



# WOMEN, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC: KEY ISSUES

## Women and Governance

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## **Introduction: Women and governance**

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To date little attention has been given to the practical application of gender equity within good governance programmes and where discussion of engendering governance has taken place, it has seldom included the perspectives of village people. The papers in this section consider the practical application of international and national legislation in supporting greater equity in political decision making, and ways to ensure that government reform processes do not disadvantage women.

From a very different perspective, six Melanesian women discuss the strategies they have employed in rural villages to improve their effectiveness in decision making and governance. Their papers, introduced by Bronwen Douglas, point very clearly to the importance of Christianity in Melanesian women's lives and its power as a vital cultural element in Melanesian governance and women's place in it.

Several themes emerge from the papers presented. These are: the importance of legislation as the basic framework for good and gender sensitive governance; the contradictions between the concepts of good governance and traditional leadership; and the lack of political will to empower women beyond statements of policy and legislation. These papers make it clear that good governance will remain a concept only while discriminatory legislation remains in place or legislation can be interpreted or implemented in ways which are discriminatory.

Rima Das Pradhan considers national legal systems within the framework of the Fourth Beijing World Conference on Women and its Platform of Action, and points to the need for aid donors to make stronger links between governance and gender and to ensure that support for judicial reform incorporates gender concerns. In international law, Hilary Charlesworth provides examples of the limited practical impact of legislative change or international Conventions on improving women's representation. Although international practices may not directly discriminate, they can effectively inhibit women's participation by relying on norms that reflect male life patterns. A major inadequacy of international law is that gender is understood as a synonym for sex and the law on sex discrimination is identified with equal treatment of men and women. She questions whether balanced participation of the sexes in international organisations would make a difference.

In considering the reform processes and the development of good governance policies and practice in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, Heather Wallace indicates that there have been significant changes in gender policy but that it is unclear what substance will be given to the rhetoric of policy. She calls for a more trusting relationship between NGOs and governments if gender policies are to be put into practice. There is the perception that the integration of gender issues into legislation and planning is determined by international agencies and aid donors. As a result the reform process is not seen to reflect the desire and commitment of the governments.

Concluding the papers in this first part of the discussion, Lorraine Corner of UNIFEM, Bangkok, discusses the concept of transformative politics and provides a valuable overview of the factors that influence women's participation in politics in East and Southeast Asia. She provides background information on organisations that support women in politics and networks and institution building activities in the region.

These papers point strongly to the need for development assistance organisations to ensure that planning and implementing governance projects are based on a full awareness of the gender dimensions of existing legislation, its relationship to customary law, and the gender bias in its drafting, enactment, interpretation and application. Consideration should be given to providing a climate in which women and men are aware of the law and their rights in terms of democratic processes and are protected from bias resulting from legislation and its implementation.

## **Hearing Melanesian women**

Bronwen Douglas's introduction and the six papers by Melanesian women provide important insights into gender and governance issues in rural villages - the situation within which most Melanesian women live. These papers outline the efforts of women to be heard, to gain credibility and to work together to improve village conditions. The papers highlight the importance of Christianity in their lives, their decision-making and as the foundation for Melanesian governance. It is clear that any future attempts to improve governance and to adequately incorporate gender issues, must carefully consider the role of the Church.

## **Threats and opportunities in Solomon Islands: Sinking or swimming in uncharted waters**

*Christopher Chevalier*

### **Introduction**

This paper assesses the threats and an opportunity created by the conflict in Solomon Islands which has caused political and economic meltdown.<sup>1</sup> The conflict in Solomon Islands is commonly referred to as a 'crisis', a word that in Chinese can mean both 'danger' and 'opportunity'. Following the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000, there are serious dangers of further disintegration but also opportunities for positive transformations. Whether the Solomons sinks or swims will depend on skilful navigation away from the waves of violent ethnic conflict and towards political, social and economic recovery.

### **Guns, law and order**

The militarisation of men, and particularly youth, is the deepest threat created by the crisis and will be the most difficult to resolve. Guns have become the means to gain significant political and economic advantages. Compensation payments paid to militants, plus profits from looting and robbery, have made 'security' a lucrative business. It will be difficult to counter such advantages for militants without providing alternative economic inducements and educational opportunities. Purely criminal elements will continue to take advantage of the availability of weapons and the absence of effective legal control. The release of all prisoners from Rove prison after the coup in June has created an additional threat from convicted criminals who have everything to gain from remaining outlaws. A gun culture has developed that is both glamorous and profitable for those who hitherto were marginalised and disadvantaged. Young militants are also causing fear and insecurity in Malaita, Western and Choiseul provinces. Disarmament will need to be both physical and psychological, getting rid of not only the guns in people's hands but also the guns in their heads (Kabutaulaka 2000).

Widespread theft, looting, hijacking, extortion, and human rights abuses have occurred since 1998, including executions and torture by both militant forces (Amnesty International 2000). Restoration of law and order remains the indispensable condition for social, political and economic recovery. Honiara is not considered safe for return without an international peacekeeping force and a neutral police force. Many people argue that it is both unsafe and unacceptable that militants will be integrated into the regular police force, as envisaged in the peace agreement.

### **Economic effects of the conflict**

The peace agreement and the restoration of government services require the rebuilding of a shattered economy. The government is bankrupt and unable to fund services or to repay national and foreign debt. The economy is in a disastrous condition due to the multiple effects of the crisis, including:

- closure of major revenue-earning businesses, such as Solomon Taiyo, Gold Ridge mine, Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd., some logging operations, and tourism;
- closure of many businesses in Honiara;
- redundancies and lay-offs of many government workers on leave without pay;
- remittances to provinces from Honiara have been drastically reduced;
- closure of markets for selling agriculture, marine products, and timber;
- inability of rural people to sell copra (for reasons of Central Exporting Marketing Authority incompetence rather than the crisis); and
- collapse of government revenue collection.

Many people have lost their income from formal and nonformal employment. Their numbers are conservatively estimated at 8,000, including those who are on leave without pay (Kudu 2000). The decline in incomes and subsequent multiplier effects have seriously reduced cash flows throughout the provinces down to village level. People who have lost property and possessions cannot afford to replace them. There is an urgent need to restore income and employment generation, but restoring investment and business opportunities will require confidence in a sustained peace process. An ominous sign is that the Sogavare government and communities are desperate to sign logging and fishing agreements to generate revenue. The government is courting foreign (often unscrupulous) investors and fishing fleets which, given the disastrous over-exploitation of natural resources during the previous decade, will rapidly deplete non-renewable resources and render the country completely unsustainable in the future.

An opportunity created by the crisis is the increased awareness of the necessity and pressure for more economic development in the provinces, particularly from businesspeople who are unwilling to risk returning to Honiara. However, losses already incurred, inability to service current loan debts and the difficulty in obtaining credit make the establishment of businesses in the provinces extremely problematic without generous internal and external credit.

### **Population displacement**

The large scale displacement of people, particularly but not exclusively from Guadalcanal and Malaita, poses both risks and opportunities for the future. Up to 40–50,000 people have been displaced from their former homes and occupations (Kudu 2000). This is a radical reversal of the urban drift which had created growth rates of 10 per cent a year in Honiara and 5 per cent in parts of Guadalcanal. People have not always moved back to their original roots, preferring to settle in coastal areas rather than in isolated and bush areas with no services. Pressure has increased on services, land and food security, particularly in smaller islands such as Rennell, Bellona, the Reef Islands, and coastal areas of north Malaita. The threats to food security, and health and education services may be temporary or long-term, depending on whether economic recovery is sufficient to generate government revenue for services.

Land disputes are increasing and are likely to escalate further due to the need to accommodate newcomers and the contesting of existing land use by returning landowners. Localised conflicts could well increase and be settled by weapons. The impact of displacement has been very diverse within and between provinces. Some provinces are benefiting from the return of skilled people, particularly in public service, business and medicine. Whether this is a temporary phenomenon will depend on successfully restoring law and order in Honiara, and regenerating economic opportunities throughout the country.

### **Education services**

Displaced children and youth are placing enormous pressures on existing school places and many are unable to find places, particularly secondary and tertiary students who were receiving education in Honiara. These new pressures occur in the context of chronic shortages of school places and teachers. Provinces need new secondary schools, tertiary institutions, distance education centres, and rural training centres. Otherwise, students from provinces and the provinces themselves will be permanently disadvantaged, which will create constraints to long-term development as well as increase the risk of future conflict due to disaffected youth. Opportunities exist to reform the secondary education system, away from one which develops a small successful elite at the expense of many drop- (or rather push-) outs, and towards providing the majority of students with social, cultural and practical life skills useful in both urban and rural areas.

### **Health issues**

There are immediate threats to health and health services. National pharmacy services have large unpaid bills, which are creating treatment shortages. There are chronic problems for provincial health services due to shortages of radios, canoes and outboard motors, which

make advice and referral of cases from clinics to provincial centres more difficult. Immunisation coverage rates have dropped rapidly, particularly in Guadalcanal and more isolated areas, which will increase the likelihood of epidemics of measles and whooping cough in the future. The seeds of a silent but lethal public health disaster from HIV/ AIDS are growing rapidly, which could kill far more youths in the coming years than will weapons. There is an urgent need to address the problem revealed by recent research in Malaita, which shows alarming levels of unprotected sex, 'long line' and rape (Buchanan-Aruwafu and Maebiru 2000).

### **Land and food security**

Land and land ownership lie at the heart of the conflict in Solomon Islands. Alienation of land and dispossession of land for plantations and the establishment of Honiara in Guadalcanal created the seeds of the present troubles. The crisis has provided an impetus for fairer returns to, and better control of, land by indigenous landowners. In the future, the precedent set by Guadalcanal is likely to lead elsewhere to stricter control of land sales. This could constrain development and freedom of migration throughout the Solomons.

Prior to the conflict, food security was virtually guaranteed except during times of cyclone and flooding. The influx of displaced people has added pressure on agricultural land in the provinces. Productivity of land will be reduced by increased use of fallow land, which has historically become shorter as populations have increased. Threats to food security vary, depending on the availability of land, its productivity, how long and how much expertise displaced people have had to plant new gardens, plus the capacity and willingness of relatives to provide food. The economic downturn also affects the ability to pay for food if subsistence produce is insufficient. Emergency food distribution is likely to be needed in Rennel, Bellona and Reef Islands because of the large number of displaced people and the poor supply of local foods.

### **Youth**

The youthful age structure of the population is a critical demographic force which has contributed to the present crisis. Many young people have experienced an individual and collective demoralisation due to their perceived 'failure' at school and their failure to find work (Mitchell et al. 1999). *Masta Liu* has become an important new cultural concept characterising the young and frequently unemployed young people who come to Honiara. Short-term migration (*wokabaot*) to town in search of work and new experiences has long been a feature of young people's lives in Solomon Islands. Alienation and marginalisation have been reinforced by an urban youth culture with opportunities for freedom from traditional authority, recreational sex, and in recent years use of marijuana and homebrew. One benefit of the conflict may be lessening of the centrifugal attractions of Honiara, which will reduce *masta liu*, *wokabaot*, and urban alienation.

Militarisation has revived young people's traditional role as warriors, while simultaneously providing them with a cause, status, power and income denied them before. It will be very difficult to persuade them to surrender weapons unless there are significant opportunities for income and recreational activities. This will require effective reorientation of government and donor development policies and resources. Otherwise, the future for youth and peaceful development is indeed bleak.

### **Ethnic identity and cultural difference**

Solomon Islands is a nation of villages, islands and cultural identities based on language and clan groupings (Roughan 2000). National identity is a recent phenomenon created by colonialism and maintained through post-independence institutions. The cement holding the country together has clearly fractured along the lines of island and cultural identity. The ethnic conflict of the past two years will be the subject of debate, resentment and possibly revenge for many years to come. As in Bougainville, a mixture of Christian and traditional reconciliation solutions will be needed to restore ethnic tolerance. Political and institutional solutions to the crisis will undoubtedly need to acknowledge and cater for ethnic identity and differences, particularly in sensitive areas such as the police, prisons and the legal

apparatus. Ethnicity may become a prerequisite for employment and right of residence. While some would regard this as a retrograde step, others view it as an opportunity to lessen Malaitan hegemony.

### **State government**

Demands by provinces for federal or independent statehood reflect both loss of trust in the national government and longstanding aspirations for increased provincial autonomy. Successive national governments have consistently ignored the needs of provinces and given them meagre returns for exploitation of their resources. There is resentment with largescale development projects benefiting Honiara and national government, while provinces remain underdeveloped. There are real opportunities for authentic decentralisation of government, but the cost of setting up and maintaining state governments could be prohibitive, while the viability of smaller provinces such as Renbel, Central, and Temotu is questionable given their size and resource base.

### **Reconciliation and the peace process**

Representatives and organisations of civil society are critical forces for promoting peace and reconciliation. There are real opportunities for strengthening the traditional roles of community, women and family through reconciliation and rehabilitation. They are currently marginalised from the political peace process and this threatens the viability and fairness of the process. The churches and Solomon Islands Churches Association (SICA), through its Peace Office, Women for Peace and NGOs have been an important voice of moderation and peace during the crisis. Churches and NGOs have an essential role to play through trauma counselling, community restoration, and peace and religious ceremonies, which will be essential activities in the months and years to come. Church organisations are probably the most important ones for reconciliation because of their widespread presence in all villages and the Christian doctrine of forgiveness.

### **Reconstruction and rehabilitation**

There is a very strong demand for more decentralised development which would bring more projects down to provincial and village level. Given the number and scatter of communities in the Solomons, there never has been, nor ever will be, sufficient paid employment or educational opportunities to meet all needs. This increases the imperative for village based development initiatives and for strengthening the capacity of community based organisations, which will require major readjustments of development assistance policies. There is deep mistrust of Honiara and national-level institutions that have failed the provinces in the past. Even if peace is restored in Honiara, people's confidence to return there may take several years. The costs of compensating or rehabilitating people who have lost possessions and property in Honiara and Guadalcanal will be very high and in all likelihood impossible for national and international governments to afford. Damage to investment confidence will make legitimate investors very reluctant to restore or undertake new investments for years to come.

### **Development and development projects**

The post-conflict process provides both opportunities and imperatives for more decentralised development. At provincial level, the demands for development include infrastructure such as roads, markets, wharves, business areas, study centres, schools and clinics. All provinces, not just Malaita, need special development assistance to allow them to create employment and income for their people. Communities want direct assistance which avoids middlemen and bottlenecks in Honiara, plus less complicated project procedures. There is a need for local mechanisms to assess and develop project plans, which could be provided by a number of organisations present in different provinces, as well as provincial government planners. Better project identification and monitoring could be achieved through provincial coordinating teams, with appropriate assistance from agencies and overseas volunteers. Better coordination between NGOs, high commissions and donor agencies is needed so that projects of different type and scale can be directed to the most appropriate agencies and donors. Churches are also an important means for implementation of projects because of



their widespread network and access to independent funding through overseas affiliates. Most of the churches have women's and youth groups that provide social and community activities that could link peace building with development activities.

### **Conclusion**

The conflict in Solomon Islands has created shock waves that will reverberate for years to come. The country could sink into further conflict and disintegration if the forces of militarisation and ethnicity dominate political and legal processes. These forces have created new pathways to power and wealth that could become entrenched if post-conflict political and economic measures are insufficient or not fast enough. The opportunities and imperatives for decentralised economic and political development must be grasped quickly if the swim to recovery is to succeed.

### **Note**

1. This paper draws on the findings of a report by an Australian NGO mission which has provided an analysis to help guide the NGO response. The mission was organised by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid and Development Services Exchange in August–September 2000. The purpose of the mission was to listen and to discuss reconciliation and rehabilitation issues throughout the provinces and to make a rapid assessment of the need for Australian and international support. The team of four visited all nine provinces and held meetings with community groups, women and youth, church leaders and government representatives, as well as representatives of displaced people. A full report of the mission will be available from ACFOA in November 2000.

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## **Engendering good governance in practice**

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### **Introduction**

Governance is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. It is the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations, and mediate their differences (UNDP 1997). The common strategy of development institutions to promote good governance involves reforms to promote predictability, accountability, transparency, efficiency, equitability and participation. In order to maximise the benefits of development assistance and economic development, the strategy commonly aims to: improve economic management; strengthen public-sector management; promote legal and judicial effectiveness; and strengthen processes for effective civil society participation and representation. 'Engendering' governance strategies involves the integration of gender into all areas of policy and programming so as to address the structural, attitudinal, cultural and institutional barriers faced by women.

'Good governance' emerged as a priority in the mid-1980s as critical to the provision of development assistance. It now shapes the policy of every major multilateral and bilateral development institution. It is based on a belief that corruption, poor control of public funds, lack of accountability, human rights abuses, and excessive military expenditure have undermined 50 years of international development efforts (see, for example, Faundez 1997, Orford and Beard 1998, Pritchard 1996, Turner and Hulme 1997). A recent landmark study by the World Bank (1998) stresses the crucial role of good governance for sustainable development. It shows how, with a good policy environment and sound country management, an additional 1 per cent of GDP in development assistance translates into a 1 per cent decline in poverty and a similar decline in infant mortality. Where governance is weak, development assistance has much less impact and is often wasted.

Studies have shown that an effective judiciary and legal system are fundamental to the promotion of sustainable development. A predictable legal environment with a reliable and well-trained judiciary is necessary to ensuring good governance and the protection of human rights. It is essential that a legal system have the constitutional right to investigate and supervise executive and administrative powers. Honest law enforcement agencies that effectively implement court decisions are essential, and an effective court administration system provides for efficient access to justice.

However, equality before the law is not always achieved, and women still face traditional barriers including:

- poor access to laws, legal systems and the law making process;
- absence/invisibility of women's rights within various legislative frameworks;
- discrimination in areas such as property, inheritance, and medical and criminal law;
- prohibitive cost of accessing legal services;
- lack of gender sensitivity within the judiciary and enforcement agencies;
- lack of women judges, and judicial officers and advocates in positions of decision making;
- high cost of legal education; and
- demands of the legal profession being irreconcilable with family responsibilities, preventing access to positions of power.

### **Divergence: Policy and practice**

#### **The international policy framework**

The Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 agreed on an agenda for empowering women and accelerating implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking

Strategies for the Advancement of Women, adopted in 1985. The Platform for Action (PFA) established a set of actions aimed at achieving significant change by the year 2000 and was adopted by 163 countries.

The PFA and Declaration emerged after a preparatory process (the most participatory of its kind) wherein women from villages in the poorest of countries to urban centres in the richest of countries demanded a space for active input. The message, though not new, was a universal one: 'Women's ... full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including ... in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the advancement of equality, development and peace' (Beijing Declaration, paragraph 13).

The PFA noted that the feminisation of poverty has become a matter of key concern in countries in economic transition. Furthermore, 'the failure to adequately mainstream a gender perspective in all economic analyses and planning and to address the structural causes of poverty is ... a contributing factor' (Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 48). It was stressed throughout that development and economic growth can only be sustained and sustainable 'through improving the economic, social, political, legal and cultural status of women' (Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 54).

## **Beijing + 5**

The Beijing + 5 Conference, to be held in July 2000, will assess achievements thus far. The September 1999 Asia-Pacific NGO Symposium identified some key concerns:

The inadequate mechanisms for ensuring that governments are responsive and accountable to citizens for the fulfillment of their international obligations to implement commitments to social and economic development that involves, benefits and empowers women, eradicates poverty and safeguards natural resources.

The lack of political will to empower women beyond statements of policy and legislation and to truly redress systemic and structural imbalances, which is reflected in insufficient resource allocations and support mechanisms to achieve these objectives and the all-too-frequent reliance on micro-schemes and initiatives to address macro, systemic or structural problems (Declaration 1999).

## **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 43**

In preparation for Beijing + 5, the annual meeting of the 43rd CSW at the United Nations, 1–19 March 1999, devoted much of its time to negotiating the text concerning institutional arrangements for implementing the PFA, and many quantitative and qualitative changes were identified (see Spence and Waghray 1999). Clearly echoing the broader governance framework of most donor agencies, the elements necessary for national machineries to be effective are considered to be: clear mandates; accountability mechanisms; partnership with civil society; transparent political process; adequate financial and human resources; and continued strong political commitment. The draft text stresses the importance of international cooperation in order to assist the work of national machineries and systems.

Various national actions are recommended:

- strengthening national machineries and the advancement of women, and increasing resources to do so;
- mainstreaming gender effectively;
- reforming laws;
- training and building women's capacity;
- gender-sensitising ministers, bureaucrats and the legal profession; and
- developing methods for assessing the quantitative value of women's unremunerated work in order to devise appropriate policies.<sup>1</sup>

The international community is urged to:

- encourage multilateral and bilateral donor agencies to assist activities that strengthen national machineries;
- document and publish 'good practices'; and

- develop and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and qualitative performance indicators to ensure the effective gender sensitive planning, monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

### **Global policy in the development context**

There is a clear convergence of PFA objectives and the need to incorporate gender and good governance more strongly into development strategies around the world. Key multilateral agencies recognise this necessity and it is often reflected in their policy frameworks. For example, the World Bank includes gender analysis in its country assistance strategies, and its 'comprehensive development framework' attempts to draw a close link between gender and governance. In Australia, Australian Legal Resource International's (ALRI; see p.x in this *Bulletin*) policy on gender and development includes:

- collecting gender-disaggregated information;
- encouraging women counterparts to actively participate in projects at all levels of project design and delivery;
- ensuring women's access to training and capacity building projects;
- promoting women's legal literacy;
- creating consultative mechanisms to ensure ongoing communication with and input from women's groups;
- recognising the important role women often play in informal dispute resolution and negotiations; and
- locating women technical assistants for project delivery, to serve as gender focal points.

### **Implementing gender and good governance policies**

However, it can be difficult to implement such policies. For example, good governance is often used as a loan conditionality by multilateral and bilateral arrangements.<sup>2</sup> Development history shows that such conditionalities are necessary, but the link between good governance and loan arrangements raises difficulties in incorporating a gendered approach in project implementation:

- Macro-level policies do not reflect day-to-day realities. There is an ongoing separation between issues relating to macroeconomic reform and those relating to the immediate needs of communities. Gender is more readily taken into account in local-level projects but is seen as not relevant or peripheral to projects relating to macroeconomic or public sector reform.
- Projects addressing gender continue to focus on violence against women, primary health and education – which are critical and important, but little connection is made between a gendered approach and the provision of technical assistance to reform legal institutions, black letter law or commercial laws in response to the macroeconomic reform strategies often included in lending arrangements.
- In-country counterparts often identify priorities which mainly respond to loan conditionalities, and thus are of limited scope. Short timelines and a shortage of skilled personnel in-country often result in narrowly defined projects, delivered in the shortest period of time.
- The lack of sensitivity in addressing traditional concerns about the 'male culture of law' worldwide has implications for the provision of legal technical assistance to countries undergoing legal and judicial reform. Many countries, including Australia, are still coming to terms with engendering the law and legal institutions with programmes such as awareness raising for police officers, judges and government officials; legal literacy for women; the criminalisation of violence against women in public and private; and gender equality under the law, including property and land rights, family law and employment. There is a danger that external legal technical assistance can perpetuate and transfer these barriers into situations where women already face significant disadvantage.

- It is difficult to find women legal technical assistants to serve as focal points and mentors, because of the traditional imbalance in legal institutions in most countries.

Some of the challenges being faced in ALRI projects include:

- Women judges attending judicial training workshops continue to be mainly from specialist courts, such as family courts, indicating their overrepresentation in such courts and fewer of them in courts of general jurisdiction.
- In projects relating to court administration, women are largely low-ranking officers. The creation of mechanisms for their advancement through career development and training is seen as an ideal long-term objective but is often met with resistance.
- In numerous projects relating to court congestion, all judges in-country have been male.
- In a legal drafting training project, there is little recognition of the need to ensure that women drafters also have access to this training.
- All except one of the ALRI's judicial consultants have been male. Justice Cathy Branson from the Australian Federal Court provided technical assistance on developing a judicial education plan for the Palestinian Territories and used the opportunity to speak on gender and law to law students at Birzeit University.
- In a judicial restructuring project, there is resistance to the use of affirmative action processes for the advancement of women judges in less traditional areas of law.
- There is a lack of financial and other resources generally and gender-related initiatives are thus relegated to the periphery.
- The unavailability or limited availability of women mentors, because of professional, advocacy and family demands, is a constraint.
- In providing legal drafting assistance on specific bodies of law, there is resistance to considering the implications for women in non-gender specific areas of law, such as corporations law and bankruptcy law.

## Conclusion

The draft language of Beijing + 5 clearly asserts the need for more accountability and transparency on the part of governments and international institutions. The development policy focus has shifted from gender in the 1980s and early 1990s to good governance. The time is ripe to fully integrate these policy frameworks at a practical level, to decompartmentalise gender projects and incorporate them into the mainstream.

Numerous studies and global policy statements, including the FPA, have highlighted the need to address the disadvantages faced by women as a key strategy in promoting sustainable development. As a first step, a coherent, integrated and coordinated governance and gender strategy needs to be developed across multilateral and bilateral agencies. Donors need to consider gender in broader macroeconomic reform programmes and aim to remove the systemic and institutional barriers faced by women.

Greater efforts have to be made in more effectively integrating the outcomes of key global policies, such as the PFA, at an international level. Increasingly, donor coordination mechanisms are being established in sector specific areas such as legal cooperation, and such fora could be used to exchange information on incorporating gender into sector specific areas at the country level. A cohesive monitoring and evaluation mechanism has to be developed by multilateral and bilateral agencies to assess the effectiveness of gender and governance strategies.

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) has developed a governance strategy following the identification of governance as a priority (Committee to review the Australian overseas aid program 1997). It is noteworthy that AusAID recognises the need to make stronger links between governance and gender and is in the process of developing such an integrated strategy.

For agencies such as the ALRI, it is important to continue to consult widely in the identification of priorities; to raise awareness of the need to include a gender perspective in macroeconomic reform strategies; to gain a thorough understanding of the gender related legal and judicial reforms taking place in Australia, and the origins of such reforms; to

analyse whether such reforms can be modified and translated; and to brief all technical assistants on gender and development concepts.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Notes**

1. It also recommends that national machineries and other institutional mechanisms: design and promote policies for the advancement of women; catalyse gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes; assist governments in taking specific actions in data gathering and disaggregation; promote research and dissemination of information on women and gender equality; establish documentation centres to disseminate relevant data and other information to promote public dialogue through the media; create and strengthen collaborative links with other agencies at local, regional, national and international levels; establish partnerships with women's organisations, academic institutions and NGOs; engage the media in re-examining gender stereotypes; and create and strengthen collaborative relationships with the private sector, by initiating advocacy dialogue and advising companies to address issues affecting women in the paid labour force and to set up ways and means to promote equality.
2. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to examine this debate (see Orford 1997:443).

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## **Gender and governance in international law**

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The International Labor Organization has estimated that, at the present rate of change, it will take 468 years before women and men are represented in equal numbers in national structures of governance. This bleak forecast raises issues of global justice. What does international law have to say about such questions of gender and governance? International law is the legal system developed to regulate relations between states. It deals with issues such as the drawing of land and maritime boundaries between states, the protection of diplomats and the use of force in international relations. International law also establishes various regimes, such as human rights law and environmental law, which affect what states do *within* their own borders.

Traditional doctrines of international law were long considered to have nothing to do with questions of either gender or governance, nor with the interaction of the two concepts. These matters were considered to be essentially issues of domestic jurisdiction to be dealt with by national legal systems. Over the last quarter of a century, however, the language of both gender and governance has taken on greater significance in international law, although, as I shall argue, their practical impact has been limited.

### **Gender**

The idea of 'gender' is typically understood by international lawyers as a synonym for 'women' and 'sex'. There has been little investigation of the way that images of gender have influenced the development of the processes and substance of international law, as is found, for example, in Carol Cohn's work on strategic studies (1993). Gender comes into focus in international law almost exclusively in the context of sex discrimination. The flagship of the international regime on sex discrimination is the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979. The Convention elaborates the prohibition of sex discrimination in particular contexts, including political life, education and the rural sector.

A major inadequacy in the international law on sex discrimination is its identification of sexual equality with equal treatment of women and men. For example, the rationale of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, and the norm of non-discrimination contained in both the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is to place women in the same position as men in the sphere of public life, such as the workplace and politics. This is also the strategy of CEDAW, although it extends to a limited extent into the 'private' sphere. The activities of the UN Commission on the Status of Women have similarly been informed by such an approach. The problem with this model of equality, as many feminist scholars have pointed out, is that it only offers equality when women and men are in identical positions, and fails to address the underlying causes and consequences of sex discrimination. Institutional practices may not directly discriminate against women, but they can effectively inhibit women's participation by relying on norms reflecting male life patterns as benchmarks of eligibility or success. The fundamental problem for women worldwide is not simply discriminatory treatment compared with men, although this is a manifestation of the larger problem. Women are in an inferior position because they lack real economic, social or political power in both the public and private worlds.

For these reasons, even the comparatively broad definition of discrimination contained in CEDAW may not have much cutting edge against the problems women face. The Convention's endorsement of affirmative action programmes (article 4) similarly assumes

that these measures will be temporary techniques to allow women eventually to perform exactly like men.

## **Governance**

The term 'governance' is not found in any of the classic works of international law. In the context of the creation and recognition of new states, international law was concerned with whether a state had a government, but not with the form that government took. The concept of 'governance' has however been employed increasingly by international lawyers. In an influential article, Professor Thomas Franck (1992) argued that there was a duty on all states to govern democratically. Other scholars have suggested that non-democratic governments should be treated as illegitimate by the international community. The idea of 'good governance' has also figured prominently in work on international development, with the elaboration of the link between the achievement of sustainable development and a democratic political system by scholars and international institutions.

Critics of the idea of 'good' or 'democratic' governance argue that the concept tends to be a very limited one. Some have pointed to the focus on the holding of elections as the totem of democracy, without regard to other indicators, such as access to political office, freedom of the press, wealth distribution and so on. Others have suggested that international ideas of governance are shaped by European and Western perspectives and are not concerned enough with the well-being of the governed. Antony Anghie, for example, has linked concern with the idea of governance with the colonial origins of modern international law. He notes

Governance has been, and continues to be, a discourse which is peculiarly about the non-western world. Whatever the economic and political failures afflicting western societies, international articulated notions of governance are rarely if ever applied to assess or remedy those failures (Anghie 1999:22).

The relationship of the idea of 'good governance' to the international law of human rights is also unclear.

## **Developing international law**

International law, then, appears to offer a very narrow framework for thinking about the relationship of gender and governance. It prohibits discrimination against women in the context of formal access to the institutions of governance, but it does not clearly deal with structural barriers to such access. It presents governance as a one-dimensional phenomenon, focused on the electoral process. How can these rather limited principles be developed in a more fruitful way?

The imbalance between women and men's representation in governance should be seen as a question of human rights. The definition of discrimination on the basis of sex in international law encompasses both direct and indirect discrimination against women. In other words, whatever their motive, practices that result in unequal enjoyment of rights by women constitute discrimination. CEDAW makes specific reference to the need to take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life (article 7). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which monitors the Convention, has stressed the importance of these provisions and called on states parties to CEDAW to take temporary special measures to ensure that they are complied with.

The claim that the unequal participation of women in political life is an issue of human rights has been strongly contested. For example Fernando Tesón (1993:651–4) has argued that there is an injustice in the under-representation of women in public life only if this phenomenon is the result of states actively preventing women from exercising their right to vote or to stand for public office. Tesón has dismissed the notion that the great imbalance in actual political participation between women and men is in itself a human rights issue. Such an approach assumes that equality means only formally equal treatment and does not take into account the many systemic barriers to women's participation in governance. These barriers include cultural and religious norms about women's role and the failure of men to share household and child-rearing tasks.



A deeper question is whether balanced participation of the sexes in international organisations really makes a difference? Evidence of the effects of women's participation in political decision making is complex. In some cases it appears to have little beneficial impact for women generally. Thus the relatively high participation of women in Nordic politics has not delivered significant change in, for example, the position of women in labour markets. Women politicians are required to operate within male-defined political structures, and whether or not they are appointed to positions on important policy committees may affect their ability to participate in politics. Party politics, for example, can significantly constrain women's representation in political fora. In her study of women parliamentarians in India, Rai has described the 'gate-keeping' functions of political parties which control political agendas. She has concluded that

... institutional constraints, and systems of organisational incentives and disincentives are important explanations of the limited role that women can play in advancing the agenda of gender-justice through party-based political work (Rai 1997:118).

Women politicians are more likely to display allegiance to party platforms than to women's issues. While women vary in their acknowledgment that they have a 'women's' mandate to fulfill, even those who are so committed are likely to face a conflict between 'selling out' their ideals or becoming marginalised within the system.

The claim that women bring different attributes than men to public life also raises some thorny theoretical issues. Arguments for women's equal participation in decision making based on the special qualities they might bring to the process often rely on the assumption that women have a 'different voice' to, and a different way of arriving at moral judgments, than men. These are controversial assertions and may perpetuate myths about women's nature, rather than developing an understanding of the power relationships that attribute particular characteristics to women. This issue is an example of the tension in much feminist scholarship between regarding gender as an unfixed, socially constructed category on the one hand and privileging the special standpoint of women on the other.

A separate issue is the difficulty of men adequately representing women's interests, which are not a fixed or stable category. Anne Phillips has argued that

... if women's interests were transparently obvious to any intelligent observer, there might be no particular case ... for insisting on representatives who also happen to be women (Phillips 1991:15).

She has pointed out that if, on the contrary, women's interests are 'varied, unstable, perhaps still in the process of formation', the separation of the representative from what is to be represented is much more difficult. The imbalance in men's representation in national and international governmental structures allows male life experiences to be regarded as a general, rather than gendered, category.

### **Some suggested strategies**

What practical strategies can be implemented in order to achieve equal participation of women in governance? Quotas and affirmative action programmes can play a useful role in encouraging women to stand for public office; literacy and education programmes are also significant. Most basically, if the nexus between sex and gender and the division of labour into public and private spheres were broken, if women and men shared household and workplace responsibilities, the conditions for equal political participation would be in place. At the same time, this could make the need for *representation* of women's interests less significant: the breakdown of the gendered public/private distinction would lead to

... a world in which gender should become less relevant and the abstractions of humanity more meaningful ... [rather than] a world in which women have to speak continuously as women – or men are left to speak as men (Phillips 1991:7).

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## **Gender and the reform process in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands**

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Both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have experienced a major change in government during the last three years. The introduction of reform programmes has been a significant feature of these new governments, with an emphasis on the development of 'good governance'. Current policy statements do reveal a clear commitment to addressing gender issues and gender inequality. This commitment has been identified as one of the components of what is deemed to be good governance and it has been stated that it is essential to the reform process. However, the success of effective policy implementation depends not only upon its delivery but also on the commitment of funds and personnel to programme and project development. Greater gender awareness and understanding will rely, particularly in these two countries, upon the development of a closer relationship between government and non government organisation (NGO) sectors. Unless the gap between them is addressed and a coordinated approach developed, a change in both community and government awareness and practice is unlikely to occur successfully. This critical link between good governance, sound policy and community action has been noted:

The many difficulties that governments face in ensuring that these fundamental opportunities are available to all people have regularly been catalogued. Yet recent research into development processes has concluded that resources per se have less impact on development outcomes than do political resolve and sound policy and programmes (UNDP 1999:92).

### **Data gathering**

There has been a growing awareness and acknowledgement that there is considerable gender inequity, particularly in the areas of health and education, in the South Pacific region. There has also been a steady development of research in this field, although the collection of essential data has been rather challenging. As noted in the *Pacific human development report 1999*, at this stage neither the gender-related development index (GDI) nor the gender empowerment measure (GEM) can be used to gauge gender inequality and disparities in economic and political decision making, because of a lack of gender-disaggregated data. The dearth of reliable and official data available to the governments of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, a feature common to many other countries in the region, has resulted in the formulation of policy based on information that requires considerable expansion and verification. Generally, the understanding of gender differences has been drawn from the limited data available on school enrolments, adult literacy levels, and life expectancy and birth rates. Significantly, there has been some input from the community sector, combined with lobbying and advocacy from particular government departments with a commitment to gender issues, to the formulation of current policy documents addressing gender concerns in both countries.

### **Policy planning and implementation**

The main activity around gender issues in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands has traditionally occurred in the non government sector. NGOs and community groups have made practical attempts to address gender inequality. The NGOs have also functioned as significant lobby groups in calling for change and for the development of policy on gender issues. Women's groups and organisations are mainly located in the community sector. Until the introduction of the reform programmes, the track record of both governments in tackling gender issues was rather poor. Overall, there has been little commitment to funding and organising programmes to redress gender inequality, and specifically to promoting and developing programmes and policies addressing women's needs.

The Solomon Islands Government, for example, is yet to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The efforts of the Women and Development Division (WDD) in policy and programme delivery have been characterised by a lack of funding, a reliance upon overseas aid, and inadequate staffing levels. The national women's policy was finally accepted by the parliament in October 1998 after a frustrating five-year history of rejection and procrastination. Although there are now clear guidelines for addressing gender inequality through government policy, such as the following aims (Solomon Islands Government 1998), the problem of the level of commitment and support for their effective implementation remains.

The aims of the WDD are to:

- Promote an increased and more effective role for women in decision making in national development.
- Improve the availability and circulation of information and resources relating to the welfare of women and families.
- Facilitate women's training programmes to develop appropriate knowledge and skills for women and to improve their participation in development.

Further, there is now recognition that contradictions exist between policy and practice. There is an awareness that effective action is needed to address this issue within the bureaucracy:

The present level of human resources in this Division is inadequate to: (a) gather and compile a baseline data base on women which is absolutely essential to plan any work in this area (b) formulate policies, programmes and projects relating to women and (c) implement and monitor the policies, programmes and projects planned. Another constraint is that women are currently underrepresented at all levels of decision making (Solomon Islands Government 1999:44).

Like Solomon Islands, Vanuatu has a history of poor commitment to gender issues, such as minimal staffing of the women's division and a lack of delivery of specific programmes and policies. A major change has occurred, however, with the development of policy which is clearly committed to addressing gender inequalities. In the Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP) document, there is recognition, for example, that there is an absence of women in decision making at all levels. There is also some acknowledgement of the impact of traditional gender relations and the CRP provides an outline of policy and strategies to address this situation, although there is minimal discussion of how to promote attitudinal change. A gap exists between the rhetoric of policy and programme development and the reality of entrenched traditional attitudes and lifestyle. The following key statement in the CRP provides an insight into traditional attitudes but does not appear to be linked to any discussion or analysis of the need for change:

Ni-Vanuatu women are generally not considered to be equal to men in customary or contemporary society and are not generally expected or encouraged to participate in decision-making in the family, the community or government (Vanuatu Government 1997:Attachment D).

## **Reform changes**

In Vanuatu, some positive changes have occurred at government level, such as the appointment of a gender equity officer, the introduction of a programme of awareness raising on gender issues and some training in gender and development for government personnel, as well as the introduction of a microcredit scheme for women, based on the Grameen Bank model and known as the VANWODS Project. Also, the CRP policy documents state that the following policies and actions are 'central' to the reform process:

- Incorporation of gender awareness and gender analysis into policy making at all levels.
- Introduction of a strong gender dimension into the collection and analysis of statistics.
- Review of all legislature to ensure gender neutrality.

- Incorporation of gender awareness education into government and donor-sponsored community activities on natural resource management and human resource development.
- Development of policy and legislation on violence against women and children.
- Appointment of a planner with specific responsibility for gender policies and programmes.
- Creation of a working group to coordinate and monitor the above.

It would appear that recent policy formulation in Vanuatu on gender issues is principally government driven and, although consultation with the community has occurred, there is a level of criticism, particularly from the NGO sector, that this process has not been inclusive nor extensive enough. Among the women's organisations, there has been some scepticism concerning what has been perceived as a male-dominated policy change, without enough reference to, or consultation with, women from all sectors of society and it is indicative of ongoing traditional male-dominated decision making.

Another assessment of the formulation of gender policy and its integration into the planning process for both Vanuatu and Solomon Islands has been that it is determined or influenced by international pressure and the agenda of aid donors. One view from the Solomon Islands is that

the integration of gender in the government process has been determined largely by two major factors: government's response to national and global issues such as gender to ensure that its policies and plans are widely accepted ... and aid donor emphasis on gender issues as a requirement to be addressed in funded programs and projects (Kere 1999:127).

This raises the question of how much of the reform process is truly reflective of the desire and commitment of governments to address gender issues or whether policy statements are perhaps a product of, and response to, international agendas.

### **National Council of Women**

Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have both experienced some difficulties in sustaining and financially maintaining a much-needed umbrella NGO for women. The identity and role of the National Council of Women (NCW) in both countries has been characterised by a certain degree of confusion and ambivalence. Some of these issues arise because of the location of NCW offices, which in Solomon Islands are attached to government, and because of the reliance on government funding in both countries to maintain NCW operations. In Solomon Islands there is also a lack of understanding within the community and among women's groups of the nature of the relationship between the NCW and the government's WDD, and of the functions of both organisations. A survey conducted in 1998 (Kere 1999) reveals both the expectations and understanding of the interviewees that 'the main roles of the WDD to be the conduct of skills training and the funding of income generating programs', indicating limited awareness of the policy and coordination role of the department and further that 'very little is known on the roles and functions of the NCW'. Similar problems exist for the NCW in Vanuatu, which are compounded by the difficulties of trying to liaise and develop policy with a Women's Affairs Office, subject to constant staff losses and inadequate funding.

### **Non government organisations**

The NGO sector in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands had a broad range of gender-equity programmes in place well before the introduction of the government reforms. Lobbying and advocacy on gender issues has also been a feature of many NGOs, with activity occurring at the local, national, regional and international levels. In particular, many of them address gender inequality in the areas of health and education.

Within the internal organisational structure of many NGOs in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, there has been a deliberate policy of addressing gender issues both in terms of programme development and staffing practices. Development partners such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Asian Development Bank have played a key role in introducing or integrating gender issues into the reform programme. Other international

NGOs and funding organisations with clear policy guidelines on gender and development have also influenced project design and policy development in these two countries.

In Solomon Islands, there has been a steady growth in women's organisations (Kere 1999), with 20 being located at the national level and an estimated 3,000 operating at the provincial and community level. Major NGOs such as Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) have been instrumental in providing and facilitating gender training, particularly through its extensive village development worker scheme. Within SIDT's own organisational structure, there has been a concerted effort to incorporate gender and development practices. Other NGOs, specifically women's organisations, have focused on health, education and income generation issues affecting women. Others, such as the Solomon Islands Information Women's Network, focus on awareness raising on a broad range of gender issues, using radio and conducting training courses. Many of the women's organisations attached to various churches are known as 'church women groups', and they play a significant role in a country that has a widely dispersed rural population. The rural-urban divide is particularly pronounced in both Vanuatu and Solomon Islands and NGOs have proved to be most effective and active in delivering programmes aimed at addressing, for example, women's health and education needs.

In Vanuatu, a broad range of NGOs operate to promote equity and raise gender awareness. Some, such as Wan Smol Bag Theatre Group, National Community Development Trust, Vanuatu Women's Centre, and Vanuatu Rural Development Training Centres Association, employ diverse strategies and approaches to gender issues and in the delivery of specific activities aimed at meeting the needs of women.

### **NGO-government relationship**

The relationship between NGOs and government in both countries has been characterised by uneasy dialogue at some levels and only a limited amount of cooperative work in other areas. In Vanuatu, there has been some representation of NGO personnel on government policy committees and there has been a small amount of government representation in NGO projects. In Solomon Islands, the tension in the NGO-government relationship has been far more pronounced; the NGOs have generally not been included in discussions on reform, which has led to a degree of mutual suspicion and some antagonism. However, following the change of government in Solomon Islands, there appears to be an improvement in the relationship and a preparedness by both to work on some joint projects.

In contrast, during the reform process in Vanuatu, there have been efforts to develop the NGO-government relationship but the main impetus appears to have come from the government, resulting in a degree of wariness in the NGO sector. However, in both countries, cooperation between the two sectors often relies on the development of relationships between individuals or specific departments and particular NGOs. The positive relationship between the Women's Development Division in Solomon Islands and a broad range of community organisations is a prime example of how a cooperative situation can be fostered under difficult political, financial and administrative circumstances and which is promoted and developed by particular individuals.

### **Conclusion**

The reform process in both Vanuatu and Solomon Islands has resulted in significant changes in gender policy. At this stage it is unclear what degree of substance will be given to the rhetoric of policy and whether the outcome will be a serious commitment to gender and development issues across all departments in both governments and throughout the broader community. The success of a combined practical and strategic approach to gender issues will very much depend upon the establishment of a far more cooperative relationship. There are major challenges for both governments and NGOs in developing a more trusting relationship and concerted approach, which is certainly required for addressing gender issues in these two countries.

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## **Women in politics and good governance: Transformative politics in Asia–Pacific**

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### **Introduction**

According to a recent report (IPU 1999:25), only 14 per cent of parliamentarians in Asia and just under 14 per cent in the Pacific are women. In the last decade, interest in women's participation in politics in the Asia–Pacific region has focused on three main issues: why more women should become involved in politics and decision making at all levels; how more women can enter and survive in politics; and how women can make a difference in the quality of political decision making.

### **Networking and institution building**

Although various women's groups in Asia–Pacific have been engaged in the struggle to promote women's political roles since the end of the nineteenth century, the movement really gained momentum in developing countries only in the last ten years. In 1990, UNESCO wanted to present the output of a research project on Women in Politics. At the suggestion of UNIFEM, which provided co-funding, UNESCO and UNIFEM brought together non government organisation (NGO) women activists and women politicians to provide an appropriate forum. The participants soon began to network and strategise on the future of women in politics in the Asia–Pacific region. An obvious requirement was the creation of mechanisms, and ultimately institutions, that could assist women struggling to survive in politics, and others seeking to enter, to share their experiences and learn from one another.

Two years later, in 1992, Netherlands funding enabled a few of these women to meet in Manila, where they decided to form a Women in Politics network. An important characteristic of the group was the fact that several were already actively engaged in politics, while others had the kind of administrative and management experience that would be invaluable in establishing and maintaining institutions.

The outcome of the meeting was the incorporation in the Philippines in 1992 of the Center for Asia–Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP). CAPWIP began with good regional coverage from its 13 board members, representing Australia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the USA. In 1996, the board decided to add two representatives from each sub-region, to be nominated by the CAPWIP sub-regional focal points.

In June 1994, CAPWIP organised the First Asia–Pacific Congress of Women in Politics. Held in Manila in the week after the regional preparatory committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the congress represented a sharpening and focusing of ideas widely debated by governments and NGOs throughout the region during the preceding months. Twenty-one countries and territories were represented by the 241 participants drawn from academia, government and politics at all levels, NGOs and community groups.

Following the success of this first congress, the CAPWIP regional network initiated sub-regional workshops. In South Asia, Chandni Joshi (UNIFEM Regional Programme Adviser) and Ranjana Kumari (Director of the Center for Social Research (CSR) in New Delhi) organised a Women in Politics Workshop for the sub-region, held in Kathmandu later in 1994. That workshop named CSR as the CAPWIP focal point in the region and set up a loosely structured council that is now a fully fledged network: the South Asian Committee for Political Empowerment of Women (SACPEW), with CSR as its secretariat. A later meeting of SACPEW in Sri Lanka approved publication of a newsletter, the addition of 30 new organisational members, and a plan for regular national and South Asian conferences and meetings, research and leadership training.



In East Asia, the Korean Institute for Women and Politics (KIWP), chaired by Dr Jung-Sook Kim, became the sub-regional focal point. It organised the First East Asia Congress of Women in Politics in Huairou, China, during the 1995 NGO Forum. Although logistical difficulties and the lack of a common language have hampered activities at the sub-regional level, the individual countries of East Asia have been enthusiastic members of the regional network. KIWP hosted a regional meeting in December 1996 on Quality of Life in the Asia–Pacific Region & the Role of Women Political Leaders, while in September 1997 Taipei hosted the Fourth Asia–Pacific Congress on Women in Politics.

The Women in Politics Pacific Centre (WIPPaC) grew out of the experience of Pacific participants in the First Asia–Pacific Congress. CAPWIP and the UNIFEM Pacific office, with funding from AusAID and the Australian national UNIFEM committee, initiated the First Regional Women Leaders Congress in the Pacific, held in July 1995. A total of 26 women and 4 men, representing 15 Pacific Island countries, attended the four-day congress on Effective Governance and Transformative Politics and decided to form WIPPaC as an informal networking group, with UNIFEM Pacific acting as the secretariat. The Pacific network is now among the most active of the sub-regions in the CAPWIP network, having organised sub-regional WIPPaC congresses in 1995 and 1996, and regional training programmes in 1997, 1998 and 1999, and hosted the Third Asia–Pacific Congress on Women in Politics in November 1996.

### **Global networking**

From the outset, the group that established CAPWIP saw the potential value of global networks. In 1994, they took advantage of the 1994 Taipei Global Summit on Women's Leadership in Politics which brought together women from both regional and global networks. This group agreed to work towards the formation of a global network and to meet again at the preparatory committee for the Beijing World Conference to be held in New York in March 1995.

The Fourth World Conference on Women provided an ideal opportunity for the various networks to meet and strategise at minimum cost. During the NGO Forum in Huairou, four regional congresses were organised by GLOBALNET and CAPWIP: the First European–North American Congress of Women in Politics; the Second Asia–Pacific Congress of Women in Politics; the First Latin American–Caribbean Congress on Women in Politics; and the First Western Asia Congress of Women in Politics.

Finally, on a wet and rather miserable 6 September in 1995 in Huairou, the First Global Congress of Women in Politics was held to receive the reports of the respective regional congresses and to share visions, plans and strategies. Agreeing that a global network was needed, the congress decided on a second global congress in 1997, again with CAPWIP as the interim secretariat.

The Second Global Congress of Women in Politics was originally scheduled for February 1998 in New Delhi. Somewhat ironically, the Indian national elections the same month forced relocation to the Philippines. Rescheduled to August 1998 in Makati and organised by the Global Network of Women in Politics, this congress was hosted by the Women in Politics Institute, Philippines, with CAPWIP as secretariat, UNIFEM as sponsor and the Asian Development Bank as co-sponsor. At the conclusion of the meeting, new officers were elected and a new secretariat designated in Africa.

### **Why women?**

In some ways, the history of the CAPWIP congresses and associated meetings documents the story of the development of ideas about women's roles in politics and good governance in the developing countries of Asia–Pacific. One of CAPWIP's first activities was political leadership training, organised in partnership with the Global Summit in Bangkok in 1993. Among the participants were delegates from China, Malaysia, the Pacific, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. It was here, after a session on power, that the group, prompted by Kanwaljit Soin, a nominated MP in Singapore, began to ask themselves: 'What kind of politics should women promote?'

This question produced the second theme of the First Asia–Pacific Congress on Women in Politics: Why Women? What Politics? Participants were challenged to define why women needed to become actively engaged in politics and to identify the kind of politics that they wanted to practise. Dr Rounaq Jahan, of Columbia University, emphasised that women must enter politics in order to bring about major changes in their lives because the political arena is where mainstream decisions are made. The congress also agreed that only women can really understand and articulate women’s needs and specific gender issues, that only they can provide a women’s perspective on all issues. For their concerns to be met effectively, therefore, women must be directly represented as a group in the political process.

### **What politics?**

The answer to this question was clear in principle: women should make a difference. However, the details of what kind of difference were less clear. The general expectation was that women’s involvement would improve standards of governance. Kanwaljit Soin referred to a 1991 Australian survey which found that 54 per cent of those surveyed believed that women entering politics were motivated by altruistic and community welfare concerns, compared with only 13 per cent for men. By contrast, 64 per cent thought men were motivated by personal interest and power, compared with only 11 per cent for women. Rounaq Jahan also argued that women are better equipped to be transformative because of their role as outsiders, bringing in new kinds of values. Khunying Supatra Masdit, an active Thai politician since 1979, emphasised that, for her, politics should not be corrupt, should serve people’s rather than personal interests and should be action-oriented.

The congress also described some characteristics of political processes that improve women’s prospects for success. Rounaq Jahan noted that it was particularly difficult for women to enter the winner-take-all American and British models of parliamentary democracy, while European experiences suggested that women candidates are more likely to succeed in systems based on proportional representation.

### **Transformative politics?**

Although the term ‘transformative politics’ emerged during the First Asia–Pacific Congress, that meeting did not focus very directly on the nature of the transformation that women were expected to bring about. The vision of politics that participants presented in the workshops was rather idealistic, emphasising empowering, community-oriented, ‘clean and honest’ and participatory governance, in contrast to the traditional ‘power over,’ capital-oriented, corrupt and top–down models of politics that were identified with traditional ‘masculine’ and ‘transactional’ politics. In the heady atmosphere leading up to the Beijing Conference, there was a feeling that women would be ‘better’, less corrupt and more socially oriented than men. Thus, the workshop sessions focused mainly on practical measures to help women enter and succeed in politics through training, mentoring, the education of women voters, networking, and so on.

At Beijing, some prominent women politicians made it clear that getting into politics was barely the first step. Once there, it had proved extremely difficult – in some cases, impossible – for them, however strongly motivated, to make a difference. Certainly, few would be considered transformative in terms of the definitions that had emerged from the regional Asia–Pacific congresses. Thus, later regional and sub-regional congresses began to address the challenge from a more realistic perspective that focused on political structures and mechanisms.

Even when successfully elected, women almost invariably remain part of a tiny minority on women’s issues or in advocating a women’s perspective on mainstream issues. However strongly they promote their issues and perspectives, most find little or no support and are forced to take up more mainstream positions and issues in order to have any impact in their chosen field. Thus, voters often find that the women they elected do not ‘make a difference’. This may be reflected in a backlash in the vote for these or other women at subsequent elections. In such a hostile environment, the women politicians who survive in the longer

term are likely to be those who push their party's rather than a women's agenda and who conform to the standards and views of the (masculine) mainstream.

The third and fourth congresses adopted a more analytical approach to the themes, respectively, of The Power of the Women's Electorate and Transforming Politics. At the Third Asia–Pacific Congress of Women in Politics, in Fiji in 1996, Marilyn Waring shared her experiences as a young parliamentarian in New Zealand. Her sobering paper highlighted the gender biases and outright discrimination that women could anticipate in politics, even in a developed Western context.

This congress emphasised the importance of building an informed and aware body of women electors who both understand and are able to articulate their issues as women. Women electors are not only the key to getting women into parliament but are also an essential mechanism that can empower women politicians to 'make a difference'. Margaret Shields, another former New Zealand MP, related how women politicians in the NZ Labour Party seeking a more liberal abortion policy against the tide of male party opinion had surveyed women party members. Their survey showed that the men's understanding of women electors' views was almost completely the opposite of women's actual opinions, and this enabled the women politicians to persuade their male colleagues to change their vote.

An aware and vocal body of women in all electorates, including those of male politicians, can enable the voices of even a minority of women politicians to be heard – and respected – in the parliament by their male colleagues. When women MPs express an opinion, whether on a women-specific issue or on a general issue from a women's perspective, male MPs will be obliged to take note if they realise that many women in their own electorates share these views. Thus, an active women's electorate can be a powerful force facilitating women's role in transforming politics.

The third and fourth congresses also moved towards recognising the importance of women as electors in ensuring another important plank of a transformative political agenda: that women politicians should be accountable to their constituents. Women in the region were no longer so sure that women politicians would remain 'better' than men. Many examples suggested that women could also be tainted by the money and power of traditional politics. Given a better understanding of how difficult it would be for women politicians to actually stick to their transformative platforms, the congresses looked for mechanisms both to support women politicians and to hold them accountable. Here, the role of women's NGOs was seen as critical in developing countries. In the absence of well-developed political parties, women's NGOs and community groups can provide a rallying point, facilitate analysis and identification of women's issues, identify and help to train potential candidates, provide support during and, for those women who are successful, after election campaigns, and demand that those elected remain responsive and accountable to their electorates.

## **Conclusion**

Has all this activity and networking produced concrete results? In a number of countries in the region, Women in Politics networks have been involved in gains in women's representation in politics. In India and elsewhere in South Asia, affirmative action has brought an unprecedented number of women into local politics. The Women in Politics networks, together with many other women's NGOs, have been involved in a massive training effort to assist these women to represent their sisters effectively. Changes in the political systems in the Philippines and Thailand have encouraged more women to stand for election, supported by NGO members of the Women in Politics networks. In the Philippines, a women's political party, Abanse Pinay, successfully contested and won a seat under the new system of representation for special interest groups. The Filipina members of CAPWIP were active in the campaign and the former president of the Global Women in Politics Network now chairs this party. In Fiji, a concerted campaign by women's groups across party lines, led by WIPPaC, saw eight women successfully elected and five of them enter the new cabinet, one in the position of deputy prime minister.

Thus, at the end of the twentieth century, women made quantitative gains in participation in politics in the Asia–Pacific region. Women’s groups and women in politics networks have been working hard to put into effect their vision of transformative politics for the new millennium. In several cases, the gains were associated with changes in political systems. In others, effective training and networking enabled women to gain a place at the table in traditional political systems. In developing countries, in particular, the extent to which these quantitative gains can be translated into qualitative improvements in good governance will not depend on women’s innate qualities as politicians. Rather, it will depend on the success of the women’s movement in developing a strong and aware women’s electorate to support women candidates, while at the same time holding them accountable for promoting women’s issues and women’s perspectives on all issues.

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## **Introduction: Hearing Melanesian women**

*Bronwen Douglas, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project, The Australian National University*

### **Gender and governance in practice**

The papers in this section do not directly address the theme 'Gender and governance' – neither word is in familiar usage by the indigenous contributors, whose concern is particular local practice rather than universal theory. All papers outline the actual operation of a modest strategy or program to enhance the skills, self-respect and community status and effectiveness of rural women in a Melanesian nation-state. Several papers propose policy implications of the particular cases discussed, and all make compelling arguments for the civic, social and moral importance of encouraging and tapping the capacities of village women. These papers are edited versions of presentations to a State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project workshop which was convened in November 1998 (Douglas 1999). My introduction examines the pertinence of the papers to global notions of 'gender' and 'governance' in the light of the workshop theme – Melanesian women as female persons, Christians and citizens in modern states.

### **Christianity in governance**

The motif of Christianity permeates the papers, to the discomfort, perhaps, of the secular sensibilities of western academics, non-church aid workers and donors. The emphasis on Christianity stemmed initially from my intellectual awareness that religion is central to Melanesian individual and collective lives and is attributed practical efficacy as well as spiritual significance. The theme, unusual in an academic setting, was enthusiastically embraced by Melanesian members of the workshop planning committee – one said it was God's will – and by most contributors. Rona Nadile, a PhD student from Papua New Guinea (PNG), spoke to the workshop on 'Prayer as practical action'. She argued that Christian prayer was largely a 'custom or tradition' performed routinely by Melanesians in conjunction with daily activities, but that there is 'an increasing growth and awareness in the Word of God. More and more women, and more and more church groups are uniting forces. There are more corporate fellowships and prayer meetings,... imagine how much prayer power can be sent up to heaven at any one time?' (Nadile 1998).

Ruth Saovana-Spriggs – a Bougainvillean who returned to her island as an adviser on reconciliation and now works with the Bougainville People's Congress – describes Christianity as 'a cultural way of life' in Bougainville and chronicles a growing sense of the power of prayer during the recent ten-year civil war, manifest particularly in women's actions for peace and reconciliation. For Melanesians, prayer can thus be a pragmatic strategy mobilised to public and private ends. It is important that policy makers take Christianity seriously as a powerful cultural element in Melanesian governance, beyond the institutional frameworks for local administration and aid delivery provided by church organisations, regarded as NGOs.

### **Christianity, custom and modernity**

Josephine Barnes is an Australian adult health educator with long experience as an aid worker in Solomon Islands. The Catholic Women's Program with which she works in Malaita is now largely conducted and controlled by Malaitan women. Barnes writes from an unquestioned Catholic perspective: she assumes the propriety of 'natural family planning' over other means of population control and ignores the indigenous methods, long proscribed by Christian missions, by which women once spaced births – contraception, abortion, lengthy postpartum sexual abstinence, prolonged breast feeding. She also privileges

'Christian ideals' over 'customs that would otherwise constrain women'. Yet to a more critical, feminist stance, present 'customs' like the restriction of women's movement to their natal or marital household, under the surveillance of suspicious, even paranoid men, look like modern products of the interplay over a century, to mainly male advantage, of two male-dominated ideologies: custom and Christianity.

On the other hand, Barnes tacitly acknowledges that Christianity meant new constraints for indigenous women and often reinforced local male control by obliterating zones of traditional female autonomy and repose, such as segregated housing and menstrual seclusion. It is important that secular or sectarian distaste at the seemingly partisan tone and politics of her paper should not efface its important story of indigenous women inspired by the Christian premise of equality; finding solace and confidence in Christian values and symbols; taking advantage of the actual plurality of the seemingly monolithic Catholic Church to seek modest, meaningful empowerment for rural women – just as women throughout Melanesia have always exploited Christianity to deflect male domination, Christian as well as customary.

The entanglement of custom and Christianity in modern Melanesian identity politics is an affront to romantic western primitivism and Christian fundamentalism alike, and a paradox requiring explanation for anthropologists. These papers suggest that the relationship of custom and Christianity can also be problematic for indigenous people, not least because Christian practice is a now longstanding 'custom or tradition', a 'cultural way of life' in much of Melanesia, and because the concepts and content of 'custom' or 'tradition' are themselves diverse, shifting and contested. Boseto's general perspective admits no conflict: she insists that in Solomon Islands 'gospel and culture are intrinsically intertwined' and draws on the nationalist binary image of an idealised custom enshrined within a Christian constitution and opposed to (Western) materialism and individualism.

By contrast, Jean Tarisesei – whose job as coordinator of the Women's Culture Project of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre is 'to revive, preserve and promote women's *kastom* ('custom')' – depicts a more mixed, contingent relationship between *kastom*, Christianity and modernity. Focusing on her island of Ambae, she stresses variation in the past and present attitudes to *kastom* of different denominations: the qualified toleration of the long-established Anglicans and Catholics; the gradual rehabilitation of *kastom* in the previously hostile Churches of Christ since the 1960s; the ongoing blanket opposition of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) and Apostolic Churches; the looming threat to revitalised *kastom* from the fundamentalist intolerance of new evangelical and pentecostal churches. For Tarisesei *kastom* is 'the way of life which comes from our own place', the 'foundation of our identity', but its practice is dynamic as people add new things 'to try to make it relevant to life today'. Thus the cost in pigs and mats of bride price is escalating in Ambae and *kastom* knowledge is taught in schools. Similarly, Enikelen Netine, who runs a rural adult literacy program in Vanuatu, describes how Bislama, a non-traditional but national language, provides a stimulus to *kastom*: it 'opens the way for the preservation of indigenous culture and custom stories', ensuring their transmission to the young and raising cultural awareness and pride.

For Bougainvilleans, rediscovered custom knowledge was a matter of survival during the blockade of their island in the early 1990s and has since become a nostalgic source of cultural assurance, in apparently seamless relationship with a thoroughly indigenised Christianity: 'the years of fighting have given the people a more deeply meaningful relationship to their environment and indigenous identity', writes Saovana-Spriggs. Her account of the revival of customary self-sufficiency and traditional medicine in Bougainville also emphasises the adaptability of custom and its validation in practice as relevant and meaningful in profoundly altered modern settings. She makes a powerful plea that the acknowledged centrality of women in the domestic and local economies, their neglected customary authority as landowners in matrilineal societies, and their recent initiatives as

peacemakers during the crisis should be mobilised at the island level of government to enable women to contribute and participate effectively 'in a world organised and managed by men' – including the 'well-meaning' outsiders currently flocking to Bougainville to assist in reconstruction. Saovana-Spriggs' case for 'the need to involve women in matters concerning exploitation of natural resources by external companies' seems incontrovertible, given the history of mining company involvement in Bougainville and the more recent story of Lihir told by Jacklynne Membup and Martha Macintyre, where once again local 'men assumed control in the negotiations with the [mining] company' and women's custodial rights to manage matrilineage land are ignored by both sides.

## **Women, modernisation and empowerment**

Apart from the consciously secular and apolitical Women's Culture Project in Vanuatu, all the women's organisations and programs discussed in these papers have strong church links, either direct or *de facto* via funding, training and personnel. This is a reminder that in Melanesia church women's wings and village women's groups continue to provide women's main opportunities for training, leadership, solidarity, networking and wider experience beyond the village and even beyond national borders. Barnes' paper looks specifically at a Catholic women's group which provides information, training and support otherwise unavailable to Malaitan women. The literacy program in Vanuatu discussed by Netine was originally an initiative of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union and is now managed by World Vision, with AusAID funding.

Theresa Hopkos, then president of the Ambunti District Council of Women (ADCOW) in the Sepik region of PNG, says that very little government, donor or NGO funding filters down to rural women's groups or actual programs in this vast riverine district, and that 'most of the services for women come from the churches, which provide a dramatic source of education and knowledge'. She herself was trained as a leader and organiser by the SDA Church. Saovana-Spriggs describes how the churches by necessity filled the vacuum in civil government during the Bougainville crisis, altering people's attitudes and expectations about the church-government relationship. Women concentrated their efforts on social services, mediation and reconciliation, working through church organisations like the Catholic women's group formed in north Bougainville by 'Maria', who tells her story in the course of this paper. Men, by contrast, engaged in fighting and politics and now dominate the restored formal level of government.

Membup and Macintyre – respectively a community relations worker for Lihir Gold and an anthropologist studying the social impact of mining – recount how Lihirian women also work from a church organisation base to devise strategies to cope with the speed and immensity of the social change and problems brought by a massive mining project, and to gain some access for women to the equivocal benefits of development. The women's vehicle in Lihir is a novel island-wide organisation called Petztorme, formed with mining company encouragement by the two major pre-existing church women's groups, whose bitter rivalry has since recurred in Petztorme and to an extent dissipated its effectiveness. Like Melanesian women generally, Lihirian women are not averse to modernisation on acceptable terms: they want to participate as much and as profitably as possible in the employment prospects opened up by mining, but face a double prejudice in the male-dominated culture of the global mining industry, which consigns women to low-paid, menial positions, and in local men's resistance to any employment of women. In alliance with the women's section of the company's Community Relations department, which makes a major social contribution by promoting the value of education, Petztorme has campaigned with some success to increase women's participation in the workforce and to improve their access to training and thus better wages. To this point very few women in Lihir have skilled jobs, but they have earned a reputation as better, more careful and reliable workers than men. Employed women typically donate much of their earnings to church projects and women's groups whereas men drink theirs in beer.

Membup and Macintyre paint an appalling picture of men catapulted into a 'fury of beer drinking' by the sudden availability of cash during the construction phase of the mine, and of the social disruption resulting from the ensuing epidemic of drunkenness and public violence. Petztorme's first project was to encourage women to work out culturally appropriate avenues of protection or refuge against alcohol-induced violence. Violence is a theme in several papers but none depicts women as its helpless victims: instead they propose various pro-active counters to violence, including community accountability, self-help, painstaking mediation, and the assurance and respect women gain from literacy training and collective action.

Hopkos lists awareness programs against domestic violence and sexual harassment as key ADCOW activities. Netine cites fervent testimonies by ni-Vanuatu women on the great benefits they have derived from literacy: access to valuable practical information; confidence, financial competence, business and leadership skills; greater community participation and cooperation. She sees female literacy as an antidote to domestic violence, having observed in some villages that 'before the men used to beat their wives, but today they have family worship together'. Saovana-Spriggs tells the story of 'Anna', who was badly beaten for taking a neutral stance as a health worker during the war in Bougainville but was later reconciled with her assailants in a large ceremony combining Christian and indigenous symbols of reconciliation. Saovana-Spriggs points to the difficult legacy of the culture of violence engendered in successive generations of young men by a decade of civil war and independence struggle – the lengthy campaign of 'Maria' and other women to 'bring back home' the young BRA men was a spiritual and psychological as well as a physical process.

## **Gender and governance**

Throughout Melanesia women's fellowship groups are key elements in effective village governance, while their integration in church and women's networks helps articulate the local with wider spheres in contexts where the state is locally absent or invisible, as is the case in much of rural Melanesia. Thus programs to develop women's personal confidence and skills, especially in literacy and numeracy, can have a dramatic impact on general community well-being: the literacy program in Vanuatu is based on the premise that 'if all the women are literate the whole community will change for the better' and Netine says that it 'also led to improvement in community organisations'. She and Barnes stress the importance women place on participatory, cooperative teaching and learning. Both suggest that women's programs are the best means to disseminate technical information at the grass roots about health, sanitation, nutrition, agriculture and business, using the familiar and the relevant as vehicles to convey new ideas. Barnes found it necessary to frame taboo subjects linked to female sexuality in Christian terms and to use Christian symbols to embolden young women to defy custom by assuming leadership roles. Reciprocally, Netine found that the most effective teaching materials for literacy classes were those providing information on *kastom*, health and other useful topics, since 'people learn to read better if the material provided is interesting or valuable to them'. In Lihir it is women who promote education and the availability of mining company scholarships to the community at large, and it is women's organisations that work to ameliorate the problems of drastic social inequality arising from the sudden but uneven injection of large amounts of cash.

In Melanesia, gender includes men in theory as well as practice and gender relations are conceived in complementary rather than oppositional terms. To be acceptable and effective, therefore, programs for women have to take account of men. Barnes commented in discussion at the workshop: 'you can't run a women's program without information for men as well. So I'm running [a men's program] surreptitiously on the side'. Netine stresses cooperation and the interdependence of person and community. The literacy program in Vanuatu focuses on women because their need is greatest – women comprised nearly three-quarters of the participants in 1997-98 – but 'the development of our human resources is a national priority' and literacy is a human right. There is no conventional feminist agenda in these papers, and yet all in their way are iconoclastic. Tarisesei writes about *kastom* in



general and not just women's *kastom*, but her paper affirms the centrality of women in Ambae *kastom*, because mats, which are women's products, are fundamental objects in customary exchanges. The acknowledgement of certain women's activities, such as mat-making in Ambae, as true *kastom* has enhanced the confidence, self-esteem and community reputation of women but there was nothing automatic about the process: for fifteen years the *kastom* promoted and revived by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre was a male preserve.

## Policy implications

The major implication I draw from these papers and from the workshop to which they were originally presented is of the need to listen to people and provide digestible, relevant information about alternative choices and strategies, rather than lecture them on the basis of universalised ethnocentric notions of efficiency and propriety. For example, as Barnes implies, the fact that indigenous women and men alike place great value on producing many children should be correlated with ongoing high infant and child mortality and the relatively recent experience of more or less massive depopulation, rather than be condemned as a tenacious 'tradition' at odds with the modern demographic orthodoxy of wealthy donor countries and global agencies. Well-meaning efforts to ameliorate the evident drudgery of rural women in much of Melanesia should not lose sight of the value they place on hard work and fine gardens. Alice Aruheeta Pollard from Malaita, then head of the Women's Development Division in Solomon Islands, warned the workshop: 'we see women's role or the load that women are carrying, we see them as overburdened, or too much load. But again when you look very closely at their attitudes to their role and their behaviour, actually it is their pride, it is their status, it is for their survival, and also it is ownership'. Similarly, and often to the frustration of well-meaning western feminists, most Melanesian women advocate a gradualist strategy to address the very real disadvantages of women, stressing that it is important not to threaten or alienate men, but to gain their support and cooperation. Angela Mandie-Filer, a PhD student from Ambunti, commented at the workshop on the ADCOW agenda: 'I think it just needed one or two men to come out and support the women and you have the whole lot of them coming out to support, so it's this peer group judgement and peer group pressure on the men ... In that area the men actually are very supportive'.

In practical terms, the major problems faced by the organisations and programs discussed in these papers are those of resources, skills, funding and sustainability. Such problems stem ultimately from the financial exigency afflicting all Melanesian countries, but particularly from the low priority given by governments and most aid donors to non-formal education for adults, especially in the rural sector and especially for women. Even programs which have received external funding, such as the Vanuatu literacy program and Women's Culture Project, are of relatively low priority locally and have no guarantee of ongoing support. Hopkos makes a plea for modest financial backing for local women's groups, associations and leaders, and the grass roots training and awareness programs they seek to implement. She concludes her paper thus: as 'women in Papua New Guinea, especially in the rural remote areas, we see ourselves first, then the churches and then the nation. We get less as citizens and serve more as Christians and citizens, and get served as women the least'. It is in the interests of all parties that this should not continue to be so: better ways are needed to extend effective citizenship to rural Melanesian women and to supplement their home-grown resourcefulness with earmarked funding, training and support.

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## **The Catholic women's group, Auki, Malaita: A catalyst for change**

*Josephine Barnes, Catholic Women's Program, Auki, Malaita, Solomon Islands*

### **From colony to nation: Changing contexts of aid**

In 1964 I went as a volunteer to teach at the isolated Catholic mission station of Rokera in Malaita, in the then British protectorate, now independent nation of Solomon Islands. In those days staff had to speak English to the students and had minimal involvement with local people. As a woman I could not move about alone and was mainly confined to the mission stations. After three years I went back to Australia to train as a nurse, intending to return to the Solomons. I could not then see any value in teaching, as most subjects seemed far removed from the reality of people's lives: for instance, lessons on the British rail system to people who had never seen a car, let alone a train. It was probably my youth that blinded me to the benefits of education, since pupils from this school later obtained responsible jobs. Nursing on the other hand showed immediate results. The health of the people was poor and needles and potions sometimes brought rapid cures, but lives were also lost needlessly through lack of equipment and expertise. In 1986, after cyclone Namu, I returned to do relief work in Avu Avu on the weather (east) coast of Guadalcanal. Many changes had occurred. I was greeted warmly and each day the women would talk or 'story' with me about their concerns for their children and their own health. The time seemed ripe for health education. In 1996 Patricia Wale, the coordinator of the Catholic Women's Program in Auki diocese, Malaita, invited me back to work as an adult educator.

### **Kastom in Malaita**

To understand the lives of rural women on Malaita one needs to go back at least a century. I am not an expert on *kastom* ('custom'), but have gained a general idea from the women with whom I work and during my long association with Solomon Islanders. Customs vary between places and islands. The traditional life style was still practised in parts of Malaita in 1964, and is in isolated places to this day. Malaita is a patrilineal society: descent and inheritance ideally follow the male line and men live and cooperate with their patrilineal kinsmen. Settlements were laid out as follows. The priest, the medium of communication with the ancestral spirits whose support was essential to survival, lived removed from the people. He passed information to the men and boys through selected men. Below them lived the women, girls and young children. The women cooked for the men, but husbands did not share houses with their wives and female children. They visited their wives, while couples also met in the gardens. Women usually gave birth alone, in the bush or in a birth hut. Menstruating women could not go to the gardens but lived in the menstrual hut, *bisi*, a place of rest and socialisation. Traditionally men walked with their hands free to protect women going to and from the gardens. Women carried all the produce and firewood on their backs. Young girls minded the young children in the villages. The women did all the cooking, cleaning, childcare, planting and harvesting. The men cleared the ground for gardens, built the houses and planned village life. They were/are the politicians. Infringements of custom could mean severe punishment: if compensation was not be paid in pigs or, in some areas, shell money, death might be the penalty.

### **Modernity, Christianity and gender relations**

With the coming of Europeans in the late nineteenth century, new needs demanded cash: men cut copra for sale or signed as indentured labourers for plantations in Queensland and Fiji. Since custom prohibited sexual relations with breastfeeding women, young fathers happily left their families to work overseas. About a century ago, Catholic and other

missionaries began to preach their faith and set up schools and hospitals. Many people moved from their villages to the security of the mission stations, which offered medicines and a firm but loving God who seemed more powerful than the jealous, punitive ancestors. The mission God could also punish in the next life, but that was not immediate. Missionaries preached equality in the sight of God, so that women could now enter the church, the sacred place, and participate in prayer.

Christian villagers were no longer separated by gender but grouped into family villages. These days young boys often still live separately from the family, but fathers are members and heads of households. Yet custom still rules the division of labour and the women's workload has increased – men insist it is customary for them to carry nothing, but women no longer get a break from the gardens each month in the *bisi*. Modern tools mean larger gardens, marketing means potential sale of surplus production, and women are urged to work harder to produce more. School fees are a tremendous burden, especially on women. Infant mortality has declined, though it is still amongst the highest in the Pacific Islands. (In 1997 the official infant mortality rate for Malaita was 14.7 deaths per 1000 births, but the Medical Director of Malaita places the figure nearer 30 per 1000.) Yet more children survive, families are bigger and the population is increasing rapidly – half is under fifteen. Arable land is harder to find and located further from the villages, which further increases the routine workload of women.

Family planning, including the 'natural' methods permitted by the Catholic Church, is not well accepted by Malaitans. Medical personnel and educators advocate population control, but seem not to understand the people's need for a strong line to provide for the elderly in the absence of social security. Men expect many children in return for paying bride price. Wives agree and are proud when the arrival of their first child demonstrates their fertility. At a 1998 workshop women and men alike rejected sterilisation: even women with many children did not want to lose the chance for more, while men were appalled by the thought of vasectomy. Most people have lost siblings or children and know that children still die from diarrhoea, malaria, pneumonia, measles and other diseases. My neighbour, one of nine children, had lost a six year old sister and a five year old brother. Most women have similar stories.

Despite the desire for children, there is general concern at the rise in school fees, the number of aimless young people and social problems. Men, in particular, often drink to excess, physically abuse women and children, and get involved in gambling and scam financial schemes. They seem lost, exercising power over women in ridiculous ways: at a church blessing ceremony in one village, the chiefs imposed compensation of SI\$250 on any woman who entered wearing shorts or with their hair in a pineapple topknot. Men feel they are losing control over their wives and teenage children, who leave for the capital, Honiara, to go to school or to work for 'Master Liu' ('do nothing').

Sexually transmitted diseases are increasing. Employed men often have sex with teenage girls seeking financial gain. Parents, intimidated because their children have more formal education, are loath to tell them the facts of life. In a group of sixty-one eighteen to twenty-one year olds attending a young women's leadership program in May 1998, only four had received any information about menstruation. Solomon Islanders seem far more aware of changes to their bodies than their European counterparts, but most lack knowledge as to why such changes occur. Because these subjects are taboo, a series of lessons to women and girls was called 'I am a miracle', and began: 'God made us and it was good'. Phrased in this way, reproductive health, anatomy and physiology could be taught and were eagerly learned.

I became aware of the need to frame these topics in Christian terms during the aforementioned young women's leadership program. I could not get across the concept of friendship with boys as getting to know them and looking for shared interests and values: in Malaitan custom sex was the only conceivable relationship between unrelated males and females, and it is very difficult for girls to refuse to have sex. I tried to explain that women have the right just to say 'No' to unwelcome invitations. Role-plays led by the girls had them

saying: 'I will not go with you because I am made in God's image and likeness'; ' God made me to be good', etc. God thus legitimised their right to say 'No', and without that excuse they felt powerless. The churches, so important to Solomon Islanders, need to work with young people to develop guidelines to help them handle the new familiarity between the sexes.

But the churches are struggling. In the past they ran schools and hospitals and had a great deal of influence over the lives of the people. Aid poured in through the overseas church organisations. With Independence in 1978, most schools and hospitals were handed over to the government. Collections for missions fell overseas as congregations declined in the mainstream churches. Aid organisations began to channel income-generating projects through the churches, but such projects often have little relevance to the churches as such, while administration and maintenance of existing structures are unfunded. Foreign aid agencies have their own criteria to meet, but their knowledge of local issues and customs is often not great.

### **The Catholic Women's Program: empowering village women**

This was the environment in which the Catholic Women's Program was set up in Auki diocese in 1990, with two local nuns and an expatriate woman as early facilitators. Initially the group held consultative meetings to assess the needs of village people and discovered that women wanted to share their problems. In the security of their peers, they felt free to acknowledge their difficult lot and cried as they told stories of hardship and helplessness. The measure of a workshop's success was inclusion in the leader's report of the phrase: 'the women cried'. The leaders believed they had struck an empathetic chord. Since normally a woman cannot leave her house without her husband's permission, 'Husbands' Awareness Programs' had to be held to persuade them to allow their wives to attend women's meetings.

The Catholic Women's Program is overseen by a central diocesan team based in Auki, the Provincial centre of Malaita. With leadership of the Program shifting to local women, Patricia Wale became coordinator of a team of three Malaitans. There are nine parishes covering limited accessible areas. Parish co-ordinators lead zone leaders belonging to villages within their zones. The women's groups obviously met a felt need as they grew far more quickly than envisaged. There are now 135 groups with about two thousand women involved. The other two Catholic dioceses in the Solomons have followed suit.

Initially the teaching was participatory, with sharing of stories, role-plays, dramas, singing, practical demonstrations of gardening skills, sewing, etc. Such activities empowered women, who learned to speak up for themselves. But when topics on the role of women were introduced, leaders could no longer simply share with their listeners the pain of their lot in life, but required training in the concepts to be imparted. Accordingly, leaders' training workshops were held. So-called 'Empowerment Topics' – 'The Role of Women', 'The Ministry of Women', 'Basic Christian Communities' – helped remind women of their importance in the very fabric of their society. Topics on health, hygiene and child development were introduced because the Medical Director of Malaita believed the leaders of the Women's Program to be the best means yet tried to impart health knowledge at the grass roots. Members of other churches could attend workshops and in some cases the 'Hidden' or heathen people came, to learn how to prevent their children from dying of diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria.

A booklet was produced from *Facts for Life*, a UN/WHO publication. The leaders requested charts to assist in their presentations. The charts were written in English by expatriates. Yet about 85% of Malaita women are illiterate and few speak English. The spoken word is the normal medium for transferring information and even knowledge of Pidgin is confined to areas close to roads and towns. Participatory methods were being overshadowed by print, again disempowering women who said they were 'Rubbish women' because they could not read or write. Pictorial charts to match the health booklet have since been produced for all groups. Drawing and mapping are part of the workshops and are enjoyed by the women. The method is again participatory, with women doing most of the

teaching to each other. In 1998 the main leaders were the zone leaders, rather than those centrally located. They receive training and return to the local villages to follow the same methods, teaching in local languages rather than English or Pidgin. In recent consultations, women expressed a need for further education in social issues. If teaching aids can be developed to enable them to teach each other, the groups will surge ahead. Women are overjoyed when they realise they do not need to be literate to take an active part. Most photographs taken now show women laughing.

Family planning is presented as the 'Strong Line Plan', with 'natural' methods demonstrated in pictorial form. Husbands have been very interested in the workshops on women's and men's anatomy, the miracle of life, and natural family planning. They demanded to be part of a recent workshop, but women will not talk about these matters in front of men, and men completely dominate a group if they join it. So the men had separate sessions. Women want the men to attend: although women are articulate in their own groups they still seem unable individually to communicate their feelings and wishes to their husbands, but believe they can do so collectively. There is a growing emphasis in the Catholic Church on groups such as a 'Family Life Program' and 'Marriage Encounter', which are useful to the literate and are helping to change family relationships, but the women's groups provide the best chance to make a difference to the lives of village women.

Recently the young woman leaders told me they could not lead. It is difficult for a Malaitan woman to be a leader, as she must not put herself out in front of others. I turned to their faith for strength. Christ brought the light of knowledge into the world, and they too can carry his light. If you put a cover over a candle it will go out. So they must take off the shield or cover they are hiding under and carry the light of knowledge to others. They took home a candle to light during their talks to remind them of this and give them courage. Thus Christian ideals and symbols can be used to override customs that would otherwise constrain women.

To be empowered, women need to want to leave the harsh, but secure domain of customary constraints and move along the hard, uncertain road to change. This means applying the skills they have learned to family life. It means standing up for what they believe in a society where they have never had a public voice. Empowerment is about finding the strength to bring about change. If laughter is a gauge of success then the Catholic Women's Program of Auki diocese has so far been a resounding success.

Tarisesei, J, 2000. 'Today is not the same as yesterday, and tomorrow it will be different again: Kastom in Ambae, Vanuatu', *Development Bulletin*, no. 51, pp. 46-48.

## **Today is not the same as yesterday, and tomorrow it will be different again: *Kastom* in Ambae, Vanuatu**

*Jean Tarisesei, Women's Culture Project, Vanuatu Cultural Centre*

### **Introduction**

I come from the island of Ambae in north Vanuatu, though since 1992 I have lived in Port Vila, the capital, and worked at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, where I am coordinator of the Women's Culture Project. In this paper I discuss *kastom* ('custom') in my island, its importance for women, its relationship to Christianity and politics, and the recent upsurge of interest in women's *kastom* encouraged by the Women's Culture Project. My work as coordinator is to revive, preserve and promote women's *kastom*. In my work I travel to many islands, including Ambae.

Ambae is a volcanic island about forty kilometres long. The people live in villages in a number of districts. They are subsistence farmers who grow their own food in gardens and keep pigs, chickens and cattle. They also have coconut plantations from which they make copra to earn a little money. There are two main languages. Today people travel in and around Ambae on trucks, small boats and aeroplanes. In the north travel is very difficult because a volcano makes the land very steep. Many people from Ambae live in other parts of Vanuatu, especially Port Vila and Santo. There are many primary schools in Ambae and three secondary schools.

### ***Kastom* in Ambae**

*Kastom* is a term in the national language of Vanuatu, Bislama, to mean the way of life in which we grew up and still practise. It is the way of life which comes from our own place. So the *kastom* of Ambae is the things we do that come from Ambae. This is hard to explain in English, because the term 'custom' lacks the idea of close association with a place. People today are trying to find ways to fit *kastom* together with the new things that have come into our lives. So the *kastom* that we now practise in Ambae is not the same as it was before. People are changing it and adding new things. One of the most important influences on *kastom* has been the churches.

People in Ambae use the word *kastom* to mean ceremonies, stories, songs, dances, and certain ways of cooking; traditional knowledge and sacred places; family organisation (or kinship) and traditional leaders or chiefs; as well as Ambae mats, pigs and other such objects. The main ceremonies practised are welcoming ceremonies for newborn babies, adoptions, marriages, rank ceremonies based on pig-killing, rank ceremonies based on mats, funeral ceremonies. Many take place over a number of days, which we count in groups of five. This is especially so in funeral ceremonies, when for a hundred days after the person's death we mark each fifth day by cooking special food: on the fiftieth day, for example, we cook things we have caught in the sea, such as fish and crabs. Food is a very important part of *kastom*. So is our vernacular language, which has words to describe all the *kastom* things we do that are hard to express in English.

### **Women and *kastom***

Mats are very important in all these *kastom* ceremonies. Mats are the main work of women in Ambae. Before western influences came, the main things women did was to make mats and take care of pigs and babies. The main work for men was in the gardens, growing food, and protecting the community. Once children grew big enough to walk about, small boys became the responsibility of their fathers, while girls were cared for by their mothers, who started to teach them how to make mats and the other things that girls needed to learn.

Today women do most of the work within the family and the community while men are more often also involved in politics and business.

Marriages were arranged when girls were quite small, sometimes even before they were born, and when they reached the age of about twelve years they often went to live with their husband's mother in order to get used to their new family. But they did not marry or live with their husbands until they reached puberty. We Ambaeans divide ourselves into two groups named Tagaro and Merumbuto, which anthropologists call moieties: people must always marry someone from the other group. Parents tried to make sure their daughters married into a family that was close both in terms of place and kinship. It was hard for a married girl to move to a place a long way away from her own parents. Ideally she should marry into her mother's family, in order to keep the family and the land together. Today most young people choose their own partners, and sometimes girls marry to faraway places, and not into their mother's family. This often causes problems with marriages, because they have not followed the correct *kastom* road. In such cases there are often disputes about land and much talk, gossip and other trouble.

### **Churches and *kastom***

Virtually all Ambaeans, like most ni-Vanuatu, are members of a Christian church. Historically and still today, the attitudes towards *kastom* of the various denominations have varied widely. The Anglican Church established the first Christian mission in Ambae in the 1870s. The Anglicans did not make too many changes. They stopped some things which were not good, such as murder and cannibalism, and some things that were hurtful, such as the tattooing of young girls. They also tried to change aspects of the men's rank system, *huqe*. Today, *kastom* is still strongly alive in Anglican communities.

The Catholic Church arrived second, after the Anglicans. They settled in only two areas and did not spread beyond them. The impact of the Catholic Church is mainly on language because they mostly use French. They did not oppose *kastom* strongly in other ways, apart from harmful aspects.

The Churches of Christ were the third church to arrive, in about 1900. Although they came third, they became the second largest denomination in the island, spreading into many areas. They stopped almost every traditional practice, such as *kastom* dances and pig-killings. They did allow *kastom* marriage ceremonies to continue, including central aspects such as the bride's pig-killing and the exchanges between the two families. Because pig-killing was an integral part of the marriage exchanges, the Churches of Christ permitted women's participation in the rank system to continue, at the same time that they stopped men's participation in the graded society. During the independence movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the pro-*kastom* Nagriamel movement had a significant impact on the Churches of Christ in Ambae, and as a result they became much more supportive of *kastom*. Nowadays Churches of Christ members in Ambae are trying to bring back men's pig-killings.

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church was the fourth to arrive in Ambae. The SDAs are not widespread, but their effect on *kastom* was worse than that of the Churches of Christ. They banned everything except the weaving of mats. It is good that weaving is permitted, because at least it enables SDAs to continue to participate in ceremonies organised by Ambaeans belonging to other denominations. They can thus be involved in the marriages of family members outside the SDA Church, because they can still contribute to the exchanges by giving mats.

The next church to come to Ambae was the Apostolic Church, in about 1960. It is mainly limited to one district. Members of the Apostolic Church do not even know how to weave Ambaeans mats, although they make floor and sleeping mats in a different style. Women learn how to weave in the women's groups organised by their Church, and they make

baskets, mats, table mats and purses in styles not just of other islands in Vanuatu, but also of Fiji and other parts of the Pacific.

After Independence in 1980, and especially since 1990, many small, mostly pentecostal churches have arrived in Ambae, almost all strongly opposed to *kastom*. There have also been splits in the existing denominations, especially the Churches of Christ and the Apostolic Church. Anglicans, by contrast, tend to switch parish affiliations rather than leave the church. As a result, there are many small churches in Ambae today, but the main Churches are the Anglican, the Churches of Christ and the SDA. The Anglican Church achieved its own independence from expatriate control in the 1980s and now all church officials are ni-Vanuatu. The Churches of Christ and the Apostolic Church are also mainly managed by ni-Vanuatu, but are influenced by visitors from outside the country, as is the SDA Church. The Catholic Church now also has local staff, both priests and nuns, but a few European nuns and priests continue to work throughout the country.

### **Women in island organisation**

Vanuatu has six provinces. Ambae is in Penama Province, along with the islands of Maewo and Pentecost. The provincial headquarters are at Saratamata in East Ambae. The Penama Provincial Council has fifteen elected and seven nominated members. The elected members are almost always men, because there are few female candidates in elections and even fewer are successful. The nominated members include one women's and two youth representatives, as well as representatives of the chiefs and the churches. There is a Women's Office and a Youth Office at Saratamata. As well as the Provincial Council, Ambae has an Island Council of Chiefs, the members of which are elected by the chiefs of all the villages around the island. Chiefs are always men.

Women have their own island council called Vavine bulu, meaning 'women together'. Women in all the villages elect representatives to the council, which meets three or four times per year, according to need. The executive of Vavine bulu meets more regularly, and representatives from Vavine bulu attend the biannual conference of the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW), a non-government organisation. The VNCW runs various awareness programs to promote women in the villages, and to help them with health, business, sewing, water supply and so on. The VNCW is mostly concerned with women's development, but Ambae women are also interested in their *kastom*. Vavine bulu promotes mat-making and this is important, because as long as you have mats you can take part in ceremonies.

At the village level, women's groups may be organised by the churches or by the women's network, but usually there is only one women's group in each village, and it is that group which sends representatives to Vavine bulu. In Ambae the government works closely with the church organisations, and people do not notice much difference between church and government. They are more interested in what both can achieve.

### ***Kastom* today**

The character of *kastom* is always the same, but the ways in which we practise it change. For example, in *kastom* marriages in the past, we exchanged women for just a few mats and pigs. But nowadays we pay for women with pigs and up to twenty of the most valuable mats. We also have church ceremonies as part of the marriage so that now we make two feasts, one for *kastom* and one for the church. This makes it hard for some people, because marriage has become very expensive. Since not every woman can make a mat, marriage is sometimes even more expensive because people have to buy mats.

The education of children in *kastom* ways used to take place at home. From an early age children were taught how to do things like weaving and dancing. But now children go to school and lack the opportunity to learn all these skills. Today some schools are trying to introduce *kastom* into the classroom. In one village the teachers have invited some older



people to come into the classroom and teach *kastom* to the children. The children are now learning how to weave mats, as well as learning *kastom* stories, songs and dances.

Today in Ambae *kastom* is being revived in many such ways. The effect of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre programs has been to renew people's interest in *kastom*. The Women's Culture Project program, which Lissant Bolton and I implemented in Ambae in 1991-92 and have since introduced to other islands, has helped legitimate the things women do as true *kastom*, whereas previously *kastom* was regarded as men's business. This has increased the self-esteem and self-confidence of women and in Ambae has encouraged them to revive styles of mats which they had stopped making. Ambae people now recognise the need to use more mats in ceremonies, instead of money, and this in turn enhances the reputation and self-respect of women.

In the future I think there will be more new ways to teach *kastom* to our young people. However, it is hard to know what the effect of the new churches will be. Many of the new denominations are very strongly opposed to *kastom*, and will try to defeat these attempts to stimulate *kastom* in the island if they come to Ambae. If there is no opposition from the churches, *kastom* will continue to be revived, even though it will continue to change. People are changing *kastom* in order to try to make it relevant to life today. *Kastom* has to fit in with church, government, education and development. The work of the Cultural Centre is to try to make sure that *kastom* remains a strong force in the lives of ni-Vanuatu. We believe that *kastom* is a strong foundation of our identity. If we don't have *kastom* we are nobody; we don't know where we come from or where we are going.

## **A literacy programme for women in Vanuatu**

*Enikelen Netine, Melanesian Literacy Program, World Vision, Vanuatu*

### **Rita's story**

Since 1989 I have been working in a literacy program in Vanuatu. I start my paper by sharing Rita's experience with literacy training in Bislama, the national language. Rita's story shows how literacy can have a powerful effect on a woman, her family and her community. Rita is from a village in northwest Malakula. She is forty years old and married with six children. She grew up in a bush area of Malakula and married a man from the same area. Rita and her husband left their village in the bush to come to a village near the salt water.

When I first met Rita in 1989 she was very shy. She was afraid to talk to me because she couldn't understand or speak Bislama. I went to the village to start a literacy program and Rita joined the course. She learned Bislama and it changed her life. She gained a new, positive feeling about herself and was able to help her children at school and also to help her community. After she learned Bislama we could talk. Her husband also joined the program and became a leader in the community and the Presbyterian church. Rita started a Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union (PWMU) group in the village. People are now working well together in the village and literacy classes are well attended. Health is another area which has seen some very important changes, especially water and sanitation. The women themselves built a water tank in their village.

Rita's family has now started a small business based on their earnings from copra and cocoa. Rita has also started a business in second hand clothes and she sells them in Norsup, which is an hour away by truck from her village. She uses the money to pay for school fees for her children, three of whom are attending secondary school. Rita is now a very confident woman and a community leader.

### **Background**

Vanuatu, formerly the New Hebrides, is an archipelago of some eighty islands with a land area of 12,200 sqkm. Vanuatu is a very young nation with a new national identity, and a small population speaking many languages. Independence was gained in 1980 after more than seventy years' colonisation by France and Britain. Settlement patterns are dispersed, and the small population of about 150,000 people speaks more than one hundred Melanesian dialects. Vanuatu is culturally as well as linguistically diverse. Most societies are patrilineal, but there are matrilineal societies in some northern and central islands, while in the north hierarchy is based on grade-taking. South Vanuatu is different again. Leadership is often based on personal achievement but some societies are hierarchical, with hereditary leaders.

### **Mission, colonial and national influence on literacy**

Literacy in the early days was a means to evangelise and establish the church. The early missionaries used literacy to teach the people to understand the Bible in their own languages. They trained people to read and write whatever their age group. This system was changed when the French and the British condominium created parallel but separate institutions that affected all aspects of life including education. While the lingua franca is Bislama, English and French continue to be spoken because of the western-style formal education introduced by missionaries and colonial authorities. Even now, French and English schools still exist side by side, although the government has pushed to unify the education system. But there are still two schools systems and access to formal education has been limited despite government efforts to improve participation rates. Today the adult

literacy rate in Vanuatu is very low, especially among women. Some islands have a lower rate than others, while overall the estimated figure is lowest in the rural areas where 82 per cent of the population lives.

The development of our human resources is a national priority. Yet although one of the government's objectives is to realise the potential of woman as partners in and beneficiaries of the development process, there is very little Government support or funds for non-formal education for adults, especially women.

In our literacy work we use Bislama as the main language. Although it is not a traditional language, Bislama also opens the way for the preservation of indigenous culture and custom stories.

## **The Melanesian Literacy program**

The Melanesian Literacy program for which I work was designed to address the low literacy rates in rural areas. The program was an offshoot of an initiative of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union (PWMU) in 1989. That initiative was a response to the problem raised by a women's group in northwest Malakula that they could not effectively undertake church work because they could not read, write or understand Bislama. They had indicated their interest in forming a local PWMU, but needed assistance in order to be able to communicate and learn to assume leadership roles. In 1989 the PWMU head office in Port Vila appointed me as Deaconess to teach these women how to speak, read and write in Bislama.

The Literacy program is managed by World Vision and began with assistance from the Australian Government, through AusAID, as part of its commitment to the UN International Year of Literacy (1990). The program has been aimed mainly at women in the rural villages, for it was acknowledged that they most lack opportunities for formal schooling. However, it is also recognised that everyone has the right to become literate.

The program has been conducted in isolated areas on eight islands in Vanuatu: Torres, Santo, Maewo, Pentecost, Malakula and Ambrym, in the north; Epi in central Vanuatu; and Tanna in the south. The program covers and builds skills in the following areas: leading group discussion; small business skills; agriculture; nutrition; handicrafts; cooking; writing stories; appropriate technology; critical literacy; translation.

## **Goal**

The long term goal of the program is to enable illiterate women and youth in isolated areas of Vanuatu to be literate in the national language Bislama, and to be able to use their literacy skills to meet their personal and community goals.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the program are as follows:

- to select and train village volunteers as literacy trainers;
- to produce and disseminate stories on culture and customs, songs, local history and information on health, nutrition and other topics useful to the villages;
- to integrate literacy work with health, agriculture and other educational areas to increase community understanding and benefits;
- to strengthen community organisation by effective use of meetings;
- to enable documentation of minutes and production of other written materials.

## **Rationale**

The rationale for a Literacy program has been that:

- literacy enhances people's communication skills, quality of life and understanding of their changing world;

- non-literate adults are disadvantaged in communication outside their areas and in economic, social and political developments, especially if they know only the local language;
- literacy training not only enables adults to become literate in Bislama, but the integration of literacy training with information on health and nutrition, agriculture and other interesting and useful topics gives people more confidence in coping with the changes in their world;
- literacy permits more effective liaison with Government staff at national and local levels, especially regarding awareness-raising activities;
- the program involves participants in the production of custom stories, songs and local histories, which raise awareness of and pride in local culture and customs.

**Table 1 Number of women and men attending classes 1997-98**

Island	Men	Women	Total	Classes
Malakula	9	36	45	3
Ambrym	6	15	21	2
Epi	20	30	50	5
Tanna	30	98	128	5
Tanna	1	92	93	5
Santo	12	30	42	5
Santo	15	21	36	5
Maewo	30	40	70	5
Torres	20	40	60	5
Pentecost	20	30	50	5
Total	163	432	595	45

### Positive outcomes of the Melanesian Literacy program

The program outcomes are very encouraging. The ability to read and write in Bislama has given access to new information, ideas and opportunities. It is generally believed that to learn to read and to write is the key to new knowledge. Women who know how to read and write have discovered for themselves a new way of life. Women have expressed how literacy has had significant effects on their lives in the following ways:

- Economic: literacy has improved women's capacity to do business.
- Community and leadership: communication and cooperation within and among villages has improved, with greater knowledge and skills. Leaders are able to improve the facilitation of community activities with the active participation of community members in group processes.
- Spiritual: literacy has enabled women to assume leadership roles in the church.
- Health: literacy has resulted in improvements in waste disposal, access to safe water, improved food storage and handling, and increased knowledge in child health care.
- Confidence: literacy has given women the confidence to express their views and to speak in public. Women have also taken leadership roles and have been actively taking part in decision-making.

The project was successful in achieving most of the target objectives set. A total of fifty-three volunteers was recruited and trained. In 1997-98 these trainers were able to conduct forty-five classes attended by six hundred trainees in fifty-six areas – northwest Malakula, south Malakula, Middle Bush of Malakula, north Ambrym, Epi, north Tanna, west Tanna, south Tanna, south Santo, Big Bay, Maewo, Torres, and north Pentecost. The number of trainees has changed each year, as the woman gained what they wanted. Some took up leadership roles in their communities. Some learned to speak Bislama well enough to be able to migrate to the two towns, Port Vila and Santo, for work. Some, like Rita, have gone into small business.

## The Maewo experience

In 1996 a member of the World Vision staff surveyed members of the literacy class in Maewo. Table 2 lists their responses.

**Table 2 Results of the Literacy program in Maewo 1996**

<b>Individual outcomes</b>	<b>Community outcomes</b>
1. I can teach little children at pre-school	1. People can follow other speakers well in meetings
2. I can read my bible in church	2. Helps build cooperation among communities
3. I can read with comprehension whereas before I could not understand everything I read	3. Helps share responsibilities and leadership roles
4. I can write about my feelings and express my views	4. Gives a better understanding of health hazards and sanitation issues
5. I can access information on subject matters such as health, agriculture, nutrition, etc.	5. Helps share responsibilities in church activities and enables everyone to participate in community work
6. Literacy helps me to be a leader in the community	6. Enables those who attend meetings to take on responsibilities and leadership roles
7. Literacy helps me manage my family, marriage and income	7. The wife becomes one of those in the home who can write and manage the family's well-being
8. I can read and write which gives me confidence	
9. I am now old and now I can read and write, which helps me record my culture and custom	
10. We can read newspapers and other information materials	
11. We can sing better than before	
12. We can draw better pictures, which surprised our community	
13. We can calculate our own <i>vatu</i> ('money') in stores	
14. I can help my children to start a small business	
15. I have written a letter for the first time to a friend in Canada	

## Literacy makes a difference

In spite of resource limitations, the project was able to produce and disseminate literacy materials on customs, culture, health and nutrition and other topics useful to the villages – working on the basis that people learn to read better if the material provided is interesting or valuable to them. Literacy materials were developed during training sessions. Government agencies and NGOs were also tapped for resource materials on health, agriculture and the environment. Practical material like this was integrated into literacy work whenever possible, and made a difference to the quality of life in participating villages. However, such integration depended on the availability of learning materials and the capacity of trainers to handle a diverse range of subject matters.

Apart from developing personal skills and confidence, especially amongst women, literacy also led to improvement in community organisations by enhancing leaders' skills and encouraging them to be more open to active participation in community affairs by other villagers, including women.

## Changes

There are some important changes in the life of the community where literacy classes are operating. I have observed the following changes in several villages:

- *before* the men let their wives to do all the work in the house, but today they share household responsibilities;
- *before* the men used to beat their wives, but today they have family worship together.
- *before* only young boys played sport, but today everyone, old and young men and women, play sport together;
- *before* only fathers and (male) catechists shared in worship, but today they share the responsibilities with family and community members, including women;
- *before*, women didn't know how to change *valu* ('money'), but today many run small businesses and shops.

Many villages are improved in terms of the number of good houses built. Some women have now learned to make smokeless stove. Some have water tanks for clean water. Many women take part in decision-making in their homes and communities; some have the chance of taking up leadership roles in their communities. They have formed themselves into groups to work together, in order to strengthen themselves spiritually, socially, physically, and mentally. One of the most important changes is that these women want to do outreach in other areas. They know how to read and write and have the confidence to convince others about what they know and what they can do.

## Conclusion

We believe that if all the women are literate the whole community will change for the better. When a woman is literate there is a change in the family which enables it to play a more active part in the community development process. Most of all, there is a change in the woman, giving her a feeling of hope and achievement.

## **The Ambunti District Council of Women: achievements and problems**

*Theresia Hopkos, Ambunti District Council of Women*

### **Introduction**

Papua New Guinea is an island nation in the South Pacific which practises Melanesian cultural ways of life. It has more than 700 languages with complicated cultures and customs. Ambunti District, in East Sepik Province, alone has ten different languages. I come from a Kwoma-speaking area. This paper represents Papua New Guinean women from Ambunti District in particular, but more generally represents women in the vast, rural, remote areas, rather than the urban centres.

I am president of the Ambunti District Council of Women (ADCOW), which was formed in 1993 and is affiliated with the East Sepik Council of Women (ESCOW). As part of ESCOW, the Ambunti District Council 'has been built from the bottom up. Leadership plus programme initiatives and directions have emerged from the rural villages' (Nakikus et al. 1991:145). My elected role as president is to coordinate and organise district executive meetings on a quarterly basis and to facilitate the implementation of Awareness programs within the respective area associations to which individual women belong (see Table 1).

### **Organisational structure of ADCOW**

1. District executive:

- President;
- Vice-president;
- Secretary or administrative assistant.

2. Area association executive:

- President
- Vice-president
- Secretary-treasurer

3. The 11 area associations each comprise ten to 30 women's groups and each group consists of between 50 and 100 individual members. They are all well established and functioning to date.

**Table 1: Area Associations in the Ambunti District Council of Women 1998**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of women's groups</b>	<b>Approx. female population (potential membership)</b>
1	Avatip	15	2000
2	Ambunti Rural	15	2500
3	Ambunti Urban	10	1500
4	Black Wara	12	2050
5	Numau	30	3000
6	Wogomus	13	1200
7	Upper Sepik	14	1000
8	Iwam	13	900
9	Wasam	13	800
10	May River	15	900
11	Hunstein Range	16	1100

## **Awareness programs**

Awareness programs are needed because most village women are illiterate. The Awareness programs supported by ADCOW include health education, political education and campaigns of social action, especially against domestic violence.

### **Health education**

The Awareness program in health education teaches:

- good nutrition: that children must be properly fed;
- child care: that children must be properly cared for;
- sanitation: the importance of cleanliness in the home and the village;
- water supply: the importance of providing good drinking water.

### **Political education**

Political education programs are mainly about voter education and raising village women's awareness of their political rights, such as:

- all woman have the right to vote for the candidate of their choice;
- a woman in the village has the right to know who are her government representatives in the Ambunti District, at provincial and national levels;
- a woman in the village must know who is her Prime Minister and so forth.

### **Violence against women**

The aims of Awareness programs against domestic violence are:

- to bring public censure on husbands who beat their wives excessively, sometimes killing them or causing desperate women to commit suicide;
- to encourage women's awareness of what is happening in the village; women should know that death is not an end to any or every problem;
- to oppose the sexual harassment that leads to fifteen-year-old girls being forced to marry older men, or women of fifty-five to sixty years being forced to remarry against their will.

## **Activities, goals, capacities and limitations**

Area association presidents play major roles in organising women's groups in their respective associations. They advise women to share their knowledge and skills in making handicrafts amongst the members of their group, so that every woman knows different styles and methods to make *bilums* ('string bags') and to weave mats and baskets, etc.

Ambunti District is unlike most other inland districts, in that it is situated along the Sepik River and the bulk of the population is spread out along the rivers, which are the only accessible means to the main centres and to obtain goods and services. In most areas, almost all villages are situated fifteen to twenty-five kilometres apart. As a result, area presidents can often only visit the women's groups in their area by paddling from one village to another in canoes, or by paying to travel as passengers in motor canoes or aeroplanes (see Table 2). Our transport costs are therefore very high and unavoidable, except when we are invited to join church groups travelling on church programs. The programs we provide usually have to be scheduled on a quarterly instead of a monthly basis, so that available resources can be put to the widest possible use.



**Table 2** Field visits from the district centre, Ambunti District: comparative distances, modes of transport required, and cost

From the centre to	Distance in km	Time motor canoe	Time paddling	Time walking	Return cost in PNG kina
1. Avatip	20	40 minutes	3 hours	Unnecessar y	80
2. Ambunti Rural*	80	1 hour	8 hours	+ 1 hour	150
3. Black Wara*	110	3 1/2 hours	12 hours	12 hours	115
4. Numau*	200	6 hours	2 1/2 days	3 days	200
5. Wogomus	250	8 hours	Not possible	Not possible	275
6. Upper Sepik	80	2 1/2 hours	Not possible	Not possible	110
7. Iwam	260	9 hours	Not possible	Not possible	320
8. Wasam	260	9 hours	Not possible	Not possible	320
9. May River	380	12 hours	Not possible	Not possible	598
10. Hunstein	260	8 hours	Not possible	Not possible	334

\* Often all three modes of transport are needed, depending on the water level of the river and lakes

The area association executives have worked so hard since ADCOW was formalised. All of them have made big sacrifices to serve their fellow women on a voluntary basis, since no office-holder, including myself, is paid. We do it for the sake of women and human development, even though at times it is an annoyance to our husbands, because as wives and mothers we sometimes neglect our husbands and children, especially when we are away for one to two weeks working on the Awareness programs, or occasionally attending ESCOW training programs.

Women in Ambunti District show that they are very talented when they have the opportunity to develop various skills in their own ways, such as in managing their families and gardens and growing cash crops. The teaching done in the Awareness programs is mostly verbal because the women can read very little. There is widespread illiteracy in the villages throughout the district and a desperate need for Adult Literacy Training programs, especially for women. Yet we lack almost all the resources necessary to undertake such programs and I do not know where they will come from.

Like the area association presidents, I personally gained most of my leadership training and my experience as an organiser from the religious programs organised by the denomination to which I belong – the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. The SDA Church trains mothers for leadership, so that we learn to organise women and to develop Awareness programs. There are four different denominations in Ambunti District: the South Sea Evangelical Church, the Assemblies of God, the Catholic Church and the SDA Church. Most of the services for women come from the churches, which provide a dramatic source of education and knowledge that helps build our characters and know how.

### **Our main problem areas**

Most of our problems stem from lack of funding, resources and training.

- we need a Women's Centre in the district where we can have our meetings, hold training workshops and seminars and display our handicrafts for tourists and other interested buyers;
- financial resources are definitely required to activate the Awareness and Adult Literacy Training programs more effectively;
- there is a need for allowances to help compensate organisers for their work and the sacrificial services that they voluntarily deliver;
- we need information and advice about where to source funding as we do not know how or where to look.

Official government assistance to rural women's groups is very rare, as is assistance from NGOs. Government assistance is allocated through the Community Development Division but available funding is normally used up in the urban centres, whilst rural areas are left to operate by whatever means are available. Since the establishment of ADCOW, we have received almost no funding assistance from the government or NGOs, though sometimes we get handouts as a means to buy votes during election periods. In the future we expect that more resources will be provided, since the District has been classified as a growth centre in view of the opening of the Frieda mine and other underlying major project proposals. So far the continual field visits and follow up programs necessitated by the new changes and developments are lacking, because of the unavailability of operational resources like finance.

Adequate finance would help support area association and local women's group activities by providing:

- fieldworkers' allowance and field rations;
- first aid;
- teaching and literacy materials;
- hire of outboard motor and canoe, fuel costs and operator's allowance;
- air or road travel to provincial headquarters for quarterly district executive meetings.

## **Conclusion**

Although women are human in any given society, in PNG they are generally less regarded and underestimated, which gives them few or no chances of an important participatory role in the development process. Being female in Melanesia and women in Papua New Guinea, especially in the rural remote areas, we see ourselves first, then the churches and then the nation. We get less as citizens and serve more as Christians and citizens, and get served as women the least.

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## **Petzstorne: A women's organisation in the context of a PNG mining project**

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### **Introduction**

In this paper we discuss the role of a woman's organisation in developing a community response to the social changes associated with a large gold mining project in Lihir, a group of four islands in New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea. Martha Macintyre has been working in Lihir since 1994 monitoring the social impact of mining, and Jacklynnne Membup has been employed since 1993 in the Community Relations Department of Lihir Gold to coordinate a women's organisation that assists Lihir women to adapt to the changes resulting from the project. Like all such large projects, the Lihir mine is bringing about enormous social and economic changes, to which people have to adapt extremely quickly. From the outset the company encouraged women's organisations, partly because official policy in PNG requires mining companies to build into their projects certain social amelioration programs that will assist people and reduce negative impacts. The island-wide women's organisation formed in Lihir is called Petzstorne, a term meaning 'working together' in the local language.

Before the development of the mine, women in Lihir had lived in villages scattered around the coast of the main island and on the three small islands just off the coast of Lihir. The society is organised into matrilineal clans, so that descent is calculated through women and land was managed through women prior to the mining development. As has unfortunately often been the case in PNG, men assumed control in the negotiations with the company and women's rights over land were ignored. This had occurred in Bougainville, and neither the PNG government nor the mining companies learned the hard lessons taught by the exclusion of Bougainvillean women as custodians of the land.

### **Forming Petzstorne**

The formation of Petzstorne brought together women from different villages who until that time had had very few links except through marriage and kinship relationships. They were therefore not accustomed to working as a single group or even to considering themselves as 'Lihirians'. Indeed, the word 'Lihir' is not the original local name of the place. The name of the main island is Niolam and 'Lihir' was the name of the language. Now, however, 'Lihir' has taken over and people have become accustomed to thinking of themselves as Lihirians. The impetus for that shift and for forming the women's organisation came from the churches, which provided the only basis for island-wide combination before the beginning of the gold mine project. Accordingly the two major women's groups, the *Katolik Mamas* (Catholic Mothers) and the United Church Women's Fellowship, formed Petzstorne, initially to promote awareness about what was happening in connection with the mining development. The aim was to provide a forum for discussing what sort of changes were going to occur and how women might respond to them.

There was fairly deep antagonism between the Catholic and the United Churches in Niolam when Petzstorne was formed. The United Church is very small: the total population then was about 6,000 people, of whom approximately 5,000 were Catholic and 1,000 belonged either to the United Church or to one of the small Pentecostal churches. Pentecostal church women have only recently become involved in Petzstorne. The Catholic-United Church tension, which has deep historical roots, has unfortunately infected the organisation. Resentment stems partly from the fact that the United Church villages, which

identify wholly with that church, are the most distant places from the mine in Lihir, and so their inhabitants receive fewer of the benefits. But tensions worsen when the views of the Protestant woman are not accepted because they are outnumbered.

### **Problems, agenda, achievements**

Petztorne has attempted to function on a wide range of issues. Its basic role initially was to serve as a way to bring women together for information sessions. Attempts to think about what might be the problems people would have to face, and how to be pro-active consumed a lot of attention in the early period of the mining project. The company, recognising that problems would arise, tried to get women to talk about them and devise their own responses. Two problems that became particularly obvious in the first few months after construction began were the enormous increase in beer consumption and the violence and social disruption that accompanied drunkenness. Violence occurred not only against women but between men. Before the project there had been relatively little beer available on the island. Domestic violence was mostly hidden from view, but the lack of inhibition when drunk meant that men began hitting their wives publicly, a thing that had rarely happened in the past. In a sense, a private and unacknowledged problem that had existed in Niolam before the development of mining was now brought into the open. For many women it was extremely humiliating to be beaten up in public in their village and there was widespread concern.

It therefore became a priority to devise ways of responding to violence – to empower women to see it as a crime and to take issues of violence to the village court. Petztorne encouraged women to develop strategies appropriate to their own communities, both to protect themselves or to have some form of refuge. Some villages decided that going to the house of the catechist was the best measure; in others there is a house where a woman and her husband were prepared to protect battered women. This is a very difficult issue in Melanesian villages, and often men will not allow their wives to take in even a relative. Just such a dilemma was expressed by Solomon Islander Jully Makini (formerly Sipolo) in her poem ‘Wife-bashing’, read to the 1998 Melanesian Women’s Workshop at which this paper was originally presented:

Impossible to go back to Dad  
Sis doesn’t want to get involved  
Can’t stand sister-in-law’s tongue  
The police don’t want to pry  
I don’t like this cruel treatment from hubby  
But where can I go? (Sipolo 1986, 12).

Very early on women decided that they wanted to be a part of the mining project as much as they could, to have access to some of the benefits it brought. Petztorne attempted to deal with these aspirations, but one of the main problems they had to face was the passive opposition of the mining company to employing women in any but very lowly jobs. Mining companies are male dominated in all cultures and very few women work for them. This is especially so in PNG, where even fewer women work in mining than do in Australia. The mostly white men who run the mining company understood the desirable goal of employing local people to mean employment of local men. Equally, there was great resistance on the part of Lihirian men to having women in the paid workforce. Of course, in keeping with ideas of employment that come from a male-dominated industry like the Australian and British mining industries, the jobs that were made available to women were all very low-paid and menial: cleaning up after and doing laundry for the workers who lived on site in the men’s quarters; helping to prepare and serve food. They were the two main areas in which women were employed, and they involved very little training – it is hard to advance your career washing sheets all day.

Men therefore were taken in far greater numbers into the training programs, while women who wanted to train often met resistance from their own families. So there was a kind of

double-barrelled gun loaded against women in the matter of employment opportunities. There was particular hostility when when women took, or attempted to take jobs that were seen as masculine by both expatriate mine workers and Lihirians, such as driving big trucks, or even small trucks, and working at the mine site in jobs that required women to wear trousers. Women wearing trousers became a symbol of male concern. Even if they were cleaning rooms and did not wear trousers, the idea that they *might* do so became the major excuse used by men to keep women back in the village.

Many difficulties thus arose from routine opposition to women's involvement in the workforce. Eventually, though, the employers began to notice that the few women who really resisted family pressures and took traditional mining jobs did not drink and so did not crash the vehicles; they were very careful workers and did not turn up late to work with hangovers. In the simple sense that women worked and conducted themselves differently from men, they gained some small advantage in the employment stakes. A few women trained as secretaries and clerks and they get better wages than many untrained men. This has to some extent made life easier for other women, particularly as Petztorme encourages younger ones to apply for positions that are not the most menial and lowly paid, and places pressure from within the company organisation to provide training for women. At the community relations level of the company, the women's section has been particularly active in trying to encourage women to apply for jobs where they can receive training and earn better wages.

### **Working in community relations**

In the Community Relations department we conducted a survey in which Petztorme members collected the information. It emerged that not only were women better workers than men when given the opportunity, but that women did different things with their earnings. The amount of money that men spent on beer varied between fifty and ninety per cent of their weekly earnings. This was during the early construction phase, when there was a kind of fury of beer drinking, which has since levelled off a little. I found it very interesting that women, on the other hand, gave about the same amount of money to the church and to Petztorme and other women's organisations that men tended to spend on beer. New church building projects and such like have flourished, mainly financed with the money that quite young women earned as laundrymaids, cleaners, etc. At present, still very few women are employed, but those who are employed are often relatively highly paid in secretarial positions – they are clustered in the usual positions that in an Australian company would be seen as women's work.

The promotion of women's roles in decision-making and employment has been a major concern of Petztorme, but the organisation has also supported a number of money-making projects for women. Women observed that men's furious beer drinking was swamping the island with cans, which quickly filled with water and turned can dumps at the back of villages into mosquito breeding grounds. So Petztorme set up a can-crushing project which generates money with which they hope to buy a truck to facilitate the work of the organisation. It takes a long time, though, to buy a truck out of crushed cans! Women's activities all fall into the 'self help' category and mining company support for men's business ventures has been far greater than for women's. Women also took over management of the market built in the new township as another source of income. Petztorme is currently trying to encourage women to supplement their income by growing produce for regular sale at the market.

The work done by the women's section of the Community Relations department includes a very important educative component. It not only promotes education about social change and adjustment, but education generally, and encourages girls to continue at school, with financial assistance from the mine. I think it is very important that women are seen to be the ones who throughout the community promote education and encourage people to apply to the company for assistance with scholarships at all levels: from elementary school right through to tertiary education. As the population expands and people recognise the need for

qualifications when seeking employment, so more young girls are choosing to stay on at school.

We want to stress that in spite of Petztorme's many internal conflicts (largely due to the pre-existing splits in the community and the speed with which members of the organisation have had to adjust to working together on issues of common concern), it nonetheless does provide a unifying group to deal with the most serious modern problem – the emergence of dramatic social inequalities. Prior to the arrival of the mining company there were not real inequalities between people in Lihir. Everyone had access to land and sea and most people lived pretty much like their neighbours. The influx of compensation payments and wage labour has altered that balance extraordinarily. It is largely through women's organisations that attempts are being made to ameliorate the conflicts arising from inequality.

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## **Gender and economic governance**

*Janet Hunt, Executive Director, Australian Council for Overseas Aid*

Economic governance is one of four key areas emphasised in any governance programme, the others being public sector reform, legal reform, and civil society. Economic governance has generally been interpreted to mean providing a market-friendly economic environment (including fiscal and monetary policy), dealing with banking and financial system weaknesses, and reform of state-owned enterprises. Dealing with corruption is a related issue.

The argument for addressing these issues is that good economic and financial management is necessary to create a conducive environment for the private sector to flourish and for successful use of development assistance. It is argued that private-sector-led growth is essential for development, but the governance system must also create some equity if this growth is to be sustained. Among the kinds of economic governance activities which Australian aid may support are:

- strengthening central government financial agencies and central economic planning departments;
- assisting governments to develop appropriate policies and procedures to facilitate integration into trade liberalisation (for example, assistance to comply with WTO requirements);
- improving the legal and regulatory framework for private sector development (for example, addressing bankruptcy laws or property rights laws relating to land, improving financial sector monitoring and supervision);
- developing taxation systems (for example, Australian assistance has been given to selected nations to simplify and reduce import taxes or to introduce a value added tax); and
- supporting small and medium enterprises (for example, through the development of microcredit schemes, or through training in business, marketing, and so on).

How does one look at these activities from a gender perspective?

Clearly, some of the activities, for example improving taxation systems to bring increased revenue to governments, have the potential to improve things for women. Taxation reforms which strengthen a government's capacity to gain increased tax receipts offer a chance for governments to increase their social expenditures, and this may broadly benefit women. However, the introduction of a new tax on consumption could have negative impacts on women trying to manage very tight budgets for family essentials.

Similarly, programmes to reduce corruption have the potential to benefit women, though there is no guarantee that they will. And while microcredit programmes increasingly target women as beneficiaries, the actual benefits to their lives of such programmes depend on a multitude of contextual factors, not the least of which is whether the increased workload such programmes may induce is offset by other reductions in the burden on women.

However, while some of the gender aspects of such economic governance projects are obvious (for example, is training equally available and utilised by women as well as men?), in this article I want to look at the 'big picture': the global push for opening markets and bringing all nations into an integrated global economy. It is this underlying rationale which provides the basis for many specific economic governance projects. I will suggest that a great deal of change is required in this underlying paradigm if greater gender equity, rather than polarisation of gender positions, is to be one of the outcomes. I will finish by asserting that those promoting governance programmes need to take seriously recent research on

gender and governance by the World Bank, which suggests that good governance requires full attention to gender equity.

### **Globalisation, inequality and gender**

Globalisation, or the liberalisation of trade, investment and financial services, and a strong emphasis on privatisation, is clearly exacerbating inequality. The latest report of the UN Development Programme shows that the world's richest 225 individuals (and I don't need to outline the gender balance there) now have a combined wealth equal to the annual income of the poorest 47 per cent of the world's people (statistically, it is likely that some 70 per cent of them are women). So, as global inequality worsens, gender inequality worsens with it.

It is crucial that we turn our attention to these 'big picture' trends in economic globalisation, which include:

- the restructuring of relationships between countries as well as within them as a result of World Trade Organisation (WTO) and particularly IMF policies, such that powerful interests prevail;
- the expanding power of multinational organisations and increased market dominance by fewer and fewer firms – 100 corporations control one-fifth of all foreign-owned assets in the world;
- changing patterns of global employment – with women and children bearing the brunt of downward pressures on labour costs and conditions (child labour being one clear example of this); trade liberalisation will often increase gender inequality in sex-segregated labour markets, yet gender impact studies of trade liberalisation are unheard of;
- reduced public sector investment – which means cutbacks in essential services used proportionately more by women because of their traditional carer roles (for example, health services);
- rapid flows of speculative capital washing around the world, deciding the fates of millions of people almost overnight – nine out of every ten dollars crossing national borders are speculative, not contributing to productive investment; in Indonesia when the crash came, women suffered cutbacks in health and family planning spending; they had to deal with huge increases in the prices of staple foods like rice and cooking oil; the cost of medicines rose astronomically; women moved into prostitution in large numbers; and reported violence against women increased – all because international speculators deserted Indonesia almost overnight;
- reduced access by people to forums which are making decisions about our futures – whether the WTO, APEC, or corporate boardrooms – the further away the decisions are made, the harder it is for women (represented more among the bus passengers than the jetsetters) to influence them; and
- essential national social and environmental regulation is resisted as a barrier to trade – so 'social clauses' are not on, and environmental and health standards are pushed to the lowest common denominator level.

### **Gender and market theory**

Underlying these trends is a faith in market orthodoxy that has failed to adjust to the times. Market theory, as articulated by its originator Adam Smith, was based on a number of key assumptions about how market forces would lead to socially optimal outcomes:

- Buyers and sellers must be too small to influence the market price.
- Complete information must be available to all participants in the market and there can be no trade secrets.
- Sellers must bear the full cost of the products they sell and pass them on in the sale price.
- Investment capital must remain within national borders, and trade between countries must be balanced.
- Savings must be invested in the creation of productive capital.



You don't have to have a degree in economics to know that many of these conditions no longer prevail. So, current market orthodoxy is based on outdated assumptions, which is probably why it is not working for socially optimal outcomes. Also underlying market theory is a mechanistic, reductionist view of society and the economy which many women are challenging. Feminist economist Hazel Henderson's approach (1986) is to see the economy as a three-layered cake with icing:

- The bottom layer is the natural resource base – the environment on which all life depends.
- The next layer is the social economy – the non-monetary part, in which women are particularly active with all the unpaid labour and social reproduction work that they do.
- The top layer is the public sector, all the public infrastructure – roads, sewerage, schools, hospitals, local government, child care centres, and so on.
- The icing on the cake is the monetised private sector.

The three layers of the cake hold up the icing – it would be nothing without the other layers. Yet, when most economists talk, they are only talking about the icing, and they separate it entirely from the whole cake. They either do not see the interrelationships or, if they do, their theories cannot deal with the complexity of the real world.

Let me give you a small, and quite limited, example of how such a perspective changes your view of development. Imagine a group of Papua New Guinean women who live downstream of a major mining development. They have always lived on sago, which no longer flourishes because the river water in which it grew has become polluted and doesn't flow at the same levels. They had used this river for drinking and washing before, but that was no longer safe. Their menfolk had been encouraged to go and work in the mine, which some had done. This gave them cash in quantities they'd never seen before, which resulted in them drinking and becoming abusive and violent to women. The mining camp had also attracted prostitution into the area, and the local women were now fearful of being infected with HIV/AIDS by partners who used the prostitutes. Such a development would be seen by economic decision makers as a positive development, contributing significantly to national economic advancement. They are only looking at the icing – they haven't noticed the damage to the cake.

### **A more gender equitable economy**

The holistic view of the economy is radically challenging this orthodox economic approach. It sets different rules:

- Full cost accounting – women and the environment must be counted in, not treated as externalities. Costs shifting from the private sector of the economy to the unpaid sector can then be identified. Cost saving will then be recognised as simply cost shifting.
- Make the goals of the global economy human development (not simply GDP growth), and hold the economists to account for achieving them; insist on integration of the social and environmental with the economic. In developing countries, growth is necessary to reduce poverty – but the quality of that growth matters.
- Give incentives to productive employment creating capital, and strong disincentives to speculative capital, such as the introduction of a speculative transaction tax (for example, the Tobin Tax) – that is, set better rules for globalisation.
- Make companies accountable – we grant them their corporate existence, we must set the terms on which they conduct their business to achieve human development and environmental sustainability. Codes of conduct are necessary.
- Open up economic decision making bodies like the WTO and the IMF to the people; make them as democratic and transparent as possible and require them to achieve equitable human development and environmental goals;

require trade agreements to show their positive impacts on humans and the environment before finalising them.

- Transform the productive monetised economy to enable people's roles in the reproductive or social economy to be respected, so that we can all live more balanced lives.
- Engender political decision making at all levels.

Achieving these changes requires massive effort and will take a long time. However, development assistance in the governance area can mean some small steps in the right direction if recent World Bank research on gender and governance is utilised, and if governance work is closely integrated with other sectoral priorities. This research shows, for example, that:

- gender inequality, particularly in education, has a negative impact on economic growth. As much as 0.4 per cent and 0.9 per cent of the differences in growth rates between regions can be accounted for by large gender gaps in education in the poor performing regions; and
- the greater the representation of women in parliaments, the lower the level of corruption, and this holds true across a wide spectrum of countries.

Greater attention to gender in education and other aspects of governance may realise rapid improvements in both economic growth and reductions in corruption, as well as contribute to poverty reduction. This is where a greater focus on the quality of economic growth is important. Achieving improvements both in women's education and in economic growth has greater social benefits than growth strategies which undermine women's well-being.

### **Global integration and rural development in Laos**

Finally, it is worth examining, from a gender perspective, a recent study of Australian assistance to the People's Democratic Republic of Laos. Jonathon Cornford (1999), of James Cook University, concludes that there have been two major areas in which Australian development organisations, supported by AusAID, have played an advocacy role in Laos: to engage in the processes of modernisation and integration into the global economy; and the advancement of rural livelihoods and well-being.

Cornford argues that 'ultimately these two areas of development advocacy lie on conflicting paths' (1999:iii). The projects that reinforce the first trend are 'governance' sector ones, which, he says, enhance the capacity of the Lao central government to implement programmes to the detriment of rural localities. He nominates the following projects as contributing to the global integration path:

- the Friendship bridge, which is seen as a catalyst for sub-regional economic integration in line with Asian Development Bank regional development directions;
- assistance to Laos to enter ASEAN and AFTA in 1996–97;
- assistance in the education sector, which is strongly biased to tertiary sector, English language training to key government ministries, such as the ASEAN Department in the Department of Foreign Affairs; and
- the land titling project, designed to develop land markets in a nation where usufructuary rights dominate.

Australia's considerable contribution to the rural sector in Laos in the 1990s included:

- the Lao Uplands agricultural development project;
- two projects in Xiagnabouli Province, in primary health care and integrated village development; and
- Community Aid Abroad's rural development and institutional strengthening project.

These latter projects, Cornford argues, have been particularly successful in improving rural lives.

Cornford concludes that development assistance should strengthen sectors of the state and/or civil society organisations that have the greatest potential to advance rural livelihoods. This would certainly be the type of assistance with the potential to significantly benefit poor women. For Cornford, this includes local government and civil society strengthening, and strengthening those central departments which themselves may promote a critique of current economic orthodoxy (such as those concerned with social or rural development).

It would be worthwhile if more studies similar to Cornford's were to be conducted, but with an explicit gender focus. Governance projects which simply enable national governments to more easily integrate into the global economy may worsen inequity and, hence, gender inequity. Those which strengthen community or local decision making processes and which adopt a more holistic view of the local economy may improve it.

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## **Christianity and women in Bougainville**

*Ruth Saovana-Spriggs, Technical Team, Bougainville People's Congress*

### **Introduction**

In this paper two Bougainville women share their experiences during the war on their island from 1989–98, and tell how their Christian faith gave them the strength and courage to initiate the successful peace process. My personal concern is that Bougainville women should henceforth participate meaningfully in the decision-making level of government, as they have always done at community level (in churches, village meetings, women's meetings), where their authority rests and where they have always had significant influence on decisions.

### **Background**

During the past two hundred years, Christianity has taken deep root in the lives of Pacific Islanders and it is now an inseparable part of people's existence. In Bougainville Christianity has become a cultural way of life for the vast majority of people. The ten years of civil war/independence struggle between the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Security Forces/local militia and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) became a major turning point to God for most Bougainvilleans. During the conflict an estimated 18-20,000 lives were lost, both in direct military confrontations and through the lack of medical supplies after the PNG government withdrew all services from the island in 1990. The government later reestablished a system of military occupation in areas not dominated by the BRA. People were herded into refugee camps ('care centres'), where human rights abuses, intimidation, harassment, rape and killings were frequent, and where movement was strictly controlled, eventually by a pass system.

In the political vacuum of 1990-94, when there was virtually no civil government, the often traumatised people committed themselves strongly to their various churches. The churches have long offered succour and services, but they now by necessity became involved in public affairs, resulting in a general change of attitude and expectation about the respective roles of church and government. The churches played a pivotal role in providing services from their few stored resources, which soon ran out. The major issue was health. Services delivered with love and Christian fellowship became the most important aspect of people's social life. Many women launched a campaign to 'bring home our children from the jungle' – that is, the young men who took up arms with the BRA to fight for Bougainville's independence. This action by women was the birth of reconciliation, and opened up other areas such as mediation and negotiation between the BRA, the people and the PNG government. It was the beginning of the peace process, culminating in a ceasefire signed in April 1998 by all the warring factions.

Here are two women's stories of their experiences during the most violent period of the war. Both are church members, one a Methodist (United Church) and the other a Catholic. Both are heavily involved in community work to restore a degree of normality to the people's lives. Both testify to the help God gave them during the war in their efforts as women to bring peace to their communities.

### **'Anna': a nursing sister-in-charge of a rural health centre<sup>i</sup>**

Anna had a Christian upbringing. Her father trained as a Methodist lay preacher and her mother was a nursing aid in the first Methodist hospital. They ran a Methodist boarding school in the 1960s-70s and Anna, like many children of her generation, received a modern education in mission schools. She trained at a Methodist nursing training college and then at a base hospital. She is a highly qualified nurse and midwife and does minor surgical

operations. She is highly respected for her work and the love and care she brings to it. Most of her staff are local women trained at various nursing training colleges.

The health centre Anna runs was built in the 1960s by the New Zealand Methodist Mission. It has a maternity ward and an outpatients section, but no surgical ward or doctor – there has been no doctor since the New Zealand medical workers left the island after PNG's independence in 1975. The centre caters for three major language communities and a population of 12-14,000.

From the beginning of the war Anna made a conscious decision to attend to all wounded who came to the centre, not favouring one side over the other. She often performed minor operations to remove shotgun pellets or stitched up badly wounded soldiers, BRA men and civilians. For her neutral stance, Anna was misunderstood and she and her family were harassed and threatened. Anna was badly beaten up by members of the local BRA branch, resulting in a dislocated hip, a badly bruised face and lacerated hands. The BRA objected to her attending injured members of the PNG Security Forces and their local militia allies, whom they saw as the enemy, deserving to die. Anna's husband sparingly applied what modern medicine was left to the cuts on her body and her family and church members prayed for her. Her recovery is testimony to God's sovereign power of healing and the power of faith and prayer.

The young BRA men eventually recognised the stupidity of their behaviour. A year or so later they persuaded their chiefs, parents and relatives to organise a big reconciliation ceremony with Anna and her family, involving several villages and including both Christian and traditional forms of reconciliation. The BRA men sought forgiveness from Anna and her family and kin, who joined in prayers for reconciliation. A huge amount of traditional currency and other gifts was given to Anna and her family as compensation, followed by a feast and much handshaking.

### **Anna's story**

It was the most difficult time of my career as a health worker in a rural community. The health centre where I have worked for over fifteen years had very little medicine. Every form of communication and transportation was cut off when the PNG government imposed a complete blockade on Bougainville in 1990. I had heard that the International Red Cross had been supplying some medicine, mainly antimalarial drugs, to the nearest health centre, a Catholic clinic. For love of the people, I risked my life, generally walking alone to this clinic to collect whatever medicine they could spare. On rare occasions, two or three men dared to accompany me. My husband comes from Buka island and it was doubly risky for him to move about because the Buka leaders and chiefs had invited the PNG Security Forces to return. In the eyes of the BRA, this invitation was a betrayal of the BRA cause – independence for Bougainville.

I made a conscious decision to attend to everyone who needed medical attention: Papua New Guinean and Bougainvillean civilians, Papua New Guinean soldiers and local militia men, and BRA men. It was my duty to save lives, which meant making no distinctions between race or ethnic groups, religion, soldiers or civilians. My commitment and my duty is first to God and to his people. Members of the BRA rejected my neutral stand and commitment. In their minds, I should only attend to them and other Bougainvilleans, and not the Papua New Guinean soldiers. At times, when BRA members learned of the little supply of medicine in the centre, two or three would come and seize it at gun point.

The PNG Security Forces also meted out their share of harassment, intimidation and threats to me, my family and my nurses. The Security Forces inherited the only vehicle the health centre had at gun point and it was never returned. Soldiers came drunk and armed to the health centre, often in the middle of the night, and shouted at nurses to attend to them, or used the only maternity ward as a toilet.

What was most difficult was maintaining a balanced attitude towards these warring factions. When I was so badly beaten, I decided not to work again, but after a while I saw the need of the people. It was my love for them, and their love for me and my family that kept me going. Besides this, God was my support. Nowadays, my family and I are constantly flooded with gifts, even from people we do not know. It is a great blessing and we thank God for that.

### **‘Maria’: a trained horticulturalist**

Maria is a horticulturalist. Educated and trained through the Catholic mission, she taught at a Catholic agricultural centre in Bougainville before the civil war. When the war began, she and her husband moved to their village in the northeast. As church leaders they took up the task of mediating between members of the BRA and civilians, and negotiating with the BRA to lay down their arms and ‘come home’ to their families in their communities. They did this in a very quiet and unassuming fashion. Maria also formed a Catholic Women’s Group in her community. Apart from social service activities, the group also engaged in negotiations with northern BRA members to abandon fighting and ‘come home’. Maria and her small group of negotiators and mediators had to establish ‘trust’ and ‘honesty’ between themselves and the BRA. This was a very delicate process.

### **Maria’s story**

The most important thing for me and my women was to establish and nurture trust and honesty in the BRA, so that trust and honesty would flow between us. One little move outside the rules of the game could mean the end of our efforts, a futile and devastating outcome for me, the women and my family.

We tracked through mountains and valleys, crossing rivers week after week, month after month. This was the most trying time for us. But we had to show the BRA that we were serious. If we gave up after a few tries, they would have lost trust in us. We had nothing material to offer them and modern medicine was a thing of the past. But like them, we looked to tradition. We learned local traditional medicine from our old people. We saw the jungle with a different eye. It became our source of medical and food supplies. Plants, leaves, roots, fruits, the bark of trees as well as marine life became useful as medicines.

Often our efforts were misunderstood, raising suspicion on both sides – civilians and the BRA. We saw the need to explain our efforts to the people but time was always an important factor. So we often had to leave suspicions hanging and just pray that no major or minor conflict would arise. But gradually, as my Catholic Women’s Group and the northern BRA members felt more secure and confident, there was a little opening in the path of negotiation and mediation. Sometimes, a small matter would take over two months to resolve, but we did it wholeheartedly.

The BRA trusted us, the women, but not so much the men. There were complicated dynamics during this ‘building trust’ process. The young BRA men know we women are important not only as landowners but also as procreators and peace makers. It finally dawned on them that the women are picking up the bits and pieces from what they, the men, have destroyed. The women saw the young men as their children, children of Bougainville whom they must protect and bring back home. These young men are the defenders of our land from external destructive forces. They do not deserve to be killed for defending their land and people, but they do need to learn to live a normal life.

### **Ruth Saovana-Spriggs: reflections**

My particular concern is that women shall participate in the future governing of Bougainville. Women’s efforts to create an environment of reconciliation throughout Bougainville must not be lost to the men. Men have a tendency for power play. In Bougainville some have destroyed and killed. It is the women who have been picking up the pieces left by men’s actions. Women from all levels, but especially simple, ordinary village women, showed strength and bravery in venturing into the jungles and the mountains in search of their children, the young BRA men, and bringing them home. The coming home occurred in waves, one by one, in twos or in groups, sometimes after weeks, months or years of women’s persistent efforts. It was a great joy to the women when the young men came home.

Women in Bougainville are ‘jacks of all trades’. Mothers and mothers-to-be are nurturers of life, leaders, health workers, teachers, fisherwomen, gardeners, cooks, fuel collectors, home carers, accountants in the customary and modern economies. It is highly desirable

that women extend these skills from the local community level in order to take a proper share in governing the island. The war has given women fresh, vital strength and command of these customary roles and their roles as landowners in Bougainville's matrilineal societies. The authority exercised over land by Bougainville women is hugely misunderstood by well-meaning outsiders who have come in droves to assist in restoring the society, the infrastructure and the people's sense of security.

The ten year conflict has caused people to reflect on their relationship to and complete dependence on the land and the environment at a time when modern infrastructure, goods and services failed to sustain them. Lost customary practices were revived and became both useful and necessary. They include building bush material houses and carving traditional canoes and paddles for fishing and transportation, when modern forms of travel had been destroyed. Traditional knowledge of healing and the use of traditional medicine became very important and effective.

However, these strategies for coping with the crisis did not just mean a return to tradition, to the past. New forms of relationships were revived, strengthened and extended. For example, a person from the south stranded in the north needed only to announce his or her clan, and he or she would immediately be taken in as a clan and family member by the same clan in the north. Such new relationships, extending kinship and friendship, were emerging before the crisis, with marriages between men and women from different parts of the island. However, they gained strength and new meanings during the years of conflict. The younger generations growing up in urban areas with Tok Pisin and English as the only languages of communication are now learning and using their local languages, to their parents' great pleasure. It is a time when the land, the jungle, the sea, the marine life, the customs, all have revitalised meanings for the people, who before the crisis were very much drawn to western ideas and influence. One can say that the years of fighting have given the people a more deeply meaningful relationship to their environment and indigenous identity.

## **Conclusion**

Women are as interested in control over their land and resources as are men in contemporary Bougainville. The women's initiative in planting/birthing the peace process should mark a new era in the process of government. Their efforts in this arena have raised a new and strong awareness of the need to involve women in matters concerning exploitation of natural resources by external companies. This is really about women regaining and exercising their traditional authority, not only in the communities and over land, but also in governing modern Bougainville. Women are looking for ways to combine traditional and modern authority in order to find their place in a world organised and managed by men. In other words, women desire to achieve a balance in the political economy of a new Bougainville.

Christianity is fundamental in people's lives. Their faith in God gave them the strength to carry out daring tasks, and their Christian love and commitment for each other gave them strength to rebuild and make sense of their individual lives. It is faith in God through Christian activities and networks that brought change and hope to broken lives. No one who lived through the conflict in Bougainville will not have testimony to share on how God saw them through the difficult times, or on the miracles which occurred, of healing, welfare, and bonding with friends and enemies. The experiences of 'Anna' and 'Maria' tell in microcosm the story of the Bougainville people.

## **Note**

<sup>i</sup> I refer to the two women by pseudonyms, since for security reasons they do not want to be identified.