

Unit7: Subnational Politics

7.1 Introduction

Subnational politics in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is defined by a complex tug-of-war between the central government and the three tiers of subnational administration: Provinces, Districts, and Local-Level Governments (LLGs). It is observed that the current political landscape is now characterized by a "recentralization through practice," where power and funding have increasingly shifted toward District Development Authorities (DDAs) controlled by National Members of Parliament (MPs).

1. The Three-Tier Structure

While the 1995 Organic Law on Provincial and Local-level Governments established the framework for decentralization, the reality is a mix of administrative devolution and political centralism as indicated by these factors below:

- Provincial Level (22 Provinces): Governed by a Governor (who is also a National MP) and a Provincial Assembly. Provinces like New Ireland and East New Britain have frequently pushed for greater autonomy, like the status of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.
- District Level (96 Districts): Though not formally a "tier" of government in the constitution, districts have become the most powerful subnational unit since the introduction of District Development Authorities (DDAs) in 2014.
- Local-Level Government (372 LLGs): The tier closest to the people, consisting of urban and rural councils. Historically underfunded, LLGs struggle to provide basic services as funding is often siphoned or withheld at the district level.

2. "Money Politics" and the SIP Funds

Politics at the subnational level is driven largely by the control of **Service Improvement Program (SIP)** funds. This creates a system of "patronage politics" where the MP acts as a "walking bank" as explained below:

- DSIP (District SIP): Roughly K10 million annually per district, managed by the DDA. Since the MP chairs the DDA board, they have significant discretion over how this money is spent, often rewarding loyal "wantoks" (kinship groups) or specific wards that supported them during elections.
- PSIP (Provincial SIP): Managed by Governors at the provincial level.
- The Conflict: This creates a friction point between Provincial Administrators (bureaucrats) and MPs (politicians). When political interests clash with administrative processes—such as teacher appointments or infrastructure bidding—service delivery often stalls.

3. Key Political Dynamics

The government is aware of governance issues at the subnational level and tries to alleviate these issues as seen from these political dynamics.

- The "Entropic" View of Decentralization: There is a recurring cycle where the National Government grants powers to provinces, only to "recentralize" them when capacity or accountability fails.
- The Wantok System: Subnational politics is deeply personal. Appointments and resource allocation are frequently influenced by clan loyalties rather than merit-based policy. This is particularly visible in the governance of teacher appointments and the provincial education boards.
- Administrative Friction: The "1-6-6" school restructure and the implementation of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) policies are often caught in the middle of these political dynamics. National policies are frequently "filtered" or modified by provincial political leaders to suit local agendas.

4. Challenges to Governance

Feature	Reality in Subnational Politics
Accountability	Weak; many provinces and districts have years of unacquitted SIP funds.
Capacity	Severe shortages in trained personnel at the LLG and District levels.
Interference	Frequent political interference in the Teaching Service and public service appointments.
Financial Autonomy	High dependence on national "function grants," which are often lower than the legally required 6.57% of non-resource tax revenue.

Current Trend

The focus has now shifted toward "asymmetric decentralisation," where provinces with higher capacity (like Enga or New Ireland) are seeking more functional authority, while the national government uses the DDA model to maintain political control over rural development.

Discussion: Explain how the current DDA structure has impacted the ability of school administrators to implement provincial education plans?

7.2 Political Skills

For school administrators the struggle to navigate the subnational political environment in Papua New Guinea requires them to move beyond pure management and into the realm of "political craftsmanship." In a system where District Development Authorities (DDAs) and provincial boards often hold the purse strings, administrators must balance formal policy with informal influence.

The Use of political skills can be applied to navigate these dynamics effectively:

1. Social Astuteness: Mapping the Power Landscape

Social astuteness is the ability to read people and "sense" the political atmosphere. For a school leader, this means understanding the unofficial hierarchy of the province or district.

- **Identify the Power Brokers:** It isn't always the Provincial Education Manager. It might be the DDA Chief Executive Officer or a specific political staffer for the local MP.
- **The "Entropic" Awareness:** Recognize that subnational governance in PNG is often in flux. Stay alert to shifts in provincial leadership or changes in the Provincial Education Board (PEB) that might affect teacher appointments or funding flows.

2. Interpersonal Influence: Building Strategic Alignment

This skill involves a subtle style of communication that allows you to influence others without appearing forceful.

- **Aligning School Goals with Political Agendas:** If the local MP is prioritizing "Inclusive Education" or "GESI" (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) in their manifesto, frame your school's infrastructure or program needs as a way for that leader to achieve their public targets.
- **The "Neutral" Professional:** Maintain a reputation as an expert researcher and administrator. When you speak from a position of data—using Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) evidence—your requests carry more weight and are harder for political actors to dismiss as personal favors.

3. Networking Ability: Establishing "Informal" Bridges

In the PNG context, the wantok system and informal networks often bypass formal bureaucracy.

- **Horizontal and Vertical Networking:** Build strong relationships with other school administrators to form a unified front (horizontal). Simultaneously, maintain professional ties with provincial planners and managers (vertical).
- **Advocacy for the Marginalized:** Use your network to advocate for GESI policies. By building a coalition of like-minded leaders and community influencers, you create a "social shield" that makes it harder for political interference to disrupt fair appointment cycles or female leadership roles.

4. Apparent Sincerity: Managing the "Wantok" Tension

This is the ability to appear—and be—genuine, honest, and open. It is the best defence against accusations of bias or "politics."

- **Transparency in Governance:** Be highly transparent about how school funds and teacher appointments are handled. When administrators provide clear, publicly accessible evidence for their decisions, it reduces the "cracks" in the system where political interference usually takes root.
- **Ethical Anchoring:** Stick firmly to the **Teaching Service Act** and established school rules. If you must say "no" to a political request, frame the refusal not as a personal slight, but as a legal necessity to protect the school's integrity and the community's children.

Summary of Strategic Application

Political Skill	Practical Action
Social Astuteness	Identify who controls the DDA's education budget.
Interpersonal Influence	Pitch school projects as "wins" for the district's development plan.
Networking Ability	Join or lead provincial leadership forums to share research data.
Apparent Sincerity	Use clear M&E reports to justify resource allocation to the community.

Discussion: Given the "1-6-6" school restructure and the current decentralization trends, which of these four skills do you feel is most critical for protecting a school's autonomy from provincial interference?

7.3 Influence Tactics

Influence Tactics in the context of organizational leadership and school administration, are the specific behaviours or "moves" individuals use to change the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours of others. While "Political Skills" are the underlying competencies, influence tactics are the actual tools you deploy to get things done.

Researchers often categorize these into three clusters: **Soft**, **Rational**, and **Hard** tactics.

1. The "Rational" Tactics (The Logic Core)

These are the most common in professional settings and are highly effective when dealing with boards or provincial managers who value data and efficiency.

- **Rational Persuasion:** Using logical arguments, factual evidence, and research data to show that a proposal is feasible and relevant. *Example:* Presenting a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) report to the DDA to prove why a specific school upgrade is necessary.
- **Apprising:** Explaining how a request or change will benefit the target personally or help their career. *Example:* Showing a provincial officer how supporting a GESI program will improve the province's national compliance ranking.

2. The "Soft" Tactics (Relationship Building)

These rely on emotional connection and personal values. They are essential for building long-term commitment rather than just simple compliance.

- **Inspirational Appeals:** Appealing to a person's values, ideals, or aspirations to create enthusiasm. *Example:* "By fixing the teacher appointment process, we are ensuring the future of every child in West New Britain."
- **Consultation:** Inviting the other person to participate in the planning or decision-making process. People are more likely to support a plan they helped create.
- **Ingratiation:** Using praise, flattery, or friendly behavior to get the target in a good mood before making a request. (Must be perceived as sincere to work).
- **Personal Appeals:** Asking for a favor based on friendship or loyalty. In PNG, this often intersects with the *wantok* system, but it can be used professionally to bridge gaps.

3. The "Hard" Tactics (Power & Pressure)

These tactics are typically used when an administrator has formal authority or when quick compliance is needed. However, they can damage relationships if overused.

- **Coalition Tactics:** Enlisting the aid of others or using the support of a group to "gang up" on a target or persuade them. *Example:* Getting several school principals to sign a joint letter to the Provincial Education Board.

- **Legitimizing Tactics:** Establishing the authority of a request by referencing official rules, policies, or the law. *Example:* Pointing to specific clauses in the *Teaching Service Act* to block political interference in appointments.
- **Pressure:** Using demands, threats, or persistent reminders. This is generally the least effective tactic for long-term influence.

Comparison of their Effectiveness

Tactic Category	Goal	Likely Outcome
Soft Tactics	Build Enthusiasm	Commitment: The person agrees and is internally motivated.
Rational Tactics	Provide Evidence	Compliance/Commitment: The person agrees because it makes sense.
Hard Tactics	Force Action	Resistance/Compliance: The person does it because they have to, but may resent it.

School Administrators Strategic Navigation

To be effective in the political environment, school administrators will use more than just one tactic. They might start with **Consultation** (Soft) to build a plan, use **Rational Persuasion** (Rational) to present it to the board, and use **Legitimizing Tactics** (Hard) only if someone tries to break the established rules.

Discussion: Which of these tactics do you find most effective when you are trying to advocate for GESI policies or inclusive education frameworks in your professional circles?