphere for all communities in Papua, including the repatriants. As recorded in the FGD in Merauke, some Papuan refugees still settled in PNG because they did not want to put themselves in danger if they returned to Indonesia. A sense of security in this context refers not only to feeling safe, but also to feeling comfortable living in Indonesia. A government representative raised this issue in the FGD Merauke:

“Mentoring was not conducted in accordance with the initial commitment. As an example, preparing for employment or residence. In the end, those who were not equipped with the necessary skills will be unable to compete once they return home. Those who lack job skills contributed to the increase in unemployment as well. This was one of the reasons why some Papuan refugees preferred to live in PNG rather than return home to Indonesia” (Anonymous, 2021).

The FGD in Keerom also indicated that repatriants did not only expect security from the state, but they also expected security from their brothers and sisters in the area, specifically on the land where they settled, as one representative of the government stated “The majority of Keerom’s residents welcomed the repatriants. In essence, the problem arose from the owners of the customary lands occupied by the repatriants. This issue must therefore be addressed by the local government” (Anonymous, 2021).

Second is the principle of protection. It is also crucial to apply this principle once the repatriants have returned home. This principle ensures that repatriants can enjoy their fundamental rights without discrimination. Upon returning to Indonesia (Keerom and Merauke), for example,

²⁹ FGD Merauke, 2021.

³⁰ FGD Merauke, 2021.

repatriated children were allowed to attend school, which made the parents happy. The parents even felt Indonesia's education system was better than in PNG. According to repatriants in Keerom, if their child did not graduate from school or failed a grade in PNG, they would automatically not continue to the next level, nor would the pupils take remedial classes. That situation was different in Indonesia, by which the education system still offered opportunities for children who did not pass exams or failed grades to fix it. Repatriants in Kwimi and Nasem villages can also administer their residential identity cards (KTP) and family identity Cards (KK), but some still encounter difficulties in doing so. Aside from this, the existence of the repatriants must also be considered. For example, although the repatriants in Kwimi identified themselves as Keerom natives and were welcomed by other Keerom natives in the village, problems gradually developed as time went on, particularly regarding the status of the land they occupied. In the case of this phenomenon, it is the responsibility of the state and local governments to protect repatriants in their chosen areas. The situation in Keerom is slightly different from the repatriants in Merauke, where the FGD recorded no issues in regard to land matters.

Third is the principle of mentoring. This principle is intended to prepare Papuan refugees from PNG to adapt to new life in Indonesia. As stated by the representative from the Merauke Regency Border Agency that:

“...as soon as they (repatriants) arrived at Nasem, they complained about the house. As a matter of fact, the materials used in the house construction were not strong enough or appropriate because they were constructed so quickly. This was the problem. The weather and climate conditions in coastal areas could cause abrasion, resulting in half-death for many repatriants. The area in which they lived was once homogeneous, but is now heterogeneous. For these reasons, they required assistance, including mentoring” (Anonymous, 2021).

In this regard, mentoring not only prepared repatriants with specific skills like becoming drivers and tailors, but also helped them psychologically to adapt to their new environment (mental rehabilitation). On top of that, mentoring is essential since repatriants, particularly those born in PNG, have different mindsets and lifestyles, thus providing them with mentoring will assist them in better integrating into Indonesian society. In Merauke, the mentoring process did not run optimally, which led some repatriants later to become collectors of bottles, and others became garbage collectors using carts. In Keerom, even though mentoring worked well at the beginning of the repatriation program, it stopped when the administration of the Regent of Keerom, Celsius Watae, ended in 2018. In addition to this, the repatriants also expected the government to conduct frequent counseling regarding economic independence as agreed at the start of the repatriation program. The mentoring process for repatriants should continue until they have achieved a satisfactory level of reintegration or independence.

Four is the principle of empowerment. This principle aims to enhance the skills and knowledge of repatriants, thereby having a bargaining position in society. However, the results of FGD in Kwimi and Nasem villages showed that empowering the repatriants remained very low. If examined carefully, some repatriants had the ability and skills to work while on Manus Island PNG as a shopkeeper, policeman, store manager, and other jobs. It means they already have skills and only needs a bit of training. Their skills are certainly strengths, and local governments should have facilitated them to find suitable jobs. Yet, the fact shows that most repatriants in Kwimi village still rely on gardening around their settlements. Likewise, empowering the repatriants did not run optimally in Nasem village. The FGD noted that although repatriants had been given knitting and similar training, it did not run regularly. Consequently, repatriants struggled to improve their quality of life. Repatriants should have been equipped with several entrepreneurial skills to become agents of change in creating jobs. Most of the repatriants in Nasem village only count on fishing and gardening, similar to local residents. Thus, it

is crucial to implement a large-scale empowerment program in the future so that repatriates will be able to have a variety of livelihoods, which will improve their quality of life. It is also possible to empower them by improving their Indonesian language since they have lived in PNG for many years and some of them were even born in PNG.

d. SWOT Analysis: Papuan Refugees in the Post-Repatriation Era

There are several factors that influence the position and strength of the repatriation program implemented by the Indonesian government for the Papuan refugees located in Papua New Guinea: 1) Cooperation. The element of cooperation is vital considering that a repatriation process is a form of collaboration involving two or more countries, and in this context, they are Indonesia and PNG. This collaboration means that if one government refuses to be involved in the repatriation process, another actor may find it difficult to do so. 2) Participating actors. As a matter of fact, in the repatriation process from PNG to Indonesia (Keerom and Merauke), not only did state actors play a significant role, but non-state actors were also involved, including the SKPKC and the Church in Merauke, as well as UNHCR in the process of repatriation to Keerom. 3) Socio-cultural. In this regard, the repatriants are indigenous Papuans and returned to their respective villages; thus, the assimilation process is not an obstacle. 4) Work experience. Some repatriants had skills and working experience in PNG, particularly those who previously lived on Manus Island. These skills are strengths for repatriants when looking for decent jobs back home.

Despite appreciating the repatriation program for Papuan refugees, it is also crucial to evaluate its weaknesses in delivering a better program in the future. The greatest and most fundamental challenge is that no national policy regulates the handling of repatriation in Indonesia. A similar thing also occurred at the provincial and local governments level by which no regulations for treating repatriants. This circumstance then led to the weak budget allocated to address the issue. The second weakness is that the government has not fulfilled its promise to provide security protection and life guarantees for the first five years until repatriants can be independent. This issue is recorded in both stories in the Nasem village of Merauke and Kwimi village of Keerom. The third weakness is the lack of mentoring and empowerment processes, making most repatriants only work as farmers and fishers. The local government should help and provide access for repatriants to get relevant jobs with their skills, given that some already have working experience in PNG.

Overall, it is fair to say that the repatriants in Merauke and Keerom were treated well by the government during the initial settlement process, but the treatment was not sustained over time, creating challenges for them to integrate into society. In this sense, their stories could have an impact on the following repatriated candidates who still remain in PNG. The most important thing is that most repatriants have seen first-hand the current condition of Papua is now different from the situations back in the 1960s, which were full of conflict. To put it differently, Indonesia can guarantee the security aspect for the safety of repatriants when they come back. The stories recorded in the FGD with repatriants in Merauke and Keerom also indicated that they were given access to education, population administration service, housing, traditional work, and others, even though that was still far from their expectation. In response to this, one government representative from the FGD contends that: “the government did not turn a blind eye, and would continue to engage with related agencies to provide assistance to repatriants for all aspects of life, including education and livelihoods” (Anonymous, 2021). These conditions certainly provide the government with an opportunity to persuade other refugees in PNG to return to Papua. Additionally, it should be noted that the Papua Province has special autonomy status, enabling future opportunities to allocate funds for improving the economic well-being of repatriants.

The threats encountered by repatriants when returning to Indonesia is also an important matter to be discussed. A case in point is the situation experienced by repatriants in Nasem village over land ownership. This conflict occurs because land ownership has changed. Repatriants owned some land before fleeing to PNG, yet after returning to their respective villages, their land was transferred to other families or sold. Meanwhile, in the case of Keerom, the land provided by the government has not yet fully belonged to the repatriants, so it somehow creates friction between repatriants and the customary landowner. A further problem is that when the repatriants arrive in Papua, they return to PNG for a variety of reasons, such as the living conditions not meeting their expectations, the difficulty of finding employment or funding their children's education. This has occurred in the case of Keerom. The central and local governments should use this experience as a lesson learned and provide comfort and better treatment for repatriants, so that returning to PNG will not happen again in the future. Lastly, the change of leadership also threatens consistent treatment for repatriants. This was witnessed in Kwimi village of Keerom when the Regent, Mr Watai, was no longer in power, decreasing the treatment of repatriants. Hence, the government should enact local regulations related to repatriation, and every leader must commit to treating repatriants no matter who is in charge.

Conclusion

This article has examined how Papuan refugees from PNG survive in the post-repatriation era, particularly in Kwimi village of Keerom and Nasem village of Merauke. These two regions have presented the challenges and opportunities faced by repatriants in Papua's northern and southern borders. In general, repatriants in Kwimi and Nasem appreciated the government's actions to facilitate their repatriation. However, continuing the government's task to empower and ensure their security for a five-year term until they have accomplished a satisfactory level of reintegration or become independent has not been entirely conducted. Consequently, the repatriants still struggle to find jobs, although some already have working experience. Most repatriants finally ended up being farmers and fishers. The land status of their settlements also becomes problems day by day, making them worried about their existence. Of course, repatriants expect a better life in their homeland than in PNG. In the first five years, the lack of government intervention has also implicated the weak implementation of four principles related to repatriation (security, protection, mentoring, and empowerment).

In the case studies of repatriants in Merauke and Keerom, this article identifies several challenges which can be lessons learned and recommendations for central and local governments to foster repatriation programs in the future. First is the need for a national policy that synergizes with regional policies related to handling repatriants. The governments can do so by revising the Special Autonomy Law for Papua, which many believed was the best solution for the Papuan conflict. In this sense, repatriants were victims of the Papuan conflict situation in the 1960s, and therefore, they have the right to be part of those enjoying Papua's special autonomy. This change will undoubtedly offer a distinct impression and motivate other Papuan refugees in PNG to return to Papua. Also, the central and local governments should express their commitment to follow-up treating repatriants in the post-repatriation era. The government should not assume that their job is only to get them from PNG to Indonesia, and then the repatriants must find a way to survive. The government should make a clear program plan in the initial five years after repatriation and implicitly cover four basic principles in the pattern of repatriation. Last but not least, the government of Indonesia and PNG should consider the repatriation issue in the best interest of the country. In that way, the treatment for repatriants would be better than ever before.

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