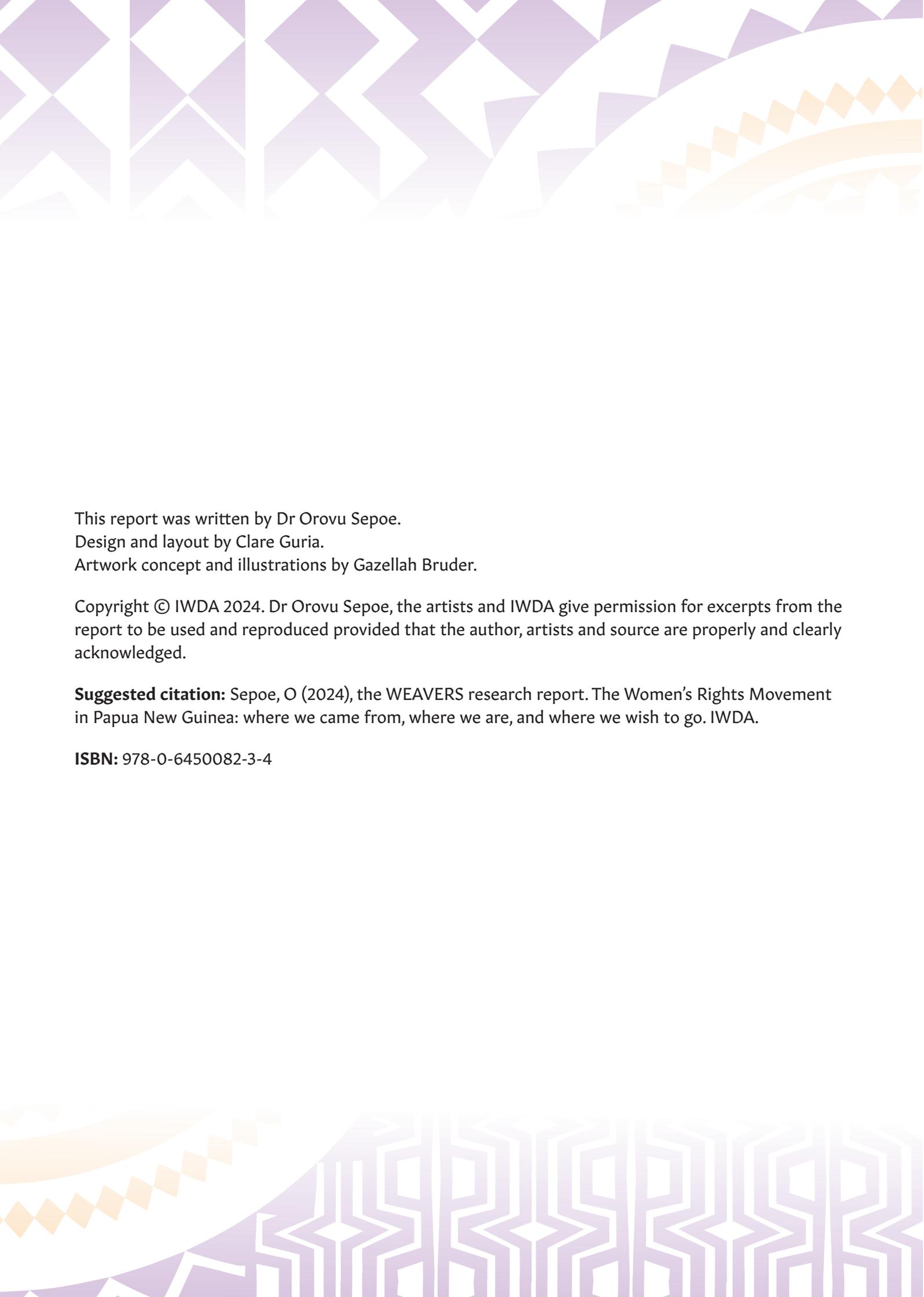


The WEAVERS Research Report



The Women's Rights Movement in
Papua New Guinea: where we came from,
where we are, and where we wish to go.

Dr Orovu Sepoe, April 2024



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The Steering Committee members were:

- Catherine Natera Founder/President, *Papua Hahine Social Action Forum (PHSAF)*
- Ipul Powaseu, Disability Advocate/Activist/Researcher
- » Dr Mercy Masta, *Conciliation Resources Pacific Program*
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- » Sabinah Kaman, *women's rights actor, Minj, Western Highlands Province.*
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- » Linda Tule, President, *PNG Human Rights Defenders Association; Chairlady, Waigani-Ensis Village Court, N.C.D. and Founder and Director- Awaha Sustainable Development Foundation Inc (ASDF)*
- » Sarah Garap, *Founder/Director-Mentor for Meri I Kirap Sapotim and Highlands Women Human Rights Defenders Network*
- » Becky Tarubi, *Government of PNG – Department for Community Development and Religion*
- » Maura Elaripe, Country Coordinator, WABHA representing PLHIV and other key populations (Sex Workers and LGBT)

The data collectors were;

- » Sophie Mangai, Provincial President, East Sepik Council of Women
- » Ferdinand Masa, Peacebuilding Facilitator, Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation, Autonomous Region of Bougainville
- » Kenneth Manman, Kafe Urban Settlers Women's Association, Eastern Highlands Province
- » Kune Garap, Meri I Kirap and Highlands Women's Human Rights Defenders Network
- » Dorothy Powaseu, Disability Advocate and Pro Bono Legal Services for Vulnerable women

This was a great learning and enriching experience for all involved. The seamless approach adopted in the research was premised on truly collaborative teamwork. **This research report is a product of their combined effort.**

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This report is testimony to your generosity.

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FOREWORD

I am humbled by this opportunity to have led the WEAVERS Research project. The WEAVERS research is intricately linked to my personal journey going back more than two decades. I have a long-standing research and professional interest in women's movement and collective action in Papua New Guinea. My doctoral research looked at the PNG National Council of Women (NCW) as a case study, and its role in advancing women's right during the first 10 to 15 years of its existence. My PhD thesis titled "Changing Gender Relations in PNG: the Role of Women's Organisations" was published in 2000. Henceforth, with three decades of experience working with the women's movement and a cross-section of women leaders throughout PNG, the WEAVERS research project provided an exciting opportunity to re-visit, investigate and understand the broader landscape of women organizing.

Most significantly, the research brought together rights actors from diverse sectors to map out, investigate, discuss, dialogue and understand the overall landscape of the women's rights movement against a background of a visible lapse in the National Council of Women (NCW), the legislated national level entity entrusted to promote women's rights, and actively mobilise other women's rights organisations (WROs) across PNG.

The significance of this action-oriented research is reflected in the collective local knowledge of the Steering Committee and data collectors who have affiliations with diverse WROs. The partnership and collaboration throughout the research process paved way for self-reflection, strengthening relationships, and forging new linkages through sharing of insights and information. As rights actors who have led, and continue to lead and work with diverse WROs, this was an opportunity for self-reflection; to re-connect; think through challenges, capture the voices and perspectives of other rights actors; and identify opportunities going forward

for strengthening the PNG women's rights movement.

WROs are important agents for progressing women's rights and empowerment, from both historical and practical perspectives. They are diverse in terms of focus areas and in how they work in different contexts to promote women's rights. WROs work independently and collectively to address the root causes of gender inequality.

The WEAVERS research provided an opportunity to bring together rights actors who are aligned to, or work with diverse WROs in PNG to explore the ecosystem of women's movement; and in particular, to share insights and knowledge, identify gaps, opportunities and shared priorities for future directions.

Dr Orovu Sepoe
Research Lead
WEAVERS Research Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognising the importance and transformative role that women's rights organisations (WROs) and rights actors play in addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment, the WEAVERS research set out to unravel and understand the ecosystem of rights actors, individuals, groups and networks that comprise the women's movement in Papua New Guinea. The underlying complexity of a post-colonial and ethno-linguistically diverse society such as PNG provided a solid premise for applying decolonial ways of thinking, articulating ideas and sharing experiences to understand the women's movement.

The entire research process, shaped by consensual and collective decision-making, was in itself a manifestation of the need for stronger collaboration, for coming together as actors, activists, advocates, leaders, citizens - in spite of power hierarchies and diversity - to achieve our common goals of equality and empowerment, a better understanding of ourselves, plus more.

Key Research Questions

The three **key research questions** that guided the research process are;

1. What constitutes the women's rights movement in PNG?
2. Who are the women's rights organisations (WROs)/networks in PNG and what do they do?
3. What are the linkages between different actors in the women's rights movement, what are the challenges and opportunities for strengthening linkages?

The WEAVERS research project aimed to strengthen the PNG women's rights movement through a locally owned and implemented research process, drawing on feminist and decolonial research approaches. This research project was one component of the broader Women's Empowerment and Voice for Equal

Rights (WEAVERS) program, funded by the Australian government through the PNGAus Partnership. The research team comprised local rights actors drawn from diverse groups including emerging and professional leaders, academia, women with disability, faith-based groups, vulnerable populations, and male advocates across all regions in PNG.

A total of 38 WROs from five research sites participated in the research. The geographical regions of Mamose, the Highlands, New Guinea Islands and Southern or Papua, and stakeholders at the national level were selected for the fieldwork.

Research Methodology and Analysis

At all phases of the research process, a collective, consensual, shared decision-making approach was adopted. The fieldwork data was collated using Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) inspired by the Meri Bung Tok approach developed and applied by Steering Committee member Sarah Garap. The fieldwork was organised with contextual and local knowledge in mind. For this reason, data collection was undertaken by team members with familiarity and networks with selected WROs based in their respective regions.

Sense checking and analysis of data was undertaken collectively by the research team over three workshops and further processed by me as the Lead Researcher. The key findings were then synthesized to respond to the three key WEAVERS research questions.

Key findings from the research presented in this report reflects the cultural nuances, perceptions, lived experiences, the challenges and opportunities as shared by members of the PNG women's rights movement.

It's a story about how far we have come; where we are; and where we wish to go in advancing women's rights.

Key Findings

Theme #1. Definition of Rights and Understanding of Women's Rights:

Definition of rights and understanding of women's rights is consistent amongst rights actors and stakeholders from diverse sectors across all regional contexts. When asked about the definition of rights, the vast majority of participants responded with a **clear** understanding of all principles of human rights and women's rights, including that rights come with responsibility and the need to respect the rights for others.

There is a strong cultural precedent of women coming together (Meri Bung in Tok Pisin) and historical perspective to the story of women's movement in PNG. The collective conscious of women in PNG regarding women's advancement, and later on human rights, begun with the earliest form of women's collectives; particularly with church and colonial influence respectively through women's fellowships and ministries, and through women's clubs in the 1950s and 1960s.

This **merging of both faith and secular rights-based groups** in the PNG women's movement follows a global trend of asserting difference amongst non-Western conception of women's movement and strands of feminism.

The specific focus of WROs is shaped by lived experience, which may differ between regions; e.g. work relating to Sorcery Allegation Related Violence (SARV) is concentrated in the Highlands region.

However the research identified a critical gap, in that **women's citizenship right to demand government accountability isn't a focus, or is overlooked in WROs understanding of rights and their activities**. This links to findings on the lack of funds and resources experienced as a common challenge by many WROs across all regions.

Theme #2. Linkages between rights actors and women's rights organisations.

Rights actors in PNG know each other and many have worked together at some point in time on particular activities or programs. Most are still actively involved in or connected to WROs, whether functioning or inactive. The linkages can be seen at different levels:

- personal, or actor to actor relationship;
- issue level – e.g. GBV or economic empowerment; program level – e.g. *Sanap Wantaim*; (literally translate as Stand Up Together]
- or at the institutional level, e.g. Provincial Council of Women (PCW) affiliated to the National Council of Women (NCW), or church women's fellowships aligned to mainstream church structures.

The Highlands region and Bougainville stand out as having the most active WROs, made possible with strong support from donors working together with NGOs and government, and indicating there has been greater resourcing of WROs in conflict-prone/post-conflict regions.

With the exception of church women's groups and a few other urban-based professional groups, the ability of WROs to convene large forums for building solidarity or sharing experiences is limited by funding or resource constraints.

Men, young and old, are also increasingly engaged in the work of a number of WROs, or in male-focused programs. Within the context of social-familial relationships in PNG, male advocacy is not a new thing, because women's lives and their gender roles are grounded in cultural-social relationships with others, which includes men. **PNG WROs are best placed to understand the cultural nuances of these roles, which is why it is crucial to allow for locally designed approaches to working with men.**

There is a **general awareness amongst WROs of the rights of women with disability, persons with disability and vulnerable/key populations** (e.g. sex workers, PLWHIV and LGBTQI+) but their inclusion is mostly in principle (token), and it is common to find these groups working in separate spaces to articulate and protect their rights.

The research also looked at linkages between WROs and other stakeholders, in particular, government and donors. WRO linkages with government vary over time and locality, with many stating the relationship is mostly weak and ad hoc to a large extent.

Linkages with **bilateral and multilateral donors** exist, but local voices and priorities are drowned out by formal funding conditions and procedures. Hence, the decolonial participatory approach adopted in the WEAVERS research has opened up a fresh opportunity for WROs to speak out, be heard and to lead donor funded research, including meaningful participation in programs and projects.

Theme #3. Ecosystem of Women's Movement

A key insight from the research findings is that the PNG women's movement constitutes a "**collective consciousness**". This is truly empowering, particularly in the face of fragmentation, weak institutional linkages and resource constraints amongst WROs. Consciousness about rights amongst rights actors offers the opportunity for movement strengthening, linkages and relationships within and across all regions of PNG.

The research data reveals some semblance of movement in the Highlands and Bougainville, but elsewhere, WROs seem to be working in isolation.

The NCW (see case study/boxed text on pages 41 and 42), as the legislated umbrella organisation, is central to our quest to understand the ecosystem of women's movement, despite its lack of functionality, at the time of this research, and indeed for the past decade (2013- 2023).

Additionally, in the context of PNG where the churches and WROs have been interconnected in their work towards women's rights makes the separation of secular and faith-based movements problematic. Women's rights actors are simultaneously faith driven as well as rights advocates and actors in the secular rights space. The very existence of multiple identities of women is testimony to this phenomenon.

#4. Opportunities and Challenges for strengthening linkages.

Opportunities for WROs and rights actors within the movement include convening rights actors and stakeholders to chart the way forward; creating space for youth and emerging leaders, including through peer-to-peer learning; mobilizing around shared issues; and sharing resources to work in solidarity. In doing so, there is an opportunity in the act of recognizing that coming together in groups gives us strength to speak out, work to influence and bring changes.

For **actors supporting the movement** (e.g. international donors, development agencies, women's rights organisations and others such as the private sector) there are key opportunities to provide core funding to WROs for organisational capacity building, technical support to strengthen linkages, and core support for women's rights programs.

The **lack of funding and capacity is a major challenge** for WROs and the women's rights movement. There are also challenges amongst WROs and women's rights movements themselves, in terms of competition, self-interest and weak leadership or over-reliance on individuals, which prevents WROs from working more effectively together. Overcoming both the external and internal challenges will be critical in order to strengthen the PNG women's movement into the future.

Conclusion

There is a women's movement, in terms of a "collective consciousness" about women's rights in PNG. The research data speak to this, affirming that despite weak organisational linkages and a fragmented ecosystem, rights actors are resilient. Working in partnership with male advocates, women persevere and continue working to address their rights across all regions, despite the odds.

The right to demand government accountability is a critical gap in the women's movement. Our understanding of rights must include injustice in being overlooked, not being funded or negligence by government in addressing concerns of women, to empower them and improve their lives. Obvious lack of influence by rights actors in resource distribution at all levels of government is the main cause of weakness and fragmentation in women's movement in PNG. Weakness and fragmentation results

from both lack of resources and competition for resources amongst WROs. This is a critical gap worth addressing. Realization of this gap can motivate rights actors to mobilise and demand the government for change, for the collective benefit of our nation as a whole. After all, PNG can only progress with protection of women's rights and gender equality.

Recommendations and Future Directions

The findings were further synthesised to highlight future directions or recommendations. In all of the below, external development partners can play a significant role to leverage and influence support for WROs and governments at all levels.

In partnership, critical issues of gender inequality across all sectors can be addressed by all rights actors and duty bearers at all levels.

Funding/Resourcing

Key Stakeholders: Government, women's rights organisations rights actors, donors

- The government should create a basket of resources or make core, flexible and long-term funding available for women's rights organisations for capacity building, human resources, infrastructure and skills development of NGOs. This will shift current focus on activity-based and ad hoc project funding.
- WROs should speak out and raise issues of government budgeting/ resource allocation and demand inclusion of separate budget line for women, (especially in Provincial Budgets).
- The national GBV Secretariat under Department for Community Development and Religion should direct the funding it receives to Provincial Administrations to enable Provincial GBV Action Committees to carry out their programs. [This agenda is in the process of being implemented by the government].
- The women's movement should engage in discussion with the Department for Community Development to understand the distribution and sources of funding for women's rights work, and develop a joint campaign to increase funding.
- WROs should work in partnership with the Provincial Health Authority to facilitate support for PLWHIV and Key Populations/Persons with Disability, including to integrate human rights training and trauma counselling, and reach out to geographically isolated populations.
- WROs should network to share information on income generation initiatives (e.g., Sharework Ltd network) with each other to sustain their activities and operations.

Networking/relationships/strengthening linkages

Key Stakeholders: Women's rights organisations rights actors, government

- National Council of Women (NCW) Forums should be held regularly to raise awareness of its role and functions, nation-wide.
- WROs should actively seek to partner with and integrate secular and faith-based networks; to bring rural women's groups and church women's network/women's fellowships within their sphere of influence, and engage male advocates or men in their work.
- WROs should actively promote and plan for Leadership succession/ emerging/young leaders and stronger regional coordinating bodies (e.g., HWHRDN).
- WROs should engage more with vulnerable populations, women with disability, and mothers who may have additional challenges in meeting their children's needs, such as teenage single mothers and widows as an integral part of initiatives to address women's rights.

Information and knowledge sharing/awareness/sensitization linkages

Key Stakeholders: Government, women's rights organisations rights actors, donors

- The government should resource women's rights organisations to deliver human rights training-gender-based violence (GBV) awareness in High Schools, Colleges, Technical Vocation Education and Training (TVET) and Universities to nurture future rights actors plus socialize awareness and understanding about rights amongst young people.
- The government should provide or support public forums/information sessions, in-person or online, on the work of NGOs/Government and funding/resource opportunities. This can be done effectively in partnership with mainstream media organisations and social media platforms.

Mobilizing/advocacy/dialogue

Key Stakeholders: Government and women's rights organisations rights actors

- WROs should dialogue with the Permanent Parliamentary Committee - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, to promote women's rights.
- WROs should lobby for a separate ministry for women and hold government accountable through the NCW network.
- The government should support strengthening of national women's machinery (comprising Office for Development of Women, National Council of Women and National GBV Secretariat).
- WROs should convene forums for Donor and Government; Finance/Office for Rural Development District Development Authority and Women's Machinery to explore financing opportunities for women.
- WROs should partner with the Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs to do a review of the women's nominated positions in decision-making bodies from Ward, Local Level government to District and Provincial levels.
- WROs, with government support, should review Ward Record processes and the use of data collected for planning and budget processes.

Capacity building/skills development

Key Stakeholders: Government and donors

- Government and donors should conduct review of organisational/governance structures of WROs/CSOs to attract funding support (develop mission, goals, strategic plans, identify clear outcomes) to move towards becoming sustainable.

Research/knowledge generation/baseline data

Key Stakeholders: Government and donors

- The government should support the National Council of Women to hold annual or biannual learning forums where women led organisations can discuss issues facing women in the country and find possible strategies to target these issues.
- The National Council of Women should conduct social media poll to gauge knowledge of NCW Act amongst female professionals and university students.
- WROs should produce Network Directories (i.e. mapping of skilled human rights workers) with support from Government/Provincial HR Divisions/Donors.
- WROs with government and donor support, should collate regional database of women representatives in government bodies.
- WROs and other rights actors should provide insights and knowledge generated from research (such as WEAVERS) widely and have the topics discussed at public forums for movement strengthening.
- International partners and government should resource local women leaders, researchers, women's rights organisations and activists to plan, lead, and implement research projects that address their needs and priorities. This will help strengthen evidence-based decisions relating to social policies and planning rights-related interventions.

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

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Purpose

The aim of the WEAVERS research project was to strengthen the PNG women's rights movement through a locally owned and implemented research process, drawing on feminist and decolonial research approaches.

Women's rights organisations (WROs) and movements provide some of the most effective mechanisms for advancing and protecting women's rights. Women's movements can create sustainable social change because their members often have a deep understanding of local contexts, communities and politics; they play a vital role in reaching women in marginalized communities; and they aim to address the root causes of gender inequality.

Individual women, women's organisations and networks are active across PNG and are working independently and collectively to contest and change the root causes of gendered inequality. These groups are constantly engaging in indigenous and decolonial ways of accessing, sharing, documenting and building knowledge. However, there have been limited opportunities for women's rights actors in PNG to come together and share this knowledge, identify gaps for deeper reflection, strengthen relationships and connections within the movement, and identify shared priorities for future directions.

The WEAVERS research project was commissioned by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) with funding support from the Australian Government through the PNGAus Partnership. The research was one component of the Women's Empowerment for Voice and Equal Rights in Papua New Guinea (WEAVERS) program that seeks to contribute to transformational and structural change in the lives of women and girls in Papua New Guinea through three separate but inter-related components.

Steering Committee and Data Collectors

The research team is diversity inclusive with members working across disability inclusion and rights, faith-based groups, and groups representing vulnerable populations (including PLWHIV, LGBTQI+ and sex worker network). Members have worked collaboratively across all research phases through a consultative and shared decision-making approach. The WEAVERS research steering committee members are listed on the following page.

Some of the Steering Committee members also took on data collection role, using their respective networks to reach out to research stakeholders. Five additional data collectors were also recruited from research sites where there was need for additional support. These included Kenneth Manman and Kune Garap (Highlands); Sophie Mangai (East Sepik); Ferdinand Masa (Autonomous Region of Bougainville) and Dorothy Powesau (NCD).

WEAVERS Research Steering Committee members



Research Context: Literature Review in Brief

The initial literature review provided the broader contextual framework for the research.

Academic and published literature on the PNG women's rights movement is scattered and patchy. Scholars such as Dickson-Waiko (2001, 2003 (a)/(b)), Bonnell, (1985); Lawrence (2015); Saovana-Spriggs (2007); Spark and Lee, (2018); Mcyntyre (2003), myself (Sepoe, 2000) and others have discussed various aspects of women organizing; e.g., around faith or church-based networks, and the interface between culture and custom, economy and modern governance. By the same token, grey literature is also scattered throughout online platforms, unpublished papers, and donor funded program reports.

A comprehensive picture of the ecosystem and factors that influence, connect and support the ecosystem fabric across the whole country are not well-documented or understood. And neither are the relationships between the women's rights movement and other social movements that aim to advance and uphold the rights of diverse groups of women and girls clearly mapped out. **This research paves way for a better understanding of the ecosystem of the women's movement in PNG.**

What are the catalytic factors or drivers that prompt women to mobilise and organize?

Both academic and grey literature shows women organizing around various issues, and connected by common historical backgrounds and diverse rights actors with cross-cutting relationships.

The women's movement in PNG encompasses formal, semi-formal and informal collectives of women. Women's rights actors mobilise at different levels of society so that groups may be local or place based, provincial, national or regional. Collectives may also involve both spontaneous, ad hoc, and short-term organizing; or institutional and juridical-legal structures. Even where linkages are not formal, or visible, these are constituent parts of

the broader women's movement in PNG.

Therefore, it is important for actors and observers alike, to acknowledge women's movement as the myriad and multiple forms of women mobilizing around their diverse needs, interests and priorities.

Influential individuals can also instigate change and be precursors, and/or the catalysts to women's movement. For instance, the first successful industrial action for women in PNG was undertaken by Margaret Loko (one of PNG's ardent women's rights campaigners) who pushed for legislation to include special provisions in the Organic Law on Provincial and Local Government (OLPLLG) in 1980 for women's representation (Catherine Natera, personal communication, November, 2022). This legislative measure has prevailed to this day and, more or less, set the precedent for demands by women for increased representation in Government Boards and Statutory Organisations and in Parliament through Temporary Special Measures (TSM) or special provisions.

One other such rights actor, Sarah Garap, a WEAVERS steering committee member and founder of Meri Kirap Sapot wrote on her experience:

“*My community entry point has always been through meri bung tok – literally translated as a women's gathering or meeting. The purpose is to provide space for women to talk about issues affecting them or to raise community concerns, and to understand who is doing what in their village so that they can draw support and work together as women. For xme, as a grassroots development worker, women organising is important to promote women's engagement and participation and to support lasting solutions to the concerns of women or the community.*”
(Garap: 2020)

The prevalence of church women's groups or fellowships nation-wide show how throughout PNG's modern history, churches have played a significant role in promoting education and formal employment. Combined with leadership roles in church ministry and training in home economics, women have raised their daughters to be leaders and pioneering elite women in contemporary PNG (Forman, 1984; Douglas, 2003; Macynntyre and Spark, 2017; Waiko, 2003(a)). Many women leaders, past and present, will relate to this common history. A separate research project to capture the richness of this story would be a significant investment in knowledge generation and bolster further understanding of women organising in the PNG context.

Early Western feminist discourse around domestic work as a source of women's subordination has proven to be of little help in understanding women's movement for most women in post-colonial contexts, such as Papua New Guinea. (Dickson-Waiko, 2003(a), McDowell, 1984). In McDowell's analysis of gender roles, 'complementarity' comes to the fore. Lawrence's (2015) analysis also emphasizes embeddedness as of paramount importance to how women understand their place in society, and define their overall social relationships.

Generally, women in PNG would not openly attest to being a feminist. Human rights activists, advocates, or even humanitarian appear to be the preferred terms instead of feminist. This is due to the terms' association with Western women's liberation and its emphasis on individual rights. Aptly described in Anne Dickson-Waiko's (2003 (a)) analysis of collective rights over individual rights, Papua New Guinean women value their strong relationships to their male kin and accept the different gender roles that men and women play for survival and in meeting customary obligations. Women and men's roles and status are different but complementary (Sepoe, 2000, Lawrence, 2015; McDowell, 1984, Sexton, 1984). Embeddedness in culture and social relationships gives meaning to women's lives (Lawrence, 2015).

This understanding is also underpinned by the respective lived experiences of the research team,

from both patrilineal and matrilineal cultures. I postulated this theme on women's influence two decades earlier in my doctoral thesis (Sepoe, 2000). In 2021, Almah Tararia's doctoral research explored this theme further and highlighted three spaces of influence by women in a matrilineal cultural context in New Ireland Province; the informal, semi-formal and formal spheres. Tararia's work highlights that '**speaking up, dispersing resources, advising others, defending kastam and mobilising women**' all constitute women's acts of influence and political agency. In the context of kastam – cultural obligations connected to language, social relations, spirituality and world-view -or dominant cultural and formal political spaces and the underlying gendered power dynamics, New Ireland women do exercise influence.

No doubt, in pre-colonial societies, men's public role depended very much on the influence of women's agency behind the scenes through their reproductive and productive work, which helped men reach prominence and attained status as chiefs or big man. Sarah Garap's (2020) mention of "leading from behind" in patrilineal Highland's context is testimony to women's agency and potential to influence changes in people's lives, and engage with men.

Overall, women recognize their roles, past and present, as being significant and an integral part of decision-making around social-economic life and sustenance.

This is why it is important to think differently about women's movement, the relationships and networks amongst women rights actors and men, and how women perceive their status and roles in the cultural context of PNG.

The issues and interests pertinent to women's lived experience become the catalyst for women's organisations and groups to emerge. This manifests in women's collective response to the circumstances and life situations of women (and girls) in specific localities and at specific historical junctures or time periods. These varying contextual realities in turn shape and determine their respective goals and objectives. This is reflective of

the **essence of women's movement as a shared space**. In other words, diversity of women's lived experiences leads to formation of diverse groups and organisations, based on generational/age/ socio-economic differences/localities. Church and faith-based interests are significant for the majority of women, whose lives revolve around community level organizing and meeting the needs of families, and church activities whilst contributing to the overall well-being of society.

Women's collectives can be membership driven, issue-driven, locally driven or personality-driven or emerge from a combination of factors. Furthermore, the nature of organisations and networks can be organic and autonomous compared to other change agents also addressing gender issues that are motivated by external actors, hence, dependent on external impetus and forces. Over time, certain global influences have gained prominence in the local domain of addressing gender inequality. One clear example is the 20 Days Activism campaign, initially led by the Family Sexual and Violence Act Committee (FSVAC) - now currently reconstituted as the National Gender Based Violence Secretariat.

However, not all women's collectives, organisations and networks work to bring about transformational changes towards gender equality and social justice for women and girls. Many are funded to deliver programs and services to a limited number of beneficiaries, or for a specific purpose. Furthermore, transformational changes have their own timeline: some immediate, others latent; whilst others are either short-term or long term.

Both bottom-up and top-down factors drive the women's rights movement. Many of the partnerships are formed to implement programs towards addressing issues such as gender-based violence (GBV)/Family and Sexual Violence (FSV) or economic empowerment. Successful implementation of these programs requires strong networking, collective learning and sharing of experiences, from within and outside of the national and local context.

Many of these organisations and rights actors connect by way of shared interests if only

intermittently, when opportunities arise, or resources allow; whilst others operate in isolation with or without the knowledge of the invisible thread that lies beneath all of their concerns and needs, and all working towards upholding the rights of all women and girls. The strength of relationships between and amongst women's organisations, therefore, varies with interest and focus, and at different periods of time.

Overall, the relationship between women's rights movements and other social and minority rights-based organisations (e.g., disability, youth, girl-child, LGBT, etc.) is either weak, or non-existent. However, this research does provide the opportunity to leverage for a stronger linkage between the women's movement and other social movements in PNG.

The literature reviewed does show that some linkages exist around the common issues being addressed by women's rights organisations. There is also indication of connections at the personal level and relationships forming the fabric of women's movement in PNG. **Put simply, rights actors know each other and have strong relationships, even though their respective organisations may not be working collaboratively in addressing rights issues.** Hence, across different geographical locations, or Provinces and Districts, there is little evidence of a solid networking and partnership in existence, from programmatic level to established modus operandi amongst WROs. This is due to a combination of factors such as lack of, or limited resources available to facilitate unity or solidarity, as well as competitive behavior displayed at the leadership level of many WROs, and lack of capacity. Furthermore, the natural topography of PNG reinforces isolation from each other, with the accompanying high cost of transportation and communication across PNG.

These factors have also affected the umbrella women's rights organisation, the National Council of Women (NCW). The NCW is therefore, central to our quest to understand the ecosystem of women's movement, despite its obvious lack of functionality, at the time of this research, and indeed for the past decade (2013-2023).



The landscape of women organizing is fluid and changing all the time. And available academic literature does not capture the full picture of women's movement. The WEAVERS research, therefore, set out to unravel and facilitate a better understanding of the ecosystem of the women's movement, with local women's rights actors with grounded knowledge leading and driving the research process.

METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

The research design was a collective endeavor to capture diversity and understand our collective identity as rights actors, based on our lived experiences - where we came from, where we are and where we wish to go.

Key Research Questions

The WEAVERS research set out to address three key research questions.

1. What constitutes the women's rights movement in PNG?
2. Who are the women's rights organisations/networks in PNG and what do they do?
3. What are the linkages between different actors in the women's rights movement, what are the challenges and opportunities for strengthening linkages?

Setting a Balanced Platform

The WEAVERS' research process is, in essence, action-oriented and the role of the Steering Committee epitomizes this. From the first WEAVERS inception workshop held on 09 October, 2022, the Steering Committee members present expressed the need to make visible the relationships that connect us and recognize that amidst our diversity and the hierarchies of power that exists amongst us, we could build a research team and work together. My role as the research lead was to facilitate and manage the diversity of perspectives and experiences amongst different rights actors, and allow for all voices to be heard.

The research team acknowledged that we are actors ourselves connected to each other through women's rights work across different generations, ethnic and cultural contexts, geographic areas, and socio-economic backgrounds with varying experiences in research practice. We also established an understanding of working in a flexible way and adapting according to changing

circumstances. We embraced our lived realities, particularly our multiple roles in both public and private spheres, as we proceeded from one phase to another throughout the research process.

As the Lead Researcher, it was my responsibility to manage and coordinate collaborative work and maintain team balance at all stages of the research. Inclusion formed the basis of meaningful participation and partnership and a busy WhatsApp team chat kept us all connected across our various locations.

The nature of participatory action and decolonial research approach requires adapting to the lived realities of research participants and right actors. The research process allowed us space to share diverse perspectives; draw on our varied practical experiences; and renewed and strengthened relationships amongst ourselves, and with the research participants.

The vital thread that underlines the WEAVERS research is that we, as rights actors, have reconnected; thereby, setting the stage for work around strengthening of women's rights movement in PNG.

Seeing new relationships forged across generations, regions, and interest areas, whilst existing relationships were strengthened, even if at a nominal level, was worthwhile.

Research Planning

The WEAVERS' research was locally-led and co-designed with the active participation of the Steering Committee; 10 women including myself and one man. The methodology was aligned to IWDA's Feminist Research Framework which outlines a commitment to participatory, decolonial and qualitative research approaches and strengthening of women's rights movements through research (IWDA, 2022).

We co-designed the research project over two in-person workshops in November 2022 and January 2023. This involved collectively refining the research and data collection questions; selecting five research sites (Highlands, New Guinea Islands, Mamose, Southern/Papua and National/NCD); selecting research activities (qualitative Key Informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions); and identifying research stakeholders and women's rights organisations (WROs). The research design and methodology was then submitted to IWDA's Internal Research Advisory Group for ethical review and approval.

The collective work experience of all Steering Committee members and I, as the Lead Researcher provided a solid platform for collaborative, participatory and inclusive research design process.

As one Steering Committee member reflected in a workshop in July 2023,

“*There is a different type of methodology emerging in this research. This is a new way of doing it... It's a home grown project.*”
(Steering Committee member)

Data Collection Activities

A range of qualitative research activities were conducted to collect data in response to the research questions. Meri Bung Tok (MBT) is a locally adapted and applied tool by Sarah Garap used in her work with rural women. The approach embodies qualitative, participatory, informal and contextually informed conversations with women separately and/or with men. The MBT is an equivalent of Community Conversation or Focus Group Discussions (FGD). This research tool was applied on-site where women's rights organisations or stakeholders were situated, and where the data collectors also live and work. Hence, data collection was carried out and facilitated by Steering Committee members and those recruited as data collectors with lived experience and familiarity with human rights work in each locality. It is worth mentioning that data collectors who were non-SC members added more to the research by being actively involved in liaison with stakeholders, and contributing to group discussions and data analysis. This is the very essence of decolonial research approach where local actors with lived experience and knowledge of the regional contexts played a key role in fieldwork for their respective localities.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were also conducted. There was value in using both MBT/FGD and KII methods for this qualitative research. Both complement each other in that the MBT elicited responses in an informal conversational way from a network of community level stakeholders, whilst KII catered for key individual actors who played a significant role such as being the founder or have held leadership role/s in WROs.

Against the background of over 800 different languages in PNG, the Steering Committee considered the possibility of using all three official languages of PNG -English, Tok Pisin and Motu - in the research. The final decision arrived at for communication with research participants was Tok Pisin and English. Specific data collection questions were devised in both languages. Motu was omitted for a practical reason; that is, due to my not been conversant in the language. A further reason was

the increasing tendency of Tok Pisin becoming more widely spoken across all regions, even in the Papua Region where the Motu language is most relevant.

Research Sites and Participants

To ensure geographical spread, five research sites were selected: Highlands, New Guinea Islands, Mamose and Southern/Papua plus the national level. Within each region, a mix of grassroots/ community level stakeholders plus Provincial/ District level groups were included. This was to ensure perspectives of women's rights actors working in different types of networks, focusing on different issues, and at different levels of the movement across PNG are heard.

From the initial literature review, over 200 organisations were identified. The stakeholder list went through four rounds of vetting, validating and deliberations about the most appropriate, relevant and/or active (past and present) women's rights organisations collectively identified by the Steering Committee and facilitated by me. The second round of stakeholder identification made a significant inclusion of organisations working with men where male advocacy groups were included. The decision to include male advocacy was made in recognition of the importance of working with men in addressing gender inequality across all sectors.

For feasibility in implementing the fieldwork within the limited timeframe and managing data analysis, the final number of stakeholders selected were 59: 11 (Highlands); nine (Momase); 10 (New Guinea Islands); 22 (Southern) and seven (national level). 38 WROs participated in the research whilst others dropped out of the research for various reasons such as lack of interest and availability; communication issues (due to internet and mobile reach), and questions around 'what's worth my time, and what's in it for us?' In general, the value of research is not widely understood and research fatigue kicks in, arising from an underlying issue

which is knowledge extraction; a phenomenon critiqued widely in post-colonial contexts (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021), and PNG is no exception.

Drawing from the collective knowledge and experience of the Steering Committee members, stakeholders were selected on the basis of both present and past visibility in addressing women's rights. Diversity and inclusion were important considerations. The Steering Committee ensured the inclusion of representatives of diverse groups including disability rights, minority LGBTI/HIV-AIDS network (vulnerable populations), faith based and secular interest groups, emerging and younger women's network plus male advocacy and national level stakeholders.

In terms of sectoral focus, the stakeholders selected work in Gender Based Violence (GBV), Leadership, Economic Empowerment, Reproductive Health and Environmental Conservation.

I coordinated the fieldwork across the five research sites and data collectors undertook the fieldwork with selected WROs between May to August 2023. Transcripts from audio recordings as well as written scripts provided the data and information for the key findings, analysis and the overall report.

SUMMARY OF WROS/STAKEHOLDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH

REGION	NUMBER OF WROS/STAKEHOLDERS	TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS KI I	TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS FGD
HIGHLANDS	8	7	2
NGI	8	8	0
MOMASE	6	5	1
SOUTHERN	6	4	2
NATIONAL	10	7	2



The Highlands Women’s Human Rights Movement has been included in the regional list because, most of the rights actors interviewed were affiliated to this umbrella human rights network. And three KIIs were conducted for the same WRO in the Highlands.

Similarly, with the national level stakeholders, a key actor interviewed wore two hats: a leadership role, thereby providing insights for both provincial and national level WROs.

It was relatively convenient to hold KII than to organize FGDs/MBTs.



Issue/focus areas:



Data Sense-Checking and Analysis

Once the fieldwork was completed, the WEAVERS research team came together in late July 2023 in Port Moresby, and again in two separate follow-up sessions in Goroka and Port Moresby during September 2023, to collectively sense-check and analyse the data to determine key findings and recommendations.

Bearing in mind the different levels of research capability amongst members of the team, preparations for the data sensing workshop involved sharing the agenda and essential information about data processing over email. At the start of the workshop, I shared de-identified copies of interview notes and transcripts with the team.

To guide the process of shifting from data collection to analysis mode, I posed three guiding questions to the research team at the start of each workshop;

1. What is the data saying? (from information collected and the voices heard).
2. Who is saying what? Whose perspective is this?
3. How is the data speaking to and responding to the three overarching WEAVERS research questions?

The findings presented below were collectively generated across the three separate sessions of data sense checking and analysis workshops. In keeping with the approach of shared decision-making; meaningful partnership and participation; as well as instilling ownership at all phases of the research process, this was a facilitated process of data analysis.

Through interactive sessions, I shared the draft key findings under three thematic areas, corresponding to the three overarching WEAVERS research questions:

- What constitutes the women's rights movement in PNG?

- Who are the women's rights organisations/networks in PNG and what do they do?
- What are the linkages between different actors in the women's rights movement, what are the challenges and opportunities for strengthening linkages?

The research team members contributed with questions, comments and additional insights throughout the data sense check and analysis sessions. Their insights and reflections add richness to the findings and as such they are included, and noted as additional data sources, in the key findings below.

KEY FINDINGS



KEY FINDINGS

The key findings are presented under each thematic area corresponding to the three primary WEAVERS research questions.

Thematic Area 1: What constitutes the women's rights movement in PNG?

A consistent and clear understanding

Understanding of human rights and women's rights is consistent amongst rights actors and stakeholders from diverse sectors across all regional contexts. When asked about the definition of rights, the vast majority of participants responded with a clear understanding of all principles of human rights and women's rights.

The **collective consciousness** of women in PNG regarding women's advancement, and later on human rights, begun with the earliest form of women's collectives; particularly with church and colonial influence respectively through women's fellowships and ministries, and through women's clubs in the 1950s and 1960s (Cox, 2015; Dickson-Waiko, 2001/2003; Macyntre and Sparke, 2017).

Dickson-Waiko's (2003a) in-depth analysis of Christian influence and the broader Western influence leads to **the interwoven character and merging of both faith and rights-based groups constitute the nature and form of women's movement. To my understanding, the different shape and the specific form or character of PNG women's movement follows a global trend of asserting difference amongst non-Western conception of women's movement and strands of feminism.** This perspective is prevalent and has been validated by the WEAVERS research.

When PNG became independent and established self-government in 1972, the Government adopted the Eight Point Plan, with the 7th aim calling for rapid increase in the equal and active participation

of women in all forms of social and economic activity. This laid the grounds for the government to take a long-term interest in progressing women's agenda, and for women to claim their rights. At independence in 1975, the new state of PNG formally embedded in its Constitution Equality and Participation as its second National Goal and Directive Principle (The Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, 1975).

Overall, women of PNG have always being conscious of their rights from the start of nationhood, and in the early years, the more educated became strong advocates for change and advancement of women in all spheres of life. Our research found that four decades or so later, growing numbers of grassroots women have become increasingly aware of their rights through the work of WROs and rights actors.

Across all regions, WROs and stakeholders defined and understood rights as:

- rights to voice and rights to be heard;
- equal participation and full participation;
- freedom of association;
- freedom of individuals to live without discrimination and interference from others;
- fairness and justice;
- freedom from violence or abuse (financial violence, physical and sexual violence) in families and communities;
- rights to peace;
- content family life with no violence and right to living in a peaceful life;
- respect for all human beings regardless of sex, age, disability, sexual orientation (vulnerable populations; women with disabilities; persons with disabilities);
- rights seek to address issues around equality;
- right to voice; right to stand for election and participation in decision-making; and to speak on issues of concern to women;
- equal participation of women in development, and be agents of change;
- right to know about laws protecting their

- lives;
- awareness and advocacy to educate and empower women.
- right to access basic education, health, shelter, food and clothes.
- women's right to property.

These quotes further illustrate participants understanding of rights:

“Everybody is equal and deserve to be treated fairly.”
(Research participant)

“Human rights defend and protects people from other people coming in and dictating how they should live.”
(Research participant)

“Human rights are helpful because it provides for women to find their space and decide for their own well-being and their destiny.”
(Research participant)

“Prior to CSO engagement, human rights to me means rights to protection given to marginalized people only. Now that I've joined the sector, I understand that Human Rights is for everyone. We all deserve justice; we all deserve to be protected. We all deserve our voices to be heard.”
(Research participant)

“Christian principles are fundamental to (name of organisation withheld), so justice is at the core of its work as well as equality: the fact of their existence explains that church women's voice need to be recognized and heard or become visible.”
(Research participant)

“Rights of an individual to access services and other appropriate goods provided by government, or within the rights movement.”
(Research participant)

There is recognition and awareness that rights come with responsibility.

Some WROs and stakeholders said outright that rights must be exercised with responsibility, hence, the implied understanding about respect for others' rights.

“Each individual has the right to do anything and everything but those rights come with responsibilities.”
(Research participant)

And furthermore, rights are helpful because:

“When they know their rights, they will live a good life [and respect others' rights].”
(Research participant)

Specific focus of WROs is shaped or determined by lived experiences or practical experiences.

Concerns around gender-based violence or violence against women and girls is generalized or is a shared concern across all regions, whilst other issues; e.g., work relating to Sorcery Allegation Related Violence (SARV) is heavily focused in the Highlands region.

The Highlands research team validated this finding that SARV is a dominant issue for the Highlands. The SARV work adds to the workload of WROs working around other rights issues.

Other regions focus more on issues such as economic empowerment, other forms of violence, advocacy/awareness/education about rights, women in leadership/governance, access to services (e.g., referral pathways), and access to basic goods and services.

Rights and accountability

Adding a critical lens to the definition and collective understanding of rights, the significant gap is that WROs are not seeing negligence or misapplication of public resources as abuse of their rights. In particular, when state institutions and government agencies fail to deliver basic services, or take actions to address concerns and

priorities of women, and more so with lack of, or inadequate funding or resource allocation. In other words, **women's citizenship right to DEMAND government accountability isn't a focus, or is overlooked in WROs understanding of rights and their activities.** This correlates to thematic area three, where lack of funds and resources is mentioned as a common challenge by many WROs across all regions.

The Highlands research participants made this point upfront, highlighting the current focus and dependence on donor partners for funding, but not on holding our own government to account. Government responsibility is paramount.

Although citizenship rights are embedded in the goals and objectives of many WROs, pragmatic actions are not clearly evident. However, some WROs are progressing citizenship rights through support for women political candidates, as one WRO states;

“ *... it is about Active Citizenship, Human rights and Good Governance through capacity development/training/awareness for women candidates which begun in preparations for the 2002 national elections plus awareness raising for leadership/decision-making at community/ward/LLG/village courts.* ”
(Research participant)

There are still challenges faced by WROs working in remote rural communities, where certain cultural norms and practices (e.g., polygamy) are resistant to women's rights and illiteracy levels are high.

“ *To interpret and to put ... this gender into practice is hard. There has been a big challenge to channel this ... interpret this human right policies into the communities.* ”
(Research participant)

Thematic Area 2: What are the linkages between different actors and WROs in promoting women's rights?

Existing connections between WROs

Most WROs and rights actors across PNG know about each other, or have worked together at some point in time; or are aware of other stakeholders in the human rights space. And they also know which actors are inactive or not working.

“ *Yes, (I know of a) GBV action group founded by (name withheld) plus a human rights activist in the Highlands and Voice for Change in Jiwaka led by a prominent leader.* ”
(Research participant- Papua Region)

... we also partner internationally... especially in partnership with the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA). ”
(Research participant).

The Highlands region and Bougainville stand out as having the most active WROs.

In the Highlands, when asked which WROs are more active in leading or voicing women's rights and empowerment at the ward/community/Provincial level, notably, the list included those groups that participated in the WEAVERS research. For Bougainville, readily identifiable functioning WROs included Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation, Bougainville Women's Federation, Leitana Nehan and Haku Women's Association.

This is in contrast to the responses to the same question from WROs in other regions, who were unable to identify similar regional organisations. This is not surprising given the context of on-going violent conflicts in the Highlands, and the post-conflict situation in Bougainville; made possible with strong support from donors working with NGOs and government in addressing SARV, GBV broadly and tribal/community conflicts.

Factors that enable connections between WROs

Rights actors are linked in different ways, through common activities and programs, such as 20 Days Activism; sharing of information about referral pathways, or through advocacy work, across regions, when resources allow.

Furthermore, WROs are strongly **linked through their programs and activities in their respective places and localities (i.e., local communities, Local Level Governments, (LLGs), Districts and Provinces)**.

For example, when discussing how rights actors are connected, the Steering Committee made reference to 20 Days Activism, led by the Family Sexual and Violence Act Committee (FSVAC) which build a very strong network of CSOs nation-wide. This sounded more like a precursor to movement building because officially, it's a sectoral committee of Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Committee (CIMC), under the Department of National Planning and Monitoring.

Other examples include the Highlands Women Human Rights Defenders (HWHRD) Network, and Bougainville Women's Federation. There are no equivalents in Momase and Papua regions, which reflects the lower level of connectedness in these regions.

The Highlands Women's Human Rights Defenders (HWHRD) network, however, lacks formal-institutional structure with member organisations, according to research participants and data collectors. One active WRO, Meri I Kirap Sapot (MIKS) has shown what it takes to expand and strengthen its network. As one research participant noted:

“ **MIKS network covers all six Highlands Provinces. Men are actively involved, and so is the Police in addressing issues of violence against women/girls.** ”
(Research participant)

MIKS plus HWHRD network has spread its influence/work in Morobe as well as Kokopo and Port Moresby through its Investment Promotion

Authority (IPA) registered business arm SHARE-WORK Consultancy Ltd and political party called WINGS party.

“ **Yes, there are many other organisations working on the ground. Our movement HWHRD, brings all these other WROs together in all six Provinces in the Highlands region. From time to time, HWHRDM steps in to facilitate and help understand the work that CSOs in the network do.** ”
(Research participant)

Many rights actors mentioned at least one other WRO from outside their locality; with a few citing specific examples like Tribal Foundation or their Provincial Council of Women, or even individual leaders who are active on the ground.

Hence, the linkages are usually with;

“ **Key players (that) are 'women led' organisations on the ground.** ”
(Research participant)

“ **'Women led' organisations are at the forefront- they support, we network and the government stakeholders provide services for crisis management and prevention.** ”
(Research participant)

At the national level, the PNG National Council of Women (NCW) as the legislated civil society umbrella body has a formal structure but awareness about its existence is weak; because it is not reaching out to half of its prescribed membership in Provinces and nation-wide. In the absence of a functioning national voice;

“ **...our organisation has tried to connect women from the rural level up to the national level. NCW should play this role as they are the national women's group representing all women.** ”
(Research participant)

In addition to NCW;

“...the provincial council of women has to connect to all levels; be one mouth-piece; and make connections for women.”
(Research participant)

Some WROs called out for more outreach by the NCW and PCW. Hence, the expressed need to;

“Connect better with women and women’s group at the rural, ward, community level. More awareness on our role and PCW and encourage women to be part of the (named) provincial council of women program.”
(Research participant)

“I’d want women to take ownership. Getting more into the rural communities. Reach more rural areas; need to connect better with other women’s groups (rural/provincial); create more awareness on our programs.”
(Research participant)

Others expressed ways of connecting better through;

“wok bung (working together) and resource sharing.”
(Research participant)

“Reviving and having refresher trainings for our members on a wide range of topics and continue membership drive to identify potential leaders. Governance & management upskilling.”
(Research participants)

One WRO was formed not due to lack of awareness but rather inaction, or lack of responsiveness to issues of concern by the NCW.

“They rejected our request– what we were trying to do so we decided that we will move away from NCW network to set up our organisation for the region.... to address this GBV and how we can also become agents of change in our own capacity.”
(Research participant)

The linkages between WROs and stakeholders can be seen at different levels.

There is evidence of linkages and relationships between WROs and stakeholders at different levels:

Personal or actor to actor level

These are **personal-informal and work relationships** that have been forged over time, and, to a large extent, this is how different actors and WROs are linked and relate to each other. The flipside to this type of linkage is that veteran leaders have held on to positions, making it difficult for the younger rights actors to be actively engaged. Recent programs around building leadership capacity have recognized this and attempts are being made to close the intergenerational gap. Personal connections and relationships are at the core of rights actors networking and working to address gender issues such as GBV.

Issue level

As actors working around specific issues such as Gender Based Violence/Violence Against Women and Girls, Women In Leadership, Women’s Economic Empowerment, rights actors connect with each other to progress their work.

One example of issue level connection would be the issue of gender-based violence (GBV). This issue has connected rights actors nation-wide. Another example is the agenda of Temporary Special Measures (TSM) which has been a long-standing issue for the women’s movement in PNG to improve women’s representation in Parliament. The TSM campaign galvanized a strong women’s movement between 2007 to 2013. A pioneer rights actor’s experience is captured below;

“We took the letter, waited over 8 hours (..) and myself and I can’t recall who; we took that time working with others from (named donor). Okay.... one night we were working until almost early hours of the morning and we took the letters to deliver. We went to the airport and we called them... wait for us please, we have something to eat. So afterwards, we went up

there and deliver the letters to them...We put each of these letters in their pigeon halls of all the ministers and the members of the executives – National Executive Council, so that's what happened. Our influence was there, working with others to support the 22 seats that was proposed.”

(Research participant)

Program level

Research Participants gave examples of singular donor-funded projects or programs, such as Family Farm Teams (FFT) or Sanap Wantaim (literally translate as Stand Up Together).

The FFT is a concept developed by the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) premised on equitable workload and shared decision-making around semi-subsistence farming activities for sustainable livelihood, working with family members (ACIAR, 2017). This transformative approach has been implemented in partnership with local partners in PNG and the region, through donor funding and technical support.

The *Sanap Wantaim program* was introduced in 2016 with UN Women support, and later other donors', to address gender-based violence (UNWomen, 2016). It is aimed at changing behaviours through partnership with men, to make cities, towns, streets, public transport, markets, communities and the country as a whole safe for women and girls.

Programs, for instance, around women's economic empowerment has played a huge role in connecting individual woman and family-run small-medium enterprises (SMEs), with support from donors and the government. The presence of a strong SME movement in PNG is a demonstration of program-based linkages.

Institutional level

The **National Council of Women**, with its formal structure and prescribed membership (in contrast to the HWHRD network or movement comprising several registered CSOs/WROs) plus other WROs (stakeholders that have participated in the WEAVERS research; e.g., Meri I Kirap Sapot) and Advance PNG Women Leaders Network (APNGWLN).

The APNGWLN is an institutional level WRO that works across regions connecting rural groups to Provincial to national level.

” *... it's like our mouthpiece at the national level. It's really like a mouthpiece at that level so, we seeing the women doing their smaller things... at our districts but at the national level, we try to bring it together to have and recognize entity to voice for these women at the province level... after all, our main purpose is to exchange ideas, programs and resources.*”

(Research participant)

In addition, a plethora of grassroots church women's fellowships nation-wide fall within the ambit of their formal church structures, which largely operate autonomously. Their regional plus national level networks follow the formal 'circuits or archdiocese' and similar geographical divisions for different church denominations. In terms of actors involved, it is common to find many church women leaders who are also connected to WROs in the secular human rights space, or vice versa. The multiple identities of women are a reflection of this multiple affiliations with both faith-based and other groups.

Given the pre-eminence of donor funded programs, and availability of resources for women from different regions to convene and discuss issues or challenges, learn new skills and share information, **donor support is critical to make it possible to convene large forums or series of activities.**

Government funding is often constrained by other priorities, or does not feature prominently in annual budget allocations for women's programs. With the exception of church women's groups and

a few other urban-based professional groups, the ability of WROs to convene large forums for building solidarity or sharing experiences is limited by funding or resource constraints.

The bulk of rural women still have yet to fully engage through existing non-church networks.

“ *There is a need to connect better with other women’s groups (rural/provincial) create more awareness on our programs, (including) resource sharing.* ”
(Research participant).

“ *Rights of women in rural areas are a concern. Not enough focus on them, in terms of financial support to empower women.* ”
(Research participant)

In terms of movement building, it is important to recognize this, and work towards bridging the divide through forums for sharing and learning from all manner of WROs and other networks, such as church women’s ministries.

To my knowledge, currently there is on-going efforts to review the National Council of Women Act 2013 (see case study/boxed text on pages 38 and 39). This legislative review process has to ensure the NCW is inclusive of ALL women’s groups. **As the legislated women’s umbrella body, the opportunity to revamp its structure and ensure inclusivity is of immediate priority, and will be an important step forward in strengthening connections amongst women’s collectives.**

Emerging leaders, and working with men and boys

Emerging leaders, young women and young men, are also involved or participate in specific programs around addressing women’s rights. Examples include SARV and GBV work in the Highlands, and Sanap Wantaim in the East Sepik Province.

Equal Playing Field is active with this target population (of young women and men), its primary target population, and works nation-wide, and so does Voice Inc. Other WROs do recognize in principle but are slow in engaging young women, hence, the growth of separate organisations/groups working with this sector of the population.

Men, young and old, are also increasingly engaged in the work of a number of WROs, or in male-focused programs. They are becoming visible through role model male advocates such as the WEAVERS male team members, amongst many others nation-wide with the recognition and understanding that men’s involvement in addressing especially gender-based violence and other women’s rights issues is crucial.

Different WROs who participated in this research expressed varied views such as:

“ *...we have women included especially in a male domain or set up... So, like for example, for myself in (place named), with the youth organisation, the LLG youth council, I’m the secretary,... among three (3) men...in the local youth council.* ”
(Research participant)

“ *Young males are visible – they are involved in marketing”(i.e. participating in the informal sector).* ”
(Research participant)

“ *Men do support behind the scenes, and most that we are engaged with are always visible as they want to be part of the change/success.* ”
(Research participant)

“ *They are not visible but do support behind the*

scenes.”
(Research participant)

” Yes; their personal experiences motivate them to be involved. They get involved in training gender and basic human rights, sexual reproductive health; yes, male advocates support their wives.”
(Research participant)

In one of the WEAVERS' workshops, the research team expressed the view that male advocacy is an emerging area of work for WROs and the approach is integral to donor agency agenda to sensitize men who are the main perpetrators of VAW. But upon further reflection, **the research team agreed that within the context of social-familial relationships, male advocacy is not a new thing. Men have always been supporting women in families and in our lives. This is because men and women's lives are interwoven in family and community life.**

In the course of analyzing the research data, reflecting on and sharing of personal experiences by research team members all point to the role of fathers and brothers whose support for daughters/sisters brought us to where we are in life.

The difference is how men are positioned in the international discourse about women's movement and rights work; either as the **oppositional sex** or as **partners with roles that complement roles of women. As articulated above, women's lives and their gender roles are grounded in cultural-social relationships with others, which includes men. This is why it is crucial to allow for locally designed approaches to working with men.**

It has become clear in the WEAVERS research analysis that male advocacy approach is not new to our cultural context, and it is an important consideration in women's rights work. But there are finer nuances to be mindful of, as the Highlands based research team members articulated:

” Men tend to set boundaries, so women and girls are confined to a culturally defined space hence, women's rights work gives women space to go beyond the cultural sphere

of male support.”
(Research participant)

” We need to go beyond and do extra things; girls/women should and can move on to other areas, outside of the boundaries set by male family members. In [human] rights work male advocacy is good in that it helps shift us from gender segregation to a holistic approach – where [male advocacy] plays the key role in bridging the gender segregation (so shift from the approach of women focus/only work to everyone taking responsibility).”
(Research participant)

Men and women must work together – to adopt a shared responsibility approach.

Including diverse and vulnerable groups

There is a **general awareness of the rights of women with disability, persons with disability and vulnerable/key populations** but their inclusion is mostly in principle (token). There were a few examples of WROs with no specific program to engage, include, work with women with disabilities, people with disabilities and vulnerable populations (including LGBTQI, sex worker and HIV+ groups). As stated by research participants, whilst members of diverse groups are not actively excluded from their work, WROs often lack capacity and resources to actively include them in their work:

” They live in the community but no specific focus is on them...This means they are treated the same as everyone else.”
(Research participant)

” WROs are [in principle] aware of or inclusive of their rights but lack of experts/capacity/human resources/facilities is a constraint! These factors make it challenging for inclusivity.”
(Research participant)

” We don't have issue with transgender/ or other vulnerable groups or people. When opportunities arise, we work with them...The approach is to accept them as they come. We don't reject them. We work with issues of vulnerability.”
(Research participant)

“ We don’t work directly with this population/ people but when opportunity arises, we work with them. We don’t reject them.”
(Research participant)

“ They are not as visible and don’t have their own recognized groups, we are not engaging them directly or as a group.”
(Research participant)

“ Right now, we do not have the capacity to work with the key population, but we plan to do so in the future. We do engage them in the 16 Days of Activism for advocacy.”
(Research participant)

However, several participants noted that they are working directly with women and men with disabilities to ensure their needs are met through their programs:

“ Yes. Here in (place named) I have program that says ‘Lukautim Meri Na Pikinini’ (look after women and children) program. So, we cater for the cross-cutting issues of disabilities, ... widows and disabilities... So in that program we look at the needs of the disability and like, in 2019, [location named] women council donated a wheel chair to a disable girl ... and we encourage girls to have rights to education. And that we have some girls attending schools and they have rights to health facilities too.”
(Research participant)

“ We work with women with disability including men in communities.”
(Research participant)

“ We have incorporated disability inclusion approaches in our work.”
(Research participant)

However, one research participant noted that – as it relates to key populations – that;

“ I think that this will be the responsibility of the health sector.”
(Research participant)

Demonstrating the need for continuing with awareness and sensitization around special needs populations.

Overall, it is common to find people and women with disabilities, vulnerable populations and LGBTQI+ working in separate groups and specific spaces to articulate and protect their rights, including a few groups that participated in this research.

Linkages between WROs and other stakeholders

Government Linkage

When asked about their engagement with the government, WROs reported varied experiences. Many WROs stated that their relationship with government is mostly weak, and ad hoc to a large extent, and also that the nature and strength of their relationship with government varies over time and localities.

“ Department of Community Development mostly provide technical expertise, for example training on rights on child protection, safe guarding, BUT they don’t support strategic direction of women’s movement.”
(Research participant)

A WRO in NGI province stated they do have an on-going relationship with Department of Community Development and Department of Law and Justice;

“ There is ongoing working relationship. The Chairlady at Community Development leads work around addressing women’s rights. There is more work and the relationship is ongoing.”
(Research participant)

“ Partnership is ongoing because one of our main activity- establishing a Gender Based Violence Action Committee (GBVAC) in each Highlands provinces.”
(Research participant)

A particular WRO. a provincial council of women (PCW), makes for an interesting model organisation with strong links to the government.

The PCW receives regular funding through the mainstream budgetary process from its provincial administration. With the support of its Governor/ Provincial MP, and for accountability purposes, the annual provincial budget allocates a certain amount for women's programs and activities. This regular funding has enabled a strong network of affiliated members in the rights space, at different level from wards, to Local Level Governments to Districts to the Provincial.

Some research participants, however, expressed disappointment with their engagement with government, citing a lack of funding and recognition for their work.

“*Relationship [with the Department for Community Development] discontinued due to funding shortage.*”
(Research participant)

“*...Government, Non-state Actors and government Partnership is on paper but not in reality.*”
(Research participant).

“*Rights actors “speak their mind so government is threatened.*”
(Research participant)

“*No acknowledgement from government for the work rights actors do.*”
(Research participant)

Other research participants also noted the prevalence of,

“*Cargo mentality where government/ organisations choose who they want to support/fund.*”
(Research participant)

and the provision of goods and services into rural PNG continue to be a formidable challenge that needs to be addressed. As one research participant stated, the Government is still failing in terms of;

“*Getting more into the rural communities. More rural outreach.*”
(Research participant)

As one Steering Committee noted at the first research design workshop in November 2022, this is significant also for women's rights organisations because:

“*Ninety percent of our women are in rural areas. When ninety percent of women are found in subsistence and semi-subsistence settings, there is a huge gap in trying to connect them. How do you bridge the divide?*”
(Steering Committee member)

The above findings are more than a reflection of the current state of affairs. It shows a definite need for WROs to mobilise and press for more government accountability, especially towards fulfilling its obligations as duty bearer of the rights of women and its citizens broadly. **This means the government has to respond to the needs and priorities of women and provide concrete funding resources to address issues affecting their lives.**

Donor Linkage

Most research participants acknowledged the support of donor partners in promoting women's rights. Several donor partners (including the Australian Government and other governments), both bi-lateral and multi-lateral, support the work of WROs either directly or through international non-governmental organisations (such as IWDA, who partner with several PNG WROs). Most of this support is usually in partnership with the government, to implement national policies pertaining to addressing gender inequality and protecting women's rights. When asked what role funders can or do? play, participants highlighted the importance of infrastructure support to enable WROs to work effectively:

“*Provide funding for operational costs and program continuity, and payroll.*”
(Research participant).

Research participants noted the lack of this kind of funding for WROs and movements across PNG as a key challenge for WROs:

“*Funding is very limited. We are not able to strengthen the organisation. Our need area is*

Institutional Capacity, strengthening/building for us to be seen as a movement and work as a movement. We are not fully utilizing the mission/vision of HWHRDN.””
(Research participant)

”” *Most of the funding is for certain programs/ activities. We do need other donors to come in and provide funding for admin costs, payroll and capacity building.*””
(Research participant)

How have these linkages changed over time?

Capacity issues and resource constraints often impact on linkages between donor partners and WROs. Many WROs openly protest stringent donor conditions and requirements, whether in preparing project submissions, in implementation, or reporting processes.

”” *Partners unable to produce data and activity reports and organisations struggling to meet expectations/demands of partner-organisations due to funding constraints.*””
(Research participant)

”” *Funding and human resource limitations has affected the strengthening of these linkages.*””
(Research participant)

This means that lack of accountability arising from limited or lack of capacity on the part of WROs affect relationships with donor partners. Trust issues arise and affect long term relationships, and unfortunately local voices and priorities are drowned out by formal funding conditions and procedures.

Hence, the decolonial participatory approach adopted in the WEAVERS research has opened up a fresh opportunity for WROs to speak out, be heard and to lead donor funded research, including meaningful participation in programs and projects.

Thematic Area 3. Ecosystem of Women’s Movement: Synthesis

Existence of a women’s rights movement in PNG

”” *Generally, movements are organic, and evolving all the time. Better coordination is needed: who is doing what? Women’s development is the main agenda for all. The agenda and the issues are the same or similar but the approaches vary or are different.*””
(Research participant)

Is there a national level network nation-wide that connects all WROs to have strong connections and relationships?

At one of the data sensing and analysis workshops, the Steering Committee discussed the question ‘Is there a women’s movement in PNG? One member responded,

”” *yes, we do - in terms of collective consciousness about women’s rights.*””
(Steering Committee member)

The point about collective consciousness is significant and truly empowering. In the face of weak institutional linkages and resource constraints amongst WROs, consciousness about rights offers the opportunity for movement strengthening, linkages and relationships within and across all regions of PNG.

The research data reveals some semblance of movement in the Highlands and Bougainville, and these relationships and linkages are sustained through donor funded programs and activities. Relationship with government is somewhat limited and sparse in the Highlands whilst there is visible presence of relationships between government and WROs in Bougainville through the Departments of Community Development and, Law and Justice.

Both regions have experienced extreme forms of violence (Bougainville crises and persistent Highlands tribal conflicts) and continue to experience these issues, hence, the active involvement and connectedness of WROs to address them.

Elsewhere, WROs seem to be working in isolation. Most are locality based, within Provinces or within mainstream structures; a good example being the Provincial Councils of Women that are affiliated sub-national members to the National Council of Women. This situation has prevailed for a long time, so it is a long-standing challenge. Some reasons for the existence of silos within the women's movement in PNG include competition between WROs (for funding and resources), self-interest and weak leadership and reluctance to handover leadership, plus lack of funding and capacity. As one research participant from a group representing vulnerable populations noted:

“... overall, we watch the women's movement from a distance and see that WROs don't work together; they all do their own thing and the politics from NCW has scared a lot of women groups from joining the bigger women's group.”
(Research participant)

As one Steering Committee member noted, silos can be effective, but not if it undermines engagement with other women's rights actors:

“Silos aren't bad, they are working well. The question is how do we connect them? Is the NCW functioning (to do the connecting)?”
(Steering Committee member)

Other stakeholders expressed that:

“Rights of Women in rural areas are a concern. Not enough focus on them.”
(Research participant)

And furthermore,

“Scaling up of activities through forums so that messages reach more people. Conduct Key Populations forums and look for ways to address the issues. Sensitize health facilities where stigma and discrimination of sex workers

are identified. [We can] Work as individuals but stand together as a group.”
(Research participant)

Case Study: A brief snapshot of the National Council of Women (NCW) will suffice, to provide the context for the politics alluded to above.

The National Council of Women Act was legally constituted in 1979 by the government of PNG. In principle therefore, this legislation gives NCW the mandate as the umbrella organisation for all women nation-wide (CEDAW Shadow Report, 2010 and Cox, 2015).

PNG achieved political independence in 1975, the same year that was declared the International Year of Women and the beginning of the Decade for Women (1975-1985). A PNG woman representative supported by the government attended the International Women's Convention in Mexico that same year. Upon her return, the first national convention for women was held in Port Moresby. This event was attended by women representing Provinces and existing organisations around the country, most of whom were representing existing church women's organisations, other women's clubs and organisations such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the Girl Guides, Soroptimist International, and Catholic Women's Association (Samana, 2016). The key recommendation of the first convention was that the delegates would return to their respective Provinces and establish a Provincial Council of Women—a total of 20 at the time.

These were happening within a political climate where the founding Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare and framers of the National Constitution had written in Equality and Participation as one of five National Goals and Directive Principles to chart our future direction as a new nation. Preceding this was the governments' Eight Point Plan proclaimed at Self-Government in 1972 to guide the emerging nation towards achieving a sovereign nation. The 7th Point called for Equal Participation of Women in development: in political, social, and economic life.

The National Council of Women was formally established as the mandated body for women-led non-government organisations and groups. A Women's Adviser appointed by the government to lead women's affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister played a

strategic role. From this focal point, women were mobilised to start establishing Provincial Councils of Women. Existing groups such as Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and church Women's ministries in all mainline churches: the Catholic, Anglican, United Church, Lutheran and Seventh Day Adventists had established networks in the country (Samana, 2016).

The process of mobilizing women was not without its challenges, as some church groups called for proper recognition and also had issues regarding resource distribution between a government office for women that worked with church groups and the new entity, the NCW, which also received support from the national government. This created frictions amongst women's groups and surfaced as a rival between existing and well-established church women's organisations and the new national entity, the NCW. This tension led to some groups disassociating themselves from the NCW in the early days. The conflicts and differences have prevailed over time and became intensified with leadership struggles at the national level in later years.

Membership of NCW comprised Provincial Councils of Women and supportive church-based organisations. The first two decades of NCW were more promising as the organisation took an active role in speaking out on issues such as domestic violence, rape and sexual assaults against women and girls.

The NCW also connected closely with its political arm called PNG Women in Politics and advocated strongly for increasing women in decision-making and political representation at all levels of government from the National Parliament to the Ward level, as well as in Boards and Statutory bodies.

In the first two and half decade of its existence, the NCW was a functioning umbrella NGO for women of PNG. However, leadership tussles, vested interests and mismanagement started creeping in and from here on, some groups lost confidence in the organisation. The wider public also expressed their dissatisfaction about its capacity to be the voice of women of PNG.

A call for reform led to the amended NCW Act 2013. The 2013 Act did nothing to deter leadership struggles,

mismanagement and caused even deeper divisions amongst women's groups affiliated to NCW. The NCW stumbled and increasingly became passive. By 2019 to 2020, the NCW reached its lowest point. It was announced dormant by the head of the mandated government Department in a Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment enquiry in 2023.

At the time of writing, the UN Women had stepped in to provide Technical Assistance to help revive the NCW through a review of the 2013 Act and revamp the organisation. This is work in progress. At the same time, the Permanent Parliamentary Committee – Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment also, through its public enquiry, highlighted the need for a review of the NCW.

A research participant provided a passionate and articulate narrative of the NCW situation as presented below.

🗨️ *The National Council of Women is an entity and is the voice mandated by the government to speak for women.... the organisation is not really coming up because of things that did not work out and we are working along the line to make it happen. By the end of this year, we should have all the provinces [on board]... we are driving the provinces to making sure that mobilization takes place and women are mobilizing themselves from the ward to the districts and to the provinces because provincial presidents are the principals of the National Council of Women by law. The National Executives have the say of the running of the National Council of Women. So the differences that we have with women leaders – that we have to abide with by saying good things in how we can bring services for our people, our women girl child and of course as an organisation and as the voice of women; we also will play a better role when we are organized properly.*

Currently we are disabled, meaning that the National Executives are not in order so what I want to say here is; as women we should be mindful in what we are aiming for and working towards to have it fruitful; we don't have to say negative things but hold our hands together and work together. God sees us as persons and of course we are born of sin and we have our failures but to look at better things ... We want to be champions of bringing services to our people, we should look forward to that – that is very important... you can be part of it; you know the roles and responsibilities of the council and has an experience of a lifetime in working with women.

So, with this experience we can all come together and work together, like for (named) region, we have our girl child there. We have a lot of things in the (named) region that needs to be done properly. When we are looking at education; it's not really coming for our ... people, the development is not there so I want us to like hold our hands together and work together. I am new in (named organisation) but I am experiencing a lot of things and it's an eye opener for me and not been part of the (named organisation) for all this time. There is a lot of development taking place and I am happy that you ladies have put in a lot of good things that help our ... people, so thank you. 🗨️
(Research participant)

Understanding of women's movement

This section is a synthesis of the research findings that speak to and define women's movement in PNG.

From my perspective as lead researcher, I understand women's movement as claiming space for ourselves – **a shared space for women**. This is based on my belief that in order to overcome challenges around 'leadership struggles, competition for positions and power', we can harness our collective strength and power by recognizing and valuing our diversity. **The WEAVERS research team had demonstrated this coming together throughout the research process. In other words, we're all in this together.**

Another team members' view resonated with the above point.

“When I reflect on our ways of working, feminism is what we've always done in our respective spaces and areas of interest. The word itself is introduced, but for us it has always been about rights and about claiming space. The PNG women's movement is a shared space that we are all an integral part of.”
(Research participant)

The following sentiment was expressed by a younger member of the Steering Committee. At one level, it echoes and manifests the intergenerational character of the women's movement in PNG.

“I used to stand on the outside, now I'm involved and standing on your shoulders.”
(Steering Committee member)

The inter-generational link plus the sentiments expressed about distancing oneself from the NCW is a demonstration of how the women's rights space is viewed as more of a shared space, inclusive of all other marginalized sectors of society, in contrast to territorial claims amongst certain rights actors.

Our own stories as rights actors adds richness to the story of our collective consciousness as constituting the women's movement in PNG.

“Feminism and women's rights are two sides of the same coin, whether you like it or not.”
(Research participant)

Whilst this is an exception, the vast majority of rights actors interviewed, however, did not relate to or express their connection to feminism, or mentioned the word in their conversations.

One research participant expressed the view of feminism as being elitist:

“From my observation of this so-called feminists...it's something that happens with professional elites, driving the issues that concerned them. That's like the Western European perspective of how women's movement should be or can be.”
(Research participant)

There is a strong element of discomfort as well as pragmatic reason for this. Overall, women have strong ties to their families and clans; hence, their identity matters in this social context. And given that much of PNG's economy is subsistence-based and, families/clans own 97% of the land, it's a rational choice to remain connected to their own people.

The research team expressed the view that we need a culturally sensitive term to connect right actors and/or for them to embrace solidarity in the rights space.

“We need a locally sensitive term that suits our customs/cultural values and way of life.”
(Research participant)

For example; Meri Bung (meaning, meeting of women) coined by Sarah Garap, co-founder of Meri Kirap Sapot. This concept describes the methodology or approach she applied in working with grassroots women and aligns well with the patrilineal cultural context where men prominently play public leadership roles. The Meri Bung Tok (MBT) approach symbolises a separate safe space for women to speak their minds, speak

out, and act on issues affecting their lives.

Creating safe space has helped with improving understanding of the women's movement.

“ *Recognizing the cultural barriers, a lot of strong women had to break barriers in order to be role models of empowerment to young women.* ”

(Researcher participant)

“ *Participants have real needs. This influenced their responses and may also be an issue – regarding movement building.* ”

(Steering Committee member)

A realization dawned with the following reflection at one of the WEAVERS data sense check workshop.

“ *So, these (findings') are the voice of women rights actors?* ”

(Steering Committee member)

This reflects the intrinsic value of action research. Further suggestions around understanding women's movements and the connection to church networks as expressed by research participants and members of the Steering Committee include:

“ *Women's movement should be like the church women's fellowship network that are helping women in their communities.* ”

(Research participant)

“ *Faith based/Church Women's Fellowships link/connect nation-wide; Can we call it a women's movement? No, we can't. It's more acceptable to call it a network; to be sensitive to church context.* ”

(Steering Committee member)

“ *Church women's groups are a social capital. These groups are working/functioning: and self-funded/ locally driven most of the time.* ”

(Steering Committee member)

These comments indicate that an anomaly exists in our understanding of how rights actors are linked or connected which relates to the origins of women's advancement and development in

contemporary PNG. Our collective contemporary history in organizing for change begun with Christian ethos of domestic skills and home care for women. Most of the early pioneers (usually wives of pastors/clergymen), whilst active in leading women's fellowships and ministries, went on to raising their daughters to become educated and professional women who took up responsibilities in the public service, or led community development and welfare work at the grassroots level. **This makes the separation of secular and faith-based movements problematic.** Women's rights actors are simultaneously faith driven as well as rights advocates and actors in the secular rights space. **The very existence of multiple identities of women is testimony to this phenomenon.**

Thematic Area 4: Opportunities and Challenges for strengthening linkages

Opportunities for strengthening linkages

Opportunities identified by research participants across regions, and at all levels require actions by WROs themselves or with support from external actors. The below four views were commonly expressed by women's rights organisations across the four geographic regions:

- Rights actors and stakeholders' forum should be held to share experiences and challenges to chart the way forward.
- Recognizing that coming together in groups gives us strength to speak out, work to influence and bring changes.
- Mobilise around common social issues to bring WROs together. As one research participant noted: Common goal or issue are the driving factors that bring organisations together.
- Sharing of resources, church women's groups and human rights defenders' network provide opportunities to work in solidarity.

As noted by another research participant:

“Churches are the hands and legs of the government, so listen to us and include our voices.”
(Research participant)

The following points were highlighted by research participants for a particular Province where Sanap Wantaim program has actively engaged male and female youth.

“For youth and emerging leaders, we should encourage them to stand up and be active in their communities.”
(Research participant)

“Creating space for peer-to-peer talk on behavioral change amongst young people.”
(Research participant)

WROs across regions thought that government and donors can strengthen linkages between women’s rights organisations by: helping to provide capacity building and organizational capacity building; providing technical support to strengthen linkages and programs; and provide support for women’s programs to achieve their objectives. WROs are also open to dialogue with government. These views were commonly expressed by stakeholders across all regions.

“We are prepared to have a face-to-face discussion with the government/partners so they can work in partnership.”
(Research participant)

Highlands based Steering Committee members and data collectors highlighted this point whilst acknowledging that the government, as the prime duty bearer, is responsible for the protection of women’s rights.

“We need to strengthen and connect with the government of PNG so they can directly fund CSO and CBOs. We need direct and long-term funding from government and donors to go right into the community and empower women groups, youth groups and community leaders for advocacy work.”
(Research participant)

Challenges to strengthening linkages

The way forward is also implicit in challenges encountered, and these are common experiences across regions. Challenges faced by WROs and amongst rights actors require actions by WROs themselves or with support from external actors. For example, financial constraints and limited (if any) funding from government undermines resources available to WROs (including office space and staff) and organisational capacity.

One particular WRO noted that they received generous support from the private sector:

“PNG Exxon Mobil was the main source; we get funds from them.”
(Research participant)

A WRO expressed that there was no acknowledgment of their work from government whilst in one case, the WRO, as cited earlier, stated

“Cargo mentality- Govt/ organisations choose who they want to support or fund.”
(Research participant)

Many WRO’s lack or have limited capacity to develop and write proposals that meet the requirements of government and donor funding, which further undermines their capacity to work independently and their ability to connect with other organisations:

“The process to access funds is rigid—email address, internet, basic IT knowledge are not available for most WROs.”
(Research participant)

As such, some women’s rights organisations are trying to undo their dependence on donor funding by establishing their own income streams:

“We are keen to be self-resourced from our own income source, so we set up SHAREWORK – our business arm, so as to make income from our members’ consultancy work to fund our programs and activities.”
(Research participant).

Other common challenges highlighted by WROs include lack of communication between organisations and the need for collaboration and networking – not only on a need basis, but the broader sharing of information, work and opportunities between WROs.

Research participants also noted that petty politics, ego and competitions between rights actors and organisations can undermine movement strengthening, as can a lack of leadership succession planning and a reliance on individual leaders within the women's movement.

“... women leaders are moving on, are leaving behind a gap. No succession plan, or inter-generational support.”
(Research participant)

“Overtime, connection/networks became weak because people left, moved away, shifted jobs. They carried with them those connections.”
(Research participant)

Hence,

“People feel vulnerable and not motivated. Filling the gap will take time, therefore, this research is needed to share these experiences and plan for the future.”
(Research participant)

A call for national dialogue was made:

“... to bring together the young and old.”
(Research participant)

And for self-assessment;

“Women and men actors--- need to look inside or within their house—and should do their own housekeeping.”
(Research participant)

This is, in essence, a call for good governance within WROs themselves. WROs and rights actors are responsible for their own organisations' ability to do well and effectively, or otherwise. Despite the odds, they keep on working.

“However, in reality, “although challenges outweigh the opportunities, they still do the work. Their passion drives them.”
(Research participant)

“WROs are still working, even though quietly, without funding, reaching into their own pockets to continue the work they have started. They may not be as active nationally or at the provincial level but in their own communities, they are active.”
(Research participant)

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations emerged from collective discussions during the first data sensing workshop held over three days in July 2023. They extend from the recommendations that directly surfaced in the data collection process to, drawing from the knowledge and experience of the research team.

Two separate data sensing workshops were held in Port Moresby and Goroka in October 2023. It is worth mentioning that the research team reaffirmed the recommendations from the first workshop based on available fieldwork data, and added a few additional points at the 2nd workshops when outstanding data became available.

Funding/Resourcing

Key Stakeholders: Government, women's rights organisations rights actors, donors

- The government should create a basket of resources or make core, flexible and long-term funding available for women's rights organisations for capacity building, human resources, infrastructure and skills development of NGOs. This will shift current focus on activity-based and ad hoc project funding.
- WROs should speak out and raise issues of government budgeting/ resource allocation and demand inclusion of separate budget line for women, (especially in Provincial Budgets).
- The national GBV Secretariat under Department for Community Development and Religion should direct the funding it receives to Provincial Administrations to enable Provincial GBV Action Committees to carry out their programs. [This agenda is in the process of being implemented by the government].
- The women's movement should engage in discussion with the Department for Community Development to understand the distribution and sources of funding for women's rights work, and develop a joint campaign to increase funding.
- WROs should work in partnership with the Provincial Health Authority to facilitate support for PLWHIV and Key Populations/Persons with Disability, including to integrate human rights training and trauma counselling, and reach out to geographically isolated populations.
- WROs should network to share information on income generation initiatives (e.g., Sharework Ltd network) with each other to sustain their activities and operations.

Networking/relationships/strengthening linkages

Key Stakeholders: Women's rights organisations rights actors, government

- National Council of Women (NCW) Forums should be held regularly to raise awareness of its role and functions, nation-wide.
- WROs should actively seek to partner with and integrate secular and faith-based networks; to bring rural women's groups and church women's network/women's fellowships within their sphere of influence, and engage male advocates or men in their work.
- WROs should actively promote and plan for Leadership succession/ emerging/young leaders and stronger regional coordinating bodies (e.g., HWHRDN).
- WROs should engage more with vulnerable populations, women with disability, and mothers who may have additional challenges in meeting their children's needs, such as teenage single mothers and widows as an integral part of initiatives to address women's rights.

Information and knowledge sharing/awareness/sensitization linkages

Key Stakeholders: Government, women's rights organisations rights actors, donors

- The government should resource women's rights organisations to deliver human rights training-gender-based violence (GBV) awareness in High Schools, Colleges, Technical Vocation Education and Training (TVET) and Universities to nurture future rights actors plus socialize awareness and understanding about rights amongst young people.
- The government should provide or support public forums/information sessions, in-person or online, on the work of NGOs/Government and funding/resource opportunities. This can be done effectively in partnership with mainstream media organisations and social media platforms.

Mobilizing/advocacy/dialogue

Key Stakeholders: Government and women's rights organisations rights actors

- WROs should dialogue with the Permanent Parliamentary Committee - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, to promote women's rights.
- WROs should lobby for a separate ministry for women and hold government accountable through the NCW network.
- The government should support strengthening of national women's machinery (comprising Office for Development of Women, National Council of Women and National GBV Secretariat).
- WROs should convene forums for Donor and Government; Finance/Office for Rural Development District Development Authority and Women's Machinery to explore financing opportunities for women.
- WROs should partner with the Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs to do a review of the women's nominated positions in decision-making bodies from Ward, Local Level government to District and Provincial levels.
- WROs, with government support, should review Ward Record processes and the use of data collected for planning and budget processes.

Capacity building/skills development

Key Stakeholders: Government and donors

- Government and donors should conduct review of organisational/governance structures of WROs/CSOs to attract funding support (develop mission, goals, strategic plans, identify clear outcomes) to move towards becoming sustainable.

Research/knowledge generation/baseline data

Key Stakeholders: Government and donors

- The government should support the National Council of Women to hold annual or biannual learning forums where women led organisations can discuss issues facing women in the country and find possible strategies to target these issues.
- The National Council of Women should conduct social media poll to gauge knowledge of NCW Act amongst female professionals and university students.
- WROs should produce Network Directories (i.e. mapping of skilled human rights workers) with support from Government/Provincial HR Divisions/Donors.
- WROs with government and donor support, should collate regional database of women representatives in government bodies.
- WROs and other rights actors should provide insights and knowledge generated from research (such as WEAVERS) widely and have the topics discussed at public forums for movement strengthening.
- International partners and government should resource local women leaders, researchers, women's rights organisations and activists to plan, lead, and implement research projects that address their needs and priorities. This will help strengthen evidence-based decisions relating to social policies and planning rights-related interventions.

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

There is a women's movement, in terms of "collective consciousness" about women's rights in PNG. It is significant that a Steering Committee member aptly defined the women's movement as the existence of "collective consciousness". The research data also speak to this, affirming that despite weak organisational linkages, lack of capacity and a fragmented ecosystem, rights actors are resilient and are aware of rights activities implemented in different localities. The rights actors persevere and continue working to address women's rights across all regions, despite the odds.

Managing with in-kind support or whatever little funding they have, whether personal or from their own family members, rights actors persevere with their work. Despite difficulties, there are strong WROs and vocal rights actors who are very active on the ground who can support action, or leverage support to overcome the various challenges faced.

Movement strengthening, in the PNG context, will involve going back to basics and building from below; to connect better with grassroots women (both secular and church networks) for them to take ownership. This requires resources and funding to strengthen and connect WROs nation-wide.

The government of PNG, in principle, promote human rights, equal participation and justice through high-level commitments in International Human Rights Conventions; the PNG Constitution and an array of policies and development strategies, but it is not doing enough to support in concrete terms, with resources and funding.

Lacking self-sufficiency, WROs and rights actors have become donor dependent and do not demand accountability from the government of PNG, at all levels.

Overall, WROs have expectations for donor support and even resist or critique their agenda or conditions; yet overlook the need to demand their own government to be accountable to women, and in addressing their rights. This understanding

of rights is missing in all the voices we heard from WROs across all regions.

Injustice should also include not being funded or negligence by government in terms of public resources or funds to address concerns of women, to empower them and improve their lives.

Obvious lack of influence by rights actors in resource distribution at all levels of government is the main cause of weakness and fragmentation in women's movement in PNG. Weakness and fragmentation results from both lack of resources and competition for resources amongst WROs. This is a critical gap worth addressing. Realization of this gap can motivate rights actors to mobilise and demand the government for change.

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