

# Security and sorcery: Pacific experience and international debates

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# Aims of presentation

(intended ‘take home’ messages)

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1. Explain the significance and prevalence of sorcery discourses, beliefs and practices for aid and development
2. Encourage the addition of a “sorcery” lens to aid and development work
3. Share some insights into how the issues raised by sorcery and witchcraft practices and beliefs are being dealt with internationally, and in Melanesia



Maybe we can develop a sorcery lens  
like we have a gender lens?

# What do I mean, sorcery??

## Definitions/ terminology

Sorcery/ witchcraft: potentially problematic and misleading English words used here to refer to a wide variety of belief systems/ worldviews whereby an individual (the “witch” or “sorcerer”) is considered able to cause harm through supernatural/ occult means

Issue of who is the “victim”? Is it the person harmed by sorcery? Or the person harmed by the accusation?



Children In Nigeria accused of being witches and wizards, protesting outside the Governor's headquarters.

# Sorcery Beliefs today

## Sorcery beliefs and practices are modern and widespread

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- Belief in sorcery/witchcraft widespread across the globe, particularly in Africa, India, Nepal and Melanesia
- Also present in the global North
- Not a “backwards” or “primitive” belief system that will “just die out” with education and development and science
- Sorcery/witchcraft is (also) a modern phenomena

The Telegraph, May 2016, London, UK “Witchcraft child abuse cases investigated by Met rise by over 50%”



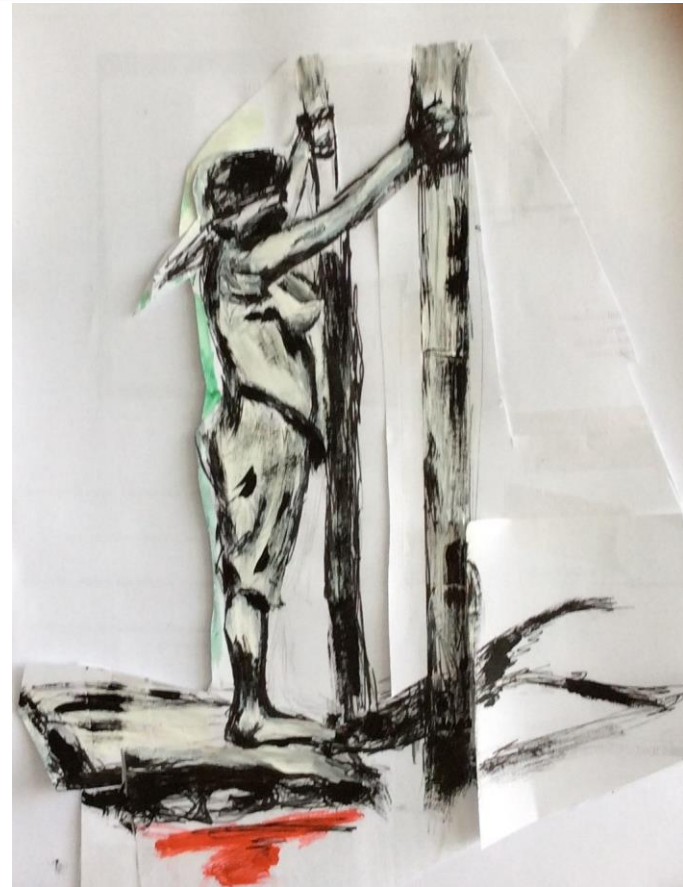
South African Pagan Rights Alliance poster

# Sorcery and Development

**There is a spectrum of harm arising from harmful practices associated with belief in sorcery/ witchcraft**

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- Retard economic advancement
- Labelling and stigmatisation
- Undermines health
- Push factor for displacement of people
- Victimisation of marginal groups
- Extreme violence
- Overall: personalising misfortune



# Really? How do you know?

## Challenges of data collection and what we know from our PNG research

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Our research in two provinces in PNG recorded 146 incidents of sorcery accusations between 1 Jan 2016 and 31 October 2017, 34% involved violence.

Of those 56 cases of violence 73% were tortured, 12% killed and 36% permanently injured

Our research into newspaper accounts in PNG over 20 years (1996-2016) shows 452 incidents, 1,442 victims (1,088 accused, 355 secondary victims), more than 15,000 perpetrators, supporters or accomplices

Research project funded through the Australian Aid program

**#PNGAusPartnership**

# An emerging international agenda

## Increasing visibility of issue within the UN

- First ever UN Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights at the UN Human Rights Council held in 2017, spearheaded by The UN Independent Expert on Albinism Ms Ikponwosa Ero



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### Experts propose action to end harmful practices related to witchcraft

GENEVA (5 October 2017) – More than 100 UN\* and other international experts have identified a series of effective ways to curb and stop human rights violations caused by a “disturbing diversity of harmful practices” related to witchcraft.

# Key issues of debate

- Debate about whether to target belief systems as well as the harmful practices
- Debate about the advantages and disadvantages of generalising about particular forms of violence
- Debate about how best to frame the issue – in terms of human rights abuses, or with a spiritual dimension or . . .
- Difficulties about terminology – is there any need to have an agreed definition?



UN Experts Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights, Geneva, 2017



# Undeveloped evidence base

## Need for much more co-ordinated research agendas/ data

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- Lots of assumptions BUT:
  - Insufficient evidence about the ways in which the harmful practices associated with these beliefs and practices are manifested
  - Fragmented data about what works to combat these harmful practices and why it works (and if learnings can be generalised)
  - Many different case studies but little overall coherence of theorising and methodology
  - Many victims of these harmful practices are not “seen” by support agencies
- Today there are increasing opportunities for knowledge and experience sharing

# Emerging hypotheses for PNG research about what may counter such violence

- Issues must be addressed using multiple strategies and multiple institutions and leaders
- Credible threats of state action
  - Eg/ issuing preventative orders; publicising sentences
- Rapid response teams of NGOs and police to save lives
- Interventions of community leaders strong enough to rise above crowd hysteria
- Post mortems? Medical evidence about cause of death

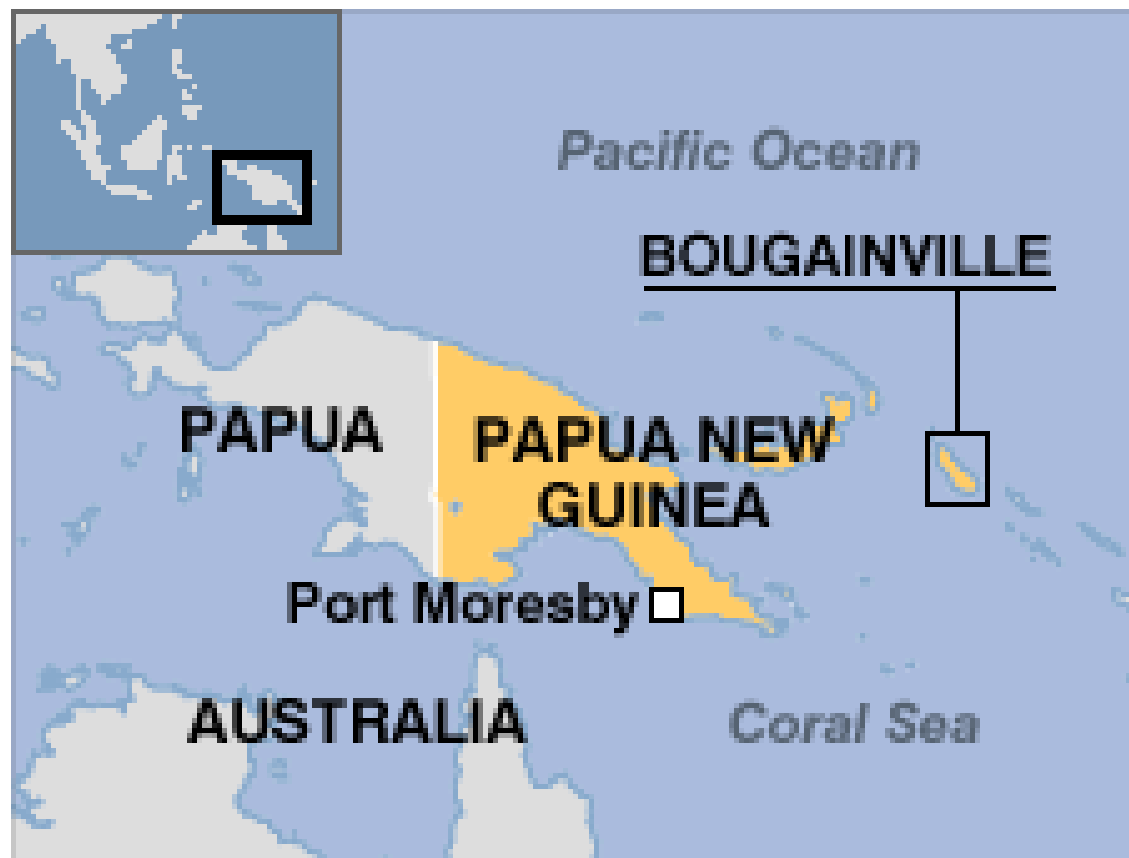


Above: New leaders of SNAP provincial committee in Enga;  
Left: survivor and her rescuer and leader of local Catholic papa's group

# Example from Bougainville

**Multiple strategies required**

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## Questions and comments welcome



## Thank you from the research team!

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