Introduction

For Papua New Guinea (PNG) to achieve its development aspirations, effective utilisation of public expenditure is essential. However, significant weaknesses exist in its decentralised political, fiscal and administrative arrangements, which open up spaces for corruption. This paper explores the potential of technology-based corruption reporting in the midst of substantial fiscal and logistical pressures. The research was designed to be of practical assistance to those with an interest in innovative uses of technology, while also contributing to broader debates about the potential strategic use of mobile telephony in developing countries. As widespread mobile phone networks are relatively new in the Pacific region, the findings presented are the first to explore mobile phone use for corruption reporting in any detail, which helps to fill gaps in the literature regarding potential future opportunities.

In PNG, public officials responsible for administering funds have lacked anonymous and accessible ways to report corrupt practices. In response, the PNG Department of Finance, with support from the Australian Government and the United Nations Development Program, has established a way for public officials working in the public financial management system to anonymously report cases of corruption through a mobile phone text messaging service. All reported cases are referred to the Internal Audit and Compliance Division in the Department of Finance for further investigation, in collaboration with relevant state authorities.

This paper reports on this innovative approach to expand corruption reporting practices in PNG based on the experiences of public officials using this new reporting mechanism. Overall, the findings show that the service has been well utilised, with hundreds of ongoing investigations and several arrests. However, it is argued here that while the project is proving to be successful, its expansion should be very carefully and cautiously planned. The current context of PNG’s public financial management system is explained first, before the project is introduced. The paper presents the research design and findings, followed by a discussion of practical recommendations and implications for the domains of policy and theory. Finally, the conclusion presents suggestions for further research.

PNG’s Public Financial Management System

PNG has experienced strong economic growth over the last decade that has resulted in increased revenue and expanded budgets focused on improving infrastructure and service delivery. Public expenditure doubled between 2003 and 2008 and doubled again with increased revenues from resource wealth between 2008 and 2013 (Howes et al. 19/11/2014). However, more recently, there have been real cuts to public expenditure due to PNG’s weakening fiscal and economic conditions as a result of a slump in commodity prices (DoT 2015).

Changes in public expenditure, marked by sharp increases and recent declines, have put pressure on public financial management systems from national to provincial, district and local levels. The difficulty remains of translating budgets into tangible results, which requires an effective public administration, implementation capacity and political commitment to deliver on policy objectives. However, significant weaknesses exist in PNG’s decentralised political, fiscal and administrative arrangements, which open up spaces for corruption and lead to the poor utilisation of public expenditure.
PNG has invested significant portions of its increased revenue into expenditure reforms for service delivery. In particular, Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), which are made available to elected officials to determine development priorities for their electorates, have experienced huge increases through the controversial District Services Improvement Program (DSIP), now Services Improvement Program (SIP). The first budget of the O’Neill-Dion-led PNG government set the trend for massively increased SIP funding to districts and provinces for development projects (up from K356 million in 2012 to almost K1.5 billion in 2013) (DoT 2013; see also Dorney 2016:33). These funding allocations were maintained in 2014 and 2015 despite cuts to other parts of the budget (DoT 2015). CDFs represented almost 10 per cent of total public expenditure in 2013, which was higher than any other country in the world as a proportion of government spending (Howes et al. 2014). Figure 1 shows that provincial budgets increased from just over K675 million to almost K3.5 billion from 2005 to 2014, while CDFs increased from just under K45 million to almost K1.5 billion over the same time period (CLRC and DPLGA 2015:61–62; DoT 2014; Ketan 2007). Much of these increased levels of funding are essentially branded as service delivery expenditure and exit financial management systems at provincial and district levels.

According to the PNG government, SIP funds are not to be used by members of parliament (MPs) and local level government (LLG) presidents on a discretionary basis. Rather, official policy documentation has asserted these funds should be used to target social infrastructure to improve service delivery (DIRD 2013). The reported use of SIP funds has ranged significantly, from the successful construction of school classrooms and health clinics to allegations of direct payments made to communities. There are concerns about the capacity of the provincial and district level bureaucrats to effectively spend and account for these increased funds (Wiltshire 3/4/2013, 13/1/2014). Further increases in public expenditure are not expected in the immediate future as PNG’s weak fiscal position has been exacerbated by lower than expected commodity prices. It is in this changing and sensitive financial and political context that the Phones against Corruption project (PaC) and subsequent research were carried out.

The PNG Department of Finance (DoF) has a central role in the promotion of accountable budget and expenditure management practices. The DoF is directly responsible for managing a network of provincial and district treasuries across PNG. These provincial and district treasuries operate in a diverse range of contexts, from urban city centres to rural and remote townships, often with little access to power, postal and banking facilities. This deconcentrated1 public administrative management structure attempts to ensure a consistent approach to budget expenditure practices across the country, whereby district and provincial treasury staff are ultimately responsible to the Secretary of Finance in Port Moresby, the capital city of PNG. The large majority of DoF staff work in provincial and district treasuries, which have only been rolled out across PNG over the last 10 years, with mixed success (Heijkoop 2014).

Figure 1: Increased budgets for provinces and districts in PNG, 2005–14.

Provincial and district treasury staff can be perceived as clients to the provincial government, in that their role is to process and administer public funds in accordance with provincial budgets. PNG has decentralised the bulk of its service delivery functions and responsibilities to provincial and district administrations, which prepare budgets and raise claims to draw down on funds that finance local services. However, they are dependent on provincial and district treasuries to approve spending and raise cheques that can be made directly to a contractor or cashed at banks. Figure 2 provides a simplified diagram of how public expenditure is administered at sub-national levels in PNG through formal budget processes. These budgets fund expenditure for essential public services like conducting health outreach patrol clinics to villages, maintaining provincial road networks and providing schools with basic learning materials. The first step is for provincial and district administrations to submit their budgets (through their respective provincial assemblies) to the National Department of Treasury. Once approved (step 2), the National Department of Finance issues warrants and cash to operational accounts at provincial and district treasuries (Step 3). Bureaucrats working in provincial and district administrations can then access these funds for their recurrent budgeted activities by raising claims for spending (step 4), which need to be approved by the DoF officers in provincial and district treasuries who issue cheques and payments (step 5).
As is shown in Figure 2, DoF officers have a unique insight into corruption in PNG because they are responsible for maintaining the integrity of PNG’s public financial management system. Therefore, DoF officers at national, provincial and district levels are well placed to report on corrupt practices taking place in PNG and were ideal candidates for this research.

Participants in this study defined corruption as a technical matter, due to their positions working within PNG’s public financial management system. In this paper, the participants’ definition of corruption is used, whereby an act of corruption was identified as an instance of the misappropriation of public funds outside of PNG’s public financial management system, through intentional action, which may or may not have been the result of pressure placed on the officer involved.

In PNG, corruption is prominent and public financial management systems are weak. PNG is ranked 145th out of 175 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which means that outside observers perceive the public sector to be corrupt (Transparency International 2014). PNG is also in the lowest 15 per cent of countries, in terms of the process for how it deals with and controls corruption, based on the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank 2014). In addition, PNG’s most recent Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Assessment (International Monetary Fund 2015) found that the credibility of national budgets and fiscal strategies was satisfactory, although budget implementation, particularly how expenditure is managed, accounted for and reported on, was very weak. In subsequent analysis, Fellows and Leonardo (12/1/2016) have noted that PEFA performance indicators have declined considerably when compared to assessments carried out in 2005 and 2009.

There are various initiatives underway to address corruption, although setbacks have been experienced, most notably the disbanding of a prominent anti-corruption taskforce in June 2014 (Howes 24/2/2015; Walton and Howes 22/8/2014). One way to minimise the risk of corruption is to provide a space for public officials to anonymously report suspected cases. In the ethnically diverse and communal societies of PNG, there are few ways to anonymously report corrupt practices. An expansion of corruption-reporting mechanisms is required, in a context of limited reach of most media and communication technologies, even within the public service, let alone citizen participation.

**Mobile Telephony**

Mobile phone coverage is widespread in PNG (M&C Saatchi World Services 2014; Watson 2013), having increased substantially since the introduction of competition into the sector in 2007 (Suwamaru 2014, 2015; Watson 2011:46–48). As in poorer communities worldwide (Benkler 2010:76), access to computers is very limited in the largely rural communities in PNG (Watson 2013) and many DoF officers at provincial and district levels have limited access to emails at their place of work. Mobile phones are cheaper (Benkler 2010:76; Kelly and Minges 2012:4) and can be used for strategic purposes, particularly basic features such as text messaging and phone calls (Heeks 2009:8; Kelly and Minges 2012:5; Watson 2014b). Literature warns of the failure of many projects which utilise communication technologies in development efforts (Dodson et al. 2013; Heeks 2009; Trucano 30/4/2010) and particularly those that are testing prototypes (Dodson et al. 2013:27). Many projects have also been undertaken without rigorous research (Chib 2013:70; Dodson et al. 2013:21; Watson 2014b:2).

Smith, Spence and Rashid suggest that mobile phones expand capabilities of individuals and communities, particularly in developing nations (2011). A typology focuses on three domains: social, economic and governance (Smith et al. 2011:78). In the governance domain, compared to the other two domains, ‘there is the least evidence to speak to the role of mobiles in the expansion of capabilities’ (ibid.:81) but the authors perceive a great deal of potential in this area (Smith et al. 2011).

**Phones against Corruption**

The DoF has established, with support from the Provincial Capacity Building & Enhancement Programme, an option for DoF staff to anonymously report cases of corruption using mobile phone text messaging (or SMS, short message service). It is
free of charge to use the service. Users can choose to receive questions and submit responses in either English or Tok Pisin (a language spoken widely within PNG, and one of the official languages of the country). All reported cases are referred to the DoF’s Internal Audit and Compliance Division (IACD) for further investigation. Such investigations do not involve contacting the complainant to ask for additional information, as this would jeopardise the anonymity of the system and IACD staff do not have access to the phone numbers of complainants. If cases are investigated and misconduct is found, enforcement can involve prosecution, in collaboration with relevant state bodies, or disciplinary actions taken within the DoF. Depending on the success of this project, known as Phones against Corruption (PaC), the SMS service may be opened up to the public. At present, promotional information is only given to DoF staff and they are asked to keep the phone number confidential. As PaC is an anonymous service, there is no information about the users themselves.

The PaC service commenced operation in August 2014. By April 2015, two public officials had been arrested for mismanagement of funds worth more than five million Kina (approximately US$2 million) (UNDP 10/4/2015). As at April 2015, more officials were waiting for court decisions and approximately 250 other cases were being investigated (ibid.). By May 2016, the number of cases under investigation had reached more than 700, with corrupt actions alleged to have taken place in many provinces, if not all.

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The PaC SMS questions are shown in Table 1 (English only). Each SMS is less than 160 characters long, which is the maximum length of one SMS (Watson 2014b). The final question is usually followed by a message of appreciation, although, during the period of the user-experience research outlined below, that particular SMS was altered, to allow users the option of providing feedback on the PaC service.

The advantages of using SMS include: not requiring specific handset types, as all handsets can send and receive text messages (Watson 2014a); not requiring specific network types, as all networks can handle SMS traffic (whereas third generation (3G) service or better is required for internet access and email use); not requiring advanced technical skills (ibid.); and not requiring users to have credit available in their phones, as services can be established so as to be free to use (as this one has been). Text messaging works well in the PNG context, when each message is succinct and clear (Watson 2013:2). In addition, text messaging can be a private form of communication, as opposed to, say, speaking on a public telephone.

### Table 1: PaC SMS questions (English version)

| Welcome to the ‘Phones Against Corruption’ SMS system to report cases. All information is 100% confidential. Type E for English, P for Pidgin or X to exit. |
| The case occurred in which Province, District, Public institution? Type answers in this order, separated by commas: Province, District, Public institution. |
| When did the alleged case of corruption occur? |
| Select the type of case: Does it involve Financial issues or Non-Financial issues? Type F for Financial issues or NF for non-financial issues. |
| Thank you. Please describe the case briefly. |
| Many thanks. We will keep your report confidential and will address it to the concerned authority for their consideration and respective action. Thank you. |

### User-Experience Research Design

This paper presents findings of user-experience research conducted with DoF staff at national, provincial and district levels. The research was funded by the Economic and Public Sector Program. User-experience research was undertaken in order to determine the effectiveness of the pilot, recommend any changes to the service and determine whether or not the service should be opened up to the public. While the findings provide valuable insights into how corruption is perceived and acted upon, the research question that informed the user-experience research was ‘What are the experiences of users of the PaC project?’.

This type of research benefits from employing more than one research method simultaneously, in order to be able to compare findings gener-
ated by different methods. Such a practice helps to alleviate the shortfalls of each research method (Lapan 2004:243; Tacchi et al. 2003:76), meaning that the resulting analysis is more robust than research which relies solely on one method. The process ultimately allows for a greater degree of understanding to be achieved (Irwin 2008:417). Two research methods have been employed concurrently: a quantitative survey of users during a given time period, using additional questions sent via mobile phone text messaging; and a series of focus group discussions, generating qualitative data. Combining these two methods was designed to enhance the overall findings, as ‘interviews and survey responses may provide different lenses on people’s perceptions’ (ibid.:415).

The survey method was designed to gain responses from a number of people, to a set of questions, in a short period of time (Neuman 2003:35). For just over two months, from 18 April 2015 to 1 July 2015, PaC users were given an option to participate in user-experience research immediately after reporting an instance of corruption. The additional questions continued in the language preferred by each user (either Tok Pisin or English).

An advantage of a survey via SMS is that it can be conducted using mobile phone text messaging with DoF staff members around the country, at minimal cost (compared with travelling to provinces to conduct research). In this instance, it has been particularly advantageous as it directly targeted those people who had just completed the PaC SMS question series, whereas the service’s anonymity could have been queried in the minds of users if a bulk SMS was sent out to previous users soliciting their feedback. A disadvantage of using a survey via SMS, especially if it was used in isolation, would be that if a person finds text messaging challenging, they may find use of the PaC system challenging and they may also find it difficult to report this using the SMS survey.

A limitation of the results generated is that the survey was only available to those users who had responded to all five of the corruption reporting questions, which meant that users unable to complete the five questions were not given the option to participate. Asking people to evaluate an SMS system, using SMS, is problematic and the results should be viewed in that context. Thus, the SMS survey results have been coupled with use of a second research method, in order to generate more understanding.

Focus group discussions are group interviews, or group discussions facilitated by one or two researchers (Tacchi et al. 2003:78). As with one-on-one interviews, the topic of discussion is established by the interviewer, who then ideally manages the interaction with flexibility and adaptability (Gillham 2000:3). In addition, group discussions can generate material that would not have arisen in one-on-one conversations (Tacchi et al. 2003:76). In this research project, participants in group interviews have been national DoF staff, as well as those at provincial and district treasuries. Respondents were both users and non-users of the PaC service (in order to preserve the anonymity essential to the service, focus group discussion participants were not asked whether or not they had used the PaC service). There was a mixed group of participants covering different levels of education, age, gender and work roles. The audio of each discussion was recorded (ibid.:78), enabling later transcription and use of direct quotes in research reporting. Using an audio recorder can assist with interpretation and analysis, and it also avoids the distraction of note-taking for all parties involved (Mangen 2007:27). Discussions were in English, Tok Pisin, or a mixture of both. A thorough informed consent process was undertaken with each potential participant. Participants were assured that their anonymity would be preserved.

This paper reports on findings from four focus group discussions: one held with staff of the IACD within the DoF, one with officers based at a provincial treasury office and two with staff of district treasuries. The inclusion of provincial and district treasury staff members allowed discussion of different operational contexts where corruption can occur, as well as differing levels of access to media and communication tools in urban and rural parts of PNG.

User-Experience Research Findings

The user-experience research SMS questions are
shown in Table 2 (English only). Prior to being asked these questions, each user was thanked for their corruption report and was asked if they were prepared to answer a few questions about the service. Each SMS was less than 160 characters long (Watson 2014b). The questions generated primarily quantitative (numerical) data that sought feedback on the service itself. A qualitative question was also asked, to determine whether the user recommended any changes to the PaC service. The final question was followed by a message of appreciation.

Table 2: User-experience research SMS questions (English version)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about the level of difficulty, was responding to the SMS questions easy, medium, or difficult? Text 1 for easy, 2 for medium or 3 for difficult.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about the time it took, was responding to the SMS questions quick, medium, or time-consuming? Text 1 for quick, 2 for medium or 3 for time-consuming.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many thanks. Would you be happy to use the SMS corruption reporting system again? Please text 1 for yes, 2 if you’re not sure or 3 for no.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you confident your report will be actioned by the authorities? Type 1 if you’re confident, 2 if you’re not sure or 3 if you feel no action will be taken.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you. Would you suggest any changes to the SMS corruption reporting system?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the period from 18 April 2015 to 1 July 2015, 187 individuals (unique users) sent text messages to the PaC system. Not all users reached the end of the PaC question series, which means that not all of them were presented with the chance to respond to the user-experience questions. Of these 187 users, 71 completed the submission process for a corruption report and were then asked whether or not they would be willing to answer a few more questions regarding the PaC system. Of these 71 people, 64 people said they would be willing to answer a few more questions (90 per cent of the people given this choice), while 7 chose not to participate. Thus, 64 users responded to the optional series of SMS questions about their experiences of using the PaC service. This represents a sample of 34 per cent of the total number of service users during that period, or 90 per cent of the people who completed a full corruption report. When asked about the level of difficulty of using the PaC service, almost three-quarters of respondents indicated that they found the service easy to use (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Level of difficulty in using the SMS service.

When responding to a question about the length of time it took to respond to the SMS questions, well over half of the responses were positive, indicating that users found the PaC system quick to use (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: The time it takes to respond to SMS questions.
Users were asked about whether or not they would be happy to use the SMS system again. As can be seen in Figure 5, 88 per cent of respondents (56 out of 64) replied suggesting that they would be happy to use the PaC service again. No respondents gave a negative answer to this question.

Figure 5: Willingness to use the SMS service again.

With respect to whether or not users were confident that their reports of corruption allegations would be actioned by the authorities, two-thirds of respondents suggested that they felt confident that action would be taken. As can be seen in Figure 6, 19 per cent of respondents (or 12 out of 64) were uncertain as to whether or not any action will be taken, while six people felt that no action would be taken and four people did not respond to the question.

Figure 6: Confidence level regarding action by authorities.

Regarding any suggested improvements to the service, most users did not respond to this question. Of those who did, 11 indicated that they were happy with the service and/or that they would not like to see any changes made to the service. Three respondents reinforced the need for honest behaviour amongst public officials and two more respondents simply replied with a greeting. Another two respondents requested that their specific allegations be investigated.

A key focus group discussion was undertaken with IACD staff. The IACD has a crucial role in analysing and assessing corruption reports received in all forms: PaC SMSs, letters, phone calls, and so on. Investigations are undertaken regarding allegations for which there is enough information. Regarding PaC, IACD staff members said the system was effective at gathering information, but that users need to send more specific details. This sentiment was explained by one participant as follows:

And specifically, if they can send the name of the particular company, if they mention the name of the person or if they specifically name the amount. Or if they could specifically mention the cheque number, the detail, that really helps us.

Another theme that was returned to throughout the discussion was the need for the IACD to have more resources to review SMSs and subsequently conduct investigations:

A couple of serious cases have been taken up already. And it also places some challenge on us on the part of the resources that we need to put into it, as we are faced with an additional task on our part. It will put pressure on the resources that we have in terms of manpower and finance, to really undertake, immediately undertake some of these serious issues that have been SMS-ed through this program.
Another theme was the need for the PaC service to be promoted repeatedly to DoF staff in Port Moresby and at provincial and district treasuries: ‘It should be effective if we publicise it. [If] we have that regular publicity in the provinces and districts and [it] encourages people to come out.’

IACD staff members were asked about whether they would suggest any changes to the wording of the PaC SMSs. As stimuli for discussion, papers were handed out showing the text messages (see Table 1). The staff members all said they did not want any changes to be made to the SMSs.

With regard to the question of opening up the service to the public, IACD staff members suggested that this should not occur in the near future. The group members concurred that the first step to be undertaken should be repeated awareness campaigns about the service within the DoF: ‘at the moment let’s keep it within finance first and let’s see how effective [it is], and then we can roll it out.’ Secondly, participants recommended that the service could be extended to other government agencies, but only after arrangements are put in place so that the IACD can work collaboratively with relevant sections of other departments to investigate cases. Thirdly, participants suggested that the service should be extended to the public at a later date, only once the system is working well for all government agencies. Overall, IACD staff members were pleased with the PaC service, saw it as a useful way for DoF staff to be able to anonymously report allegations, and found it to be useful for the IACD.

A focus group discussion was conducted with staff of a provincial treasury office. The participants at the provincial level had little knowledge of the PaC service. However, they generally agreed that the concept was valuable, as explained by one participant:

The department is criticised so many times about what is happening in the department. So with this project, people being aware that they will be reported. And that will deter every one of us from doing things that is not right. Corrupt ways, uh?

There were no changes suggested to the wording of SMS questions. Even so, there was discussion about the fear that officers might have when considering reporting. Even if an officer believes that the service is anonymous and confidential, they may still worry about being exposed during the investigation process. It was suggested that awareness messages targeted to DoF officers at all levels need to explain clearly how investigations are conducted so as to protect the identity of the person reporting.

Province-based staff were of the view that the PaC service should be extended to other government departments and agencies. They explained that the DoF is not the only agency handling funds. However, they were hesitant about the idea of opening up the PaC service to the public. It was felt that such a move would generate a large volume of responses: ‘there will be many, many texts coming through’. It was also a concern that it would be difficult for investigators to know whether a report was coming from a public servant or a member of the general public, which could have ramifications when assessing the validity of the report. Generally, those participating in the focus group discussion at the province level concurred that the service should be opened up to the wider public service, but they were not positively disposed to the idea of inviting members of the public to submit reports.

Two focus group discussions were conducted with staff of two district treasury offices. These district-based officers had no prior knowledge of the PaC service. Given that context, it is unsurprising that district staff suggested that more awareness should be conducted to inform officers like them about the service. While they discussed the potential benefit of opening up the service to other government agencies, there was a strongly held view across the two focus group discussions at district level that the service should be strengthened within the DoF before it is extended to other government agencies. The idea of extending the service to the public was not viewed favourably. It was explained that people at village level would need a substantial amount of education about the meaning of the term corruption before they could be expected to meaningfully contribute to the project.

There were no changes suggested to the service by officers participating in the two focus group discussions at district level. District-based officers
were particularly grateful about the introduction of the PaC service, saying that it would be very helpful for them, given the pressures faced in their day-to-day work. As one officer explained, corruption is a daily experience for them:

> We live with it, we work with it, sleep with it, this is a burden we carry. We come to work, we want to work honestly, but in the back of our minds we have this burden. Because every day we work with these things that we know are not following correct procedures.³

The district treasury officers were happy to learn about the service and have access to it. They thought the service would help them as it can be hard for them to report incorrect practices and there is often fear about doing so. They were anxious to ensure that the service is anonymous:

> We don't want our identity to come out. One hundred per cent if it cannot be shown out to whoever, because it's risky. If we put anything out, you know, it's money, so can it be hidden? Definitely no-one can know. [There are] So many things to be reported.⁴

In the two focus group discussions with district-based staff, there was discussion about the increasing amount of funding that is going to the district level:

> As, me for one, I really, I think it came at a good time, where, um, the government is pumping lots of money into the district level, LLG, where we are really right with the people and some of us, we see that the money is not really going to what we should be expecting it to be.⁵

A payment approval usually goes through three to four staff members. If a staff member has a concern about the payment, they hold back on processing the payment or make a note in red pen on the paperwork. District-level staff said in the focus group discussions that they can be threatened to process payments by the district administrator, the district treasurer, contractors, the MP, the MP’s staff and even assistant secretaries: “This thing is going to be really helpful to us. We want to report, but they come at our back and threaten us or things like that. We appreciate this.”

**Summary of Findings**

Overall, these findings indicate that PaC is working well and providing a useful service. Those PaC users who provided feedback suggested that generally the service is both easy and quick to use. Most respondents suggested that they would be willing to use the SMS service again. The confidence level regarding follow-up action by authorities was reasonably high, with two-thirds of respondents suggesting that they were confident that action would be taken by the relevant authorities, in relation to their corruption report. Most respondents suggested no changes to the service.

Out of the focus group discussions, there were no concrete suggestions regarding changes to the wording of text message questions. Nonetheless, there were suggestions regarding promotion of the service and potential expansion of the service, but not in the near future. Overall, the feeling was that the service was useful but that it needed to be promoted more amongst DoF staff at all levels.

Regarding expansion, in summary, further awareness within the DoF was recommended. The possibility of making the service available to staff in other government departments was discussed in detail. IACD staff members wanted to see such a move implemented only after arrangements had been determined with their counterparts in internal audit sections. Provincial treasury staff were of the view that the service could be extended to other government agencies. However, district-level staff believed this should not happen until a later date. Overall, the idea of extending the service to the public was not viewed favourably. IACD staff felt this should be done at a much later date, whereas province and district-based staff did not believe that opening the service to the public would be beneficial.

**Discussion**

Rather than testing out a new technology, which can be problematic (Dodson et al. 2013), the present project utilises the existing mobile phone network to enable corruption reporting. The approach of ‘finding ways to hang relevant services onto the
growing mobile base’ (Heeks 2009:11) is in keeping with suggestions of scholars about utilising existing, simple technology (Trucano 8/7/2013; Watson 2014b). In project conceptualisation and implementation, there can be a disconnect between design and the reality on the ground (Dodson et al. 2013:21–22; Heeks 2009:19), but in this case project design built upon research about mobile phone access and use in communities in PNG (Watson 2013) as well as the DoF’s understanding about the communication options available to staff at all levels. There can be a lack of rigorous research regarding communication technology projects (Chib 2013; Dodson et al. 2013). In particular, there is a lack of available evidence of effectiveness regarding mobile phones and their use in governance (Smith et al. 2011:82) and this project contributes towards the literature in this area.

Regarding the use of mobile phones in governance, a typology distinguishes between three types of implementation using mobile phones in government service delivery: as an additional channel for existing government services; to extend traditional government services to people in previously underserved communities; and to provide new services (Raja et al. 2012:88). The establishment of the PaC project could be seen as fitting into any of these types, but fits best into the final category, as a new service, given that most officers in provinces and districts feel they have few other options for reporting cases of corruption. At districts, staff have not in practice had access to any means of reporting corruption, given limited access to public phones and post offices in such locations.

There are useful practical implications of this research. While focus group discussions generated suggestions about further promotion of the PaC service within the DoF, staff of the IACD are concerned that they do not have the resources they require to investigate and follow-up on all relevant cases. Thus, there appears to be a distinct trade-off between further promotion within the DoF, which includes officers at provincial and district treasureries, and an increase of the investigation capacity required within the IACD. The case load of the IACD has increased substantially since the PaC service commenced. Currently, there are a high number of cases to investigate, and resources available to the IACD have not increased since this anonymous, free corruption reporting service was introduced. If no action is taken to increase the human resources and funds available within the IACD, there is a real risk that DoF staff will lose confidence in the system. As has been found in other research, when confidence is low, people are less likely to report corruption (Walton and Peiffer 17/6/2015). The SMS survey showed that two-thirds of respondents were confident that action would be taken regarding their report. Based on the huge number of cases already awaiting investigation, prompt action on two-thirds of cases appears unlikely and thus the expectations of users will not be met. In the medium term, if cases are not dealt with in a timely manner, DoF staff will gradually lose confidence in the PaC system, and therefore will be less likely to use the service to report corruption (see Walton and Peiffer 17/6/2015). Political commitment to effectively resource the IACD may be required, in a tight fiscal context.

Expansion of the PaC service needs to be carefully planned. In the first instance, the IACD could liaise, through the secretary of the DoF and the heads of relevant agencies, with the internal audit divisions of other national government departments to provide them with reports relevant to them that have already been received through the PaC service. Discussions may also consider whether to promote the PaC service to staff members of those departments, but it is recommended that this promotion should occur only once the current case load has been dealt with. While promotion of the service to staff of other national government agencies could be an option, it may also be useful to consider extension of the service to provincial and district administrations, as provincial administrations also have internal audit divisions.

There are also safety implications arising as a result of the introduction of the PaC service. National and sub-national staff operate within a complex, changing political and social environment and investigations also occur within this context. There are very significant risks to investigating officers from the national level, especially if they are travelling from Port Moresby to provinces and
districts to investigate cases. Risks will be particularly notable when the travelling officers may not have ethnic origins from that same region. In focus group discussions, staff members at provincial and district treasuries raised concerns about safety. During investigations by the IACD, DoF staff working at sub-national level need to be protected. Collaboration with local police in provinces and districts may be necessary.

In terms of policy implications, PaC is perceived to be a valuable system that has already placed a substantial additional burden on the limited investigation capacity in the internal audit division of the DoF. Before the PaC reporting mechanism was put in place, it was very difficult and very risky for public officials to report corrupt practices. Reports of corruption from within the system through an anonymous service can identify specific cases for further investigation. These reports can be very useful as they come from public officials with a deep understanding of how public expenditure should be managed. However, the overwhelming number of corruption reports received, in response to only modest promotion of the reporting mechanism in provinces and districts, does suggest more serious issues with the integrity of PNG’s public financial management system more broadly. It raises questions for how donors and non-government organisations can support anti-corruption efforts, and manage their own development programs in PNG that may work in these systems. The PaC service is working well because of its integration into the IACD. It is recommended that other anti-corruption efforts also utilise on-the-ground knowledge of internal auditors and the structures already in place through internal audit divisions.

Concluding Remarks

The PaC project is one of the first projects in PNG which strategically uses mobile phones to address an important social problem like corruption. By utilising mobile phone text messaging (SMS), it adheres to published guidelines on the use of mobile phones for development purposes in PNG (Watson 2013). It is a free, anonymous service which allows for private communication of corruption allegations by people who are part of the system for the disbursement of funds and therefore may have privileged information. The PaC project complements a range of other initiatives underway in PNG which aim to address issues of corruption. While there are many hurdles to be faced in the battle against corruption in PNG (Koim 8/12/2014), the PaC project makes a positive contribution.

While research has been conducted on the general public’s perceptions of corruption in PNG (Walton and Peiffer 17/6/2015) and on specific groups of anti-corruption activists in PNG (Walton 2016), this research provides a unique insight into perceptions and experiences of corruption from insiders working within the public financial management system.

In terms of further research, it would certainly be interesting to document how exactly SMS cases of alleged corruption are handled by the IACD. Such research may involve researcher immersion within the IACD for several weeks, using either participant or non-participant observation. It may also involve following selected specific reports through processing, in order to understand the outcomes of investigations. Such research could help to determine the size and type of resource envelope required for investigations.

A separate research exercise could look at reporting rates and trends over time, delving into the data and the context to ascertain whether anything of note is revealed, for example a spike at a certain time may be related to a political or media event at a particular location within PNG. It may be possible to conduct a longitudinal study consisting of a baseline study, an intervention promoting PaC in particular locations and then a follow-up study. However, ethical issues would need to be considered when designing an intervention as it may further increase the case load of the IACD and could unrealistically raise the expectations of those working in the selected locations.

Another interesting research project could be conducted at district levels, where funding amounts have increased significantly in recent years. Such research could further explore the experiences of district treasury officials who are caught between trying to appease the local MP and district administrator and upholding the integrity of PNG’s public
financial management system. Research could also seek perspectives of staff at provincial and district administrations.

In addition, user-experience research could be conducted on other mobile phone projects in PNG and similar contexts to learn more about such mechanisms. It also noteworthy that the SMS survey method is a promising new research method that could be used in other projects to gather data remotely, given the inherent difficulties of conducting research in PNG.

This paper is intended to be useful for government departments and organisations with interest in utilising mobile phone technology for strategic purposes. It may also be of use for those who view corruption as a human development challenge. This research will help to inform the future direction of the PaC project. The results presented in this paper suggest that the project has been successful so far in creating a safe space for those deeply engaged in public expenditure management to report cases of corruption. Expansion needs to be carefully considered, investigation capacity and outputs need to be closely examined and caution is recommended in terms of promoting the service to the broader public.

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Notes on Authors

Dr Amanda H. A. Watson is a communication researcher and a Visiting Fellow with the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University.

Mr Colin Wiltshire is a research fellow in the politics of service delivery at the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University.

Endnotes

1  Deconcentration refers to the redistribution of the central government responsibilities, whether political, financial and/or administrative at different levels or geographical locations. It is usually considered the weakest form of decentralisation.

2  Those who did not complete the process may have texted in to the wrong phone number, actually in search of a different service, or may have been people testing the service, or may not have completed the full set of questions.

3  Translation of interview quote in Tok Pisin.

4  Some parts of this quote were translated from Tok Pisin.

5  Some parts of this quote were translated from Tok Pisin.

6  For discussion on ethnicity in the PNG public service, see Payani 2000.

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State, Society and Governance in Melanesia
Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs
ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200

Telephone: +61 2 6125 8394
Fax: +61 2 6125 9604
Email: ssgm@anu.edu.au
URL: ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au
Twitter: @anussgm

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