



## GLASS Research Unit

*Patron: Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AO, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia*

### Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability (GLASS)

**GLASS submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region.**

#### INTRODUCTION

This submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region is presented on behalf of Professor Margaret Alston OAM and the team from the Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability Research Unit (GLASS), based in the Department of Social Work at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Members and PhD students working in GLASS have conducted research relating to the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region for a number of years.

This submission provides an informed perspective on the key issues to be considered in the Parliamentary Inquiry into the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region. It focuses on the terms of reference of the Inquiry to address:

- Barriers and impediments to enhancing the human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean - Asia Pacific region, especially regarding the impact of family and sexual violence, women's leadership and economic opportunities;
- Achievements to date in advancing women and girls' human rights in these key areas;
- Implications for economic and social development in the Indian Ocean - Asia Pacific region of promoting women and girls' human rights; and
- The effectiveness of Australian programs to support efforts to improve the human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean - Asia Pacific region.

#### ABOUT GLASS

GLASS is a research unit established within the Department of Social Work at Monash in 2008. It has grown significantly in the last five years and now hosts a number of researchers and PhD students. The patron of GLASS is the former Governor-General of Australia, Ms Quentin Bryce.

GLASS aims to achieve global gender equality in ways that enable and empower women and girls to lead socially sustainable change. GLASS undertakes high quality independent research to inform best practice policy development and encourage debate and activism for change. Through research, partnerships and student projects, GLASS contributes to contemporary and emerging areas of research in gender and equality



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within four core areas: Gender and climate change; Violence against women; Leadership; and, Social Sustainability.

Our submission draws on case studies from our research, partnerships, projects and advocacy work in Bangladesh, Laos, Nepal, Phillipines, Timor Leste, Solomon Islands, India, South Africa, and Papua New Guinea.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN INDIAN OCEAN - ASIA PACIFIC REGION**

The area in question is diverse and subject to significant internal political, social, cultural, economic and religious differences. We make the following broad comments and follow up with country-specific case studies.

Over the past several years the region in question has experienced major changes as a result of a shifting geopolitical landscape, globalisation, free market forces, the corporatisation of agriculture and climate-induced and environmental disasters. The growing neoliberal focus on economic growth, rather than sustainable development, has major implications for the region and creates numerous human rights issues for women and girls as they are impacted by multiple systems of inequality, including loss of property rights, diminished workers' rights, a wealth divide between the wealthy and the poor, and the movement away from universal social protection safety nets. In several countries in the region, there have been conflict situations and groups with fundamental religious interpretations have gained increased power, all of which have critical impacts on the human rights of women and girls. Girls' access to work and education is reduced in areas of conflict or disaster and the safety of women and girls is under threat in post-disaster and post-conflict sites across the region.

In general the areas in question are subject to particular forms of patriarchal control, controls that are reinforced by fundamental religious interpretations. For example in our work in Asia we are aware of conservative religious leaders blaming women for climate changes, arguing that their lack of full covered dress, their access to public space and their entry to the workforce has caused religious deities to be angry. The level of patriarchal control varies but is revealed in the lack of autonomy women have in making choices about who and when to marry, in their lack of personal freedom of movement, access to education and other services and their lower wages and reduced access to higher paid positions. It is also revealed in the resort to the notion of 'family honour' as a reason to strictly control the freedom of women and girls. This issue is so wide ranging it impacts on all aspects of women's lives.

### ***Food and water security***

Many small Pacific nations are now dependent on imported food, a situation that is not only threatened by rising fuel and transport costs, and at risk of economic shocks, but that has major health consequences. These factors have reshaped the social landscape of the area, producing major challenges for women, men, girls and boys across the region. The erosion of traditional small farm production and therefore food security, and reduced access to clean water and sanitation has directly impacted women and girls. reduced access to clean water and sanitation has directly impacted women and girls. The proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, for example, with its emphasis on deregulated commercial trade, may have negative consequences on communities in poor countries that are not part of the Partnership, in particular household based food security, women's labour conditions and environmental protection.



Water security is threatened in a number of areas by climate and environmental disasters and by the erosion of storage caused by aging infrastructure and / or storm surges and salination. For example in the Satkhira region of Bangladesh, salt water inundation has had a significant impact on fresh water availability and resulted in women having to walk much further to source fresh water. This is having a number of consequences including on women's and children's health. Erosion of infrastructure is evident in coastal regions of the Pacific where storm surges, cyclone activity and salt water intrusion are causing major damage to fresh water stocks. This has a direct impact on the work of women and girls who may have to seek alternative water sources.

### ***Out-migration***

There are several trends across the region that impact on social arrangements – chief amongst these is the extraordinary rise in outmigration for remittance income. This practice involves both women and men, although across the region this outmigration encourages men and boys to seek employment in urban areas and often in other countries. Pacific family members seek work in Australia, NZ and the US, while within Asia men and boys may out-migrate to cities to work on construction or travel to other Asian countries or the Middle East for work. Obvious exceptions to the male dominated nature of the practice is the outmigration of rural Bangladeshi girls to the garment factories of Dhaka and Filipino women to the Middle East to work as domestic labour or rural village women in Asia who undertake domestic work in the cities.

Outmigration has several consequences apart from the long periods of absence from families. While this practice provides some income stabilisation, our research suggests there are other disturbing trends including the unsafe, insecure work practices in the garment factories (an area where Australian consumers receive enormous benefit) and domestic spheres, women's increased exposure to violence, poor pay and conditions, and children being reared by relatives. Our work also reveals other trends associated with the outmigration of men. These include the trend in some Asian countries where we have undertaken research for men to establish a second family (polygamy) in the city, and over time to cease paying money to their village family. There are also reports that the incidence of HIV/AIDS is rising where outmigration is a common practice, and reports that men returning from the Middle East are bringing more conservative views on women's role and on issues such as contraception.

### ***Early marriage***

One of the most serious consequences of the significant challenges faced by rural families in South Asia is the rise of early marriage as a direct result of the hardships caused by economic changes and climate and environmental disasters. Many families are now marrying their daughters at very young ages (as young as 9) to avoid high dowry payments, due to women's lack of property rights, and to reduce the numbers of family members to be fed. Early marriages result in young girls being exposed to early childbirth and consequent health issues and dropping out of education.

### ***Land ownership***

In post-disaster / post-conflict sites, there is evidence that land ownership and tenure is used as an indicator of those who should receive aid. This strategy overlooks the practices of women and girls in relation to home-based food security. Women are less likely to receive aid that is tied to land based production or fishing, despite their extensive work in these areas. Women may not own land, but they form a majority of the agricultural workforce and undertake a lot of the fish processing work. Where outmigration is a common practice, they are the backbone of the agricultural production



workforce. However our work reveals that the lack of recognition of their efforts, and the focus on the landowner, results in their lack of access to credit, agricultural inputs and agricultural extension advice and that this is having a significant impact on productivity.

### ***Violence***

We note the rise in violence against women across the region. Violence in post-disaster and post-conflict sites occurs across the globe including in post-disaster sites in Australia. Women and girls in the area under study are exposed to increased violence and trafficking within and across borders. Women and girls are also raped and abused in conflict situations and viewed as the spoils of war. Violence against women is common in shelters during and after environmental disasters and there are moves across the world to make shelters more gender sensitive as a result. In situations where they are not gender sensitive, women and girls are choosing not to seek shelter. We also note the rise of extreme violence across the region including the hideous practice of witch burning in PNG, the significant rise in acid attacks, the abuse of girls reporting sexual crimes at police stations by police officers and officials, the extreme punishments given to women for adultery, the failure to prosecute rape crimes and the increase in trafficking across the region. These issues represent major human rights abuses for women and girls across the region.

### ***Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and girls***

It is also important to highlight the human rights issues faced by lesbian, bisexual, transgender (LBT) women and girls. In many countries in our region, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are denied many rights such as protection against hate crime, adoption of children, marriage, and protection from workplace discrimination. We are aware of violence by individuals and the State against LBTI women and girls, particularly in countries with few rights for LGBT people. Concerningly, it is illegal for LGBT people to engage in consensual sex in 77 countries in the world, including nearly half of the countries in Oceania and Asia. With the continued vilification of LGBT people in our region, the Australian aid program has a responsibility to defend the human rights of LBT women and girls within its gender programming, as well as ensure that Australia leads by example.

### ***Trafficking***

The trafficking of women deserves particular comment. Many women and girls in this region are trafficked into cities or across borders, a practice that is growing and deeply disturbing. We are aware of people posing as employment agents going to villages to supposedly recruit girls for the garment factories and the girls subsequently disappearing. Trafficking of young girls is one of the most outrageous breaches of the human rights of women and girls across the region. Trafficking has also been linked to climate change – in India, for example, women are at high risk of trafficking when community members out-migrate from rural areas to the cities due to natural disasters or the inability to produce food due to the changed climate.

### ***Asylum seeker and refugee women***

We also note the situation of asylum seeker and refugee women, forced to flee dangerous situations, often with children, and being subject to further abuses in our own jurisdictions. There is little analysis of the reasons why these women and girls flee, the dangerous process involved on coming to Australia and their treatment once in our control, now on Manus Island and Nauru. This is a significant area of human rights abuses against women and girls that must be further investigated. We also note that



refugee and asylum seeker women may have experienced rape and other forms of violence, be victims of female genital mutilation and experience violence in their relationships once in our country. There are major areas of human rights abuses across the refugee experience.

### ***Post-disaster reconstruction***

Post-disaster reconstruction can also have unintended consequences. In two sites in different countries of the region we are aware of rebuilding that included the siting of toilets at the end of a road of newly constructed houses. In both cases women and girls have been victims of sexual violence when going to the toilets. It is therefore important that the Australian government's aid efforts do not add to the human rights abuses of women and girls, that women and girls are consulted about reconstruction efforts and that funds are fairly distributed.

### ***Representation of women***

Further problems occur when women are not included as part of decision-making and consultative bodies. The active exclusion of women in these cases results in their issues not being addressed. The political representation of women more generally across the region is low. In some countries there have been quota systems put in place to ensure that a number of seats are designated for women. Women leaders champion this system. Nonetheless they argue strongly that these seats must be contested fairly and that the successful candidate be elected in a transparent way – not assigned to the seat by the dominant parties. In all cases there is not fair and adequate representation of women – in some situations where they are assigned to seats this compounds the lack of fair and adequate representation of women. Women constitute a very small percentage of decision makers across the region. We would strongly support quotas of women to representative positions as this creates a pathway to inclusive practices and supports women as leaders.

### ***War on women***

Across the world and particularly in the region in question there is a growing war on women. This is demonstrated in overt and structural violence, the feminisation of poverty, rising levels of homelessness, the invisibility of caring and household work, the reduction in services and recognition of women, and a general invisibility of women in public life. A significant factor in the human rights abuses experienced by women and girls is the normalisation of gender inequalities through customs and fundamentalist interpretations inspired by patriarchy that endorse these abuses. These abuses are further reinforced by institutional arrangements, a lack of visibility and sometimes unintentional support for practices that disempower women. These structural and practical conditions have resulted in women and girls across the region experiencing significant and ongoing human rights abuses.

In summary, the factors that constrain the human rights of women and girls include:

- increased power of people who have fundamental religious interpretations;
- customary laws and legal frameworks that reduce women's access to legal redress and / or foster differential expectations and penalties for women and girls;
- a focus on young girls as central to family honour leading to child marriages, tight controls on behaviour and movement;
- a rise in dowry demands as an economic strategy by young men often leading to violence;



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- macroeconomic systems that prioritise multinational corporations over small-scale producers and the land right of local people;
- climate challenges that impact disproportionately on women and girls;
- post-disaster impacts that further reduce women's safety (eg increased levels of violence against women in shelters, a lack of gender sensitive practices in post-disaster sites, distribution of aid/support to males and /or land owners, corruption in distribution practices);
- out-migration and remittance income issues;
- access to services, including education and health;
- low representation of women in parliaments and other decision-making bodies;
- less attention to issues that impact women and girls;
- rising levels of violence, including extreme forms of violence (eg witch burning, acid throwing, gang rapes) against women and girls;
- water and food security that impact disproportionately on women and girls;
- erosion of infrastructure and lack of sanitation;
- livelihood and economic issues that affect women through practices such as not employing women, paying women less, women being required to have a male escort, low levels of flexibility; and
- gossip and sexual innuendo that targets women.

## ***Women as agents of change – untapped resource***

In closing we note that there are many positives occurring for women in the region. Our experience is that women and girls do not see themselves as victims and are in fact significant shapers of culture, family life and the community. Women have been empowered in many regions through access to paid labour, education, family planning and a range of resources provided through aid agencies and through the benefits flowing from strong women's organisations. Women and girls have critical local and community knowledge that is of vital importance to community resilience and strength. We have listed the issues above that impinge on their rights and freedoms – this does not mean that we wish to leave an impression of weakness or enduring vulnerability. The women and girls of this region are a critical part of the sustainable development of our region and we urge that gender sensitive strategies and actions build the capacity of women and girls.

We urge that foreign aid (including scholarships) and INGO funding be particularly targeted to women through loan and training schemes, leadership training, education access and improved infrastructure services including essential service delivery (water, sanitation, family planning, and health care). Reductions in foreign aid must not be viewed as a reason to reduce attention to the human rights of women and girls in our region. We argue that this is an area where the Australian government's commitment to our region must be transparent, gender sensitive and cognisant of the issues impacting girls and women.

We stress that Australian-funded gender programming must *holistically* recognise and address the multiple factors that impinge on the human rights of women and girls. A narrow gender strategy that focuses on women's economic livelihoods will not result in women's empowerment if issues such as men's violence against women, climate change and women's burden of unpaid care are not also integrated and addressed within the program. Australia's aid program must acknowledge the complexity of the human rights issues of women and girls, and undertake a long-term strategy that is focussed on structural, not superficial, change. A gender-centric aid program that is just and effective



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will understand and aim to transform entrenched systems of inequality in our region, particularly the systems of patriarchy, racism, homophobia, and neoliberalism. This involves supporting structural change at the individual, household, community, national, regional and international levels. We suggest that aid funding is prioritised for local feminist organisations within the region, and for INGOS that put women and girls at the centre of their work, such as International Women’s Development Agency, Asia-Pacific Women, Law and Development Forum, ActionAID Australia and, increasingly, Oxfam Australia.

We also urge that DFAT fund development programming that is founded on research and an evidence base of best practice, informed by the needs identified by community members. The aid program should also continue piloting innovative approaches such as Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement (SINPA), with research integrated throughout pilot projects. The Australian Development Research Award Scheme (ADRAS) is a vital component of Australia’s development program, as it supports NGOs in Australia and in our region to work with academics to conduct rigorous research that directly links to programming. We suggest that the ADRAS program continues, with a constant research theme of Gender Equality, and with gender disaggregation required across all research projects. We also suggest that the program focus on strengthening the capacity of universities within our region, by prioritising research projects that have cross-regional university partnerships. We also highlight the importance of supporting research projects that have a feminist, participatory action research methodologies, as this approach is inclusive and transformative for community members, and strengthens local capacity in understanding and addressing local issues through a gendered lens.

We are aware that one of the critical safeguards against poverty is the support of women and girls to access education, family planning and other health services, paid work, agricultural training, credit and extension, legal redress and political representation.

The following sections provide case studies from our research for further information.



## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

### **Case study: Sexual violence against women in the Pacific (Azita Sobhani PhD student)**

Women in the Pacific region face some of the highest domestic violence rates globally and are the worst represented politically. The research released by the World Health Organisation (2013) found that between 60 and 68 percent of women in the areas of the Pacific reported suffering physical or sexual abuse from their partner. In Fiji, an independent report found one woman a day suffered permanent disability as a result of domestic violence. The lack of access to legal aid, health services and proper policing to protect women while being the primary carers for their families (often the last to eat), can be cited as the outer manifestations of systemic structural inequities in the system.

The report of the Eighth Conference of the Pacific Community (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2014) highlights the Pacific region as having the highest rates of suicide (related to mental health) and violence against women in the world. It is felt that improvements need to be made in the areas of culture and spiritual well-being in the Pacific as well as the economic aspects.

The report, entitled *Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific* was conducted in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea (Fulu et al. 2013). It explores the prevalence of men's use of violence against women in the survey sites, and shows what factors make men more or less likely to use violence. The findings show male rape of women was pervasive across sites with the highest at 62% in PNG. The rape of an intimate partner was more common than non-partner rape in most sites except PNG. Rape perpetration started early in life - 49% of the men reported having raped a woman did so when they were teenagers (64% in PNG). Rape was most commonly motivated by a sense of sexual entitlement (men's belief that they have the right to sex regardless of consent), with the second most frequently reported motivation being fun seeking or boredom followed by anger or punishment.

### **Case study: Violence against women and girls in natural disasters in Bangladesh (Professor Margaret Alston, Dr Kerri Whittenbury and Alex Haynes (PhD student))**

In our research in Bangladesh from 2011-14, we travelled to three diverse regions of rural Bangladesh and included nine villages and several hundred participants in our research. These areas have experienced significant climate challenges. We examined the gender impacts and discovered a number of areas where the human rights of women and girls suffer. We focus here on increased violence:

- Women experience violence as normal part of their everyday life.
- Girls in affected areas are being married early, at very young ages as a direct result of climate changes.
- Girls are subject to 'Eve-Teasing' (sexual harassment) that varies from mild sexist comments to dangerous and violent acts such as rape and acid throwing.
- Eve-teasing now includes photo-shopping girls into compromising photos to destroy the community's view of the girls – this has led to girls having to be married.
- Honour is a concept that results in heavy policing of the actions of women and girls.





- Dowry payments are a source of significant tension and if not paid, girls are beaten by their husband and his family.
- Women and girls are more likely to die in catastrophic events.
- Women and girls may not receive early warnings and lack time to prepare.
- Shelters may not be gender sensitive and women and girls are either subject to violence, or may choose not to seek shelter.

For further information see:

Alston, Margaret. (in press) *Women and Climate Change in Bangladesh*. Routledge Women in Asia series, London.

Alston, Margaret (in press) *Women, Political Struggles and Gender Equality in South Asia*. Panmacmillan, London

### **Case study: Child protection in Nepal (Suman Khadka PhD student)**

Child protection issues including child labour, sexual abuse, exploitation and physical violence are rampant in Nepal. 2.1 million children aged 5-14 (equivalent to half the population of Melbourne, Victoria) are economically active (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008). Of this, over 127,000 children are estimated to endure the worst forms of child labour (International Labour Organisation 2004). While both male and female children are vulnerable the impact disproportionately falls on girl children. For example, 65% of domestic workers below 14 years in Kathmandu were found to be girls (Children, Women in Social Service and Human Rights 2009) and 40% of survivors of child sexual abuse and rape are girls below 18 years (Child Workers in Nepal 2008). Coalition Against Trafficking in Woman Asia Pacific estimates every year about 10,000 Nepali girls (between the ages of 9 and 16) are sold to brothels in Indian cities and that over 200,000 Nepalese girls are involved in sex trade in India.

The need to address and invest on child protection concerns is well recognised by both governmental and international agencies. In fact, external assistance for child protection is much higher than the State expenditure. According to GLASS researcher Suman Khadka (2014), overall, the child protection sector receives 0.01 percent of the government budget (about US\$ 400,000) while the child protection budget of UNICEF alone in 2010 was US\$ 3.6 million. Moreover, the majority of the activities of the Central Child Welfare Board's (CCWB), Nepal's key child protection agency, are funded through foreign aid. In 2010 it received US\$ 69,000 from the government but about US \$ 1 million from external partners.

Khadka (2014) found that Nepal's efforts to date rely much on individual agencies who address specific issues rather than respond through a comprehensive and an integrated system. While abuses are not new to human civilisation what differs is how it is dealt with. Most of the efforts in Nepal are ad-hoc, piece-meal and NGO led. On the other hand, after going through a period of charity-led, ad-hoc pieces of social work, much like Nepal now, all major welfare states including Australia have now established rigorous Child Protection Systems (CPS). Nepal lacks even rudimentary elements of such a system and does not even have a body of publicly funded professional social workers. The Nepali state hence not only fails to support vulnerable children, it does not even know who needs its support. Although generalised statistics on the overall number of abused abound, specific information required for the purpose of case management (where are they? who are they with and in what conditions?) is unavailable making a systematic case management an impossible task.



Khadka found that although 51% of the children in her study have been or are at risk or are experiencing ill-treatment, only four of the children are now in protective care while 40% of the children are either still at risk or suffering from some form of ill-treatment. None of them are connected to any protection agency. One woman respondent said, “after my sister died my brother-in-law remarried and my sister’s children became orphans. Nobody knows where they are. I have heard they are in Kathmandu as domestic workers”. This is alarming as the woman hails from a district that is prone to woman trafficking. But it shows how children fall through the cracks and vanish making them de-facto citizenship-less, informal citizens.

If aid is to have a sustainable and real impact on the lives of the most vulnerable in the developing world it must address structural barriers by building systems such as CPS including through technical knowledge. This will be instrumental not only in addressing children’s abuses but also creating a model for addressing human rights abuses in the region.

### **Case study: Social work responses to gender inequality in Papua New Guinea (Dr Cathi Flynn)**

Monash Department of Social Work has been working with colleagues in the Social Work Strand at the University of Papua New Guinea since early 2010; this partnership began as part of a broader Group of Eight (Go8)-AusAID funded project, but has continued beyond the cessation of funding in mid 2012 (Brydon et al. 2012). The University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) is the only provider of Social Work education in PNG. The program, from which approximately 30 students graduate each year, is one of the largest and oldest in the School of Humanities and Social Science and in the university.

PNG is seen as one of the most destabilised countries in the world today, with the condition of women and girls particularly concerning. There are high levels of public - community violence noted, particularly in the capital, Port Moresby, but gender-based violence is a particular problem. Some estimates show this to have been experienced by up to two-thirds of women. As recently claimed, “For too many people in PNG, especially women and children, the management of violence in homes and communities is as mundane as a daily chore” (Rooney 2014). This has implications in many other arenas, including HIV. Quite simply, with violence against women having a level of acceptance in communities, it is difficult for women to abstain from sex or to negotiate condom usage.

Whilst sexually transmitted diseases have been a long-standing issue, it is of growing concern that 2% of the population are now estimated to be HIV positive; this is the highest rate in the Pacific. The most significant growth is amongst young women (these rates are thought to be double that of young men of the same age). These troubling patterns are thought to be influenced by a range of intersecting factors: poor knowledge/education of safe sex practices (whilst the literacy rate for young people is higher than that for older adults, it still remains at around 70%; girls are still less likely to even start school); early sexual activity and marriage; polygamy and men having numerous partners; and ‘development’ - the ‘hotspots’ for HIV transmission are along the main transportation routes through the country associated with the mining and logging industry and the subsequently high levels of transactional sex. Responding to this is challenging, given the largely remote and often inaccessible location of the majority of the population and the large number of language groups (800); the challenges in responding with culturally sensitive practices and education has been



highlighted in a recent documentary by Monash film-maker Cameron Rose Envisioning tomorrow: social work in PNG. This documentary is clear that whilst Social Work in PNG was built around indigenised and community focused responses to issues, the country and the profession are now confronting the very private experiences of public issues.

Social Work is seen to have a key role in contributing to ongoing development and the provision of responsive human support services in PNG. Yet the profession is challenged by a number of limitations, including lack of funding, for services such as those dealing with family violence. GLASS is aware of only a handful of these services across the 19 provinces (with a population of around 7 million). In recent months, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop announced additional support for such services in the city of Lae, including support for specialist police units. These services have been piloted before with some success, but have not been sustained. This is a continued issue in PNG – seed funding is provided but funding for ongoing services is not.

### **Case study: Men's violence against women and girls in Solomon Islands (Naomi Godden PhD student)**

Men's violence against women and girls (MVAWG) is extremely common in Solomon Islands. In a study conducted by Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC 2009), nearly 2 in 3 (64%) ever-partnered women aged 15-49 reported experiencing physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner, and 42% of women reported experiencing physical and/or sexual partner violence in the previous 12 months. Sexual violence was more common than physical violence, with significant overlap between the two. Furthermore, 18% of interviewees had experienced sexual and/or physical violence from a non-intimate partner. Gang rape (*long laen rape*) of young women is also very common (Buchanan-Aruwafu 2007). Young women attribute shame and stigma to *long laen rape*, and generally do not report the rape to protect their reputations.

Men's violence against women and girls occurs within multiple complex systems of inequality in Solomon Islands:

- SPC (2009 p.3) found that likely contributors to rates of men's violence against women include: the acceptability of violence against women; the frequent use of physical punishment to discipline women who are seen as transgressing their prescribed gender roles; the common practice of physically disciplining children, whereby children learn from a young age that physical violence is normal; the law does not define partner violence, particularly marital rape, as a crime; and the lack of formal support services, which makes it difficult for women to seek help. Risk factors for intimate partner violence include attitudes to sex (women who believed that a wife can refuse sex with her husband under at least some circumstances); controlling behaviour; women stepping out of accepted gender roles; non-partner sexual violence; bride price; partner's alcohol consumption; partner had affair; partner fights with other men; partner beaten as a child; partner unemployed (SPC 2009 p.9). Men's identified reasons for partner violence included bride price, alcohol, acceptability of violence as a form of discipline and gender inequality.
- Brideprice, which sometimes occur in Malaita and some communities in east Solomon Islands, is seen as "a reimbursement to the girl's family for the loss of her labor" (Buchanan-Aruwafu 2007 p.118). Brideprice significantly diminishes women's agency and human rights, and women are commoditised through taboos related to premarital sex, and expectations for productive and reproductive labour in marriage (UNICEF 2005; Rasanathan & Bhushan 2011).



- Natural disasters also increase men’s violence against women, and it is highly likely that the recent flood in Honiara resulted in further incidences of MVAWG.
- Women’s unequal power is directly related to increased risk of violence from men. Women’s decision-making power and individual agency are limited by many factors, including: the increasingly nuclear structure of families; women’s lack of property rights, and limited voice in management and allocation of land in areas where land is inherited matrilineally (UNICEF 2005); expectations of women to fulfil traditional unpaid care work roles such as being a “housewife”, mother, being responsible for agriculture, collecting firewood, maintaining food production, fishing, fetching water, domestic chores, child-rearing and caring for the elderly (UNICEF 2011; Maetala 2008); and structural impediments to women participating in leadership and decision-making at the family, tribal, community and national levels (Maetala 2008), resulting in very few female chiefs and Members of Parliament. Women also tend not to be able to participate in decisions about reproduction and family size (UNICEF 2005).
- The ethnic tensions (1998-2003) involved rape and forced prostitution of young girls and women, resulted in unplanned pregnancies, social dislocation and severe trauma for many women, with increased suicide rates and increased rates of separation and divorce (UNICEF 2005). Intergenerational trauma is likely to be present in many families.
- Women with disability experience intersecting and multiple discriminations and are very marginalised, experiencing high risks of landlessness, greater likelihood of abuse, and heightened social and economic vulnerability (Gartrell, Manderson and Jennaway 2013).
- MVAWG is also directly linked to structural issues such as migration to urban centres such as Honiara, compulsory land acquisition, and an overwhelmingly patriarchal governance structure, as these processes can further entrench gender inequality.
- A recent study into the impact of shocks, including food and fuel price hikes, found that the shocks were directly related to men’s violence against women, and forcible prostitution of some women (Feeny et al. 2013). Women and girls in Solomon Islands are at high risk of men’s violence in a fragile economic, environmental and social context that is vulnerable to various shocks.

### **Effectiveness of Australian programs in addressing VAWG**

Only 18% of women who experience violence seek help from formal services or people in positions of authority, and 75% of women who had experienced violence had never left home because of the violence (SPC 2009). Within this context, effective programs that address MVAWG are those that holistically understand MVAWG within the complex systems and structures of inequality, and work in partnership with communities to collaboratively identify strategies to challenge individual, community and national beliefs and practices that marginalise and discriminate against women.

Effective Australian programs that address women’s human rights issues in Solomon Islands are those that:

- Build multi-agency partnerships with a strong focus on sharing learnings, information and funding;
- Holistically involve individual casework and crisis intervention, community development activities, government-level advocacy, and strong research and evaluation.



- Prioritise and strengthen the capacity of grassroots feminist groups and women's human rights organisations.
- Incorporate deeply participatory processes that are culturally strengthening, prioritising and supporting community members (including those of marginalised groups) to design, implement and evaluate the programs.
- Recognise, critique, inform and empower communities to take action about issues that abuse the human rights of women and girls, such as compulsory land acquisition, climate change, free trade,
- Support attitude and behaviour change at the individual, community, national, regional and international levels.
- Engage in learning through cycles of action and reflection, with participatory monitoring, evaluation and research embedded in the program.
- Support women to engage in and influence decision-making across all areas of policy.

An example of an effective MVAWG program is the Oxfam Solomon Islands program Standing Together Against Violence (STAV). This program was situated within the SINPA program, an excellent model for enabling collaborative development programming.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

### **Case study: Women's human rights issues in natural disasters in rice-growing areas of the Philippines (Gerlie Tatlonghari PhD graduate 2014)**

Natural disasters exacerbate existing gender inequalities and further worsen the human rights issues faced by women. These were observed in research conducted in rice farming villages in Nueva Ecija, Philippines in 2012 (Tatlonghari 2014, Tatlonghari and Paris 2013). Tatlonghari's study shows that women farmers are worse affected by typhoons and flooding and their contributions to actions are limited as compared with men farmers. They are disproportionately affected by natural disaster due to loss of livelihood and disruption of existing gender roles and relations. For instance, gender-based violence was reported as conflicts among partners became more frequent due to lost income and livelihoods. Involvement in decision-making of women is also challenged as the limited resources are controlled by men while women's burden to do unpaid care work has increased due to sickness of young and elder member of the family. Meanwhile, adaptation response of women to natural disaster is limited mainly due to their scarce access and control over resources. Consequently, they are emotionally stressed and pressured to provide food for the family at the same time burdened to acquire loans to informal networks to restore their livelihoods.

Despite of these challenges, women played critical roles in reducing the impacts of natural disasters. Women spend more time outside their homes to seek income from non-farm work. This change in gender roles have resulted in increased access to resources and empowerment among women who take on additional responsibilities and change their roles in rice farming and in the household. This has also created additional burdens for women, however, as they become more concerned with managing their farms and at the same time taking care of household welfare. Thus, women's potential talent as key agents of change and their resourcefulness in responding to natural disasters should be enhanced to help them effectively adapt to catastrophic events.



## **Case study: Gendered impacts of climate change in Bangladesh (Professor Margaret Alston and Dr Kerri Whittenbury)**

The gendered impacts of climate change in Bangladesh are significant and wide ranging. We have discussed the issue of increased violence above. We also note that gendered impacts include:

- Outmigration trends (women and girls to domestic work or the garment factories)
- Food and water security directly impacts women – they eat less in a crisis to ensure their family members have more food and their access to water sources may require going further each day to secure water.
- Aid is delivered usually to the land owner and identified household head – this is usually the male resulting in women receiving less access.
- Health and education access is reduced as a result of climate challenges.
- Violence is a significant and ongoing issue.
- Pressures relating to honour, harassment and violence, early marriage and dowry are exacerbated by climate events.

## **Case study: Gendered approaches to Disaster Risk Management in Nepal (Marg and Kerri)**

We are working on a Disaster Risk Resilience indicator tool with Action Aid and The Economist Group. We are working to develop a set of gender-sensitive indicators that can assist governments and communities across South Asia to address gendered outcomes.

## **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

### **Case study: Women's movement in Timor Leste (Naomi Godden PhD student)**

Since Timor-Leste's independence in 2002, Timorese civil society has rapidly grown and strengthened. In particular, women's human rights organisations at the national and local level, including collectives and cooperatives, are increasingly common. However, the departure of the United Nations and other notable INGOs such as Save the Children from Timor Leste has resulted in a fewer funding sources and partnership options for women's rights organisations, particularly in rural and remote areas. Women's rights organisations, many of which developed organically in local communities, often struggle to financially function in an inconsistent and unstable funding environment, and rely on volunteers and unpaid staff to continue their work between periods of funding. Furthermore, the standard 3-year funding cycle is insufficient for effective, sustainable community development programming, and feminist organisations are burdened with difficult reporting requirements.

Despite these challenges, the women's movement in Timor-Leste is very strong and active. Women's rights organisations work to address multiple women's human rights in Timor-Leste:

- Poverty is very common - 68.1% of the Timor-Leste population experience multidimensional poverty, and 37.4% of the population live below \$1.25 per day (UNDP 2013).



- Timor-Leste's maternal mortality rate is 300 maternal deaths/100,000 live births (UNDP 2013), and quality obstetric care is lacking (Rede Feto 2009).
- The 2010 Demographic Health Survey (DHS) in Timor-Leste found that 1/3 of women have experienced domestic violence since the age of 15 and 24% of women who experience violence seek help (National Statistics Directorate 2010).
- The 2010 DHS also found that 27% of surveyed women were malnourished, an improvement from 38% in 2003 (National Statistics Directorate 2010).
- International and internal sex trafficking is a growing issue. Even with support from organisations such as IOM, the Timor-Leste government is not adequately prepared and resourced to address this issue, and ensure the safety and protection of women and girls who are trafficked into, and throughout, Timor-Leste.
- Many women experienced sexual violence during the Indonesian occupation, and some are still traumatised by these experiences.

### Effective programs

Rede Feto is a national network of 24 women's rights organisations that aim to "improve the lives of women and girls, and advance gender equality and women's rights for sustainable development in Timor Leste" (Rede Feto 2014). Rede Feto annually organises the National Women's Congress which is held throughout rural areas and in Dili, monitors women's rights issues, provides training, support and information to women's organisations, and is involved in high-level advocacy. It is an important body for participatory, gender transformative programming in Timor Leste.

In a statement to the 2009 Timor Leste Donor's Meeting, Rede Feto advised that,

*"all stakeholders must promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all stages of their project planning, and implementation and the whole life cycle of a project. Additionally, there must be specific programs directed to enhancing the capabilities of our girls and women. More importantly, all programs must pay special attention to gender, and not include it as an afterthought. There is a range of approaches development professionals use to achieve gender equality and equity in their programmes, including: Promoting policy and institutional; Increasing support to women's networks and organisations; and Including men as partners and allies in gender programming" (Rede Feto 2009).*

Key strategies for addressing women's human rights issues involve supporting women small scale producers, vocational training, micro-finance, small-business management training, access to credit and other employment opportunities, along with quality women's literacy programs (Rede Feto 2009). Importantly, livelihoods and literacy programs must be closely monitored to ensure that women do not experience increased violence from men when they gain additional skills, confidence and income.

Furthermore, women have a dual burden when they engage in economic activities, because they are also responsible for unpaid care work. This "double burden" must be addressed when aid donors pursue economic livelihood projects for women, as livelihood engagement can in fact entrench gender inequality and increase stress for women and girls, resulting in increased MVAWG, worsened women's health issues, and economic inequality through unequal wage conditions and working conditions. Women's unpaid care work responsibilities must be recognised, reduced and redistributed in economic livelihood programming.

Gender transformative programming in Timor Leste is most effective when conducted in partnership with feminist organisations, for several reasons:



- Feminist organisations are lead and informed by women, and have a deep understanding of gendered issues and apply gender analysis to their work. This ensures that women’s rights programs are appropriate, relevant, effective and sensitive to women’s needs.
- Feminist organisations support women to develop leadership skills, which enable women to participate in and influence local, national and international decision-making.
- Feminist organisations can provide employment opportunities to women, and support women’s economic empowerment in a nurturing and gender transformative environment that has fair working conditions and collective capacity strengthening.
- Feminist organisations build solidarity amongst women within and between communities, and support collective action for policy change.
- Feminist organisations embody and practice participatory, grassroots approaches that enable community members, including marginalised groups, to have an active role in designing, implementing and evaluating programs that affect their lives.
- Feminist organisations are more likely to apply gender transformative interpretations of *tabu* (indigenous knowledge) in program design and implementation.
- Feminist organisations generally prioritise processes that focus on capacity strengthening and sustainability. Rede Feto highlights the importance of international organisations and donors building exit strategies into program design and implementation, “in order to guarantee the outcome of building national capacity towards sustainability” (2009 p.2).

### **Case study: Women’s local and national leadership in Bangladesh (Professor Margaret Alston, Dr Kerri Whittenbury and Alex Haynes (PhD student))**

Our research in Bangladesh has shown:

- Evidence of effectiveness of quotas
- The need for more women in leadership roles
- Attention to local level women’s groups and support for national organisations.
- Support for NGOs operating in these areas with a human rights and gender sensitive framework.

### **Case study: Women in political leadership in South Africa – Vedhna Lalla (PhD student)**

Until 1994, South Africans congregated along racial lines to challenge or reinforce the Apartheid structure. An examination of the various groups involved in the anti-Apartheid movement reveals that gender was of little significance with regards to leadership appointments and opportunities. In fact, the anti-Apartheid struggle produced both male and female heroes. However, the realization of a full democracy led to, or at least entrenched sexism – another form of discrimination. Following the first post-Apartheid elections in 1994, male-dominated leadership elite emerged in the public and private sectors, adapting the patriarchal tradition of some African communities to a much broader leadership domain.





According to the *Millennium Development Goals Monitoring Report of South Africa* (Republic of South Africa 2013), in 2009, 44% of parliamentary seats were held by women, an increase from 25% in 1994. This suggests that the parliamentary representation of women is of priority. It may be argued that Government is attempting to be inclusive and this is indicated here.

However, the indicators from the corporate sector tell a different story. According to the Grant Thornton *International Business Report* (Grant Thornton 2013), just over one quarter of top decision-making roles in South African businesses were filled by women. As had been the case since 2009, only 28% of senior management positions were filled by women. Furthermore, 21% of South African businesses surveyed had no women in senior management positions.

A *Women in Leadership Census* conducted by Businesswomen's Association of SA (BWASA) found that the proportion of women in executive management positions in South Africa has increased marginally (BWASA 2013). The question remains, is diversity and Affirmative Action being applied or are women fronting? According to BWASA president, Kunyalala Maphisa women still have a long way to go to achieve equality in the upper levels of management in South Africa. The same report states that there were more white than black women in executive manager positions, but more black women in director positions.

## **SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Case study: Women in agribusiness in Lao PDR (Professor Margaret Alston and Dr Kerri Whittenbury)**

We are beginning a project in Lao PDR looking at the gendered outcomes of out-migration for women farmers. This project assesses the impacts on food security of an increasing number of women being directly engaged in food production as a result of male outmigration.

## **GLOBAL OVERVIEW – Azita Sobhani (PhD student)**

The issues outlined above are situated within a global context of the feminisation of poverty. The increasing feminisation of poverty became globally visible at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995 when it was adopted as one of the twelve arms of the Beijing Platform of Action - “persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women”. Since then the concept has lent itself to a number of definitions but mostly encapsulates the elements: that women form a majority of the world’s poor; and this is linked to feminisation of the household headship with such families being the poorest of the poor. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), although a potent instrument to focus the world on the basic needs issues of development, have narrowly defined indicators of gender equality. These indicators do not take into account the systemic and structural disparities and women’s vulnerability to poverty (such as inequalities in the division of unpaid care work, women’s limited right to assets, violence against women, violations of women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights and their unequal decision making in the household, etc.) that sit behind visible symptoms such as economic poverty, maternal deaths, child mortality, and children not attending primary and secondary education.



As a key example, despite some advances being made in halving global economic poverty of those living on \$1.25 a day, and having an explicit goal of gender equality, much remains to be achieved in related areas of maternal health and education (in 63 developing countries, girls were more likely to be out of school than boys among primary and secondary age groups (United Nations 2014), and unpaid domestic and care work (women roughly spend on average twice as much or more time than men). Additionally, although the maternal mortality ratio declined globally, we have not met the target of reducing the ratio by three-quarters. In 2013, an estimated 140 million women who wanted to stop or delay childbearing did not have access to family planning – and this seems to be one of the MDG targets that is likely to be met last (United Nations 2014). Age at the time of first marriage is rising, but women in poor and rural areas continue to marry young, and have fewer opportunities to go to school, less say in household decision making and are more likely to experience domestic violence. They are exposed to the risks of early pregnancy and childbirth, are not able to negotiate spacing of children, and due to lack of money for skilled birth, early pregnancy is the leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 in developing countries (UN Women 2014).

Furthermore, although the MDG target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water has been achieved, in 2011, 768 million people still drew water from an unimproved source. Here women and girls often bear the burden of water collection and walking long distances for access. Again, just 49% of the global population has access to improved sanitation. Access is critically important for women's safety and dignity, and UN Secretary-General's latest report (2013) highlights that the missing gender dimension of this target risks neglecting the specific needs of women and girls. Finally, with a projected 6.8 billion mobile-cellular subscriptions by the end of 2013, global penetration (measured as the number of subscriptions in relation to total population) will reach 96 per cent. But women are on average 21 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone (UN Women 2014). This global overview of the MDGs shows that the identified issues in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region are situated in a complex global system of gender inequality.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Millennium Development Goals Gender Chart (2014) highlights that between 2002 and 2011, the share of bilateral sector allocable aid in support of gender equality remained relatively static starting at 27% in 2002 and rising to 35% in 2011. However in 2011, only 5 percent of the total bilateral aid went to programs making gender equality its principal objective. Gender equality focused aid is concentrated in the social sectors of education and health with alarmingly low levels of aid targeted towards economic sectors. Only 2 percent of aid to the economic and productive sectors such as banking, business, agriculture targeted gender equality as its principal objective.

The need for sustained and focused aid on the principle of gender equality in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region is an inevitability that requires planning beyond the traditional transactional bilateral model. Careful consideration needs to be given not only to economic skills and capacity building, but to systemic structural impediments to realisation of human rights of women and girls and robust community engagement programs that invite an examination of human attitudes and cultural norms needed to realise the vision of the advancement of the region - a sustainable, equitable and prosperous future for the region.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

GLASS provides the following recommendations for DFAT's aid program in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region:

1. That gender equality is mainstreamed across the Australian aid program, and the human rights of women and girls are prioritised in all areas of Australia's aid work.
2. That gender equality programming is focused on structural change at individual, household, community, national, regional and international levels, with a focus on challenging entrenched systems of patriarchy, homophobia, racism, neoliberalism and environmental exploitation.
3. That the Australian government aid program prioritises its funding for feminist and women's human rights organisations, understanding that women are most appropriate and most effective in achieving sustainable, gender transformative change.
4. That men's violence against women and girls is prioritised as a key human rights issue in the region, and that gender analysis is undertaken throughout all monitoring to ensure that implementation of Australian-funded aid programs do not increase men's violence against women and girls.
5. That further aid be dependent on gender-sensitive analysis.
6. That research is integrated into all gender programming, with a priority for feminist participatory action research conducted in partnership with Southern universities and local NGOs.



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