

TOWARDS A JUST AND EQUITABLE ECONOMY, AND A GENDER EQUAL SOCIETY

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This paper is based on conversations between Helen and Kate, and conversations between Helen and the women and men in her village, community and across Bougainville. The paper also draws on evidence collected through a Feminist Participatory Action Research project on climate justice Helen conducted between 2013 and 2015.

Introduction

Much of Bougainville is a matrilineal society and women have been acknowledged as the driving force behind the ceasefire, the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001 and post-conflict attempts at reconciliation and transformation.¹ In Bougainville land entitlements pass through women to their children. These inherited entitlements are not the same as inheriting land ownership though

– instead women inherit the role of custodians of the land. Part of that custodial role is to make sure the land is cared for and used not just for the current family and community but for future generations. Women are born on their land, learn about the land, know their land and tend to their land. Women grow the gardens that almost all the community depends on for sustenance. Women also learn about the plants, the rains, water sources, and the dangers and the remedies

that the forests can provide. But this doesn't mean that women have always been able to make decisions either about their own land or about the industries that impact on their land. Patriarchal attitudes, magnified by colonial assumptions about gender roles and power, deliver significant decision-making power and control to men. When women lose land and have no inheritance, they face a sudden loss of identity and community value. Landless women in a matrilineal, yet patriarchal society, have very few survival options and are vulnerable to exploitation.

Despite the central role women have played in the peace process and their role as custodians of land, they have largely been excluded from decision making over Bougainville's development path. The original agreements to open the Panguna mine excluded women and attempts to reform the agreement mainly involved men. The same criticisms can be made of other development decisions where women are largely excluded yet routinely bear the brunt of the negative impacts.²

This paper argues that women can, and must, play a leading role in forging a new development path for Bougainville. The paper describes women's experiences of and resistance to mining on Bougainville. It argues that an extractivist-based economy is not a model for a gender equal society and that gender equality must be at the heart of a just and sustainable economic model for Bougainville. In this context, past attempts at supporting women's economic power are briefly critiqued. The paper concludes by outlining some elements of an alternative model for a sustainable and just economy and therefore future for Bougainville.

Women's experiences of and resistance to mining on Bougainville

The Panguna mine had an irreparable, devastating impact on women. Women lost their

ancestral lands and with this their children's future birthright. Women living around the mine lost lands through pollution, and the mine itself and its associated infrastructure. It was men, not women, who negotiated the deals that saw land sold to the mining company. Colonial administrators and foreign corporations imposed their own gendered ideas about property and decision making and approached male leaders, disrupting matrilineal systems.³ Negotiations were mostly held away from the village, in environments and in ways that were unfamiliar to women who generally don't feel comfortable negotiating outside of the community context. Women received little compensation in return. The mine also changed the nature of the economy and of society. Almost all the employment offered at the mine went to men. The good jobs went to foreign men, the lower paid jobs went to men from Port Moresby or other parts of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the lowest paid jobs went to Bougainvillean men. The mine directly employed very few women although some jobs were created for women to provide services to the mine and its workforce. Across Bougainville the price of food and other everyday goods increased – far outweighing any income women were able to earn because of the mine, such as selling produce from their gardens at the markets that sprang up around the mine site.

In Bougainville, women primarily manage water resources for their households and villages. Pollution from the mine then impacts

1. Barbara King (2009), *Women and Peacebuilding: A Feminist Study of Contemporary Bougainville*, PhD Thesis, The University of Queensland.

2. This experience is not unique to Bougainville. Michael Ross found that when extractive industries dominate the economy, women's political influence is significantly reduced and countries "are left with atypically strong patriarchal norms, laws, and political institutions". (Michael Ross, 'Oil, Islam, and Women', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 102, 2008 No. 1).

3. Helen Hakena, Peter Ninnes and Bert Jenkins (editors) *NGO's and post-conflict recovery: the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, Bougainville* (Asia Pacific Press ANU E Press: Canberra, 2006).



Credit: Rob Z - stock.adobe.com.

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women more so than men because women are forced to walk much further to obtain clean water for their families. Some women are forced to use dangerous, polluted water for irrigation, cleaning, cooking and even drinking. When water becomes scarce, either because of pollution or drought, men often take over. Some men have placed locks on their family's water tanks and the distribution of water then becomes a source of power for men.

Given women's obligations to land it is not surprising that women have been at the forefront of movements to close Panguna and to keep it closed. Most recently, in June 2017 women from the 'seven sisters' area of central Bougainville successfully blockaded

a meeting at the Panguna mine site where a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that might have paved the way for a re-opening of the mine was to be signed. At that time one of the women, Regina Erenngmari, said "I don't want mining to be opened, no BCL, no mining. Because land is owned by the women, not the men".⁴ The women also won an injunction against the signing of the MOU under Section 53 of the Constitution of PNG prohibiting "unjust deprivation of property", a provision preserved in the Constitution of the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG). Finally, in January 2018, the ABG imposed an indefinite moratorium on the site.

Opposition to the Panguna mine and other extractive, foreign-owned industries are born of multiple grievances. Environmental devastation

4. Eric Tlozek, 'Bougainville Copper Limited's Panguna mine hits roadblock from protesters', Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 17 June 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-17/bougainville-copper-panguna-mine-suffers-setback/8626762>.

is a central concern as are, the inequalities that these projects create and exacerbate. This includes the inequalities between men and women; between those in the community who profited from the mine and those who didn't; between the Bougainvillean workers and the foreign workers; between the companies who extracted the profit and the local people who received 1% of profit⁵ yet suffered the consequences; and between rich, powerful countries and a people whose right to self-governance had long been denied.

Many people have written about the paradox of the 'resource curse': that countries with the most abundant resources suffer with the lowest human development. Less has been written about the way this impacts on women. It's clear that an extractivist-based economy has direct negative impacts for women as women from Panguna have experienced but it also has long-term adverse economic and planning impacts that increase gender inequality. For example, extractive industries re-direct what little state funds there are into infrastructure for the business (roads and ports), into security for the mine and even redirect education funding toward the skills needed in the mine, which again focuses on skills for male workers. Similarly healthcare suffers from reduced public investment. While healthcare services might increase around the mine they can be focused on the health of a primarily male workforce. Finally, higher currencies (which is discussed by Paul Flanagan in his paper) mean alternative industries that women may foster can collapse.

The 'masculinsation' of the Bougainvillean economy caused by a focus on extractive industries and the subsequent conflict and militarisation of the community contributed to a horrific increase in violence against

5. Bougainvilleans received 5% of the PNG government's profit. The PNG Government originally received only 1.25% of profits which was later renegotiated to 20%. So the largest percentage attributed to Bougainvilleans was 1%. (Rory Ewins, *The Bougainville Conflict*, <http://speedysnail.com/pacific/bougainville.html>).

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women that continues to plague Bougainville today. A UN study found that 62% of men in Bougainville have admitted to raping a woman.⁶ The study places Bougainville as one of the most dangerous place for women outside of a war zone in the world. It's not surprising given extractive industries and militarism both independently fundamentally change the nature of gender relations in society and are associated with high rates of violence against women.^{7 8} Women leaders feel that the respect for community life and the central role women played within the community was eroded during the conflict and many young men were schooled in conflict, rather than community harmony.

The disconnect between women's economic empowerment programs and women's economic power

There have been efforts to increase 'women's economic empowerment' in Bougainville. Yet in practice economic empowerment projects have been mostly about increasing some women's access to credit schemes to establish

6. Fulu, E., Warner, X., Miedema, S., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T. and Lang, J., 'Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific' (UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV: Bangkok, 2013).

7. Katy Jenkins, 'Women, mining and development: An emerging research agenda' in *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 1 (2). 2014, pp. 329-339.

With an abundance of resources, a young population and the knowledge that collectively people have already changed the development path of Bougainville, the foundations of a more just future exist.

micro-enterprises or improve access to markets. Despite the term ‘empowerment’, rarely do these programs lead to increased power for women collectively. Instead they focus on trying to build individual power yet ignore many of the structural barriers to greater economic power for women. While some women benefit from these schemes and non-discriminatory access to financial resources is important, international experience shows us that they do not deliver structural changes or increased collective power to women.

Economic empowerment cannot simply be about having increased access to money through credit, more women working for wages in extractive industries or more women being mine owners. Increased money does not necessarily translate to increased power if the money is then given to or taken by men. For example, the 2013 Bougainville Family, Health and Safety Study reported high rates of economic abuse of women by men: 35.2% of women reported that their male partner had taken their earnings against their will, and 55.4% of women reported that they had been subject to economically abusive acts.⁹ Women have not increased power if the process of earning money has decreased their autonomy or influence (which can be the experience of some women employees); or if the increase in wages then leads to increased time demands as women juggle their work obligations with

8. Erika Svedberg, ‘Militarization and Women: Gendered Militarization’, International Studies Association and Oxford University Press, 2012, <http://internationalstudies.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-263?print=pdf>.

9. Jewkes, R., E. Fulu and Y. Sikweyiya, ‘Family, Health and Safety Study, Bougainville, Papua New Guinea’, 2013 Medical Research Council South Africa and Partners for Prevention.

household food production, water and energy management, and child and elderly care. Increased time demands on women can lead to reduced community power when women can no longer participate in community discussions or other civic processes.

Women’s economic power will only exist when women are able to make collective decisions over the economic model they want to adopt. Real, participatory processes to work on alternatives to educate women about options; to work with them to trial and then collectively evaluate different strategies; and to make decisions over how they are implemented are required. Increasingly there is a recognition that women should be included in meetings. But too often women feel like flowerpots at meetings who are there for beautifying the meeting. When women are asked how to plan a consultative process, and how women would like to come together to learn and collectively decide, then women will have power.

Towards a just and equitable economy

With an abundance of resources, a young population and the knowledge that collectively people have already changed the development path of Bougainville, the foundations of a more just future exist. The elements of a sustainable economy that aims for gender equality and sustainability must include: investments in and support for education, health and social care; cooperative resources for agricultural production that can be brought to local and international markets; cooperative energy and water management; community managed tourism and service industries; and new forms of international solidarity. Some of these elements are explored briefly in this section.

The elements of a more equitable economy need to redress the symptoms of past failures, restore elements of the shared economy and community life that existed before the



Photo credit: Christina Hill

conflict and also create new approaches to a 'solidarity economy'. Economic decisions are intertwined with social and cultural lives and the decisions we make need to create stronger and fairer social and cultural lives. This can be done by restoring community owned common land and making sure it is cared for and benefits all and ensuring our economic policies redistribute the fruits of our collective labour, whether it be paid or unpaid. A key feature of 'solidarity economies' is that decisions are democratically made by all involved. If we collectively build new industries, we can collectively decide where profits get reinvested. When women are at the centre of that decision making they often reinvest in common goods – whether that be in health-care, energy, water or in shared tools for our agriculture.

Because of the conflict a generation of young people were denied education, and this has had long lasting and devastating impacts on Bougainville. Many skilled professionals

now come from outside Bougainville to work which means Bougainvilleans miss out on the few jobs that pay a living wage in areas like health, and Bougainville loses opportunities to develop vocational skills. Part of the solution lies in providing education and vocational training to both young people and adults – particularly those who missed out during the crisis. Health education should be a priority as more health professionals and health research is needed to address problems such as maternal mortality and childhood malnutrition. To take one example, there was previously a nurse training centre in Arawa, Central Bougainville, which was burnt down early on in the crisis, but now nurses come from outside Bougainville. Re-opening the centre and expanding it to include a research centre – which could be in partnership with a tropical health research institute – should be a priority given the health needs in Bougainville.

Women have strong agricultural knowledge

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yet better coordination to share safe agricultural practices and traditional practices is required. Many women continue to use unsafe pesticides and fertilisers even though the environment is extremely fertile and shouldn't require additional chemical inputs. Agricultural cooperatives and exchange centres where knowledge, equipment and inputs can be shared have proved useful in women's collective farming efforts in other countries. Seed banks or libraries can assist women exchanging information on plants that thrive in Bougainville and in retaining Bougainville's biodiversity.

Women's cooperatives have proven to be economically, environmentally and socially transformative in other countries. In Morocco, for example, women's cooperatives producing argan oil have transformed the lives and relationships of Amazigh women, increased the rate of girl's education and halted the deforestation of large argan forests.¹⁰ In Bougainville, copra, virgin coconut oil and cocoa could benefit from a similar approach. To date, however, efforts to increase production have focused on individual production and attracting foreign investors. Women are often the producers of these products but men have negotiated the sales and benefited from the profits. Women led cooperatives can provide much greater bargaining power and also support education, exchange and support. A cocoa cooperative existed before the crisis but hasn't been effectively re-established despite the interest in increasing cocoa production.

Similar approaches could be utilised for energy. The majority of women and their families live without reliable access to energy. Fuel costs can be high and variable. Bio-gas from

10. Zoubida Charrouf and Dom Guillaume, Sustainable Development in Northern Africa: The Argan Forest Case. Sustainability, 1, 2009.

pigs has been successfully used by some households but there are limits to the broader uptake of this. Some homes have access to solar power, but there are few skills to service the equipment and solar power is limited to primarily day use. Cooperatives could develop micro-grids and support efforts to give Bougainvillean women access to programs such as the barefoot solar engineers which has begun to spread to the Pacific.¹¹

Women continue to be involved in artisanal small-scale alluvial mining (ASM) in Bougainville. The impact on women's health and the environment is alarming, and women and children are known to "suffer dust inhalation leading to respiratory diseases, exposure to mercury and its neurotoxic affects and in some cases cyanide exposure when used in reworking tailings".¹² Yet ASM research in other environments has shown that "women's ASM activities are crucial sources of revenue for themselves and their families, allowing for basic survival, health and education, as well as accumulation activities that improve the status of women and their dependents".¹³ Women miners need education and safer processing inputs as well as support for fairer wages and prices that could come through cooperatives designed specifically to support women miners.

To truly re-shape our economy and achieve sustainable development we need stronger democratic participation of women. While there are three dedicated places for women in the ABG, Bougainville has been unable to get much past that quota. In addition to greater representation is the need for greater participation. The

11. <https://www.barefootcollege.org/the-launch-of-our-pacific-womens-barefoot-solar-initiative/>.

12. Danellie Lynas, 'Health and safety issues faced by women engaged in small scale mining in PNG - could a flexible and informal training program improve their quality of life?', Proceedings 19th Triennial Congress of the IEA, Melbourne 9-14 August 2015.

13. Doris Buss et al, 'Gender and Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Central and East Africa: Barriers and Benefits', GROW Working Paper Series, Institute for the Studies of International Development, GWP-2017-02.



Photo credit: Christina Hill

decisions around Bougainville's development path would benefit from women's input in participatory budget setting processes for example. A community development council involving at least 50% women could complement the role of the elected Government and work to harmonise development assistance as well as the necessary supporting fiscal policies. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹⁴ points to the obligations of governments to establish community partnerships to meet the ambitious agenda.

Some concluding comments

Bougainville is clearly owed reparations for past damage to its environment, society and missed opportunities for its future. It's a clear principle of international law that the 'polluter pays'. The global legal principle of solidarity that underpins the founding of the UN Charter also requires richer countries to provide development assistance of 0.7% of GDP. However, with international aid waning and aid often used as a means of supporting the interests of investors from donor countries, other forms of international solidarity are required.¹⁵

Bougainvillean women cannot bear an economy based on extraction and exploitation. If Bougainville is to enjoy a gender equitable and thriving community, it must design

an economy that benefits all, not just a tiny minority. To do that it needs to challenge the idea that economies must extract and produce financial wealth and instead measure economic success on the ability of the community to improve its health, its livelihoods and reduce violence especially against women. Bougainville must establish new ways of working and new forms of solidarity. Bougainvilleans have shown themselves to be capable of survival in the worst circumstances. Bougainvilleans must now draw on their histories and prove that they have kinder, more creative, more equitable and more sustainable ways to thrive.

14. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

15. As communities in the Global North seek to transition to sustainable and more caring economies, they often also seek ways to take responsibility for the failure of governments to address the climate and inequalities crises. According to the Transnational Institute (TI), those communities might also seek ways to support global transitions "a key international intervention that individual Transition initiatives (primarily in the Global North) could therefore make would be to link with and support particular commons regimes in the Global South. This could expand the current focus on social enterprise in the Transition movement to include a focus on building economic, social, cultural and political connections between particular localities in the Global North and South" (Tom Henfrey and Justin Kenrick, *Climate, commons and hope: the transition movement in global perspective*, Transnational Institute, 2015, https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/018138c_tni_climate-commons-hope.pdf).