



Resource Management in Asia-Pacific

Working Paper No. 32:

Rural Households and Resource Management in Papua New Guinea

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Paper presented in the Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program Seminar Series
The Australian National University, 21 March 2002

The correct citation for this publication is:

Author: Berit Gustafsson

Year of Publication: 2002

Title: Rural Households and Resource Management in Papua New Guinea

Series: Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Working Paper No. 32

Publisher: Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program, Division of Pacific and Asian History,
Research School for Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University

Editor: Helen Glazebrook

Place of Publication: Canberra

ISSN – 1444-187X

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Working Papers

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Rural Households and Resource Management in Papua New Guinea

In this paper I intend to focus on women's role in the development process in Papua New Guinea, in particular, what I think has contributed to the neglect of women's traditional roles and their knowledge in, for example, agriculture and resource management in development projects. I want to suggest some alternative methods that may eventually contribute to the inclusion of women in decision-making and the planning of projects that so far have focused primarily on men.

Nowadays, development projects are usually preceded and accompanied by a gender awareness analysis, and there has been a growing focus on women's productive roles and the integration of women into the national economy. However, in the final stages of project planning, development planners and donor agencies still seem to remain ignorant of, or refuse to acknowledge, indigenous social and economic structures. I would argue that the reason why they fail to understand indigenous structures, and the roles that men and women play in the local society, depends on which model is applied in the gender awareness analysis. Ideas about gender roles often reflect the development planner's own views of gender roles in Western society, and not in the one being studied.

However, even though women in Papua New Guinea usually do not have formal rights to land, and rarely perform in public, they often control stages in the production of food and goods, and have valuable knowledge and skills to which men might not have access. Such skills and knowledge are embedded in local structures and cannot be understood with the use of Western models. In order to understand indigenous structures, it is necessary to broaden the perspective from public performances and ownership, and look at the roles in which men and women perform in economic and political life in the indigenous culture.

Before any project planning for resource management we must study how knowledge is transferred, the division of work according to gender in the productive chain, and the rules that decide who should do what and cooperate with whom. We should also ask whether the incorporation of indigenous models in development planning might in fact contribute in a better way to sustainable development and equal participation by both genders.

Western influences

Many of the studies that have been made of Papua New Guinea, from the 1950s to the present, are based on models with roots in European academic thinking, where ownership of natural resources, access and control over the economy and production is said to decide a person's status in society. In light of this it is assumed that, because women rarely own rights to natural resources, they lack access and control over resources and production. Another theory that also has been used in many studies of Papua New Guinea, even by women, is based on the assumption that women's lower status derives from their biological capacity to reproduce, which prevents them from participating in economic and political activities.

Others have arrived at the same conclusion by dividing society into opposing categories, such as nature/culture and domestic/public domains. Such oppositions are always related to gender, and women are said to belong to the domestic/nature/reproductive sphere, where production is directed towards consumption, while men perform their work in the public/cultural/productive sphere and produce for exchange, trade and business.

Commonly the theories mentioned here assume that women, because they are more or less confined to the domestic sphere, are inferior to the men who control the public sphere. The first generation of female anthropologists shared this view, and believed that men had more knowledge

about their society than women. Therefore we do not have much data from this time on women's roles outside the domestic sphere (Guiart 1993: 114).

The theories I have mentioned here belong to the fifties, sixties and seventies, and anthropological theory and methodology have changed much since then. Nevertheless I think it is important to keep these theories in mind since they are still dominant in Western thinking, not least in studies on gender.

European values have lasted so long, and have been so universal, that they are widely accepted in the socialisation patterns of developing nations. Many urbanised Papua New Guineans seem convinced that models from Western society are necessary when structuring their approach to the problems of modern society. Politicians and other leaders therefore often choose to ignore indigenous structures even when these prove to be economically more sustainable. According to the 'Country Strategy Note for 1997-2001' on Sustainable Human Development in Papua New Guinea, the objective of the government is to increase participation by women as both beneficiaries and agents in the social, economic, political and cultural development process. Special gender desks have been installed in the policy and planning branches of government departments to ensure that each department implements the National Women's Policy. However, the gender models they use in their planning are often based on Western values that do not describe the reality in rural areas.

Poor development in rural areas has contributed to a sense, especially among young men and women, that their own culture is inferior to Western culture. Often one hears Papua New Guinean women equate tradition with male domination and modernity with female liberation (Jolly 1997: 159), and argue that the Western way is the only way out of male dominance and hard work. However, it is not only poor development that has led people to believe that the indigenous culture is inferior to the West. The missions played a major role in the development of the country, and in the perception of how men and women are viewed today. In Melanesia in 1995, the Women's Division of the Department of Religion, Home Affairs and Youth wrote that 'the influence of the missionaries and the different colonial masters in the early 19th century saw the beginnings of cultural changes and improved the status of women's lives in PNG' (The South Pacific Commission, 1995: 65).

Missionaries often had the preconceived idea that local women were not free agents but objects of men's sexual urges, interests and strategies, and they tried to bring about a form of women's liberation through conversion to Christianity (Guiart 1993: 110). However, their primary goal was not to give more power to the women, but to indoctrinate them to adopt what they considered to be a proper way of life. Thus, while men received some formal education, women received training in the values of cleanliness, obedience and good manners (Whiteman 1983: 178), and were expected to restrict their activities to the household (Ralstone 1989: 60).

Thus, the missions and the colonial administrations ignored, or simply refused to acknowledge, indigenous ideals where principles of kinship, sexual relationships and work organisation often predicated domestic life, and where kinship roles often took precedence over the marriage bond. The powers and controls women exercised in many indigenous societies therefore were either not seen or were erased. It is against this background that many still assume that women, because they own no land and because they are bound by their biological capacity to reproduce, have no influence over production and over the economy. And this is why women's roles in economic development are typically imagined through the lens of the family.

However, in Papua New Guinea, the family or domestic sphere is not equal to the domestic sphere in European society. In traditional Papua New Guinea society, there existed no strict line between the public and the domestic, and even nowadays, especially in rural areas, it is often impossible to decide to which sphere different work tasks belong.

In my own studies on gender relations in Papua New Guinea, I have found Biersack's theory of households very useful, mainly because it questions our ethnocentric ideas about the public and

domestic spheres. Biersack (1984 and 1990) has done extensive research in the Southern Highlands Province, and challenges conventional models by looking at domestic and public spheres as two distinctive orientations of the same unit, the household. According to her, the public and the domestic domains represent two faces of the household, one facing inwards and the other facing outwards. In a modern context, the household in its public aspect produces food and goods that are distributed or sold to other groups. In its private aspect, the household produces food for consumption. Thus, it is the household in its public aspect, and not merely the men, that produce food and establish relationships with the outside world.

The boundary between domestic production for household consumption and production for sale or exchange is not a clear demarcation. The household functions simultaneously as a consumption unit and a production unit, and the labour inputs essential to its functioning are interdependent. Gender does not determine which aspect different work tasks belong to, rather this determination is based on the occasion and for what purpose the work is to be done (Gustafsson 1999: 9).

There are several reasons why I think Biersack's theory should not be confined to gender studies but could be used also as a basis for thinking about development projects. Firstly, it forces us to focus on the interrelatedness of domestic and public activities, and secondly, in Papua New Guinea, the household continues to be the basic unit and primary source of market production and supply in the country, and therefore could constitute a natural base for development projects. Finally, Biersack's model forces us to focus on the purpose for which men and women produce, instead of differences between the genders.

So far, the practice among peoples in Papua New Guinea to separate men and women in work, ritual and sleep, has been used as evidence of gender inequality, and has led to the assumption that men and women could, and should, be separated in development projects. However, in Papua New Guinea, gender separation is not necessarily the same as segregation. A common error among development workers is their failure to see that, in a wider context, the work performed by men and women is complementary. This means that men and women control different skills, yet what they do in their own sphere of activity has consequences for the other gender, the household, and ultimately for the society in which they live. Thus, the issue is not whether men and women have equal access to resources, to public performances and to the same kind of work, but that the parts they play are equally important for the system to function (Gustafsson 1999: 118-19). Here lies the big difference between Papua New Guinean and European gender concepts.

Kinship

The separation by gender is integral to local social and economic structures, which in turn are constructed within the framework of kinship. The kinship system not only decides who has rights to certain resources; it also decides the roles which men and women perform in production and ceremony. Therefore, to understand the nature of the division of work according to gender, we have to know more about the kinship system in the society being studied.

Keesing argued that, in the Solomon Islands, traditional structures of kinship and institutions of collective land title and communal obligation were obstacles to development and modernization, and that the hope always lay in the ambitious individual willing to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities against the grain of tradition (1993: 36). Papua New Guinea is no exception, and development planners in general do not consider traditional structures of kinship and institutions of collective resource management.

Considering that the majority of the population still live in rural areas and obtain a large proportion of their domestic food requirements from the use of their own customary land, it is impossible to ignore kinship. The work organisation by gender in rural areas is still based on kinship structures. This means that development projects in rural areas, and especially those that involve renewable resources, must include a kinship study.

M'buke kinship system

I am going to use the people on M'buke Island in Manus Province as an example of how economic and social roles were, and still are, constructed in indigenous society. As in many Papua New Guinean societies, the M'buke traditionally lacked centralized organization, and the clan was the largest political and economic unit that cooperated on a more regular basis. The clans were not endogamous however, and existed only through relationships established with other groups, primarily through marriage and trade. Networks of economic relationships established through a marriage were permanent, and were reactivated through life cycle rituals performed for children born in each marriage.

Before marriage, M'buke men and women would participate in the production of food for consumption, but did not have any trade partners. It was only with the birth of her first child that a woman, by initiating an economic relationship with her brother, established herself in the economic system. The brother took care of his sister when she gave birth, he performed life cycle rituals for her children, and together they exchanged wealth with the sister's husband. From then on, until the children were grown up and were to be married, the brother and sister cooperated as a team in exchanges. With the children's marriage there was a change, and the woman in her role as mother now cooperated with her husband in exchanges.

Women exchanged wealth during or immediately after ritual performances, as members of the husband's side or the wife's side, and they also contributed wealth in large-scale exchanges. While women were the main performers during rituals, men performed in large-scale exchanges and acknowledged the contributions made by the women by calling out their names in public.

Before marriage, a woman helped to produce food for consumption only, but as a mother she was also expected to produce a surplus for trading purposes. Women had their own networks of trade partners, comprising men and women from other villages. The difference between men and women in trade was that women traded their products with neighbouring villages, while men traveled far to obtain shell discs and other valuable objects.

It is not possible to describe the ceremonial system in detail, but I have tried to provide an example of how principles of kinship predicated domestic life, and to show that men's and women's economic roles were not decided primarily by gender but by their kinship roles. Thus, both men and women produced goods that were traded in the public sphere, and established networks of economic partners, not as individuals, but in their roles as mother's brothers or husbands, mothers or father's sisters. The kinship system served as a framework in which men and women worked in the production, accumulation and distribution of valuable goods. Thus, it was the kinship structure, and not merely control over resources and production, that decided who was allowed to participate in the economic system. Even nowadays, married couples on M'buke have separate networks of trade partners.

In the sense that both partners achieved their positions through the kinship system, the traditional system was equal. I am not saying that men and women received equal rights through the kinship system, only that it contained a structure for cooperation and guaranteed participation by both genders.

M'buke is only one example, and there are too many cultural differences in the nation to generalise on this basis. However, more than 95 per cent of all land in Papua New Guinea still falls under the customary ownership system in which custom defines people's rights to benefit from the land. It is the clan that decides who can use the land and for what purposes, and cooperation in production for subsistence is still based on kinship relations and membership of extended families. As long as the family produce for subsistence, both men and women, even though they often perform their work separately, are involved in the process. Even though they may not inherit rights to land,

women marry men from other clans and receive rights through their husbands to clear land for gardening. Daughters who choose to stay on their father's land after they have married are generally given access to a piece of land for gardening.

My experience from Manus Province is that the main difference between men's and women's 'rights' in production lies in what is planted. While men plant trees that grow slowly, women can only plant vegetables and fruit trees that grow quickly. Daughters who remain on their father's land can utilize some of the land, but they cannot plant pandanus, coconut trees and sago palms. What men plant will remain on the land for generations, while women grow vegetables for consumption. Thus, the difference is not a question of access but a question of continuity versus consumption. Manus society, with a few exceptions, is patrilineal. The male line is continuous, and it will remain on the land for many generations, while women are replaced and cannot own something that survives them. This interpretation might seem too academic, but I think it is important to remember that the difference between men and women is not necessarily a matter of ownership, but rather that they control different niches in the ecology. Since women usually collect plants and vegetables from the forest and fetch water, they often know more than men about how changes in the environment affect their resources.

According to the 1980 national census, 91 per cent of economically active females were engaged in farming and fishing for cash or subsistence, with 51 per cent of that total involved solely in subsistence agriculture. This compares to a total of 66 per cent of economically active males, of which only 34 per cent were engaged solely in subsistence agriculture (Booth 1991). These figures are old, and a national census was conducted again in 1990 and 2000, but I think we can assume that the situation has not changed radically. In the highlands, women are still the main producers of garden products, and in coastal societies, both men and women fish for consumption and marketing. Generally, women contribute more than men towards the production of food for the family, for customary use and for trading purposes (Melanesia 1995: 65). As a rule, women own the crops from their own gardens, and this is the economic basis on which they may expand their trade relationships, first within the community, then outside of it (Leslie 1979: 181).

It is only when the land or sea is allocated to cash cropping or other development projects that women's contributions are no longer accounted for. In development projects, it is usually the men, as owners of these resources, who are involved in the planning process, while women's preferences are overridden, and they are unable to influence the process. Even in matrilineal societies, female leaders are often being replaced by their brothers and sons in negotiations regarding development projects. The introduction of cash cropping has meant that brothers no longer move to their wife's land, but remain on their maternal land, and against custom, transfer the cash cropping rights to their sons. Thus, women are losing control, even when they are supposed to be the owners of natural resources.

Weskos Resources Incorporation

In 1998, I was asked by GTZ (the German Technical Cooperation Agency) to evaluate the Weskos Resources Incorporation project on the southwest coast of Manus Island, and to study the extent to which its sawmill project had affected the natural environment, gender relations and work organisation. The west coast is one of the most remote and underdeveloped areas of Manus, and prior to the Weskos project, formal employment was available only through Monarch Investments Pty Ltd, which started its own logging operations in the area in 1988. The logging company mainly offered employment to men, while the women occasionally earned an income through maintenance work such as laundry, cooking, cleaning staff quarters and selling garden products to expatriates and workers (Gustafsson n.d). While the landowners were critical of the activities of the logging company, the logging company had failed to help landowners with a portable sawmill, as promised in their development proposal, and their operations had led to destruction of the natural environment and wastage of forest products.

To counterbalance the impact of large-scale logging operations, one of the landowners bought a portable sawmill with his royalty money in order to process sawn timber out of waste from the logging area. Other landowners joined him, and in 1992 they established the Weskos Resources Incorporation project in order to obtain funds to expand their activities. GTZ was asked to help with the implementation of the project. They agreed to provide loans for the purchase of a permanent sawmill, chainsaws and vehicles for transport, and to provide technical advice and training.

The lesson learnt from this project was that sustainable timber harvesting and processing could provide landowners with sufficient income to meet their needs, as well as ensure that the biologically rich rainforests would provide economic, social and spiritual benefits for future generations.

Before the logging operations started in the 1980s, both men and women were primarily engaged in gardening, hunting, and fishing, and in collecting forest products. The island has few areas with flat land, and the forest has always provided an important basis for the subsistence economy -- for timber, household items and firewood. The undergrowth also provided a rich source of food, medicinal plants, herbs, fruits, nuts and oils, while rivers and creeks provided water and fish.

Even though men and women worked in the same garden, they performed different tasks. The traditional separation in work according to gender meant that men and women used different resources, or used the same resource for different purposes. Men used plants, bushes and young trees to make glue for canoes and ropes used in house building and other maintenance work. The women used the bark of young trees to make rope for their baskets and pandanus leaves to make raincoats. Plants and bushes were also used as medicines and as dye.

Knowledge about the use of forest resources and how to preserve these for future generations was transmitted to the younger generation through participation in work. Young girls worked with their mothers and learnt from them, while the men, who formerly received their education while living in the men's house, seemed to have lost some of their knowledge about their forest resources when these houses disappeared.

The west coast people want to participate in the development process, and their forest is the only resource that could give them access to the monetary sector within the foreseeable future. At the same time, they value their land use systems and wish to preserve them for future generations. The aims of the project are to earn an income from the sawmill while working to promote and maintain sustainable harvesting of forest products and creating work for both men and women. However, when the Weskos project was planned, women were not included, and their knowledge and customary influences in decision making regarding resources were not accounted for.

A board consisting of five male clan leaders directs the sawmill. Rights to land are inherited by men, and women typically do not qualify as members of the board. The approximately 34 sawmill employees are typically all men, while only two women work full time at the office. Another woman helps occasionally with administrative work. The women say that the men are not deliberately trying to exclude them from the project, but the handling of machinery is not considered suitable work for women. The men say that the different work tasks at the sawmill are physically too heavy for women, and the technology is too complicated. However, in relation to gardening, and when it is time to carry heavy loads of vegetables and sago from the forest to the village, there is no discussion of whether the work is physically too heavy for women.

When the Weskos project was planned, it was said that it would provide a base for the women to initiate their own agricultural projects. However, to give opportunity to the women to sell the surplus they could produce from the gardens, the infrastructure needed to be upgraded. Today, there are no roads to other villages or to Lorengau town, and to travel by speedboats that are controlled by the men is too expensive. Also, the exploitation of their forest resources has contributed to an acceleration of erosion, weathering, and humus decomposition, leaving an already

poor soil with even lower nutrient and absorptive capacities. The gardens from which the women are expected to produce a surplus for sale are thus already damaged by the logging activities.

The sawmill does not generate enough money to replace the traditional base for subsistence. Still, nothing has been done to improve the situation for the women, who therefore continue to produce mainly for private consumption, at the same time as they have taken over some of the men's often physically heavy work in food production. Those women who find it hard to cope without the men can get support from the Church women's fellowship, for which they receive payment. All jobs, such as clearing a new garden, harvesting sago or cutting down bamboo trees, have a fixed price.

Thus, while the men have been granted loans and technical support for their project, and also a salary, the women are left on their own, with no possibility to influence the development of their forest resources. The initial plan was to engage the women, who already have experience in replanting trees, to nurture seedlings, and to plant and clear young trees, in the reforestation effort. However, when the owners of the sawmill investigated the issue, it was impossible to trace the money that the logging company supposedly has given to the government in reforestation levies.

The men's disinclination to include women in the sawmill operation could stem from their traditional division of work. In the old days, men's work consisted in felling and transporting timber for house building, furniture, canoes and clearing new gardens. Trees are widely regarded as symbols of masculinity, and women themselves accept that forest management is men's business. The handling of trees could be seen as a 'traditional' male occupation. But the forest consists of more than trees, and when it comes to conservation of renewable resources, which is one of the project's aims, one could expect that women, with their experience in this field, would be included.

Interviews with the women showed that they know more than men about such things as the names and uses of trees and plants. But instead of using their knowledge in the forest project, it was the men who received education and training, while the women are encouraged by the church (SDA) to participate in fellowships where they make baskets, sew clothes, bake bread and so forth, in order to collect money for the church.

The impression I was given is not that men are reluctant to work with the women, or that they do not recognize their knowledge about the forest. Rather, among the men, there is a tendency to monopolize access to Western technology since it is prestigious to acquire and control new skills. People living on the islands depend on dinghies with outboard motors for transport, yet few women are taught or allowed to run dinghies. When bicycles were introduced in the province (at the beginning of the 1990s) the men insisted that it was against their custom for women to ride bicycles.

However, the men are not as superior as they would like to be. One of the directors said that the project could not produce as much as they would like to because the men still do not understand the 'magic' of Western technology. The man said that if someone asked us Westerners to produce large quantities of sago in a short time, we could do this because we have the organizational and technical skills. This remark is interesting, I think, because sago production is based on cooperation between men and women.

M'buke Cooperative

In the 1970s and 1980s, cooperatives were established all over the nation, of which most failed. But I should mention the M'buke cooperative that was established in 1955 and lasted for a number of years, because it shows that, when there is no interference from outside, people organize their work rather differently. The M'buke community comprises eleven islands, including M'buke Island itself. During German times, most islands were used for coconut plantations. In 1955, the people on M'buke bought back their islands from the Australian government and established a cooperative to produce copra on the plantations (Gustafsson 1992). What I find interesting about this project is

that both men and women were encouraged to buy shares in the cooperative, and that they performed the same kind of work according to a rotating scheme. The shareholders worked approximately six months in a year. Even though the kinship system on M'buke is patrilineal, and women 'traditionally' did not inherit rights to natural resources, in the project they not only worked together with the men, but they could also buy shares in the cooperative.

The M'buke case might not be representative, since the men own no customary land, and the sea is their main resource. Work on the 'land' thus is not decided through traditional norms. But it is worth considering, since it included women both in the production process and in the decision-making and planning process.

Maybe we have to ask ourselves whether more account is taken of the interests of both genders if there is no or little involvement from outside in the form of Western expertise. Could it be that it is development workers who indoctrinate people to assume that women work better when separated from the men in their own projects.

The reason the M'buke people lost interest in the cooperative was partly because of a drop in the price of copra and partly because of poor management. This seems to be the case with most development projects in Papua New Guinea. The structure, the skills and the knowledge are all there, but what is lacking is guidance on how to turn these into sustainable development projects. The adoption of foreign models, technology and skills has so far proven to be unsuccessful.

Women's groups in development

Something else that has contributed to discrimination against women in development is the tendency to refer to women and youth as vulnerable groups. While development projects are defined as economic phenomena, the vulnerability of women and youth is more often seen as a social problem. By this division women are automatically alienated from the economic sphere, and are seen as a burden to the economic progress of the nation. The establishment of women's groups as a measure to make women become more active in politics and decision-making may thus have the opposite effect. To encourage women to form their own groups is nothing new, for the Christian churches made an early contribution to the mobilization of women in women's clubs, mothers' fellowships, and the like.

In Africa, in general, female group membership is seen as an important source of political power. Membership in such groups has provided women with both economic and political power, as well as basic support networks for day-to-day activities (Cunningham 1996: 340). But the fact that it may be good for African women to separate themselves from men does not mean that the same thing will work in Papua New Guinea. This form of segregation is not typical for Papua New Guinea, where sex and age is not as important as the formation of cooperative groups consisting both genders and several generations. When women cooperated in traditional society, they were usually related through kinship and acted in their respective kinship roles.

There is no doubt that the development process is favoring mature men, while women and youth are victims of discrimination. It is not my intention to argue against women's groups, for these are surely valuable as a forum where women can receive support and education. There is no secret that women's councils in rural villages are often reliable and successful, and that they can work together across village boundaries. However, there is a great risk that the aim of strengthening 'vulnerable' people, through the creation of new groups, leads to segregation, not only between the genders but also between age and occupational groups.

The risk with women's groups, as I see it, is that we may forget that, although women as a whole have some general problems in common, they also have particular problems, which stem from their geographical or economic situation as members of households and communities. These problems

can never be understood through the creation of women's groups, but only through studies of local kinship systems and local social structures.

Experience shows that projects and business enterprises run by women's groups never last long because of internal conflicts, and that family- or clan-based projects are often far more sustainable. Thus, while women's groups can help to strengthen women in many areas of life, the extended family or clan seems to be more reliable in economic enterprises. If we continue to focus too much on women, we may in the process destroy structures that would be more rewarding to use for development purposes.

If we aim to include all members of society in the development process, it may be more rewarding to focus on already existing cooperating groups, such as the clan or extended family, which naturally include both genders and different generations, and combine the different skills and forms of knowledge that are necessary for projects to succeed. This means that recognition must be given to traditional cultural forms. In that way youth and women would automatically become part of the collective effort, and would be less vulnerable in the development process. The clan or extended family already functions like a cooperative, where each individual member belongs to a subdivision of the larger entity. In such kinship structures, the work organisation is already determined, and thus can help to eliminate discrimination and competition between individuals.

It is often suggested that plans to give women their rightful place in development should focus on their economic contributions in what is generally referred to as informal or domestic labour, and should aim to upgrade the female sphere of economic activity to make it equal to the male 'public sector'. The formal sector of the economy in PNG is very small, and for development purposes, the informal sector is certainly very important. However, by saying that the female sphere should be upgraded, we have already accepted that women's economic contributions are not as important as men's. Thus, we are back to the Western model where men and women and formal and informal activities are placed on the same scale of values. Considering what has been said earlier, that the indigenous structure is based on complementarity, there should not be a female sphere that could be separated from other spheres in society. It is only if we focus on the interconnections between what might be considered the 'female sphere' and the male-dominated 'public sector' that women can be given their rightful place in development, and not if we strengthen the lines which separate them.

Conclusion

What I wanted to show here is that assumptions about Papua New Guinea society based on gender concepts derived from Western society have not so far contributed to positive development for women. And more importantly, men and women in Papua New Guinea have been indoctrinated to believe that the road to development is through Western ideals. So far this road has only meant that women's traditional knowledge, for example in agriculture and resource management, is ignored, with the result that women have become alienated from decision-making and planning processes.

Papua New Guinea has never had a centralized form of social organization. Life-long co-membership in small and often highly interdependent and cooperating groups has had an effect on the conditions of interaction, the character of social relations, and the sharing of knowledge and values. Yet development planners usually assume that several thousand communities will respond in the same or similar way to development initiatives, as if to say that there is only one problem of community participation, rather than a multitude of local problems (Filer and Sekhran 1998: 264), and little interest has been shown in the variety of indigenous economic and social systems (Keesing 1993: 39).

As long as it is thought possible to generalize and apply the same model to all societies, it is impossible to see that the sexual division of work varies considerably between different culture areas, even in respect of the same crop produced in similar economic circumstances, and that a

model developed for one area cannot be used in another area. Generalizations help to widen the gap between the models of community organisation proposed by development planners and the great variety of existing organisations formed by local groups to improve their livelihoods.

But what can we do in our roles as anthropologists and researchers to make development planners acknowledge women's role in agriculture and resource management, and thereby allow them their rightful place in the decision-making and planning process together with men. Development experts may not be able to carry out studies of each society, and anthropologists might be better fitted for this kind of work, as well as for the task of safeguarding indigenous peoples against models of development which are constructed in the Western world.

Papua New Guinean society is not yet industrialized, almost 85 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, and most of these people obtain a large proportion of their domestic food requirements from the use of their own customary land. Customary land tenure is concerned with networks of kin and the obligations of clan and community. As long as society is constructed within the framework of kinship, men's and women's roles in the household and resource management should be studied within this context.

As researchers, we should insist that development projects are preceded, not merely by a gender awareness analysis, but more importantly by studies of local systems of kinship and networks of relationships between men and women. Men and women, even though they may perform different tasks, are part of the same productive cycle, which serve as a base for private consumption, commerce, and 'custom work'. The indigenous productive cycle could serve as a base for future development projects. This means that, to allow equal participation by men and women in development, we must focus on other dimensions of economic roles, especially women's control over production and their involvement in resource management.

However, in rural areas, the problem is not merely to create more opportunities for women to participate in development. One of the main problems today is that the introduction of new opportunities for individual families to earn additional cash incomes is often not realistic because of poor management skills, limited access to credit, and a lack of support from the government. Most rural communities seem to need some form of external supervision or encouragement before taking action on their own account, and there are no external agencies that have the capacity to offer this kind of support without getting locked into existing structures of administration (Filer and Sekhran 1998: 288). I am arguing that, if we focus more on kinship and indigenous household structures, some of these problems could be solved.

Especially in rural areas, the household is still the most important productive unit. In future planning, the focus should be on households as cooperating groups rather than property owning groups, and on people's participation in social, political and economic life, irrespective of their location in the private or the public spheres. In that way, development could contribute to strengthening the position of both genders, instead of constructing new hierarchies. We need to show as much concern with people's experience and attitudes as we do with their resources.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that development planning based on indigenous structures might help to strengthen both men and women's roles in development and contribute to equal participation in the process. People in Papua New Guinea in general believe that development means adopting new technology and knowledge instead of developing their own traditional organization and skills. Thus, we not only have to deal with our own ethnocentric tendencies, but against a background of almost one hundred years of Western indoctrination, we have to convince indigenous peoples that their skills and knowledge might turn out to provide more equitable and sustainable models for the development of the nation.

What I have said here is nothing new, but it needs to be said again, especially since an increasing number of young and middle-aged Papua New Guineans tend to alienate themselves from their rural background and may even be ashamed of their 'primitive' relatives.

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