

# Cultural Identity and Social Dynamics of the Dom People in Chimbu Province



## Chimbu Province: Voices from the Highlands

#Ethnography #PNG

An ethnographic portrait of the Dom people, their rugged landscape, and enduring social fabric.

### THE PHYSICAL & CULTURAL PROFILE

#### Landscape: "Dom Grass"

Located in the **Gomeni District**. Characterized by mountainous terrain, rocky clay soil, and savanna grasslands (Kunai). Infrastructure is limited; accessibility depends heavily on weather and foot travel.

#### Ethnic Identity

- **The "Strong Face":** Distinctive physical features identifying Chimbu origins.
- **Social Character:** Highly talkative, welcoming, and community-oriented.
- **Values:** Prioritizing others over self; "Quality over Quantity."

*"We talk a lot... we interact with people too quickly. That's the thing that differentiates us from other provinces."*

### SOCIAL FABRIC & GOVERNANCE

#### Patrilineal Structure

A male-dominated society where leadership and kinship are passed through the father's line. Men handle public discourse; women's roles are traditionally secondary in decision-making.

#### Linguistic Nuance

**Koman:** General lingua franca

**Kora:** Local dialect (heavy 'R' sounds)

#### Conflict & Justice

**Root Causes:** Historically land; modernly election-based rivalry.

**The Chief's Role:** Mediates to prevent chaos; community must listen to avoid "bad luck."

**Resolution:** Compensation via exchange of **pigs and money**.

#Patrilineal

#TribalJustice

#SosoreSpirit

Reading Time: ~8 mins • Subject: Chimbu Highlands Identity

This interview provides a detailed look into the life, environment, and traditions of the Dom people within the Chimbu Province of Papua New Guinea's Highlands. The discussion covers the rugged geographic landscape, the unique "talkative" and selfless character of the inhabitants, and the transition of traditional conflict resolution into the modern era.

## Detailed Point Summary

### Geographic Landscape and Infrastructure Challenges

The Dom village is situated in the Gomeni District, east of the main town in Chimbu Province. The terrain is characterized by steep, rocky mountains and a soil composition of heavy clay, which significantly hinders the development of infrastructure such as roads and health services. Due to the lack of reliable vehicle access—especially during rainy weather—residents often rely on foot travel to navigate the mountainous environment. The area is notably distinct for its savanna and Kunai grasslands, leading outsiders to refer to the community as "Dom grass," a name that reflects the physical features of the land [00:17-01:33](#)[02:46-03:33](#).

## Community Identity Profile

|                                                       |                                                |                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Geography</b><br>Mountainous, Savanna<br>Grassland | <b>Social System</b><br>Patrilineal (Male-led) | <b>Key Traits</b><br>Talkative, Selfless,<br>Welcoming |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|

### Social Character and Cultural Identity

Chimbu people are often identified by their "strong faces" and a reputation for being talkative and interactive, which allows them to connect quickly with others. Despite being perceived as "rough" by those from other provinces, the community is deeply selfless, often prioritizing the needs of others over themselves and valuing quality over quantity in their interactions. While they operate as a cohesive unit during major social events like tribal fights, bride price ceremonies, or funerals, they tend to be more individualistic regarding personal financial responsibilities, such as school fees [03:45-05:0007:33-08:47](#).

### Linguistic Diversity and Traditional Structure

While Chimbu Province comprises six districts with various distinct languages, *Koman* serves as the general written and oral language that unites the region. The speaker specifically belongs to the *Kora* language group, a dialect distinguished by its frequent use of "R" sounds. Socially, the community remains strictly patrilineal, with leadership and kinship passed down through male lines. Although modern influences are present, men continue to hold the primary decision-making roles in public and traditional forums [05:02-07:33](#).

### Conflict Resolution Process

1. **Intervention:** The Chief or "Big Men" call for a ceasefire to prevent community chaos.
2. **Negotiation:** Both sides meet to discuss the impact of the violence (e.g., children missing school).
3. **Compensation:** An agreement is reached involving the exchange of **money and pigs**.
4. **Resolution:** Compensation is paid to injured parties/families to restore peace.

### Conflict, Safety, and Modern Beliefs

Tribal warfare over land has largely ceased in the modern era, replaced by occasional conflicts during election cycles driven by candidate support. A unique "code of conduct" exists during these fights: women, children, and those not involved in the dispute are generally left untouched and can travel freely. Justice is typically served through traditional mediation led by "Chiefs" or "Big Men," involving the exchange of pigs and money as compensation. Despite feeling physically safe, a lingering fear of *Sosore* (spiritual sorcery) remains a significant psychological deterrent for those returning to the village [10:15-16:10](#).

### Key Data

- **Administrative Divisions:** Chimbu Province consists of **6 districts** [05:07](#).
- **Linguistic Markers:** The *Kora* dialect is specifically identified by its heavy use of the **"R" sound** [06:06-06:48](#).
- **Social Milestones:** The respondent notes the country is approaching its **50th anniversary**, yet patrilineal traditions remain dominant [06:58](#).
- **Environmental Features:** The region is characterized by **clay soil** and **Kunai grass** 34].

## **Conclusion**

The Dom people of Chimbu Province maintain a resilient cultural identity rooted in a challenging mountainous landscape. While traditional customs and vernacular languages are slowly fading as they fail to be passed to younger generations, the core values of community support, patrilineal authority, and traditional justice continue to define the social fabric of the region [09:04-10:1316:11-18:11](#).

## Transcription of F-Chimbu Province

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** For our research is, uh, the ... this interview that I'm going to ask you is based on the Highlands region of Papua New Guinea. And I have a total of 10 questions to ask, to interview you. Where are you from? Can you state your home province and your local village name?

**Interviewee:** Um, I am from Chimbu, a province in Highlands region, um, in the district of Gomeni. My small village is known as Dom.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay, thank you. Where is your place located? Can you describe your physical environment?

**Interviewee:** Uh, my place is located at, uh, um, the east side of the town itself.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** Um, it is very mountainous.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** And, um, not, um, like the car road and all this. Um-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** ... it's not easy access. Sometimes the, because of the mountains, um, it is like the mountains are filled with rocks.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** And the type of soil there, it's, uh, clay, and it's very strong. Therefore, um, there's no mu- not much infrastructure like roads, health services and all this.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So sometimes we have to walk. Sometimes we have to go by car. And if it- if the weather is raining and all that, then there's no car going and coming to and fro. So it's like a mountain, like it's like you're climbing a mountain.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Ah.

**Interviewee:** So we have to walk sometimes. Sometimes we have to go by car.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So, yeah.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay, thank you. So can you des- um, what do people call or refer to your ethnic group or community?

**Interviewee:** Um, the type of ethnic group or community or how they call us, it's, uh, basically because of the, the attitude of the-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** ... our people, the culture. So-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** (coughs)

**Interviewee:** ... um, from where I come from, um, people, um, usually differentiate us because we, um, we kinda talk a lot. And, um, um, the people out there are not, uh, that, um ... they're welcoming.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** But at the same time, like, in the little towns, they usually, they're so rough.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** Therefore, that's where they are the people, when they move around or from other provinces, they come and they used to be like, "Okay, this, these are people from the mountain. On the other side, you see these are Dom people and they, they are rough." And they usually do that, do that. Th- that's how they differentiate us from other district in, uh, Chimbu.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm. So d- uh, do they call you, like, refer to you with any name, like southern name, to your community?

**Interviewee:** Uh, because of the, the, the type of, um, landscape and the type of the environment there, um, my village, it doesn't have a lot of trees. It, uh, it is made up of savanna grassland.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So there's like a name they usually give us. They will be like, uh, Dom grass, meaning the land filled with like grass.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Interviewee:** So Kunai grass and all this. When you come across my camp, you see those similar type of features.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** It's located in my village. So that's why they call us by that, so they wanna make, like, differentiate us, they call us like, all this are Dom grass, meaning that like, the place itself is called Dom.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** But then they, they include this one. So when you come to that place, you'll be like, "Oh, the name itself is giving the type of features of the environment that I come from."

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm. Okay. Thank you. Um, can you describe the physical appearance of your people that distinguishes them from the rest of the Highlands region and the rest of the country as a whole?

**Interviewee:** (coughs) Um, the physical-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Physical f-

**Interviewee:** ... The physical features, (sniffs) um, you can tell from the face, um, especially the Chimbu-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** ... as general, not the district itself. Um, we have like the strong face-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** ... where you can tell that, okay, yes, she is from Chimbu. And the type of, um, character and behavior we have-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** ... like, we show, we give whatever we have. Um, we care for people a lot.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** That's the thing that is unique about us. And we give quality instead of quantity, and we help each, I mean, other people that we come to know of. And that, that's the only thing that differentiate us from other provinces, and that makes us unique as well. And many of the times,

like, we don't think about ourself. We think about other people first, and then, like, later, we think about ourself. And we talk a lot.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So in, um, most of the other provinces, they'll be like, | (foreign language)

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** Like, we are like that. So since because we talk a lot, people will be like, "Okay, these people are from Chimbu because yeah, they talk a lot."

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** "You see?" And when you, like, you can get to know them easily because they talk a lot. They interact with people too quickly.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So yeah, that, that's the only thing that differentiate us from other provinces.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm. Okay, thank you. So what is your Indigenous language called? And is it oral or written?

**Interviewee:** Um, in Chimbu province, um, we have like six district.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So the six district, they don't speak the same language.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** We speak, uh, totally a different language altogether. But there's a general language that everyone in Chimbu k- know of. Um, it is both written. It is oral as well.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** It is known as Koman language. So if, um, people from other districts in Chimbu, if we wanna greet someone if we know of, then we speak Koman. That makes us, um, know each other that we're from Chimbu. But, um, the fact is, like, we don't have same language.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** We have different languages. Even in the same district, like, there's like two or three different languages that differentiate us. So that's why we ... in Chimbu, you don't, you, you can't hear us speak a lot of, uh-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** ... our vernacular because we, uh, we speak different languages.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So the only language that is common-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** (clears throat)

**Interviewee:** ... and that is oral, that is written as well, it's Koman language.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm. What about your language? Uh, what is it called?

**Interviewee:** Um, (coughs) my language is, we call it Kora language because, uh, there's a lot of R in there.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** So, if like, in Kumane if you wanna say, like, um, "leave me," or, like, olusi in pidgin, we say, like, in Kumane you would say kindli kondo. And then in Kora you would say, like, Kora olusi. Like-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** With R in there.

**Interviewee:** With R in there. That's why we- they call us, like, if other districts they see us they will be like, "These are people who speak Kora language," they'll be like that. And then this is how it differentiate us from other districts, so there's a lot of R in there. That's why they say, like, we speak Kora.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** All right. Well, thank you. So what type of sociological structure do you practice? Is it patrilineal or matrilineal society and is it still effective today?

**Interviewee:** Oh, obviously in highlands region it's patrilineal. You can't say matrilineal because, uh, most of the, uh, chiefly system, it is being passed down from one male to another, the kin system as well. It's not, uh, matrilineal, it's patrilineal. It is still practiced today even if, if, um, uh, even though the country is, like, in 50 years, uh, 50th and then we're still living in patrilineal society. Most of the islands region, in my village as well, most of the men do the talking and everything is done by the men. The women just have to sit there and then you don't have to do anything. Yeah.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay. Wow. Um, is your community, um, sociocentric or egocentric? Meaning that does your community work together as a community or they only care about themselves and work separately?

**Interviewee:** Um, in the community, in my village, in the community that I come from, um, if it is like a tribal or tribal fight or bride price or a house price ceremony and all this, that they work together-

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** ... because it's a community and they have to help each other in times of needs and all this. But if it comes from, like, school fee and stuff like that, no, they don't usually help.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Oh, okay.

**Interviewee:** Maybe the basic reason, I don't know why they usually do that. I have no idea about that.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** But, um, this only because the school fee or the way you live your life or how you plant your food or you do your garden, it's all up to you.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Hmm.

**Interviewee:** But the big thing w- that brings them together to do contributions and, like, work together as a community, it's during, like, tribal fights, uh, bride price ceremony, funeral service.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** And this, but apart from that, no, they just mind their own business and go on, go on with their life.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm. Okay. Thank you. So how do your traditions, culture or social rules is influenced by your people's thoughts and actions? How do your culture, um, and your tradition influence your action and your thoughts as a single human?

**Interviewee:** Um, it's our culture and, um, customs influence the way we do things basically because, um, it has been practiced by the generations after generations. So, um, much of the customs, especially in Chimbo, it has been died out already because, um, the one is the language. Uh, we know- no longer speak our vernacular, so it's easily dying out.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** And, um, the culture, especially the traditional dress and all this, it's still going, the traditional singing, it's still going. But, um, most of the customs and culture is dying out. Uh, maybe because the, the old ones, they don't want to teach the upcoming ones. That's the whole reason why it's been dying out. So, um, our culture is... it's unique.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** Especially the headdress. You can see that all these people are from this because of the cultural dressing and headdress and, uh, all this. But apart from that, uh, most of our culture is being dying out already.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Okay. Thank you. So what are the root causes of tribal fights? Can you describe what happen during tribal fights in your village if you have tribal fights happening?

**Interviewee:** Um, mm, in Chimbo, we don't much, we don't have tribal fights.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** In the past, yes, they usually have tribal fights, but, um, they fight over land and... Yeah. The only thing they, they talk about and they fight is the land. That was in the past, but in today's, today's generation, they don't do tribal fights. Only in, during election times, yes, they, they do.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** Um, they fight because, you know, there are, um, supporters, like, wanting their, um, candidate to stand and the other one is bringing in their candidates and then that's where they split themselves and be like, "Oh, my man is gonna stand and yours is not gonna stand for this electorate." And then-

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, this is the root cause of that. Basically because of the election, but previously, in pa- in the past, they used to fight over land and all this. But today, no, especially in my community.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** And most of the parts in Chimbo Province.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Okay. So when, when, when you say, um, they have fights during elections and all that, how does it ef- affect, uh, helpless women and, and children and your daily life in the community?

**Interviewee:** Um, when they, when they fight in elections, it doesn't affect the woman and the children and it doesn't affect anybody because the, they have that understanding that they are fighting between the enemies and not all of us.

**Valka-Mir Foundation:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** So, like, the roads are going to be free. You can travel where you want to go. They won't touch you. They won't be like, "Oh, where do you come from?" You're be- I mean, they don't touch women and children. They just fight with the men. ... and, uh, they won't disturb



anybody. They don't disturb anybody. Even though the fight is, like, getting worse and they'll be like, oh, like, you've, you've heard rumors about some oth- other islands places, they'll be like, "Okay, it's fighting and you cannot go there." But from us, the Chimbu people, no, you can, you can go freely. Like, they won't touch you or they won't be like, or they're in the process of fighting so you're gonna get that. No. You're, like, you're not part of the fighting so they won't touch you. Even, you can, especially the women and children, you can, you can come from the, from the place where the trouble is or the fighting is but they won't touch you.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay. Thank you. So how do you resolve conflict and justice is, uh, served within your community? Are there any traditional ways of solving conflicts and issues?

**Interviewee:** (smacks lips) Yeah. Um, they follow the structure of, um, the past, how they usually like the, the chief.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewee:** And j- the chief have to, like, come out and be like, "Okay, w- we," um, "we need to stop fighting and come up to a solution, a conclusion." And then the other side will be like, "Okay, why do you wanna, want us to stop the fighting?" And then they'll be like, "No, we're killing each other." And like, "We're hurting each other and the children are not going to school." And like, th- this, this, uh, fighting cause fear. so simply let's just stop and then, like, the chief is talking so they have to listen. If they don't listen, then something worse might happen to them because we believe that the chief is like our head and whatever, if he's catching the community, the community is going to be in a chaos, or the clan itself. So, they have to listen and then they come together and then they bring ... Like the other side, they agree to an amount, like, okay, we're gonna bring this amount of money, this amount of pigs and then if the both side agree to it, then they solve the problem.

**Interviewee:** So now since that the police are in there, the law and order, um, enforcement is there, but because of the ... there's not much, um, service delivery. They used to do it, do it the traditional way as I've explained. So, that you've come together and bring, like, uh, big men we usually see in the village. So bring them together and they all agree and then they solve the problem this way, giving like, exchanging of pigs and money and then stop the violence or, or whoever that has been injured, like, they pay them, pay the compensation to the family and the tribe that he come from he or she come from and then they, they just solve the problem and there'll be peace.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Thank you. So how fa- safe do you currently feel in your community? Like, how safe do you feel?

**Interviewee:** Um, currently in my comm- community, I feel, um, it's really safe. Like, it's not that, um, like they're fighting and then you'll be scared, like, uh, to go to your village, all this. But there's only one thing that, especially in Chimbu, that we believe in that still exists is the Sosore. I mean, people saying it died already, I mean, you can't believe in that. We know its spirit, but, uh, we still fear that because coming from this type of, uh, place where they practice such, it's, it's the only thing that scares us to go back in the community. But apart from, like, physical fighting and all this, um, travel and all this, it doesn't scare us because they just fight, like, over small things and they make peace and then the community is okay. You travel freely. You can go and there's nothing gonna disturb you along the way. Nobody's gonna touch you or say like you, or how do you come, where do you come from, or they won't even ask you.

**Interviewee:** You're free to go back to your village and come and play. But the only thing that scares us is the Sosore. Like, we still believe in that because, like, sometimes we usually see it

become all nice, so we still believe in that. So that- that's the only thing that makes us scared to go back to the village. But apart from that, everything is fine. Everything is okay.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay. So, overall, how do you feel about yourself being a person from your community, uh, as a highlander?

**Interviewee:** Um, (clears throat) as a highlander, I feel, I mean, I feel blessed because, um, most of the things out there is fresh. Um, because we come from the highlands region, I mean, at my own village, at, uh, where I come from, um, people see that this is mountainous and then how can you do gardening and how can people survive because there's no tree. I mean, you can see it. There's no tree. If you were to have chances to travel down there. So there's like grass. Where the wat- I mean, the water is like in between the mountains. There's like beautiful waterfalls, like crystal clear blue. Um, that's the whole thing that impresses me that I'm like, in my village you can, like, drink fresh water and even the gardens that we do, even though the, the soil itself is, um, it's like it's seen as a clay soil. But once we try to do gardening, the food itself is like ... It's so, the soil is so fertile. So if you, if you were to plant, uh, vegetables and all this, the harvest is so great.

**Interviewee:** And you can even fill up your basket without even finishing a plot of, um, the garden itself. So, that's the thing that makes me so proud of where I come from. Even though the service delivery is kind of like not that good, but I'm still proud because I'm from that area and I'm still proud that I'm from Chimbu because of the uniqueness of the place that I come from and the type of tradition, the type of character and behavior that we have in our DNA. So that's the thing that makes me so proud that I'm from Chimbu and I'm an islander.

**VALKA-MIR FOUNDATION:** Okay. Wow. Thank you so much.