



Journal of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea

ISSN: 0023-1959

Vol. 31 No. 2, 2013

Enabling female married student spouses at Pacific Adventist University

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Abstract

Thirty-nine years since independence women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are still underutilised, and gender equality is still a distant statement. At present, the statistics for women in PNG are very discouraging: only 30% of women are in the workforce; fewer than 40% of females have the opportunity for formal education; and, approximately 50.9% of women, aged 15 and older are literate. There are fewer than 10% of women are in management, leadership, and decision making roles in the workplace. Approximately 81% of the PNG citizens live a subsistence life style. One way to change these statistics is to empowerment of women of PNG through informal educational processes. When women have access to education and skills training there is a correlation with the improvement of family conditions; and the creation of a literate creative and resourceful people. Churches have the power to be ‘agents of change’, to provide leadership and guidance. PAU is a university managed by the Seventh-day Adventist church with the prime purpose of educating Pacific islanders. A group called “Partners in Ministry’ at Pacific Adventist University organised a series of programs to empower women on the campus. There were many benefits of from these empowerment programs. Many wives were economically empowered as a result of starting their businesses; self-worth of the women improved; many husbands became champions for gender equity and acceptance of women’s right to be effective pastors. The women empowered at PAU understood their cultural and historical contexts but used their additional knowledge, skills and values for active participation in life changing opportunities.

Introduction

Thirty-nine years since independence women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are still underutilised, and gender equality is still a distant statement. At present, the statistics for women in PNG are very discouraging: only 30% of women are in the workforce; fewer than 40% of females have the opportunity for formal education; and, approximately 50.9% of women, aged 15 and older are literate. There are fewer than 10% of women are in management, leadership, and decision making roles in the workplace (Papua New Guinea Vision 2050: Working Strategic Policy: Human Capital Development, Gender, Youth, and People Empowerment: 6). Even though women are approximately half the population, their contribution to education, politics, business and church is still very limited, far less than half. Women in PNG have limited opportunities for empowerment.

Literacy Rates

The 2050 Vision Statement says that the PNG’s youth literacy rate is less than 64% and numeracy standards are also poor and have not improved since 1990 (PNG Vision 2050: Working Strategic Policy: Human Capital Development Gender, Youth and People Empowerment: 5, 10, 23 & 54). Girls account for some 45% of enrolments in basic education and drops to 40% by grade 10. Many children are not attending school. Even when a student

has access to school, the provision of education is substandard. Under-training of teachers and the poor quality curriculum have resulted in low standards of numeracy and literacy. The attainment of basic literacy and numeracy is necessary for basic survival, living a healthy life and ensuring their own prosperity (PNG Vision 2050: Working Strategic Policy: Human Capital Development Gender, Youth and People Empowerment: 4 & 5). Education empowers all citizens to become, literate, creative and resourceful people with knowledge, abilities and skills for personal wellbeing and national development (PNG Vision 2050: Working Strategic Policy: Human Capital Development Gender, Youth and People Empowerment: 9). to pay for education even if schools were available.

Rural Women

Women living in rural villages; approximately 81% of the PNG citizens, live a subsistence life style. Small cash crops are the key to survival (Bourke, 2012) but there is little cash for education, health or the pursuing of business opportunities. Women, in particular, have little opportunity to leave their isolated communities.

Women living in urban and semi urban areas are also facing crippling issues. With the blossoming population growth, large numbers of families share one abode; finances are stretched just to cover the costs of food. With few women in the workplace, they have to rely on handouts from husbands and relatives. Many are not empowered with the skills or resources to meet the needs of themselves and their families.

Traditional Views of Women

For many people, especially men, the traditional cultural viewpoints of women are not complementary to 'Western' theories of gender. There is a sense that empowering women is contrary to traditional behaviour and more importantly believed to be spear-headed by other interfering cultures. It is commonly still believed that women are '*em samting nating* (women are nothing). Why should women be empowered when they should not have power? The discussion of female gender equity has created tension within the PNG society.

Poverty

With over 30 percent of households are living below the poverty line (PNG and the Millennium Goals, 2010), PNG needs significant economic growth, higher than the current 2.8 percent per annum, to lift the population out of poverty. Salama (quoted in Noho, 2010) reflected that the alarming economic and social intra-country disparities have stifled economic growth, reduced economic efficiency and development despite the enormous

resources in the country. Women, especially in isolated rural areas, are affected by this lack of economic growth.

Poverty is directly translated into a lack of basic food needs. Many women spent time in the gardens and food preparation but this leaves little time, money or access to education or health opportunities. Without access to basic needs the cycle of poverty continues.

Sorcery

In many rural areas, traditions are passed from one generation to the next. Without the benefit of education, accidents, death and illness are credited to the evil spirits. There are no unexplained tragedies. Bad things are caused by the malevolent activities of sorcerers.

“In Papua New Guinea, 85% of the population live in rural areas where animist spiritual beliefs still influence everyday life and are conveyed to younger generations through oral history . . . Accusations of sorcery mainly occur within the family or the village and over whelming target and most vulnerable, including women, widows, elderly people and those who are resented or envied. [A]llegations are attributed to jealousy, envy and revenge, and their increasing occurrence connected to social inequality, exclusion from development, disenfranchised youth with unfulfilled expectations and poor rural health services” . . . In places where there is a stronger focus on development in education, health, employment and human security, sorcery accusations and killings are rare (Wilson, 2012: 2).

Wealth is unevenly distributed

It is commonly recognised that there is more money in society as a result of the mineral and gas exploration. In a letter to *The National* ‘LNG Project money worrying me’ (2012, 2 March: 8), a reader mentioned that great waste of LNG project money that was spent on motel and hire car expenses rather than using the extra finances to improve the conditions and opportunities of the families. The women are not benefiting from financial improvement. There is a common saying, ‘Educate a man, you educate a man; educate a women, you educate a whole family.’ When women have access to education and skills training, there is a direct correlation with the improvement of family conditions. It is recognised that women are more productive farmers and better entrepreneur than their male counterpart (Promoting Opportunities for all. 2011: 5 & 9). When women have access to money the whole family benefits!

Security

Security, especially with women, is an issue in all parts of PNG. Law and order issues, including rape, have become an issue of great concern. Research has shown that 75% of women and children experience family violence; this includes rape (Child Protection

Situational Analysis, 2008) and 60% of men have participated in pack rape (Papua New Guinea: Violence Against women: Not inevitable, never acceptable, 2006: 5). “[I]t is not quite an overstatement to say that women are oppressed from the cradle to the grave . . . Experience shows they are molested as children, they are seduced as adolescents; they are raped. In their maturity they have little economic control over any asset apart from their own bodies; throughout their whole life they are threatened and receive physical beatings,; and in their old age they are terrorised, threatened, tortured and murdered because they are believed to be witches” (Brunton, 1990: 353). Men are very much in charge of their wives; wife beating is terribly common. There is still a common belief among husbands that they have ‘purchased their wives with bride price’ and therefore, entitled to teach the women who is the boss; they will never learn otherwise!

Violence against Women

Violence against women in PNG is reinforced by strongly held cultural biases and patriarchal and religious views. Despite the horrific statistics and stories, the Government of PNG have done little to protect victims of gender-based violence. The lack of ineffective policing to prevent and investigate gender-based violence, or provide an effective remedy to victims, means violence against women goes largely unpunished (Opinion Editorial, Amnesty International: 2). “[A]s long as violence against women continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace” (Unga quoted in Eves, 2012: 1).

Judiciary

If men and women “the survivor’s behavior caused the abuse or is at least an excuse for it (i.e. she asked for money, refused to have sex, questioned the husband or boyfriend about other women etc” (Eves, 2006), then citizens, and particularly women, have no power. If victims believe the judiciary have little capacity or willingness to deal with gender related issues then there will be not reporting of crimes of family and sexual abuse. If compensation is paid to cover up sexual offences against children and women (Family and Sexual Violence Policy, n. d.: 24) then the women are again disempowered.

There has been limited success in attempting mediation as a means of recognizing the crime. Mediation is only appropriate when both parties have equal power and status and share a common vision of resolution (Garrity, 1998). Linking mediation to the village based network, there is more success in changing attitudes and therefore, preventing further escalating violence.

Political Inaction

Cabrido (2011) believes there need to be a change in the vision of leaders. “Too many leaders whose vision are myopic and whose greed and corruption are astounding”. Change of any kind, especially, the change of the status of women must be owned by the whole community. “Councillors, church pastors and community leaders must be held responsible for what happens to people in their communities” (Paulus quoted in Wilson, 2012: 2). Change of the status and recognition of the contribution of women has to be linked to strong political leadership and effective management, from senior bureaucrats in Waigani right down to administrators of schools and health centres in rural villages (Callan and Wiltshire, 2012).

Need for Power Empowerment

The situation in PNG can only change if there is people empowerment and people have the tools and resources to meet their own needs as they see appropriate to their own priorities. Empowerment is the process of instilling and allowing self-confidence of the individual to surface and foster. There is a removal of the sense of powerlessness (Papua New Guinea Vision 2050: Working Strategic Policy: Human Capital Development, Gender, Youth, and People Empowerment: 6, 7). This empowerment means equality of all; people receiving the same opportunities and treatments regardless of gender (Gender Equity in Education Policy, n.d.: 3). Empowerment can be viewed as a means of creating a social environment in which all members of society can make decisions and choices for social transformation, and therefore social improvement (Babu, 2011: 2).

Gender inequality is equivalent disempowerment. Inequality imposes costs on families, communities and even makes countries less competitive (Promoting Opportunities for All. Nov 2011: 3). Gender equality is essential if poverty is to be eradicated (Eves, 2012:1). When women are educated, they have power over their own lives. They have the ability and the opportunity to improve their economic and livelihood. They have the ability to improve the lives of their families. Education of women translates to lower fertility rates, reduced maternal mortality and improved the health of children (Promoting Opportunities for all, Nov, 2011: 5, 3). Gender equity and empowerment is therefore, essential for all.

PNG ranks 133 out of 169 on UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index for 2008 (United Nations Development Plan, 2010) and with only 12.4% of females aged 25 and older having at least secondary education. To ensure gender equity is a high priority, AusAid has

incorporated gender as one of its crosscutting issues that must be addressed when accepting AusAid funds. NGOs are expected to ‘recognise gender in the identification of priorities for activity implementation’, and furthermore to ‘identify gender as a thematic issue for institutional strengthening activities’ (Papua New Guinea Church Partnership Program: Program Framework Final Draft: 2005: 48) AusAid 2004: 48). The ‘Aus Aid’s Gender Policy’ (Gender Equity in Australia’s Aid Program-why and how, 2007) sees gender equality as essential for development and aid effectiveness. For their part, the NGO partners’ approach to PNG gender issues within a strong Christian belief of equality and justice as ‘preached’ by most Christian churches in PNG and within the human rights framework (Anderson, 2012). The NGO partners and many PNG leaders have seen evidence of the plight of PNG women and the lack of general advancement of women. There is common belief that women can only be empowered if they have improved economic status, equal participation in decision making and leadership opportunities, improved access to health and education (Gender Equity in Australia’s Aid Program-why and how, 2007:4).

Agents of change: Churches

Health

A means of people empowerment is through churches. Many of the local denominations active in PNG attempt to improve and empower the lives of the citizens. For example, churches provide 40% of basic health services (Promoting Opportunities for All, 2011: 9). But still there are not enough medical facilities, trained medical professionals or adequately supplied medical hospitals to treat the increasing population. Even though women are more likely to spend their merger income in improving their families’ welfare, the expense and lack of medical facilities makes general health improvements nearly impossible. Child mortality in rural areas is still extremely high in rural areas (Bourke, 2012).

Education

Even with the churches contributing significantly towards the development of the PNG human resources through the provision of education services, many people do have access to these services. Currently churches provide 50% of basic education services; 30% of secondary schools; and lastly 41% of vocational schools (Promoting Opportunities for All, 2011: 9). Many districts still do not have schools.

Church Led Reform

With 97.28 percent of the population identified as Christian, Operation World, (Eves, 2012: 2) says churches have the opportunity to influence daily life practices and the ‘sense of

the world' and have the venue and opportunity to address the problem of violence and gender equality. 'Church-led reform' enjoy the support of the authoritative voice of the church (Eves, 2012: 10). PNG is a country where secular and sacred has no clear demarcation, an integrated world (Whiteman, 1984: 88). Melanesians see the spiritual and the material aspects of life as interrelated (Bartle, 2005: 40). Churches have the power to be 'agents of change', to provide leadership and guidance. The custodianship role of the church means there is responsibility to encourage spiritual renewal and provide guardianship to the nation's spiritual, moral and ethical values development (PNG Vision 2050: Working Strategic Policy: Human Capital Development Gender, Youth and People Empowerment: 117). Churches have the power and the responsibility to change the perception and attitude to women.

Churches, as agents of change, must provide opportunities to change attitudes and change perceptions. One of the most effective ways for Churches to change community norms is to engage both men and women in discussion. For example, the Anglican Church's project *Man Tru* has changed community norms about what it means to be a 'good' man in the different roles of husband, son, brother, father and worker. These 'good' men become 'male champions' to train others. Women's groups, Conferences and spiritual fellowships are opportunities that encourage enabled women to participate in activities that improve the situation for themselves and their families (Anderson, 2012). Church leaderships has the power to use culturally appropriate approaches that encourage gender equity and experience 'life in all its fullness' (Anderson, 2012). The churches have the potential to influence significant change in attitudes and behaviour that underpin the implementation of national policies and laws by making gender equality part of their mission to 'live the gospel' (Anderson, 2012).

Conclusion to this section

With empowerment, women themselves, have a sense of 'significance' and value. On a personal level there is increased self-esteem and believe in themselves that change is possible. Brookfield (1994), a supporter of Knowles (1984), assumes that most adults, including women, have sufficient self-confidence and self-motivation to be involved in the development of their lives. Even though PNG is a signatory to a number of international conventions that support gender equity and empowerment of women, particularly the 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' and the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' (Clarke, 2010-2011), these conventions have not

translated into national policies, strategies and laws. Churches, leaders and all aspects of the judiciary have to be serious in changing attitudes to gender disparity.

Introduction to Case Study

Pacific Adventist University (PAU) is a university managed by the Seventh-day Adventist church with the prime purpose of educating Pacific islanders so students could obtain professional degrees. In the School of Theology, they graduate ministers for the Seventh-day Adventist church. A portion of these students who arrive to study at PAU are married with families. This research focuses on the spouses of married theology students and how the University provides assistance in empowering these spouses to be more successful as people and more effective as minister's wives.

Programs of empowerment at PAU

During 2012, an active group was formed, called "Partners in Ministry". The original communication for this group was opened for any person who wished to join the group. As the group meet, the numbers and the composition of the group settled, the majority of the group included female married theology students' spouses. A series of programs was designed based on the specific needs mentioned by the group. Their needs ranged from spiritual, physical and educational. The group, or parts of the group, met formally once a month, and informally more often.

The empowerment goals of this group were to:

1. Strengthen self-worth and awareness of personal power for change
2. Provide education opportunities
3. Provide opportunities for participation
4. Build awareness of financial opportunities, and income generation
5. Build personal capacity by develop full potential of talents and abilities
6. Create partnerships
7. Strengthen coordination and cooperation
8. Identify Male and Female Champions
9. Create awareness of legislation, laws, policies and access to justice relating to human rights
10. Increase women's access to support services (safe houses, life-skills training, counselling, therapy)

As the majority of these women attending were minister's wives, there was request that the programs covered issues that would assist them as minister's wives, programs that incorporated worship and devotional ideas; programs that assisted with home and lifestyle issues and lastly, programs that assist the professional women.

The following programs were provided.

Spiritual

How to organise Bible studies and give Bible studies?
How to organise and preach a sermon or a devotional?
How to use draping as decoration in the church?
How to speak in public?
What are general counselling principles and how can they be used in a church situation?
How to plan a religious program?
What are some insights from current ministers' wives?
How to practice and organise Personal Devotions?
How to learn to read and write (Literacy classes)?

Home

How to make vegetarian food?
How to make cakes that sell?
What are some basic health and life style issues?
What is involved with personal grooming and appropriate dressing?

Professional

What are some basic financial services to assist in setting up a home business?
What are the issues involved with basic budgeting?
How and what is time management?

Benefits of empowerment programs at PAU

1. Equal participation

In PNG, ministers' wives are expected to support their husbands in ministry. They, themselves, as senior leaders in their communities, also wished to have equal participation and responsibility as partners in the mission of the church, as spiritual authorities and leaders. The programs at PAU were designed to give women the skills necessary to organise and conduct spiritual programs and provide counselling to other women.

2. Productive Power

When women have the appropriate skills they have the productive power to improve the finances and opportunities for their families. The awareness of financial opportunities led to some of the women beginning their own business. This small income generation gave the women economic empowerment. For example, representatives came from Nationwide Microbank to PAU to educate the women regarding services offered by the bank. The bank taught the women how to use their mobile phones as a means to access money through local trade business agents. Interest rates, services and products were explained to the female attendees. The discussion and questions that followed the presentation, demonstrated a real interest in how to use the banking services to set up small businesses, especially with selling cooked items at the PAU Sunday market.

3. Improved Personal Self worth

The 'Partners in Ministry' programs have strengthening the women's self-worth and awareness of personal power for change. After many of the programs, the women are excited about their new knowledge and discussed how this knowledge could be used when they return to their pastorates with their husbands. There was a sense of empowerment.

4. Male and Female Champions

One of the interesting consequences of these meetings is the awareness of Champions in making change regarding gender equity issues. Husbands, even though not attending the sessions, reacted positively to their wives empowerment and pushed for change in the work places and the acceptance of women's rights. The findings with the group of women at PAU agree with Eves (2012: 10) findings. "Men who follow the born-again Christian ideals are concerned about how they treat women, reflect on their roles in family life, attempt to share decisions about the domestic sphere and, importantly, reject violent methods of resolving conflicts within that sphere".

5. Ripple Effect

Ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist church has been a 'hot' debate. As a result of the meetings and discussions, women themselves are realising the ability and capacity of women to hold ministerial and leadership positions. There is recognition that God calls both men and women to be ministers. This sense of 'divine calling' should be acknowledged and respected. There is now a greater belief that women are equally called by God to be ministers. It is interesting to note that the graduating ministerial group of 2012, a third of the class were females. There is a general recognition that females, along with their male counterparts, can be trained to be effective ministers.

Conclusion

This research has shown that "Actively supporting women's participation in economic, social and political life is a key factor in reducing poverty, enhancing economic growth and democratic governance, and increasing the well-being of women, girls and their families"(Promoting Gender Equity through Millennium Development Goals, 2012: 5). The women empowered at PAU understood their cultural and historical contexts but used their additional knowledge, skills and values for active participation in life changing opportunities. The women were empowered to creating an environment in which all people, men and women, were able to develop their full potential and lead productive and creative lives development (PNG Vision 2050: Working Strategic Policy: Human Capital Development

Gender, Youth and People Empowerment: 4). The women had skills that enhanced basic survival, improved lifestyle issues and ensured their own prosperity.

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