



Women and development

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Despite official commitment to women and development, women continue to lag behind men. This paper outlines gender differentials in health, education, employment and participation in decision-making and discusses current initiatives to improve gender equity and women's participation in and benefit from development.

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Women want to work in groups. They want to learn. They want to take on an active part in development, but too often there simply is not time. Too often men say that forming groups, going to meetings, getting information, attending courses, and planning their own projects is not what women should be doing. Too often men hit or hurt women. But it is women's right to be equal partners, and it is men's obligation to support that role (Cox 1991).

Women in Papua New Guinea are seen in the legislation as equal participants in the development of their country (Eight Point Plan and National Constitution), yet in practice most women are denied the possibility to participate in relation to almost every indicator of human development (Preston and Wormald 1987; Hina-waeola 1987; Nakikus 1985; Gillett 1991).

In 1990 women constituted almost half (48 per cent) of the 3.5 million Papua New Guineans (National Statistics Office 1991). Most Papua New Guinean women (86 per cent or approximately 1.5 million) live in rural areas although there is some drift to the cities and bigger towns. According to preliminary figures from the 1990 census, 77 per cent of women are under the age of 35 and 41 per cent under the age of 15.

Women in traditional Papua New Guinea society were considered to play an important role in maintaining the status of men (Gena 1990) and there was a clear division of labour between men and women (Papua New Guinea Government and UNICEF 1987). Women were mostly involved in activities related to the home, food production, and general care of children and household, while men were responsible for protection of the community (Papua New Guinea Government and UNICEF 1987).

In some traditional societies women had power although it was not overtly exercised (Tamate 1987). The social structure of the country in terms of male/female relations is changing, but these changes appear to be more geared towards blurring the responsibilities of women and men, and towards fortifying male dominance. Traditional practices, such as the bride-price which is exacted from the family of the husband in some Papua New Guinean societies, are abused when very high prices are charged (Tamate 1987; Shoeffel-Melissea 1987), resulting in the problem of the status of women being measured more in terms of the money they bring to the union than their worth as persons. Male dominance is also increasingly exercised through wife beating, now considered a serious problem in Papua New Guinean society. The Papua New Guinea Government and UNICEF Report (1987) indicates that not all women condemn the practice of wife beating and among the educated urban élite the acceptance of the practice is high at 36 per cent of women and 41 per cent of men.

Women and health indicators

That health and development are closely linked factors is well recognised. This is so, both in the sense that without a certain level of economic and social development there is little possibility of providing needed health services, and that without adequate health conditions there is little energy to help build a society (Østergaard 1992). That the health of women is crucial in the process of development is less recognised. Yet women not only bear and feed their children, in many contexts they grow the food and bring the water long distances for the whole community, or support their household through demanding work both in terms of hours and physical strength. In this respect it is

important to examine women's health indicators in order to assess the potential of their contribution to development. If these indicators are poor this may be evidence not only of the underdeveloped condition of the country in general, but also may point to possible differential treatment of girls and women in relation to food and access to basic health care services (Østergaard 1992).

There is considerable literature on the health situation of Papua New Guinean women. According to the 1980 census, they had a life expectancy of 51 years, which was up 10 years from the 1971 figures. Hopefully, the 1991 census will indicate further improvement, but at the time of writing, these figures had not yet been released. Differences by province show that women in the Southern Highlands and West Sepik have a life expectancy of 47 and 43 years respectively, while in the North Solomons, life expectancy is 59 (Avalos 1994: Table A1).

Venereal disease among women has been increasing and is starting to be considered a problem (Gillett 1991). According to Gillett (1991) the most common diseases are gonorrhoea and syphilis and the incidence of HIV/AIDS beyond the few reported cases is being investigated. Also, the proportion of women suffering from malaria is probably also much higher than the statistics indicate, as women tend not to go to health centres due to the many obligations at home and/or distance to these centres.

Maternal health is an important area for consideration, in that most Papua New Guinean women will give birth five or six times in their life. The number of women among those of child-bearing age (15 to 44 years) who gave birth was high at 17 per cent in 1987 (Gillett 1991), with important differences by province (Avalos 1994: Table A2; Gillett 1991). While most urban women have supervised deliveries, this is not the

case for most rural women, although in general the situation has improved greatly. In 1985, 43 per cent of women had supervised deliveries (Avalos 1994: Table A2). Although family planning services are available, they are limited, as is the willingness to accept advice. Maternal mortality is estimated to be 7 per 1,000 live births and according to UNICEF (1990), Papua New Guinea, with a per capita GNP at least double that of many African countries, has a maternal mortality ratio higher than many of those countries (Biddulph 1993). Further, 'the life-time risk of maternal death to a Papua New Guinea woman is 1 in 20 compared to 1 in 7,000 for an Australian or USA woman' (Biddulph 1993:164, working with UNICEF data).

Malnutrition is a serious problem for Papua New Guinean women. According to Gillett (1991) many women suffer moderate to severe protein energy malnutrition. This, combined with malaria, affects the weight of newly born children. Causes of malnutrition have been identified as long periods of breastfeeding with no added energy and protein, the heavy workload of women in agriculture, and infectious diseases such as malaria. Other important problem areas are anaemia, iodine deficiency and over-nutrition (obesity) among urban women.

In the examination of health indicators, consideration of the social and economic conditions of the everyday lives of Papua New Guinean women is particularly important. Several reports (Gillett 1991; Papua New Guinea Government and UNICEF 1987) focus on the life conditions of women as causes of severe health risks. Gillett (1991:160) points out that 'the way women are treated in their marriages, their workload and their level of education are all important factors which affect their health.'

Education and schooling

Almost all the analyses of the situation of women in Papua New Guinea indicate that one of the contributing factors to problems experienced by women in social and family life and to women's limited participation in public affairs is their low level of participation in educational programs and low levels of literacy in comparison to men.

Women lag in literacy

The 1990 preliminary census figures indicated the level of literacy for the total population 15 years or older in Papua New Guinea was 53 per cent, with nearly 1 million illiterate (National Statistics Office 1991; see Avalos 1994: Table A3 for provincial figures). Female illiteracy was 55 per cent compared to 41 per cent for males. If there can be some comfort in the census results, it is that they indicate levels of illiteracy below the UNDP (1993) estimate of 62 per cent.

Two factors stand out in relation to illiteracy rates. First, while the gap between male and female illiteracy rates might be expected to be lower in the younger groups of the population because of the effect of schooling, the male/female gap in respect to illiteracy was higher in the 20-24 age group than in the 15-24 age group and higher than in the total population 15 years of age or older. Using an index which sets male indicators of illiteracy equal to 100 (UNDP 1993), in Papua New Guinea for every 100 literate males there were 67

Table 1 **Index of the male/female gap in rates of literacy (males = 100)**

	15+	15-24	20-24
Papua New Guinea	70	77	67
Highlands provinces	58	68	65

Source: National Statistics Office, 1991. *National Population Census, 1990: preliminary figures*, National Statistics Office, Port Moresby.

literate women in the 20–24 age group as compared to 77 in the 15–24 age group or 70 in the whole population 15 years of age or older (Table 1).

The other factor which is of concern is the sheer extent of the problem in the Highlands provinces. Overall illiteracy rates in the Highlands were 67.3 per cent compared to the national average of 53 per cent; women's illiteracy rate was 75.2 per cent and male illiteracy 60 per cent (National Statistics Office 1991). The younger age groups also had higher illiteracy rates than the national average.

Girls lag in school

The average schooling of Papua New Guineans was 1.2 years for males and 0.6 for females (UNDP 1993). Although there has been considerable improvement in primary gross enrolment rates (that is, the proportion of the population 7–12 years old enrolled in schools) from 56.2 per cent at independence in 1975 to 71.3 per cent in 1990, the provision of adequate schooling is still an urgent problem. The rate of increase in enrolment rates was high in the period from 1972 to 1985 at 16 per cent for boys and about 31 per cent for girls. Subsequently, the rate of increase for girls has averaged about 4.5 per cent and for boys around 4.6 per cent. In 1990 there were still important differences in

enrolment rates by province, ranging from 94 per cent in the National Capital District to 48.1 per cent in the Southern Highlands province.

Between 1985 and 1990 the gross enrolment rates for boys and girls moved closer together from 72 per cent to 73 per cent for boys and from 60 per cent to 69 per cent for girls (Avalos 1994: Table A4). Retention rates in primary school in Papua New Guinea (first to sixth grade) have been consistently poor since 1975, and average figures indicate deterioration rather than improvement between 1975 and 1991 (Avalos 1994: Table 3). The retention rate for girls was slightly higher in the period 1975–85, but in 1991 it was similar to that of boys and worsening. While national figures are useful for a general analysis of the system, they hide considerable variation among the provinces.

In examining the enrolment and retention rates of females, Yeoman (1985) conducted a survey of 685 people in 16 provinces on their perceptions about causes of school drop-out among girls. Those surveyed included parents, female drop-outs, male drop-outs, teachers, boards of management, headmasters and administrators. Additional information on 185 male and 115 female 1984 drop-outs was obtained through tracer studies in 17 schools. Yeoman's table of factors most

Table 2 In school and out of school factors affecting female enrolment and retention

In school	Out of school
Cultural/historical factors	Age of entry
Geographical factors	Supply of teaching materials/aids
Attitudes of parents	School fees
Disillusionment with schooling	Sexual liaison and sexual harassment
Restricted high school entry	Quality of the learning environment
Limited employment prospects	
Family labour requirements	
Marriage	
Tribal fighting	

Source: Yeoman, L., 1985. Universal primary education: factors affecting the enrolment and retention of girls in Papua New Guinea community schools, Evaluation Unit, National Department of Education, Port Moresby.

frequently cited as contributing to poor enrolment and retention of girls is reproduced in Table 2. There is much reason to believe that these factors are still at work in the 1990s.

In assessing the importance of these factors, Yeoman indicated that where physical access to school was possible, the most important out of school factor affecting enrolment and retention was the attitude of parents (particularly fathers) to the education of women. Where parental encouragement existed most other factors could be overcome. Other very important contributing factors, in her view, were the teachers' skills and commitment to creating a suitable learning environment and the girls' own vision of their role, status and potential as well as their level of motivation to succeed.

The completion rates for primary school students in 1992 were around 65 per cent, the transition rate in 1992 from primary to secondary was around 38 per cent of those who completed the sixth grade (Papua New Guinea, National Department of Education, staffing and enrolment statistics). In general, female high school enrolment has slowly increased since 1981—gross enrolment rates for the female population aged 12–16 indicate an increase from 11 per cent in 1986 to 12.1 per cent in 1989, but this must be weighted against the male gross enrolment rate of around 18 per cent in 1989. There are also marked differences by province in terms of female enrolment (Avalos 1994). Overall, girls fare worse than boys in terms of retention for the entire four years of provincial high school (Avalos 1994: Table A6).

Women's low participation in vocational training

Vocational education is the other post-sixth grade alternative. In Papua New Guinea this part of the non-formal education system also has very low rates of female

participation. The proportion of women enrolled in vocational schools is less than 30 per cent of the total enrolment of these schools—just over 1,000 girls entered the first year of studies in vocational centres compared to 3,000 males. Partly, this is due to the restricted number of courses which are appropriate for girls, but it is also due to lack of boarding facilities for girls who have to be away from home. To a large extent, however, vocational education centres suffer from a lack of resources, inadequately trained instructors, poor curriculum and generally poor government support (Preston 1989; GTZ 1991).

Women lag in upper-secondary and tertiary education

The average proportion of girls accepted to further studies after Grade 10 is 35 per cent, compared with about 70 per cent of the boys. Only in nursing are women predominantly accepted—other careers such as teaching still take less women (46 per cent average) than males. In relation to teaching, there may be a circular effect on the numbers of high school graduates who are interested in teaching as a result of the low number of female role models they encounter in school. Flaherty (1992), in a study of Milne Bay and East Sepik high school teachers' perceptions found that an important influence on girls' choice of teaching as a profession was the teachers, in particular female teachers, they had encountered. Although there is no clear evidence of why so few tenth grade female graduates move on to upper-secondary education, it would not be too difficult to assume that cultural and social factors are at work.

In the distance alternative for secondary education (at the College of Distance Education) there is a similar or even worse situation in relation to female enrolment. According to Martin (1988) the average proportion of female enrolment in relation to total enrolment from the start of

the College of External Studies (or College of Distance Education as it is called now) was 31 per cent.

Women are also poorly represented at university level in Papua New Guinea. The University of Papua New Guinea had in the second semester of 1990 a female student population of 427 students, or 22.9 per cent of its total student population, representing a slight increase from 18 per cent in 1987 (Avalos 1994: Table 9). The University of Technology showed even lower figures with a 14.4 per cent female enrolment in 1991, and slightly higher in the first semester of 1992 (16 per cent) (Avalos 1994: Table 9).

In order to show the extent of inequity in the use of public resources, Murphy (1985) calculated the proportion of public expenditure at each of the two universities in relation to the number and sex of their output (certificates, diplomas and degrees). She was able to show that for the University of Papua New Guinea in 1983, males received the benefit of almost 10 million kina more public investment than females. From a total of 14,042,803 kina, the net expenditure applicable to female output was a little over 2 million kina. At the University of Technology investment related to female output during the same year was 584,750 kina compared to 9,161,080 kina for males.

Women and productive activities

There is much greater awareness that women contribute to development in a variety of ways, among which is their own direct participation in productive activities (Østergaard 1992). Nevertheless, such participation in developing country contexts is still largely restricted to unpaid household and agricultural activities even though, as in Africa, women may contribute substantially to producing food and be involved in the growing of cash and market crops (Whitehead and Bloom 1992). Often little attention is paid to assisting women to raise the quality of their work and insert themselves into the monetary productive sector. In Papua New Guinea, this is also true.

Women's total participation in money-raising activities of one kind or the other has not increased since 1980. Participation in the labour force as defined in the 1980 census slightly diminished (Avalos 1994: Table 10). However, in 1990 more women were in wage employment, were students or were seeking employment than in 1980. Women's greatest participation was in the non-wage sector of the economy. Women continue to be mostly involved in agriculture and fishing activities, though with some increase in the number of those who do so for money (Avalos 1994: Table 11).

Table 3 Women's participation in the informal non-wage sector by activity, 1980 and 1990

	1980		1990	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Business/self-employment	19,165	5.6	21,597	3.4
Farm/fishing for money ^a	14,446	4.2	322,590	51.5
Farming/fishing for subsistence	309,851	90.2	282,051	45.0
Total	343,462	100.0	626,238	99.9

^a Includes those whose main economic activity was subsistence.

Sources: 1980 National Population Census, Table 12; Pre-release, Summary of Final Figures (February 1985); 1990 Census, Preliminary Figures.

The 1990 census separated the categories of 'business' and 'self-employment' but this barely affects comparability with the 1980 census, as less than 1 per cent of women were registered in 1990 as being involved in large-scale business. The number of women active in small-scale business or self-employment continues to be low and decreasing since the 1980 census (Table 3).

Agriculture and fishing

Women not only play an important role in subsistence agriculture but also as labour input for cash crops. However, there is little solid information at the national level on their role in this sector of the economy. The role of women in agriculture suffers from a number of constraints (Schoeffel-Melissea 1987). Among them is the debate of what is a woman's appropriate role. A second constraining factor is the lack of technical support and advice on food crop cultivation, including intensive cultivation techniques, marketing and business opportunities. Also important are the social circumstances which force women to spend a lot of time in 'unproductive' tasks such as walking long distances to gardens and to collect fuel and water. Women's role in fishing is much larger than is generally acknowledged. According to the *Women's Sector Review*, studies have shown that women catch at least 25 per cent of the annual catch weight, or more if the crab catch is added (UNDP 1991). Furthermore, they are dominant in the processing stage of small-scale fisheries and contribute to the marketing of fish where the husband is involved in catching.

Self-employment and small-scale business

Women, especially in rural areas, engage in small business activities as a means of contributing to income for family needs. Compared to the 1980 census, the 1990 census figures indicate a smaller proportion of women declaring their

involvement in these activities—this may be due to the difficulties of marketing their products and obtaining credit for their businesses. Booth (1991) indicated that of the 2,039 loans by the Agriculture Bank of Papua New Guinea in January 1991, only 91 were provided to women. One of the areas in which possibilities of self-employment for women could increase, is where mining projects are located. Booth (1991) refers to a 1987 study of the social impact of the Porgera Gold Mine area indicating that the majority of women in some villages were involved in gold panning, in trade store operations or petty trading. These women were able to keep their income to purchase trade store food, soap and kerosene. There are, however, other aspects of mining developments which have negative effects on women's living conditions, for example, male immigration, village over-crowding, law and order problems and competition for village females on account of high male-female ratios (Booth 1991).

Wage employment

Formal employment still constitutes a very small percentage of the total economic activities of the Papua New Guinean population. Estimates around 1982 indicated a participation of 13 per cent of the labour force in wage employment and

Table 4 Main areas of wage employment among women, 1982-92

	Number	Per cent
Education	4,492	16.6
Primary production	3,710	13.7
Commerce	3,570	13.2
Health	3,462	12.8
Central government	3,274	12.1
Finance and property	2,806	10.4
Other miscellaneous	5,702	21.1
Total	27,016	99.9

Source: Papua New Guinea, 1986. *National Manpower Assessment 1982-1992*, Department of Finance and Planning, Waigani.

preliminary figures from the 1990 census found this figure to be around 10 per cent. Within this group the participation of women increased from 12.6 per cent in 1980 to 18 per cent in 1990. The 1980 census data showed an enormous male/female differential in wage employment, a pattern which has not altered in the 1990s. Closer examination of a sector of employment with relatively large female participation, the education sector, indicates that women account for only one-third of education employees in Papua New Guinea (Avalos 1994). Further, lower proportions of women are employed in teaching at the primary level and in primary teacher training in Papua New Guinea than in other developing countries (United Nations 1991). In 1987 the involvement of Papua New Guinean women as staff in other higher education institutions was also relatively low and this included non-citizen staff (Avalos 1994: Table 15).

Women in public life

Early in the history of independent Papua New Guinea, when few citizens were prepared for leadership positions, there was a group of women who were able to have roles of importance (Johnson 1985). They all shared common characteristics of having tertiary qualifications, coming from the coastal and island areas where there was a long history of western schooling, and of having relatively advantaged and educated parents (at least one employed in administration, business, as a teacher or pastor). Some of those women continue to be leaders today, but younger equally well-educated and talented women find it more difficult to attain leadership roles in the public service. At the time of writing only two departmental heads were women, and only one woman was at the level of First Assistant Secretary.

The usual reasons given for why women do not attain higher positions are that both their family commitments and

family problems (such as husband's opposition to their work or domestic violence) make it difficult for them to devote the time and energy and creativity that would make them eligible for promotion. Many women disagree with this view (see Gibson 1993). Experience shows that most of the women operating below senior officers in the public service, are in fact carrying the burden of their superior's activities. Observation by those who work in such places indicates that the organisational system itself tends to stifle women's confidence. Also the opportunity to participate or suggest ways of doing things to those above their rank is often not made easy, especially by males who fear that their own status may be eroded. If there is a nurturing atmosphere and members of a department are encouraged to participate, women are able to assert their view and stand greater chances of influencing decisionmaking.

Women in politics

Palamen nogat meri gen [Parliament has no women!] was the headline of the national newsletter for women after the 1992 parliamentary elections (*Nius Blong Meri*, June 1992). For the second time running, no women were elected for parliament from the 17 that were nominated to contest the elections. Only one came close with a second position. In all four parliamentary elections in Papua New Guinea, only three women have ever been elected.

Most of the women who participate in organisational decisionmaking, especially rural and non-educated women, do so at the grassroots level, in organisations and women's groups of various types often linked to churches and/or to the provincial councils of women (Schoeffel 1983; UNDP 1991). While many women's groups have concentrated on training in 'female crafts', more and more groups are seeing the need to assist women to become aware of their needs and to engage in activities which will

be of benefit to health, economic, educational and political concerns. Considerable training is provided by these groups. The extent of their ability to implement activities they deem beneficial is limited, however, by funding possibilities, negative male attitudes towards increasing access of women to resources and information (UNDP 1991), and conflicts among the various national groups dealing with women's affairs.

Key problem areas and future directions

Formally, Papua New Guinea has recognised the importance of women and their equal rights to participate in development. In 1972, the seventh of the Eight Point Improvement Plan for Papua New Guinea called for 'a rapid increase in the equal and active participation of women in all forms of economic and social activity.' Although important, achievements since independence still fall short of satisfying women's basic needs, securing recognition of women's roles and providing the opportunities women need to make their participation less stressful and more meaningful.

Despite the lack of assertiveness in official policy documents, there is a framework in place that offers possibilities for increased programs and change given political will and funding (Nakikus 1985; Tekwie 1992). This framework includes a National Women's Development Programme, a National Women's Policy Paper, women's organisations at national, provincial and local level, projects and programs embedded in the activities of the central government agencies, and a number of non-governmental agencies.

Papua New Guinea has a fairly well-developed structure of women's organisations at national and provincial levels, and a substantial proportion of the task of dealing with the problems faced by women in the area of health, work,

education and general social conditions, has been undertaken by official and grassroots women's organisations, as well as non-governmental agencies. For example, collaboration between the National Department of Health and the National Department of Home and Youth Affairs with UNICEF, and the Papua New Guinea Medical Research Institute, among others, enabled the formation of a Steering Committee on Women's Health to be formed. The Committee reported at the 19th Waigani Seminar organised by the University of Papua New Guinea, outlining strategies for improvement of the situation that were gathered from the experience of many groups and organisations (Taufa and Bass 1993).

Although women have an important role in the main economic activity of Papua New Guinea—the agriculture sector—in comparison to men, their quality of life is poor in terms of health, social support, protection of rights, level of participation in decisionmaking, primary education, higher education, employment, promotion, and attaining positions of leadership.

The contributing factors to the above situation are complex, stemming partly from conflicts between traditional culture and modernisation, partly from lack of employment opportunities especially in urban areas (despite the promise of mining resources), and partly from the attitude of those involved in development who assume that women are assistants or supporters but not protagonists in the process.

Inevitably, women will profit from overall improvements in Papua New Guinea's development. But given existing inequalities, those improvements may not diminish the gap between males and females unless they are accompanied by assertive action to accelerate women's access to basic services and to formal education provisions. This should be especially so in the least-developed areas of the Highlands, the Sepik and Western provinces.

To a large extent the gains for women in Papua New Guinea have resulted from pressure coming from the women themselves: those most educated and those in organised groups. A few male politicians have embraced their cause and others, under the influence of international aid organisations, have conceded the need to hear about women's issues and make some room for these in their policies. The attitude, however, has been closer to seeing the situation of women as an issue of 'welfare' ('poor women, we must do something for them!') rather than considering it as a problem of 'inequality' and hence, basically unconstitutional. To date, for example, Papua New Guinea has not signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, although there should be no conflict in doing so because the country's constitution mandates women's equality.

Recognition of the role of women in development in Papua New Guinea needs renewed commitment from intellectuals, politicians, senior public servants—men and women—that actions are going to be taken to remove injustices and provide the support which is owed to them.

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