

Interview with Everlyne Sap
14 September 2016
State of the Pacific 2016 Conference – ANU

CAMILLA: Welcome to the Development Policy Centre podcast. My name is Camilla Burkot, and I'm a research officer at the Development Policy Centre. In this podcast, recorded during the State of the Pacific 2016 conference, hosted by the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program at the Australian National University, I'm interviewing Everlyne Sap.

Everlyne is a gender advocate and chairperson of the Family and Sexual Violence Steering Committee of the Restorative Justice Initiative Association at Porgera Mine in Enga Province, PNG.

Everlyne, welcome.

EVERLYNE: Thank you, Camilla.

CAMILLA: I wanted to talk to you about the work that you do and about the Restorative Justice Initiative Association (RJIA). You gave a talk a little bit earlier as part of a panel on private sector development in the Pacific. So maybe you can just give us an overview of what the Restorative Justice Initiative (RJI) is, how it came to be, and your role in it?

EVERLYNE: There has been a lot of social issues in Porgera. In the past, it was okay. The real Porgerans were living there, and their families, with the traditional laws that abided then, and it was more trouble-free. There wasn't much about social issues.

But when the mining started, it was not the company, but it pulled the people from outside of Porgera into the valley, Porgera district.

And the numbers increased, and also people from hardship were like there from different settings, coming in and then mixing around and learning from each other. And they came up with a lot of issues in life.

And one of those common issues in there is people go out there looking for alluvial gold. And then the cash flow is from the illegal mining in alluvial. So people from that Porgera district, within the district themselves and from outside nearby villages, from the different districts, they also came in there. And they started doing the alluvial mining and illegal mining within the Barrick vicinity, the mining area.

So they go there, steal gold and come out, and the cash flow in the valley was very high. And when that happens, what happens? Like when there's a lot of money, there's a lot of social issues. Like one goes out there, drink, drink, drink. They take their money straight to the beer club or other, and then they drink, drink, and then they go out.

Another, you see these days, women will come there and young girls, and even married, and they are living on money now. So it's like, you know—and then they go out and family sexual violence issues go there. And also cross-cutting issues like, you know, HIV/AIDS and other health issues are also part of this, when the cash flow is high.

So they have money, so they forget about their wives and they go out with another woman and go drink, and then the husband comes in, you know? They try to retaliate. All these kinds of connected issues occur. And then on the streets, it's not safe for the young girls and even women roaming around in the night too, because there's these kind of activities where drunkards are careless in their behaviors, where they can go and they can do anything, rape and so and so.

And also, like when they are under the influence of alcohol, they can easily throw their bush knives, throw sticks, throw stones at someone else, where they get hurt. And then, they would like to retaliate, and what happens? And with these little things happen between the two people, grows into a bigger issue and tribal fights occurs. When tribal fights occur, it involves the families, decided from their own areas that they've been living comfortably, out of basic services of district, infrastructures, everything. Lives are lost.

CAMILLA: So it's quite a negative cycle, a spiral almost.

EVERLYNE: That's right.

CAMILLA: More people coming in and that sort of social tensions really increasing. So tell me a little bit about the Restorative Justice Initiative.

EVERLYNE: So that's the kind of situation Porgera was in. Barrick does try to do something for the good of the community, but then it's our attitude, like, we kind of like disturb. Maybe we want hard cash, and hard cash. We don't really want to see something sustainable, and we have to work hard to meet that, to make that it happen.

And when Barrick says "These are the funds available," and we have to really utilize it properly so that—we want to see better results coming out. We can't really blame them, blame Barrick. It's another thing, its our attitudes and people coming in, bringing in a lot of problems as well.

And most of these employees also live—working here, local employees, who live around the mining area. And when they leave their families, they kind of like go from their marriages, women who are there, and this kind of practice also caused family sexual violence. And all those issues were unbearable.

The local level government itself can't do anything. And the district can't do much about it. And the police were helpless. At one instance, they came after the police too. So all these things, like—and police were on their own. Local leaders were on their own. Local leaders, they tried to do something but they couldn't, because they are only few. They can't really talk for the whole. And they can't try to go out, reach all the people, bring them together, mobilize them and talk to them about how to come up with a resolution to find peace.

So they were operating on their own, living on their own. And when RJI came in, RJI purposely came in, because RJI in place, live in the community, with the locals. So they also provide bus services within 10 kilometers, 6 kilometers. And when fighting went on, they were also affected. So they have to leave the place and move closer to house where there wasn't fighting so that they can still have their—they won't lose their employment.

And then Barrick thought it was unsafe for its vehicles, busses to run back and forth because when the fighting goes on, road blocks, armed gangs, serious problem on the road. Public travel is not safe.

So they kind of like, for the safety reason, they stopped busses running to pick up the employees. And later on, they saw that the issue was coming down, the big tribal fights, and they looked for ways to sustain peace and stability in the community.

So what can they do? When they went and talked to the community leaders, "Can you do something?" "We need the police." "Can police do something?" "We need the district administration." "Can district administration do something?" "We need those leaders. Government institutional leaders. We need the local leaders." You see?

So Barrick had several meetings, and came up with this idea, bring all the key stakeholders together and to address this law and order issue in the community. And they came up with this project called RJI. So that's when it was purposely trying to improve security and stability in the community.

So it really worked hard to make it happen, and then continuously meetings were held, and then involvement. And from—it started in 2012, and then started mobilizing the leaders, and they started forming leaders interest group and business interest group. The leaders interest group, the task is to go out and then meet with the leaders in respective areas, because we live tribe by tribe, and in each of the tribes we have tribal leaders. That leader in that village, another village, another village. So another village is affected, they have tribal fights, and those two, someone who is a neutral one, someone has to—

CAMILLA: Bring them together?

EVERLYNE: Bring them together, mediation and negotiation for peace. And then so leader, who's very neutral, who's respected like what I say, RJI civil society leaders chairpersons very respected

by all community in Porgera. So they kind of like go out, and when they want to go out for this activity, they need the police.

So police came in and magistrates, those are the government institution, and the head of the government institution is the district administrator. So they had meetings.

And on the other hand, like Barrick is a business entity, company, corporate. And also, they have business houses, like IPI – Ipili Promotion Investment. And other businesses, like they have so many businesses there, wholesales and retail stores. So those ones, when fighting goes on, they'll be affected. You see?

CAMILLA: Yeah.

EVERLYNE: And so RJIA came up with another civil society group, which is business interest group. So business interest group leader has to go out and meet with the leaders of the respective business houses and then bring them together. "What can we do when this happens?" So there is the main road from Barrick down to the highway, main highway, all the way to Lae – have you been there, Papua New Guinea?

CAMILLA: I have been to Papua New Guinea, but not—were you talking about the Highlands Highway? Is that the one?

EVERLYNE: Okay. So that's Highlands Highway. From the wharf, there, fuel and all those things are transported by containers all the way up the highway all the way to Barrick. When tribal fights going on, that stopped, it's distracted. And business houses are affected. You see that?

So they kind of like—business leaders group leader mobilizes all those. "What can we do when this happens?" Okay, they have to—one way is they provide resource. Like if they go out to the tribal areas to make negotiations for peace, they'll have to provide them with some things that are needed: transport or fuel, if they have a vehicle, or food, some things like that.

And for the short term, medium term, and the long term, they'll have to plan to maintain peace. Or when similar things like this happen, what will we do in the future? So it's that kind of things. And I'm the chair of family and sexual violence.

CAMILLA: So if I can just interrupt. So that's what I was going to ask you next. So it sounds like the [Restorative Justice] Initiative sort of came about originally as a response to law and order issues. So family and sexual violence, how does that connect to—how do you see that as part of law and order?

EVERLYNE: So that connects, did I connect the leaders interest group and business interest group? Okay, now in that area, when fighting goes on, it's unsafe for me as a woman, and the children, to move from one place to another. If we do happen to—if we have a need on the other side, and

if men come around with a gun or traditional weapons, they can shoot. They can rape, or they can pull the bilums.

They can do all kinds of things if they're alone by themselves. And if I go there and someone holds me and rapes me in a tribal fighting zone, and then my brothers will say "Who is this man?" They will hunt for him, and another tribal fight is headed, you see? Because we, the females, our security is our brothers and fathers, and the community man. Isn't it interesting?

Okay, so that's another area. And so it's not safe, for the safety reason. And the other reason is, like what I said, there was when Barrick was in place, especially police and security personnel, were paid by Barrick, who came there. They were involve in sexual abuse to women who were looking for gold in Barrick's vicinity.

And that was some years back. And because they leave the families at home, they had a case, and when they were there, they want to have easy access to local women. And so abuse went on. And this sort of abuse, that's another type, another case. And then when landowners get their land royalties, it's men's society. Man is the tower, and women doesn't have much to say in every decision-making. You understand me?

CAMILLA: Mm-hmm, I do, yeah. I'm following.

EVERLYNE: And so when they get the land royalty benefits, land royalties paid direct to them, a check, cash. So when they grab it, it's a man who gets the check first. So they go out, they go straight to the beer club, or they go out of the province, take another woman with them, and it's finished. When they come home, the woman waits, money, and children, no food, cause tribal fight—I mean family problem, domestic.

And so, so many of these cases. So especially the landowners, and even the cash flow, illegal miners, because of high cash flows, they—one of the areas that they spend money mostly is on beer and women. Yeah. So women want to survive, and some—many reasons.

So—and then the locals and everyone says it's because of the mining activity. Otherwise, in the past, we have never experienced this. You see? The kind of blame and all these activities. So Barrick has to do something. And it came up with this Restorative Initiative also to address this issue of family and sexual violence, and also to empower women.

Barrick did—in my life, I was a teacher before, like Sinclair [Dinnen] said. But I never went to any community development institution, or gender or human rights. Straight from teaching, I applied for a position in women's welfare, in Porgera, which was Barrick-funded, to deal with women's issues, those who were affected by mining areas.

And it did put me through a lot of training and empowered me to come this far. And in that, Barrick is the best. Yes. It does a lot of good things for us, but we have to do something to

really appreciate and make avenue for sustainability in individual's life and the community life, in the family and the community life.

So that's one thing that we lack because of the mindset. And so Barrick came up with another, what this civil society was Family and Sexual Violence Steering Committee, which I was the chair appointed, and to address women's issues, and to empower women. And I feel I'm one of the empowered women to this stage. Because I can stand in a public way, women never. And I address issues, which is through Barrick, Barrick's trainings and funding put me through Fiji Women's Crisis Center and a lot of things in my life.

CAMILLA: That's wonderful.

EVERLYNE: Yes. So Barrick does good things. And it does. It really wants to do good things for us, but it's ourselves sometimes, and also outside influences, especially human rights from outside. They don't really understand our setting. And their context is different, you see? Australia is, America is different from Papua New Guinea. And Papua New Guinea's urban area is different from Highlands, and Highlands is different from the remote areas. So there's lack of understanding [of] the kind of impact that we will face. So their interactions and involvement [is] also affecting this.

CAMILLA: It's learning to go both ways, trying to translate those human rights.

EVERLYNE: That's right.

CAMILLA: Language and agendas are different.

EVERLYNE: Yes.

CAMILLA: So tell me a bit more about—I'm interested to know a bit more about the changes that you and your fellow committee members have managed to make in terms of support for people who have experienced family and sexual violence.

EVERLYNE: Okay. This is what I will say. Men in the Highlands, especially in Enga Province, where I come from – I'm born there and I'm pure Engan, and I know my culture back to front. So in order to address family and sexual violence effectively, I have to take an appropriate approach, knowing the culture and psychology of the people living in there. Do you understand me?

CAMILLA: Yeah.

EVERLYNE: And so—and one of the things that you see male advocates that I touch, we can go for women advocates, because men and women come together, and when we advise on training to women, men will say "What's that? Where are you trying to go? Get down." "Where are you

trying to go? Get down". They always say "What is human rights? We don't know about human rights? What's women's rights?"

They'll make this kind of words, "Oh, you try to step over us? Get down." You see? So what I do is I walk around in a circle. So this is the language that I use in my language. I speak my language. I use these words respect and understand, to bring peace into the family.

"Do you love your wife? Then how do you want to see your children? In the past, the families did this, fathers did this for their children so that they can sustain their lives. And right now it's not. So do you love your child? You going to be not young all his life, but you're going to get old, and you'll need your child's support. You want to see him to become a lawyer or teacher?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"Do you want to see him getting a job?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah."

"So why are you ignoring? And it's not your effort only. It's your wife's effort. So two of you will have to come together and understand each other's role and support each other for the good of your family and your child to grow nicely."

And if someone says "I have my right. I have my woman." And here you will go. "What's women's rights, or what's human rights? Get lost with the women's rights and human rights." So what I do to address, this, is that the right approach in our awareness. We don't say we are coming here to do awareness on family and sexual violence. That name, we had to put it aside and we used different language. But we will still achieve that, our goals.

CAMILLA: A different way to the same—

EVERLYNE: Different way.

CAMILLA: The same ends.

EVERLYNE: And so this is—we approach and doing. And then we did, and these ladies—I'm going back to your question. So they are typical Engans, typical Highlanders, typical Porgerans. They don't want to—they don't care about what action they take will affect the woman, their wife. You see?

They don't marry only one wife. Other parts of the Enga, maybe one or two. In the past, maybe three. But now, it's only one, because of their social status. But now, like Wapenamanda

District and Wabag District , they say that it's expensive. I see most of them are one, and then two.

But in Porgera, rows of wives. And they wouldn't care. They wouldn't tell them. If they want to get the next wife, you don't have any choice. You just sit there and how you live is your problem. You see? So these are kind of mentalities.

And the leaders there, leaders from that area, were picked out to become civil society leaders, you see? They go through this, but they're more respected. But through the training that DFAT has funded, through the good relationship of RJIA, they have developed their mindset. Amazingly, I saw this business leaders interest group leader, and leader interest group chairperson, these two saw an amazing change.

Business interest group leader is very young. He's got only two children. In Porgera, when you go, no man will ever touch their child or hug or hold their babies. It's entirely women's responsibility, mother's responsibility. But you will see this man, he will take the child around, put it on his shoulder.

And now when he drives, he puts his wife in the front. That is unusual in Porgera. And the other person is doing the same. He's got married to two, but he's now faithful to only one wife and the children. You see the change, those two men change. And I can see that, and I can say that's the biggest change.

And I'm looking forward to bigger impact in the district. And down that way, to Wabag District, it will discover. So we are starting with a very, very challenging, difficult area, which is the practices, cultural practices, traditional practices really far more worse in regard to respecting women.

So these two are changing. And then we've got 36 male advocates who have gone through the family and sexual violence training, and they are realizing now. And we would like to continue. And then the other one was church group. They're all male. I don't have the—I didn't put it there, but I've got it here. If you see that, they were all male. The leaders, unlike other places, you wouldn't see any women who are church leaders. It's all male.

And we had a big debate of why you're advocating for families. It's a church group who depends on the scripture. The scripture says treat everybody fairly, regardless of gender, regardless of sex. You love, because Jesus loves everyone equally. But they put this aside. You see they are typical Porgerans. But these male church leaders, they also went into this. Now, they said "We'll hold hands like this and address issues in the district. We are trying to move on, coming to the faith." No funding. Some of the funding stopped. Am I answering you correctly?

CAMILLA: Yeah. No, this is really interesting, because you're giving us a lot of the context. I'm just thinking while you are talking about how, really what this—what you just have been talking about is really cultural change. It's social change. It's cultural change, and that in my experience is often one of the hardest things to do.

I think it's really great, the examples you gave of, you start having role models and people who are respected people in sort of high positions who can provide that example for others, and it slowly filters out.

But I also wanted to ask you, we'll come back to the funding question, the issue of funding. But I wanted to ask you a little bit also, you mentioned earlier about sort of the local government and the police, and they really didn't have resources, or they didn't have motivation, or maybe it's all of these things, to really respond to—

EVERLYNE: They were working in isolation.

CAMILLA: Yeah. So have you been doing some work as well to help strengthen institutions, and particularly to help survivors of violence?

EVERLYNE: Oh yeah, that's right. In the past – like I would say four years back, three years back – when RJI was existing, there were like when women who went through violence, went into police station to get help, “Go back. You go sort it out with your husband.” And then who can, the husband who beat her, how can they communicate? It's difficult. See, they're not getting good help.

And then they go to magistrate. Magistrates say, “Go and bring the man in. I'll look into this.” Or “I'm busy.” You see, they're all men. They're all men.

And then when they go to village court, even though they get a big cut on the head, bleeding, go there and ask for the village court, they won't say—sorry, I'm trying to speak in my language! – “You have three children. And the man has paid bride price.” So now, traditional decisions are coming in here. You go back” and she is suffering in silence.” You see? It has been going on like that. I struggled and struggled since 2010, December. And when I was saying “Oh, I'm going to—I'll be a welfare officer.” A welfare officer, in the past, it's someone who was a legal officer. But I'm not coming from a legal background. I'm a teacher. But welfare, they didn't understand. It's just trying to deal with women's issues, you see?

So they kind of like “Oh, welfare officer?” All my friends and all my relatives, they live in Porgera. They're kind of like—they were distant away from me. They didn't want to come close and talk to me because they were scared, threatened. You see? Oh, if they come and talk to me, and I like kind of try to help a woman who goes through violence, and the husband will attack me, they don't want to be part of it. You see? They don't also want to be attacked.

But I took a bold step. I will one time crack it down and try my best. So I went around. When I wanted to do awareness straight direct to women and men, I saw there was already a blockage. Because women, they can't talk openly about the family issues, you see?

If someone really goes bad, if they are sexually abused, it's—they'll be disregarded in the family and community. We don't talk about this. It's a norm. So I couldn't really. So what I did was – and then, if I ask "Who raped you, and who did this?" They were scared of the men, the perpetrator, you see?

So it was really quite hard. So I did this. I used my teaching background, from known to unknown. I went around to the schools and I said—I'm also a personal development teacher and a counselor, school counselor. So I said "I can help do some counseling and check to see any students..."

I told them symptoms. "Okay, identify some students who are not concentrating, or coming late, who are doing this," and teachers are reporting, "oh this one and that one". And I said "I want to talk to them. I'll volunteer." And therefore, "My father was like this and my mother was like that."

And then I kind of like, you know, "Can you bring your mother and your father too?" And then I sat down and talk to both of them, and the father understood, mother understood, you see. And then I started slowly talking about women's rights, legal rights. And then when the men, I say "Hey! You know, it's no more civil matter. It's criminal. When you hit this, or when you abuse the child, or rape." "OK, OK, thank you very much, sister. Thank you very much."

And then that's how I slowly, slowly, slowly—I was doing that since 2010, December, and then RJI came in to help, because I did a lot of awareness. I got the courage to go out to the public and to do the awareness, to the level that they will digest, and then move on. So...

CAMILLA: So yeah, that's interesting. So using some of the schools as an institution to try and get access to people. And so these days, in terms of police and healthcare providers, is there a greater sort of understanding and connection, and then the courts as well? For women who do end up taking this and making criminal charges.

EVERLYNE: Okay, now RJI came in. So RJI is now working with the leaders of institutions. So police station commander is the first contact, and then seniors down the line, and then magistrate, district magistrate, and the senior clerk, and then the health CO, and then the village court chairperson of the whole MS, operations mekim, that's what we call in Papua New Guinea.

So those leaders brought together, and then RJI will have meetings on how we can strategize plans. And then they will, you know, kind of like "Ooh, OK we did that." And then I go there and voice for women. I'm the only one woman. The other women were invited, but they're scared to address this.

So I thank the Lord, I would say, because I always pray and then go there. So that's my belief, you see? I believe in the Lord. And I thank the Lord also that my personality is different from Enga. We are very aggressive. Anything, if I talk to you, like as if you cause a serious problem to me. We kind of like, our approach is at the aggressive level. Just any normal talks too.

So these women can't. So lucky I have this approach where I sit down to listen to. So I voice for women. I don't say everything, because they are all men sitting down and I'm the only woman. And then I go, all women, I deal with these cases. And they said "They'll come to the district court." And they think it will help, you see, when they are there. I don't like to say "Oh, they came to the district court, but you're not helping", you see?

CAMILLA: It's a different approach, yeah.

EVERLYNE: So "they will come, please help". And then "can we have a look at some laws that are protecting these women?" and we will discuss them in a meeting and trainings, and then police come in. And then we advocated and we brought it---brought family and sexual violence in. So before the establishment, I kind of went around because I went to Fiji, and then I learned about family and sexual violence unit.

And then even I didn't see face of it, but I forget it. Okay, be careful, because family and sexual violence unit, police, it's going to be on its own. It's more on human rights approach and addressing women's issues. So it's going to be at the lowest change. I'm washing my hands. I'm helping you to advocate.

My brothers, my uncles, "Oh, that's good. You are really helping us." So they kind of all folded their hands. Because in the past, they kind of go like this and throw their legs out. And so that's how we advocated and then police here started developing. Okay, we should have done that, but we did this. And then from there, and down to the next level, down to the base level. Magistrates now referral pathways.

CAMILLA: Oh, that's really good.

EVERLYNE: So when family and sexual violence unit was sent there, we got four staff there. And one of them is female. Which I approached her on human rights, and then she came around and Barrick sponsored her to Fiji. So she's the prosecutor.

CAMILLA: Fabulous. That's good.

EVERLYNE: So she prosecutes all the family and sexual violence cases, takes them down to the magistrate. Magistrate is now good. Because we have, in Papua New Guinea, the head of all the district magistrates is a woman now. So they're scared that women report.

So some of those tactics apply there. So now Porgera district magistrate is very helpful to women. We have got OIC, officer in charge of family service unit. If any woman is abused, and it's a man to man in their own, attitudes and behaviors, he just tells them. The very difficult, hardest man to handle was handled by him.

And the rest of them, whoa. The police unit, it's a new unit. There is change happening now, big change. It has never been like that. We really want to continue and have a big impact. You see? And referral pathway is now in a more coordinated manner.

They are taken to family support center, where they need to get medical health reports if they are sexually abused. That is one that was to be set, and the funding stopped. So now in Porgera, the most remotest part, most women know their human rights, than ones that are supposed to know first, like Wabag town and Wapunamanda. So it's very interesting.

CAMILLA: So yeah, overall it's really a positive story. It sounds like quite an amazing change from how things were both institutionally and, as you say with that, you didn't have these referral pathways and these services in your district.

EVERLYNE: In the past, no.

CAMILLA: But now it's really moving up. But I guess that this is the issue, as you mentioned, that now the funding is a problem. So the funding has stopped now from Barrick?

EVERLYNE: Yeah. I don't know what's the reason. Barrick also sold its shares to another Chinese company. 95%, that's what I heard. So recently took over, the management has changed. I'm not really sure. I can't talk much about this. All I can say is the funding stopped and we are like this, it's almost a year now. In that period, we should have, in a year, it's like now law and order problem is trying to creep in, which is not a good story.

CAMILLA: Yeah, it's worrying, especially when you've done so much to improve the situation. You want to see it continue going up and not slide back—

EVERLYNE: So what I'm doing now, I've formed this—I founded this Voice for Enga Women Association. So at place, there's no funding, but voluntarily, willingly, I'm advocating for family and sexual violence, gender issues. And then I'm going back to the rural areas—sorry, excuse me—and we look for ways to sustain the women.

The two programs now are running parallel. Agriculture, they plant their cash crops, sell them, get the money, sustain themselves. And then human rights, if men come around and say "Okay, give me all your money," you have to know your human rights, legal rights. And then but I tell them "Just manage it, so that you don't cause any additional problem or..." And then that's, I'm doing that. So it's like all over Enga Province. I've got women from all over Enga Province.

CAMILLA: That's wonderful. Well I have kept you much longer than I intended, so perhaps we'll wrap it up there. But I hope—first of all, thank you very much for sharing the story. It's really a good story, an encouraging story, and we know that violence, sexual violence, is a huge problem across PNG and around extractive industries.

So I hope that this positive story can inspire some others, and I hope that we can—maybe there's someone out there listening who may be able to help you with the funding. Because that's always a perpetual issue. But I want to thank you very much.

EVERLYNE: Thank you very much, Camilla.

[End of transcript]