

# Young Feminist Reflections, Critique & Struggles

PACIFIC

## Madang, Papua New Guinea: The Struggle to Protect and Control our Land, Resources and Livelihoods

by Rosa Koian

I work for a small NGO called Bismarck Ramu based in Madang, Papua New Guinea. A part of the struggle of my group is educating Papua New Guineans about their land rights. The government is pushing for land registration and thinking of economic gains through selling or leasing of large tracts of land. But the people think differently. This land is our life, our survival. I've got a piece of land in a forest area – I gather my nuts, leaves and meat from it. That is my life. We just don't think about economic returns.

In this area, there are oil palm plantations, widespread logging and also a fish cannery. Thanks to the economic partnership agreements with Australia and China, two mining companies are also operating. They are extracting nickel, ore and gold through strip mining. Both mining companies have their own pipes that run through the side of the river for hundreds of kilometers. It rains for months at a time where I live, and as a result there are chemical run-offs into the river. Three hundred thousand people live along this river. They are dependent on fishing. People around the coastal areas have come to us and said, "We don't want this waste to go into our sea."

These people have been told they have to move, but many have decided that they will not move. A group of people have been protesting while waging a legal battle and moving an internet-based international campaign. We have had some success. We have managed to stop the companies since March 2010. We have stopped them from disturbing the reef.

A lot of things are happening on the ground. We continue to be told to make space so mining companies can go ahead and take our minerals away. This is our struggle. It is a Papua New Guinean fight. But some of our people are also starting to see the wider connections between our issues with those of others. The GEEJ Pacific regional consultation has been useful for me to think about the way that we are inter-connecting the things that are important to people everywhere.

*Rosa Koian is a lawyer from PNG and longtime community activist with the Bismarck Ramu Group (BRG) in Madang. Rosa took part in the GEEJ Regional Consultation and Training Institute in the Pacific. This article is taken from a longer presentation Rosa gave at a Public Forum in Suva, Fiji on 10 September, 2010.*

## Solomon Islands: Defining, Acknowledging and Supporting Women

by Ender Rence

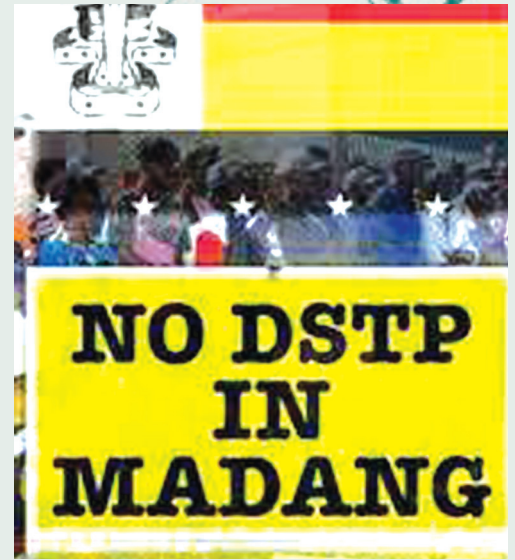
I live in the Solomon Islands, a small Pacific Island state that lies north east of Australia in the Pacific Ocean. There are six major islands and a further 300 islets in the group, with a population of just over 500,000 people mainly living in 500 villages. My country is a nation of villages with diverse cultures with over 70 distinct languages. A recent report named 'Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety' indicated that in my country, two in every three women aged 15-49 reportedly experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.

In some parts of the Solomon Islands, formally educated women may see themselves as equals of men, but there are still few who think in this way. This was recently identified during a recent consultation and training held in Honiara by *Vois Blong Mere*, the largest women media body in the Solomon Islands. The sad experience during the last national general election in August 2010 showed that most women in the provincial level still do not see women as appropriate political candidates. Not one of the 26 women candidates was elected to the national parliament. Women simply did not vote for women because they still see men as being more capable.

Women candidates need to have physical spaces and other resources that would enable them to work safely together to analyze their problems as well as explore opportunities with a broader world view. Women could benefit from learning business management and communication skills so that they can compete confidently with men for available positions in all areas. This also means finding 'common ground' so that gate keepers (especially older women in the villages and communities) could begin to see how they too can benefit from having knowledgeable and dedicated women in positions of power.

The government and all other institutions that say they want women from all walks of life to excel must work together much more in different areas of women's education, training and empowerment. Listening directly to women and girls about their needs leads to strategies and steps that have a higher chance of making positive impacts on women's and girls' lives.

*Ender Rence belongs to the Media Department of the Solomon Islands Development Trust. She took part in the GEEJ Regional Consultation and Training Institute in the Pacific in September 2010. This is excerpted from a longer reflection essay that she submitted to DAWN.*



Landowners protest against the marine dumping plans.  
Photo Credit: Ramu Nickel Mine Watch (<http://ramumine.wordpress.com/2010/12/09/papua-new-guineas-ramu-dumping-case-to-be-heard-from-february-8/>)



Reeti Onorio, Ender Rence and Rosa Koian at the GEEJ Regional Consultation and Training Institute in the Pacific, September 2010



Vois Blong Mere Solomon Media Workshop Group  
Photo Credit: <http://www.voisblongmere.org.sb/>

# Young Feminist Reflections, Critique & Struggles

AFRICA



Protest March organized by the Network of Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), which sought to honour the pledge by the Mills Administration in Ghana to appoint more women into the cabinet

## Climate Justice, not Population Control

by Christine G Njeru

The GEEJ training could not have come at a better time, for I was at a point in my young feminist life when I was asking a lot of questions. One of the most interesting and uniquely true debates I was privy to in the DAWN GEEJ space was the reproductive rights and environment justice linkage. I must admit I was one of the advocates of the **“population growth is a major cause of climate change and that lower birth rates are the solution,”** message. However from the presentation it became vividly clear that whereas the economic south has a high population growth we have the least amount of carbon emissions. My own country Kenya, for instance, emits only 0.3 tons of the world's carbon emissions. On the other hand, the industrialized countries that have lower population rates account for close to 80 percent of the accumulated carbon dioxide build-up in the atmosphere. As young African feminists, we need to change our approach and realize that the major cause of climate change is not population growth but carbon emissions and that the numbers don't add up. What is needed is climate justice and not population control.

The push to attain the Millennium Development Goals must not downplay or limit the women's comprehensive agenda as set out in the Beijing Platform for Action. It is apparent in my country that a lot of funding has been channeled into the maternal mortality campaign, at the expense of other women programs. Africa no doubt has the highest number of women dying at

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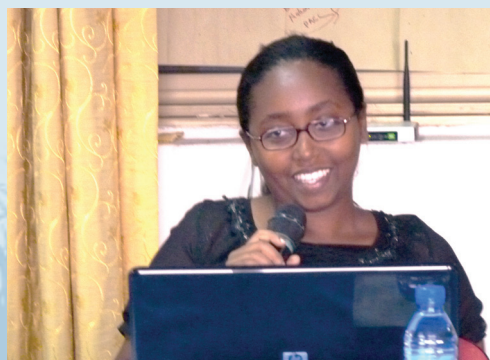


Christine Njeru (left) and Hibist Kassa (right), taken at the GEEJ Regional Consultation and Training Institute in Africa, November 2010

childbirth, and the campaign as well as all forms of interventions, is required. However the chances of failure are high if, for instance, women have no food to eat. Hence the need to complement maternal mortality campaigns with other interventions like food security and environmental sustainability.

Kenyan women have a reason to celebrate, as the year 2010 saw a Constitution we had fought to realize for many years come to fruition. For once the Gender Equality message and affirmative action have been formally acknowledged in the supreme law of my country. These two aspects will no longer be the subject of roadside declarations as they have been in the past. A number of leadership positions too have been set aside for women. But one of the other remarkable features of our new Constitution is that it has set aside a whole chapter on Land, Environment and Natural Resources. Chapter 5, Part 2 of the Constitution sets out guidelines on how the state and the citizenry should interact with their environment in order to conserve it. To me, this is one positive step forward in the clamor for environmental and gender Justice. We patiently wait as our parliament comes up with legislation that gives full effect to the provisions of this chapter.

As I continue my work, I now endeavor to incorporate this new thinking for in the words of our very own Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai: **“It is important to nurture any new ideas and initiatives which can make a difference for Africa.”**



## Struggles: a Matter of Liberty, an Opportunity for Justice

by Hibist Kassa

Increasingly, there is a blurring of the boundaries between local and global issues. The current triple crises have created the perfect storm. The drive for a resistance to the predominance of neo-liberalism in the policy making process is intensifying. Interestingly, there has also been increasing emphasis on incorporating previously excluded groups in policy dialogue at the regional level in Africa. Is this incorporation or cooptation? Is the African Women's Decade and the 16th AU Summit on Shared Values, seeking to entrench the status quo through constituencies which are most likely to challenge the system? There is a need for more grassroots oriented advocacy strategies which build the capacity for their *meaningful* involvement in policy matters.

I argue that women in Africa form constituencies which take the struggle to a higher plane. The fact is that the daily struggles of women to access clean water, food, health care and education for their families is a universal fight for a life worth living. Young feminists are placed in a unique position to propel women and youth in the direction of change. These strategies will feed into a furnace which will mold a new face of activism in Africa. In the lead up to attainment of independence, women and youth were the catalysts of the struggle. Today, they need to connect with the power that comes with knowledge. This will be refined in the praxis that comes with struggle. I am of the view that this will lay the basis for taking political struggles into a new degree of intensity.

In developing countries like Ghana, public universities are facing a decline in subsidies from the state. I argue that education is a potent political weapon in the pursuit of social and political change. Within the narrow framework of the MDGs, access to post primary education in Africa has been curtailed. Creating a glass ceiling at the primary level can serve as an instrument to contain youth. How can youth voices be heard?

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