

GENDER AND ECONOMY IN MELANESIAN COMMUNITIES

THE RIVER OF CHANGE

LEADERSHIP, SAY
AND ROLE MODELS

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WOMEN
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Women's voice in community decisions

Positive male role models
Less risk taking and violent behaviour

Infrastructure supports women's and men's economic opportunity
Young men more involved in household and community work
Women in non-traditional leadership roles

Valuing women's and men's contributions

More of men's income spent on the household

Fair division of household tasks, including parenting

End of violence and manipulation

Respect, communication and shared planning

Women gain leadership opportunities

Women have control over their income

Equal influence in household decisions
Women can access and control resources

Women increase their profits / returns

Women have voice in the family
Women gain new skills and access to markets and jobs

Women work together to raise their voices in the community
Women help each other to grow their income and savings

Women trust and support each other

Women exchange skills, and share costs, resources and workloads

Women can resolve conflict between themselves

THE RIVER OF CHANGE

Relationships between women and men are like a river system full of smaller streams or tributaries. In a river system some streams are healthy and clear and full of fish; others are clogged with leaves and dirt, trickling slowly over rocks.

Currently in Melanesia, many parts of this river system are not so healthy, highlighting unequal relations between men and women. Women are disadvantaged in many ways relative to men and this affects their ability to participate in and benefit from economic activities. In many households it is women who carry the burden of labour and responsibility to support the daily needs of the family. Limited sharing of workload and income between women and men, and a lack of support for each other's personal development, limits the capacity for families to improve their well being. In some communities, young men are caught up in a cycle of self-harm and violence due to a lack of male role models that encourage young men to avoid high risk behaviour, contribute to the household, and treat women with dignity and respect. Decisions about the use of communal resources can tend to reflect the needs of a small portion of the community, and do not result in equal sharing of benefits, or the development of economic opportunities for all.

From research with Melanesian communities conducted in 2010 and 2011, four broad areas of community life emerged that make up the larger river system of relations between women and men. These are:

1. Women 'come up'



2. Women's collective action



3. Togetherness in the household



4. Leadership, say and role models in the community



These four tributaries each help promote economic opportunity for women and men, as well as improved relationships, and more equal sharing of economic benefits. If action is taken to improve the flow of these rivers, the overall situation for women and men can improve. While focusing on one section of the river will achieve change in some areas, strengthening the flow across the entire system – that is in all the four tributaries – is needed to create lasting and comprehensive change towards gender equality.



WOMEN 'COME UP'

What it means....

- ➔ Women gaining confidence and realising their own value.
- ➔ Women gaining access to and control of economic opportunities, training, markets and resources to expand their influence in households and community.
- ➔ Women enhancing their capacity to earn and control personal income and resources.

Why is it important for women to 'come up'?

When women 'come up' (or in Solomon Islands Pidgin 'Kam Ap'), they have more confidence, skills and resources to control and improve their lives. They can intensify their production, diversify their income sources, decide for themselves how they spend their spare time, and how they distribute their income and produce. This benefits women, and also benefits their family and communities: studies show that women who have control over their production and income usually reinvest a high portion of it into others.

"In 2010, I attended training on how to grow cabbages. After that I had more healthy vegetables and I knew how to continuously plant, transplant seedlings and sell the mature ones. I got more money for food for the family... I even employed some men to work in the garden to lessen my work. This meant that I had more time to spend with my friends, do washing and attend trainings."

Young woman, Solomon Islands

Challenges faced by women trying to 'come up' in their community

Women's efforts to 'come up' can be hindered by unsupportive husbands and families, lack of markets and difficulties getting to markets, and the costs of running their small businesses, which leaves little surplus money. Women's earning potential can be limited by small profits, lack of time, gender stereotypes that restrict women's access to work opportunities, and discrimination that often sees women earn less than men for work of similar value.

Issues you can explore to find out whether women in your target community are 'coming up'

- ➔ To what extent can women who earn their own income decide how it will be spent?
- ➔ Do women have access to resources, markets, services and the support necessary to build their businesses, and grow and stabilise their income?
- ➔ What level of confidence do women have to connect with other women, develop their skills, speak out on issues that concern them and take on leadership roles?
- ➔ To what extent do women have access to opportunities that provide an equitable return on their labour (income earned compared to time spent doing the work) relative to men?

"My husband doesn't give me money other than for food shopping so I started my own business. Now I am surviving on my own [using my own money to buy personal items]. I don't need to depend on my husband's wages."

Married woman, Fiji



WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE ACTION

What it means....

- ➔ Women creating formal and informal networks and groups with other women to share skills, resources and labour, develop income opportunities, grow their income and savings, and strengthen their voice at the community level.

Why is women's collective action important?

Women and men in Melanesia have very separate roles and responsibilities. Women often have overwhelming responsibility for day-to-day needs of the household, but have limited time, mobility, resources, and economic opportunities to fulfil this expectation. To improve their access to new economic opportunities, while ensuring they meet their responsibilities to the household, women often turn to other women (rather than men) for assistance. For example, women exchange produce to diversify food for the family, or support each other with gifts and care giving during hardship such as illness. By working together, women can learn income-generating skills, increase their income by reducing production and marketing costs and risks, increase access to markets, better manage workloads, and increase productivity. Involvement in a group can give women more voice and leadership opportunities, so they are more likely to be heard on community issues. Communities where women are well organised and have strong relationships between them provide more opportunities for women to improve their own and their family's well being.

"When women's husbands do not have time for gardening, and the women want bigger gardens, they take turns to work in each other's gardens. They also pool funds to pay for fuel and boat hire to take their produce to the market."

Woman, Solomon Islands

"Before joining the Women's Farmers Network Maria used to be very shy. When she became a Network member she started to meet other women, share knowledge and attend meetings and training activities. In meetings, the women took turns to chair. At first Maria was too shy to chair the meeting, but over time her confidence grew. Now she has taken a leadership role in the Network and is a very active member."

Story from Solomon Islands

Challenges to collective action

Women's organising is not always easy. Fighting among women can limit their ability to work together, and women can face difficulties in maintaining women-only spaces, particularly when their groups start generating substantial funds. Inclusion of men in 'women's only' groups, can reduce women's influence in the group, and result in decisions that do not reflect women's needs. For mixed-sex groups to be successful, women leaders need to be confident to speak out in front of male leaders, and male leaders need to respect and value women's perspectives in decision-making.

"We fear if men have membership, because they are quite strong, so they might accidentally take over responsibility and then mismanage money. Women are trying to prove themselves first."

Woman, Solomon Islands

Issues you can explore to find out whether women in your target community are forming effective collective action groups:

- ➔ How are women organising to maximise their cash incomes, develop life skills and confidence and share workloads?
- ➔ To what extent does conflict between women affect their ability to maintain cooperative relationships?
- ➔ To what extent can women-only groups and women leaders influence outcomes and create change at the community level?

HOUSEHOLD TOGETHERNESS

What it means...

- ➔ Women and men of all ages, each contributing fairly to household wellbeing including household tasks, care work, parenting and work for cash.
- ➔ Creating a shared vision for the family's future, and family relationships of trust, respect and care, free of physical, psychological or emotional violence.

Why is household togetherness important?

Household togetherness promotes harmony between household members and ensures that the household maximises the skills and capabilities of each member. A household can achieve this by allowing all members to contribute productively to the family's day-to-day needs and have a say about how the household manages its collective resources to meet the interests of the entire household.

"After we built the house, I started to do domestic work at home, help with cleaning when I was home. My wife started to respect me more and I started to respect my wife more because I started to understand what her work involved. I began to recognise that my wife had more responsibilities than me. We started to have a more open and healthier relationship."

Older man, Fiji

"We plant crops together and I sell them in the market. We put half the money in the bank and use the other half to meet household needs. My husband does most of the physical work and I sell the produce, but we discuss together all the decisions we make. It's the best way."

Married woman, Fiji

Challenges to togetherness

"Sometimes men ask for some of their wife's money. If women make money and don't share it, men can beat them."

Older men, Solomon Islands

"Women can make suggestions about how to use money – but ultimately it comes back to men to decide how the money is spent. So suggestions cannot have effect."

Older man, Solomon Islands

"When I go and sell my cake at the market, I don't normally tell my husband how much I have earned. Instead I lie to him and hide the money in my purse in the house. This is because my husband smokes and drinks. I need to hide my money so that we have enough to buy basic items."

Older woman, Solomon Islands

Issues you can explore to find out about household togetherness in your community

- ➔ To what extent are men contributing to parenting and household tasks relative to women in their household?
- ➔ To what extent is household work fairly shared between young men and young women in the household?
- ➔ Do women and men speak to each other in a respectful and caring way?
- ➔ To what extent do men contribute cash, relative to their income, for basic household needs?
- ➔ Do husbands and wives (or live-in couples) trust each other with the management of their personal income and savings?
- ➔ To what extent can women safely negotiate cash management and savings decisions in the household?
- ➔ What approaches do households use to manage finances and why?



This 'river of change' poster is part of a resource kit of materials that help to understand and measure change in economic activities and relations between women and men in Melanesian communities. Other materials include:

- ➔ A poster using floating coconuts to help in understanding roles of women and men in economies in Melanesia
- ➔ Flash cards for three participatory monitoring tools to test the strength and flow of the river of change
- ➔ A manual of indicators and tools for tracking change in gender relations and the economy in Melanesian communities. This manual includes instructions on how to gather data using a survey and six group-based activities to produce community-based indicators of gender equality and economy. It also includes a CD with a data management file in Microsoft Excel to enter, store and analyse the data collected. A Microsoft Word file with example results (in graph format) and analysis is also included in the CD.

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MONITORING THE RIVER OF CHANGE

It is very important to understand what is happening within the river system. Based on this knowledge you can work to adapt your approach or develop new strategies that may be more effective. You need to regularly look for signs that help tell you what kind of change has happened since the last river check, and if the change is positive.

You can check the state of the river by taking a water sample from each tributary of the river you are focusing on. Taking a sample gives you information about the health and flow of the river. Checking the flow and health of the river regularly can help you understand how communities are changing.

The gender equity river system is large, and it is difficult to collect water samples from all tributaries, especially when you have limited resources. Use the activity below to think through some of the areas that you can monitor in your programs.

Team Activity:
Using the river of change (reverse side of this poster):

- Review how your existing activities relate to the river of change, using the Step 1 and Step 2 of the activity 'Deciding where to focus'.
- Identify the tools that you currently use in your program to track change towards gender equality (if any). Write down the information you expect to gain from each tool on a separate sticky note or piece of paper. Place these on the river system under the relevant tributary.
- Looking at the tributaries that your program focuses on, check that you are collecting enough relevant information to know whether the river is flowing and healthy.
- If you do not have sufficient checks across this tributary, brainstorm ideas on how any gaps could be addressed, given your focus and resources.
- For ideas on what to monitor along each tributary, look at the "Issues you can explore" section under each theme listed on this poster. For ideas on different methods for collecting this information, see the following tools in the toolkit:
 - Flash cards of three participatory monitoring tools to test the strength and flow of the river of change
 - The Manual of indicators and tools to track change has instructions on how to use a survey and six group-based activities on a one to three year basis to gather data on gender equality and economic change. It also includes a CD with a Microsoft Excel workbook to enter and analyse the data collected.

DECIDING WHERE TO FOCUS

Achieving gender equality requires strengthening the flow across the four tributaries of the river system. However not all programs have the resources, or capacities required to improve the flow across the entire river system.

Use the following activity to reflect on the sections of the river you are already working on, and the sections you could easily address given the scope of your program, organisational skills and available resources. If you decide that your organisation is not well placed to progress change across all four tributaries, focus on those where you have the most to contribute and consider other organisations or groups that you could work with to promote change in other areas.

Team Activity:
Using the river of change (reverse side of this poster):

- Sit with your team and reflect on the four tributaries of the river. Consider:
 - Are the river and all of its tributaries relevant in your program? Why / Why not?
 - Is there anything you think should be changed, removed or added to the tributaries based on your experience and the local situation?
 - Is the health of any parts of the river likely to change – either positively or negatively – due to planned action by other organisations, government or communities over the next few years? Do these changes require action from your organisation?
- Identify the approaches your team currently uses to strengthen gender equality in your program. Write each approach on a separate sticky note or piece of paper and place on the relevant section of the river. Draw extra tributaries if your programs focus on gender equality themes beyond this river system.
- Reviewing the entire river, identify any gaps in your current strategies that could lead to blockages in the tributaries that are important to your organisation.
- Brainstorm potential ideas on how any gaps could be addressed within your program scope and resources. (Note: You may decide that some tributaries are beyond your expertise or focus or not a high priority compared to other tributaries when you have limited resources). Remember you don't need to do everything – you could link to other organisations or groups that do that work!
- Discuss whether each proposed strategy is the most effective and appropriate way to achieve the desired change. Write the agreed strategies on a different coloured sticky note and place them on the relevant part of the river.
- Review your proposed and existing strategies to make sure they cover the issues important to your organisation. The next step is to develop a work plan and budget. Good luck!



LEADERSHIP, SAY AND ROLE MODELS

What it means...

- ➔ Women having access to a range of leadership opportunities including those beyond women's traditional areas of influence.
- ➔ Women having influence over and gaining equal benefits from communal resources, alongside men.
- ➔ Men providing positive role models for young men and steering them away from risky, anti-social and violent behaviour that undermines community safety, women's physical and mental health and economic progress.
- ➔ Development of community infrastructure that promotes women's and men's economic opportunity.

Why is it important?

When women have a voice alongside men at the community level, about all kinds of community issues, the interests of both women and men are represented, and change can happen that takes everyone's needs and desires into account. When older men in the community act as positive role models for younger men, there is less anti-social and violent behaviour, and young men can be supported to find productive social and economic opportunities, including in the household and the wider community.

"Women want to be involved in planning in the community, church and in the family. Now men are stronger and do the planning, and they undermine women by telling them they don't know anything. If some women did this work [planning], other women folk might gossip about them and spread false news, they would be jealous."

Older women, Solomon Islands

"One group of boys stay together in one house and smoke marijuana. When they run out they paddle [in their boats] to buy marijuana from other villages. They are lazy to work in their gardens and can't support their families. This has also resulted in a lack of respect towards family (fathers, leaders, elders etc)."

Young man, Solomon Islands

Challenges to achieving leadership, say and role models

Men do not always value women's input into community issues, and in the past, some issues have been considered outside of women's domain. These attitudes need to be discussed and negotiated openly, as both women and men have ideas and knowledge to contribute. In some communities, male elders have not been good role models, which means young men lack guidance and support in choosing healthy and positive behaviours for themselves.

"Elders should do things as a good role model [in relation to drinking and smoking] in the community. Right now, older people don't always provide a good role model for young men."

Young man, Solomon Islands

"Although I was in the reconciliation committee, I was only there to sign the cheque. When the money came into the committee I couldn't say anything about how it should be used; only men were involved in distributing the money."

Woman, Solomon Islands

Issues you can explore to find out about leadership, say and role models in communities

- ➔ Do older men provide positive role models for young men at household and community levels?
- ➔ Are community leaders actively intervening to prevent and resolve risky and harmful behaviour in young people?
- ➔ Are women represented in leadership roles in non-traditional areas and in mixed-sex community groups?
- ➔ In decision-making forums, to what extent are women leaders representing the diverse voices of women across the community?