

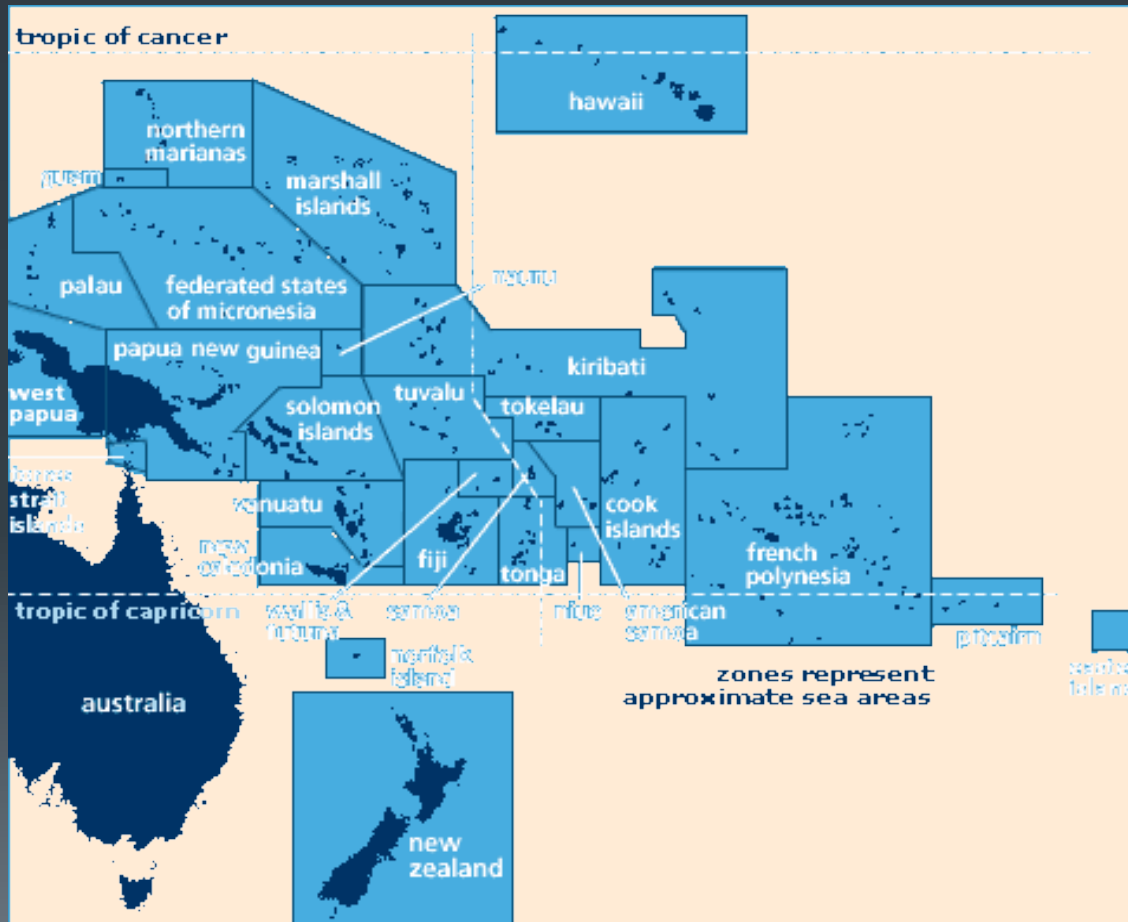
Leveraging Rural Women's Leadership & Agency “Voice for Change”



*Presented by Lilly Be'Soer
Jiwaka Province, Highlands Region, Papua New Guinea*

*The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and
hunger eradication, development and current challenges:
Panel Session 2: The role of gender-responsive governance
& institutions for the empowerment of rural women*

Map of PNG / Pacific Region



Map of PNG and the (central) Highlands Region



Culture, society & governance

- Largest Pacific Island Country: Population: 7 million
- Independent state since 1975, after 100 years of British, German, Australian colonial rule. Highlands Region only opened up 1950
- More than 80% live in rural villages, dependent on agriculture-based livelihoods
- World's greatest cultural & linguistic diversity: 830 district languages.
- Most citizens bound to abide traditional/transitional systems of clan and tribal law, justice, social obligations and governance

Wealth, Transition and Conflict

- Lowest Human development Index ranking (HDR) 153/185, of all Pacific countries.
- Transport & communications infrastructure severely under-developed.
- Vast natural resource wealth (gold, copper, nickel, oil, gas, timber, fisheries reserves) but majority people poor, with very limited access to services.
- Highlands region rich in minerals, gas and petroleum. Huge resource development projects displace thousands of farmers, pollute rivers and compensate with cash royalties

Wealth, Transition and Conflict (cont.)

- Traditional Inter-tribal land disputes & violent conflict in Highlands society never eradicated, remains 'normal and accepted' but totally undermines development
- New political & economic opportunities fuel rivalries and competition over access to resource rents/royalties that lead to war, deaths, mass destruction of property, and displacement of people:
- Highlands warriors now fight with home-made and high powered guns stolen from army and police or smuggled from Indonesia, Australia, New warriors emerging; Rambos, hired guns and mercenaries.
- Local warlords reign, tax, terrorize, oblige clan / tribe members to contribute to clan-based heavy weapon stockpiles for payback and protection.
- Politicians, business and professionals fund their clansmen to fight

Political Economy

Wealth, Transition and Conflict (cont'.)

- Women forced to assist clan based build-up of arms and ammunition.
- Thousands of Internally Displaced People lose agricultural livelihoods,
- Displaced women and girls are made extremely vulnerable to forced marriage, polygamy, sexual violence, and their men impotent to protect.
- Lack of sufficient basic government services to rural areas due to high security risk and costs. INGOs and UN only travel with expensive commercial armed security guards.

Status of Women

- Only 4 women in parliament since 1975. Currently only 1 of 109 seats.
- A new 'Temporary Special Measures' Bill for 22 Reserved Seats for Women was rejected by parliament last week
- Women rarely elected to local government and the idea of women police and magistrates is still new and still few.
- High prevalence of Sexual and Gender based Violence in normal times (60-90% of women are affected) and heighten in conflict times and during elections.
- High Incidence of HIV infection and AIDS related deaths (Mobile men with Money)
- High incidence of torture, grievous injury, maiming and extra-judicial killings when women are accused of practicing sorcery, causing accidents and illness

Status of Women (cont.)

- Women have rights to cultivate land, gather forest products and to fish for or collect marine and river resources, but do not have ownership rights over productive resources.
- When customary land is leased for large scale developments, women do not participate and are not considered to have the right to claim a direct share of leases, royalties or compensations payments.
- Women assist men in growing commodities for export (mainly coffee) but men control cash crop incomes. 70% men's incomes spent on themselves.
- Lack of adequate support services to rural women is minimum

Voice for Change



- During 2005, Voice for Change got started and aimed to end conflict, end VAW, to promote women's economic and political empowerment.
- It linked to regional networks on against VAW and trained in Gender and Human Rights, and Gender Impacts of Conflict.
- Realized IDP issue and the urgent need for breakthrough to challenge and change male leadership and end the manipulation of custom to oppress and control women and SGBV with impunity.



Voice for Change (cont.)

- And to provide services to increase agricultural production, incomes, local savings and loans
- Addressing needs of the most marginalized: including poorest, widowed, most subjected to violence, disabled by DV or sorcery related attacks
- Groundbreaking work to end GBV, conflict, re-settle IDPs, ensure safe, free elections
- Recent negotiations, mediation and resettlement of 500 Internally Displaced families.

Jiwaka – a new Province

With new opportunities

- Jiwaka is our new declared home province with the first elections of provincial leaders to be held in July 2012 and presents the opportunity for women and men to build model gender responsive provincial and local governance, infrastructure and services.
- **‘Voice For Change’** is now starting dialogue with the transitional government on planning new policies, projects for markets and related infrastructure to strengthen women’s economic activity, empowerment
- Negotiating By-laws, policies and budgets to lobby for zero tolerance of Gender Based Violence (GBV)



Challenges remain

- to strengthen a remote rural organisation, to ensure adequate funding to cover very high costs of travel, security and connectivity
- to recognize that everyday existence, survival and livelihood is demanding and that leadership by women involves sacrifice, risk with high personal and economic costs
- Learning how to up-scale, sustain initiatives, partnerships and to plan projects that have impact on women's lives.

“Voice for Change”



Lilly Be'Soer (second from left) WHRD with survivors of violence (severed limbs). Credit: Lilly Be'Soer, Voice for Change Jiwaka Province, PNG.



Women of the Jiwaka province, Highlands region PNG, displaced by armed conflict supported by Voice for Change for their economic and psychological recovery.



Women alongside men as peacemakers, mediators, monitoring the welfare of IDPs



Mobilising, organising, demanding Change



Women of the Jiwaka province, Highlands region PNG, displaced by armed conflict supported by Voice for Change for their economic and psychological recovery.

Surviving violence, torture & oppression



Lilly Be'Soer (second from left) WHRD with survivors of violence (severed limbs). Credit: Lilly Be'Soer, Voice for Change Jiwaka Province, PNG.

Rural farmers, market vendors family providers

