



**State Society and Governance in Melanesia**

WEST PAPUA/IRIAN JAYA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, BOUGAINVILLE, SOLOMON IS, SAMOA, AMERICAN SAMOA, VANUATU, FIJI, CALEDONIA

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Briefing Note



## Men, Masculinity and Development in the Pacific

Gender is an essential category in the planning, implementation and assessment of all programs to improve economic and social conditions. The UNDP puts this even more emphatically: ‘Human development, if not engendered, is endangered’ (1995: 1). The Millennium Declaration, adopted by the United Nations in the year 2000, also stresses that progress towards gender equality is essential to the eradication of poverty and to achieving sustainable development. Gender equality is a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in itself, but gender perspectives must also be included in the implementation of all other MDGs (which address poverty and hunger, education, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnerships for development) (UNDAW 2004: 3). Bilateral and multilateral aid organisations, therefore, now include gender equality as a goal in planning their delivery of aid. The development agencies working in the Pacific, such as AusAID and NZAID, have also adopted the aim of gender equality as a key aspect of their strategies.

Over the last three decades, a wide variety of analytical and policy approaches to gender and development has emerged. This briefing note reviews some of these trends and presents reasons for a stronger focus on men and masculinity as part of the development agenda for the Pacific.

### From Women in Development to Gender in Development

In the past, development thought and practice in regard to gender has taken two successive approaches: Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD). The emphasis of the WID approach was on women’s economic and

#### KEY POINTS:

- Men are still largely missing from gender and development policies and practices.*
- Achieving gender equality is not possible without positive changes in the lives of men as well as women.*
- Millennium Development Goal 3 is ‘to promote gender equality and empower women’ but this fails to positively address the role of men.*
- There is a need to develop programs working with men across a broader spectrum of the development agenda.*
- More effective ways are needed of including men across the spectrum of HIV prevention programs.*
- Programs must be culturally pertinent.*
- Programs should be scrutinised for negative gender impacts.*
- Promoting men’s involvement in sexual and reproductive health is a key element in building gender equality.*

productive roles, with the underlying argument that, due to male bias, women’s productive activities had been disregarded in development thought, while development assistance regularly bypassed women and went to the men. Although the WID perspective placed women firmly on the development agenda, most who pursued this approach accepted the existing social structures and failed to address the sources of women’s inequality. The adoption of the GAD perspective by development organisations in the 1980s brought a shift toward a more relational concept of gender, away from seeing women as a discrete category. A key aim of GAD was to reveal

and improve the balance of power relations between men and women, which were now understood to be socially constructed. However, despite this shift in perspective, gender has continued often to be equated with women alone. The priority given to women in GAD is usually defended with the logic that because 'gender relations almost universally favour men and disadvantage women, explicit and on-going recognition of women's subordinate position in the gender hierarchy is necessary' (MacDonald et al. 1997: 11, cited Chant & Gutmann 2000: 9). Thus, as it is women who are disadvantaged by the main patterns of gender inequality, any remedies should be directed to women. This argument seems so undeniable that apparently no-one has considered whether it is a sufficient condition to bring genuine gender equality. Yet this approach perpetuates the either/or mode of thought, so that gender issues have continued to be widely regarded as 'women's business' and of no concern to men. After almost two decades of programming for gender equality, the belief remains widespread among development practitioners that in practice gender does not apply to both men and women, but solely to women. At the same time, most male policy makers and theorists continue to dismiss gender as a mere women's issue. They seem not to realise that they themselves are gendered, perhaps assuming that the masculine is the standard model of human being.

So, it remains that men are not often mentioned in gender policy documents and are largely absent from gender-oriented development practice. When they are considered, it is often as obstacles to women's development through what Andrea Cornwall has termed the 'problematic male' discourse (2000: 21). It is true that men too often exploit and mistreat women, but to deal with this simply by empowering women to better match men is to remain within the same oppositional logic criticised above.

Fortunately, there is now a growing recognition of the need to reconsider this issue in a more inclusive way, to take up the question of men's responsibility for women's disadvantage, and to consider what role men might play in the redress of gender inequalities.

Including men is necessary because gender inequality 'is intimately tied to men's practices and identities, men's participation in complex and diverse gender relations, and powerful masculine discourses and culture' (Flood 2005: 2). Indeed, some gender and development scholars argue that any effort to further gender equality that does not bring men on board is likely to fail (Kimmel 2002: xii). For example, the UN Expert Group on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality concluded that without the active involvement of men and boys it will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the international goals on HIV (UNDAW 2004: 3-4).



'Stop Violence: It is Illegal to Hit Women.' Anti-violence Billboard, Port Moresby.

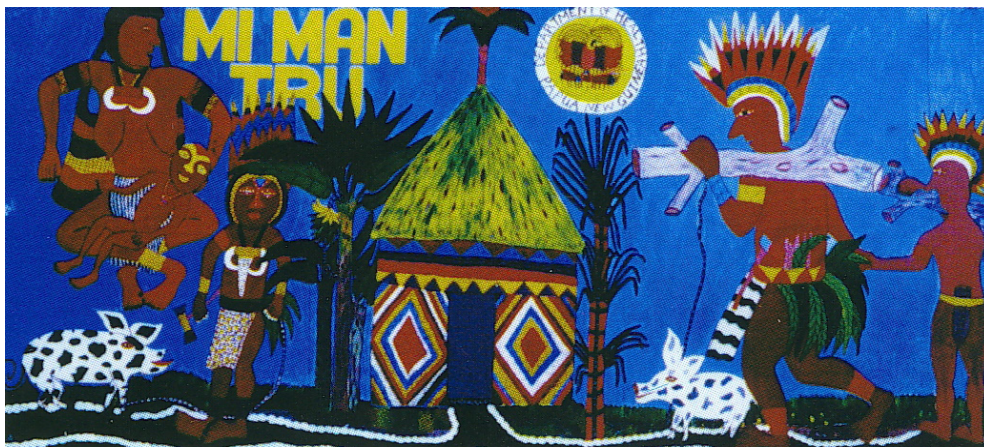
### The Dual Epidemics of AIDS and Gender-Based Violence

Recent interest in working with men and boys has been sharpened by the AIDS pandemic, which has impelled a recognition that gender inequality and gender-based violence are major drivers in the spread of HIV. Even so, effective change in development thought and practice has been slow to come.

In 2001, the UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS which stressed that gender equality and the empowerment of women were fundamental to reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS (para. 14) and that there was a dire need to challenge gender stereotypes, attitudes and inequalities (para. 47). Recognising that women and girls were disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, the Declaration emphasised the need to accelerate the implementation of national strategies to promote men's and women's shared responsibility to ensure safe sex (para. 59) (UN 2001). Today, every major international authority involved in the response to AIDS recognises that a

gendered approach is essential to success (UNAIDS 1999, 2000; UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM 2004; UNDAW 2000; WHO 2003).

Still, apart from recognising that men as well as women bear responsibility for safe sex, the ‘gendered’ approach often continues to mean the feminine gender. For example, many HIV interventions aim to help women avoid infection by empowering them in sexual relationships, but this means that two vital factors are neglected: the part played by men in the spread of HIV and the part played by broader social circumstances, such as poverty and the economic inequality of women. Some scholars have argued that the narrow focus on women ‘actually served to



**‘I’m a Real Man’. PNG Department of Health Christmas Card promoting sexual and reproductive health issues.**

undermine women by making them responsible for HIV risk reduction’ (Campbell 1995: 197). Women do of course need particular attention, but a strong and constructive focus on men is also required. Men often have attitudes which increase exposure to infection: they often prioritize their own pleasure over women’s and assume they have rights to women’s bodies, including control over when sex occurs and whether contraception is used.

### **Men Make a Difference**

When, in the year 2000, the UNAIDS World AIDS Day took the theme of ‘Men Make a Difference’, a renewed interest in men was kindled and the need to involve men and boys as allies in stemming the AIDS pandemic was recognised. With men now included as gendered beings, awareness grew that patterns of gender inequality are interwoven with social definitions of masculinity and men’s gender identities. It is now recognised that it is necessary and important to study and analyse how the masculine gender is created in particular cultures/communities,

especially those forms of it that generate behaviour that propels the spread of HIV. If the sources of such masculinity and the immediate causes of behaviour that propels the spread of HIV are traced and mapped, we can obtain a much clearer idea of how to go about changing these. At the same time, research can look beyond the negative; affirmative forms of masculinity and masculine behaviour can provide models and inspiration for effective interventions.

In places such as Papua New Guinea, masculine gender identity is consciously cultivated through ritual and other cultural means, showing that gender is indeed a cultural and historical product.

Masculinity changes depending on its setting, which itself is constantly being modified by new influences, and particular forms of masculinity are culturally valued over others at various times and in various places. In any society multiple forms of masculinity co-exist; as Bob Connell says, there is a great variety and complexity of ways of ‘being a man’ (2000). Many

men are not violent and do not engage in practices that put themselves and others at risk of contracting HIV, showing that men can and do uphold positive values.

To realise the Millennium Development Goal of gender equality requires men to think and act in new ways, to reconsider traditional images of manhood, and to reshape their relationships with women. There is a growing recognition that a new emphasis on the part men can play in achieving gender equality will contribute effectively to improving human rights, the promotion of democracy, eradicating poverty, economic justice and other development goals.

### **Putting Men on the Agenda of Pacific Development**

Despite the international surge of interest in initiatives aimed at men and boys by NGOs, governments and donor agencies in the last few years, very few initiatives have been taken in the Pacific context. Development practitioners and

academics have rarely bridged the gender divide to consider men and masculinity. There is clearly a need for more engagement with this important issue.

So far, most gender initiatives have been in the area of sexual and reproductive health, especially HIV and violence prevention. Often working with both men and women, these have sought to promote non-violent and more equal relationships. For example, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Project have adapted a version of the Stepping Stones workshop package for use in the Pacific. Designed by Alice Welbourn for use in small communities in Africa, Stepping Stones aims to promote sexual health through building stronger and more equitable relationships between sexual partners, using participatory learning approaches. It has now been used successfully in many countries and has been shown to be effective in changing young men's sexual practices and reducing levels of violence (Jewkes et al 2008).

The more culturally appropriate and gender-aware interventions are, the more likely they are to be successful. Policies developed elsewhere should not be uncritically transplanted from one context to another. Training packages need to be adapted or developed on the basis of sound research and thorough understanding of the cultures of the Pacific nations in their great diversity. All interventions should be appraised for their gender impact on both women and men, so that negative effects can be avoided.

Initiatives with men are often prompted by anxiety about HIV and gender-based violence, but if the wider agenda of MDG goal 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women) is to be realised, their extension into areas such as health, employment and education is indispensable.

Understanding of the complex issues gender involves remains limited. More research is needed into the cultural manifestations of masculinity and how it is changing in these times of greater movement of people and ideas. For example, men are embracing popular Western cultural figures, such as Rambo and Bruce Lee who personify martial masculinities, and body modification practices which increase the risk of HIV transmission. However, research also needs to move beyond cataloguing negative masculinities; rather it should endeavour to identify

positive masculine characteristics that can be used to develop culturally appropriate interventions. For example, recent evidence from Papua New Guinea shows that new forms of masculinity are emerging that eschew the use of violence (see Eves 2006). Also, given the profound importance of Christianity in the lives of most Pacific Islanders, there is a need for research into the diverse ways gender is interpreted by churches in the region, again seeking positive openings through which gender equality can be encouraged.

*This briefing note was prepared by Richard Eves.*

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