

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE PACIFIC – 2013 PNG UPDATE AND THE PACIFIC - ANU

Introduction:

Papua New Guinea is a multi –lingua and culturally diverse nation compared to any sister pacific islands. It has 800 plus languages and cultures, and nearly 70% of the five(5)million people are still illiterate, or can not read or write and don't even have access to basic education, health and hygiene.

The Country has gained its independence in 1975 and since then very little has taken place in the legislation on addressing issues affecting livelihood when compared to gender based violence. Papua New Guinea is experiencing many social, economic and political changes coming about.

The rapid developments that are taking place associated with modernisation and globalisation that have challenged our tradition, values and this has greatly affected the lives of many people especially the women and children and has brought about escalating problems, and often a hidden one.

Gender based violence in PNG may have similarities in other pacific islands and globally. It is indeed one of the major developmental issues and it is most often the vulnerable who are victims as in the case of women and children and even few men have also fallen victim lately due to the trauma that a woman has suffered for sometimes and begins to release where a man falls victim.

TRADITION AND CULTURE:

The tradition and culture varies from Provinces to Provinces, bride price was no exception as a form of ownership by men. Traditionally it was a form of recognition to reunite the man and the woman's clan and to maintain the family ties. This has been misinterpreted by many who now used bride price as a token of ownership which is totally against the PNG tradition and the laws. The culture also in the past had an impact on the life style of dressing and behaviour and ages in marriages and certain tradition and customs to be adhered to.

In traditional PNG society, women's role are usually seen as subordinate or less important than the men's role. Because of the ways of looking at things, the importance of women's role is not always appreciated and valued even to date.

Women are not usually in public and community decision making even though they are people who are the most important support of the family unit and provides economic resources. Women have been expected to do women's work such as looking after children and providing food. This contribution is invisible, not counted as something of value. Women all over the Pacific and other countries as well as PNG have been looked upon as inferior by men and seen unfit to take on jobs that are traditionally done by men.

CHANGES IN THE SOCIETY AND HIGH EXPECTATION OF WOMEN

Modern society has changed this abit,but we still have a long way to go in many countries including PNG.

In the past,very few PNG women managed to achieved public position of power either in public service or business and even politics.

Now we are seeing changes gradually creeping in, as women are taking up roles that were traditionally males role and it proves to the nation and the world that women are just as capable as their male counterparts at succeeding in these jobs.

Women have proven themselves in PNG and maybe else where in the Pacific and globally to be very successfully as nurses,teachers and these roles have generally been accepted because they are nurturing roles,like a mother,but women have proven to have become administrators,mechanics,lawyers,pilots,doctors, politician and so fort.

In PNG and else where in the Pacific and Globally women are now taking very challenging jobs,however they are still very minority and alot more empowerment on qualities of a women is still needed today in a male dominated society.

Women do labours heavy work. Women work long hours even when they are physically unfit. This is common in Melanesian where gender inequity is high and role differentiation is very strict. Women are vulnerable to abuse if they do not work hard to cater for the immediate and extended families.

Women psychologically undergo unnecessary stress while physically involve in labourous work. A newly wed women is responsible for taking care of her husbands aging parents and so has to work hard to avoid critism from her inlaws and husbands relatives and to please her husband. Husbands beat their wives because of the pressure from their relatives.

Women and girls today in Melanesian society and else where in the world will continue to suffer emotionally,psychologically,financially under much pressure and even lose their life.

EFFECTS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Gender based violence is a very serious problem in PNG as it disables what should be harmonious relations within the family and the community at large. It has alot of negative effects on the victims,family, Province and the Country.

It results from gender inequality and discrimination. The violence are so frequent imposed on the women and even children adds up to physical,emotional and psychological abuse. Gender base violence violates significant dimensions of human rights and denies the rights of women. Violence against women will continue unless effective measures are taken to eliminate the problem. Thus is crucial for everybody to work together to put a brake on this ugly problem so that we have healthier and more peaceful homes and societies.

The victims of gender based violence are women and children who have suffered or experiences physical wounds,brutal attacks and even death.Two thirds of the women in rural area have been beaten and fifty seven percent were hit by objects or weapons where by medical assistance was not available because of the remoteness of the area or in some case where medical help is available the victim does not have money to pay for get the medical help and does even dies if sustained very serious injuries.

The women victim continuos to suffer in silence because there may no other financial support for the children or no where to seek shelter because of pressures so she blames her self for all those beatings and silently and psychologically suffers. At times they commit suicide and attempts or even commit murder upon the perpetrator and she is sentenced to prison.

That does lives the children who had witnessed the continous violence in silent are traumatised, and many have left home and are living on the street with their peers who are also victims of GBV.

GBV is becoming a norm in the Melanesian society and eating away the core of the family unit and destroys dramatically the children who are innocent victims.

The communities do not intervene as GBV is a norm of a family matter and none of any bodys business.It also very much hinders the developments taking place and has cost the Goverment of PNG a lot of money to combat violence and other social issues through the social services.

As a consequences of GBV alot of women and children have contracted the HIV virus or other sexually transmitted infections through husband or wife having multiple relationship as a result of disorder in marriage.

Children have resort to alcohol or drug due to unstability in the family, and left school at an early age or could not continue on further because of violence in the home. Parental care and love for the children is no longer felt in the society today.

Many growing children resort to violence at an early age in school, in the communities that have resulted in school fights caused by children and youth who were victims of GBV now affected by alcohol and drugs.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND THE LAW

In PNG there is no specific crime for domestic assault. It is classified under assault summarily or Grevious bodily harm under the Criminal code Act.

The issue of Protection Order for victims is still an issue in the Country and it is progressing very slow and at times puts the victims at a very greater risk from the Court and the Police.

There is no specific protection or safe house transist for the victims in some centres of PNG. The centres that are providing safe transist are sometimes at risk due to perpertrator or relatives forcing to take back the victim home.

Until such time the legislation specifies and includes tougher penalties to be imposed on the perpetrators that may reduce or minimise the seriousness of the violence inflicted on the victims. And a no drop policy to be introduced where the victim does not withdraw the charges, it goes before the court to be heard, but that will determine the safety also of the victim of her protection and safety if there is such services available.

PNG CONSTITUTION AND THE UNITED NATION TREATY

PNG's constitution is based on Integrity, justice and peace. It empowers the people under basic preambles which is slowly picking up and a lot of abuses and damages have been done so the legislation needs to be tightened up to allow the constitution to prevail.

PNG is a signatory to the United Nations Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Children (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC) and there are others not to mention.

PNG will be liable to the United Nations if this is not followed, and we women are continuously being harassed, beaten, raped, murdered, burned alive and will continue to suffer in the hands of men who God created to be our protector and refuge.

ACHIEVEMENTS

PNG has come a long way battling the challenges in a male dominated society since self Government. The changing society and the involvements of international communities have made a major breakthrough in addressing the GBV and HIV AIDS related issues. The current Government is now seriously taking into consideration the issue of GBV and planning to allow for its own legislation around GBV.

Many great women leaders from around the Pacific like Ms Shamima Ali from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre was a focal advocator to address seriously GBV in the Pacific. PNG Women and other Pacific Islands today have very powerful GBV activists and advocates who are still running the race to combat this cancer like issues.

The Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Program in conjunction with the Pacific Islands Chief of Police have made an impact on signing an memorandum of understanding for all Police in the South Pacific to seriously address the issues of GBV, and not only that the program have conducted skills investigative skills for all Police Officers in the Pacific to fully manage the GBV complaints at the work place.

The Law and Justice Sector Program (AUSAID) have done extremely well in designing program in all sector under LJSP. The program has enhanced capacity for the magisterial services, correctional, Police, Village Courts, the Judiciary, and the Ombudsmen service of PNG.

Hospitals in PNG have improved their services in attending to victims of GBV at a special medical unit, churches and faith based organisations have increased their knowledge to address this issues. The business houses and other stakeholders are also taking part in this GBV Campaign in few Provinces in PNG.

A lot of training were conducted of GBV and HIV, Empowering women and youth on GBV, Gender Sensitising, Crisis Counselling, Human rights etc for the volunteers who are keen in attending to GBV issues.

A lot of community and school awareness and being done. Radio talk back programs, campaigns and lobby workshops.

The Police in few centres have improved in their dealing with GBV, and the local courts in providing Providing protection order for the victims.

Men are slowing becoming an agents of change in few Provinces in PNG. In Lae Morobe Province where I live, we have formed men against violence, Youth Against Violence, Children Against Violence under the service centre named as Yana Male Advocacy And Child Life Line Services to be launched soon. Further more the city where I live in, is where the major multi billion dollar project taking place, and there is an influx of businesses booming, and expatriates from all over the world venturing into share partners etc in the developments taking place.

GAPS

- Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee for all Province in PNG to linked up with each other.
- Inadequate Magistrates available for Family Court
- Ineffective service delivery of Protection Order from the Court and the Police
- Inadequate safe transit haven in most centre in PNG
- Informations and services of GBV and other related social issues lack in the remote and rural setting of PNG, and it is a great demand in deed.
- Immurgency after hours for GBV not available, only in Lae, Morobe Province just started by Yana Advocacy Services
- No services available especially design for people with disabilities who are victims or perpetrators of GBV or other related issues.
- Medical services for GBV after hours not available as yet
- Monitoring and Evaluation of GBV is very weak
- Advance Data on case management for all GBV service providers in PNG

WAY FORWARD

- Keep on lobbying for the legislation on GBV
- Lobbying for the Constitution to be adjusted with limited freedoms of human dignity.
- Keep lobbying for tougher penalties for perpetrators of GBV
- Strengthen the networking in all centres of PNG and the Pacific in addressing GBV
- Advocate centre for men and boys to be created in some area in PNG.
- Lobbying for men and boys to be Agents of change
- Working to create services centres for People with diasbities who are victims of violence
- Create Womens Crisis Centre in all Centre in PNG to link up with Fiji Womens Crisis Centre
- Advocacy to reach very remote areas of PNG on GBV and HIV AIDS

- Empower local run service centre to venture
- Special services for the victims of GBV male and female inmate after discharge from CS Goal – Life skills pathway into employments to sustain their living.(sewing,poultry,piggery,trade store)
- Create a data co ordination centre for PNG in Lae(Yana Advocacy is willing to spear head) as it is a central location.
- Attend data collation programs to enhance GBV officers to maintain accurate information to correspond throughout PNG and the Pacific.
- And to conclude every individual, group,communities, nations and the countries, regardless of status,color,race,nationality, have all to contribute by putting our hands up to be **AN AGENT OF CHANGE** for a better tomorrow for our childrens generation otherwise the **CYCLE ON ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE GOES ON AND NO ONE WILL FIND THE SOLUTION TO END IT ONCE AND FOR ALL.**

Thank you

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