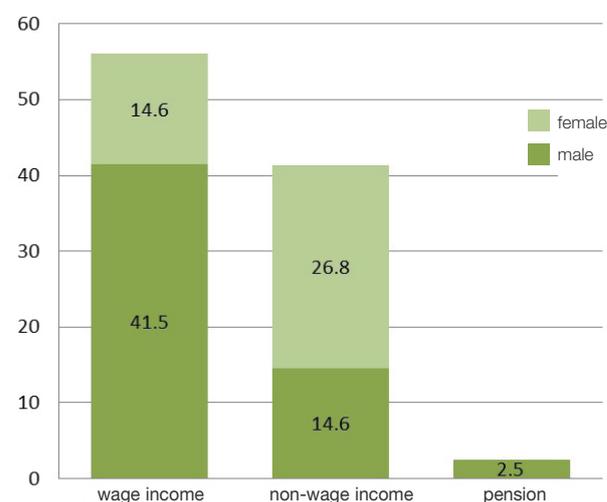


This *In Brief* presents some preliminary findings of my doctoral research examining the political-economy context of livelihoods in urban informal settlements in Papua New Guinea (PNG). It highlights the gendered dimensions of economic engagement, household livelihood choices, and the importance of situating these issues within economic processes occurring in the urban context. My fieldwork was carried out over a six-month period in 2013 in the ATS settlement (an acronym that derives from the settlement's location near the PNG Defence Force Air Transport Squadron compound) in Port Moresby, the National Capital District (NCD), which is located roughly two kilometres ENE of Jacksons airport. It included: interviews with representatives of the NCD, development agencies, non-government organisations, and local institutions; in-depth interviews with key informants; and a survey of 32 households of one migrant group within the settlement. This sample of households is around 30 per cent of the households I identified as part of this group of migrants, and comprises a robust representation of the group. Data collected on 230 individuals residing in these households, selected on the basis of complete information and qualitative data, form the basis of this and others in a series of *In Briefs*.

The fieldwork was undertaken in the urban context of burgeoning informal settlements, increasing population, and developments in property markets that render formal housing prohibitively expensive for many residents. Although the estimated population of the NCD of 364,125 represents 5 per cent of PNG's population and is growing at 3.3 per cent per annum (NSO 2011), anecdotally, some observers estimate that it is closer to 1 million. Nearly half of NCD's population live in informal settlements (Galgal 2011; Jones 2011).

In the NCD, although women are increasingly engaged in wage employment, they continue to dominate the informal sector, which has increased in importance in terms of income (Gibson 2013). Of the 230 people surveyed,

Figure 1: Types of income-earning activity by gender (%; n=82)



82 had an income. Of these, 2.5 per cent and 56.1 per cent of people were on pensions and waged employment respectively, most of whom were men (Figure 1). Most people on waged employment were engaged in the low-skill services industry (Figure 2) and over 90 per cent of these were employed by the private sector.

Out of the 82 economically engaged residents, 41.4 per cent were engaged in the informal sector, most of whom were women who operated small residential markets near their homes (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Types of wage employment by gender (%; n=46)

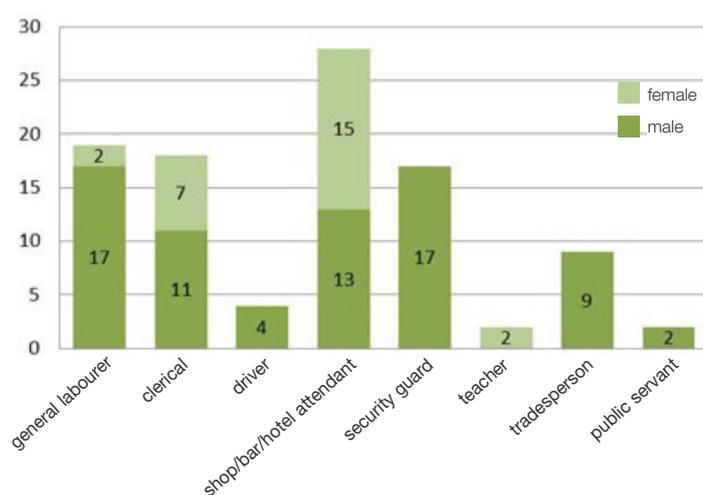
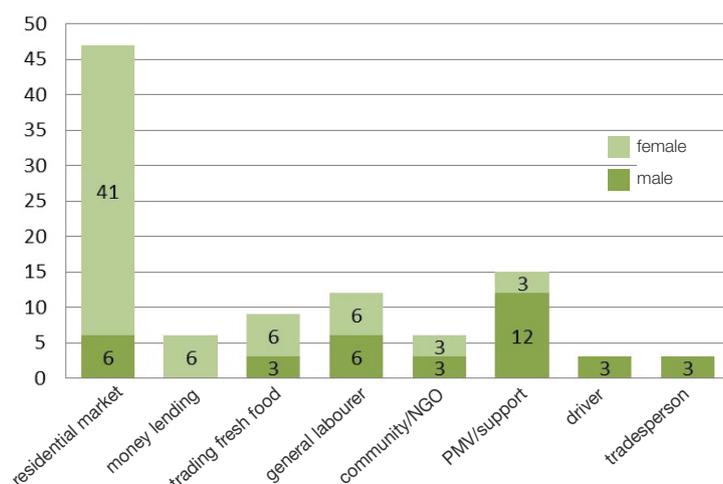


Figure 3: Types of informal-sector activity by gender (%; n=34)



Residential market stalls varied in size and array of items sold, including betel nut, cigarette, biscuits, drinks, rice, candles, soap, laundry detergent, noodles, and phone credits. Galgal (2011) and Barber (2003) found similar patterns in other settlements in the NCD.

Women operating residential markets played an important social role in the community. They flexibly balanced income-earning with other household and community engagements, such as: childcare; collecting firewood in the nearby hills; and queuing for water at the communal taps. Residential markets were important sites for social interactions and sharing of information. People often shared stalls or supported each other by minding a stall while the vendor attended to other matters. Umezaki and Ohtsuka (2003) also note this mutual support among women.

Security factors in NCD and low incomes combined to create rather insular economic conditions: settlements' economies were connected to the city economy through wage earners but were distinctly localised. The levels of trade at residential market stalls were low, relied on cash circulating within the settlement, and fluctuated with the pay cycles of wage earners, who were the key source of cash entering the settlement. This link between wage and informal local incomes was important for managing household incomes. Wage and market income complemented each other. Wage earners bought or

borrowed from residential markets, and offset these borrowings or replenished stocks during pay weeks. When the household faced shortages of cash or food, its first point of access was the residential market. Residential markets broke down when stocks depleted as a result of dishonoured repayment commitments by wage earners.

Policy insights emerging from these findings for programs aimed at urban economic engagement include the need to: (i) recognise the gendered dimensions of local economies; (ii) engage with women where they are already economically active and acknowledge their important social roles; (iii) recognise that settlement economies operate under local

conditions that are connected to broader city political economy developments, such as the availability of wage employment; and (iv) seek innovative partnerships with the private sector where it dominates wage employment so that waged labour contributions to local settlement economies can be enhanced.

Author Notes

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