

Violence and insecurity in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea

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Executive summary

This report presents the results of a study conducted in the Hela region of the Southern Highlands Province (SHP) of Papua New Guinea (PNG) over a 16-month period (October 2007 – March 2009). The study had the broad aim of exploring perceptions of insecurity, looking at the scale, nature, triggers and impacts of interpersonal and tribal violence. The main purpose of the study was to generate information for advocacy and to inform the policies and programme development of Oxfam and its local partner in the region, Hela Community Care (HCC), formally known as Community Based Health Care (CBHC).

Two types of methodology were used: participatory methods at the community level and a survey with individual victims of violence. The community level research was conducted at eight study sites located in the districts of Tari-Pori, Komo Magarima and Koroba Kopiago. Sites included communities that were experiencing tribal violence at the time of study, relatively peaceful areas and communities which had been part of CBHC's community health and agricultural programme. Participatory action research tools were used together with interviews and focus-group discussions with community members, government and other stakeholders such as local mediators and NGOs. An interpersonal violence survey was conducted in partnership with Tari Hospital to collect quantitative data pertaining to types and causes of intentionally inflicted injuries amongst men and women. Unlike similar studies using analysis of hospital records, victims of violence were interviewed directly. This allowed the researchers to understand the nature of the violence in terms of the relationship between the person injured and the perpetrator(s), and enabled a detailed investigation of the triggers of violence. The criteria for interviewee selection and definitions of types and triggers of violence could be kept constant throughout the study, which cannot be guaranteed where hospital records are used. However, the time period covered was necessarily much shorter than studies using hospital records. During the 16-month research period, hospital data were collected on a continuous basis and the participatory data were collected opportunistically according to availability of the communities concerned.

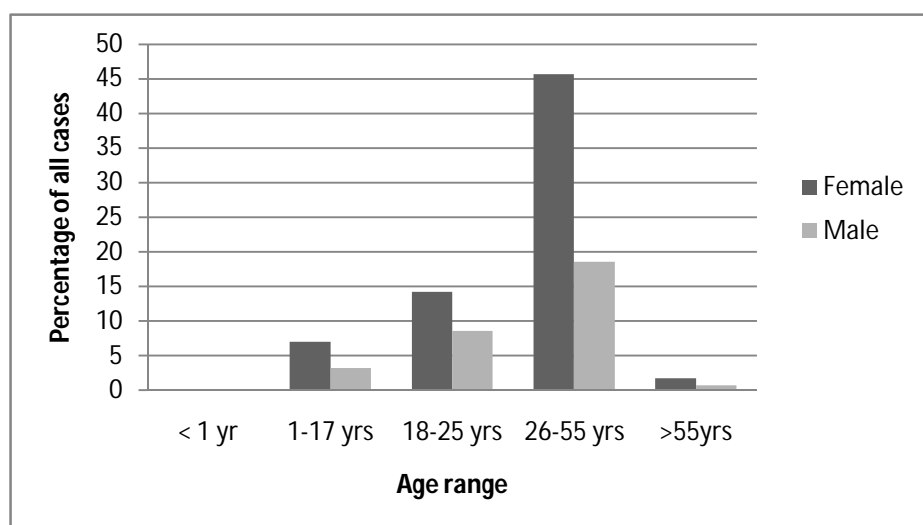
Recent economic growth in PNG has not translated into an increase in living standards for ordinary Papua New Guineans. Unequal wealth distribution, a lack of economic opportunities and poor service delivery to the rural majority has been accompanied by an increase in criminal activities and corrupt practices, although causal relationships between these factors are hard to establish. A resource rich region, the SHP has one of the highest provincial revenues in the country, but per capita Provincial revenue is lower than the national average. SHP is one of the worst performing provinces in the country in terms of socio-economic indicators. Conflict and lawlessness have contributed substantially to this lack of progress, accompanied by corruption in political affairs at the provincial and district levels.

The last two elections have been failures with widespread irregularities and a state of emergency was declared in 2006. A deterioration of infrastructure and service delivery has contributed to a decline in health and education levels since the 1980s. Tribal fighting and violence in general has increased since the departure of the colonial administration, the development of large natural resource extractive industries nearby (such as the Porgera mine in Enga Province), and a greater use of guns after the 1990s. The instability experienced in the region has led to a growing demand for guns for security reasons as well as political gain (e.g. in the use of intimidation to influence voting during elections). Police, the courts and local leaders have not been able to contain the spread of conflict.

The Huli people living in the three study districts speak a common language. Claims to land extend back over eight-generations of both the maternal and paternal side of each family; an individual may thus acquire land in several localities, through either or both parents. The Huli are still very much bound by custom but with increasing exposure and development in the area, the modern economy and external influences are quickening the pace of change. Although the apparent triggers and the nature of conflict may be changing, many of the patterns of violence observed today are rooted in cultural norms and traditions. Hela society, like others in PNG, is fiercely egalitarian. To those who consider themselves wronged, and their kin or supporters, revenge killings are a legitimate form of redress; payback violence aims to maintain the balance of deaths and is essential to the equivalence ethic which is so central to their culture. While everyone is affected by conflicts, women in particular suffer from fear and insecurity that pervades all aspects of their lives. This insecurity arises both from group warfare and from violence in the home. The high prevalence of violence against women can also be seen in the context of traditional beliefs, which ascribe to them the power to pollute or poison men. Women may also be mistrusted due to their divided allegiance between their own kin groups and those of their husbands.

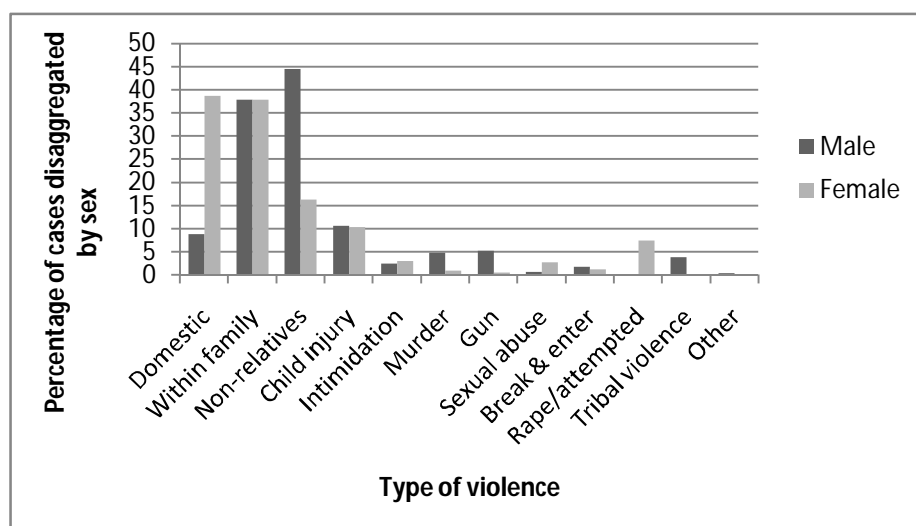
The findings from this study indicate a high rate and tolerance of violence in Tari and the wider Hela region. In the hospital survey, two to three cases presented daily and a total of 908 cases were covered. Many others do not seek care, as high feelings of insecurity lead to reduced mobility: women have restrictions placed upon them by husbands and brothers and also fear rape or sexual abuse, whilst men fear enemy attack outside their clan lands. Females made up two-thirds of all cases that presented to the hospital (see Graph (i)) and in most cases their perpetrators were known to them. Conversely three-quarters of all perpetrators were males.

Graph (i) Proportion of people presenting by age and sex for all deliberate injuries



Those presenting at Tari hospital experienced varied forms of violence which differed according to their sex and age (Graph (ii)). In the majority of cases (77 per cent), violence experienced by females was within their own home or family, whereas males were more involved in violence outside of family relations (47 per cent). More than one-third of injuries to females involved a husband attacking his wife.

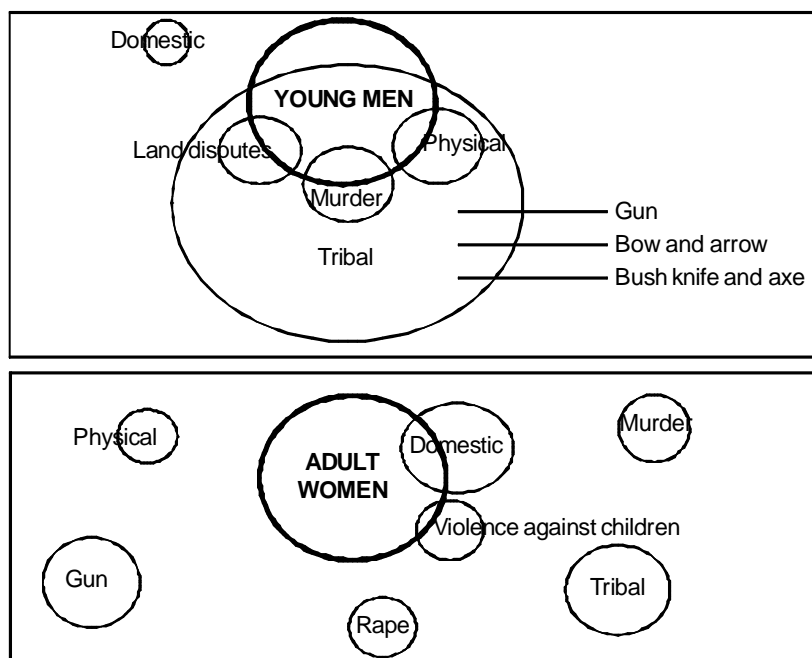
Graph (ii) Type of violence experienced according to sex¹



¹ 'Domestic violence' is defined as being between spouses or co-wives; 'family violence' is between other relatives up to the second generation (e.g. second cousins); 'physical violence' occurs between more distant relatives or non-relatives; 'Child injury' refers to injuries to minors below 18 years of age. Categories are not mutually exclusive and so multiple types of violence may be assigned to each case. Percentages are calculated within gender groups, so data shows the proportion of male and female victims respectively affected by each type of violence.

Very few cases of tribal violence (less than two per cent of cases) presented to health services, mainly due to feelings of insecurity associated with getting to the hospital, but also because of the policy of charging a 'fighting fee' of K50 from victims of violence and trauma. However, community research showed that this type of violence was commonly mentioned even in communities which were not experiencing conflict at the time of the study (see Figure (i)). A large number of those participating in focus group discussions had scars from injuries inflicted during tribal fights.

Figure (i) An example of the Venn diagram used in the community research, as presented by young men and adult women from a community in Tari-Pori district. The size of the circle indicates the impact of the type of violence, whilst the distance from the group impacted on (young men or adult women in these cases) indicates the frequency.



Four out of five cases that presented to hospital involved the use of a weapon. Female perpetrators used a weapon more than males, but male victims were more likely to have been attacked with a weapon than females. A machete was the most common type of weapon used (41 per cent); guns were used in only six per cent of cases. Sticks and stones were also commonly used. 95 per cent of the 20 cases where the victim died involved the use of a weapon.

There were multiple triggers for any episode of violence. For the sample as a whole, the most common trigger mentioned was payback violence or violence as an act of retribution, followed by money and theft. In the case of female victims, common triggers related to polygamy, spouse control and infidelity. Community research showed that men exerted high levels of control over their sisters, daughters and

nieces. "Disobedience" on the part of female kin justified a violent rebuke as their "bad" behaviour reflected poorly on the strength and status of the men and could impact on the females' bride wealth potential. Such violence was responsible for ten per cent of cases where females experienced violence within the family. Nine of the 14 cases of sorcery-related violence involved female victims. Vulnerable women who have no male kin to support or defend them tend to fall victim to accusations of sorcery, and where violence ensued, this was often condoned by the community.

The most common triggers of violence towards male victims were alcohol, theft, money problems and land disputes. The community-level research illustrated links between these factors and underlying problems: often mentioned were growing dependence on the cash economy, poor service provision, lack of economic opportunity and increased pressure on land, all of which lead to inequality and jealousy. Today, households must pay for both health care and education, costs which many cannot afford, while bride price and compensation costs are spiralling out of control, fuelling other social ills such as violence against women, and HIV and AIDS. The community level research suggested that HIV and AIDS were of concern to married women and young people. Many young men could not afford the increasing costs of bride price and so relied on opportunistic sex, whilst young women's fear of HIV was closely associated with their fear of rape. Ten per cent of females presenting to the hospital reported rape or sexual abuse; of these 70 per cent concerned victims under 18 years of age. In over 40 per cent of these cases the perpetrator was related to the victim.

Drug abuse and alcohol consumption are also destroying community relations. A lack of parental support and guidance by the clan has driven many young men to identify more with their peers than with the wider community and to become engaged in anti-social activities, further weakening social cohesion.

Land, women and pigs were the main triggers of tribal violence and are closely linked to the value system of the Huli people. Minor disputes may evolve into full-scale tribal warfare if not properly mediated. The nature of tribal warfare has changed with the introduction of guns leading to a much higher number of deaths and injuries, and greater demands for compensation with few economic means to manage these expectations. These unrealistic compensation demands fuel further conflict when they are not met.

While compensation payments were a traditional method of solving disputes, the payment of compensation (especially since the introduction of the cash economy) does not always solve problems. Underlying issues left unresolved have the potential to rekindle the conflict in future. What is not addressed today is carried forward to the next generation of children through the telling of *tumbuna stories* (ancestral stories) in the *haus man* (men's house). This encourages inter-generational cycles of payback and perpetuates the perception that violence is an acceptable behaviour, and compensation an acceptable form of redress. Children are often

raised in a violent environment both in the home and the wider community, where the use of violence is seen as a legitimate means of expressing grievances.

Tribal violence brings massive destruction to people's lives and affects both their mental health and physical wellbeing. Displacement exacerbates other problems such as lack of education, loss of land and livelihood opportunities, increasing still further the numbers of lawless and idle young people in communities. It undermines development efforts and induces a state of dependency on others, as whole families are forced to move away to live with kin elsewhere.

The greater use of firearms (both home-made and factory-produced) in conflict has changed the power dynamics and leadership in communities and has weakened state institutions, including the police and courts, which are unable to effectively deal with security and conflict prevention. A common security concern mentioned in the community research was the ineffective law and justice sector, the erosion of leadership structures due to increasing levels of corruption, and the growing distrust of local leadership, police, and the courts. The current police service and justice system in Hela is overstretched and under-resourced, has low public confidence and police officers may suffer from a low self-esteem. In the absence of law and order, people have resorted to buying arms to safeguard their lives and property.

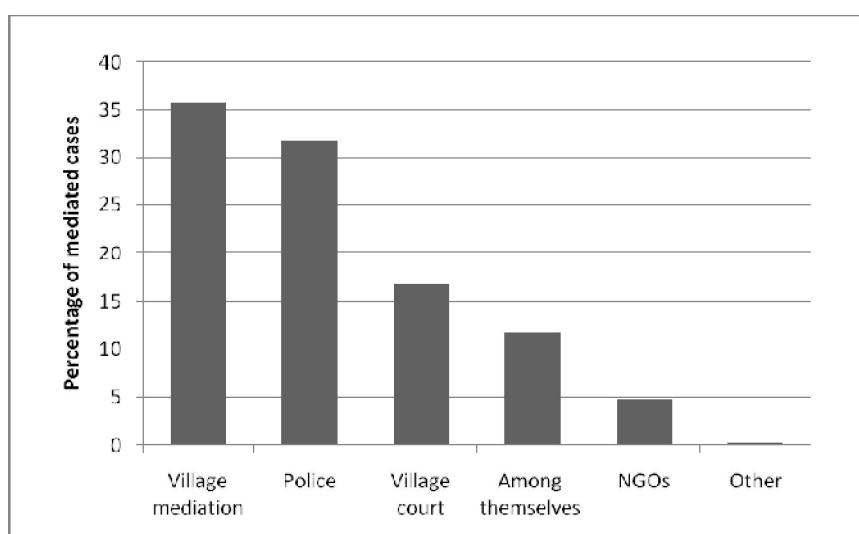
Formal systems of conflict mediation or dispute resolution are long, tedious and expensive. As a result, dispute resolution largely remains at the community level. In 34 per cent of the cases surveyed at Tari Hospital, steps had been taken to report, resolve or mediate the dispute by the time of interview. (Other cases may well have been addressed subsequent to the victim's recovery). In Papua New Guinea, victims of violence may take their case to the village courts, the lowest level of the formal justice system, although in Southern Highlands Province many magistrates do not receive their pay and some courts do not function. Cases concerning serious offences should be referred to higher courts such as those at the district level. Alternatively, cases may be resolved by informal mediation processes facilitated at the village level by community mediators who work on an informal basis. Some cases are not mediated by any outside parties but are resolved between the families of the parties involved.

Of the 305 cases on which some action had been taken by the time of the survey (shown in Graph (iii)), one third were subjected to village mediation, while village courts dealt with 17 per cent of cases. Only 31 per cent of these 305 cases had been reported to the police at the time of interview, corresponding to 13 per cent of the total sample. Most disputes were resolved through the payment of compensation between parties, in which case, the perpetrator does not necessarily bear the consequence of the offence (since his/her clansmen are expected to contribute), and justice is not provided directly to the victim (since it is paid to the family rather than the victim). The primary role of compensation is to re-establish harmonious

community relations and prevent further conflict from occurring. It may have little to do with justice.

Community research in peaceful communities suggested that mediation was most effective when there were collaborative efforts between government officers and village leaders. Village leaders, the local councillor, public servants in the area, like the school headmaster, school teachers, village court officials, church leaders, and women's groups all worked together to ensure that further conflict was prevented. NGOs such as Young Ambassadors for Peace, and Peace Foundation Melanesia, also play an important role and have assisted in the development of structures less formal than those of village courts to deal quickly with small disputes.

Graph (iii): Action taken by victims or their families at the time of the survey (n=305)²



The results of this Oxfam study demonstrate the strong links between security and the existence of good leadership and governance and a strong civil society promoting peaceful development. Jealousy, inequality and land issues are among the key drivers of conflict, and may be associated with all types of violence, from family violence to tribal conflict. The Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project currently under construction is likely to exacerbate tensions through an influx of both cash and people into the area. Landowners inside project development licence areas will be entitled to royalty and equity payments once gas starts flowing, while those outside will not. The availability of large amounts of cash is likely to result in increased use and abuse of alcohol, and the large imported (and mainly male) workforce needed for construction, may further disrupt social relations, posing special dangers for women. The planned new Hela Province (which will come into existence in 2012) has created high expectations about what these new

² The category 'NGOs' includes mediation actions through Peace Foundation Melanesia and Young Ambassadors for Peace. In four of the 305 cases two types of action were taken.

developments will bring for the region, while the upcoming 2012 national elections are likely to increase instability still further as the benefits at stake rise.

Large volumes of LNG-related cash are already flowing into the region, both through resettlement programmes and contracts to service providers. Payments will also accrue to local and provincial government, with the expectation that these funds will be used for service delivery. If this fails to materialise, then the potential for violence aimed directly at those associated with resource extraction will be severe. In addition, the time lags between commencement of large scale construction and actual delivery of benefits to landowners (due to begin only when gas is flowing), are poorly understood by local people, leading to intense frustration.

Key recommendations of this report include the following:

Overall the research shows that insecurity and violence pervade all aspects of daily life in Hela, undermining all types of development in the region. It is important that both government and donors acknowledge this fact when considering the financing and implementation of programmes in sectors not directly connected to that of law and justice, whether they are targeting economic development, health or education. The recommendations given below concern possible directions for Oxfam and its partners in Southern Highlands Province to be further considered and provide valuable insights for other organisations working to address the complex issues of insecurity and violence in Papua New Guinea.

Justice and mediation

- Oxfam could further explore the relationship between informal justice, village courts and district mediation structures in order to better support links between community-based peace building efforts and state institutions. Collaborative peace building efforts have been identified as the best way to achieve effective mediation to resolve issues quickly. An example can be taken from the multi-stakeholder District Peace Management Teams supported by Eastern Highlands Provincial Law and Justice Department. These teams have clear roles and responsibilities, written protocols and support from the Province for their activities. Such structures do not exist in Southern Highlands Province, so Oxfam needs to identify other (and perhaps more local) opportunities for collaboration, or lobby for replication of such structures.
- In order for such partnerships to be effective, Oxfam would need to advocate for greater budget allocations to village courts, many of which barely function in the Southern Highlands. The creation of Hela Province is an opportunity to work with the new administration to look at the reasons for low trust in the courts.

- Oxfam and its partners could advocate for a stronger role for women in the peace and justice system, in particular the instatement of at least one woman magistrate on every village court. A partner organisation needs to be found that can train village court staff on human rights and gender using well-designed and appropriate curricula.
- Minor disputes have the potential to turn violent and generate wider conflict. Thus, local mediation mechanisms which can address local problems quickly, whilst providing 'closure' to all parties, should be supported. One such strategy is to promote restorative justice, which seeks to provide restitution to victims and to restore relationships between offenders and victims, while also protecting their human rights. Such an approach would incorporate peace building values, skills, and techniques into broader governance and development work.

Policing and security

- Instead of a sporadic and expensive deployment of troops brought in to quench outbursts of violence when they arise, it would be better to increase the number of regular police on the ground. The number of police personnel in Tari at the time of the study was derisory, although staffing has since improved; there is also a need to improve police capacity in terms of office supplies, equipment and vehicles to carry out day to day operations. The Hawa Correctional Services in Tari needs to be restored for detainees and is crucial for improving law and order in the region. Oxfam could advocate to the provincial level government and resource extraction companies to support improvement of policing and correctional services.
- As we have seen, a large proportion of cases of violence involve female victims. A woman's desk at the police station and associated training for female staff when dealing with such cases would greatly improve the ability of the police to assist the victims.
- Systematic training programmes should be provided for police and other security sector actors at all levels to mainstream human rights and gender issues and to promote gender sensitive workplaces for police and village courts so that women may feel safe and seek help if they need to.

Awareness raising and attitudinal change

- Cultural norms and values in Hela society underpin the patterns of violence described in this report. Male attitudes towards women, perceptions of masculinity, the role of violence in socialising children and parent-child relationships are all important factors. Various initiatives exist in Melanesia to address some of these problems through programmes that focus on men or

whole households, promoting behaviour change through awareness raising, discussion, role play and various other tools. HELP Resources in East Sepik, for example, runs a behaviour change programme for men and boys that could be adapted to SHP.

- Behaviour change programmes should include issues around sexual and reproductive health for both men and women including hygiene, HIV and STIs, family spacing and contraception. Such issues are common triggers of domestic violence. Targetting the whole family (albeit through separate male and female courses) helps people to understand links between gender relations and control of family size. Oxfam could look at what other actors are doing in SHP to see how partnerships can be built in this important area.
- Many questions remain as to the effectiveness of programmes which try to bring about behaviour change amongst men, and there is little information to suggest which approaches might work best. The Australia National University (ANU) is conducting research to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of a number of initiatives in PNG. Collaboration with ANU could be sought in order to evaluate and feed back any findings into future programmes implemented in SHP.

Access to services

- Payment for medical reports, which are required to take cases of violence to court, should be abolished. These reports represent a major barrier for those seeking justice through the formal system. Abolition of fees for cases of violence in hospital would also greatly improve access to healthcare for victims. Oxfam and MSF have helped to abolish such fees at Tari Hospital but they remain at many establishments, including Mendi hospital. These issues require advocacy at the national level.
- Many victims of violence require post-trauma counselling. MSF provides such services through a family support unit in Tari hospital, but they are lacking in more remote areas. Victims are often discharged from hospital only to be attacked once again. At present there are no safe houses for women in Tari, or indeed in SHP in general. Access to such refuges following attacks may provide time for aggressors to cool off and for female victims to assess their options. Security issues associated with safe houses are serious, but Oxfam should assess the possibilities.
- Investment in livelihood strategies and development of the rural sector is needed in order to improve self-esteem, generate income and foster a culture of savings. An emphasis on money management could help to mitigate some of the side-effects of cash payments currently flowing into Hela Province. Such payments when spent quickly on alcohol, drugs, gambling and women,

exacerbate violence both in the home and outside it. Oxfam's partner in Simbu Province, Community Development Agency, has some experience in this area and could help to support partners in SHP.

- Improved distribution and quality of services and other tangible signs of development must be provided to ensure that people across the region feel they have all benefited from development activities. Although causal links are hard to establish, both this study and others suggest that inequitable service provision may exacerbate conflict, while provision of government services has been suggested by combatants as a way of reducing tensions. Service provision has deteriorated significantly since the 1980s, but expected revenue from the LNG project may provide an opportunity for change if some money can be channelled effectively into improving essential services. In order to advocate for better service delivery, Oxfam and its partners will require a good understanding of the implications of various mechanisms proposed in recent studies to address problems of poor service delivery. These include direct funding of facilities by Central Government and, more locally, by resource extraction companies themselves.

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