

Introduction: Conflict and Peacemaking: Gender perceptions

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To date the international literature has given little consideration to the way gender and social structure relate to conflict, peacemaking and peacekeeping. This is true of the Pacific, where internal conflict in Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Timor-Leste and West Papua have shattered a long held illusion of a peaceful Pacific. Escalating violence and the very different roles women and men have played in dealing with it have highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of ways in which conflict might be reduced in the future, how peace can be achieved more quickly, and better support provided for victims of conflict.

Impact of conflict

These papers highlight the complexities that underlie national conflicts and that hardship and trauma do not end with a peace agreement. Alice Pollard, Ruth Liloqula, Dalcy Paina and Helen Hakena describe the displacement, food shortages, increase in female headed households, chronic physical and psychological trauma and teenage pregnancies that have been the result of conflict in Bougainville and Solomon Islands. They discuss ways to address the long term impact of a generation without education, the increased fear, mistrust and destruction of the economy and infrastructure. All will take many years to overcome. Their papers show very graphically that women and children are the major victims of Pacific Island conflicts and that women are the major, but largely unseen and unacknowledged, instigators of peace. These papers include the personal stories of Pacific Island people – all deeply involved in the violence and conflicts of Bougainville, other parts of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Fiji.

Causes of conflict

Several very clear themes emerge from the papers presented. The causes of conflict, while complex, do not differ greatly from those in other developing countries, most particularly countries with a strong colonial heritage, when, as Bronwen Douglas discusses, the creation of new nation states incorporated very different tribal and ethnic groups. Some causes are universal, including perceived grievances between ethnic groups — usually over resources and power. These are often linked to historical differences and demands by minority ethnic groups to maintain their language, culture and identity. Identity may include demands for a state based on a specific religious affiliation. In terms of the importance of ethnic or tribal identity, the Pacific situation mirrors that of Sub Saharan Africa described by Gebre Selassie.

In the Pacific, the major underlying cause of conflict is unequal access to resources, particularly to land and paid employment, and lack of involvement in decision making and authority. This is brought about by a complex web of population pressure, internal migration and urbanisation; colonial regimes that favoured one ethnic group over others; weak national governments; perceived lack of government concern with, or ability to listen to, demands of the people; centralisation of resources and infrastructure; lack of employment; relative deprivation; and a rapidly increasing gap between a small wealthy elite and a growing number of poor. The situation is exacerbated in the Pacific by a breakdown, or weakening, of traditional methods of dispute resolution and peacemaking. When this is combined with the ready availability of powerful weapons and a 'Rambo' culture among young men, the

likelihood of large scale, open warfare increases dramatically, as Patrick Howley, Carol Kidu and Helen Hakena discuss.

Communication and conflict

A range of factors related to communication also underlie the emergence and escalation of conflict, as well as the possibilities for effective peacemaking. Lack of information about political processes and legislation can lead to conflict. For example, in Fiji, lack of public information and discussion about the content of the 1997 Constitution helped fuel conflict. Although the new 1997 Constitution protected the land and rights of ethnic Fijians, most people were unaware of this, as Mosese Waqa's paper shows. He and Sharon Bhagwan Rolls discusses events in Fiji from an information and media perspective. Lack of knowledge among women of their rights, including their democratic right to vote and their legal rights regarding rape and domestic violence, encourages an escalation of both democratic and personal abuse.

Violence and the media

For the last 30 years, the impact of media violence on young people has been widely discussed with recent acknowledgement among medical professionals in the United States that it can encourage violent behaviour among young people. Discussion in both the symposium and the workshop highlighted growing concerns in Pacific Island communities about the popularity of violent videos, the growing acceptability of sexual violence and the glorification of the 'Rambo' gun toting, macho image as a role model for young men. Patrick Howley critically examines the Pacific 'Rambo' role, its growth and impact. He and Martha Macintyre agree that true peace will only come about when men decide not only to give up their guns but to clear guns and the Rambo image from their minds.

Domestic violence and national conflict

The relationship between domestic violence, a growing culture of violence and national conflict is widely discussed by the authors. Carol Kidu and Martha Macintyre both look at the relationship between increasing domestic violence and national conflict in their discussions of the Papua New Guinean situation. Socialisation of children, particularly boys, is an issue of concern. Women's status, women's roles, and national and international legislation and the way it is interpreted and implemented, are all underlying factors that relate to an increase in conflict.

Control of political, religious, economic and social processes in the Pacific Region, including in Australia, are still overwhelmingly male. The growing culture of violence which usually starts in the home and includes abuse of children, combined with the lack of legislation or will to police domestic violence, augers ill for the future. A recent AusAID appraisal of violence against children in the Pacific outlines the likelihood of child abuse escalating to more widespread conflict. This is borne out by research in Melanesia and Australia which shows that abused children often become abusive teenagers and often violent adults.¹

Pacific women and peacemaking

In the Pacific, women have had a vital role in peacemaking although they have been neither consulted, nor included, in formal peace talks. Alice Pollard, Dalcy Paina, Helen Hakena, Ruth Liloqula and Sharon Bhagwan Rolls write of their experiences working with women's groups, NGOs and church women's groups in their attempts to stop the conflict and alleviate its terrible impact on women and children. All night vigils, expressions of women's solidarity across the Pacific, lobbying political leaders and commanders of the warring factions, going behind the 'army' lines to speak with

soldiers, running the gauntlet of the rebel no-go zones in the Solomons, getting food into Honiara, providing information to Fijian women and addressing the social and economic devastation of 10 years of war in Bougainville are just some of the crucial roles these and other women have played in their efforts for genuine and lasting peace.

The United Nations and international law

The role of Pacific Island women as peacemakers over the last 10 years was reflected in the historic United Nations Security Council meeting in October which, for the first time, focused on gender equality, peace and security. The resolutions include concerns that 'civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict' and 'reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security' (Security Council Resolution S/2000/1044 - A/S-23/10/Res.1).

Donor assistance in conflict resolution and maintaining peace

Donor assistance in peacemaking, peacekeeping and/or restorative justice has not always been as effective as it could have been. Workshop discussion indicated that frequently the outsiders involved have not been aware of all factors underlying a conflict, or have not understood the situation and perceptions of both parties concerned. The role of the parties around a peace table is frequently not clearly understood by anybody. Agreement as to the nature and function of these roles needs careful negotiation by donors, the parties in conflict and all other stakeholders.

There is a perception that donor agencies feel that their role ends when a peace agreement has been signed when, in reality, their major role should just be starting. The aid response needs to support peace negotiations, military peacekeeping where it is needed, humanitarian relief and peacemaking development on a timely basis. While there is recognition that donors are limited by their agency requirements, there is a great need for flexibility and realism about what can be achieved and how long it will take. There is a need for immediate humanitarian intervention that is based on a 'do no harm' ideology, followed by support for government, NGOs and communities to rebuild and relocate. Throughout the Pacific, community development training in conflict avoidance, conflict resolution, mediation and restorative justice skills, is felt to be required. This should be available at all levels of society, including in schools. Communication between government, local government and civil society must be facilitated. There needs to be support for community groups to access information on governance issues as well as on social and economic development. A free press is a vital factor in an informed public.

Policy recommendations

The major policy recommendations that emerged from the 'Conflict and Peacemaking' workshop were for:

- donors and Pacific Island governments to adopt a human rights approach to conflict avoidance, peacemaking and restorative justice and include both women and men in these processes;
- marginalised groups, in particular women and ethnic minorities, to be brought into mainstream political and economic discussion and development activities;
- donor support to help rebuild infrastructure without creating dependency;
- humanitarian relief to be based on the principle of 'do no harm'; and

- donors to be consistent in their social and economic policies and projects to ensure that development outcomes work towards overall stability in Pacific Island countries rather than creating and/or supporting inequalities or maintaining an unequal status quo.

Notes

1 See Sinclair Dinnen, 2000 in Sinclair Dinnen and Allison Ley (eds) *Reflections on violence in Melanesia*, Hawkins Press, Sydney Jane Anderson, 2000 'Innocents betrayed' *Courier Mail*, April 27, p1

Elizabeth Cox, 1992, Campaigning against domestic violence: an evaluation of the PNG Women and Law Committee's Campaign against Domestic Violence, UNICEF report, Port Moresby

Government of Australia 2000, *Young people say DV – no way*, Evaluation of the National Domestic Violence Prevention Workshops for Young People, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra

Government of Australia 2000, 'Young people and domestic violence', Fact sheet from national research on young people's attitudes and experience of domestic violence, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and the Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.